Gender norms, agency, and trajectories of social change and development in agricultural communities

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Contents

Glossary

Agency	The "ability to define one's goals and act upon them," either independently or jointly with others (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438).
Gender norms	The fluid, contextual and "differential rules of conduct for women and men," including rules governing interactions between women and men, women and women, and men and men (Pearse & Connell, 2016, p. 35).
Empowerment	The "process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 435).
Innovation	Women and men effectively negotiate and change how they "interact with each other and respond to their environment" across a system of interlocking institutions (adapted from Leeuwis et al., 2014, p. 6; also see Berdegué, 2005; Leeuwis et al., 2021; Schot & Geels, 2008). Like the other concepts, innovation can be conceived as a process and an outcome.
Local normative climate (LNC)	The prevailing set of gender norms in a community (Petesch, Bullock, et al., 2018, p. 116). Longer version: The normative order of a location, and the extent to which the prevailing framework of gender norms and other social rules encourages or discourages the freedom and agency of all community members to pursue the lives that they value (Chapter 7).

Normative Change	A transformative process whereby a community's entire normative framework changes in ways that greatly encourage (or discourage) gender equality and social inclusion (chapters 1 and 7).
Normative relaxation	The ongoing and typically slow reformulation of individual norms in a community (chapters 1 and 7).
Poverty reduction	Women and men free themselves from deprivation of basic capabilities (Sen, 2000).

Note: References available at end of thesis.

Chapter 1


ING. EDGAR
MENDEZ BURGOS
Los cambios se fecundan en las ideas
se refuerzan con las palabras
se demuestran en las acciones
NEW YORK

The orderly yet disorderly interplay of norms and agency

The first and fifth Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commit the global community of nations to end poverty (SDG 1) and to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (SDG 5). The deadline for these ambitious goals is 2030. For rural regions of the world these goals present enormous challenges, as rural areas account for 80 percent of the world's population living below the international poverty line (World Bank, 2020, p. 9). Within rural regions, however, there is great variability in poverty levels and trends (Bird, 2019), with studies revealing that poverty levels vary greatly even between two farming villages in proximity (Epstein, 2007; Narayan, Petesch, et al., 2009). Rural poverty is higher among women than men (World Bank, 2020, p. 10), and gender inequalities in education, employment, leadership, and other dimensions crucial to women's empowerment are often larger in rural contexts than in urban settings (Evans, 2017). Even so, within rural regions women face strong variability in the barriers to and opportunities for bettering their lives (e.g., Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013).

As I worked on the thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic soared across the world. An International Monetary Fund (IMF) and UN Women report indicates that it may take until 2030 just for poverty levels to recover to their 2020 levels, and women's poverty rates are increasing faster than men's (Tang et al., 2021).

Why is social change and development so uneven in the countryside? Why do some rural locations appear to provide adequate livelihoods for much of their population while most villages persist with extensive poverty? Why should it

require generations and generations of incremental change for women to achieve equality with men?

Explanations for the persistence of rural poverty place varying emphases on locational differences in access to competitive markets, infrastructure, and public services, in political and social inclusion, and in capabilities of low-income men and women to act on goals (Bird, 2019; Narayan, Sen, et al., 2009; Sen, 2000; Dercon & Gollin, 2014a). Such complexities, in fact, inform the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) call for an "agroterritorial" strategy to reduce rural poverty and improve food security (2017, p. xi). The strategy argues for attending to context and opportunities afforded by strengthening urban-rural market linkages. Concerns for social and institutional dimensions that reproduce inequality are underspecified in the FAO report and in most others that address concerns about agriculture's uneven contribution to poverty reduction and other leading development objectives (e.g., Dercon & Gollin, 2014).

On questions of gender inequality in agricultural regions, including its linkages to poverty, there is also a very large body of research (for discussions of this literature, see van der Burg, 2019; Sachs, 2019; Badstue, Petesch, et al., 2018; Bock & van der Burg, 2017; Farhall & Rickards, 2021). With her pathbreaking book entitled *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, Ester Boserup launched the gender and agriculture field in 1970. Among the many novel contributions of the book, Boserup argued that modern farming systems perpetuate rather than ease poverty in locations where these systems marginalize women from agricultural innovation and extension opportunities. The emerging literature since then nuances and challenges Boserup's conclusions on women's exclusion from agricultural innovation and the sector's contributions to gender inequality and rising poverty (e.g., Jackson, 2007; Badstue, Petesch, et al., 2018; Quisumbing, 2011b). But this literature also reaffirms Boserup's concerns about how agricultural innovations and other initiatives intended to empower women

continue to pose risks for them (Pyburn & van Eerdewijk, 2021; Sachs, 2019; van der Burg, 2021).

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

The objective of my thesis is to improve understanding of the microsocial processes in a smallholder community that contribute to ending poverty and achieving gender equality, as called for by the SDGs. We need to know better how to support and empower these women and men to better their lives and to forge more inclusive and predictable development trajectories for their communities. My thesis takes on this challenge by working with relational theory about gender norms and agency, which I introduce next. Most of Chapter 1 explores this theory. I then introduce my research questions and methodology and close the chapter with a brief roadmap to the rest of the thesis.

1.1.1 Norms and agency prism: Learning from patterns and diversity

My thesis centers on how diverse rural women and men perceive their capacities to shape their lives and innovate with their rural livelihoods, and on the potential contributions of this agency to processes of empowerment and poverty reduction. I explore these dynamics through a theoretical prism that registers "interactions between norms and agency" (e.g. Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013; Kabeer, 1999). This prism presents various angles for exploring and learning, yet there is one issue: the working order of this prism often generates findings that appear to be contradictory. To explain the consistency and yet inconsistency, I briefly define the five key concepts in my toolbox for working with the prism and then set the concepts in motion.

My anchoring concept is ***agency***, which Naila Kabeer (1999) defines as actors' ability to define and act on goals for their lives. To conceptualize

outcomes that convey a kind of agency that is potentially empowering, I also employ Kabeer's definition of ***empowerment,*** or the highly agentic "process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 435). Further down I elaborate on what constitutes strategic life choices, but for now we can assume that this includes choices and outcomes of relevance for women's and men's capacities to innovate with their livelihoods. Next, for conceptualizing outcomes related to ***ending poverty***, I employ Amartya Sen's framing as the agentic process by which people have freed themselves of deprivation of the basic capabilities to "lead the kind of lives that they value—and have reason to value" (Sen, 2000, p. 18). Next, I add ***innovation*** to the mix, defining this as the social processes by which women and men effectively negotiate and change how they "interact with each other and respond to their environment" across a system of interlocking institutions (adapted from Leeuwis et al., 2014, p. 6; also see Berdegué, 2005; Leeuwis et al., 2021; Schot & Geels, 2008). Innovation processes can be fruitfully analyzed at various institutional scales, but my focus is mainly on local-level institutions until the last chapter of my thesis.

Of final relevance to my conceptual toolbox, in her seminal 1999 academic paper Kabeer also made a persuasive case for working with values and social norms about gender when assessing agency and its contribution to women's empowerment. ***Gender norms*** refer to the "differential rules of conduct" for women and men, including rules governing interactions and status distinctions between and among women and men (Pearse & Connell, 2016, p. 35). As I elaborate in section 1.2 below, these gender codes are the foundational rules for organizing social relations and institutions in all societies. In addition to their relational dimensions, most theories about gender norms emphasize their significant contextual, contested, and fluid dimensions (Pearse & Connell, 2016; Cislaghi & Heise, 2020).

With these concepts in our toolbox, we can now travel with and learn from the interactions and paradoxical findings of a norms and agency prism. Let's begin with Sen's guidance that "it is the agency aspect that is most influenced by a person's sense of obligation and perception of legitimate behavior" (1997, p. 9). Norms are key forces shaping whether and how we act on goals. To further orient our journey with norms and agency, let's reflect on Kabeer's (2016; italics added) apparently logical title to a journal paper: "Gender Equality, Economic Growth, and Women's Agency: the *'Endless Variety'* and *'Monotonous Similarity'* of Patriarchal Constraints." One might reasonably ask, is it the variety that is of paramount concern here? Or the similarity? Yet when posed individually, the two questions do not fully grasp her arguments on their simultaneity. To clarify further, I next synthesize selected findings from numerous studies about norms and agency in rural locations.

On the "monotonous similarity" of norms and agency interactions, it is expected in most (but certainly not all) agricultural communities[1] that men will exercise authority roles and protect and provide adequately for their households. Women typically take responsibility for most housework and care needs; depending on the context, they may also hold obligations to generate income. The head of a landowning household, typically a man, is fully expected and entitled to innovate with and expand their agricultural production. The heads of households with little or no land or other resources, also usually men, are likewise expected to provision, often with daily wage jobs. Meanwhile, women's more and less predictable periods of extensive care duties (i.e., for the youngest, disabled, ill, or elderly members of the family) generally constrain their provisioning capacities whether their household is well-resourced or not. In many rural locations, diverse gender norms encourage women to present themselves as submissive and homebound housewives and to obscure or discount whatever livelihood activities they may be able to undertake.[2] *The norms and agency prism*

offers a means to learn from the ***patterns*** *that appear in how gender roles and relations are perceived and expressed in daily life.*

Let us now turn to "endless varieties" and to the diverse ways in which norms and agency interact. Although it is taboo in many villages of the world for a woman to conduct a large economic transaction, in some contexts a woman who heads a household can occasionally be spotted buying or selling an improved breed of cow, and her neighbors will (hopefully) pretend not to notice. In other villages, such practices would be inconceivable for any women, and not only would this woman be reprimanded and her reputation tarnished, but senior members of her family could be ostracized for failing to monitor her conduct and prevent the transgression. In still other villages, local norms are less confining, and villagers have no apparent objections to a woman from a well-resourced household taking a large bank loan to purchase several newly introduced breeds of cows, more cropland, machinery, or whatever else she deems a wise investment.[3] *The norms and agency prism also offers a means to learn from the* ***diversity*** *that appears in how gender roles and relations are perceived and expressed in daily life.*

My thesis employs the norms and agency prism to explore the often contradictory evidence about whether and how women and men perceive space to pursue and negotiate important goals for their lives. At its most finely tuned, this prism "escavates subtle variations within contexts of consistency, underlying consistencies within contexts of variation" (Stern, 1995, p. 226). With a larger optic, Kabeer's (2016) paper on endless variety and yet monotony cogently explains why women's increased agentic capacities and greater gender equality contribute to economic growth, but growth does not reliably return benefits to women's agency and empowerment.

In short, engaging the norms and agency prism improves understanding of the similar and yet diverse social processes that underpin agricultural innovation,

empowerment, and poverty reduction. The persistent paradoxes embodied in this prism, as I will show, present both opportunities and hurdles for almost everyone. My thesis develops and applies a concept that provides some additional structure for learning from these contradictory social forces.

1.1.2 Thesis contributions: Local normative climate and community typology

The thesis makes two contributions to improving understandings of agency and norms interactions and their potential to encourage more equitable processes of social change and development in a smallholder community. The first contribution is a deepening of the concept of local normative climate (LNC). LNC refers to "the prevailing set of gender norms in a community."[4] Fundamentally, this is about whether the social context of a rural location encourages or discourages agency, and for which social categories of women and men. One might presume, for instance, that most LNCs of rural locations present discouraging and limited spaces for women's agency. Yet such assumptions are risky. Turbulent periods of political, socio-economic, and technological change in the countryside may in some cases widen the space for agency, so that a poor tribal woman in a remote village, for example, might be emboldened to take legal action to enforce her claim to a farm plot (Rao, 2008).

The second contribution of the thesis, the community typology, will be elaborated in chapters 6 and 7.[5] The community typology findings emerged from an application of LNC to an analysis of 79 village cases. These findings offer a comparative perspective on how LNCs vary in their signaling of the latitude in a social context for agricultural innovation, empowerment, and poverty reduction. Under certain conditions, an LNC may change in ways that contribute to transforming a local opportunity structure. By opportunity structure, I refer to the "rules that shape social actions and the resources that furnish agents with the

power that makes it possible (to varying extents) for them to act" (Lane, 2001, p. 297).

Certainly, this *is* multidisciplinary and broad terrain for a PhD thesis. My journey toward a PhD is not an ordinary one. I have contributed to four global qualitative field studies on issues of poverty and gender.[6] These studies were conducted under the auspices of large international development or research institutions, and I chose to pursue a PhD project as an opportunity to reflect critically on and deepen my previous research. LNC was developed collaboratively during the analysis phase of my most recent multi-site study on gender and agriculture. At that juncture, I needed to bring more structure to my own learning and to my collaborations with other researchers due to the unexpectedly (for me, at least) diverse expressions of the norms and agency interplay in a set of village cases from sub-Saharan Africa. In section 1.4 of the chapter, I discuss my newest multi-site study, which provides the basis for much of the research to follow.

1.2 THEORIES THAT WEAVE NORMS INTO AGENCY

Theories from feminist, sociological, and development studies literatures have helped me to conceptualize and explain interactions between gender norms and agency. Much of this theory focuses on improving understandings of microsocial processes that produce and reproduce gender inequalities. In addition, I reach for studies that address intersectional concerns, such as how an individual's gendered status position is also shaped by intersections of their life stage and socio-economic status.

As I move into the analytic arguments about these social processes, it is important to keep in mind that my outcomes of interest – empowerment and poverty reduction – do not necessarily coincide with or reinforce one another.

Gender inequality manifests at all income levels, not just among low-income women and men. Constraints such as overwork, dependency, and powerlessness affect diverse types of women (Chant, 2010, p. 3) as well as many men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These inequalities differ from disadvantages that arise from economic scarcity, and their interactions appear to be diverse. For example, at certain junctures of a country's development evidence indicates that gender inequality rises as poverty falls, in part because social mobility typically enhances the "authority and responsibility of the male household head" (Jackson, 2010, p. 48). At other junctures, pro-poor prosperity and gender equality may appear to be spreading (World Bank, 2011).

My goal with the theoretical presentation is to elucidate the fluid and contextual properties of gender norms and the similar and yet diverse ways they interact with agency. First, I introduce the general relational and gender theory that informs the thesis. Next, I elaborate the agency and norms interplay with literatures mainly set in rural contexts. Much of this focuses on women but I also discuss normative dimensions of men's agency. Then I move into theory about the dynamic spaces where goals are pursued and negotiated. Norms set the terms for these negotiations but may also be transformed by these negotiations. I close the theory section of the chapter by introducing LNC and synthesizing the theory that underpins the new concept.

1.2.1 The foundational forces of gender

The theoretical approach of the thesis follows a relational ontology, or an understanding of social life that emphasizes the social embeddedness of people's interactions and capacities for acting on goals. Status differences often influence these social processes, with gender constituting a principal axis of difference. This approach, as explained by Charles Tilly (1998, p. 21):

> typically treats [gender and other social] categories as problem-solving social inventions and/or by-products of social interaction (Elster, 1983, pp. 25-99). Relational analysts characteristically conceive of culture as shared understandings that intertwine closely with social relations, serving as their tools and constraints instead of constituting an autonomous sphere.

Relational theorists who address gender inequality bring these "shared understandings" of appropriate gender roles and relations into explanations of processes that drive the construction and reproduction of social relations and institutional arrangements that tend to encourage men's dominance. These gendered social relations and institutions, however, operate in ways that both constrain and enable the agency of men as well as women, including elite men. A large landowner may face expectations in some contexts, for example, that they show concern and support for a tenant with few resources who is facing a family emergency. Relational theorists in the innovation field conceive of innovations, and the social processes that create novelties, as "social constructs" that engage diverse interests, objectives, and power relations (e.g., Berdegué, 2005).

Gender refers to socially constructed status differences between and among women and men, with these differences underpinned by norms that prescribe appropriate roles and conducts for each gender (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020; Pearse & Connell, 2016). West and Zimmerman (1987) offer one of the more influential theoretical conceptions of gender as "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (p. 126). Gender, then, is "something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others" (p. 140). While gender status differences must be constructed, once they are established all men and women then become accountable to the norms that inscribe them, and these differences are then used to "reinforce the 'essentialness' of gender" (p. 137). Butler (1988) similarly

conveys gender as a "performative accomplishment" that is "instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (p. 519; emphasis in original). From such a standpoint, there is then "the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style" (p. 520).

Rural social contexts, the subject here, stand apart from urban centers in that they tend to be perceived as places with repetition of "traditional gender roles," a "density" of family and kinship relations, a prevalence of farm households with integrated (rather than separate) "spheres of production and reproduction," and values that hold "unpaid and voluntary work" to be of importance (Asztalos Morell & Bock, 2007, p. 20). Under closer scrutiny, as discussed above when introducing the norms and agency prism, rural ways of life appear as less repetitive of these practices and values. Shelley Feldman and Rick Welsh (1995), for instance, usefully ask whether inequitable gender relations should be taken as givens in the decision-making processes and divisions of labor in farm households. They move questions of agency and power to the fore because bargaining processes and workers' different responsibilities must sustain a household's productive and reproductive needs on a daily basis *and* at the same time serve the "contradictory, complementary, or competitive" interests and needs of various household members (Feldman & Welsh, 1995, p. 36). Women and men alike, as well as broader societal forces, influence the social and economic lives of smallholder households and communities.

The norms and agency interplay also varies in complex ways among different social categories of women and men. Depending on the social context, single young women in low-income households sometimes have greater freedom to engage in productive activities compared to their newly married or better-off peers (Elias et al., 2018; Rietveld et al., 2020; Rao, 2014).

1.2.1.1 Agency and gender norms as mediators of social change

In *Development as Freedom*, Sen (2000) frames the development challenge as one of expanding people's capabilities to shape their lives in ways that they themselves value. This reconceptualization of development, Sen argues, "allows us to acknowledge the role of social values and prevailing mores" in influencing "the freedom that people enjoy" as well as other development achievements such as "gender equity" (p. 9). Women and men – including those with scarce resources – can effectively shape and better their lives and help one another if given "adequate social opportunities" (p. 11).

In Chapter 8, "Women's Agency and Social Change," Sen (2000) circles back often to the mutually shaping dynamics of "value systems and conventions," on the one hand, and of women's capabilities to exercise agency in consequential areas of their lives, on the other. The latter include their options to be educated, to "work outside the home," to own productive assets, and to "prevent over-frequent childbearing" (pp. 193-195). The chapter contains repeated references to attitudes "and the economic and social circumstances that *encourage or resist change in these attitudes*" about women's entitlements (p. 202, emphasis added). The "changing agency of women," moreover, is a *fundamentally local* process and one of the "major mediators" of economic and social change (p. 202, emphasis added).

In her seminal journal article on women's empowerment, Kabeer presents a theoretical framework that draws attention to interactions between agency and ("competing claims for") resources (Kabeer, 1999, pp. 436–437). Resources are conceived to have material, human, and social dimensions and to "reflect the rules and norms that govern distribution and exchange in different institutional arenas" (p. 437). Kabeer then reinterprets studies of women's agency to clarify the need for conceptions and measures of agency that account for the contextual conditions under which choices are being made. The conditions include household

arrangements, other local institutions, and prevailing norms that shape women's position in these institutions. She contrasts the regions of sub-Saharan Africa, which often provide a greater latitude for women to (informally or formally) manage their own households, livelihoods, and resources, with contexts in South Asia and elsewhere "where households are organized along more corporate lines, [and] where a powerful ideology of 'togetherness' binds the activities and resources of the family together under the control of a male head" (p. 460). Under these latter conditions, women have strong interests in investing in and pursuing goals through cooperative relations with their spouse and other household members.

Kabeer offers a contextually rooted conception of agency and norms. Her scope encompasses both individual and collective initiatives that touch upon the local norms that prescribe gender roles, relations, and entitlements within and beyond a household. Many constructs of agency, however, focus solely on women and stress conditions that enhance their individual autonomy, thus obscuring barriers to and opportunities for women's agency posed by their family and kin and other social relations in which women are embedded (Mumtaz & Salway, 2009). Nevertheless, whether through individual or joint initiatives, a great challenge for nurturing processes that strengthen women's agency is that myriad norms discourage them from making decisions, especially those "strategic life choices" that strongly affect their life path, such as choices about their education, marriage, working life, childbearing, and relationships beyond the household (Kabeer, p. 437). In many contexts women risk violence and even abandonment should they break norms by seeking to limit their fertility or generate an income. Yet it is women resisting these norms and gaining greater control of these choices that holds "potential for challenging and destabilizing social inequalities" (Kabeer, 1999, p.461; Sen, 2000, pp. 194-5).

Also of importance to agency and norms, a multidisciplinary body of feminist and wider literatures is advancing the concept of intersectionality (Colfer et al., 2018; Kings, 2017; Leder & Sachs, 2019; McCall, 2005). Intersectional approaches explicitly unpack the differentiated experiences and interests of women and men to advance "the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (Hill Collins, 2015, p. 2). For many feminists, analyses that remain (superficially) located in the gender binary risk reinforcing gender status hierarchies and missing evidence for cooperative relations among women and men and more complex forms of norms and agency interactions due to differences in norms and how they interact with agency among the social categories of women and men in a context. These issues are explored further in the sections to follow.

1.2.1.2 Gender norms and the complexities of men's latitude for agency

Here I turn to men's norms and their interplay with agency. It is important to recognize that various gender norms also often disadvantage men and constrain their agency, and these disadvantages intensify when men are unable to fulfill their authority or provisioning roles or perceive these roles to be contested.

Like women, men are held accountable to numerous restrictive norms, which vary across different contexts and categories of men (Connell, 2003; Kimmel, 2000; Pearse & Connell, 2016). Yet studies on masculine gender identities in farming are "curiously lacking" in the global South (Tickamyer & Sexsmith, 2019, p. 68). The different gender norms attached to men's roles—that "idealize strength, risk-taking, financial success, sexual prowess and other characteristics that are difficult to achieve"—tend to diminish the agency of many rural men (p. 68).

Zubia Mumtaz and Sarah Salway (2009) briefly discuss gender and generational norms affecting men during their nuanced intersectional analysis of processes shaping the spaces for women's empowerment. In the joint households that are common in rural Punjab of Pakistan, where this study is set, young men are generally subordinate not only to their fathers but also to older male siblings and grandfathers. Men are expected to "socialize with other men" and limit time spent with their wives (p. 11).

In an urban context, Steve Derné (1995) offers deeper insights into gender and generational norms associated with joint households. He argues that the diverse norms that subjugate women are "often not the result of cultural tradition, or the threat of dishonor, but are driven by men's understanding of their interests as men" in having "power over subordinates" (p. 169). Even among a small and relatively homogenous sample of 49 upper-middle-class, upper-caste Hindu men, Derné finds important differences in the extent to which they maneuver around customary expectations. Love marriages, for instance, are perceived to challenge strict expectations of deference to and eventual care of the senior household members as they move into old age. Sanctioning practices commonly call for marginalizing men and women who enter into love marriages, creating anxiety and fear in young men and women who may be entertaining such a choice. Even men in arranged marriages are discouraged from interacting with and developing strong emotional bonds with their wives, as "men fear that a wife may try to manipulate her husband, tempting him away from his obligations to his parents" (p. 21). Yet men vary in how they navigate these expectations. Older men with more experience negotiating norms as well as young men with an older brother (who will typically take over some day as the household head and care for the parents) were more likely to pursue close relations with their wives and to set up their own households.

While her focus is on women in African contexts, Rose Marie Beck (2009, p. 531) frames the "space to move" for men as also highly gendered, laden with "innovation and ambiguity" and important for understanding processes of local social change. She highlights various development processes that are narrowing economic opportunities for many men across Africa while offering new openings for women. These contradictory forces are exacerbating the challenges that men perceive for achieving their expected status and roles. Ideologies of the "noble man" guide Swahili norms along the East African coast, and "he is associated with civilization, religion, the law, Arab descent and education…" The noble and civilized man's behavior is generally one of "*upole* 'gentleness'" (p. 535). Gentleness can be a respected trait in a man, not just a woman. Nevertheless, Beck's analysis, as with most gender studies on the "space to move," centers on women: women must innovate to negotiate norms and to project their voices in the spaces afforded to them, and men accommodate this. Beck cautions that these spaces of innovation do not necessarily engender more equitable outcomes and "'good' per se" (p. 546).

A common thread in the literature is the dynamic entanglement of individual and shared interests among members of farming households (Jackson, 2007; Rao, 2017; Feldman & Welsh, 1995). A review of field studies from Burkina Faso found that cereal production varies in quite orderly ways among male kin (Whitehead & Kabeer, 2001). This research found the productivity of the compound head (or the senior male in a cluster of male-headed households) much greater than that of individual male household heads, who in turn outstripped the junior men's production. For women and men alike, the agricultural household is a "complex and shifting arena of separations and interdependencies" (Whitehead & Kabeer, 2001, p. 10).

Previous research spanning nearly 100 urban and rural communities across 20 countries found rural men to be by far the least supportive of gender equality

based on definitions of the concept that they themselves provided (Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013, p. 29). By contrast, rural women expressed the most positive views of gender equality, even more so than the urban women and men in our samples. Rural men's perceptions about gender equality suggest that they have the farthest to travel. Moreover, women's (significant) agency and men's (limited) agency appear to be occurring in the many countries where policies and programs aim to strengthen women's empowerment while men perceive their roles as providers and authority figures to be strained by current social change and development processes. Questions about men's resistance to and backlash against women need to consider the extent to which this has to do with women asserting more agency, as well as with "men's general anxiety about the fragility of their rural livelihoods and status" (Okali, 2011, p. 7; also see Pfeffer et al., 2016). While men may be privileged by the gender order, men may not "feel powerful," and some perceive themselves to be the victims of policies that specifically help women (Kimmel 2008, p. 93).

1.2.2 Moving over time and place with norms and agency

Women and men both strive to advance their shared and individual interests, and norms about gender and other categorical status differences shape how these interests are perceived and acted upon. The agency and norms interplay varies among the diverse social categories of women and men in a village. In addition to this complexity, here I address how individual norms appear to "move in multiple directions" (Pearse & Connell, 2016, 43). The gendered social rules tighten and loosen to accommodate how actual practices in a social context often differ from a community's norms and how women and men alternately enforce, comply with, negotiate, and withdraw from different norms as they move through their daily lives and interact with members of their household and community.

In this section, I work with theories about "trajectories of negotiation" and consider how norms are constantly on the move (Tilly, 2016, p. 15; Sewell, 1999). I first set the context for these "mobility" processes by presenting the concept of social "spaces" where goals are pursued and negotiated over time. I next elaborate arguments for distinguishing between two types of mobility: normative *relaxation* and normative *change.*[7] By normative relaxation, I mean the day-to-day social processes by which women and men negotiate individual norms, perhaps because they are unable to uphold a particular social rule or because that rule constrains their ability to meet a need or move forward on a goal. For example, a low-income woman may have little choice but to work for pay in jobs that are beyond her homestead even though this practice is strongly discouraged in her village. She will need to negotiate norms shaping women's mobility and economic roles day in and day out, and in different ways as she moves into different spaces. I discuss evidence below which suggests that these processes of normative relaxation typically involve social pressures that slowly do alter individual norms through dynamics that are seemingly imperceptible as well as overtly conflictual.

Processes of normative change, by contrast, mainly appear during periods of shock when new opportunities or risks are profoundly disrupting local institutions and customary modes of social interaction. These dynamics may open spaces for diverse categories of women and men in a location to further their projects and create new ones, and in the process potentially alter their community's norms in ways that are more in sync with the actual or desired gender relations, roles and conducts of most community members. These shock-induced dynamics present narrow windows of opportunity and an LNC may be signaling everyone to leap at their unusual chances to be assertive and innovative. These dynamics, as I will show, may potentially drive significant change to

multiple norms. This speedier rhythm of normative change differs significantly from the slower and more mundane processes of normative relaxation.

1.2.2.1 The gendered negotiating spaces

The "spaces" for agency provide the fuzzy playing fields where community members negotiate pathways for furthering their interests and goals and the norms that may constrain this agency. A location's gender norms and other social rules set the terms for these interactions, but they do not ensure compliance. As Giddens explains, the reliable exercise of power in a social system "presumes regularized relations of autonomy and dependence"; still, "all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors" (Giddens, 1986, p. 16). These spaces where autonomy and dependence are negotiated may trigger all manner of negotiating tactics, sensitivity, diplomacy, cooperation, wiliness, humor, or perhaps aggression, tears, rage, silence, disregard, and so forth. These spaces may also be of either a hidden or public nature. Aggressive tactics by dominant actors tend to be costly for some but gainful for others as they expose the unfairness of norms and potentially spiral into cycles of increasingly conflictual bargaining. Close-up examinations of these dynamics often show them to be mundane negotiations over small matters. Longer-term perspectives reveal the more significant and contested interests at stake, how past negotiations shape future ones, and how the negotiator with the greatest power, prestige, and resources most often – although not always – commands most of the negotiation spaces and shapes the outcomes (Tilly, 1998, 2001b, 2007a).

In one of his seminal works, *Durable Inequality*, Charles Tilly (1998) elaborates key social mechanisms that reinforce negotiating processes that often tend to favor and sustain the dominant actor(s), network(s), or organization(s) in a negotiation space. Rather than focusing on the spaces with the more numerous

and presumably most powerful collectivities, however, Tilly centers his main argument on a quite simple dynamic: a pair of social categories. Inequality endures mostly because of daily interactions among interpersonal networks across a social boundary, with each side "representing" one of "paired and unequal categories," such as man/woman; Muslim/Jew; citizen/foreigner; salaried/hourly worker (pp.1, 6-8, 79, 100). This social mechanism of categorical inequality does most of the work to normalize and then reinforce, again and again, expectations of inequitable access to resources, prestige, and power. In the social locations of "households, kin groups, and local communities," gender and age differences offer "familiar models" of expected social interactions that repeat and hold influence "over a wide variety of organizational settings as well as over a great range of unequal outcomes" (p. 8).[8] Most members of a household, for instance, have some shared interests in existing arrangements. Over time, and depending on the cultural context, young members of a household in an agricultural community should expect to become patriarchs or matriarchs some day.

Negotiating spaces are also shaped by local knowledge as well as status positions. This knowledge is gleaned from years of firsthand observation, independent and collective experimentation, creativity, and *courage* to act when the moment is ripe. This knowledge is the routine stuff of "daily games" among organizational members, including "work sharing, flirtation, patronage, snobbery, solidarity, recreation" (Tilly 1998, pp. 190). Some feminist theory argues that women and subordinate groups of men invariably acquire and negotiate from a "standpoint" of a *greater* knowledge than rulers. As the subordinates in many negotiating spaces, they are the ones who must develop the keenest radar and cleverest tactics (Harding, 2012; Colfer 1983).

1.2.2.2 Normative relaxation: slow and uneven trajectories of negotiation

Processes of normative relaxation express the changing latitude for maneuver in a negotiating space. These processes often involve a slow and uneven loosening of some norms for women, but less so for men as they have strong interests in maintaining many patriarchal norms. Particularly in rural communities, it is not "uncommon for [men] to express open dissatisfaction that women are gaining a stronger and more independent voice" (Muñoz Boudet et al., p. 68). Historical examinations of these dynamics indicate that stresses around gender roles and relations are far from new. In the later years of colonial Mexico, indigenous and colonial actors with differing normative frameworks struggled for supremacy, with women often bearing the brunt of these battles over deference and independence (Stern, 1995). This was a period of ongoing aggressions and incarcerations targeted at "insubordinate mature women" of peasant and indigenous origin because they apparently posed "a danger to the moral order" that Mexico's foreign rulers sought to impose (Stern, 1995, p. 118).

Paradoxically, while normative rules are often conceived as internalized cognitive processes, the ongoing negotiation and flexing of these rules may trigger either public or private displays of significant aggression (c.f., Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). Box 1 presents a case from Tanzania of visibly beneficial but also stressful and uneven experiences associated with processes of normative relaxation. Elsewhere I provide examples of the aggressive sanctioning practices that may be triggered as different norms are negotiated.

A relaxation of norms provides more spaces for women and subordinate categories of men to maneuver and negotiate their interests and needs. These social interactions, however, do not often drive deeper changes in the restrictive gendered rules that organize a society. A key reason for this is *precisely* the fluid and contextual properties of gender norms. Even in villages with thriving opportunity structures, various local and wider norms and institutions tend to

sustain men's dominant status. For instance, in many if not most agricultural communities, men's formal producer or water user groups are often (although not always) better networked with and resourced by external partners than women's informal forestry or rotating credit groups (Agarwal, 2000, 2001; Molyneux, 2002; Westermann et al., 2005).

Box 1 Case study: Processes of normative relaxation in a village of Tanzania

A large Tanzanian village of 7,000 residents illustrates a type of local social change and development process in which many but not all women observe their agency and economic opportunities to be expanding. Changes to women's roles are occurring unevenly.

Women report that it has now become acceptable for a village woman to be a leader and "involved in politics beyond the village," cultivate and harvest large plots, have a secondary education, and "be rich and own cattle and land." According to the local women, their poverty plummeted from 70 to 30 percent over the past decade. One member of the group explains that many women, including those with scarce resources, have benefited from the recent introduction of modern agricultural methods. They are raising cattle and growing sunflowers, groundnuts, and grapes. A relatively new and active local producer cooperative includes both women and men.

Other study participants indicate no such gains in their lives. The men's group reports half the village's men to be poor still. Members of this group also confide that many local men are shirking their provisioning responsibilities, "letting their wives do everything." Such a man, they indicate, "when the harvest comes, steals the crops. He is a lazy man." Many households are also landless and unable to connect effectively with new agricultural opportunities. The women's group also acknowledges that some village women continue to have limited freedom and scarce options. They are "confined at home … [too] poor to buy anything useful" or to speak in public.

Source: Muñoz Boudet et al. (2013, pp. 150-152).

Nitya Rao (2014) provides nuanced intersectional analysis of caste differences to examine women's agency in five villages of Tamil Nadu, India. Women of the lowest caste, Dalit (Madharis), who are among the poorest in the villages, testify that their role as household providers affords them greater "decision-making in their parental homes, a degree of marital choice, and recognition from their husbands" (p. 70). By comparison, women from the Gounder landowner caste have more choice about their educational and economic opportunities but continue to face rigid norms that discourage them from pursuing paid work outside the home. Rao also presents evidence of how this agency and norms interplay shifts in different ways for the two categories of women as they move through their life cycle and as the circumstances of their households and villages change.

In her study of masculinities, Carol Colfer (2020) presents two cases of communities adjacent to forests, one with more and one with less equitable gender norms. To guide the comparative work, she develops a finely grained harp-shaped theoretical prism that expresses a range of masculine norms, including competition versus cooperation, independence versus hierarchy, and time versus productivity. The first community case, a U.S. town in Washington state, was characterized in the 1970s by a sharp contrast between, on the one hand, the many "locals," or men who typically had logging jobs and who were expected to be "strong, courageous, competitive, independent and dominant within the home," and on the other hand, men from the town with public sector jobs who tended to display more cooperative forms of masculinity (p. 59). Colfer et al. (2020) revisit the Washington case in 2017 and find a change toward a more "companionate view of marriage" (p. 193) and greater support for gender equality. They attribute this to an erosion of many local men's breadwinner status due to disappearance of logging jobs and to the nationwide advances in women's status and economic participation in the intervening years. That many men and

women left their beautiful town and families in search of jobs elsewhere suggests that these changes have been stressful for this community. Ironically, perhaps, women and men described more equitable gender roles and relations in the other community case, from East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Gender norms in this case have remained relatively equitable even as this once remote village has become increasingly integrated into less equitable national and global political, social, and economic institutions. This is true even though numerous villagers have become active members of national and international religious organizations that preach men's dominance. In contexts with greater gender equality, processes of normative relaxation appear to contribute to sustaining these dynamics as well (Colfer et al., 2020).

Many field studies that examine the negotiation of gender norms detail accounts of women engaging in small infractions of norms ("perhaps" absentmindedly or "perhaps" to send a signal). This then triggers disproportionately harsh sanctions from their husbands, who perceive their authority to be challenged by such negotiating tactics (e.g. Munoz Boudet et al., 2013, p. 72). Scarlet Epstein examines these unpredictable and yet predictable sanctioning practices to explain the apparently unexpected doings of a lower-caste man who was publicly threatened with a beating and stripped of obligations by a vital patron simply because he tried to refill his own coffee cup more quickly. The interior of this coffee shop was strictly off-limits to his low caste, and his patron apparently felt a need to make a sharp lesson of this breach of decorum. Such marginalizing and crushing dynamics are also expressed in a case of a remote village of Bhutan where a small girl inquired over dinner with her family why they must always wait for their father to eat when she is extremely hungry. Instead of merely explaining the rules once again, her father lashed out viciously at his wife for the small child's questioning of the norm (Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013, p. 27). These unduly aggressive sanctions for small infractions tend to

convey a ruler who is anxious and needs to send a clear warning about their power. Box 2 shows how sanctioning practices appear to contribute to gender inequality whether a village is prospering or not.

Box 2 Fifty years in the life of two Karnataka villages: Opposite poverty trends, similar (discouraging) gender trends

Scarlett Epstein (2007) works with social norms to contribute to explanations of the uneven social change experienced by two nearby villages of Karnataka in the south of India, one that adopted the then-novel green revolution technologies and one that did not. This research ran from 1954 to 1996. Paradoxically, perhaps, the village that lacked resources to adopt the new technologies experienced significant poverty reduction, while poverty grew among lower-caste households in the modernizing agricultural village. In the village that experienced more equitable growth processes, norms relaxed to accommodate the landless men in search of work opportunities within and beyond their village, and these processes fueled a diversification of the local economy as small businesses emerged to provide services to other farming villages. By comparison, norms governing caste differences remained restrictive in the agriculturally modernizing village – and it was mainly the landowning castes that flourished over the course of Epstein's study.

Women appear to have benefited little from the changing economy of either village. As markets expanded in both villages, the better-off households competed for prestige, including by withdrawing women from income-generating pursuits and adopting costly dowry practices. Households with scarce resources strived to emulate the new practices of those with more respect in their villages, which in turn led to many assuming burdensome debt obligations. As resources grew in the two villages, Epstein further reports rising problems of domestic violence linked to men's increased drinking and gambling in both villages.

Source: Epstein (2007).

Processes of normative relaxation provide space for women and men to negotiate confining normative expectations as they go about their everyday lives

or, when the opportunity arises, to act on a goal. Moreover, processes of normative relaxation play out whether the negotiating spaces are embedded in a well-established institution or in a "site of innovation" where new social forms are yet to be established:

> Individuals use gender … as a primary cultural tool for coordinating their behavior with others and organizing social relations with them…. It causes people to carry cultural meanings about gender well beyond contexts of sex and reproduction to all activities that people carry out through social relations. As people use trailing cultural meanings about gender to frame new social contexts that they confront, they reinscribe status assumptions embedded in these cultural meanings into the new setting (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 28).

A localized intersectional lens sheds valuable light on the unevenness of social change and development within as well as across communities. While norms may relax and move over time, they may also hold steady or tighten further. These types of social processes only appear to change different norms slowly, if at all. The dynamics of normative relaxation contribute to the continuous and more often inequitable gendering of social change and development.

1.2.2.3 Normative change: Accelerated and broad-based trajectories of negotiation

Phases that unleash normative change are often triggered by some manner of shock. A symbol as general as male and female may sometimes be redefined by "dynamics entirely foreign to that institutional domain or spatial location" (Sewell, 1999, p. 49). These turbulent phases set off such a terrific jolt to institutions that a window may open for an unstoppable cascade of change to multiple norms. The new framework of norms may express as liberating—or as far more restrictive. Today's Afghanistan is a case of the latter. Next, I provide

examples of the opposite: a transformation of norms in ways that advance gender equality and empower women.

War and its aftermath may present openings for more equitable norms to take root. When conflict brings chaos to agricultural communities, farming and livestock livelihoods may become too risky. Men may go to war, fear conscription, struggle to guard the farm and other assets from seizure, or go into hiding; as a result, women are often compelled to expand or step into income-generation activities (Kalyvas, 2006; Petesch & Gray, 2010; Tilly, 2003). In some contexts women may be less likely to be targets of violence. Wartime also appears to polarize women's and men's agency. Women's agency grows as they step into new roles, while men often report emasculation. In the recovery period, normative change that is empowering for women may take root in communities benefitting from strong leaders of both genders, a restoration of peace and security, humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, and a rebounding economy (Petesch, 2011, 2018).

More gender-equitable family and inheritance laws represent potentially powerful forces for strengthening women's agency and resource control, but evidence indicates that these reforms may also be ineffective and expose women to violence (e.g. Rao, 2008). Case studies in Ethiopia are illustrative. In one village, a widow risked her life and endured ostracism for seeking to claim her inheritance of cropland, while a widow in another village successfully exercised her legal rights and now manages her own plot although security concerns lingered (Badstue, Petesch, et al., 2020). In addition to legal and policy reforms at the national level, local customary laws and expectations also matter, as "social legitimacy is essential for realizing gender claims" (Okali, 2011, p. 4).

Under conditions when capable states have strategic interests in normative change that is freeing for women, these dynamics can potentially unfold rapidly and in what appear as mostly peaceful ways. With interests that included national

security, a rapid acceleration of development, and a need for women and as well as men to provide labor for factories and agricultural production, the Chinese government near the turn of the 20th century unleashed an extensive public health campaign that effectively ended 1,000 years of foot-binding of small girls in a single generation. Yet even this very capable state had to adopt aggressive tactics in some remote rural regions of this enormous country to alter norms that garnered prestige and respect for families whose women and girls had "tiny feet" (Ko, 2005).

The ground rules for institutions are "continuously subject to varied interpretations and enactments" (Portes, p. 241). Periods of rapid change appear to opportunistically accelerate negotiations over a loosening (or tightening) of the entire framework of gender norms. The ongoing processes of normative relaxation mean that some or potentially many villagers are already practicing and observing less (or more) restrictive norms for their roles and conduct. When opportunities present that encourage gender equality, contestation over prevailing norms appears to accelerate as multiple "negotiators" race to better their lives before these opportunities close. Along the way, these women and men rewrite their normative and institutional rules to make them more (or less) equitable and accountable to the broader interests and needs of the village's women and men. Meanwhile, processes of normative relaxation continue.

1.2.3 Advancing a new concept: Local normative climate

To conclude the theoretical discussion, I return to LNC, defined as the "prevailing set of gender norms in a community" (Chapter 3, p. 86). LNC embodies learning about the fluid and contextual properties of norms and their interactions with agency. This interplay generates mundane regularities but also a social life full of diversity, contradictions, and unpredictability. Women and men may have common or separate goals. Some goals may press against normative expectations,

while others may benefit from them. Norms may be alike or different from village to village, and from gendered social category to gendered social category within them. Although residing in the same community, one person may perceive many spaces to advance their projects while another does not. Often, norms about gender, generation, and socio-economic status emerge as important to these perceptions but in ways that may vary exquisitely. LNCs most often signal a climate that is only encouraging of a type of agency associated with the negotiation of individual norms – making for what appear as slow and uneven dynamics of normative relaxation. Occasionally shocks may open spaces for women's and men's agency in ways that profoundly alter multiple norms.

Relational theories from feminist, sociological, and development studies that explore linkages between agency and norms in a location improve understandings of the highly fluid and contextual social processes that create, reproduce, and ease inequalities over time and across diverse locations. Gender differences provide a ready means for organizing social relations in *all* domains of social life. Theoretical contributions on gender norms clarify why there is often stress around these social rules as actual practices increasingly press against normative expectations.

The fluid ability of some norms to relax while others hold tight, or perhaps tighten further, enables a restrictive LNC to persist and retain relevance over time in a social context. Certainly, the micro-social processes associated with normative relaxation enable new practices and opportunities to flower, such as women's political leadership, innovative agri-food enterprises and active producer and self-help groups. Yet such innovations most often appear to unfold without much change to norms that advantage men's status.

Even under relatively inclusive institutional conditions where economic opportunities are expanding for low-income women and men, and spaces growing for pursuing goals and for agency to grow, all villagers continue to have interests

in upholding some restrictive norms at different junctures of their lives. The same norms that constrain agency at one juncture may enable agency at another.

Many theorists emphasize the mundane, quiet, or mostly subconscious ways in which norms operate and sometimes loosen over time. Yet these interpretations do not explain very well the ongoing investments in maintaining appearances or the unpredictable and visible sparks of unusually harsh discipline when a seemingly inconsequential norm is contested. Nor do approaches that emphasize the quiet and imperceptible relaxation of norms clearly explain the strongly gendered patterns by which violent conflict surfaces in households and more widely in a society (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). Women are far more likely than men to die at the hands of their intimate partner or other family members. Nearly a third of the world's women have experienced intimate partner violence (WHO, 2021). Moreover, surveys of this violence indicate extensive national and locational variability, with one international survey finding that as many as half of all women sampled in some countries report instances of physical or sexual assault by their partners (WHO, 2005). In many rural regions of the world, women may be unsafe in the public arenas of their villages because persistent norms hold that women and girls should be mainly confined to their homes; it may even be considered acceptable and manly to assault them emotionally and physically if they venture out in public unaccompanied (Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013). Young men, meanwhile, remain overwhelmingly the chief perpetrators and victims of lethal violence beyond the household, and male victims account for more than 80 percent of intentional homicides (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011, p. 2). Such findings raise questions about what constitutes peace and security in society.

For selected feminist and sociological scholars such as Sandra Harding (1993), objectivity in both the natural and social sciences is not achieved by taking a disengaged and dispassionate research stance. Rather, objectivity is about "limited location and situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Such

approaches assert that knowledge is "about communities, not about isolated individuals," and they underscore that research provides a partial view and is subject to "mutual and usually unequal structuring" (pp. 590 and 595). From this perspective, research questions and methodologies that emphasize "objective social locations" (Harding, 1993, p. 56), and that privilege learning from diverse villagers' understandings and experiences, provide adequate starting points.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The theoretical approach of the thesis centers on how gender norms both shape and are shaped by the agentic capacities of women and men to access, engage with, and benefit from agricultural innovation and other opportunities in their village – and the potential contributions of these social processes to ending poverty (SDG 1) and achieving gender equality (SDG 5). To improve understanding of these processes, my research addresses the following questions:

- How do gender and other social norms operate to shape and accommodate the diverse and changing conditions of rural communities?
- How do the mutually shaping dynamics of norms and women's and men's agency advance or impede agricultural innovation in a community?
- Under what conditions do local men and women observe empowerment and poverty reduction in their village? Do processes of gender-equitable agricultural innovation contribute to these outcomes?

The thesis applies comparative case study methods, as these are appropriate for addressing my complex and processual research questions. Next, I review my most recent case study research as my thesis builds upon this work.

1.4 GENNOVATE: OVERVIEW OF RATIONALE, APPROACH, AND METHODOLOGY

Much of the research for my thesis was part of a research initiative conducted under the auspices of the CGIAR (formerly the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research). The CGIAR is a major network of international organizations dedicated to food security research. Between 2014 and 2018, most institutional members of this network collaborated in a large qualitative field study on gender and agricultural innovation. The collaboration also engaged numerous other partners, including Wageningen professors and doctoral students. Entitled GENNOVATE (Enabling Gender Equality in Agricultural and Environmental Innovation), the study's fieldwork reached more than 7,000 women and men residing in 137 villages from 26 countries of the global South.[9] Here I highlight key aspects of the study's institutional context, purpose, and methodology, and Chapter 2 elaborates further on these dimensions.

GENNOVATE's management was housed in the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center in Texcoco, Mexico. The research initiative was not attached to a specific research program, but rather was a formative study designed to be of broad relevance for advancing scientific knowledge on "how gender norms and agency interact to shape agricultural change at local levels" (Badstue, Elias, et al., 2020, p. 541). I served as the study's expert advisor and contributed to the study's design, management, and publications.

The research responded to concerns with positivist and extractive research approaches that predominate in agricultural and development research. Among the study's aims, our team sought to encourage more plural research approaches by employing qualitative comparative methods and by strengthening capacities in the CGIAR system for "inductive comparative research methodologies that explicitly seek to expose the contributions to be garnered from both women's and men's local knowledge" (Badstue, Petesch et al., 2018, p. 15). While the CGIAR

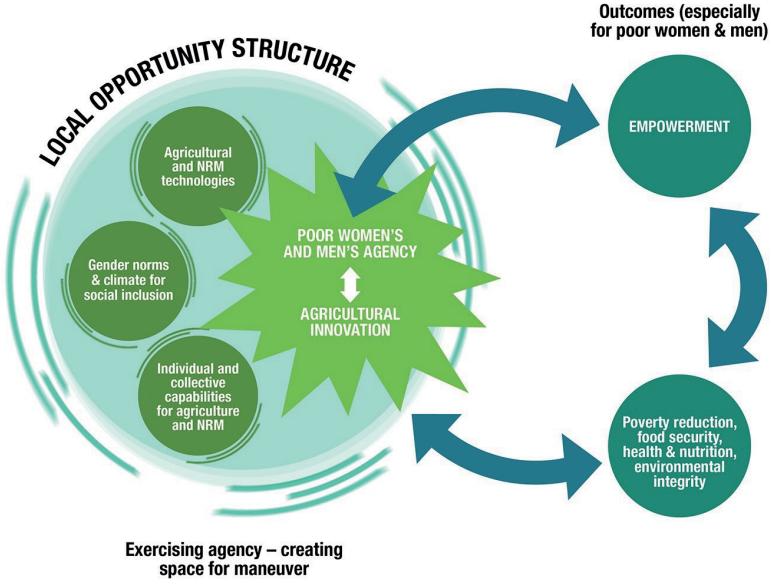
system has a long history of engagement with qualitative methods and participatory research and development programs, these initiatives have struggled to gain traction and inform the system's major strategies and programs for the design, scaling, and evaluation of agricultural innovations (Badstue, Elias, et al., 2020; Badstue, Petesch et al., 2018; Chambers, 2017).

GENNOVATE does not focus on any specific agricultural innovations, but rather explores local women's and men's own understandings of and experiences with innovation processes. Our research also uncovers many non-agricultural livelihood activities. Figure 1 below presents GENNOVATE's conceptual framework, which builds on the relational theory just presented. The model conceives of empowerment and poverty reduction as products of interactions between agency and opportunity structure, and the glossary for the thesis provides definitions of the concepts in the model. The model expresses the potential for diverse interactions between agency, norms, and resources, with a local opportunity structure shaping and being shaped by the combinations of the community members' agency, normative expectations, and capacities to mobilize resources and innovate with their agricultural livelihoods. The double-headed arrows between agency and agricultural innovation convey that these interactions hold potential for empowering and improving the well-being of community members, with these effects in turn feeding back into and affecting the local opportunity structure.

Gender norms and the climate for social inclusion[10] exercise a mediating role throughout the interactions expressed in the GENNOVATE conceptual framework. This model informs the empirical work in the thesis (Chapters 3 through 6). With the benefit of hindsight and the work for this thesis, I would now argue for a clearer distinction between the opportunity structure's rules and resources, and for adding interactions across these two spheres. There could then be, for instance, a dynamic sphere for LNC that includes dimensions such as

gendered social norms, skills repertoire, and technological change (and these significant influences on the roles and institutions that organize a social context). This would still follow the GENNOVATE study's understanding of technological change as a deep cultural influence on local innovation processes (Portes, 2006; Berdegué, 2005). Then the other (interacting) sphere for resources could refer to gendered power differences in "the ability of an actor to impose his or her will despite resistance" (Portes, 2006, p. 239), and the associated gender differences in resource control, status hierarchies, organizations, and networks.

Figure 1 GENNOVATE conceptual framework



Source: Badstue, Petesch et al. (2018, p. 11).

Chapter 2 presents and reflects critically on GENNOVATE's case study methodology and explains how the research design addresses the study's processual research questions. We review the main protocols for

sampling, data collection, and analysis and discuss how the research methods address concerns for context, comparison, and collaboration. Among the design elements, the study applied maximum diversity sampling protocols for case selection to ensure that the research contexts provide for diverse conditions. The full sample includes 74 cases from Asia, 53 from Africa, and 10 from Latin America, and reflect the research priorities of the CGIAR system at the time. Within the case study villages, the sample included equal numbers of women and men from low- and middle-income sectors of the community and from younger (ages 16 to 24) and older (ages 25+) generations.

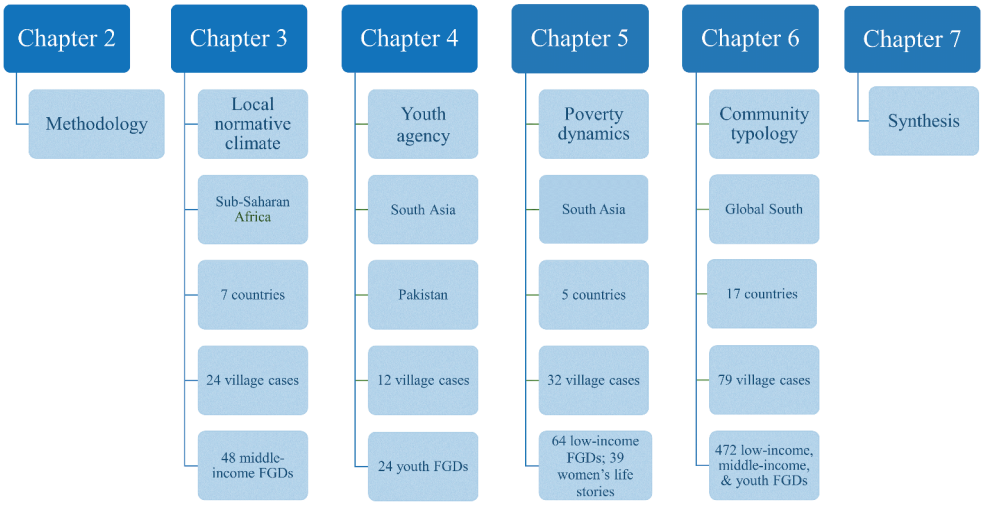
In each study community, field teams worked with a package of 15 qualitative instruments with standardized semi-structured interview guides (Petesch, Badstue & Prain, 2018). The instruments comprised six sex-specific focus group discussions (FGDs), eight individual interviews, and key informant interviews with at least one male and one female community leader. Facilitators engaged focus groups in reflecting on questions about local women's and men's roles and responsibilities in their households and in agriculture and other livelihoods, their opportunities for and barriers to agricultural innovation, and market conditions for their enterprises. Focus groups with young people probed their educational opportunities and goals for the future and asked how local people would perceive the doings of three hypothetical couples with agricultural livelihoods and different types of gender relations.

The dataset from this fieldwork is organized to enable researchers to probe for and learn from both patterning and diversity of norms and agency interactions in a single case, or across multiple cases. Systematic content analysis and triangulation of evidence, as well as other iterative learning methods, are nurtured by the study's analysis protocols. The protocols weave together contextual and comparative empirical research strategies. The broad research collaboration provided both face-to-face and virtual arenas for the study's large and dispersed

research team to interact, support, and learn from one another during all phases of the study (Elias, Badstue et al., 2018). GENNOVATE's dataset from numerous and diverse village cases, as well as the study's comparative, contextual, and collaborative methods, enable us to argue cautiously for the broader relevance of the findings produced (Miles et al., 2014; Ragin, 2008).

I now conclude the theoretical and methodological introduction to the thesis. Six chapters follow. The chapters' key themes are highlighted in the second row of Figure 2. Again, Chapter 2 moves more deeply into the research methodology. Four empirical chapters then follow, each drawing on different subsets of the GENNOVATE village cases. The bottom four rows of Figure 2 summarize the main samples and population groups featured in the empirical chapters. Chapter 7, the final chapter, addresses the research questions, presents a set of lessons informed by theoretical and empirical contributions in the thesis, and reflects on implications from the research. Summaries of the chapters can be found at the back of the thesis.

Figure 2 An overview of chapter themes and samples for empirical chapters



NOTES

[1] I use the terms village, context, community, locality, location, or case interchangeably, although I recognize that this requires various normative and other assumptions about membership and borders. For the empirical work to follow, a "case" refers to a single locality "that inhabitants call their village, community, neighborhood, hamlet" and where "most inhabitants share a common language, culture, and history" (as described in Chapter 2, p. 41).

[2] Testimonies that express these norms can be found, for instance, in the case studies from Kenya and Nigeria in Chapter 3, most youth focus group testimonies in Chapter 4, and the life stories from women unable to move out of poverty in Chapter 5.

[3] The first example is documented in village cases from Ethiopia presented in Badstue, Petesch et al. (2020); the second in cases from Pakistan documented in Chapter 4; and the third in a case from Uzbekistan documented in Chapter 6.

[4] As discussed shortly, LNC emerged during collaborative research conducted prior to the thesis (Petesch, Bullock, et al., 2018, p. 116), and the article with this research has been slightly adapted for Chapter 3 of the thesis.

[5] As with LNC, the community typology findings are from collaborative research conducted prior to the thesis (Petesch, Feldman, et al., 2018) , and the article with this research has been slightly adapted for Chapter 6.

[6] The GENNOVATE study was completed in 2018. Section 4 of this chapter provides an overview of the study and Chapter 2 discusses the methodology in detail. This research was informed, in part, by my earlier global studies with the World Bank, *Voices of the Poor* (e.g., Narayan et al., 2000), *Moving Out of Poverty* (e.g., Narayan and Petesch, 2007), and *On Norms and Agency* (Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013).

[7] This framing of normative relaxation versus change is introduced in my earlier research for Muñoz Boudet et al. (2013, pp. 54-56). However, my learning about these differing dynamics expanded during my research for GENNOVATE and this thesis.

[8] Rather than norms, Tilly mainly works with the concept of scripts that structure interactions according to the sites of interaction, such as the tightly scripted and deferential interaction of a job interview compared to the more relaxed interaction of two friends having lunch. However, most theorists work with models of culture that employ social norms when explaining patterning in social relations and daily conducts (Portes 2006).

[9] See https://gennovate.org/ for the study's methodology, publications, and team.

[10] The climate for social inclusion refers to the extent to which the local level institutional fabric is inclusive (or not) of women and men from different categories of the community. LNC differs in that it expresses the deeper influences of gender norms on social life, including their influences on skills repertoires, roles, and institutional blueprints, as discussed in Portes (2006).

Chapter 2


MENDEZ BURGOS
Los cambios se fecundan en las ideas
se refuerzan con las palabras
se demuestran en las acciones
NEW YORK

Qualitative, comparative, and collaborative research at large scale: The GENNOVATE field methodology*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

International agricultural research leverages high economic returns, estimated between $2.8 and $3.8 billion annually for wheat alone (CIMMYT, 2015, p. 2). As impressive as these figures are, further returns could be leveraged from innovations in agriculture and natural resource management (NRM) if women had the same opportunities as men to access, adopt, and benefit from improved technologies and practices. Despite women's significant and, in many countries, expanding roles in agriculture, and despite decades of programs to reverse the gender divides, adoption rates continue to strongly favor men (see, for instance, FAO, 2011; Slavchevska, 2016). Such large and persistent gender inequalities matter because they constrain agricultural productivity and its contributions to poverty reduction, gender equality, food security, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion. Moreover, a growing body of literature demonstrates that new agricultural technologies and practices that are not sensitive to gender risk worsening the poverty, workload, and wellbeing of low-income rural women and their families (Cleaver, 2003; Cornwall and Edwards, 2010; Kumar & Quisumbing, 2010; Okali, 2011 and 2012). However, the conditions under which both women and men benefit from agricultural and NRM advances are still poorly understood.

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We present a qualitative comparative methodology that addresses this important knowledge gap and enhances the toolkit for large-scale agricultural research for development. "Enabling Gender Equality in Agricultural and Environmental Innovation," or GENNOVATE, the study combines contextually grounded, comparative, and collaborative research strategies to illuminate regularities in how gender norms and agency—concepts that we elaborate below—interact to shape local innovation processes across diverse contexts. This can inform strategies and interventions for more gender-equitable adoption of improved agricultural technologies and practices.

GENNOVATE represents unprecedented research collaboration for the CGIAR (formerly Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research), a global partnership of research institutes advancing agricultural science and innovation. The large study team spans five continents and includes principal investigators (PIs) with nearly all CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs), as well as other academic and independent researchers.[1] The field teams completed data collection in 137 villages across 26 countries in 2016—listening to, learning from, and systematically documenting the views and experiences of over 7,000 adults (ages 25 to 55) and youth (ages 16 to 24) living in agricultural and forest communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

To set the stage for presenting the qualitative, comparative, and collaborative methodology, we open with a discussion of the emerging field of multisite "medium-n" methodologies which informed our approach. We next introduce the study's rationale, key questions, and conceptual framework. We then explain and reflect on the study's sampling, data collection and analysis protocols, and related literature.

2.2 "MEDIUM-N" QUALITATIVE FIELD STUDIES

There is a small but growing qualitative comparative literature that is grounded in contextual research strategies and people's own understandings and interpretations of their lives, but which engages with larger samples and more comparative "variable-oriented" analysis procedures than traditionally associated with qualitative research. Known in the field as "medium-n," these approaches refer to field studies that apply a relatively standardized qualitative methodology to sample sizes of, roughly, 10 or more cases. Most of these studies treat an urban or rural "community" as the basic unit of analysis for a case; and many apply maximum diversity sampling frameworks to identify patterns across diverse contexts.[2] Within GENNOVATE a case is similar to the notion of "site" and refers to a population living in a single locality that the inhabitants call their village, community, neighborhood (barrio), or hamlet. The principle for defining this unit of analysis is propinquity as this increases the probability that most inhabitants share a common language, culture, and history and can be treated as a single case.[3] Medium-n approaches represent an important contribution within qualitative research because the size and diversity of their samples can generate patterns that have broader relevance for policies and programs, while their findings remain anchored to local contexts and their complexities (Miles et al., 2014, p. 314).

GENNOVATE was inspired by the World Bank's medium-n global studies (e.g. Narayan et al., 2000; Narayan & Petesch, 2007; Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013), in which field teams gathered testimonies from thousands of women and men on topics such as wellbeing and ill-being (see World Bank, 1999 for methodology), how a low-income man or woman escapes from or remains trapped in poverty (Narayan & Petesch, 2005), and what makes a good wife and a good husband (Turk et al., 2010). The innovation that GENNOVATE brings to the methodological approach of these projects includes a focus on agriculture and

NRM, the social context that supports or inhibits innovation in rural livelihoods, and the unprecedented collaboration among the PIs from independent CGIAR research institutes in their application of common methods of data-gathering, processing, analysis, and dissemination of results.

Ambitious medium-n approaches have previously been employed to probe into the social and institutional dimensions of NRM and other rural development processes. Akter et al. (2017) apply a multidimensional framework for measuring empowerment in agricultural contexts developed by a team at the International Food Policy Research Institute (Alkire et al., 2013) with 37 focus group discussions conducted in 21 villages in diverse agricultural regions of four Southeast Asian countries. The authors reveal dimensions of women's strong agency, such as equitable access to productive agricultural resources and control of household budgets. Colfer (2005) applies participatory tools across 30 community-level case studies in 11 countries to analyze adaptive collaborative management initiatives to sustain local forest resources. Of note, Colfer (2005, p. 186) reports local forest management capacities to be *strongest* in the "chaotic and difficult settings" affected by national and local conflict. In a follow-up 15-community study across five tropical countries, Colfer and Pfund (2011) combine qualitative and quantitative tools to provide finely grained comparative analyses of the often weak and contested interface between national and local governance systems for management of forest landscapes. Barron, Diprose and Woolcock (2011) use maximum diversity sampling, longitudinal qualitative fieldwork, and newspaper archives in their inquiry into the effects on rural strife of a large governmental community-driven development program in 16 sub-districts of two conflict-affected provinces in Indonesia. The authors identify significantly lower violence levels in the more economically dynamic province, but only for their set of research communities which had been engaged for at least three or four years in the community development program. Hossain et al., (2010) present qualitative

longitudinal research that compares impacts of the 2007-8 food and fuel price shocks and financial crisis in a rural and urban community in five developing countries. These comparative community-level studies bring to light dynamics and opportunities and hardships that might escape purely quantitative survey methods.

As with Colfer and Pfund's or Akter's approaches, medium-n methods may be paired with or complement quantitative methods (Kanbur, 2003). Perez et al., (2015) explore factors shaping resilience to climate and other changes among farming households and communities in 11 village-level cases across nine countries in East and West Africa. The authors offer significant evidence from survey and focus group data of large gender differences in access to resources and institutions that affect the ability to withstand shocks. Quisumbing (2011) corroborates in-depth qualitative work (Baulch & Davis, 2008) on the importance of combinations of shocks in the lives of Bangladeshi villagers, especially dowry and medical expenses, as drivers of falling into and remaining in poverty.

It is not coincidental that many of these pioneering medium-n studies delve into questions of impoverishment or gender inequality, or center on political, economic, or natural resource crises or conflicts—topics which require engaging with fluid and contested power relations and institutional arrangements and thus benefit from processual and contextually grounded research strategies. Nevertheless, these studies have attracted diverse types of criticisms, including weaknesses in design and implementation that limit reliability of their data (e.g. White & Phillips, 2012; Hossain & Scott-Villiers, 2019), superficial treatments of context and evidence (e.g. Jackson, 1999b, 2002; Brock & McGee, 2002), and associations with existing disciplinary monopolies and paradigms that impede greater research pluralism, collaboration, and learning (e.g. Brock & McGee, 2002; Rao & Woolcock, 2007). As calls continue to be made for contextually sensitive research that can better address the uncertain and contradictory effects

of agricultural innovation and other development processes (Kristjanson et al., 2017; Seymour & Peterman, 2017), GENNOVATE's design seeks to carry forward the learning on a methodology that is still at the frontier of new social science methods. While these large-scale approaches have been criticized for the way in which they obscure contextual differences, this flattening out makes it possible to see what is common, and what is not, which is important in understanding processes of globalization (Hossain & Scott-Villiers, 2019). Much remains to be understood about contextually specific processes of social change in the face of large-scale development, and thus there is clear need to demonstrate the viability of the approach as a contribution to research communities with similar concerns.

2.3 STUDY RATIONALE AND APPROACH

The research methodology combines concerns for context, comparison, and collaboration. The notion that context matters is central to the study's conceptual framing and the research questions that guided the research design:

- How do gender and other social norms operate to shape and accommodate the diverse and changing conditions of rural communities?
- How do the mutually shaping dynamics of norms and women's and men's agency advance or impede agricultural innovation in a community?
- Under what conditions do local men and women observe empowerment and poverty reduction in their village? Do processes of gender-equitable agricultural innovation contribute to these outcomes?[4]

The previous chapter presents the rationale, concepts, and literatures that informed these study questions, as well as our conceptual model of the processes raised in the study questions. Here we provide highlights of these crucial guiding elements for our field methodology.

To address the study questions, we draw on feminist literature concerned with the mutually constitutive and contested relations between agency and structure (e.g. Kabeer, 1999; Ridgeway, 2009; Wharton, 1991). The study questions require exploring interactions between gender norms, agency, and agricultural innovation in specific contexts. Gender norms—the socially constituted rules that prescribe men's and women's daily behavior—are an important dimension of context. These norms are maintained by internalized and stereotypical beliefs about men's higher status and competence (Ridgeway, 2009), as well as by mutual expectations—held by one's family and social networks—that individuals should act in gender-appropriate ways (Bicchieri, 2006; Mackie et al., 2012). Norms are underpinned by psychosocial processes that come to define power relations, including women's subjectivity.

The study explores men's and women's perceptions about making important decisions in their lives, and their experiences with innovating in their rural livelihoods. Study participants, women and men of different socioeconomic and age groups, reflect on their engagement with new agricultural technologies, natural resource management practices, learning opportunities, relationships, and institutions in their community. These innovations may be locally devised or externally introduced. Our understanding of innovations and innovation systems is influenced by Berdegué (2005, p. 3), who describes innovations as "social constructs, and as such, they reflect and result from the interplay of different actors, often with conflicting interests and objectives, and certainly with different degrees of economic, social, and political power." Innovation in this sense

includes farmer-level experimentation and adaptation, which can be seen as an expression of agency.

The study examines how gender norms and other factors in specific localities mediate the capability of men and women to exercise agency, make choices, and innovate in and benefit from their agricultural livelihoods. Fundamentally, *agency* is about "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438), either independently or jointly with others. GENNOVATE's conceptual framing positions agency as a process that is embedded in and conditioned by local opportunity structures—the particular combinations of resources including infrastructure, institutions, and social organization—but also plays a role in shaping these.

The study's conceptual framework reflects that interaction between men's and women's capacities for agency and innovation, and the opportunities and barriers for innovation in their local opportunity structure, can contribute to a process of empowerment and other dimensions of improved wellbeing. Importantly, the social rules that so often advantage men's capacities over women's to access and benefit from new agricultural opportunities may be questioned or come in conflict in ways that can provide space for agency and social change. Normative change in women's agricultural roles may sometimes emerge from processes that are cooperative, such as through reaching a new mutual understanding in a community that recognizes and supports local women farmers' innovation in soybean production, processing, and sales (e.g. Padmanabhan, 2002). Additionally, normative change may follow more conflictual processes of negotiation and contestation, involving, for instance, men resisting women's growing participation in commercial rice production (e.g. Fonjong & Athanasia, 2007). The study's framework rests on the understanding that women and men living in farming, forest, and mixed environments are key stakeholders in innovation processes and must be active participants in learning

about, testing, and adapting a new technology or practice to their needs. The heterogeneity of local opportunity structures—which may feature more or less restrictive gender norms and be more or less empowering for different genders and social groups in a community—is what makes innovation processes so varied, complex, and uncertain.

A second key element of the research design is its *comparative* approach. The study employs comparative case study methods to address the study questions because they enable "investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2003, p. 2) and make cautious generalizations to other settings (Pallares- Burke, 2002, p. 18). The goal is to provide an alternative, "middle way" between the significant time investment and small samples associated with ethnography and the limitations of survey research. As applied research, we move towards the "diagnostic approach" advanced by Ostrom (Basurto & Ostrom, 2009, p. 7) in her groundbreaking work on common property resources. This combines attention to relevant causal processes and a large comparative case study methodology to "identify key variables present or absent in particular settings so as to understand successes and failures." "At a deeper level," explain Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014, p. 101), "the purpose [of multisite approaches] is to see processes and outcomes across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus to develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations." Indeed, this is the rationale for their use by the World Bank, CGIAR, and other international institutions.

Lastly, the research approach was framed by principles of research *collaboration*, which are emphasized in participatory and feminist traditions and highlight the importance of the subjectivities of study participants and researchers. These participatory and feminist contributions, including by researchers within the CGIAR, was strongly collaborative, and this has been

carried into the gender research out of which GENNOVATE emerged (Cernea & Kassam, 2006; CGIAR-IEA, 2017).

Many feminist inquiries apply inductive research strategies that are sensitive to the diversity of women's experiences as well as to subjects' own representation of their lives (Olesen, 2005, p. 137). Similarly, our research design is concerned with how, why, and by whom knowledge is obtained. It prioritizes a collaborative research process that can contribute to improving the institutions where the researchers work and, ultimately, the lives of the study participants (Chambers, 1995; Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; Olesen, 2005).

2.4 SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOLS

Data was collected between April 2014 and May 2016 using semi-structured field instruments. These were designed to foment rich reflections and interactions among study participants while also enabling systematic comparative analysis of the many topics discussed and population groups sampled. In focus groups and individual interviews, study participants reflect on questions such as:

- What qualities make a woman a good farmer? And a man a good farmer?
- What are the differences between a woman who is innovative and likes to try out new things and a man who is innovative?

In the following section, we provide an overview of the research protocols for sampling and data collection, and then we reflect on a few challenges with both.

Table 1 presents the countries, crops, and research programs reached by the fieldwork. The sample covers the world's three major food crops: rice, wheat, and maize, and other important food crops, such as groundnuts and pulses. It includes countries in the dryland ecosystems of Africa and Asia and communities practicing agro-forestry and aquaculture in Indonesia and the Kyrgyz Republic.

Table 1 Study countries, target crops and systems, and CGIAR Phase 1 Research

Countries	Target crop & system	CGIAR Research Program (CRP)
• ***Asia***: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh), Indonesia, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Uzbekistan, Vietnam • ***Africa***: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe • ***Latin America***: Colombia, Mexico	• Aquaculture • Banana • Cassava • Chickpeas • Groundnuts • Humid tropical systems • Maize • Millet • Pigeonpea • Potato • Rice • Sorghum • Sweet potato • Tree-based systems • Wheat	• Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) • Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) • Dryland Cereals (DC) • Dryland Systems (DS) • Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA) • Grain Legumes (GL) • GRISP • Humidtropics • MAIZE • Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB) • WHEAT

2.4.1 Sampling principles

The study cases are situated within agri-food systems of relevance to the specific CRPs involved. However, rather than selecting cases in relation to a particular type of agricultural system or agro-ecology, the communities were selected purposively to introduce variance on two dimensions considered important for understanding gender differences in agricultural innovation:

– *Economic dynamism*, here understood as competition over agriculture or NRM resources, infrastructure development, changes in the market orientation of smallholder farmers, processing technologies for key commodities, the relative percentages of buyers

and sellers in local markets, and livelihood diversification, including on- and off-farm employment.

– *Gender gaps in assets and capacities*, such as the percentage of girls completing primary school compared to boys, the extent to which women hold important leadership positions in local organizations, and norms about women's freedom of movement.

The sampling frame's two axes for stratification reflect an empirical literature finding associations between countries with greater gender equality and higher levels of economic growth (e.g. World Bank, 2011). We hypothesized that similar associations are likely to characterize community-level variation, despite the highly variable influences of "local structures of patriarchy" (Kabeer, 2016, p. 315) which dampen the effects of growth on gender equality (Kabeer & Natali, 2013).

With a focus on agricultural innovation, which has potential to contribute strongly to economic growth, the effects of these local structures are precisely what the research was designed to investigate. By exploring and comparing our evidence across villages that differ in economic dynamism and gender inequality, our diverse sample enabled us to present nuanced evidence of the fluid ways in which gender norms operate to shape local agricultural innovation processes, even in a context of otherwise similar cultural regions. The heterogeneous case studies also provided a means to compare ways in which local innovation processes can, in turn, contribute to opening or narrowing the scope for women to negotiate and withdraw from local norms which constrain their agency and livelihood initiatives. Additionally, the diverse sampling enabled us to identify broad regularities in the extent to which the normative climate encouraged (or discouraged) exercising agency in a community and, in Chapter 6 of the thesis we offer a typology of three types of local social change processes informed by these regularities.

For substantive as well as practical reasons, the protocols provided PIs with some flexibility in the sample selection. For instance, where information on local gender gaps was difficult to obtain or less salient in a particular context, PIs could consider other relevant indicators. This guidance differs from quantitative research protocols that specify standardized measures for stratification to ensure consistency in the comparative units of analysis. We allowed for a more expansive set of indicators to reflect the study's diverse cultural and agro-ecological contexts. This followed George and Bennett's (2005, p. 19, in Locke & Thelen, 1998; emphasis in original guidance that "researchers must carry out 'contextualized comparison,' which self-consciously seeks to address the issue of equivalence by searching for *analytically equivalent* phenomena—even expressed in substantively different terms—across different contexts."

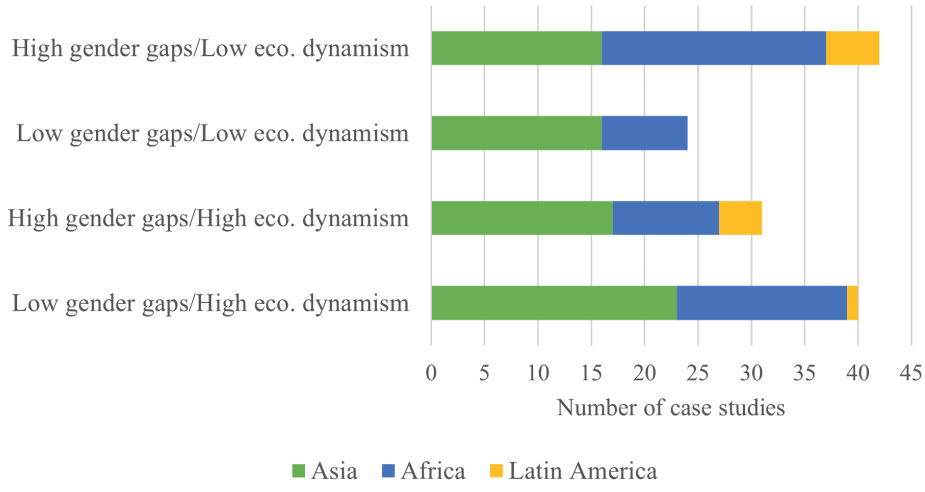
2.4.2 Case selection

Selection of the 137 cases in 26 countries was guided by the PIs' classification of the cases on gender gaps and economic dynamism (Figure 1. Asia contains the largest number of cases (74, followed by Africa (53 and Latin America (10. The regional concentration in Asia and Africa reflects current research priorities in the CGIAR system. The sample includes nine of the world's 15 most populous countries: Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Mexico, Philippines, and Vietnam. Figure 1 summarizes the regional distribution, showing good coverage of all four sampling dimensions except for the smaller Latin America set of cases.

The classification was challenging as many PIs reported limited or no access to district- or community-level census, survey, or administrative data to inform their sampling. In these cases, community selection had to be informed by CRP scoping studies, other secondary literature, consultations with CRP scientists, and site visits with local authorities (see Table 2 for examples of how

this was done). For example, in East Kalimantan in Indonesia, the team drew on its previous field studies and oil palm literature to hypothesize that gender norms would be more restrictive where land leasing and wage labor for large-scale oil palm production were more common than smallholder production.

Figure 1 Regional distribution of cases by sampling framework



Most study countries contain two to four cases, although eight countries contain samples ranging from six to 18 cases each, mainly due to the presence of multiple CRPs in the country. The effects of local structures, and therefore the importance of careful sampling, are supported by our initial observations, which indicate strong variance on gender gaps *within* the sampled regions of a country as well as between them. In one of the four cases in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtun Khwa province, for instance, less than a third of girls are in primary school, women rarely leave the homestead except on family occasions, and some women found it too unsettling to speak aloud in focus groups and so whispered their responses to nearby companions who then spoke out on their behalf. In another village in the same province, girls were reaching secondary and tertiary education levels, and some had found jobs as teachers.

Table 2 Examples of case study selection

Study region	CRP	Province or district	Selection criteria (economic dynamism & gender gaps)	Number of cases
India: Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh	WHEAT	Intervention areas	Census data on livelihood and income sources and farm property & female literacy and share of scheduled caste population	12
Indonesia: East Kalimantan	FTA	Intervention areas	Modes of incorporation into oil palm systems and concerns for wage labor, land leasing & dispossession & independent smallholder (as proxies for eco dynamism & gender gaps)	5
Mexico: Oaxaca and Chiapas	MAIZE	Intervention areas	State and district level data, as well as previous project monitoring data. Previsits with local key informants, including regional hub managers, local partners and community leaders to gather information on village economic and agricultural conditions and trends & gender data such as women's age at first pregnancy and participation in local councils	6
Nigeria: Oyo and Kaduna	Humid Tropics	Intervention areas	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture data and previsits with key informants: market infrastructure & education, early marriage	4
Philippines: Nueva Ecija	GRISP	Intervention areas	Survey data on income & local key informant information on women in local elected office and civic leadership	3
Tanzania: Kilosa, Muheza, Meru, Kilombero	MAIZE	Intervention areas	Varietal diffusion monitoring data, and previsits with district authorities and community development officers to gather information, for instance, on village economic trends and agricultural diversification and productivity & women's representation in local public and civic leadership, asset ownership, and men's and women's farming roles	4
Uzbekistan	WHEAT	Intervention areas.	Survey data used for provincial selection based on wheat yield & women's participation in farm management	4

The local agricultural economies also vary greatly across the cases. In one of the villages sampled in Oyo State of Nigeria, there is almost no infrastructure and residents cultivate maize, cassava, plantain, kola nut, and cocoa for their own

consumption and sell the surplus in a weekly local market. The other village sampled in Oyo shows signs of greater prosperity due to more infrastructure, services, crop diversity, and commerce. The larger sample includes cases that are even more economically dynamic where some farmers engage in highly mechanized and irrigated commercial farming for distant markets.

2.4.3 Data collection teams and tools

The field teams were comprised of a team leader who in many cases is the PI, or alternatively an experienced national field researcher, and a minimum of one male and one female facilitator and one male and one female note taker. This was to ensure that no member of the opposite sex is present during data collection as required by study protocols. Field team members were typically experienced national researchers who know local languages and cultures; however, teams include translators if needed, and a hired community organizer to support local logistics.

The package of data collection instruments reflects extensive reviews of literature, lessons and tools from previous field studies, two rounds of field pilots and feedback from experts and study participants on the instruments. The first trial of the instruments took one week and was conducted in a rural village in central Mexico by a seven-person team of senior researchers and experienced field staff. Debriefings with study participants followed the data collection to elicit their views about the process and questions asked, and to discuss any confusion. After submitting the revised methodology package for review by PIs and other CGIAR and World Bank researchers, a second and final pilot was conducted during the GENNOVATE "training of trainers" in Kampala and Mukono, Uganda. Additional regional trainings of trainers for PIs followed in Colombia and Bangladesh which reviewed study objectives and concepts, sampling protocols, facilitation and documentation needs for each data collection

tool, and good practices for training, fieldwork preparations, and management of field teams and community relations. In classroom exercises, PIs and a local field team rotated in and out of roles as facilitators, note takers, and village members. The regional trainings also provided opportunities for PIs to observe the local team in practice fieldwork with the instruments. *The GENNOVATE Methodology* (Petesch et al., 2018) details protocols and recommendations covered during the training.

The methodology package features 15 data collection activities for each research village (Table 3). There were three focus group instruments: the first was conducted separately with low-income women and men, the second with middle-income women and men, and the third with young women and men (six groups in total). Every team also conducted nine *semi- structured interviews* guided by three instruments: i) a community profile to gather background demographic, social, economic, agricultural, and political information about the case (requires key informants of both genders); ii) innovation pathway interviews with local people who are known for trying new things in agriculture[5] (two men, two women); and iii) life story interviews (two men, two women). With strong advance coordination and support from a hired community organizer, most teams completed the fieldwork for a case within one week..

Each field instrument contains a standardized semi-structured individual or group interview guide to ensure comparability in data collection; however, PIs tailored sections of the interview guides to address other issues of importance to their CRPs or the specific case. For example, the PI from the Aquatic Agricultural Systems CRP who ran nine case studies in Bangladesh and Philippines introduced questions on community problem-solving. To ensure a common understanding of the tools, the trainings engage team members in long hours reviewing, discussing, and practicing the data collection instruments—question-by-question. The team also reviews the quality of the translation of each question, making sure that it

not only captures the intent of the English version, but that the translated phrasing uses common, everyday terms. For example, in the data collection, we explored the concepts of agency and empowerment with a dynamic ladder exercise that engaged the terms “power and freedom.” Teams worked to ensure that their translation of these terms used everyday words or phrases that would be familiar to the villagers in their case studies.

Facilitators must learn to become comfortable with asking each question as it appears in the interview guide. They must memorize key topics where their probing is essential (also flagged in the guides), such as questions repeated across the tools about local experiences with agricultural and NRM innovations. Note takers, working on laptops, are trained to use the interview guides as a template to document question-by-question individual study participant’s responses as fully as possible. Note takers also register silences, gestures, or emotions that accompany responses, and in some cases take voice recordings as backup to ensure they have verbatim quotations. Additional questions asked, or questions skipped, are also noted. To ensure appropriate ethical procedures are followed, before each data collection activity, facilitators read aloud slowly and discuss a prepared statement. This explains the study purpose, assures confidentiality, and alerts study participants that they have the right to not answer questions and are free to end their participation in the study at any time.

Table 3 Overview of data collection instruments

Instrument	Purpose	Respondents
Activity A. Literature review	• To situate the case in a wider context by providing general background information about the study country and case study area and to review relevant findings from recent studies, particularly about the innovations of interest and their gender dimensions.	(Principal investigator)
Activity B. Semi-structured interview: *Community profile*	• To provide social, economic, agricultural, and political background information about the study community	Key informants • 1 or 2 men • 1 or 2 women
Activity C. Focus group: Ladder of Life	• To explore gender norms and household and agricultural roles • Labor market trends and gender dimensions • Enabling and constraining factors for innovation, and their gender dimensions • The culture of inequality in the village, factors shaping socio-economic mobility, poverty trends—and their gender dimensions • Intimate partner violence	Low-income adults ages 30 to 55 • 1 FGD of 8 to 10 adult women • 1 FGD of 8 to 10 adult men
Activity D. Focus group: Capacities for innovation	• To explore agency and decision making • Community trends • Enabling and constraining factors for innovation, and their gender dimensions • Gender norms surrounding household bargaining over livelihoods and assets • The local climate for agriculture and entrepreneurship, and their gender dimensions • Social cohesion and social capital	Middle-income adults ages 25 to 55 • 1 FGD of 8 to 10 adult women • 1 FGD of 8 to 10 adult men
Activity E. Focus group: Aspirations of youth	• To explore gender norms, practices, and aspirations surrounding education • enabling and constraining factors for innovation, and their gender dimensions • Women's physical mobility and gender norms shaping access to economic opportunities and household bargaining • Family formation norms and practices	Older adolescents and young adults ages 16 to 24 • 1 FGD of 8 to 12 women • 1 FGD of 8 to 12 men
Activity F. Semi-structured interview: *Innovation pathways*	• To explore in-depth the trajectory of individual experiences with new agricultural and NRM practices, and the role of gender norms and capacities for innovation in these processes.	Agricultural and NRM innovators ages 25 to 55 • 2 men innovators • 2 women innovators
Activity G. Semi-structured interview: *Individual life stories*	• To explore the life stories of different men and women in the community who have moved out of poverty, fallen into deeper poverty, or remained trapped in poverty, and how gender norms, assets, and capacities for innovation in agriculture/NRM, and other assets and capacities shaped these different poverty dynamics.	Individuals of varied poverty dynamics ages 30 to 55 • 2 men • 2 women

The trainings and guide also review procedures for recruitment of study participants, as each instrument specifies a particular age range and socioeconomic status aside from the general requirement that the large majority of study participants be engaged in agricultural or NRM livelihoods. Teams are trained to consult widely with different leaders and sectors of the community as they compile potential lists of study participants for the different tools. The consultation is time consuming but important to ensure recruitment beyond a particular segment of the community. Many teams visited the study communities or hired community organizers to begin the recruitment process in advance of the fieldwork as well as to facilitate the team's entry and other logistics; however, the trainings emphasize a need for close supervision by field team leaders.

The tools draw directly from participatory rural appraisal techniques (PRA) and feature many visual activities and probing questions to support and deepen the study participants' own interpretations and analyses of key study topics and to encourage rich discussion among study participants. In contexts with limited literacy, the visuals were enhanced with symbols. Interview guides also contain a few pre-coded questions that engage focus group participants in private individual rating exercises before discussing the topic. The rating activities provide a useful device to reduce biases that can be introduced by whoever replies first to a focus group question, and the numerical responses are documented systematically in the field notes to support comparative analytic work later on.[6] To illustrate, in the focus groups with young men and women, each study participant is asked to estimate and record on a small slip of paper the number out of every 10 women in their village who "move about freely on their own in the public spaces of the community." The slips are collected and results posted anonymously, and the facilitator refers to the pattern of responses to guide a discussion by the group that often elicits reflections on local norms governing women's physical mobility.

With older adults, many rating exercises are repeated, but the reference point is changed from the current period to a decade ago—for instance, on whether it was common or not for a young married woman to work for pay. This data often provided valuable information on perceptions of change in a particular norm over time. The study also relies on a decade-long recall for rating activities that assess local changes in women's and men's decision-making capacities and in household poverty levels, recognizing that individuals recall more strongly events that are "1) unusual, 2) have relatively greater economic or social costs or benefits, and 3) have more continuing consequences" (Farfan & Zezza, 2014, p. 29). Dempsey (2010) discusses risks of obtaining partial information and recollections that are tailored to explain current circumstances. The study addresses issues with recall in various ways, including by training facilitators to identify, and repeat during focus groups and interviews, an important local or national event a decade ago to strengthen people's memories. Also, many recall questions address consequential events or processes, such as major life decisions, which other studies (e.g., Krishna, 2007) have found to be more accurate. Moreover, focus group members frequently assist one another with recovering information, and key study questions are repeated with different population groups to support triangulation.

2.5 FIELDWORK ISSUES

Where teams can tap into existing relationships with and knowledge of research sites, this greatly eases fieldwork preparations. Tapping into existing bonds of trust enriches the quality of the data collection process and evidence gathered. The research products are also more likely to be relevant and make a difference. Yet, these relationships may also prompt suggestions of bias if difficult places are underrepresented, or study participants are courteous and expect some kind of

benefit. More specifically, community members from villages where CRPs or other external partners are active may overstate the advantages and understate the problems with an agricultural innovation. It is important to note that these issues are not unique to qualitative research, and experienced social researchers are equipped with techniques to reflect on how their own history, status, and biases, as well as those of their "subjects," may be affecting the evidence and, in turn, interpretations and findings.

Unquestionably, data collection requiring mere days in a village cannot substitute for the strong relations of trust and deeper insights on gender power relations and contestation of norms provided by skilled ethnographers and extended fieldwork, repeated over time (see, for instance, Collier, 1997; Epstein et al., 1998). Nevertheless, the instruments provide multiple vantage points on these processes; all six focus groups, for instance, engage in detailed discussions about the most important agricultural innovations for women and for men to have come into their communities over the past five years. In addition to focus group data, semi-structured individual interviews and community profile data also provide nuanced information on the study communities as they relate to the status of and conditions over time for the village men and women in their local labor, agricultural, or land markets. Study participants observe benefits from new agricultural technologies, roads, and other resources, which are increasing their yields and profits; however, they also detail less desirable changes for their rural livelihoods, such as more onerous work profiles, difficulties with accessing new seeds, and inadequate technical support when new technologies and soil management practices fail (Petesch et al., 2017; Badstue et al., 2017; GENNOVATE RTB-HT team, 2017).

Rapid data collection is also limited in its ability to glean hidden meanings of status differences as well as local expressions, silences, and knowledge schemes. Moreover, all transcripts (apart from those in Spanish) are translated by

the field teams into English for the data coding, posing additional interpretation challenges. PIs and other team members spend long hours reviewing both original notes and translations. Nevertheless, in all cases of translation, whether in the formulation of questions or interpretation of responses, essential meanings can be lost (Temple, 2005). People also struggle to find the words to convey their understandings and experiences, and it must be recognized that "a very wide area of knowledgeability is simply occluded from view" (Giddens, 1984, p. xxx).

A common criticism of field instruments is that they can be overloaded with questions and drag on too long. Certainly our focus groups with low-income women and men cover a multitude of topics, and many teams found it helpful to introduce a break for a shared meal. Another concern is that focus group dynamics almost always mean some participants dominate and others remain silent. There are many ways to nurture inclusion and elicit a range of views in group interviews (Chambers, 2002), and some of these are discussed and practiced during training. In Afghanistan, the team spent many long hours recruiting women because, as the field team leader reported, husbands did not allow wives "to sit with strangers giving information." The team also took breaks in the data collection to repeat explanations about the study purpose and to gain trust. While this required additional effort, the team provided some of the study's most insightful and detailed field notes.

The many cases where high-quality facilitation combines with the methods to set off group chemistry provide superb insights into the normative environment that surrounds farming roles and innovation processes. The following exchange from the middle-income women's focus group during our pilot outside Mukono, Uganda serves as an illustration:

Facilitator: If a woman from this village wants to use improved seeds or other inputs for her plot, but she does not have any money, what would she do?

Participant 1: She sells some of her pigs and she gets some money and she goes and buys improved seeds.

Participant 2: For me, I go to our friend or a neighbor. I talk to that neighbor and tell him or her to lend me some seeds, and when I have some I can bring back some seed. And then I can plant.

Participant 3: The woman goes for these village credit circles and borrows money from them and goes to buy improved seeds and other inputs like fertilizer.

Participant 4: A woman usually doesn't need (to buy) fertilizer because she has some animals.

Participant 5: They go to another farmer and offer cheap labor. And she's given some little money. And she uses that money to buy some input like maybe seed or fertilizer.

2.6 ANALYSIS

The analysis strategy combines two procedures: i) inductive case-oriented "deep" or "thick" description techniques (Geertz, 1973); and ii) deductive variable-oriented "wide" thematic techniques (Patton 1990; George & Bennett, 2005; Miles et al., 2014) using NVivo software and other methods. While these procedures revealed many insights, we found comparative analysis of gender norms to be especially challenging due to their highly contingent and fluid qualities. We reflect on how our ladder evidence on empowerment and poverty dynamics provided a helpful bridge across the wide and deep on this key area of concern for the study.

2.6.1 Iterating between deep and wide

The case-oriented "deep" analytic techniques required a focus on a single case study to explore the interplay of gender norms, agency, and innovation processes in that context. The case-oriented research generated a series of background case studies that were prepared by PIs, field team leaders, and research analysts. A

general outline was suggested for this background work that drew on secondary literature in addition to the evidence gathered, and provided an overview of the local context that included analysis of gender norms, such as those shaping household and agricultural roles; experiences with agricultural innovations; and women's and men's perspectives on trends in agency and poverty reduction in their villages, and the factors they attribute to these processes. These background case studies proved indispensable for informing and interpreting findings from the comparative work across the case studies and the different population groups reached within them. Evidence of this work can be seen, for instance, in the discussion of specific cases in all four empirical chapters of the thesis.

The variable-oriented "wide" analysis involved two datasets: i) an Excel data file generated by pre-coded questions and/or rating activities during data collection with each instrument; and ii) a coded dataset of all the narrative data, which was generated by systematic content analysis and data coding with NVivo 10 using 150 common codes broken into 15 topic areas. Guidance regarding the numbers of codes is wide ranging, with some recommending 120 to 300 codes and others 30 to 40 and fewer (Saldaña, 2013, p. 24).

The data coding framework was based on systematic content analysis of field notes from Bangladesh, Mexico, Philippines, and Zimbabwe; two rounds of PI reviews; and further testing during the first coder training. The main themes and examples of subthemes in the coding tree which coders analyzed included:

- *Agricultural innovations and resources*, including factors such as physical technologies, formal and informal agri networks and learning, seasonality, profitability, and yields;
- *Agency and decision making,* such as assessments of levels of and trends in agency, decision-making roles and gender relations in these roles, innovators, and aspirations;
- *Gender norms*, e.g. references to gender-specific or non-gender-specific roles, capacities, or conducts; trends in restrictiveness of norms;

- *Economic agency and provider roles*, such as asset access, use, or control; lack of money or other resources; general references to an income earner;
- *Livelihood types and labor market conditions*, such as "agri work for self or household," "agri work for others," "entrepreneur or trader," and trends in job opportunities;
- *Household roles and relations*, such as housework, parenting, and care roles;
- *Community (and wider) institutions and resources*, such as services and formal and informal non-agri networks;
- *Community trends in wellbeing and poverty reduction*, and whether trends are improving, static, or deteriorating;
- *Social identities*, such as whether a passage referenced a woman, man, child, in-law, youth, widowed or separated, or different combinations thereof; and
- *Emotions and attitudes,* such as joy, stress, or conflict.[7]

As is common in comparative studies (Saldana, 2013), we also had (structural) codes dedicated to specific questions in the instruments, such as a code for the "top-two" local innovations. This rating activity, conducted in every focus group, occurs after lengthy discussion of new practices, technologies, learning, or networks in their village over the past five or so years.

As guided by a senior NVivo expert, our coding protocols required the narrative content of each transcript to be systematically analyzed in five waves, with each wave covering a different set of topics.[8] Coding was carried out by two teams to ensure consistency. Teams were trained for two weeks, and individual coders maintained journals in NVivo within their coded dataset on coding questions and decisions. Coders also interacted in virtual discussion forums and met weekly to discuss puzzles with data interpretation.

The coded data sometimes yielded striking findings, such as women's frequent but men's scarce reflections about their spouse when assessing their decision making in major affairs of their lives (see Chapter 3 of thesis). This data

provided a sort of graphic representation of important theoretical constructs in feminist literatures associated with men's prominent roles in women's pathways for making decisions and controlling resources, while men's reference points for their agency are typically other important men in their lives (e.g. Connell, 1987; Jackson, 1999a). The coded data also challenged assumptions and biases, such as an expectation that the young people, because of their greater education, would find gender norms less restrictive than the older adults in the sample (Petesch et al., 2017).

In this way, the coded data enabled systematic work on focused topics across the different population groups, communities, and countries covered by the study, and supported the identification of recurring themes. An external reviewer, armed with GENNOVATE's written protocols and numerical and coded datasets, will be able to identify links between the study's key questions and relationships in the conceptual framework, the coding tree, the evidence collected and analyzed systematically, and the conclusions generated (see Yin, 2003, pp. 33-39).

2.6.2 Bridging deep and wide

In both the deeper and cross-case work, some of the most challenging analysis involved interpretation of seemingly contradictory observations about local gender norms. The coding tree enabled examination of the discourse around specific norms as they pertained to initiatives requiring, for instance, physical mobility, asset use or control, or other dimensions of agricultural livelihoods, such as acquiring (or not) skills, accessing others' labor or achieving (or not) profitability. Yet, norms and agency are both highly relational, fuzzy, and moving targets. We fully agree that testimonies cannot be taken at "face value," and rapid approaches and coded data provide a dim "view to the power of speech acts, silences, reflexivity, and research relationships" (Jackson, 1999b, p. 139). For

example, women often mention constraints on their agency and participation in innovation opportunities, such as an agricultural extension event, due to restrictions on their physical mobility, yet the specificities of and disagreements over local mobility restrictions defied synthesis. Averages of numerical ratings on women's mobility obscured the complex ways in which women work around and flout physical mobility norms in their everyday lives, and how the mobility expectations change with a woman's age, marital status, life stage, socioeconomic position, education, religion, local safety, and so forth.

These analytic challenges for comparative work reflect the fluidity of gender norms on the ground. They also reflect the myriad tactics—ranging from subtle pressure to rarer acts of violence—that men and women continuously deploy to uphold and challenge different types of norms as they impinge on particular interests or circumstances. A cross- case interpretation of the role of a particular norm would have required high levels of assumption and abstraction to account for the myriad contingencies.

Among the ways we addressed these issues, two stand out. First, we reduced the emphasis on insights about the role of any particular norm on interpretations of evidence about women's agency so that we could be more attentive to demonstrating their complexity and how many norms intertwine and operate in continuous tension with low-income women's as well as low-income men's lived realities. Women's agricultural livelihoods are making vital contributions to the security and wellbeing of their households, but in most of the case studies normative expectations—such as women's deference to men's authority or circumscribed physical mobility, or pressures on them not to claim agriculture-related assets—continue to interact in ways that mainly discourage women from taking initiatives with their livelihood activities.

Second, a breakthrough (slowly) came in the form of new learning with our two ladder activities, one of which examines questions of agency and major

decision making with four of the focus groups, and the other explores local socioeconomic mobility with the remaining two focus groups in each case. What is especially helpful is that the four older adult focus groups in each case rank their community now and 10 years ago on either the general level of agency of their own gender or on household poverty levels (we did not ask the youth groups to assess trends). In this way, the various ladders' numerical ratings signal whether local women and men see the processes of change underway in their community to be mainly beneficial or harmful forces in their lives—and by how much. Additionally, we have women's and men's testimonies explaining their ladder ratings and trends, and these testimonies offer some information on local norms and how they are interacting with the trends identified. The combined numerical and narrative ladder data provided a valuable entry point for assessing the sets of norms shaping a "local normative climate" for women and for men to perceive opportunities, take risks and innovate in their rural livelihood activities (Chapter 3 of thesis). Chapter 6 of the thesis explores highly beneficial dynamics in a set of villages where the ladder assessments indicated by all six focus groups are significantly favorable—and women and men alike testify to a local normative climate that is fueling greater gender equality. Thus, rather than comparing the effects of a specific normative belief or practice, our move toward a broader concern for how the normative climate was shaping perceptions of trends in agency and poverty reduction enabled us to address more meaningfully the complex fluidity of norms on the ground.

In sum, we iterated between and forged connections across our case- and variable-oriented analyses, with each cycle contributing new and more nuanced insights into our study questions. This cycling back and forth between "deep" and "wide" requires considerable time, focus, and perseverance to gain confidence in and meaningfully present the findings due to the size and complexity of the dataset (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2013). The findings point to opportunities to

reduce the topics covered by the instruments, but also clear benefits from the study's exploratory scope, which provided us with an opportunity to hear and learn from diverse gender, age, and socioeconomic groups about the innovation processes and other changes unfolding in each case study.

The social embeddedness of our global institutional collaboration in the CGIAR system poses opportunities and challenges. Paula Kantor, who lost her life much too early, considered the principal aim of GENNOVATE's new type of research collaboration to be that of diversifying the kinds of scientific knowledge privileged and employed by the network of CGIAR partner institutions. In this way, additional research and development partnerships and processes could flower in order to buttress low-income women's and men's empowerment and self-determination.

For example, in Mexico, the field researchers shared syntheses of the findings with development partners active in the research communities, and convened follow-up dialogues in each of the six communities to share and hear views on what had been learned from their contributions to the study. The researchers also collaborated with other social and biophysical scientists, and PIs and partners are producing deeper analyses of the case studies (e.g. Cohen et al., 2016; Locke et al., 2017) and hands-on tools for non-gender researchers and practitioners.[9] Results have been discussed and seeds of change sewn at senior levels.

2.7 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

According to Tracy (2010, p. 841, citing Weick, 2007, p. 16), the best qualitative research strives for complexity and richness in its descriptions and explanations, and rests on a "requisite variety" of theoretical contributions, samples, and data sources. The methodology embodies principles of context, comparison, and

collaboration. Its contribution to better understanding of the strong and fluid influences of gender norms on local agricultural innovation processes was enabled by a coherent and rigorous research design. This comprised the study's dynamic study questions and conceptual framework, maximum diversity sampling protocols, 15 semi-structured instruments, and application of "deep and wide" analysis procedures.

The collaborative research strategy prioritized local understandings of lived experiences and combines concern for contextual influences on social action with rigorous comparative protocols to identify regularities across diverse cases. The research methodology provides a field-tested approach for large-scale research and intervention programs, within and beyond the CGIAR system. This enables us to better understand and contribute to the evolution of inclusive local institutions, including more equitable gender norms.

Agricultural research and development, though focused in the first instance on technical change, is clearly embedded in social and political processes. These processes make concern for contextual influences on women's and men's decision making relevant to many types of agricultural innovation. We hope this qualitative, comparative, and collaborative research methodology can make a contribution to the increasingly urgent need for new models of learning and change that take that reality fully into account to ensure inclusive, equitable development.

NOTES

[1] For GENNOVATE team see https://gennovate.org/research-team/. The team includes a mix of senior, mid-career, and post-doctoral researchers from multiple countries.

[2] Maximum diversity or variation sampling maximizes variation across the sample to increase generalizability (Miles et al., 2014) on the basis that: "Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program" (Patton, 1990, p. 172).

[3] Where a village was characterized by important social group differences such as ethnicity or migrant status, we recommended repeating data collection with the largest two social groups or selecting an alternative site without these important differences to increase comparability.

[4] These research questions inform my thesis and are adapted from the original GENNOVATE research questions (see Petesch, Badstue, Camfield et al., 2018, p. 31).

[5] PIs could frame the selection criteria to focus on successful adopters of either a specific CRP innovation, or one or more innovations of local significance.

[6] See Chambers (2003) and Holland (2013) for discussion about quantitative data in participatory research.

[7] The actual "node" labels and sequence differ in the coding tree due to NVivo alphabetization rules, analysis protocols and organization of instruments. PIs introduced additional nodes for their own analyses.

[8] The number of waves varied somewhat with each instrument and as the coders became more familiar with a case and the analyses required. The length of the transcripts varied, with each case typically requiring a full workweek to code six focus groups and eight semi-structured interviews.

[9] For tools see https://gennovate.org/gender-tools-for-scientists/.

Chapter 3


MENDEZ BURGOS
Los cambios se fecundan en las ideas
se refuerzan con las palabras
se demuestran en las acciones
NEW YORK

Local normative climate shaping agency and agricultural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa*

In this chapter we introduce the concept of local normative climate to address concerns for the contextual and fluid ways in which gender norms affect women's and men's agency and livelihood roles. Gender norms comprise the "differential rules of conduct for women and men, including rules governing interactions *between* women and men" (Pearse & Connell, 2016, p. 35; emphasis in original). By agency, we refer to an individual's capacity to take consequential decisions and actions that shape their life (Kabeer, 1999). Our focus on normative climate responds to a call in the gender literature for improved understanding of the "combination of contextual factors (such as legal discrimination, social norms, and gender-based violence)" that constrain women's claims on resources and roles as decision makers (Campos & Gassier, 2017, p. 2).

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While much of the empowerment literature has focused on the agency of women, we propose integrating concerns for normative climate to account for conditions that influence both women and men, and gender relations among them. In this chapter we introduce the literature that informs our understanding of normative climate, and then apply the concept to explore and compare how normative climates shape perceptions of agency and agricultural opportunities in 24 farming villages from sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This dataset is part of the GENNOVATE (Enabling Gender Equality in Agricultural and Environmental Innovation) initiative).[1] Our analysis of normative influences on agency is framed by men's and women's own understandings and interpretations of their capacity to take important decisions in their lives and how this has changed over the past decade in their community. We present both context-specific and comparative findings that demonstrate the value of adding local normative climate to improve understanding of processes that engender differences in how women and men perceive and respond to opportunities and constraints in their lives.

3.1 THE LITERATURE ON GENDER NORMS AND THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH AGENCY

Significant gender inequalities characterize rural communities in the SSA region. There are, however, large differences among countries in the extent of these inequalities, with data indicating that gender differences are possibly larger in the West than the East. For example, a recent (LSMS-ISA) survey spanning nearly 32,000 households in six SSA countries finds that women overall contribute 40 percent of the labor for crop production, but with large variation by country and region: in Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda women provide more than half the agricultural labor, while in Nigeria and Niger this falls to 37 and 24 percent, respectively (Christiaensen, 2017, p. 6). Moreover, there are regional differences within countries. For example, in Nigeria women's contribution to agricultural

labor is 32 percent in the north and 51 percent in the south (ibid.). Further, review of 17 studies of land ownership and management finds that women are systematically disadvantaged, but, as above, this varies by region and country. For example, one survey finds women's sole ownership of land as high as 31 percent among agricultural landowners in Malawi; but this declines to 16 percent in Uganda, 15 percent in Tanzania, 8 percent in Niger, and just 3 percent in Nigeria (Doss et al., 2015, p. 21).

Although suggestive, this research fails to address the underlying determinants of these differences, including what we can learn by examining women's differential access to land and participation in agriculture in a particular context. Concerns for context have been raised as well in the measurement of women's agency and empowerment. A review of studies on women's empowerment concludes, for example, that community-level "contextual factors are often more important in determining women's empowerment and its outcomes than individual-level factors" (Malhotra et al., 2002, p. 18; also see five-country study by Mason & Smith, 2003). They call for more empirical attention to the community level, "where institutional and normative structures … are most likely to affect women's empowerment" (ibid., p. 15). Similar calls are made in the field of gender and agriculture (Kristjanson et al., 2017; Seymour & Peterman, 2017; Peterman et al., 2011). By defining a conceptual approach that emphasizes the influence of contextual factors on women's and men's resource control and decision making, we contribute to the large women's empowerment literature concerned with these processes (e.g. Alkire et al., 2013; Batliwala, 1993; Cornwall, 2016; Gammage et al., 2016; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005; Narayan, 2005).

The concept of local normative climate builds on the recognition that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon and provides a primary framework for organizing social relations across societies (e.g., Ridgeway, 1997 and 2009).

We were particularly inspired by feminist theoretical contributions and empirical research that reveal how norms "move in multiple directions" to fluidly intersect with other local forces in ways that often, but not always, advantage men's status and interests over women's (e.g., Pearse & Connell, 2016, p. 43; Ridgeway, 2009; Kabeer, 1999 and 2001; Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013).

3.1.1 Theoretical conceptions of norms

Theoretical literature on social norms can be sorted into two broad disciplinary streams (Cislaghi et al., 2018). The first stream features social psychologists and behavioral economists who conceive of norms as operating primarily through people's beliefs about what others do and ought to do; and where beliefs are maintained by processes of social approval and disapproval among reference groups of individuals who interact frequently (ibid., p. 6; Bicchieri, 2006; Mackie et al., 2015). The second stream, on which this chapter mainly draws, includes feminist theorists who work with notions of gender norms and gender roles to explain socially constructed rules that are "applied to groups constituted in the gender order—mainly to distinctions between women and men" (Pearse & Connell, 2016, p. 31).

The gender order features two sex-typed (or stereotypical) roles. The two roles embody "the characteristic pattern of status inequality in which the higher status group is perceived as more proactive and agentically competent and the lower status group is seen as more reactive and emotionally expressive" (Ridgeway, 2009, p. 149). Each role carries with it sets of norms and sanctioning practices associated with upholding the norms; however, there is latitude for how each role may be exercised (Portes, 2006). For example, it may be village norm that women remain silent during community meetings; and sanctioning practices for women who speak include disregarding them or making angry gestures and comments to put a stop to those who flout the rule. Thus, while in public a village

woman may respect her gender role and avoid reputational harm by not airing her views at such a meeting; however, in private she may be able to persuade a male family member to take a concern of hers into the community meeting as their own. The fluid properties of norms enable a woman to comply with or negotiate and shape the practices that are typical and appropriate for her role and agentic capacity. Feminists have contributed important insights to this understanding by highlighting that an individual embodies multiple gendered roles, such as wife, mother, and farmer, making for varying interests, tensions, and opportunities in the norms that one enacts.

In sub-Saharan Africa, it has been well established that women's farming roles are highly heterogeneous across the region as "gender roles and responsibilities are dynamic; in particular, they change with new economic circumstances" (Doss, 1999, p. iv). An analysis of GENNOVATE SSA cases affirms the diversity of women's farming roles (Petesch et al., 2017). Sex-specific focus group members of low-income women and men perceived a good female farmer as skilled and hardworking as she must manage family provisioning from home gardens and other sources, perform housework and care tasks, and labor on her husband's farm. The good male farmer also faces strong expectations of agricultural know-how and family provisioning. However, for men norms stress profits from farming and command of key agricultural resources such as land and tools—but little in the way of housework or care obligations. Such normative framings underpin rural gender hierarchies, as revealed in testimonies such as this one from a woman residing in a village of Ethiopia with highly restrictive norms for women: "Women are not farmers. They are their husbands' shadows. They work behind their husband. They support him. They do what he does but she is never considered the main farmer" (ibid., p. 25). Expectations of women to be farming in the shadows constrain the recognition and returns that they can garner from their farming and discourage their economic agency.

Norms shape the context for but cannot determine human action. Both women and men struggle to overcome normative constraints in their lives. Norms governing the division of labor and resources in farming households are always sites of negotiation. Indeed, the gender and agriculture literature argues for the greater influence of African women relative to women of other regions due to their significant agricultural roles (Boserup, 1970), and documents their efforts to resist or thwart processes that marginalize them from economic opportunities and that give men claims on their labor and resources (e.g. Freele, 2011; Kandiyoti, 1988).

Most theories about how norms function concur that they are bounded by context and operate among individuals often interacting with one another. Women in some villages of SSA, for instance, risk social ridicule should they interact independently with a male extension agent or attend an agricultural training, while in other villages women can access these resources without normative constraint (Petesch et al., 2017). Many experts on social norms emphasize how norms are held in place because we believe that others conform to and value these societal expectations and perceive that our own social approval hinges on compliance. Our notion of local normative climate stresses the highly contextual and fluid processes by which norms shape gender roles and power relations.

3.1.2 Gender norms as topics of agency

Discussion of gender norms in measuring women's agency and empowerment is longstanding, with Naila Kabeer (1999) especially noteworthy in signaling the importance of norms and context for their meaningful interpretation. Processes of empowerment include those "who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability" (Kabeer, 2001, p. 19). An assessment of a woman's agency over managing her crop sales, for instance, requires understanding the everyday

livelihood roles of women and men in the village. A woman who endeavors to sell vegetables in the village market where only men are sellers will have to exercise her agentic capacity to challenge this norm. Should this woman achieve a market presence, she may potentially become an empowering role model who expands the choices and opportunities perceived by other women and families in her community.

Our methodological approach, which we discuss next, builds on a World Bank global study of norms and agency interactions in nearly 100 urban and rural communities (Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013). To explain the fluid ways in which norms operate, the authors distinguish between processes of normative relaxation and change (ibid., p. 54). With relaxation, norms become less restrictive to accommodate the realities that communities are dynamic and women and men often withdraw from complying with confining social rules as they carry out their daily lives. Yet, these practices may not be valued or confer recognition, and may be subject to sanctions. The perception that women are not farmers or only farm in men's shadows illustrate these processes of relaxation where women labor but are not recognized as farmers. To present a context of normative change, the authors discuss a village in Tanzania where the local economy has diversified and both male and female focus groups testify to how over the past decade local women have become visible and successful leaders in farming and in the civic life of their village (ibid., p. 150-2).

Indeed, there is evidence of women's growing labor market participation across the SSA region, which is being driven by forces that include rising costs of living, male labor migration, improved access to public services, and legal reforms (Evans, 2017; World Bank, 2011). Additionally, women's roles as decision makers are increasing in the private sphere (e.g. Jackson, 2014). Women's changing roles are in part products of development processes that have disadvantaged men's livelihoods, including in rural economies, and contributed

to men's "peripatetic" provider roles and relations with their families (ibid., p. 12; Amuyunzu-Nyamongo & Francis, 2006; Evans, 2016, Silberschmidt, 2001). Women have had little choice but to increase their participation as income earners. One manifestation of these processes appears to be wider trends of women-headed households, which now constitute one-in-four of the SSA region's households (Milazzo & van de Walle, 2015). These households, moreover, are experiencing *faster* poverty reduction than male-headed households (ibid.).

Akin to the processes by which women conform to and resist dictates that call for their submission and domesticity, in varied ways groups of men also uphold and withdraw from norms of masculinity that associate them with dominance of women and provisioning roles. In many parts of SSA, and elsewhere, local economies provide limited pathways for men to achieve economic independence, a condition widely seen to define manhood and to enable men to form their own family and acquire status and a decision-making role (Barker and Ricardo 2005; Amuyunzu-Nyamongo & Francis, 2006). In other words, men too are constrained by and struggle in "a system of stereotypic conventions that leave them unable to live the lives to which they believe they are entitled" (Kimmel, 2000, p. 93). The burdens for men who rely on arduous and insecure farm labor to provide for their families are also a type of gendered vulnerability, which some men resist (Jackson, 1999a).

As noted earlier, normative change can result from changes in people's misperceptions of what others do and approve of, as well as changes in institutions and power relations (Cislaghi et al., 2018). While Cecilia Ridgeway uses the notion of "rules of gender" rather than gender norms, her contributions (e.g., 2009) demonstrate how subconscious stereotypical beliefs condition social interactions, how the frequency and intimacy of interactions between the sexes differentiate these social processes from other types of social group interactions,

and how these processes contribute to variability in institutional structures and their discriminatory practices. Playing fields for women and men to exercise agency in their lives are not level, but constantly shifting. Both women and men access different sets of norms as "discursive resources" to negotiate their interests and needs, providing "the ground for the resistance and agency which constantly reformulates the 'rules' of social life" (Jackson, 1998, p. 80). It is these relational, fluid, and contextual processes that inform our concept of local normative climate.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces and applies the concept of local normative climate to improve understanding of the influence of gender norms on processes of how men and women exercise agency and innovate in their rural livelihoods. The analysis draws on a set of 24 case studies from the larger GENNOVATE research initiative.[2] This research was concerned with how gender norms and agency interact to advance or impede processes of innovation and technology adoption in agriculture and resource management across different contexts. Here we review the cases and data collection and analysis procedures used in our study of normative climate.

3.2.1 Sample

Our sample contains 12 case studies situated in the West of the SSA region, and 12 in the East (Table 1). The case studies are based on GENNOVATE's global sampling framework, which applied principles of maximum diversity sampling to introduce variance in the case studies on levels of economic dynamism and of gender gaps in assets and capacities. The cases are a subsample of 137 GENNOVATE cases. The variability of characteristics among the research communities, including in the macro contexts in which they are situated, helps to

establish a strong foundation for making analytic arguments about the relevance and generalizability of patterns identified (Miles et al., 2014).

Table 1 Sample of 24 case studies

SSA region	*Country*	*# Case studies*	*Gender Inequality Index Rank (188 countries)***
West	Mali	5	156
	Niger	3	157
	Nigeria	4	n/a
East	Burundi	2	184
	DR Congo*	1	141
	Kenya	2	135
	Rwanda	1	84
	Tanzania	4	129
	Uganda	2	121

*For simplicity we pooled the single case in the central region, DR Congo, with the 11 cases in the East.

** Gender Inequality Index measures the gap between women and men in achievements in three dimensions, reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market.

(see http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii).

The sample provides strong variance in economic, agro-ecological, religious, and security contexts. Thirteen of the cases are classified as sites of low economic dynamism relative to their surrounding sub-national regions, with the remaining contexts providing more active and competitive local economies, including for marketing agricultural produce. Dryland conditions characterize nine study villages in the West, and the remaining are in humid and semi-humid zones. The communities are Christian in the East and Muslim in the West (except this reverses for one case in the East and three in the West).[3] Key informants report local experiences with violent political strife over the past decade in roughly half of the villages spread widely across the sample; only Uganda did not have at least one conflict-affected village. Seventeen of the cases are characterized as having greater gender inequalities relative to their surrounding

sub-national regions, as measured by larger gender gaps in primary school completion and women in local elected political positions. Polygyny is common in nine study villages sampled in the West, and three in the East.

3.2.2 Data collection and analysis

GENNOVATE's data collection tools are inspired by participatory methods that enable women and men individually and together with others in their community, to reflect on and interpret their own lives and experiences. This chapter mainly draws from the data gathered from two focus group instruments, each of which was repeated once in a research village to ensure same-sex groups. The first focus group instrument reached low-income women and men, and the second middle-income women and men (for a total of four focus groups in each case). Each group contained eight to 10 participants who ranged in age from 22 to 55. The chapter also includes data from focus groups conducted with youth (ages 16 to 24) and key informant interviews (with both genders) to construct a profile based on demographic, social, economic, agricultural, and political information about the case. With strong advance coordination and support from a hired community organizer, most teams completed fieldwork for a case within one week.

Informed consent procedures required members of the field team to begin each data collection activity by reading aloud a short written explanation of the purpose of the study and the particular instrument. The statement indicates that participation in the study is voluntary and confidential, and that those who agree to participate in a focus group or interview may choose not to answer any question or to end their participation at any time. Facilitators also explain that they cannot promise any direct benefit to the community or any individual from the research. Field teams are trained to convey this information, to solicit questions, and to check that participants understand.[4]

Discussions of a Ladder of Power and Freedom provided one of the means that we explored normative influences on perceptions of agency. The ladder tool enables local people to assess and reflect on their own changes in decision-making capacities over a ten-year period. Inspired by Sen (1999) and Kabeer (1999), we use the better-known terms of "power and freedom" for discussions with villagers about their sense of agency, and we anchor our questions in consequential decisions that shape one's life path. The exercise is conducted with the middle-income groups rather than the poorest or best-off sectors. Typically, middle-income groups perceive a more fluid normative environment compared with poorer social groups (e.g., Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013; Gelfand et al., 2017); however, testimonies from low-income women and men about their agricultural roles, opportunities, and experiences also informed this analysis. We discuss the ladder tool in some detail because the numerical and narrative data that it generates made a valuable contribution to both the contextual and comparative applications of the concept of local normative climate. As women and men explain the levels of agency for their own gender in the village, their testimonies reveal some of the expressions of agency that are normative for the women and men in their local context.

The Ladder of Power and Freedom exercise opens the focus group and engages four questions. Showing a picture of a simple five-step ladder, facilitators ask focus group members to consider the extent to which the majority of the men in their community (if a men's focus group, or the majority of local women if a women's group) have the capacity to make their own decisions about important affairs in their life, such as "where they will work or whether they will start or end a relationship with a person of the opposite sex." A ranking of step 5 indicates great power and freedom (and step 1 very little power and freedom) to make these consequential decisions. Focus group members anonymously rank their gender on small slips of paper, which are posted on the ladder visual and discussed. The

rankings and discussion are then repeated to capture perceptions of power and freedom a decade ago (recall issues discussed in Chapter 2). A summary statistic (change in perceived agency = mean step now – mean step 10 years ago) is generated to compare perceptions of change on the ladder among focus groups. A positive summary statistic indicates perceptions of increased decision-making capacities.

For analysis of normative influences on local agricultural livelihoods and decisions, we draw mainly from the four middle- and low-income focus group discussions. The groups discuss local men's and women's agricultural roles; new agricultural technologies, practices, networks, and learning opportunities; and household decision-making processes related to local agricultural livelihoods and women's resource control. Our work with the focus group data was enriched by information gathered from the other instruments.

The findings are the result of collaborative data management, sharing, and analysis among co-authors. For example, transcripts required a common format, and as data were collected in local languages, each transcript was translated into English in the same format and systematically reviewed by the principal investigator.[5] We applied four analysis procedures: systematic content analysis of the narrative evidence from the focus groups with a set of 30 common questions; authors' independent analyses of their own cases; analysis with GENNOVATE's coded narrative dataset (discussed in Chapter 2); and comparative work with ladder summary statistics and other numerical data gathered from pre-coded questions to key informants and focus groups.

As part of the GENNOVATE collaboration, a training session and ongoing mentoring by senior anthropologists on the team emphasized concern for reflexivity and for how our position as external researchers shapes the kind of data gathered, as well as our understandings and interpretations of the meanings and experiences that men and women convey to explain their sense of agency and

the social conventions of their villages. While all external researchers face limitations, we also recognize that when compared to long-term ethnographic approaches, rapid data collection methodologies may fail to register the ways in which subaltern groups might resist, challenge, and sometimes alter oppressive structures (Jackson, 2002; Scott, 1985). To mitigate some of these limitations, the GENNOVATE dataset provided diverse opportunities to triangulate testimonies about the factors and processes that women and men themselves identify as enabling and constraining power and freedom in their lives. By spotlighting two case studies, we present participant testimonies to incorporate some "of the uniqueness of particular places and times, cultural specificity, and historical background" (Jackson, 2002, p. 504).

3.3 RESULTS

3.3.1 Case studies of normative climates

By local normative climate we refer to the prevailing set of gender norms in a community, and how they are interacting with other dynamics in that context to differentially shape women's and men's sense of agency and opportunities in their lives. In this section we apply our concept of local normative climate to an analysis of two case studies, and in the following section we engage the 24 cases comparatively. The first case is in the Oyo State of Nigeria, and the second in Kenya's Western Region. The normative climates in the case studies differ significantly. The Nigeria case presents a climate that discourages women's agency, but encourages men's agency. In the second case, these dynamics are reversed. We explore each case to reveal the contextual influences on women's and men's conceptions and interpretations of their agency and livelihood roles and decisions. In different ways these cases challenge some assumptions in the literature about women's and men's agency.

3.3.1.1 Enterprising Yoruba women with limited agency

Ilu Titun (a pseudonym) is a village of 2,500 residents in Oyo State. Both Ilu Titun's women and men cultivate maize, cassava, and vegetables, with much of the produce directed toward self-provisioning rather than market sales due to poor road conditions. The village hosts a primary school and a health clinic but lacks irrigation and electricity. Most households rely on a local river for water. Focus group participants report primarily Yoruba heritage and some Igbo, and are mainly Christian, although several Muslims joined the focus groups. Villagers are polygynous, live in extended families, and share meals where husbands are typically served first followed by children and then women.

In Ilu Titun, women are deeply engaged with their local economy, with diverse flexible norms supporting their economic participation. By comparison, however, the men of Ilu Titun express a greater sense of empowerment and testify to satisfaction with their farming opportunities and with various restrictive norms that privilege their status.

Many village norms undergird women's initiatives to provision for their family. Women of Ilu Titun move about the village independently, cultivate improved maize and cassava varieties, and vend in the village's weekly market. While women have never been elected to local office, one woman represents market women in village meetings and formal occasions. Local inheritance practices provide for wives to receive equal shares of their husband's inheritance to pass on to their children, regardless of the number of children. Women participate in agricultural extension opportunities and learn of new technologies and practices; however, one woman, a 55-year-old widow and farmer, cautioned, "We women don't really have time for such. We are really busy."

Relative to most SSA contexts, Yoruba culture has historically been encouraging of women's economic participation. Yoruba women customarily enjoy more property rights than women from other ethnic groups of Nigeria and

elsewhere in the SSA region, and they "are expected to earn an income of their own from which a substantial proportion of household expenses may be met" (Aluko, 2015, p. 60). Scholars caution that women's economic activities have not yet translated into more gender-equitable relations and decision making, even for women residing in urban centers (e.g. Aluko, 2015; van Staveren & Olasuno Odebode, 2007; Forsythe et al., 2016). Our data largely confirm this.

In discussing women, members of the low-income men's focus group shared that a good woman farmer of their village "must be able to carry out some basic farming activities such as planting and, at the same time, perform her domestic chores," and "must know how to process her farm produce such as cassava into garri, maize into pap, and yam into yam flour, and so forth." Women corroborate these expectations of heavy domestic and agricultural work burdens, which, for instance, include providing labor on their husband's plots before they plant their own. Their diverse farming and marketing activities help them to manage household food security and cash needs, strategies that reduce risks from crop failures and market uncertainties (Forsythe, 2016).

Yet, despite significant contributions to their households, members of the women's focus group surprisingly describe these industrious village women as having climbed from the bottom step up to merely step 2 of their Ladder of Power and Freedom. One woman explains that compared to a decade ago she now earns more and is able to meet the needs for all five of her children. Other women, however, stress that they have little authority to make decisions. "My husband restricts my freedom to make major decisions because he is head of the home and I have to respect him for peace to reign," explains a 50-year-old trader. Another woman, also age 50 and a trader, adds that women cannot "really have a say . . . when you are not contributing much." These testimonies depict a local normative climate that generally marginalizes local women and fails to acknowledge their role in family maintenance. Within the focus group, the only participants who

report that they exercise independent decision-making are either widowed or separated. Normative expectations are often different for widows compared to married women, and this can enable them to be household heads and earn economic status (Potash, 1986).

The men's focus group of Ilu Titun on average reports climbing from step 2 to 3 on the Ladder of Power and Freedom and conceive of their agency mainly in relation to their roles as accomplished farmers. A 55-year-old farmer and father of five prompted nods of agreement from other focus group members with this explanation: "Most of us made a lot of profit from sales of our produce, and this has given us some level of freedom to do what we want. *Ko sowo, ko sagbara*, meaning there is no power without money."

While women convey a sense of limited opportunities for their agri-businesses in the village's weekly market, men have access to trucks, which enables them to sell their produce in a market outside the village where they can fetch higher prices. "Men are meant to travel far and not women," relates the village head (male key informant) when explaining the two markets.

Indeed, the two markets provide a certain perspective on the sharp rebukes elicited by our question to the focus groups of low-income women and men about their views of gender equality. One woman, a 49-year-old trader and farmer immediately retorts that they had "nothing like equality." In the men's group, the question about gender equality triggers a passionate justification for women's lower position, highlighting underlying anxieties about the fluidity of norms:

> Participant 1: Equality between men and women is a very bad thing especially in Yoruba land and particularly in this community. Women are supposed to be under men in everything. God has made men their heads, and that simply means men and women cannot be equal in any way. (45-year-old male farmer)

> Participant 2: We believe that the women themselves know we can't be equal. They become very rude and disrespectful when they have freedom. (45-year-old male farmer)

Together, both men bond over displaying their power over women using their belief structures, revealing how norms, including religious beliefs, define which issues can legitimately be bargained over and which fall in the arena of the uncontestable.

Certainly, Ilu Titun's fertile soils and skilled women and men farmers and traders represent significant assets; yet, the village's confining norms, remoteness, and lack of services impede women's access to and control of resources that might enable a stronger sense of agency. Given normative pressure to maintain strict gender hierarchies, such as through religion and community sanctions, the local agricultural economy is experienced very differently by the men and women of the village. In Ilu Titun strongly patriarchal gender relations continue to constrain women's benefits from their considerable economic roles.

To be sure, some gender norms are more fluid in Ilu Titun, while others are restrictive and mediate against cooperative forms of gender relations and women's decision making and resource accumulation. In the face of such complexity, the data from the Ladder of Power and Freedom provide helpful indications about men's and women's perceptions of how the normative climate is affecting their sense of opportunities and barriers. For women, the climate mostly discourages them from bettering their lives, while men's reports are more favorable as their circumstances secure their power in the gender hierarchy.

3.3.1.2 Despairing Luhya men

Our second case, Amatuma (pseudonym) from Kenya, illustrates a difficult normative climate where the local economy is transitioning in ways that men perceive as disadvantageous to their livelihoods, and which they register as a

descent on their Ladder of Power and Freedom. Yet, local women report rising power and freedom, and describe how they assumed new household roles and livelihood activities in order to pull their families through difficult times. These challenging community circumstances often prove stressful on gender relations and exact a great toll on men, but they also drive a relaxation of gender norms for women's roles (e.g. Amuyunzu-Nyamongo & Francis, 2006; Petesch, 2018a).

With a population of 2,000, Amatuma is located in Vihiga County in western Kenya. The village is characterized as peri-urban and enjoys good road access to Kisumu, a port city. Poverty levels are relatively high, very few people reach secondary school, and there is competition for resources due to the area's dense population. Farmers mainly cultivate maize intercropped with beans under rainfed conditions. Key innovations include improved breeds for dairy and hybrid maize varieties. Most Amatuma residents belong to a Maragolis subgroup of Luhya, are Christian, and speak Luhya, Swahili, and other dialects. Polygynous practices have declined over the last decade and now nuclear households are the most common. Patrifocal practices are common, in which wives leave their birthplace to live with their husbands. Close family relations extend to wider kinship groups; and women often develop enduring relationships with their husband's family. Lineage is patrilineal, and bride price commonly practiced (Wakesho Mwagae, 2013). Many testimonies in our data speak to the emergence of new norms that are supportive of women's growing roles in their community; however, observations from Amatuma's men and women indicate the persistence of restrictive norms that prescribe men's dominance over women and their significant provisioning role. For example, a 42-year-old farmer in the men's focus group expresses aspirations for the young women of the village to be educated and "join groups and participate in development"; however, another 52-year-old farmer in the group cautions that young women also "need to understand and accept that they are number two, and not the head of the family."

Yet, women and men alike describe a local context that makes it very difficult for men to fulfill their gender-ascribed roles. For example, middle-income men register a decline on their Ladder of Power and Freedom from step 3 to just below it. To explain this trend, men speak of frustrations with joblessness and decreased access to land which have undermined their potential to earn income. Urbanization, changes in inheritance practices, and an increasing population put pressure on land and decrease the size of men's agricultural plots. Study participants report a decline in parents sharing plots and providing land titles to guarantee ownership of the plots to their children. "We don't have title deeds for our small pieces of land," states a 30-year-old single male farmer in the focus group, "and we don't have a voice." Another man, a 55-year-old widower and farmer, adds that because of these conditions, "We are like squatters."

Both women and men report problems of men's alcohol abuse and infidelity, and associate these with the causes and consequences of the village's difficult economic circumstances. According to our female key informant, a community leader, an astonishing *half* of Amatuma's households are headed by women, a phenomenon she explains accordingly:

> There is a crisis in this area. Men are dying at a fast rate! Women are then the heads of the home. I think it is because men have become lazy and women have practiced their skills and perfected it. Men just idle around and indulge in alcohol. A good number of families are broken, and we also have a high number of widows.

Among several ethnic groups of western Kenya, including the Luhya and the Luo, a widow may be considered married under customary dictates and is expected to remain part of her husband's family, or she may be forced to leave and surrender claims to family assets. Women who resist this practice may face challenges that include raising children alone, landlessness and economic exploitation, social stigma, and a denial of rights to remarry men of their choice (Philip et al., 2015).

In some cases where women sustain close relations with their extended family, for instance, widows may be able to retain resources (e.g. Gwako, 1998). Our data offer a scenario of women heading their own households and where gender norms are relaxing in ways that support their pursuit of farming opportunities. Across the wider set of cases, women who run their own household typically rank their agency high, and attribute this to their need to make decisions and provide for their family.

In contrast to the men's descent on the ladder, women perceive they have moved from step 2 up to step 3. The women—all 10 of whom report farming occupations, and eight identifying additional jobs in trading, hairdressing, and tailoring—explain that they would have climbed higher but for the many constraints they face. The women mention barriers such as land scarcity and struggles with scarce resources. They lament lacking the knowledge, finance, and training necessary for them to adopt "expert farming techniques" such as crop rotation and measures to combat rodents. A 45-year-old farmer in the focus group identifies inadequate support from husbands and other women in the village as additional barriers they face: "In marriage there are hindrances too, because when a woman has an idea, the man opposes them so they can't get started." Another in the group, a 46- year-old farmer and vendor of business clothes, strongly agrees that finding help is difficult and elaborates that a savings "merry-go-round [rotating credit group] . . . can only stand when other women support them."

When asked to reflect on the reasons for climbing their ladder, these women acknowledge how their lives have changed and how their family's expectations of them changed as well. "Ten years ago women were just housewives with nothing to do," states the farmer and clothing vendor. As these women shoulder heavy household work burdens, by "nothing to do" they are echoing the Yoruba women's perceptions that they were not contributing the kind of work that is deemed to have value and affords them recognition and resources.

A 50-year-old farmer explains that in the past women could not progress because husbands, in-laws, and other family members "were not for the idea that a woman should work." Now, women are often identified as the "developers" in the household by men and women alike, which is a sign of their changing roles as farmers and entrepreneurs who provide for their families. Explaining the climb on the ladder, a 46-year-old farmer shares: "Back then women were less informed, but today we attend seminars like this one so you find that [now] women even can keep cattle for milk produce, which gives them cash."

Amatuma's focus groups with low-income men and women largely express support for the notion of gender equality. A 46-year-old male farmer in the men's group considers equality good because both boys and girls "get the same levels of education"; similarly, a 52-year-old male farmer remarks, "Nowadays we have male and female judges in the low courts." However, a vocal minority among the men is unconvinced, with a 32-year-old male farmer suggesting that gender equality puts a man at risk for being "despised by women." Nevertheless, testimonies reveal that men continue to exert a considerable degree of authority within intra-household relations.

As indicated in their diverging ladder data on power and freedom, with men falling and women climbing, the normative climate may fuel highly gendered coping strategies, such as women becoming known as developers and playing vital roles in leading households, and men withdrawing their labor and turning to antisocial behavior, including alcoholism. Social and economic changes in this case are having profound consequences for family structure and wellbeing where men's fears and anxieties are reflected in worries about being despised by women (also see Amuyunzu-Nyamongo & Francis, 2006; Silberschmidt, 2001).

The two cases illuminate the variability in how gender norms operate to shape women's and men's lives. In Amatuma, a flowering of more equitable

norms for women's economic participation is deemed to be empowering by local women. In the case of Ilu Titun, women observe limited agency despite their longer engagement with commercial farming and trading and the presence of many norms that support this. Simultaneously, testimonies from both cases reveal a persistence of patriarchal norms underpinning men's dominance and claims on resources; however, land and job scarcity in Amatuma is making for a normative climate that is more disabling than enabling for men's sense of power and freedom. In both contexts, gender relations are marked by stress and uneasy cooperation.

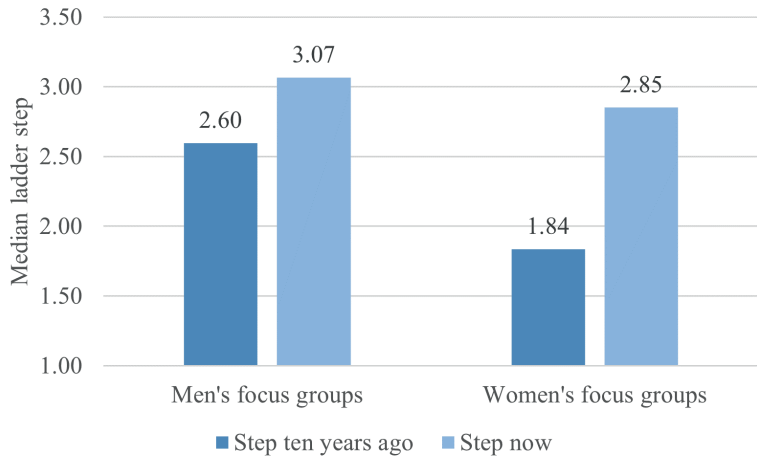
3.3.2 Comparative findings on local normative climates

In this section we draw on all 24 cases in order to present a comparative application of the concept of local normative climate. Due to limited space, we focus mainly on the Ladder of Power and Freedom rankings and discussions for this analysis. The ladder data help to reveal people's sense of agency and capacities for making decisions in their lives, as well as important gender differences in how they perceive and negotiate their local normative climate. The larger comparative perspective masks local norms, but is useful for highlighting regularities, such as the effects of life cycle transitions on both women's and men's agency, and how economic conditions are an overriding concern for men. To illuminate our comparative findings meaningfully, we draw on specific examples from our in-depth cases.

Figure 1 presents an overview of the 48 ladder summary statistics on power and freedom for two time periods across a decade. Women displayed more upward mobility than men, while men begin and end at higher positions on the ladder than women. Broadly, these patterns seemingly reflect on the one hand, men's established dominant position in the community and the reality that they have been decision makers for generations; while the women's rankings speak to

their changing roles over the past decade, changes which they generally deem to be giving them greater power and freedom to take important decisions in their lives.

Figure 1 Median rankings on five-step Ladder of Power and Freedom for the majority of men and women in the study villages. Ten years ago and now (48 focus groups)

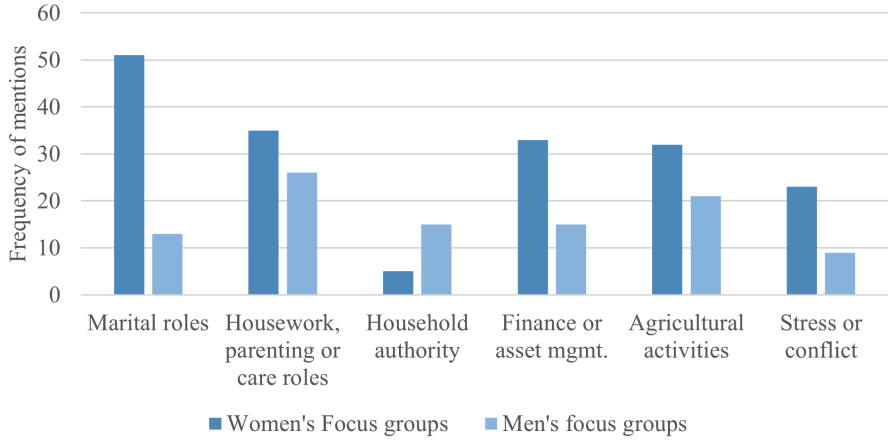


These general patterns obscure variability in the ladder rankings. In half of the cases, both women's and men's ladders show some degree of upward movement, as in Ilu Titun. Seven cases reveal perceptions of static or falling power and freedom for men, while women show positive movement regarding their agency and decision making, as in Amatuma. Space prevented us from presenting one of the five cases where women express being stuck or falling on their ladder, whereas the men's ladders show climbing. Downward or static ladder trends raise red flags because they typically indicate that there are hardships affecting a substantial segment of the community. This is especially evident given that some amount of upward movement (rather than descent) is to

be expected due in part to normative life cycle processes which make it common for men and women to perceive greater power and freedom over the course of a decade of their adult lives.[6]

Across the cases, the ladder of power and freedom discourse most often centered on concerns about household relations, which include men's and women's changing positions, roles, and relations as they move through different life stages. Figure 2 highlights that women frequently conceive of their power and freedom in relation to their husbands and to their domestic roles. When their agency ranking is high, women often attribute this to their husband's support, and when it is low they often refer to norms that require strict deference to their spouse. This is consistent with arguments that women, first, derive a strong sense of purpose in their domestic roles, and second, and household gender relations exercise important influences on the extent to which women perceive agency in their lives (Jackson, 2014 and 1999b). Women's sense of agency in our cases is also linked to their livelihood roles, issues that we return to below.

Figure 2 Common topics in the discourse about men's and women's positions and movements on the Ladder of Power and Freedom (48 focus groups, GENNOVATE coded dataset from 24 case studies



The men who volunteered reasons for their ladder rankings mainly express agency in relation to their role as household heads, fathers, and successful farmers. Unlike women, men seldom mentioned their spouse in their ladder discourse. It is also notable that men proved much less talkative than women about their ladder rankings. When men do speak up, it is often about step 4, although most men register that their position is best expressed at step 3. Rather than in relation to their spouse, men typically conceive of their power and freedom in relation to other men in their family and community. Relations among men are also relations of power, and men hold one another to normative codes of masculinity in their social context; and they (quietly) signal that they are breaking norms for local men when they position themselves at the lower rungs of the ladder or perceive that they are stuck or falling.

Men's and women's explanations for ladder movements differ in ways that are highly normative. Men, for instance, often associate their empowerment with the life cycle transition of moving from living under the authority of their father (or parents) and other elders to forming their own families. Women sometimes express this key transition—from father's to husband's household as a period of limited agency or even disempowerment. In the Amatuma case, men express frustrations that include parents not providing them with agricultural land or titles, resources which define manhood for many rural men. With great regularity, men express limited or declining agency on their ladder when they have yet to assume or cannot exercise strong household authority and provide substantially for their families. We saw these dynamics not only in the case from Kenya, but also in Burundi, DR Congo, Niger, and Tanzania—i.e. cases that spanned eastern and western regions of SSA.

By comparison, norms for women are in greater flux. Women are more likely, although not consistently, to express a sense of growing power and freedom. They often relate their sense of increased agency to experiencing a more

harmonious or supportive relationship with their spouse, to ensuring the wellbeing of their children, and to undertaking new livelihood or savings activities which enable them to meet the food security and cash needs of the household. When women perceive their movements on the ladder as constrained to steps 1 and 2, or when they descend on the ladder, their narratives often refer to restrictive normative prescriptions regarding their submissive positions, constrained mobility and time, housework and care obligations, and scarce access to assets and income-earning outlets. "Tough men like my husband don't give me freedom to make decisions," says a 50-year-old farmer and mother of six from Ilu Titun. Unlike men who can refer to commonly accepted norms of masculinity, women who pursue new goals for themselves and their families often must negotiate, contest, or flout different norms that restrict their freedoms.

Yet, as women persistently press on the norms that constrain their endeavors to manage their households and better their livelihoods, men strive to uphold norms that privilege their position over women and to which they perceive to be entitled—making for ongoing tensions in gender relations. Men's key gatekeeper roles in women's capacities to innovate in their agricultural livelihoods is a key message emerging from analysis of 336 semi-structured interviews in 19 countries (Badstue, López et al., 2018). Where women observe climbing and reaching above step 3, their narratives typically attest to norms that are more accommodating of their agency. Sometimes, as Amatuma reveals, women and men testify to beneficial *change* in local norms, such as the greater acceptability of women to work for pay or to learn about and innovate with new agricultural practices or marketing activities.

Unfortunately, women who describe upward climbing and a more flexible normative climate do not necessarily reside in places that provide an adequate context for a type of empowering process that fuels more gender-equitable local level institutions and greater wellbeing. The data generated by the power and

freedom ladder activity offer a useful entry point for assessing the local normative climate and its role in highly variable processes of exercising agency and strengthening rural livelihoods. Where ladder rankings reach step 3 or higher, women's and men's narratives more consistently speak to a sense of effective agency, self-confidence, and gains in wellbeing than when individuals are climbing or trapped at the two bottom steps. As the ladder data is at the community level, where local women are reaching step 3, gender norms are also likely to be evolving in ways that are more supportive of their agency, but the fluidity of norms always make such assessments challenging. What we learn from the ladder exercise is that the local normative climate is highly variable, and gender norms have differing effects on men's and women's perceptions of opportunities for exercisig agency and innovating in their rural livelihoods.

3.4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The conceptual approach used here reveals how a normative climate is shaped by diverse contextual influences that give rise to social processes where, for instance, local agricultural opportunities are only perceived as empowering by men in Ilu Titun, and only by women in Amatuma. Comparative findings highlight how perceptions of decision-making capacities are rooted in fluid normative expectations that evolve differently for women and men as they move through their life cycle. Normative expectations and opportunities for women and men to be effective decision makers are continuously changing.

In the larger set of cases, we found extensive evidence of women expressing perceptions of empowerment, and of negotiating the confining norms that have constrained their ability to be visible and effective decision makers. But, in the face of their growing agentic capacity and many other changes in their

communities, norms have been more stable that establish men's dominance over women and the significance of men's provider role. The more limited fluidity of male norms is important in helping us to understand how the unevenness of change contributes to local level social processes that take emotional tolls on women and men, fuel stress in gender relations, and impede the normative changes that would enable faster transitions to gender equality.

Our data also make evident that the fluidity of norms contributes to heterogeneity in the processes affecting women's and men's perceptions of their agency. Based on extant literature on the variability of women's agricultural labor and landholdings, we expected to find more restrictive norms in the western SSA cases, and that this would dampen women's ladder ratings and give rise to substantively different narrative discourses about how their capacities for exercising decisions, including in their livelihoods, have changed over time. However, we found instead some evidence of more restrictive norms in the West, but a regional analytic framework did not provide a meaningful fit for some of our cases. In Ilu Titun, for instance, local norms enabled women to be very mobile, employ new seed technologies, and engage in agri-processing and vending, while some contexts in the West constrained women's livelihood activities.

We thus concluded that a notion of "local normative climate" would provide a useful conceptual approach because it helps to convey the diversity of interactions between norms and agency as revealed in our data. Importantly, the concept shifts attention away from focusing on women and their roles and influence in specific domains and decisions of their lives, as is common in many measures of empowerment, to focus instead on the fluid set of norms that weigh on the roles and relations of both women and men. This enabled us to explore how different norms hold tight, relax, or change in the same context, and to be attentive to the variability of these processes on the ground. We could also reveal

tensions, contradictions, and opportunities that arise from the fluidity of norms, such as expectations that women should only participate in the local market while men can access the distant one, or that women can sometimes become known as the developers of their community.

Significantly, as the Amatuma example shows, men's agency is deeply conditioned by local economic conditions. A local normative climate that contributes to emasculating men and their sense of hope contributes to processes that fuel greater rural economic inequality. These processes also make women's counter-stereotypical emotional grit and developmental drive all the more important—as the Amatuma women are finding greater room to maneuver and diversify their livelihoods in these same challenging economic conditions. These dynamics put the burden on women to assume greater economic responsibility on top of their many other gender-ascribed responsibilities to maintain the family.

Exploring men's and women's ladder testimonies offers insights into the relational properties of community-level gender norms that contribute to the persistence of gender inequalities. In Ilu Titun, men aggressively held one another to account as their community's leaders. Rather than classifying communities based on the restrictiveness of specific norms or levels of agency, notions of inclusion and exclusion appear more appropriate. An inclusive climate refers to contexts where *both* men and women are encouraged or supported to undertake important decisions in their lives and to climb up to step 3 or higher on their ladders. By contrast, an excluding normative climate describes more typical cases where *either* men or women perceive their local context to limit their capacities to shape consequential areas of their lives. They register this as a lower step or a descent on the ladder.

The ladder method provided a valuable tool for applying the concept of local normative climate. The notion of a ladder offers study participants a simple and yet flexible construct for expressing their capacities to be decision makers,

and how they perceive these capacities to be changing. The four ladder questions and ranking activities are relatively easy to incorporate into other instruments and, with training, to use in focus groups or semi-structured interviews. The narrative and numerical evidence generated then provides for some contextualized and comparative analysis of normative influences on agency.

Findings from the chapter suggest varied opportunities for the concept of local normative climate, ladder method, and our collaboration with villagers to inspire and inform other research and development initiatives that aim to strengthen local people's capacities to remove barriers to their agricultural livelihoods. The concept draws attention to whether a context is encouraging *both* women and men to be visible and empowered decision makers, and highlights the fluid and relational ways in which gender norms and agency interact on the ground.

NOTES

[1] For further information on the GENNOVATE research initiative, see Chapter 2 of the thesis and https://gennovate.org/.

[2] The full GENNOVATE sample included 137 village cases from 26 countries.

[3] Community profile datasets often include information on the principal religions.

[4] Signed consent was not considered appropriate for many of the research contexts due to concerns for limited literacy and local customs and norms.

[5] The conversion of field notes into English requires skilled field teams. For example, translation of the Mali and Niger data into French and English from local languages was a multi-layered process that involved multi-lingual and bi-cultural team members well versed in translating between two or more languages. The interviews and focus groups were all done in local languages with notes typically taken in French. English translations were done later by members of the field team. In converting the data from local language to a European language if an appropriate translation was not found, it remained in local language. The team discussed word choices and meanings of the final transcripts to ensure that the English translations were as accurate a representation as possible of what was said by the respondents. The research team was experienced in the challenge of collecting and translating cross-cultural research data and was confident that the translations are appropriate and reflect the comments of the participants (Temple and Young 2004; Halai 2007).

[6] A World Bank study (2014) applied a similar methodology in Niger and discusses how men's and women's different ages and household roles shape their agency. The report also finds that, "As both men and women age, they gain respect, prestige, and power over their juniors. Older women thus command labor and capital in ways that their junior counterparts cannot" (ibid., p. 10).

Chapter 4


MENDEZ BURGOS
Los cambios se fecundan en las ideas
se refuerzan con las palabras
se demuestran en las acciones
NEW YORK

Not raised "to make big decisions": Young people's agency and livelihoods in rural Pakistan*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 Study context and rationale

Pakistan currently ranks as the world's fifth most populous country, of which nearly two-thirds is rural (World Bank, 2019, p. 44). Sixty percent of the country's rural population is under age 24 [National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) & ICF, 2019, p. 23]. Agriculture continues to serve as the backbone of the country's economy, contributing 19.2 percent to GDP and employing 38.5 percent of the labor force (Finance Division, 2021, p. 17). Agriculture is thus vital for young people's livelihoods, but the sector has seen only marginal improvements in productivity over the past three decades (World Bank, 2019).

Wheat is the country's largest crop, with a share of 1.8 percent of GDP (Finance Division, 2021: 13). There is both great need and scope for improving crop yields and food security (Kirby et al., 2017). Access to food is uneven and malnutrition widespread; 38 percent of children under age five are stunted nationally, and this rises to 47 and 50 percent in the Balochistan and Sindh provinces, respectively (NIPS and ICF, 2019, pp. 211-212). Only 54 percent of rural children attend school at the primary level; this falls to 32 percent for middle and secondary school (ibid., p. 16).

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Pakistan's sizeable rural youth population potentially presents an opportunity for the country to achieve a more inclusive and prosperous development trajectory, but this will require that these young women and men muster the agency to overcome many barriers. Our paper explores normative influences on young people's capacities to make important decisions and strengthen their livelihoods. We show expressions of these norms in testimonies gathered from 24 sex-specific focus groups on their decision-making and economic experiences. This evidence is part of the dataset for 12 agricultural community case studies in four provinces of Pakistan. This research in Pakistan is, in turn, part of the 137 cases in 26 countries prepared for the GENNOVATE qualitative comparative field study on gender norms, agency, and capacities for agricultural innovation.[1]

This chapter builds on and contributes to youth studies from rural regions of the global South that conceive of young people's agency and trajectories as socially embedded processes conditioned by their local opportunity structure. For our analysis, important dimensions of the local opportunity structure include the social relations within and among smallholder and landless households, the vibrancy and inclusiveness of the local economy, and the local social norms which influence gender and generational status differences and underpin "negotiated and constrained interdependencies within and across the generations" (Punch, 2015, p. 263; see also Kabeer, 2000a; Robson et al., 2007; Sumberg et al., 2021; Leavy & Hossain, 2014; Srinivasan 2014; White, 2015, 2019; Morarji, 2014; Elias et al., 2018; Rietveld et al., 2020).

The chapter draws on this relational theory to provide a comparative perspective on young people's perceptions of their decision-making capacity and livelihood experiences. Next, we review this theory including empirical examples from rural Pakistan. We then present the study sample and methods. In the empirical section, we explore regularities as well as differences in how young women and men perceive their agency and livelihoods; and we present two

contexts that appear to provide more supportive opportunity structures for some of their youth relative to others. We then discuss our findings, including the unevenness of young people's agency, the gendered nature by which local economic opportunities are perceived, and the contribution of gender and generational norms to these dynamics. We conclude with reflections on the implications of our findings for research and for agricultural and development strategies aiming to reach rural youth.

4.1.2 Theoretical and empirical literatures informing analytic approach

Our analytic approach draws from contributions by Naila Kabeer (2000a, 1999). With a focus on the foundational importance of household relations in all societies, Kabeer puts forth the notion of "intergenerational contract" to improve understanding of normative status expectations attached to a person's gender, household position, and age. These social rules give rise to complex power relations among household members due to their differentiated and ever-changing roles, obligations, and claims on resources over the life course of the household (Kabeer, 2000a). Under conditions where household enterprise remain crucial for family welfare and old age security, as in the case of the multigenerational households which are common in rural Pakistan, investments in children (and especially girls) will be constrained (ibid.). On questions of agency—or the "ability to define one's goals and act upon them"—Kabeer argues for interpretations informed by the local opportunity structure, which encompasses not only the resources and choice sets available to an individual, but also the social rules that condition access to resources and how choices are conceived and furthered (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438).[2] In short, processes of exercising agency and pursuing livelihoods, and whether such processes are perceived to be empowering, are mediated by the various roles and behaviors expected of women and men in their social setting.

The South Asia region is well known for the potent norms governing household roles and relations. These social expectations vary in the region but generally include preferences for women to bear sons, family wealth transfers that privilege sons, obligations on brides' families to provide dowry and send daughters to reside with in-laws, subordination to in-laws for young married women, and expectations for sons to support elders (Bhanbhro, 2021; Critelli, 2010; Hafeez & Quintana-Domeque, 2018). The marked status distinctions that govern household relations are rooted in "a strong ideology that links family honour to female virtue" and to associated practices of purdah which restrict women to the household and call for their accompaniment in public (Critelli, 2010: p. 238; Bhanbhro 2021). The durability of these norms in Pakistan is, in part, a product of the country's struggles for independence (gained in 1947), which gave prominence to "a gendered Islamic discourse" centered on women and family life (Feldman, 2006, p. 17; Dunne et al., 2017). This literature reveals, nevertheless, many dimensions, aside from religion, important for understanding the persistence of gender and generational hierarchies, including longstanding ethnic, caste and socio-economic divisions (Critelli, 2010; Bhanbhro, 2021).

At the household level, the senior male generally serves as the main authority, and all men are expected to contribute to sustaining the family economically. Young men are customarily subordinate to older male siblings as well as their fathers and other older kin. From a young age, boys are encouraged to "socialize with other men" and limit time spent with their mother, sisters, and (eventually) their wife (Mumtaz & Salway, 2009, p. 11; Bhanbhro, 2021).

Men are also the dominant actors throughout the agriculture sector, although many women contribute actively to agriculture. A review of women's agricultural roles in Punjab and Sindh, provinces -- which account for 90 percent of the rural population -- finds crop production and agricultural markets to be men's domain, with women supporting men, for example, by managing livestock

from the homestead, as this enables them to observe purdah (Drucza & Peveri, 2018). A qualitative study of six wheat-farming villages in Punjab and Sindh documents women's engagement in harvests and other activities, typically under men's supervision, on family farms or for others (Zaidi et al., 2018, p. 3-4). While many rural women are economically active, normative restrictions on their physical mobility and income generation are recurring themes in the literature. Risk of social sanctions typically works to keep norms in place. Half of rural men and women in Pakistan agree that wife-beating is justified under at least one these conditions: when she argues with her husband, goes out without telling him, or neglects in-laws (NIPS & ICF, 2019, p. 276).

The literature also shows factors such as location, socio-economic status, age, household position, education, and ethnicity to intersect with gender and influence related social norms. In rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), women's work is largely unpaid, and those who do generate income do so mainly through livestock and artisanal activities performed at their homesteads (Samee et al., 2015). Practices associated with women's seclusion are often less strict for low-income women who must work (Drucza & Peveri, 2018). A survey of 3,000 rural women reports greater empowerment (measured as control over important decisions) among women who hold senior positions in their household, and among women who reside in Punjab and Sindh rather than KP; however, women with more education or in better-off families do not necessarily report more empowerment than less educated or poorer women (Ahmad et al., 2016).

Youth studies set in rural contexts of the global South highlight the agency and diverse trajectories of young people as they negotiate family expectations and pursue education and work opportunities that move them in and out of agriculture, and to-and-fro their villages (e.g., Punch, 2015; Elias et al., 2018; Rietveld et al., 2020). Through these experiences, young people gain know-how with negotiating and asserting their interests (e.g., Srinivasan, 2014). While norms obligate young

men to provide for their households, some resist or negotiate their provider role by shirking "shameful" and onerous farm work, or, if educated, taking additional classes or non-farm jobs even at lower pay (e.g., Morarji, 2014; Jeffrey et al., 2005; White, 2019). In rural KP, unemployed young men with advanced degrees endure harsh stigma and isolate themselves from kin, neighbors, and friends (Shah et al., 2020, p. 551).

In their mixed methods study in rural Punjab, Mumtaz and Salway (2009) argue for interpretations of agency that account more fully for kinship relations. They find young women's access to healthcare information and services to hinge on whether they have close ties with their mother-in-law and other senior women in their spouse's kinship network. They further surmise that mothers persuaded sons of the benefits of fewer children. While they conclude that young women's gains in health do not appear to have affected their agency or household gender relations, their study reveals the highly local social processes spurring change in childbearing norms through rather than independent of young people's household relations.

4.2 METHODS AND MATERIALS

Our findings draw mainly from focus group discussions conducted separately with young women and young men in 12 farming communities of the Balochistan, KP, Punjab, and Sindh provinces in 2015 and 2016. The discussions stemmed from the GENNOVATE (Enabling Gender Equality in Agricultural and Environmental Innovation) research initiative.[3]

4.2.1 Sample and data collection methods

The study communities (Table 1) were selected based on maximum diversity sampling, which called for variance along two dimensions: *economic dynamism*,

derived from information on infrastructure development, employment opportunities, and agricultural practices and technology adoption; and *gender gaps*, derived from data on literacy, educational attainment, and women's participation in elected office.

Wheat-based farming systems characterize all 12 villages. Most farmers are small-scale and engage in diverse crop and livestock activities both for markets and household use. Development conditions are more favorable in the plains of Punjab and Sindh compared to the poorer villages and rugged terrains of Balochistan and KP. Irrigation and electricity are widely available, and pipe-born water is present in seven study villages. The Appendix provides additional information on each case study.

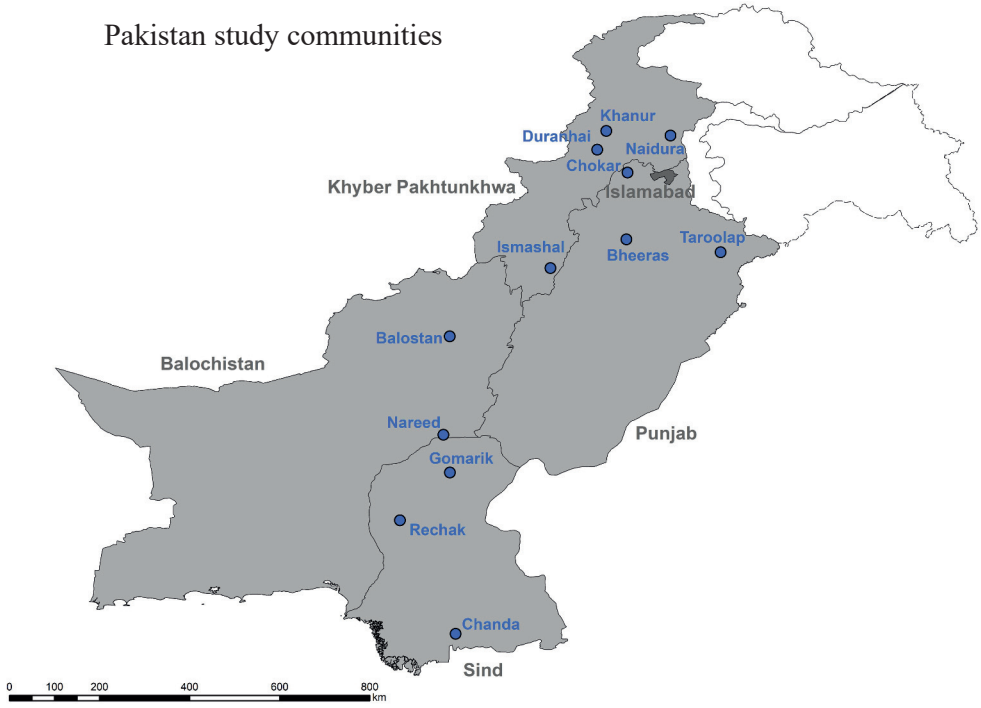
Table 1 Youth focus group characteristics

Province	Village*	FGD members		Married		Some secondary education or higher		Agriculture is primary occupation	
		Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Balochistan	Balostan	9	8	0%	13%	67%	25%	33%**	75%
	Nareed	8	9	13%	44%	0%	11%	50%	78%
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Khanur	8	8	50%	25%	13%	100%	100%	0%**
	Ismashal***	7	n/a	29%	n/a	57%	n/a	100%	n/a
	Naidura	7	8	14%	100%	14%	n/a	100%	100%
	Duranhai	7	8	57%	38%	0%	88%	100%	100%
Punjab	Chokar	10	7	0%	0%	100%	86%	50%	0%**
	Taroolap	10	7	10%	0%	90%	100%	100%	86%
	Bheeras	8	9	25%	0%	13%	100%	25%	100%
Sindh	Rechak	10	12	0%	42%	20%	25%	90%	75%
	Chanda	10	7	50%	57%	0%	86%	50%	100%
	Gomarik	8	10	88%	100%	0%	40%	88%	100%

*All village names are pseudonyms.

**Six or more FGD members identify "student" as primary occupation.

***Young men's roster data was lost.



Note: This map does not imply the expression of any opinions of the authors concerning the boundaries.

The selection criteria for focus group members called for young men and women aged 16 to 24, and for a significant share (at least six members) to have some experience in agriculture. The sample includes roughly 200 youth, with three-quarters of both sexes reporting agriculture to be their primary occupation (Table 1).[4] The men average 22 years of age, with 40 percent married. The women average 19 years of age, with a quarter married. More than half the men and a third of the women attended at least some secondary school.

We also draw on data collected from four other sex-specific focus groups in each village: two with low-income women and men (ages 30 to 55) and two with middle-income women and men (ages 25 to 55). Additionally, the dataset includes a community profile of each case, gathered from local key informants (at least one man and woman). This provides economic, demographic, social, and

political background on the locality. The field teams received an intensive one-week field-based training.

All data collection activities were conducted in the principal language of the village with one facilitator and one notetaker of the same sex as the study participants. With advance coordination and support from a hired community organizer, most teams completed the fieldwork for one case in one week. The team subsequently translated the fieldnotes into English and produced community synthesis reports. Prior to each data collection activity, informed consent procedures required facilitators to read aloud slowly and discuss a prepared statement explaining the study purpose and confidentiality assurances. Field teams alerted study participants of their right not to answer questions and to end their participation in the study at any time.

One of the ways we examined young people's agency was the Ladder of Power and Freedom exercise at the opening of the focus group.[5] Showing a picture of a simple five-step ladder, the facilitator asked the young men (or women) whether a majority of the men (women) in their village has the capacity to make their own decisions about important affairs in their life. Facilitators also provided examples of important decisions, such as about whether or where to work, or whether to start or end a relationship with a person of the opposite sex. Step one indicates little power and freedom to make important decisions, and step five represents great power and freedom. Participants note the step on small slips of paper, which are then posted (anonymously) on the ladder and discussed. The findings also draw on the groups' discussions of what local young men and women typically do after completing their studies, and their experiences with agriculture and other livelihood activities. The youth focus group required about two hours.

4.2.2 Data analysis methods

The data were analysed through qualitative comparative methods that require working iteratively with two approaches (Miles et al., 2014). The first employs variable-oriented techniques that draw on systematic content analysis methods and GENNOVATE's coded dataset (in QSR NVivo, a social science software) to identify recurring themes.[6] For example, we ran queries with the coded dataset to assess the frequencies of, and analyze text passages pertaining to a ladder step (or level of agency), *and* to another topic (or coding node), such as parents/elders, marriage practices, physical mobility, education, poverty, type of livelihood, and so forth. The dataset also contains an Excel file with responses to pre-coded questions in each instrument. The Appendix features examples of this evidence. The second approach is a contextual case-oriented analysis, and examples of this appear in the two village case studies discussed below. Together, the "wide" and "deep" analysis protocols provide many opportunities for identifying, crosschecking and nuancing patterns in the evidence. For example, young women's responses to a pre-coded question on the extent of local women's physical mobility can be compared with the (frequent) discussions of this topic by other focus groups in this community and in others.

The design and analysis of the Ladder of Power and Freedom exercise stemmed from Kabeer's (1999) arguments for indicators of agency and empowerment that capture consequential (rather than everyday) decisions shaping one's life path, such as marriage or occupation. A capacity to influence these types of decisions in rural Pakistan requires a young man or woman to exert a significant level of agency because they must often press against prevailing norms. In so doing, these dynamics hold "potential for challenging and destabilizing social inequalities" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 461; cf. Sen, 2000, pp. 194-195). Yet, an indicator such as holding a job cannot be assumed to be empowering. Norms, opportunities, and other dimensions which shape a young

person's goals and capacity to benefit from economic participation vary on the ground; and meaningful assessments of agency require contextualized research strategies (Kabeer, 1999; Punch, 2015).

Due to peer pressures and other factors, we concur with White (2019) that focus group data may reveal more about norms than the study participants' actual practices and intentions for their lives. By framing the initial question in the ladder exercise around the decision-making of "the majority" of the local young women or men, one of our goals (in addition to learning about agency) was to depersonalize a potentially sensitive and normative question to study participants from very different contexts. The discussion of the ratings and other topics illustrated some of the local norms that are typical and appropriate for young people in that context, and study participants often volunteered examples from their own lives.

To better situate and crosscheck our findings on young people's economic participation, we analyzed labor market data from the two rounds of the PDHS (2012-2013 and 2017-2018) that preceded and followed the qualitative fieldwork in 2015-2016. Some caution needs to be exercised with these findings. As the focus of the PDHS is on the health of families, the sample focuses on those who have been married and overrepresents women, which results in a small sample of rural young men. Also, underestimates of women's economic activities is a common issue in surveys (Zaidi et al., 2018), as discussed below.

4.3 FINDINGS

The young women and men who joined our focus groups mostly indicate limited capacity to make important decisions in their lives and frequently attribute this to norms that require their strict deference to elders and other customs of their villages. Young peoples' circumstances and interests, moreover, can make it challenging for them to adhere to their local norms. Despite expectations that men

should be the providers and farmers, some young women engage in farm work and other livelihoods to generate income, and some young men would rather not work if the only jobs available are physically taxing, low status, and poorly paid. Much like rural young people in numerous other countries (e.g., Elias et al., 2018; Leavy & Hossain, 2014), most young study participants express discouragement with their agricultural and other opportunities to make a living. Young women appear especially marginalized by norms that limit their physical mobility and discourage their economic participation.

Although perceiving their own opportunities as limited, both young women and men mostly report increasing productivity and profits for the farmers of their villages due to growing use of machinery, improved seed technologies, and innovations in soil management practices, irrigation, and livestock rearing. At the same time, young people experience these developments in gender-differentiated ways. In the villages of Khanur in KP, Nareed of Balochistan, and Chokar of Punjab, young women indicate that, compared to their mothers, they engage much less or not at all, in farming activities due to the arrival of the wheat reaper, harvester, and other labor-saving machines. One young woman, from Khanur of KP, reports that her parents manage all household and daily chores, including the livestock, and "I do my studies". Many young men, meanwhile, say that they are always in search of better work beyond their village because, among other reasons, other family members can manage the farm and livestock without them.

The PDHS (2012-2013 and 2017-2018) survey findings corroborate the focus group's testimonies of high young men's employment but large declines in young women's from already low levels. Nearly all (more than 90%) ever-married rural men between ages 15 and 24 report working in both survey rounds, with a small rise to about a quarter of these workers in agriculture in the second round. For ever-married rural women in this age group, their employment dropped from 20.8 to 11.8 percent, and from 9.2 to 4.5 percent in agriculture.

Zaidi et al. (2018, p. 26) caution that most surveys in Pakistan underestimate women's economic activities because much of women's work is informal and perceived to be household duties and thus "not considered to be work by survey respondents." Status also attaches to men who are sole providers and to women who can focus on the housework and care needs. At the same time, we show below how these norms are negotiated and married women of different generations in our focus groups testify to carrying out diverse agricultural activities. Most focus groups report that some norms soften for women as they become older, their children grow up, and they gain more status in their households. Of further note, approximately a quarter of women work in agriculture without pay, while nearly all men are paid (NIPS & ICF, 2019, p. 37).

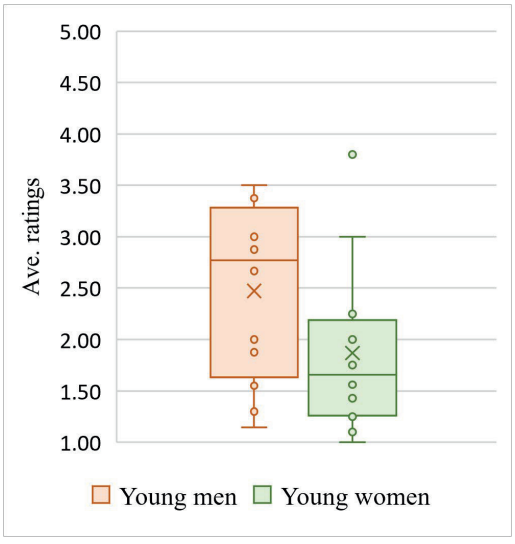
4.3.1 Perceived agency constrained by young age, gender, and family position and obligations

Based on employment trends, one might anticipate that the young men who joined our focus groups would express much greater agency than the young women. In fact, young women and men mostly position themselves on steps one or two, indicating limited capacity to make important decisions in their lives (Figure 1). Among other factors, they stress that local customs call for a household's elders to make all consequential decisions, including about the education, working life, and marriages of young family members. Nevertheless, two young women's and five young men's groups average on step three, indicating perceptions of agency.

Ratings from seven young women's groups averaged on the ladder's bottom, and most powerless rung. Their explanations refer to norms that require submission to elders, brothers, and husbands, that curtail mobility and education, and that render them unable to make any decisions other than perhaps small ones over their clothing or chores. "It is a sign of honor for men to be considered as the decisionmaker and head of the household and community," explains a 24-year-old farmer and mother of two from Nareed, Balochistan. Although some had

attained secondary and higher levels of education and were married, these women's testimonies did not differ from those still single or with little or no education. Nor did those closer to age 24 express greater agency than younger participants. Women in the study often convey the early years of marriage to be very difficult because they must demonstrate obedience to their new family and assume many housework and care responsibilities.

Figure 1 Distribution and mean (x in box) of young women's and men's focus group average ratings on five-step Ladder of Power and Freedom (24 youth focus groups)



Note: Averages of individual ratings from members of each focus group

In Naidura, a large village near an urban centre of KP province, the young women mainly rank themselves at step one, and a 16-year-old echoes many other young women's testimonies: "We don't have the freedom to make any decision. We can't even go outside alone and are always accompanied by males." A 20-year-old mother with some university education adds: "… even I have no freedom to make any decision regarding myself or my child." She explains, "After

marriage, you are in the husband's home, and you only do the house chores and take care of the in-laws. " The young women in Bheeras, a small farming village in Punjab, are among the few to discuss their economic roles, but these young women still mostly position themselves on step one and explain that they work as labourers with their brothers. They are paid and this helps to "fulfil our needs, but we cannot make decisions for ourselves" (17-year-old).

Young men's ratings are more varied than young women's, but no matter the step, their testimonies often speak to their junior household position and expectations to respect elders. If on steps one or two, men stress their younger status among their household's men. For consequential decisions regarding work or marriage, "Usually, the eldest male member of the family has this right," remarks a single 25-year-old farmer from Taroolap in Punjab. They report that having older brothers further limits their power. In Gomarik, in Sindh, young men explain that because all young people in their village live with their parents, they have no choice but to follow directions. In a few cases, young men say they "must oblige elders" because they are poor. The many young men's testimonies about their limited power and freedom suggest that this perception is typical.

For the young men's groups that averaged step three, some express greater agency due to being married, a marker of adulthood. The Naidura group of KP was comprised entirely of married men, and a 22-year old father of two reports that "our parents give us authority to take decisions because we have our own family now," while another who is 25 and also a father of two cautions that even married men "still consult" parents. Most young men in our sample are like young women in that few mention education or livelihoods as factors that increase their power and freedom; however, we present exceptions to these findings before concluding the empirical section.

4.3.2 Rural livelihoods, family, and gender

As with testimonies about their limited decision-making capacity, young women testify to diverse confining norms when discussing their livelihood experiences. Many young men, too, observe discouraging conditions for making a living, in part due to expectations to follow in their father's footsteps or to pursue jobs away from the village. Whether out of need or their own drive, we also present evidence of norms bending as young people negotiate and resist their expected roles and conducts.

4.3.2.1 Young women

Young women across the focus groups indicate that, once they no longer attend school, they become busy with housework and family care duties. Despite various norms that discourage their economic participation, our data indicate that many rural young women engage in small-scale income generation activities from their homes, such as caring for livestock, sewing, and embroidery. As we show, some report laboring in crop fields beyond their homesteads.

While both focus group and PDHS findings signal declines in young women's employment in agriculture, testimonies in five villages indicate that some young women, both single and married, are assisting with crop or livestock activities: "[Women] bring grass. They bring water. They bring wood… [and] also work in farming like sowing, weeding, and cotton picking. They also help with sprays and fertilizing land," observes a 19-year-old woman from Chanda of Sindh Province. Yet, many testify to norms that provide for only men to be farmers and depict women in limited "helping" roles. According to a 22-year-old single woman of Punjab who holds a college degree, "Women of this village depend on men in all matters. They don't go for farming. They just help men in harvesting of wheat. They don't have any opportunities."

The scope for young women's physical mobility and economic roles varies across the cases. Young women's focus groups estimate on average that fewer than three women in every ten move freely in their own villages, but in about a third of the villages estimates rise to seven or more village women. Both young men and women testify that middle-aged or older women "like our mothers and grandmothers" can visit other women or a relative in the village. The relaxation of some norms for older women can also be seen in the low-income women's focus groups, who report it to be common for *older married* women and *widows* to work for pay in seven of the villages, while this falls to five villages for *young married* women, and to three villages in the case of *young single* women. In none of the villages would a woman of any age be welcome as a trader in her village market – though women do sell produce, prepared foods, and other goods from their homesteads or enlist men in the family to market their goods.

Testimonies reveal the contested nature of women's economic roles, especially if the women are young. "Girls don't go to the fields," exclaims one member of the Rechak young women's group in Sindh; and another counters, "Girls pick the cotton, cut crops, weed, learn to apply fertilizer, sow wheat. All of this work is learned at an early age." Still, another adds, "Young girls are not allowed to go out, only older women work in the field." Similarly, in Khanur of KP, some in the group indicate that women are only involved in activities "inside the home and men are responsible for outdoor activity," while others, such as a married 18-year-old and mother who lives with her in-laws, exclaims, "I work from dawn to dust within and outside home till bedtime." Yet, later in this focus group, the same young woman notes, "Young ladies work at home and women of older ages work at plots." Meanwhile, a young man of Khanur reports in his group that women in his village spray and weed the crops when their husband "is out in the city."

While, in practice, villagers seek to negotiate normative expectations in order to move forward with their diverse needs and interests, these processes appear to have limited effects on prevailing norms. Ongoing pressures to (at least appear to) comply with local norms should not be underestimated given the importance of women's behavior for family honor and the widespread acceptability of violent sanctions for women who flout norms (NIPS and ICF, 2019). A young man of Nareed in Balochistan warns that women can be beaten if they try to grow and sell their own produce, and another shows his agreement by adding, "It's not their work." A member of the group then qualifies these views by sharing that the village women do exercise some influence over what they produce, as men who sell women's produce "must seek her consent, and if she disagrees, he cannot sell her products. Other family members will speak out against this, and the family elders will intervene."

The data suggest that many young rural women are economically active, albeit in ways that mostly remain hidden and thus maintaining the appearance of conforming with norms.

4.3.2.2 Young men

In contrast to young women, rural young men are expected to work and provide for their families. They convey their job options to be largely determined by their family's circumstances, and most express resignation to laboring under their elders or in low-status and poorly paying jobs. In addition to helping their fathers on the farm or in a shop, they work in daily wage farm or construction jobs, sell vegetables in the local market, run small enterprises, and engage in labor migration. "I am working with my father in the field," declares a 24-year-old from Khanur, and a 19-year-old then shares, "I also assist my parents and bring fodder for our cattle." If not from a better-off family that can provide work, young men of Khanur say they take daily wage jobs.

In all but one village, young men indicate labor migration as common. Most testimonies suggest that they leave or are pushed out of their village because local jobs are undesirable or scarce, or opportunities on their families' farm are limited. In Ismashal of KP, young men say that they are continuously seeking "suitable employment" beyond the village "because they want to get rid of farming work because it requires hard work…"

In four groups, concerns emerge for young men who neither study nor have jobs, but "just sit idle," "do work at home without income," or "play games." In Naidura of KP, a 24-year-old farmer and father of one indicates that most young men in his village "do nothing, just wasting their time in useless activities." "They farm or work as laborers," adds a 22-year-old farmer, and seemingly implying these jobs to be useless as well.[7] The young men report that educational opportunities have improved in Naidura, but the world is moving fast, and they are "lagging behind" because a master's degree is now necessary to obtain good jobs. In such ways, some men resist expectations to provide when their only job opportunities confer low status and diminish their agency, take a heavy physical toll, and provide meagre returns (also see Jackson,1999a).

4.3.3 Case studies: Contexts that nurture some young people's agency

Here we explore conditions in the two cases where young people observed the highest power and freedom ratings. These cases elucidate the gendered and generational processes by which agency and livelihood roles are perceived and experienced, including in more dynamic local opportunity structures. Neither village, however, offers a context that encourages both young men's and women's agency. In the first case, a village of Balochistan, only young men report a relatively healthy level of power and freedom. In the second case, in Punjab, the young women report this power. To provide a broader perspective of this

unevenness, we conclude each case study with observations from focus groups of older generations.

4.3.3.1 Balostan's young men

Balostan is home to diverse ethnic groups, with the largest group, at half the village population, comprised of a comparatively well-off and politically influential Pashtun subtribe (also see Appendix). Only two of the eight young men in the Balostan focus group reached secondary school (one some post-secondary education); and none report that they are still studying. All are single but for one, and all report farming occupations, though more than half also work in businesses such as shops and hotels in a nearby town.

In the Ladder of Power and Freedom exercise, the young men on average pick step 3.5, the highest among the young men's groups. They explain that times have changed, and young men now have more influence because "Elders listen to them" when deciding on their education, business ventures, or marriage. Balostan's young men also show a remarkable enthusiasm for farming compared to their peers in other study communities. They share details of various improved wheat varieties, including some that produce twice the yields of local varieties. They speak of machinery, "doing soil and water tests," applying specific chemical inputs, cultivating several types of vegetables for growing markets, and receiving helpful guidance from extension services, NGOs, and international donors such as UNDP. "We are always learning from experience," observes a 23-year-old in the group.

By contrast, the young women position themselves at step two, explaining that "We here in the village have no freedom in our lives," and "We can only decide on our clothing." Nor do they perceive any growing opportunities. Rather, the young women detail how only their brothers attend high schools and universities as far away as Lahore. "My brother didn't even allow me to go to this primary girls' school," laments an 18-year-old. Another confides that she has

some interest in farming, “but I don’t do it because this is considered as men’s work here.”

The differences between young men’s and women’s perceptions of their agency and opportunities repeat themselves in the low- and middle-income focus groups with the older adults. The two men’s groups speak of benefitting from roads and mobile phones, becoming “hard working” and more knowledgeable about farming, and earning more due to “very good” wheat and vegetable crops. The men also report a rise in government and private sector jobs. The women’s low-income group, however, speaks of fewer work opportunities for the village women compared to a decade ago, and attribute this to “gender differences,” “cultural practices,” “societal pressure,” and their lack of education. Middle-income women paint a mixed picture about their agency. Most chose step three and convey that men are now more open to “taking suggestions from them” about household matters (55-year-old widow with 8 children), which are common dimensions of women’s agency as they advance in their life cycle. Other women express having more freedom in the past when “women could go outside the home and worked with men, but now they aren’t allowed” (42-year-old, married with six children). Current processes of agricultural development in this village, as in most others in our sample, appear to be marginalizing most types of women from economic opportunities.

4.3.3.2 Chokar’s young women

Next, we turn to the village of Chokar in Punjab, which is principally comprised of Khattar landowning households. Villagers testify to a flowering of opportunities both on and off their farms over the past decade. The ten young women in this focus group are all single and completed at least middle school with most achieving more. All the young women report working as teachers, laborers, farmers, or engaged in service jobs or dairy activities, and two combine

work and school. Educational and economic opportunities help to shed light on these young women's average rating of step 3.8, the highest of all 24 youth focus groups (and the outlier blue dot for young women in Figure 1).

A 24-year-old teacher in the young women's group credits their education as the main driver of the group's high ladder ratings. Others speak of parents supporting the educational and economic pursuits of all their children, with the teacher explaining that young women and men alike "have permission to go anywhere for doing a job or getting education," including to the district headquarters to attend university. As in other cases, contradictory testimonies emerge about women's agricultural roles. Across the Chokar dataset, villagers testify that the local women no longer work in agriculture. Yet, several participants in each of the three women's focus groups indicate farming and dairy as their occupations. "Yes, women are involved in cattle farming, only in the cowshed … in the boundary wall of the house," declares a 16-year-old in the young women's group after one member states that local women no longer work in agriculture. Earlier, this 16-year-old reports most villagers to "belong with farming and labour."

Meanwhile, young men of Chokar position themselves on step two. Much like most other young men's focus groups, they speak of their poverty and going for "daily work" (18-year-old single student and farmer), and how they are not raised 'to make big decisions about their life' (16-year-old single student and farmer). Testimonies later in this group refer to idle young men and parents who are prioritizing their daughters' schooling over sons because they believe the girls show more promise in succeeding at school and obtaining good jobs.

As further background, members of Chokar's focus group with low-income women mainly testify to greater opportunities compared to the past. "Agricultural activities, factory jobs, and construction works are increasing day by day, so there is sufficient space available for women to get involved in

different sectors,", explains a 45-year-old laborer and mother of six. While some in this group wax less sanguine about the changes underway, others acknowledge that, unlike the past, village women now work as teachers, in healthcare, and for government. A 55-year-old mother of eight observes that "our girls are studying from primary to higher education" and "people are getting and using loans for small businesses, agriculture, and for livelihoods." Meanwhile, ratings from the middle-income women's group of Chokar also average at nearly step four on their ladder; and a 25-year-old Lady Health Worker explains that the village men "listen to their women and fulfil all their demands. They are not strict with women." Others in this group report that local women now "know more about their surroundings" and participate in important decisions about their children.

Indeed, Chokar's adult men's groups acknowledge the major change in women's roles, and how village women now have "professional" jobs and "work confidently on salary." In study villages beyond Chokar, we rarely hear views depicting growing gender equity in household relations and productive roles. Moreover, the rising status of women in Chokar appears to be accompanied by reasonably supportive conditions for the men's livelihoods. The middle-income men ranked themselves only on step two of the ladder, but they nevertheless testify to improving conditions for farming due to machinery, improved seeds, and irrigation. In the low-income men's group, the members indicate their job options to have improved and local poverty to have declined by nearly a quarter over the past decade.

4.4 DISCUSSION: CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AS CHANGEMAKERS

Most of the young people who joined our study from Pakistan's countryside express little ability to control their life path, little hope that agricultural work can

improve their lives, and little capacity to obtain desirable nonfarm jobs. These dynamics are unpromising for the drive and talent needed for this large generation to negotiate and shift the discouraging norms of their villages and access the resources and opportunities necessary to strengthen their local economies. Nor does it appear to be promising for most rural youth who joined the study to acquire stable work in fast-paced urban labor markets.

Kabeer's (2000a, 1999) theories of "intergenerational contract" and empowerment-- which spotlight the importance of household relations in shaping access to opportunities--offer useful framings for interpreting young people's perceptions of their agency. The young study participants repeatedly stress how responsibilities for making important decisions rest with their elders. Their sense of agency is mediated by social rules attached to their gender, young age, junior household position, marital status, socio-economic standing, and more. The Ladder of Power and Freedom evidence as well as other data from our cases nonetheless express diverse interactions between the prevailing norms of a village and young women's and men's sense of agency and opportunities.

4.4.1 Negotiating norms where opportunities mostly appear scarce

We presented many quotes to illuminate young people's experiences with upholding, negotiating and withdrawing from gender and generational norms as they carry out their daily lives. For instance, some young men testify to resisting their duties to provide when their only options are "useless" farm work and other daily wage manual jobs. Meanwhile, some young single and married women openly report their engagement in agriculture, even as these activities risk stigma for women and their household. Except for Balostan, current processes of mechanization and other technological advances in farming do not appear to be attracting young men to the sector, while they are further limiting young women to reproductive roles and home-based livelihoods (also see Mohiuddin et al.,

2020). Investment in university and advanced degrees, moreover, is proving to be a "contradictory resource," as it is seen to provide springboards mainly for those with resources and connections, while ambitions to study and have a good job distance young women and men from their "local forms of cultural and economic capital" (Morarji, 2014, p.186; Jeffrey et al., 2005; Shah et al., 2020;).

Interactions between agency and opportunity structure are deeply complex, and neither education nor employment can be assumed to fuel a young person's agency. A recent survey of 480 rural women in KP province found them engaged in diverse livelihood activities mainly from their homesteads, but fewer than one in four considered their income earning to strengthen their decision-making capacity (Jabeen et al., 2020, p. 13).

4.4.2 Negotiating norms where opportunities appear to be expanding

We showcase Balostan and Chokar to reveal possibilities of opportunity structures that can benefit certain local youth. Both Balostan and Chokar appear to have growing and diversifying economies, yet so do other cases in our sample. What is more distinctive about these two communities is that the young people's elders are not only participating in their expanding economy but opening these doors to their youth--albeit in ways that manifest as highly gendered. In the first case, young men participate actively in the agricultural innovation processes of their village, while in the second case young women refer to their educational and nonfarm opportunities and supportive parents.

Balostan's young men say that "times have changed," they "are more empowered," and can influence their elders' decisions. These young men displayed detailed knowledge about agricultural innovations and external partners, while this type of know-how is usually only heard from men of older generations in this dataset. Meanwhile, Chokar presents an opportunity structure where women along with men are accessing diverse types of jobs and there is a

relaxation of the set of intersecting norms that pertain to young women's education, livelihoods, and physical mobility. Their mothers appear to be vital to paving the way; but both the low- and middle-income men's testimonies demonstrate that men too have been supportive of and benefited from women's economic participation. Chokar's testimonies also suggest that household relations have become more equitable. Unfortunately, the marginalization of women from visible agricultural roles still persists even in relatively supportive conditions for women's economic participation.

Taken together, our findings from the 12 cases signal that many stifling norms tend to accompany young people who work in agriculture--deterring them from imagining a promising future for themselves in the very sector that dominates their local economy. Yet, our sample also illuminates the unevenness of agency and opportunity structure interactions across and within the cases, and the possibilities as well as barriers that this variability presents. In their everyday lives, some of Chokar's young women and Balostan's young men challenge the roles and conducts expected of them. Some openly express pride in their livelihoods in the focus groups, which appears to inspire others. The complex interdependencies in the social life of households and villages mean that as opportunities expand for young people, these processes potentially have ripple effects on loosening some of the gender and generational norms in a local context. Again, the other youth groups in these same two villages do not express much agency, suggesting that spill-over effects never can be assumed, and some rural population groups may be disadvantaged by their changing agricultural economies. The young women across most cases appear especially vulnerable.

4.5 REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

Our findings point to a need for research and development models that do not engage with young people as a separate group to be targeted specifically, but rather as vital members of households and other complex networks of social relations in which gender, generational, and other diverse norms figure prominently (cf. Sumberg et al., 2021[8]). Research and development approaches to support Pakistan's growing population of rural young people need to account more effectively for household relations and the diversity of ways in which agency and opportunity structure interact on the ground.

Expanding rural educational opportunities requires urgent attention. Some research indicates greater returns for educational investments by targeting poorer hamlets, in part due to limited safety for girls traveling to-and-from schools as well as norms that compel low-income families to withdraw children from schools in better-off hamlets where they face extensive discrimination, including from teachers (Jacoby & Mansuri, 2011). To improve girls' opportunities, a World Bank report on Pakistan (2019, p. 71) proposes a school-based program with agency and norms objectives and design elements that include strengthening life skills of adolescent girls and providing them with safe spaces and peer networks. Yet, to foster transformative change in these girls' lives, changes are also needed in the status and treatment of both boys and girls by their families and more widely in their village. Pairing the program with a community-based learning initiative to expand opportunities for all local youth—that, for instance, includes educators, leaders, parents, and students, and invests in ongoing follow-up—sends an important signal and could potentially nurture wider safe spaces for village girls to thrive along with boys.

Given the importance of household agricultural enterprise and agri-food value chains in the economy, further research is needed of the conditions that

expand young people's participation in these opportunities (also see White, 2019; Flynn & Sumberg, 2017). Unlocking strategies that improve especially women's capacity to benefit from agricultural research and development, such as through training and credit initiatives that enable women themselves to access and manage farm plots and use agricultural machines, could enhance their asset base and status (Mohiuddin et al., 2020; Farnworth, Bharati et al., 2018). This, in turn, holds potential for strengthening food security and accelerating development of wheat-based systems and livelihoods. Additional understanding is needed of negotiations over resources across productive and reproductive needs among the (changing) members of extended households of smallholder farmers and rural laborers (Quisumbing et al., 2014; Kabeer, 2000a). This includes social norms shaping young men's and women's access to cropland, intergenerational resources transfers, and other assets. Further study of gender and generational barriers to young people's migration for education and work could also open pathways for change (Punch, 2015).

The research design enabled us to explore agency with diverse mix focus groups and contexts. Being able to compare the ladder rankings and discourse across genders and generations is revealing. We also suggest (slower) ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and interviewing the same respondent multiple times (also see White, 2019). There would be much to gain from revisiting cases with methods that provide more time than rapid approaches for researchers to build relationships and facilitate more collaborative forms of learning with community members. There is also potential for innovation with building young people's own capacities to assess agency in ways that enable them to reflect critically and move forward on their own notions of power and freedom and desirable livelihoods. Rather than a ladder, Robson et al. (2007) argue for a horizontal construct and improved capturing of diverse forms of agency (such as hidden forms, or with a supportive parent or local network).

Finally, learning partnerships and online platforms now support a growing body of work on social norms in international development policies and programs.[9] These approaches are often informed by community-based mobilization and education models that were developed in the public health sector, as this sector has the most experience with and evidence for effective interventions to reduce discriminatory norms associated with violence against women, female employment, and other leading development concerns (e.g., Heise et al., 2020). In the field of agricultural research and development, collaborative learning models are emerging that engage men and women producers with development practitioners and researchers in reflecting critically on gender roles and relations and in identifying opportunities for inclusive agricultural innovation processes (Wong et al., 2019; Badstue, Elias et al., 2020). With young women and men as both participants and leaders in some of the learning initiatives on social norms, these collaborations are strategically nurturing youth agency and more inclusive development processes.

APPENDIX: OVERVIEW OF VILLAGE CASES

Province	Community	Population	Principal social groups	Qualified doctor visits regularly?	% public secondary school	# Every 10 women who move freely in public* % Women working for pay**	Dynamism of local agri. market Frequency of visits by traders and middlemen from distant markets Principal crops/livestock
Balochistan	Balostan	1700	50% Uthmankhail, 11% Sulemankhail, 10% Babozai, 10% Shamalzai	No	Girls: 5% Boys: 25%	2.7 1%	Active daily market 7 km away Occasionally visit Almond, apricot, apple, wheat, vegetables (cauliflower, tomato, and lettuce), livestock, poultry
	Nareed	1000	50% Lehri, 12.5% Ambi, 12.5% Machi, 10% Aeri	No	Girls: 25% Boys: 25%	2.3 50%	Active daily market 6 km away N.A. Vegetables, chickpeas, wheat, rice, fish
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Duranhai	14000	25% Badrakhe, 20% Miangan, 15% Kakar,10% Malakan, 10% Peeran	Yes	Girls: 50% Boys: 50%	2.1 8%	Daily market with average activity Rarely visit Wheat, maize, vegetables, livestock, and strawberries
	Ismashal	7000	25% Khar, 35% Thathal, 10% Khawar:	Yes	Girls: ≈ 0 Boys: 25%	2.7 5%	Daily market with average activity Regularly visit Wheat, maize, and rice, cattle, buffalo, goats, poultry
	Khanur	3000	50% Mareezi, 20% Gujar, 15% Utman khel, 10% Chichyan	No	Girls: ≈ 0 Boys: 25%	7.0 8%	Daily market with average activity Rarely visit Wheat, maize, and tomatoes, cattle, buffalo, goats, poultry
	Naidura	6000	55% Awan, 35%Tanoli	No	Girls: 75% Boys: 75%	3.0 15%	Weak weekly market Rarely visit Wheat, maize, and vegetables, cows, sheep, goats, poultry

Province	Community	Population	Principal social groups	Qualified doctor visits regularly?	% In public school	# Every 10 women who move freely in public* % Women working for pay**	Dynamism of local agri. market Frequency of visits by traders and middlemen from distant markets Main crops/livestock
Punjab	Bheeras	5000	72% Awan, 6% Maachhi, 5% Mochi	No	Girls: ≈ 0 Boys: ≈ 0	2.0 70%	- Very active daily market - Rarely visit - Wheat, potato, vegetable, maize, sorghum
	Chokar	1200	90% Khattar, 7% Awan,	No	Girls: 50% Boys: 30%	6.8 30%	- Market of ave. activity 13 km away - Regularly visit - Wheat, peanuts, canola and soya beans, lentils, livestock, poultry
	Taroolap	12000	40% Cheema, 30% Bhandar 10% Awan, 10% Salahri	Yes	Girls: Almost all Boys: Almost all	2.6 2%	- Very active daily market - Regularly visit - Wheat, rice, vegetables, livestock
Sindh	Chanda	4500	99% Chand	No	Girls: ≈ 0 Boys: ≈ 0	3.5 8%	- Very active daily market - Rarely visit - Wheat, rice cotton, chili, cattle, and other livestock
	Gomarik	700	88% Goopang, 5% Jatoi, 5% Shaikh	No	Girls: ≈ 0 Boys: ≈ 0	7 Nearly all	- Very active daily market - Rarely visit - Wheat, cotton, sugarcane, sorghum
	Rechak	3000	44% Chandio, 12% Panhwar, 10% Lashari	No	Girls: ≈ 0 Boys: ≈ 0	3 Nearly all	- Active daily market - Regularly visit - Wheat, chilies, sorghum, onions, fennel, vegetables, rice, livestock

*Young women's focus group members (average ratings). Other data from local key informants.

** "Working for pay" includes payment with money or goods or services, such as meals, housing or education fees.

Note: All data pertain to village population.

NOTES

[1] The Pakistan cases are part of a the GENNOVATE dataset of 137 village cases in 26 countries. For further information on this research initiative, see Chapter 2 of the thesis and https://gennovate.org/.

[2] Kabeer employs the term resources rather than opportunity structure and defines resources to include both conventional economic resources as well as "human and social resources" such as the "rules and norms that govern distribution and exchange in different institutions arenas" and "give certain actors power over others" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). This aligns with Lane's (2001, p. 297) notion of opportunity structure: "[R]ules that shape social actions and the resources that furnish agents with the power that makes it possible (to varying extents) for them to act.

[3] See Petesch, Badstue and Prain (2018) for the GENNOVATE methodology. Chapter two of the thesis discusses and reflects critically on the study's sampling, data collection and analysis methods. For further information on and publications from the study (including more than 20 journal papers), see gennovate.org.

[4] Among the roughly 200 focus group members (one young men's focus group roster was unfortunately lost in the field), 18 were older, and two younger than the recommended ages of 16 to 24. Mostly they were outside of the age range by a year or two.

[5] For guidance on applying the Ladder tool in the field and analyzing this data, see Petesch and Bullock (2018). For examples of other analyses with GENNOVATE's Ladder data, see Lawless et al. (2019) and Chapter 3 of the thesis).

[6] See Chapter 3 of the thesis for discussion of the coding framework and list of the principal codes.

[7] Jeffrey et al. (2005) similarly report young men in a village of Uttar Pradesh, India to express perceptions of "uselessness" and "waiting" although engaged in paid work.

[8] Although addressing youth employment in Africa, our findings appear to support conclusions from Sumberg et al. (2020) that there is not much evidence to support targeting youth.

[9] These two websites offer many helpful resources on gender norms, including lessons from international public health and development interventions: Prevention collaborative (https://prevention-collaborative.org/) and Align: Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (https://www.alignplatform.org/).

Chapter 5


ING. EDGAR ESTUARDO
MENDEZ BURGOS
Los cambios se fecundan en las ideas
se refuerzan con las palabras
se demuestran en las acciones
NEW YORK
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Gender norms and poverty dynamics in 32 villages of South Asia*

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The poverty dynamics of a community, and the social arrangements and opportunities that shape these dynamics, constitute important dimensions of well-being and the freedom of people to lead the lives they value (Sen, 2000). Various literatures concerned with well-being and development signal the contingent nature of how individuals perceive well-being and freedom in their lives, with social norms and expectations, such as those associated with socio-economic position, gender or other markers of social identity, exercising important influences on perceptions (Batz & Tay, 2018; Graham & Chattopadhyay, 2012; Sen, 2000). For example, the empirical literature finds that experiences with economic gains often foster a greater increase in perceived well-being among poorer populations compared to higher income groups (Diener & Diener, 1995; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002); however, as we highlight below, many studies have challenged assumptions about these linkages for women.

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In this chapter, we examine qualitatively the significant ways that gender colors local people's assessments of and experiences with moving out of poverty and with remaining poor. The sample spans 32 farming villages from five countries of South Asia. Our analysis of local poverty trajectories is framed by the concept of gender norms, or the "differential rules of conduct for women and men" (Pearse & Connell, 2016, p. 35), to highlight the strongly gendered processes by which people perceive and experience transitions out of poverty and persistence of poverty. The analysis draws on feminist conceptual approaches that forefront the contextual, contested and fluid qualities of norms (e.g. Jackson, 1998). The restrictive norms of this region present analytic opportunities to showcase the seemingly diverse yet "monotonous" beliefs and practices (Kabeer, 2016) that slow the evolution of more gender-equitable poverty transitions.

The difficult nexus of rurality and the persistence of poverty and gender inequality remains a challenge in South Asia. A recent global panel study concludes that a child born into a poor family from the two regions with the highest concentrations of poverty, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, has a significantly lower prospect than a child born elsewhere of attaining a better life than their parents (Narayan et al., 2018). Data on rural-urban gender disparities in the region are scarce, but one study finds child marriage to be much higher in the countryside than cities of Bangladesh, and such practices raise women's risks of violence and exploitation (UNFPA & UNICEF, 2017).

The influence of gender norms on the pathways and barriers to escaping poverty have mainly been addressed by case study literatures, which limits what we can learn from the larger comparative research of poverty dynamics (Razavi, 1999; Ruspini, 2001; Hulme & Moore, 2010). In the following section, we introduce theoretical literature on gender norms and the concept's relevance for longitudinal studies from South Asia that address gender. Next, we discuss the methodology used to produce and analyze our dataset, which features women's

and men's interpretations of and experiences with poverty transitions from diverse villages of South Asia. In the empirical section, we demonstrate significant regularities in normative influences on conceptions of poverty trajectories, including how they constrain and obscure recognition of women's economic initiatives in most but not all village contexts. We then conclude with reflections on the ways that norms discourage and accommodate—and, more rarely, become altered by—the initiatives of local women and men to move out of poverty.

5.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender norms comprise socially constructed beliefs and practices that, across diverse cultures, associate men with authority and productive roles and women with submissive and reproductive roles. These norms include dictates that, for instance, constrain women's voice, freedom of physical mobility, and role in the economy, and represent an important social mechanism by which gender inequality persists (e.g., Seguino, 2007). Relative to other world regions, the social conventions of South Asia interact in ways that often provide little latitude for negotiation. Patrilocal marriage and dowry traditions uproot girls and young women from their families and villages, marginalize them from family resources, and when combined with seclusion norms that constrain women's mobility, deepen their social isolation and economic dependence on husbands. The South Asia region also harbors the highest regional rate of intimate partner violence in the world (UNICEF, 2018). Nevertheless, normative codes have fluid properties. For instance, practices associated with women's seclusion to their homesteads are often relaxed for poor women who must work (Drucza & Peveri, 2018).

The available large longitudinal poverty studies that address questions of gender in developing country contexts consistently reveal women to be

disadvantaged compared to men, albeit with some gender gaps declining such as in education (e.g. Narayan et al., 2018; Diwakar & Shepherd, 2018; Van den Broeck & Kilic, 2018; Baulch & Davis, 2008; Quisumbing, 2011a, b). An insightful mixed methods study, dating from 1996 to 2007 in Bangladesh, uncovered significant poverty reduction among communities participating in agricultural technology programs that targeted low-income women, but mixed success with increasing women's asset control and reducing vulnerability due to events that deplete assets, notably dowry and wedding expenses and illness (Quisumbing, 2011a, b; Baulch & Davis, 2008). A recent mixed-methods study of poverty dynamics in eight countries of the global South finds that agriculture remains an important pathway out of poverty; however, the authors highlight numerous adverse gender norms that constrain women's productive role such as, in the case of Nepal, restrictions on women's physical mobility, gender wage inequality, and women's "double burden of income and care work" (Diwakar & Shepherd, 2018, p. 21).

Feminist analyses illuminate how gender norms operate and endure over time through mechanisms that are "both internalized (produces gendered selves) and also externally present and impinging through status expectations held by others and through institutional forces" (Sanyal et al., 2015, p. 18). Public surveillance and sanctioning practices play important roles in maintaining norms (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). In many contexts of rural South Asia, and elsewhere, a woman who abides by codes of modesty and domesticity may be admired, while a woman who strives to be entrepreneurial with farming and move her family out of poverty potentially invites scorn, not only upon herself, but the entire family. Public actions to improve women's status, such as with inheritance and dowry laws, have been impeded by the durability of patrilineal kinship systems and the great value in these societies of stable and traditional family structures (das Gupta et al., 2004).

There is a longitudinal community case study literature from the fields of anthropology and sociology that brings to light the roles of values, norms, family hierarchy and other local level institutions in mobility processes to explain the causes of unexpected and sometimes contradictory effects of agricultural innovation and rural development on the ground (e.g. Rao, 2008; Semedi, 2012; Tickamyer & Kusujiarti, 2012). A study of scheduled castes in two villages of Karnataka, India that began in the mid-1950s observed persistent gender gaps in both villages, even as one of the two agricultural villages prospered greatly (Epstein, 2007). Women faced men's growing drinking and gambling, worsening domestic violence, and women councilors "still tended to act as the mouthpiece for their male sponsors rather than representing the demands of village women" (ibid., p. 210). Another longitudinal study of two villages in Jharkhand, India, brings to life the diverse strategies employed by Santal women to defend their eroding land rights and gain recognition (Rao, 2008). The women "had to tread carefully" and some risked their lives as they endeavored to garner allies among kin, community leaders, and courts to assert claims on property (ibid., 36). Drinking men also appear in the Jharkhand work, and both studies highlight low-income men's struggles with increasing marginalization as central to understanding women's heightened vulnerabilities with the penetration of markets, a decentralizing state, and other forces in the countryside (also see Farnworth et al., 2020). Gendered expectations for men to protect their families and provide adequately also exert pressure on subaltern men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jackson, 1999a, 2000).

From the more nuanced analyses of local development and social change, moreover, it becomes evident that normative expectations vary on the ground and are not only constraints. Some gender norms provide for cooperative gender and family relations, and many dictates are continuously negotiated and resisted as women and men lead their daily lives and pursue their interests (e.g., Jackson,

1998; Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013). A low-income woman who generates assets may or may not be able to control these as she strives to move out of poverty. Gender norms mainly operate as constraining forces on women's agency and exercise significant influences on both women's and men's poverty transitions.

5.3 METHODS AND MATERIALS

Our research draws from 32 community cases conducted in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan (Table 1) as part of the GENNOVATE research initiative (Enabling Gender Equality in Agricultural and Environmental Innovation). GENNOVATE's conceptual framework calls attention to how gender norms shape and are shaped by women's and men's agricultural innovation, and how these interactions potentially contribute to processes of empowerment and poverty reduction.[1]

Table 1 Overview of sample

Study country	# Case studies	# Low-income focus groups (# participants)		# Women's semi-structured life story interviews	
		Women	Men	Movers	Chronic poor
Afghanistan	4	4 (36)	4 (41)	1	2
Bangladesh	6	6 (60)	6 (59)	4	3
India	12	12 (125)	12 (110)	4	18
Nepal	3	3 (27)	3 (25)	1	1
Pakistan	7	7 (56)	7 (59)	2	3
Total	32	32 (304)	32 (294)	12	27

5.3.1 Sampling framework and contexts

The study communities were selected based on maximum diversity sampling principles that specified variance along two dimensions: i) economic dynamism and ii) gender gaps. Economic dynamism was estimated using indicators such as infrastructure development, the integration of local livelihood strategies with

markets, labor market opportunities, and resources available for innovations in agriculture. Gender gaps were estimated with reference to indicators such as women's leadership, physical mobility, education levels, access to and control over productive assets, and ability to market and benefit from sales of agricultural produce.

The communities differ in numerous ways. The villages are populated by diverse caste or tribal groups, and several report both.[2] With minor exception, the Muslim religion prevails in cases from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan; Hinduism in India; and Buddhism or Hinduism in Nepal.[3] Weather shocks and political conflict disrupted lives in some villages from all five countries, and insecurity persisted across all four Afghan cases. In one remote village, from Pakistan, community members testify to near feudal-like conditions, with most village workers, including children, shouldering labor obligations to landlords due to protracted indebtedness. Elsewhere, the literature and our own data point to less rigid socio-political conditions, as rural power structures have become more diverse with the reach, albeit uneven, of markets, roads, public services, political parties, international and nongovernmental actors, and an array of more and less formal local networks, including women's own self-help groups (e.g., Lewis & Hossain, 2017; Epstein, 2007; Narayan, Pritchett et al., 2009). Irrigation is present in all but four of the 32 case studies, and electricity is largely available except in most villages visited in Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Most boys and girls are indicated by key informants to be attending primary school in the study villages, except in three Pakistan cases. Most children also attend some secondary school, except for in the Pakistan cases and girls in Nepal.

5.3.2 Data collection methods

GENNOVATE's data collection tools (Petesch, Badstue & Prain et al., 2018) are inspired by participatory methods that enable women and men to reflect on and

interpret their own lives and experiences. In each research village, data collection included six sex-specific focus groups with (i) low-income women and men, (ii) middle-income women and men, and (iii) young women and men. In addition, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted guided by three instruments: a) a community profile to gather background demographic, social, economic, agricultural, and political information about community (requires key informants of both genders); (b) innovation pathway interviews with local people who are known for trying new things in agriculture (two men, two women); (c) life- story interviews (two men, two women). Table 1 highlights the primary data used for this chapter, which include 64 focus group discussions with low-income men and women and 39 semi-structured life story interviews with women.

Due to space constraints, decisions were made to explore and compare two types of poverty transitions among the set of women's life story interviews: those who move out of poverty (12 women) and those who remain poor (27 women). The categorization of the mover and chronic poor sets was done by combining the reported assets and livelihood activities with responses to a question about how the woman's household is getting by with the current level of income. Movers, for example, consistently testify to getting by with ease, while chronic poor responses convey struggles, such as with periods of hunger; loans taken from relatives, shopkeepers, and others. The women's ages range from 28 to 54.

5.3.3 Analysis

Our approach to qualitative comparative analysis involves working iteratively with two analytic procedures (Miles et al., 2014). The first employs variable-oriented measures that draw on systematic content analysis methods and GENNOVATE's coded dataset (in QSR NVivo, a social science software) to identify recurring themes across cases associated with the mobility dynamics

captured in the focus group and life story testimonies. The coded dataset enables analysis of, for instance, the different types of livelihood activities, family relations or networks associated with the testimonies that depict upward or chronic poverty trajectories. The second approach to analysis is the contextual case-oriented work that focuses on the gender norms associated with mobility experiences in a specific village or person's life, and how people negotiate these expectations.

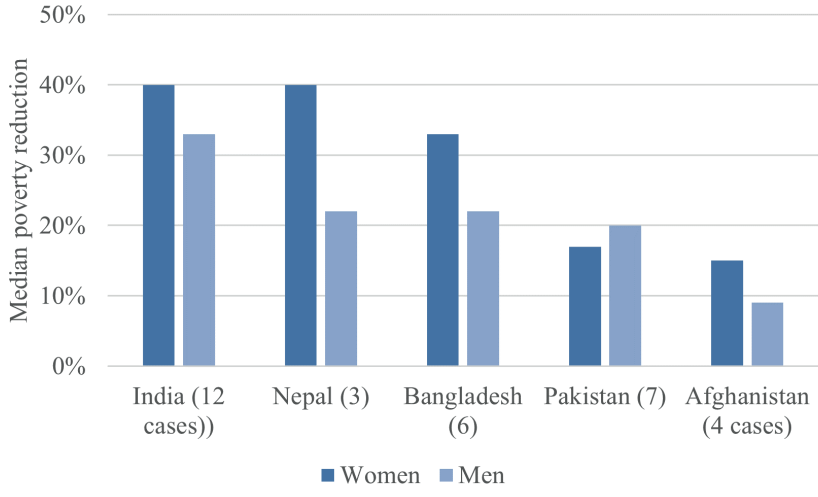
We recognize that findings are inherently colored by status differences and quality of relations between the researcher and research subject, and the significant interactions between data collection, interpretation processes, and junctures of time and place (Feldman & Welsch, 1995; Portelli, 2016). In diverse ways, what study participants elect to share and how researchers grasp and interpret what is shared are colored by questions of position and distance. Chapter 2 of the thesis provides additional discussion of GENNOVATE sampling, data collection and analysis protocols, including issues of recall, courtesy bias, informed consent procedures, translation, coding, data triangulation, research ethics, and other common field research concerns.

5.4 FINDINGS

Focus groups with low-income villagers widely perceive men to exercise the principal role in the poverty trajectories of their families and villages. Men's initiatives dominate the discourse even though we also probe directly into women's experiences with getting ahead. Men's roles grow even larger, moreover, in testimonies about why families stay poor. The analysis then shifts to a set of women's life stories to showcase the fluid properties of norms, and the women's substantial roles in the mobility processes of their families and villages.

Across the 32 study communities focus groups observe a median of roughly 60 percent of their village households to have been poor a decade ago (or 2005/6).[4] Over the ensuing decade, women's groups indicate poverty to have fallen to 38 percent while men perceive nearly half of their village population as still poor. When comparing trends by country (Figure 1), women's groups from India and Nepal observe the strongest poverty reduction (40 percent), and men of Afghanistan the least (9 percent). In most case studies where women indicate greater poverty reduction than men, this was because the women's focus groups perceive households with cropland tenure or workers with stable jobs to qualify as no longer poor, while men's focus groups often identify all manner of smallholders, shopkeepers, low level civil servants, moto-taxi drivers, and so forth, to be poor because the earnings from these jobs are unable to provide adequately for their family's daily needs. As women rarely own land or hold stable jobs in these villages, their markers for distinguishing low-income households from others strongly center on men's economic capacities.

Figure 1 Perceptions of village poverty reduction over past decade (By country and 64 women's and men's low-income focus groups)



Our evidence showcases diverse gender norms that constrain women's productive roles and privilege men. In most villages, women's presence in the public sphere is strongly discouraged, and they frequent the market rarely and only if accompanied by a male relative. Women often testify to needing their husband's permission for them to generate income. In most villages from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, women with produce or handicrafts to sell conduct their marketing from homesteads or with the help of family members. Nevertheless, we highlight below some of the examples in our data that signal flexibility with rural seclusion practices and women's productive roles.

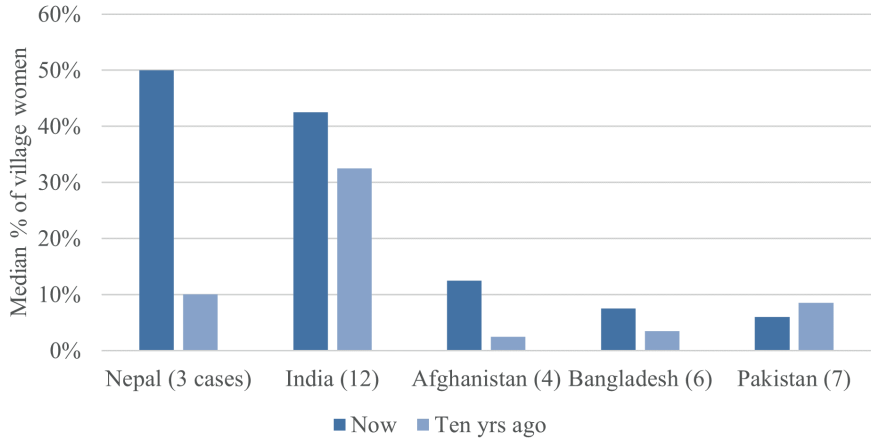
The three Nepal case studies stand apart from the others on some key dimensions that shape gender roles and resource access. At 83 percent, women's labor force participation rate in Nepal is very high by global standards, and even more so compared to rates of between 20 and 33 percent among the other four study countries.[5] Figure 2 presents estimates provided by local key informants on the share of women's day laboring on farms across the case studies in 2005 and 2015, revealing a dramatic increase in Nepal following the end of the country's civil war in late 2006. In addition, women from Nepal report much greater freedom to be mobile in their villages relative to the other cases.

Figure 2 also reveals that many low-income women engage in daily wage farm work in the India sample. Especially in the cases from India, but also elsewhere, study participants often convey a confusing mix of norms that alternately discourage and accommodate women's income earning. These types of testimonies speak to the fluid properties of gender norms, and how they loosen or tighten, and occasionally disappear—even deeply rooted expectations like "only men are farmers."

Farnworth et al. (2019) present a case from the Nepal sample to demonstrate how women's roles are shifting from working on farms to actively managing them and employing the latest agricultural technologies and practices,

often supported by and in consultation with husbands in distant jobs. Similar dynamics of women stepping into more managerial agricultural roles can be seen in the life stories from the women in our sample who moved out of poverty in the other countries as well. The experiences of these women, however, appear relatively infrequently in testimonies from focus groups about the poverty dynamics of their village.

Figure 2 Share of village women who take daily wage agricultural jobs (Key informant estimates, 32 villages)



5.4.1 Gender norms and poverty escapes

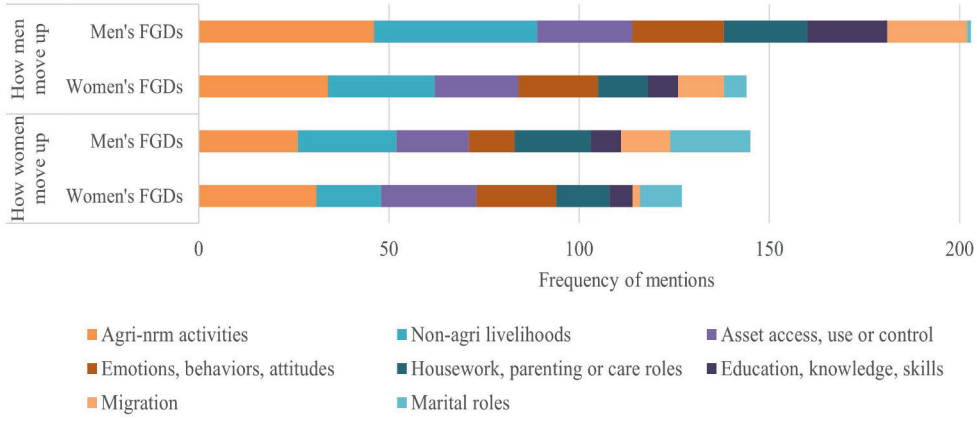
In each study community, a group of low-income women and a separate group of low-income men discussed how the men of their village have contributed to moving their households out of poverty, and then they discussed the women's contributions.[6] Revealing of the strong gender differences in this discourse, the word count from the men's responses to the question about how men escape poverty (4615) proved to be nearly double what women had to say about how women accomplish this (2428).[7] "Women usually cannot bring a big change, but they can assist their men in going up," explains a member of the low-income

men's focus group of Ismashal village[8] in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province.

Figure 3 below presents the leading topics that emerged in responses to the questions on how men and women move out of poverty. The frequencies highlight that focus groups largely stress similar dimensions for both genders. To get ahead, men and women alike employ varying combinations of agricultural activities, nonfarm jobs, asset-building measures and persistent hard work, the latter of which was coded to "emotions, behaviors, attitudes." Beyond these leading dimensions, it is noteworthy that men almost never mention their spouse (marital roles) in reference to men's upward mobility. Yet, when the topic turns to women's efforts to move up, women's focus groups, and even more so men's, testify often to how couples cooperate, for instance, by women supporting their husband's farming by laboring in the field with him or provisioning cash from their livestock activities.

While the mix of factors appears quite similar for both genders, the coding frequencies conceal perceptions of considerable gender differences. Focus groups overwhelmingly associate men with significant opportunities, such as purchasing land, managing their own commercial farm, opening shops, working in government and private sector jobs, engaging in labor migration, taking large loans, and so forth. Women, by contrast, are mainly depicted as engaged in smaller initiatives to get ahead, such as supporting their husband's farming in villages of Pakistan, tending to livestock and vegetable crops from homesteads in cases from Afghanistan and Bangladesh, taking up farm jobs in India and Nepal, and tailoring across diverse communities. Additionally, women's careful stewardship of savings often emerges as an important strategy: "If a man gives 10 rupees to a woman, she will save two even from this small amount" (low-income women's focus group, Murmura village, Bihar, India).

Figure 3 Leading topics associated with upward mobility
(GENNOVATE coded dataset, 64 low-income focus groups)



Note. All but three of the references in the vices coding to why women stay poor are in reference to men's drinking, drug use, gambling or illicit activities.

In Nepal, and a few cases elsewhere, nevertheless, we find reports of women engaging in commercial farming much like men. In Pakadi village of Nepal, women say, "We grow both seasonal and off-season vegetables and hybrid varieties of crops to make more profit." Similarly, in Deva village of Uttar Pradesh, India, the women's focus group observes little difference in how men and women escaped poverty in their village:

> People on step 1 (10 years ago) have worked very hard to rise above poverty and earn enough to be able to live decent lives. Both husband and wife work hard in farm labor and other casual labor to be able to earn as much as they can. Some of them started sharecropping and others took land on lease. They have

saved whatever they could and bought small plots for additional means of livelihood. Hence, they have slowly risen to step 2.

Pakadi and Deva also happen to be contexts where women report extremely high rates of poverty reduction (40 and 67 percent, respectively), and their testimonies indicate that norms have relaxed in ways that support women's initiatives to engage in and benefit from commercial farming opportunities and contribute to their villages' prosperity. Another community from Bangladesh, Borian, near Mymensingh city, presents a case where local women are returning from urban factory jobs, buying land and raising cattle and goats. However, focus groups elsewhere rarely talk of women engaged in such significant initiatives.

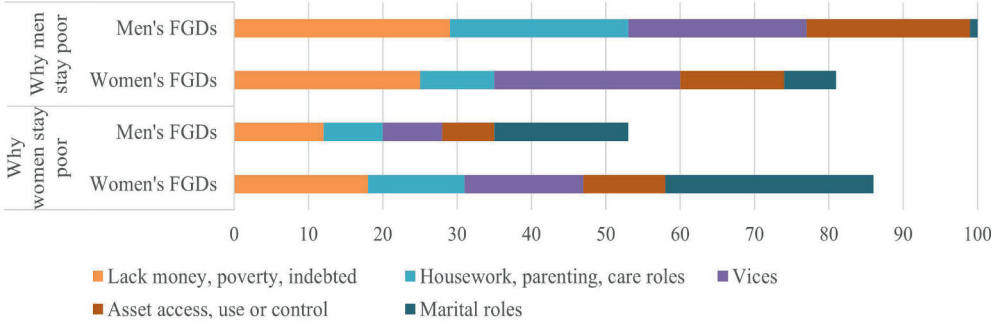
The heavy coding to emotions, attitudes and behaviors brings to the surface the strong agency and psychological dimensions associated with upward movements. To get ahead, both women and men repeatedly stress a need to be "hard working," "struggling hard," "take a lot of risks," "persevere" and "fight against all odds." Particularly among the Pakistan testimonies, but also elsewhere, women and men recognize the emotional labor that women shoulder for their families by keeping "her husband away from stress," supporting her "husband in all of his efforts," not making "unnecessary demands," and being "content with his income." By comparison, men's emotional support to their wives is rarely mentioned. Such narratives attest to the highly normative pressures on low-income women to run the household adeptly on scarce resources and on low-income men to provide despite the unreliable, arduous, and low paying work available (e.g., Jackson 1999a). These stresses around the patriarchal bargain move us directly into the even more strongly gendered testimonies about the drivers of chronic poverty.

5.4.2 Gender norms and chronic poverty

When a household persists in poverty, focus groups largely attribute this to men's challenges with income generation and willpower. In the face of a man who cannot find his way forward, a low-income woman is widely perceived to have little room to maneuver.

Figure 4 presents the main topics that surface in the focus group responses to the two follow-up questions about why a low-income man, and then a low-income woman, are unable to move their household out of poverty. First and foremost, men and women identify a lack of work opportunities for men to generate enough income to maintain the family as the leading reason why families stay poor. There are testimonies specific to agricultural hardships, such as the meager and unreliable returns from farm jobs, problems of landlessness and unproductive land, and weather shocks, but mainly focus groups stress that there is "never enough money" to cover expenses.

Figure 4 Leading topics associated with remaining poor
(GENNOVATE coded dataset, 64 low-income focus groups)



Note. All but three of the references in the vices coding about why women stay poor refer to men's drinking, drug use, gambling, or illicit activities.

Many also consider poverty to be a consequence of men's own making because they are "not that smart," "lack ambition," "lazy," "don't work hard," "idle," and "enjoy [life] and stay home until the money runs out" (women's group, Rawatgaon, Rupendehi, Nepal), or "shy away from working hard and long hours" in daily wage jobs (men's group, Bete, Punjab, India). Men and adult sons also stay poor by squandering money on "bad habits" like drinking, gambling, drug use and other illicit activities (the vices coding). "Some men say they drink in despair"; and their wives fight with them because "they are making a bad situation worse…" relate members of the women's group of Cheeda, India. The women of Cheeda talk of poor men beating their wives as a driver of chronic poverty.

Poverty persists due to myriad family circumstances (the coding to housework, parenting and care roles) that include many children, many daughters and dowries, lack of help from (idle and lazy) adult sons, and care of those who are ill, disabled or elderly. These needs are compounded by a low-income family's lack of money and other assets to access better work or to cover expenses, and their indebtedness to local shopkeepers and moneylenders. Shocks due to illness and dowry are frequent findings in the longitudinal literature about triggers of descents into poverty and chronic poverty (Quisumbing, 2011b; Baulch & Davis, 2008); however, our broad coding categories, such as lack of money or household care needs, flatten findings from more specific codes for illness and weather shocks, and how adverse events often combine. These processes become more evident from the life stories below.

The coding patterns mirror those for upward mobility in that references to spouses emerge frequently as explanations for women's chronic poverty but rarely as causes for men. In Shanti of Uttar Pradesh, India, a woman expresses a common refrain in these testimonies, "Women suffer their husband's fate." This was especially seen to be the case if the husband was not actively working to maintain the family; and in many of these communities it continues to be

acceptable to berate and physically punish a woman who pressures her husband to provide or who seeks to generate income of her own—as these moves challenge men's authority.

Focus groups sometimes consider women who themselves fail to build savings or who make unnecessary purchases as reasons why households cannot get ahead. Women also remain trapped because of other gendered expectations that make them "mostly busy with household chores" (Panali, in Kabul Province, Afghanistan); and "they cannot work outside the home for fear of losing their reputation and respect" (women's group, Master Goli, Rangpur, Bangladesh).

Contextual differences emerge strongly in these testimonies. In focus groups from KPK, Pakistan, women say they remain poor because they are "almost slaves," "depend on men", and cannot be involved in moving their households ahead because they do not have jobs, land or money. In Afghanistan, men and women attest to scarce opportunities due to the continuing conflict, distrust, poor economy, rampant corruption, need for special connections, and the expectation of women's subordination to men, e.g.: "what can a woman do to make him go outside and work?" (men's group, Lehsat, Afghanistan). Even in contexts where large numbers of working men are away, and many low-income women must farm independently, some still testify to different normative constraints on their capacity to generate income: "We can see that families are doing better where women have started working; yet mindsets don't change" (women's group, Murmura, Bihar, India). Whether reflecting on climbing up from or being stuck on the bottom ladder steps, women and men stress obligations on men to be men and to take charge and provide, and how very much low-income men and women invest every day to negotiate these expectations.

5.4.3 Some move up, others cannot

For the remaining analysis, we turn to the women's life story dataset to explore the normative dimensions of mobility processes in more nuanced ways than is possible with focus groups. In these testimonies, the fluid properties of gender norms become apparent as diverse types of women explain and interpret the trajectory of their lives and wellbeing over the past decade. A key dimension that sets apart most movers is how they secured productive assets from husbands or brothers that enabled them to begin processes of accumulation and innovation with their agricultural livelihoods. Family relations also figure significantly in chronic poor trajectories but mainly to support the women in their gender-ascribed reproductive roles or to cope with shocks.

When comparing women in the mover with the chronic poor set, similarities can be seen on several dimensions. As shown in Table 2, both on average have little education, are mothers of four or five children with the youngest around ages 10 or 11, and most live in homes with secure tenure.[9] Moreover, more than half in both sets report experiences with public assistance, a family member's labor migration, and a major family illness or accident. Both mover and chronic poor women similarly report combining and moving in and out of varied livestock and field agriculture activities. In India and Nepal, most women's occupational histories included day laboring on farms, and many women from all countries testify to experiences with sharecropping and leasing land. Reports of domestic work, tailoring and daycare jobs are also present but less common, and women often combined these jobs with agricultural work.

Notwithstanding the many commonalities, the mover set differs in significant ways. These women are much more likely to be married, belong to a landowning family, and manage large livestock. Most movers, moreover, are employing modern agricultural technologies and practices:

- In 2015, using zero tillage machines I started maize farming, for which I had a great yield and large profit (Mover, Matipur, Bangladesh)

- In 2005 I started my cultivation work, like growing betel leaves. And owning cows and goats. At that time, my financial situation starts getting better. I used to buy cows on Eid-ul-Fitr and sell them and buy more cows and own them. (Mover, Dampur, Bangladesh)

- I work on my own land as well as on sharecropping. Since I started using zero tiller there is not much field preparation to be done; so my work has become easier and faster; this time my total yield was 10 quintal, from both my own land and the sharecropping share. This is double of what I use to grow without the tiller. (Mover, Prem, Bihar, India)

- After marriage, I got training on vegetable farming. In the beginning the agriculture office provided some vegetable seeds as well. And I began to grow vegetables along with cereal crops like wheat, paddy, maize, oats. […] I learnt how to make soil rows. High rows of soil during monsoon and low rows of soil during other season for growing vegetables. I learnt how to use compost fertilizer ... (Mover, Thool, Myagdi, Nepal)

- We used new seeds as my children got information from others. We plant the seeds with a drill machine. We also use chemical fertilizers and pesticides for better production. (Mover, Khanur, KPK, Pakistan)

In 10 of the 12 mover's life stories, the women are engaged in commercial farming activities on land that they themselves acquired or significantly financed the purchase. The remaining two movers are generating income from dairy activities. One of these two is an Afghan woman in her fifties with an elderly husband. She used to work extensively in the fields but currently focuses on dairy activities, as she has adult sons who now take care of the crop- related activities. With loans from her brothers and a cousin, she leased the cropland and launched

a tractor-service rental business for her sons to run. Movers are also somewhat more likely to reside in extended families. In the next section we illustrate further the importance of women's perseverance with their livelihoods and negotiation of family resources.

Table 2 Selected characteristics of women's life story sample, Movers and chronic poor (Average share)

	Movers (12)	Chronic poor (27)
Age of respondent	42.10	42.60
Completed primary school (none completed more)	0.33	0.11
Married	0.92	0.63
Number of children	5.00	4.15
Age of youngest child	10.40	11.10
Resides in extended family household	0.67	0.48
Household owns farmland	1.00	0.30
Homestead owned by household head(s)*	1.00	0.93*
One or more ox or cow owned in past 10 years	1.00	0.48
Husband or children engaged in labor migration	0.58	0.56
Receives some form of public assistance	0.58	0.63
Civic tie (formal or informal network or training)	0.75	0.37
Major family illness or accident mentioned	0.67	0.59

*Note: Three in chronic poor set on government land and pending titles

By comparison, chronic poor women rarely mention significant benefits from their farming opportunities or employing machines or other modern technologies and practices. But underpinning these differences are social processes with important regularities. More than one-third of the chronic poor women are widows, separated from or abandoned by their husbands. Five others

testify to serving as their family's main provider due to husbands who had problems with drinking or violence, or both. Another three women, all in the India sample, run their household due to husbands who are disabled. The chronic poor also testify to trajectories stymied by varying combinations of family health crises, displacement due to conflict or floods, daughters' dowry obligations, failed migration experiences, and crushing indebtedness. These hardships are present in the movers' narratives as well, but do not derail these women's momentum with their livelihoods. Our evidence strongly suggests that an important reason is that the movers had an influential family member who was willing to flout local customs and provide a woman with economic support to expand their agricultural activities.

The movers are also more likely to enjoy civic ties, such as participation in self-help and informal credit groups and training opportunities. Whether mover or chronic poor, however, women rarely mention social ties beyond the family unless prompted. Instead, it is family bonds that emerge most often. Towards the end of their interview, we ask the women to reflect on the most significant relationships that have helped them to pursue important goals in their lives. Half the movers named husbands in their responses, followed by brothers in another quarter (Figure 5). By comparison, chronic poor women reach further afield to find support, if they identify allies at all (Figure 6). It is more common for chronic poor women to remark that "there hasn't been anyone that important in my life" (chronic poor, Shanti, Uttar Pradesh, India) than a husband who "has always been there for me" (chronic poor, Prem, Bihar, India). Sons or daughters are identified in about equal measure to brothers by chronic poor women. By comparison, movers never mention children in these responses. For movers, husbands are most often "my pillar of strength" (mover, Prem, Bihar, India), while, for chronic poor women, husbands could be "the source of all my worries and sorrow" (chronic poor, Cheeda, Uttar Pradesh, India). Or, a brother could be "very cruel and never

consider me his sister or even a human being" (chronic poor, Katam, Nangahar, Afghanistan) or the very reason why "I achieved my goals and became prosperous in life" (mover, Ismashal, KPK Province, Afghanistan). The importance of these various relations to the women's trajectories comes into more focus next.

Figures 5 & 6 Women's most important relationship helping them to pursue goals in life, Movers and Chronic Poor (39 Life Stories)

Figure 5 Movers (12)

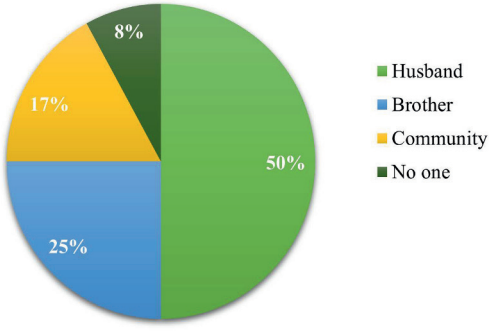
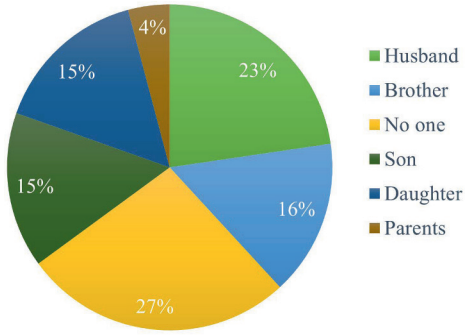


Figure 6 Chronic poor (27)



5.4.4 Norms relaxing and tightening as roles and relations change

Here we present and compare the life stories of a mover and chronic poor woman in each of two villages. The first two women reside in a large and dynamic village of western Bangladesh and the second two in a smaller and remote community from Bihar, India. Both villages are making progress on poverty reduction, but focus groups estimate roughly 40 percent still to be poor in the first case, and 50 percent in the second. While the life stories cover a broader set of concerns, the emphasis here is on the events and relations associated with individual women's

capacities to strengthen their livelihoods and accumulate assets and that the women considered to be important for understanding the ups and downs of their lives and wellbeing over the past decade. As the gender hierarchy prescribes, both mover and chronic poor women often framed their trajectories in relation to important men in their lives.

5.4.1.1 Differing trajectories in Dampur

Dampur village hosts a growing population of 4000 and resides in western Bangladesh in Rajashahi district. Improved transport, cellular service, irrigation, and other infrastructure development help farmers to make good profits on their rice, vegetables, jute, betel leaves, wheat, maize, and fish. Key informants also report various governmental and NGO programs that have supported local farmers to intensify crop production and diversify into aquaculture. The two women who shared their life stories report that they did not participate in any networks or extension opportunities, and the young women's focus group indicates that a woman would not be welcome at a community event where agricultural information is provided. The village's processes of agricultural innovation, in other words, have mainly reinforced the community's restrictive normative climate for women's economic agency.

Age 40 and with two children, Sufia is the mover from Dampur. When Sufia and her husband were expecting their second child, her in-laws pushed them out of their home due to unspecified conflict. However, Sufia portrays her husband as "a little lazy"; and one suspects that his parents might have considered it past time for him to step up and provide, and for them to feed fewer mouths. The couple coped by building a house on government land. Especially interesting, however, is that Sufia used this transition into a nuclear family as an opportunity to gain access to a plot (11 kathas) with the backing of her brother and father. Further revealing of the conflict surrounding this couple and the strong influence

of gender norms, Sufia's husband refused to allow her to be named on the title for the plot purchased by her brother:

> My husband said if the land is not written in my brother's name then he will divorce me…. I agreed because I didn't want to cause any trouble… But I took the decision of cultivating the field and my husband agreed to it. And from the produce I could buy other land with that money.

Ejected from his family and landless, the husband likely perceived his authority in the family and more widely directly challenged by his in-laws' gift of land to his wife. Questions about family violence were not posed during the interview, however, in their testimonies, the low-income women's focus group observed a sharp spike in Dampur's women being beaten in family conflicts over the past decade, with the rising costs of raising children indicated to be a major driver. Given the village's strict norms that constrained women's income generation and the strife implied by Sufia's testimony, it must have been deeply challenging for this young pregnant woman to press forward with her own agricultural initiatives. Nevertheless, Sufia poured herself into bringing the plot to life.

Along with raising goats and cows, and the housework and care needs, Sufia cultivated betel leaves in 2005 and added paddy the next year. By 2011, her farming proceeds enabled the purchase of more land and she diversified into eggplant, chilies, and bitter gourd. Sufia says she learned to cultivate these crops from her grandfather when young. In 2014, Sufia qualified for a major loan to set up her son in a grocery shop, "From which my family started earning more."[10] She further adds that the son is responsible for repaying her loan. Sufia reveals later in her testimony that her husband suffered a stroke in 2006 and required years of medical treatments until he passed away in 2013. When Sufia reflects on her life, she considers the most important relationship to be with her brother, "because of him I can now stand on my two feet."

Next we turn to Renuka, who also lives in Dampur and remains poor. Renuka's husband divorced her shortly after marriage at age 15, and she returned to her family. She never remarried, is now 55 years old, and caring for her mother in a small home on her middle brother's land. She says she is shunned by most every family and community member. Renuka had inherited a small plot from her father but she turned that over to her brother, who shares some of the produce. She mainly gets by with seasonal farm jobs and income from livestock, which she recently expanded to seven goats and ducks and 15 chickens. A sister lent and then gave Renuka a goat in 2007 after she faced periods of hunger in 2005 and 2006; and as her livestock grew, Renuka says this enabled her to start generating savings. At this juncture, Renuka is resigned to her isolation and poverty, and concludes that her life would have been easier if she had land: "I could have earned a lot of money from farming my land." Like many women who inherit plots, she needed her family's support and protection rather than alienating them by hanging on to the property. The various gendered expectations that disempower women with no husbands reinforced Renuka's chronic poor trajectory.

5.4.1.2 Differing trajectories in Murmura

To examine the next pair of life stories, we move to Murmura of Bihar, India. With a population of 500, Murmura is predominantly Kurmi caste, and most village workers take day jobs on farms or sharecrop. There is no electricity, nor the extension and NGO services of Dampur. Both Murmura's women and men produce dairy and farm in the surrounding fields of wheat, paddy, maize, pulses (dalhan), and dhencha, (a manure crop). Yet, few women move independently in the village. "Girls live under a lot of restrictions to save our pride and the pride of the family," explains a participant of the young women's focus group. Murmura's

focus group with low-income women report a rise in domestic violence compared to a decade ago, but not at the rate of Danpur's.

Jana, age 43 and mother of three daughters, heads one of the many families of Murmura that remains trapped in poverty. When the youngest was three, Jana's husband left to find better work to support the growing family. He was never to be heard from again, leaving Jana the weight of raising and marrying off three daughters. Jana initially fed and educated the girls by taking loans and farm work; and over time she managed to combine farm jobs with sharecropping, "which allowed me to start saving." But Jana says one of her biggest challenges is that her yields are a tenth of what they could be because she cannot afford irrigation or fertilizer. She considers further debt to finance her farming too risky. In addition to small loans from the shopkeeper, Jana mentions borrowing over the past decade from the moneylender for her second daughter's wedding in 2010, to improve her dilapidated house when it fell apart in 2013, and to cover medical expenses when she became very ill in 2014. Her in-laws gave her the title to the house, and she mentions a brother helping with medical expenses. But to maintain the household, much less move out of poverty, she has only herself, and for a few more years, a 12-year-old daughter who works with her in the fields. Jana mentions friends in the village who are proud of how she has managed independently, but she worries greatly about how she could cope with another illness and aging in the years ahead.

Finally, we turn to Anita of Murmura. She is 54, a farmer and mother of eight, and her household only recently moved out of poverty. Anita opens her story by sharing that she married into a poor landless family and took her first job 25 years ago after losing a sick child: "… there wasn't enough money to take him to a better doctor. This jolted me … and I decided to go cut turai (ridge gourd)." The decision incurred great wrath:

> … my husband was very angry and did not eat for two or three days because he just hated the very idea of my working on another person's field. Then I talked patiently to him and made him understand my viewpoint. I told him that if he went to work in town he would earn more, and if I worked simultaneously here in my village, I would also contribute to family funds and we would be able to save some for emergencies. I reminded him how we had lost a child for lack of money. Finally, he relented.

The women's low-income focus group of Murmura cautions that in their village "there is fear about what others will say if the wives work," and indicates it to be rare for a young married woman to work for pay. One imagines that 25 years ago Anita's actions caused a scandal, and her husband had reason to be concerned for his own and his family's reputation. In fact, Anita confides, "People definitely spoke behind my back and made fun of me because I worked in other men's fields." Once she had her family's support, however, Anita says she no longer worried about "these petty issues." Other women interviewed similarly testify to processes of great resistance to and then acceptance of their income earning, and over time, gaining greater respect and say in the family.

For much of the marriage, Anita's husband worked in a distant town and sent remittances. When he returned home to stay over ten years ago, however, the large family was still quite poor. Anita remarks that her "husband cooperated fully" with scaling up their farming activities, but her narrative clearly indicates that she led the way. She explains that in 2005, "I leased 5 or 6 kathha of land and started working on it since my husband was never comfortable with the idea of my working on other people's plots." In order to lease the land, "I sold all my jewelry, in consultation with my husband." In 2010, she was able to lease additional land and her savings continued to grow, so that by 2014, "We finally managed to purchase our own 8 kattha plot. It was a big achievement." Anita owns the land jointly with her husband; and even at age 54, and with five sons,

she still works every day in the fields. They have a loan to repay from a daughter's wedding, major expenses that include a son who is studying in Chennai, and debts from her own and her husband's illnesses in 2014. Had normative conditions and economic opportunities in Murmura been more inviting for women like Anita, one imagines she may have gotten her family across the poverty line much sooner.

While the social conventions that shape access to assets and transfers of family wealth strongly privilege men, the testimonies make evident that some women engage in sharecropping, leasing, and acquisition of farmland. This was the case whether a more dynamic village of Bangladesh or a more remote one of India. The women's experiences, nevertheless, reveal significant politics and strategic timing to accompany whether and how a husband, brother, or other kin will invest in them to accumulate livestock or to manage cropland and succeed economically. Women who can mobilize enough family support to launch their own commercial farming and then bring sons along appear to have significant advantages. Sometimes other opportunities can help mobilize the necessary acceptance, if not outright support, of family. A 37-year-old mover from Matipur, Bangladesh, credits her participation in the Union Federation women's farmers group with enabling her to turn her life around due to training she received on paddy and fish farming. Mainly, though, movers stress their own perseverance as well as the support and resources that they mobilized from husbands and brothers. Chronic poor women also strived to get ahead but lacked kin or other means to bolster their productive projects.

5.5 DISCUSSION

Across the 32 village case studies, prevailing understandings of poverty transitions emphasize men's roles and devalue women, even as women, in

addition to maintaining the household, also generate income and assets that lift their families out of poverty and help them cope with shocks. The persistence of such patriarchal framings attests to the powerful capacity of gender norms to relax or tighten to accommodate the changing circumstances of women's and men's lives without requiring a similar change to the deeper values, family structures or other institutions that regulate the social life of families and communities (Sewell, 1999). The contingent nature of norms sheds light on important social processes that impede the transition to more equitable norms as households and villages become more prosperous.

Villagers overwhelmingly associate men with the means to amass assets, command family labor, travel to distant jobs, and bring their families out of poverty. Processes of chronic poverty are even more tightly attached to men, and their struggles with provisioning and fulfilling their gender-ascribed role. By comparison, when focus groups reflect on women's roles in the mobility processes of their villages, their contributions are acknowledged, but women's fates are widely seen to be tied to men's, which conforms to dictates that emphasize women's dependency. The testimonies speak to pressures on women to restrict their livelihood initiatives, avoid family conflict, and bolster men's self-esteem, which are common findings in the gender literature and signal some of the ways that women, too, uphold gender hierarchy in their daily life (e.g., Jackson, 2000; Anderson & Jack, 2016).

Additionally, women and men sometimes act in ways that restructure rather than preserve the rules (e.g. Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013). In Madpur village of Faridpur district, Bangladesh, poverty has fallen faster than in most study villages, and women there testify to a normative climate where it has become acceptable for them to be earning income, such as by combining livestock activities, vegetable and fruit production, and diverse daily wage jobs. While women lament how much longer they work every day than their husbands, they

still want the changes underway in their lives to continue: "We think the matter of equality between men and women is good for all of us." Low-income men in this village express similarly favorable views about the changes in women's lives and relate how closely couples cooperate to move their families ahead. In most villages, including those experiencing significant poverty reduction, there is limited evidence of norms that support women's roles in the economy and cooperative gender relations.

When we turn from focus groups to life stories, women's agency emerges with great force as they recall their family relations, livelihood initiatives, and other key economic and social experiences shaping the trajectory of their lives. The women often testify to negotiating pressures not to work for pay, not to make claims on family resources, not to challenge men's authority in their efforts to undertake or expand their livelihoods. Movers and chronic poor alike also attest to persevering through periods of profound insecurity due, for instance, to marrying as a child and leaving their natal home, illness and death of loved ones, family conflict and separation, crop and livestock losses, and deep indebtedness. The women who made their way out of poverty took great reputational and financial risks with securing the consent and material backing from husbands, brothers, or other relations in order to scale up their own agricultural activities. Among the movers with adult children, many shared proudly of marrying off daughters while investing in cropland, shops, and higher education for sons—processes which contribute to the intergenerational production of gender inequality. By comparison, chronic poor women in our sample report scarce or no support for their livelihood activities, even as most had become the primary or sole income earner for their family. Nor could they do much to bolster their children's fortunes. Across diverse types of villages and households, patriarchal norms prevail that entitle men to control over women and family resources and contribute to weakening the contribution of poverty reduction to gender equality.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Gender norms exercise significant influences on poverty transitions. Across the study contexts, the possibility of families to move out of poverty is deemed to depend on men's roles. This is the case even where many low-income women toil in agriculture to build savings, educate children, provide secure housing, and acquire cropland, or whether they pawn their only assets to deal with crisis. The latitude for women to work for pay and build productive assets varies across the cases, as well as within the villages. Over time some women have negotiated substantial roles in small-scale commercial agricultural enterprises and moved their family out of poverty. In relatively few villages, however, are such practices widely recognized or encouraged.

NOTES

[1] For information on the GENNOVATE research initiative, see Chapter 2 of thesis and https://gennovate.org/.

[2] Annex C of Badstue et al. (2017) identifies the social group composition of each case, as well as other community characteristics.

[3] This research was not designed to assess the role of caste, tribal or religious identities; however, these dimensions did not surface much in testimonies.

[4] The poverty levels are based on an exercise that engages focus group members in building a ladder that depicts traits of the different socio-economic groups of their village at each ladder step. Then the group establishes the ladder step at which households are no longer considered poor in their village. Next they sort 20 seeds that are representative of all the households in the village on the different ladder steps; and the seeds are sorted again to represent the distribution 10 years ago. For an example of two ladders from a similar study conducted in rural Andhra Pradesh, India, see Narayan, Prennushi et al. (2009, p. 244).

[5] World Bank DataBank based on ILO model; accessed January 27, 2019.

[6] As discussed in note 4, these questions follow detailed discussions on the socio-economic conditions and trends of the households in their village.

[7] Please note that word counts differ from the frequency of mentions, which refers to a text passage that has been coded to single topic, and a passage can range from a brief phrase to a set of paragraphs. Also, some of the disparity in word count between men's and women's initiatives to move out of poverty can be attributed to focus groups already mentioning wives and/or other family members' contributions to household poverty escapes in response to the first question about men's initiatives to move out poverty.

[8] All names of villages and individuals are pseudonyms.

[9] The complex dynamics surrounding home ownership and improvements have been set aside from the presentation of findings. For diverse reasons, such as needing to rebuild after weather shocks or conflict, or due to becoming eligible for housing assistance, housing acquisitions and improvements did not necessarily correspond with favorable conditions for the household's income and assets. Nevertheless, women consistently observe significantly improved wellbeing when circumstances made it possible for them to own or improve their home.

[10] See Davis (2011) for additional findings on role of sons in mobility processes in Bangladesh.

Chapter 6

Community typology framed by normative climate for agricultural innovation, empowerment, and poverty reduction*

6.1 INTRODUCTION

On a figurative five-step ladder, Sonam (pseudonym) estimates that she has moved from step 1 to step 5 over the past decade. Step 5 characterizes the women of her village with great power and freedom to make consequential decisions in their lives—such as about whether and where they will work for pay, or whether to begin or end a relationship with a man. By way of explaining her significant climb up the ladder, Sonam stresses a decision she made five years ago to take a risk and try sharecropping for herself. She'd never endeavored to work for pay before.

Sonam, 40 years old and from a village of India's Uttar Pradesh, lives with her five sons, ages 14 to 22, two daughters-in-law, and a granddaughter. Sonam reports that she never attended school, married a cousin at age 14, and endured great hardships that included domestic violence and raising her boys in a dilapidated hut. "When [my husband] lived here, he abused me physically and mentally," confides Sonam. "I lived like a servant. There was no question of giving my opinion on any matter."

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Yet, Sonam says she turned her life around in 2010 when she first began to sharecrop:

> It was my decision to start working since the financial condition of my family was far from good. We could barely manage to eat three meals a day. No one asked me to work. It was my decision. That changed our lives completely for the better.

"With the money I earned by sharecropping" and support from her family, Sonam replaced their hut with a concrete house in 2011. The following year, a portion of the land received from Sonam's in-laws at marriage was used as collateral to finance her husband's transportation to work in Saudi Arabia. Over time, remittances from her husband combined with her own earnings enabled Sonam to "return all the money we had to borrow from people during difficult mes." Sonam also purchased land, and shared, "Now my sons are also working. So we are in a comfortable situation now. There are no problems."

Sonam's testimony is part of a dataset of village case studies from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As we will show, Sonam's village is a context where many women experience a strong sense of empowerment from assuming a greater decision-making role in their household and in the village's agricultural economy. Some of the village women with resources are managing commercial farms and using the latest seed technologies and equipment in consultation with their husbands, or independently if widowed or their husbands are in distant jobs. In other villages sampled in Uttar Pradesh, as well as elsewhere in India and beyond, women's roles are also changing; however, their ratings of shifts in their decision-making capacity typically moves from steps 2 to 3 (out of 5). Most women in our study do not perceive their experiences in their family and community over the last decade to be nearly so empowering as Sonam's. Most continue to face local

gender norms that discourage women from voicing their opinions and that only recognize men as agricultural innovators.

Gender norms comprise the "differential rules of conduct for women and men" (Pearse and Connell 2016, p. 35). The influence of these social rules on women's roles and decision-making has been a longstanding concern in the gender and agriculture literature (e.g. Boserup, 1970; Doss, 1999; Quisumbing, 1996; Kandyoti, 1998; Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2010). Gender norms are challenging to measure, however, due to their contextual and fluid properties: women and men alike uphold, negotiate, withdraw from, and sometimes alter these social rules as they interact with others, manage risks, and pursue goals for bettering their lives (Petesch, Badstue, Camfield et al., 2018; Pearse & Connell, 2016; Sewell, 1999; Jackson, 1999).

Informed by the concepts of agency and gender norms, this chapter explores women's and men's own assessments of the conditions and trends in their community for taking important decisions and for reducing poverty, and the role of agricultural innovation in these processes. In addition, we draw on these local assessments to build a community typology that expresses three distinct trajectories of local socioeconomic change. The analysis builds on the GENNOVATE (Enabling Gender Equality in Agricultural and Environmental Innovation) conceptual approach, qualitative comparative field methodology, and dataset of 79 village cases spanning 17 countries of the global South (see Chapter 2 and https://gennovate.org/).

The objective of this chapter is to mobilize GENNOVATE's conceptual approach and unique qualitative comparative dataset in ways that enhance understanding of the local normative conditions associated with inclusive agricultural innovation processes. We begin the chapter by discussing the literatures on agency and gender norms that informed our conceptual approach, and then review the study's protocols for sampling, data collection, and analysis.

In the section on results, we discuss how we constructed and interpreted our three-part community typology. Each of the three sets of villages in the typology depicts a different trend in how local women and men assessed 10-year changes in their decision-making capacity and local poverty levels. The first set of villages, labeled "transforming" cases, presents local observations of rapid and inclusive social and economic development. The second type, "climbing" cases, presents more moderate processes of favorable change, and the third, "churning" cases, are characterized as stagnating or deteriorating. Transforming cases are distinguished by a highly inclusive and fluid normative climate that encourages both women and men to be effective decision-makers and to innovate in their rural livelihoods. In addition to the comparative findings that informed the typology, three village case studies are presented to illuminate important commonalities as well as contextual differences among the transforming set of cases. Before concluding the chapter, we reflect on the normative regularities and differences uncovered by our approach, and the contribution of growing gender equality to agricultural innovation and wider processes of institutional transformation and rural development.

6.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

GENNOVATE is a large qualitative study that explores and compares, across diverse cultural contexts, how gender norms both shape and are shaped by women's and men's capacities to participate in and benefit from the agricultural innovation processes of their local economy. The study's conceptual framework conceives of the interaction between gender norms and women's and men's engagement with agricultural innovation as dynamics that have the potential to contribute to empowerment and poverty reduction in a village (Chapter 2). Here

we highlight the literature that informed our understanding of agency, empowerment, and gender norms, and their interactions.

6.2.1 Agency and empowerment

While agency is often conceived of as the capacity to act and take decisions, empowerment refers both to processes and outcomes that result in "the expansion of choice and strengthening of voice through the transformation of power relations, so that women and girls have more control over their lives and futures" (van Eerdewijk et al., 2017, p. 13). Feminist conceptualizations of empowerment have long emphasized the contested character of gender power relations (e.g. Batliwala, 1993; Jackson, 1998; Kabeer, 1999). Batliwala, for example, defines women's empowerment as "the process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power" (1993, p. 130).

GENNOVATE's approach builds on Kabeer's (1999) conceptual framework that specifies three dimensions that effect empowerment and transform power relations: resources, agency, and achievements. Razavi (1999, p. 423) usefully summarizes the main attributes of Kabeer's framework, which remains relevant (e.g. review by Donald et al., 2017):

> . . . "resources" (not only access, but also future claims, to both material and human and social resources), "agency" (including processes of decision-making as well as manifestations of agency, such as negotiation, deception and manipulation), and "achievements" (or outcomes in wellbeing).

The measurement of agency and empowerment across cultures, however, is a continuing challenge (e.g. Donald et al., 2017; Narayan, 2005). The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) has advanced measures that are comparable and multidimensional (Alkire et al., 2013; Malapit et al., 2014). The comparative measures we use are similar to quantitative approaches in that they

draw from women's and men's observations about their decision-making capacity, as well as other measures of wellbeing. Nevertheless, the GENNOVATE methodology differs in that it is guided by theoretical approaches that stress the social embeddedness of agency and the historical and contextual specificities of the factors and processes that enable or hinder empowerment on the ground. This concern for contextual influences on agency and processes that drive more equitable gender power relations calls attention to the role of gender norms (Kabeer, 1999).

6.2.2 Gender norms

Gender norms, such as expectations of women's deference to men, are learned behaviors from a very young age. Many experts on norms emphasize how they are held in place because we believe that others conform to and value these social expectations and perceive that our own social approval hinges on compliance (Bichieri, 2006; Cislaghi et al., 2018; Mackie et al., 2015). Feminist literature on gender norms draws attention to how these social dictates contribute to reproducing the "gender order" and "distinctions between women and men" (Pearse & Connell, 2016, p. 31). However, these same dictates often become subjects of negotiation and resistance when they constrain or no longer hold much relevance for women's and men's day-to-day lives (e.g. Jackson 1998, 1999).

The notion of local normative climate, elaborated further in the empirical section of the chapter, focuses attention on the set of norms prevailing in a local context and their fluid qualities—with some gender norms in a community remaining restrictive or perhaps tightening further, while others may be relaxing or disappearing altogether (Chapter 3). The relaxation of norms describes local processes, for instance, whereby a few village women successfully negotiate a rule that only men should be present at community meetings and women begin attending the meetings. A gender norm may relax enough to disappear, such as

when many women along with men attend community meetings and this becomes widely accepted and normal. While these processes of normative relaxation and change are vital for increasing gender equality, they remain uneven on the ground: in diverse cultural contexts a woman may still face ostracism or perhaps physical punishment if she interacts independently with a man who is not a relative of her family (Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013). Normative relaxation speaks to the uneven and sometimes risky social processes whereby some, or perhaps many, women are finding space to negotiate and contest different normative constraints in their lives, while others in the community continue to uphold and conform to restrictive dictates.

In fact across many study villages, women often convey that compared to a decade ago they are encountering more relaxed gender norms and finding it easier, for instance, to express their opinions in family matters, to move in the public spaces of their village, and to earn some income from their own agricultural activities (e.g. Badstue et al., 2017; Petesch et al., 2017; Luis et al., 2018).

Importantly, groups of men also contest and resist norms of masculinity (e.g. Connell, 2003; Pearse and Connell, 2016; Kimmel, 2000). Some local contexts may provide limited pathways for men to achieve or maintain adequate financial independence, a condition widely seen to define manhood in varied cultures around the world. (e.g. Barker & Ricardo, 2015; Amuyunzu- Nyamongo & Francis, 2006). For example, in a GENNOVATE case study of a peri-urban community in western Kenya, where land and jobs are scarce, men perceive themselves to be “squatters” in their own community, and many struggle with heavy drinking and other antisocial vices (Chapter 3; also see Bullock & Tegbaru, 2019). The burdens for men who rely on arduous and insecure farm labor are a type of gendered vulnerability, which some men resist (Jackson, 1999). In sum, as women and men go about their daily lives, the relative fluidity of local gender

norms set the context for their capacity to take important decisions and engage with agricultural innovation and other opportunities for bettering their lives.

6.3 METHODOLOGY

See Chapter 2 of the thesis for discussion of GENNOVATE's approach and comparative qualitative methodology. Here we review the main protocols that guided the sampling, data collection, and analysis of the cases and evidence used for this chapter.

Our sample includes 79 GENNOVATE village-level case studies:

- *24 cases from Africa:* Burundi (2 cases), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1), Ethiopia (8), Kenya (2), Nigeria (4), Rwanda (1), Tanzania (4), Uganda (2);
- *49 cases from Asia and Central Europe:* Afghanistan (4), Bangladesh (6), India (15), Nepal (6), Pakistan (7), Philippines (3), Uzbekistan (4), Vietnam (4); and
- 6 cases from Latin America: Mexico (6).[1]

Case selection was based on GENNOVATE's global sampling framework, which applied principles of maximum diversity sampling to introduce variance on levels of economic dynamism and of gender gaps in assets and capacities in the individual village cases chosen for the sample.

In each research village, the field team conducted a total of 15 data collection activities with a methodology package of six instruments with semi-structured interview guides (Petesch, Badstue, & Prain, 2018). There were three focus group instruments: the first was conducted separately with low-income women and men, the second with middle-income women and men, and the third with young women and men (six groups in each case and 471 in total). The fieldwork also

includes nine semi-structured interviews in each case (711 in total) guided by three instruments: i) a community profile to gather background demographic, social, economic, agricultural, and political information about the case (requires key informants of both genders); ii) innovation pathway interviews with local people who are known for trying new things in agriculture (two men, two women); and iii) life story interviews (two men, two women). With strong advance coordination and support from a hired community organizer, most teams completed the fieldwork for a case within one week.

All six focus groups in a village case conduct a variation of a ladder activity[2] that captures perceptions of trends at the community level on agency or on wellbeing; and it is this data that we use to construct the community typology. Here we describe the different ladder activities in some detail as this is needed to understand the study methods and results to follow.

In each case study, four sex-specific focus groups—two with adult members (ages 25 to 55) drawn from the *middle income* and two with *youth* (ages 15 to 24)—conduct a *Ladder of Power and Freedom* activity as the opening exercise. Rather than refer to the technical terms of agency or empowerment, facilitators use the more commonly known terms of power and freedom (also see Sen, 1999). Indicating the village to be the frame of reference, the facilitator shows a visual of a simple five-step ladder and asks the women's focus group members to consider the ladder step that best exemplifies the power and freedom of most village women (and the men's focus group considers their local men). The facilitator also explains that step 5 of the ladder indicates a significant capacity (and step 1 very limited capacity) to make independent decisions about important affairs in their life, such as "if or where they will work or about starting or ending a relationship with a [opposite sex of FGD]." Each focus group participant is then asked to write privately, on a small slip of paper, the step on the ladder where they believe most individuals of their own gender in the village are located. The

facilitator collects and summarizes the ratings, and then guides a discussion on reasons for the steps identified. This is the end of the ladder activity for the two youth focus groups. The two middle-income focus groups engage in a further step of rating and discussing levels of agency 10 years ago. A summary statistic (change in agency = mean step now – mean step 10 years ago) is generated for comparing perceptions of change among the focus groups. A positive summary statistic indicates movements up the ladder and potentially a significant sense of empowerment if climbing a good distance to reach step 3 or higher.

The *Ladder of Wellbeing* activity, conducted with the two focus groups of *low-income* women and men (ages 30 to 55) in each study village, explores local perceptions of wellbeing and experiences with moving in and out of poverty. The facilitator begins the activity by asking focus group members to reflect on the characteristics of the "best-off" households in their village. Next, focus group members are directed to the bottom step of the ladder to describe the "worst- off" households. Then the focus group is free to add however many steps to the ladder as needed to capture the different wellbeing groups—and their corresponding traits—that are present in the village. During these testimonies, the facilitator records key traits of each ladder step on a flipchart for the group. Most ladders have three or four steps, although a few have more steps.

Once agreement is reached on the ladder steps and traits, the focus group identifies the step at which local households are no longer considered low-income, or their "community poverty line." Next, the group works together to sort a pile of 20 seeds (provided by the facilitator) across the different steps which are representative of all the households in their community. The sorting exercise is then repeated to indicate the distribution 10 years ago. Following this, the activity turns to discussions about the assets and capacities of farmers at the different steps and the experiences of women and men in their communities with moving up, getting stuck, or falling on their ladder. The findings from sorting the seeds

provide the basis for generating a summary statistic [moving out of poverty = (share poor 10 years ago – share poor now) ÷ (share poor 10 years ago)] to enable comparing perceptions of poverty dynamics across the focus groups and case studies. A positive summary statistic indicates perceived poverty reduction.

As explained in the results section, the focus groups' ladder statistics on agency and wellbeing conditions and trends of their village provide the skeleton for the three-part community typology — with the most favorable statistics depicting the set of transforming cases and the least favorable statistics conveying the churning cases. et, the typology's construction and our interpretation of the different social processes that it registers are informed by GENNOVATE's conceptual framework, which expresses innovation processes as socially embedded in a local opportunity structure that is comprised of gender norms and other influences on local actors. In addition to the comparative statistics, the ladder method generates narrative data that contributes to a contextual analysis of mobility processes. *As focus group members assess and explain the levels of and trends in perceived agency for their own gender, or the perceived change in poverty levels of their village (depending on the ladder), their narratives reveal some of the expressions of agency and wellbeing that are normative for the women and men in their local context.* Alternatively, focus groups may also attest to perceptions of disempowerment or deepening poverty, depending on the ladder activity and their views. Our analysis of normative influences on local innovation processes and perceptions of wellbeing is also informed by evidence gathered from other modules of the data collections instruments. One module, for instance, engages focus groups in reflecting on and assessing local women's and men's experiences with and benefits from new cropping or livestock practices, ways of managing natural resources, and formal and informal agricultural networks and learning opportunities.

Our findings are informed by qualitative comparative analysis that broadly involves working iteratively with two analytic procedures. The first employs "variable-oriented" measures that engaged the research team in identifying patterns in the numerical and narrative data generated from the ladder modules and other evidence gathered on agency, norms, and agricultural innovation. The second is the contextual "case-oriented" analysis that focuses on a specific village and is linked to analysis and comparison of normative influences on dimensions such as agricultural roles and decision- making (or agency) among the different social groups sampled in the case. We present three case studies that display case-oriented work. Chapter 2 provides additional discussion of sampling, recall, courtesy bias, translation, data triangulation, research ethics, and other common field research concerns.

We agree with feminist critiques that the variability of gender norms and ingenuity of human agency to overcome constraints on behavior call for significant caution with comparisons or predictions from our evidence (e.g. Kabeer, 1999). Yet, it is possible to compare broad types of change that community members perceive on the Ladder of Power and Freedom, as well as on the Ladder of Wellbeing, and to do this within and across the diverse gender and social groups. However, our interpretations of narratives or ratings remain anchored to their focus group and locality.

6.4 RESULTS

This chapter employs GENNOVATE's conceptual approach and qualitative comparative data to build understanding of the normative conditions associated with inclusive agricultural innovation processes. This objective drew us to the ladder data on trends in local perceptions of agency and wellbeing to identify and learn from cases where focus groups consistently registered significant upward

mobility on their ladders. How are these cases similar? And how do they differ—when compared with one another as well as with the wider set of cases? In addressing these questions, we uncovered patterns in our evidence that we present through the analytic framework of a three- part community typology.

In most cases, focus groups from the same village observe differences in the agency and poverty trends of their community. To better account for the diversity of views among the different gender and social groups, we offer a community typology that is constituted by the complex and discordant ways that norms and agency typically interact on the ground. As discussed in Chapter 3, the narratives generated by the ladder exercises are laced with strong normative dimensions, and when triangulated with other data gathered, enable assessment of the normative climate and the socially embedded ways by which gender norms interact with other circumstances in the lives of community members to accommodate and, most often, perpetuate existing asymmetries in power and access to opportunities.

6.4.1 Most climbing their ladders

Across the 79 case studies, a large majority of the village women and men who joined the *middle-income* focus groups report movement up their Ladder of Power and Freedom when compared to a decade ago; they now experience greater decision-making capacity over important affairs in their life. Additionally, a large majority of the *low-income* focus groups observed households in their villages moving up and over the community poverty line on the Ladder of Wellbeing. Men's and women's upward movements on the Ladder of Power and Freedom is expected in part due to built-in structural dimensions in the ways in which gender norms and life cycle processes interact with agency (Chapter 3). The favorable poverty trends observed by low-income focus groups, moreover, parallel the wider positive trend in rural poverty among low- and medium-income countries.[3]

Women indicate greater upward mobility on their Ladders of Power and Freedom than men, but they also often start from a much lower position. On average, across the 79 cases, women place themselves at a median of step 1.88 a decade ago while men rate themselves at step 3. The gender difference in ladder positions in the current period narrows greatly, however, with women rising to step 3 and men 3.6. The more limited climbing by men on their ladders is likely associated with the fact that adult men have been accustomed to making important decisions for generations; reinforcing their perceptions, moreover, is the relative stability of the gender norms that govern men's (agentic and dominant) roles in their household and village. Meanwhile, women's greater climbing on their ladders is seemingly reflective of their growing roles as decision-makers in their households and local economies, and mirrors evidence in the data that indicate an evolution toward more relaxed norms for women's roles than in the past. The *youth* focus groups do not assess trends, but their Power and Freedom Ladders showed limited variability with all medians at or very near step 3 for the current period across regions.

The focus groups with low-income women and men report substantial progress on poverty reduction in their communities. The median poverty level observed across the villages differ little by gender, ranging from 60 to 70 percent poor a decade ago and falling to 45 percent in the current period. Overall, estimates of local poverty reduction of 20 percent or more can be found in 62 percent of the men's groups and 56 percent of the women's groups.

The median statistics, nevertheless, mask significant variability in local perceptions of changes in agency and poverty. To provide a flavor of this variability, Tables 1 and 2 divide our cases into two sets. Table 1 presents the maximum, median, and minimum values for the set of ladder statistics from the cases where all six focus groups consistently observe favorable trends; while Table 2 presents this same range of values but from the cases with mixed ladder

trends, or where the ratings from one or more of the six focus groups' summary statistics indicate a static or falling ladder trend (or a ladder position below step 2 if youth focus groups). When comparing the same focus groups in Tables 1 and 2, the maximum values are quite similar while the median and minimum values are in most every instance much lower in the set of villages with mixed trends compared to the set of villages with favorable trends.

Table 1 Range of ladder statistics from cases with consistently *favorable* trends (Maximum, median, and minimum values, 47 cases)

	Ladder of Power & Freedom (Change in agency, 94 middle-income focus groups)		Wellbeing Ladder (Change in poverty, 94 low-income focus groups	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Maximum value	2.10	3.00	.83	.87
Median	1.00	1.40	.38	.36
Minimum value	-.40	.10	.05	.06

Table 2 Range of ladder statistics from cases with *mixed* trends (Maximum, median, and minimum values, 32 cases)

	Ladder of Power & Freedom (Change in agency, 64 middle-income focus groups)		Wellbeing Ladder (Change in poverty, 64 low-income focus groups	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Maximum value	2.30	3.00	.81	.83
Median	.82	.67	.17	0
Minimum value	-2.25	-3.00	-.80	-.67

To ensure meaningful classification into the two sets, we applied fuzzy set logic (Ragin, 2000). With fuzzy sets, researchers apply both theoretical and

substantive knowledge about their cases to calibrate the membership of a set and there is scope for ambiguity (or fuzziness) in "whether a case is more in our out of a set" (Ragin, 2008, p. 30). A case from the Morogoro region of Tanzania (Petesch et al., 2017, pp. 13-14), for instance, is included with the favorable set, although members from the men's middle-income group indicate, on average, a decline of -.40 on their Ladder of Power and Freedom (e.g. the minimum value for the first men's column in Table 1). Their average ratings indicate a decline from step 4.2 to 3.8 in the decision-making capacity of the village men. By way of explaining their fall on the ladder, some in the focus group express concerns for how local men's decision-making is being affected by the village women's growing agency and changing norms that are encouraging women to be more assertive and outspoken in their families. Testimonies from other men in the focus group contest these changes, with one countering, "The whole household waits for me to decide." Nevertheless, a rating of 3.8 is still quite near step 4 indicating a relatively high level of agency, and most of the other evidence from this case also argued for moving it out of the set with mixed trends. For instance, the middle-income women corroborate reports about their agency trends (from step 1 to step 3) and testify that when local women marry, now "you can plan with your husband." Low-income men and women also observe upward ladder climbs and poverty reduction in this case. In this way, the use of fuzzy sets better enabled us to sort the cases into the set that best represented the prevalence of ladder and other data that we had about the local normative climate and the overall trajectory of a case.

The two tables, in fact, provide hints of how we exploited the variability in the ladder statistics to build and learn from the community typology. Table 2 conveys the stymied trajectories observed by the set of villages in our typology that we refer to as churning cases. A notion of churning comes from the poverty dynamics field, where it is used to convey findings that some households struggle

with frequent movements in and out poverty (e.g., Hulme, Moore, and Shepherd, 2001). As elaborated further below, we often find churning cases to be characterized by innovation and development processes that are excluding or providing very limited opportunities for a substantial segment of the community.

Before completing the ladder specifications for the remaining two types of cases in the typology, we turn first to a case study from one of the eight transforming cases. This village offers valuable insights into the fluid and discordant gender norms that we often find on the ground and their relevance for who can access and benefit from promising local agricultural opportunities. On the one hand, the village's middle-income women speak to the relaxing and disappearing gender norms commonly seen in transforming cases; and yet, on the other, low-income women's observations about their lives in this village depict the restrictive and excluding normative climate observed by one or more focus groups in a churning case.

6.4.2 Case study: A ladder for some women, but not others

The centuries-old village of Cheeda in Uttar Pradesh holds a population of 2,500 spread across three hamlets, with farmers cultivating paddy, wheat, and vegetables and tending buffalo and goat. More than half of Cheeda's population comprises smallholder farmers who belong to different castes, such as Kurmi (30 percent) and Baniya (30 percent). They enjoy relatively prosperous lifestyles compared to other social groups in the community who work mainly as agricultural laborers or other casual labor. Key informants report a new preschool and lower secondary school, government business subsidies, and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Sonam, whose story opens this chapter, is from Cheeda. When explaining how she reached the top step on the Ladder of Power and Freedom, her testimony reveals how some gender norms relax while others remain restrictive. Sonam

boasts about her initiatives with sharecropping, but also reports drawing strength from her five sons—who are now growing up, marrying, and helping to maintain the household, as gender norms prescribe in the village. Similarly, testimonies from the middle-income women's focus group show how their capacity to take decisions in their family has grown. In stark contrast, low-income women observe the persistence of numerous vulnerabilities, closely echoing Sonam's reports about her past life and the constraints on her voice and abusive relationship with her husband.

Women of Cheeda's middle-income focus group observe that on average they have climbed up nearly two steps on their Ladder of Power and Freedom to reach step 3.4. Among the 10 women who joined this group, all identify themselves as farmers, four report they are widows and six are married. By way of explaining the change on their ladders, the women refer to how they are now more educated and knowledgeable about their rights, and more assertive in their households. They describe a loosening of household hierarchies as in-laws "don't try to control their daughters-in-law. Earlier this control was very rigid." Changes in women's roles in the village are also influenced by high rates of men's labor migration: "When there are no men in the house then their wives can take certain decisions."

Several women farmers of Cheeda are recognized as active and skilled wheat and paddy farmers who apply the latest seed technologies and hire labor when needed. Key informants estimate 80 percent of the local women farmers use tube wells to irrigate their land, and a quarter of sharecropping and rental transactions to involve women. Young women report great freedom for both unmarried and married women to move about their village independently and engage in small-scale trade. The women in their youth focus group ranged in ages from 16 to 22, all unmarried, and all but two had completed secondary school or higher. They position themselves on step 3.2 of their Power and Freedom Ladder,

explaining, “When our parents decided to send us to school, they decided to empower us,” and, “[e]ducation has brought about a revolutionary change—we are wiser and more capable.”

Although they reside in the same village, low-income women’s testimonies reveal no such empowering processes in their lives. None of the 10 women in this group had attended school and all identify themselves as farm laborers. In discussions of gender equality, low-income women explain that “daughters have freedom, but daughters-in-law don’t.” Conceptions of power and freedom are often conditioned by the ways that an individual’s household, life cycle, and socioeconomic positions intersect and evolve. When considering their role in moving their families out of poverty, a woman in this group reports their lives to be in the hands of their husbands: “Women’s fate is decided when they get married. They live the way their husbands want them to. They don’t have much in their control. They can fight and fight hard but that is all they can do.”

By fights, the woman is referring to previous testimonies of the drinking and gambling problems among the village’s low-income men—and the deep stress and vulnerability to abuse that this causes for the local women. Yet, somehow amidst family conflict and “back-breaking” farm work or brickmaking, some women in this focus group still report their lives to be improving: “Today every family is able to afford at least one square meal a day,” and, “Now people have all become very hardworking.” They want their daughters to be as educated as their boys, and speak of new lenders extending credit, self-help groups they belong to, and the limited opportunities offered by the 10 days of work annually with MGNREGA.

6.4.3 A community typology framed by village trajectories

The discordant narratives from Cheeda about their normative climate open a window on the differentiated social processes that give rise to and sustain gender

and social group inequalities. These same social processes also contribute to the variability in local perceptions of agency and norms. Although low-income women's narratives from Cheeda express many challenges, they still estimate village poverty reduction at 20 percent; and the village's five other focus groups convey favorable conditions on balance and argue for classifying this case among the transforming communities. By comparison, low-income women in the seven other transforming cases observe much better livelihood opportunities for themselves as well as local poverty to be disappearing far more quickly. Thus, while cases like Cheeda, or the one from Tanzania highlighted earlier, indicate the boundaries of the community typology to be fuzzy, the focus groups in each of the transforming cases nevertheless present evidence of a normative climate that is interacting with local opportunities in ways that are enabling a significant share of community members to make progress up their ladders.

To select the set of transforming cases, we set challenging benchmarks that required all six focus groups conducted in a village to observe quite favorable trends (or status if youth). The criteria include:

i. *both* middle-income focus groups observe a climb of at least one full step up their Ladder of Power and Freedom;

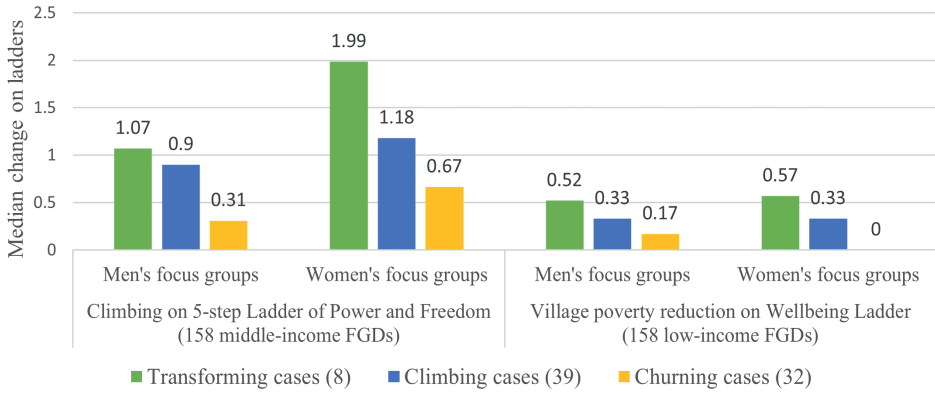
ii. *both* focus groups with low-income villagers observe poverty reduction of at least 20 percent, *and*

iii. *both* youth focus groups position themselves on at least step 3 of their Power and Freedom Ladder.[4]

Eight of our 79 cases met the criteria for the *transforming* set. The other two sets of villages in our typology comprise 39 *climbing* cases with ladders that all register at least some degree of upward movement (e.g. Table 1 minus the eight transforming cases), and 32 *churning* cases with mixed ladder trends (Table 2).

Figure 1 provides an overview of the ladder statistics sorted by the three community types. The 10-year observation period captured in our evidence shows rapid change in the lives of women residing in the transforming set. Middle-income women in the eight transforming cases overall observe striking gains in power and freedom of nearly two full steps up their ladder and closing in on step 4; and low-income women assess close to 60 percent of their village households moving from below to above the community poverty line on their Wellbeing Ladder. Middle-income men and low-income men from transforming cases also consistently report stronger ascents on their ladders relative to the men from climbing and churning cases. At step 3.2, young women from transforming contexts observe a slightly higher median ranking on their Power and Freedom Ladders than all other youth groups. We did not find much variation in the youth ladder statistics, with median rankings of the 155 young men's and women's focus group, respectively, at 3.0 and 3.2 (transforming cases); 3.0 and 2.9 (climbing); 3.0 and 2.7 (churning).

Figure 1 Perceptions of change in local women's and men's power and freedom and in local poverty reduction, Focus group assessments by type of cases (316 focus groups, 79 cases)



More important than the numerical findings for each type of case, however, are the regularities in the normative conditions that the typology broadly registers. Some Uzbekistan and Vietnam climbing cases very nearly reached the transforming set, for instance. In climbing and churning cases alike, however, the narrative data make evident that different middle-income, low-income, and young women are innovating in their rural livelihoods, but varied gender norms, depending on the context and social group, still limit their visibility, decision-making, physical mobility, resource control, and access to information, networks, extension services, and other opportunities. Alternatively, these cases may have men's ladders displaying only limited climbing, or stagnation and descent if a churning case, and this is usually related to economic difficulties or other circumstances affecting many men's perceptions of their authority position, decision-making or provisioning for their families. Gender norms for men have remained relatively stable and weigh heavily on men's sense of agency across the cases.

Again, the numerical cut offs are not clear-cut; what is more revealing are the regularities in the normative conditions that the typology broadly registers. In Ilu Titun, a climbing village from Nigeria's Oyo State, women are the main vendors of their local weekly market, but they say they can only reach step 2 of their Ladder of Power and Freedom. They report their local market to be hampered by the bad feeder road to the village, and husbands who control their earnings and require them to work on their plots before the women tend to their own plots (Chapter 3). Yet, Gbodomu, another research village in Oyo State, presents a transforming case where women's narratives still speak to some confining norms, but low-income and middle-income women alike there perceive significant benefits from an expanding village market, and say "everybody is into business now" (low-income women's focus group). Additionally, middle-income women report controlling farmland and now making enough money "to allow us

to enjoy the freedom to make major decisions." In short, in the climbing cases, women and men are generally perceiving enough normative latitude to exercise agency and take some risks to improve their livelihood activities—and ascend their ladders. In transforming cases, they widely observe numerous normative barriers relaxing and disappearing, leaps in their capacity to take important decisions and risks, and many village families escaping poverty.

6.4.4 Churning contexts

Villagers from churning communities speak to the saying that a chain is as strong as its weakest link. Even though it is frequently just one or two focus groups in a churning case that register falling or no change on their ladders, the remaining ladders from these cases often display more limited gains. These are the contexts where local gender norms and innovation and development processes are interacting in ways that are greatly constraining or disadvantaging a large segment of the village, and this is registering on one or more of the ladders as a descent or stagnation.

Perceptions of stagnant or impoverishing village contexts on the Ladder of Wellbeing should always be cause for concern; however, discouraging trends on the Power and Freedom Ladders also raise red flags because it is much more common for adult focus groups to perceive increased agency over the course of a decade as discussed above. In some cases, villages may be coping with processes of urbanization and agricultural change. A case from Chiapas, Mexico, for example, features a large town and commercial maize farms, and while women report favorable ladder trends and new opportunities for their entrepreneurship, middle-income men perceive they are stuck at step 3 and low-income men observe rising poverty and a decline in job opportunities.

Women's ladder statistics more rarely sorted their communities into the churning set. One case of women expressing hardships, nevertheless, resides in

Ethiopia's Oromia region (also see Petesch et al., 2017, p. 27). Low-income women in this case display detailed knowledge of new seed technologies, chemical inputs, and cropping practices; however, they also report increased agricultural labor burdens with the new practices, continued domestic violence, failing crops, and rising poverty. Similarly, middle-income women's narratives speak to difficult lives and prevalence of restrictive norms:

> In my case when my husband leaves for the field, I need to go with him. I have no one to do the household chores. When we return on the way back I need to collect firewood to make the fire and prepare food. If the food is not ready on time, he will beat me. He never thinks I was with him the whole day. I also need to fetch water.

Men's narratives from churning cases, moreover, may also be laced with perceptions of powerlessness and despair. According to a 50-year-old farmer and father of eight who joined the Oromia village's low-income men's group: "Hopelessness is the most damaging effect that traps people below the poverty line. The community considers them poor, and they are discouraged about changing their life."

Every community has its own culture of inequality, and our sample captured quite a few with bottom steps that crush agency.

To better understand the conditions that enable women and men to escape from the bottom steps of their ladders, this chapter casts a spotlight on the transforming cases, where many women and men indicate they are making empowering movements up their ladders and leaving poverty behind. Toward this end, we next present another case study of a transforming context. This time we broaden the spotlight to include narratives from the village men and their vital contributions to agricultural innovation processes that benefit from normative relaxation and greater gender equality.

6.4.5 Case study: A minority village in the throes of good change

Situated in the Vietnamese highlands and home to Thai ethnic minorities, Hom village has been experiencing rapid economic development. In explaining their movements on the ladders, men and women alike express appreciation for improved infrastructure that now better connects the village to the nearest town, electricity, and availability of running water. Work for pay, market activities, and mobility (using motorbikes) also increased for both women and men. Agricultural innovations that mainly include hybrid varieties of maize, but also of rice, longan (a tropical fruit), mango, and other crops, as well as modern equipment and chemical fertilizer, have considerably increased productivity and profits. Formal education is now the norm for both girls and boys. These changes reflect the Vietnamese government's economic reforms and other policy initiatives since 1986 to promote rural as well as urban development, referred to as *Đổi Mới* (Renovation), which seeks to create a socialist-oriented market economy and open the country to the outside world (Thinh, 2009; Knoedel et al., 2004).

Middle-income men say they have climbed from step 2 to 3.6 on the Power and Freedom Ladder and speak to recent economic developments that include the knowledge gained through agricultural demonstration sites, training, and workshops led by extension agents and agricultural input companies. These resources, and motorbikes that aid their mobility, enable them to increase their productivity, income, and confidence. Low-income men perceive nearly half the village still in poverty but falling from 70 percent a decade ago. They consider that women and men should cooperate to lift their households out of poverty because when the "husband and wife are not united, not working together" households may remain trapped in poverty.

Likewise, middle-income women attribute their quite similar climb from step 1.9 to step 3.6 to their ability to move around with the establishment of the

new road, as earlier "women could not ride a motorbike, did not know where to sell products, and depended on their husbands for everything. They could only stay home to do farm work and bring up children." Hom's women also attribute their increased power and freedom to how they are more educated and aware of their rights, and more assertive in their households. According to low-income men and women, domestic violence has decreased in the village due to lower poverty levels, but also to the better implementation of legislation against domestic violence by a local security team and police officers, and to women's greater knowledge of their rights due to television, radio, and newspapers (low-income women's group).[5]

Middle-income and youth focus groups in Hom village consistently present testimonies that convey men to be good husbands when they "help their wife" with household work and childrearing, and the low-income and youth focus groups reflect directly on questions of gender equality and all consider that to be desirable in this case. Their statements resonate with the Vietnamese government's official discourse on gender equality, wherein women's and men's equal participation is central to socialist state development, and their shared responsibilities within the family—including household chores and childcare—are affirmed in the Constitution and in family law (Que 1996; Schuler et al., 2006).

Yet, community members temper their statements about gender equality. All focus groups consider men the "pillar" of the family, head of household, and main decision-makers. It is still "strange for a wife to make more money than her husband" (middle-income women), and women recognize that they have fewer opportunities than men to learn of and take a risk on a new agricultural practice. Nonetheless, despite these expectations, their narratives reveal a normative climate that is enabling some relaxation and change in women's and men's roles,

decision-making, and opportunities within Hom's patriarchal context. In response to a hypothetical scenario about a man's ability to spend his inheritance on a motorbike against his wife's will, a middle-income man acknowledges his wife's agency and the value of cooperative gender relations:

> It's . . . difficult to [spend my inheritance] without my wife's agreement because we are supposed to agree with each other. A motorbike is only worth it when she is on it with me. If I buy it [against her will], she might not ride it with me.

6.4.6 Patterns of resource distribution

In this section, we compare community attributes that are common in each of the community types—transforming, climbing, and churning. Our evidence, from key informants and focus groups, reveals the importance for transforming contexts of public services, expanded markets, and men's labor migration. Central to these processes, however, is a normative climate that is catalyzing greater gender equality and both women's and men's participation in and benefits from their village's agricultural innovation process, as this is the life blood of their economy. Embedded in this macro environment is the evidence we have garnered on community members' perceived power and freedom to be decision-makers and to move their households out of poverty. The transforming communities include two each in India (Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) and Uzbekistan, and one each in Mexico, Nigeria, Nepal, and Vietnam. To be sure, India and Uzbekistan are countries that have been experiencing extremely rapid economic growth for more than a decade, while the other four countries have witnessed more moderate growth. Between 2004 and 2014, which is roughly the observation window for the study's recall data on trends, Uzbekistan's Gross National Income (GNI) grew by a median of 8.81 percent, India's by 7.98 percent,

Vietnam's 5.72 percent, Nigeria's 5.71 percent, Nepal's 4.42 percent, and Mexico's 3.30 percent (World Development Indicators, Accessed 11-Sept-2017).

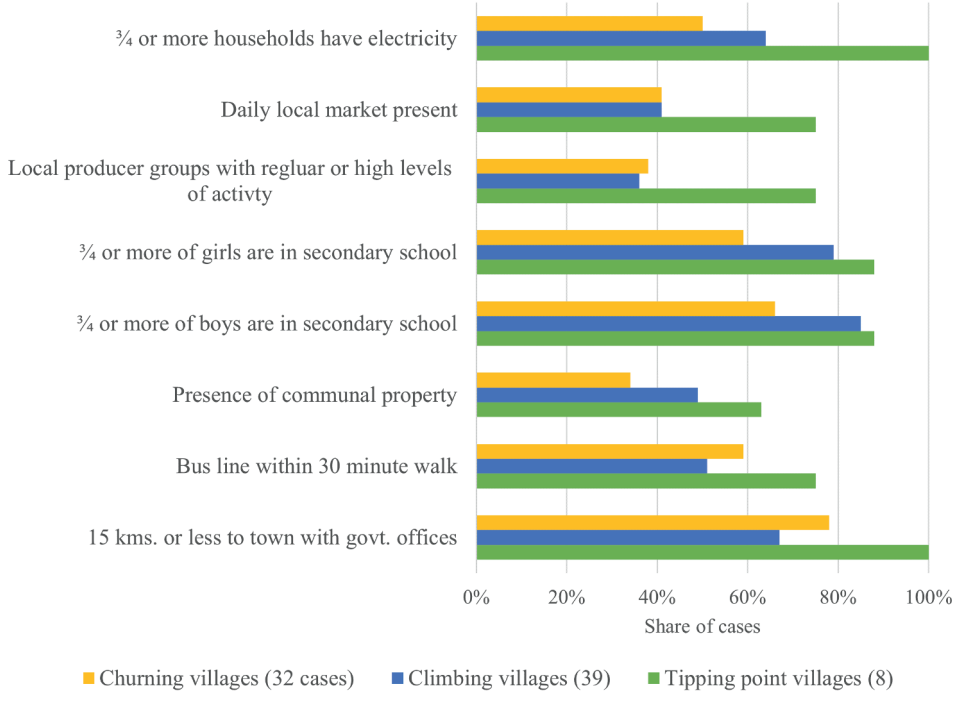
As shown in Figure 2, compared to the climbing and churning sets, transforming cases are more favorably endowed with various economic, social, and natural resources, such as electricity, daily markets, producer groups, and teenagers in school. Yet, it is important to indicate that in four of the six countries with at least one transforming case, there are also one or more churning cases. For instance, in the previous section we highlighted a case from Chiapas, Mexico that is prosperous compared to most cases but nevertheless sorted into the churning set. While agricultural and other development opportunities may be growing in countries with prospering macroeconomies, our data make evident that these favorable conditions are not necessarily widely shared in their ountryside.

One way we took stock of local gender norms affecting economic opportunities was to systematically ask low-income men's and women's focus groups whether remunerated labor is "common or not common" among four types of women in their village: young unmarried women, young married women, older married women, and widows. Across the transforming cases, focus groups of both men and women largely observe paid work to be common for all categories of women. Among the men and women in the climbing and churning cases, an interesting pattern emerges where it becomes increasingly common for women to work for pay as they move through different life stages. Young married women are indicated to be the least likely to work for pay overall, with men in two-thirds of the churning contexts indicating that this type of woman does *not* work for pay.

We also saw similar patterns of fluidity in norms shaping women's mobility. In a rating exercise, youth focus groups of both sexes from all but one transforming case assess that it is very common for women of their village to move about independently in public (e.g., at least six or more in every 10 local

women). Young people report this in about half the climbing and churning villages. Likewise, compared to the other cases, in transforming communities, young people more often report that it is rare to marry before age 18.

Figure 2 Selected community characteristics, by type of cases (Key informants, 79 cases)



Key informant responses to gender-differentiated questions gathered to build community profiles largely corroborate the focus group observations (Figure 2). Key informants from all but one of the transforming cases observe that it is common for women of their village (i.e. ≥30 percent of local women) to take jobs as agricultural workers. In comparison this is common in only half the cases in climbing communities and less than 40 percent of churning ones. Similarly, in 75 percent of the transforming communities, key informants estimate that at least half of traders in the local market are women; while this is the case in roughly 40

and 50 percent, respectively, in the climbing and churning cases. Men's and women's temporary labor migration is also higher in the transforming communities compared to the others. Further, heavy male migration creates the need and resources for married women to access commercial farming opportunities, but the impacts of these processes remain variable.[6] This links with reports that local women are more likely to have access to irrigation in transforming communities than women elsewhere. Transforming cases are also more likely to have elected women as village leaders.

To better understand how macro-structural changes, such as new government policy initiatives, and new codes of women's behavior operate, we systematically reviewed narrative data from an illustrative sample of focus groups in 22 of the 79 cases, including all eight transforming cases, eight climbing cases, and six churning cases. We selected cases that would provide strong contrasts in regional, country, and local contexts. Women across the transforming communities testify to greater freedoms as well as more diverse outlets to innovate in their rural livelihood activities and describe gaining more authority in the household. Although the historical and current circumstances in the transforming contexts vary, a normative climate which is becoming more inclusive for women and men alike to exercise agency ties them together, as well as greater livelihood innovation, improved public services, growing markets, and men's migration. But for one focus group with low-income women in the transforming set, every focus group with middle-income and low-income women in the eight cases describe local women engaged in new or increased agricultural and marketing activities and note that this work was both desirable and normatively acceptable. Among climbing and churning cases, these types of testimonies appear but with much less frequency. Even though different types of local women in climbing and churning cases are actively farming and vending, their narratives often associate agricultural innovation and breadwinning with

men, and, if they mention women's experience with innovation, often it is accompanied with explanations of their normative role in provisioning food for the family or of different normative constraints that they face with their livelihood activities.

Before moving to a discussion of the findings, we present one more transforming case where especially rapid social and economic change has taken hold. Middle-income women and men from this village position themselves on steps 4.3 and 4.4, respectively, on their Ladders of Power and Freedom—the combined highest levels among our cases. Moreover, low-income women and men alike observe very rapid poverty reduction, at 57 and 67 percent, respectively, with poverty now seen to affect perhaps 10 to 15 percent of their village rather than one in three families, as in a decade ago.

6.4.7 Case study: Where new thinking and resources spread widely

Nodira sits in Uzbekistan's Andijan Province. Major market reforms, significant agricultural innovation, infrastructure improvements, and men's migration emerge as important factors in testimonies. The local women's contributions to transforming their village may also reflect the specific history of this region, where, during the Soviet era large numbers of rural women were employed in the public sector, and since then quotas and other measures have supported women's economic participation (e.g., Jayal, 2006).

When describing Nodira's strong and growing farm production and businesses, men and women both highly praise their government's new and simpler business registration procedures, tax incentives for rural businesses, loans for young people, and investments in women's enterprise development and skills. "Simultaneously our thinking has changed," declares a member of Nodira's low-income women's focus group. "We understand that success in business depends on us, our skills and experience, and education and access to modern information

about new technologies." Middle-income women relate how they sell more farm produce due to new roads and market infrastructure; and a young woman in her focus group declares, "Mostly young girls are busy in our local markets and some girls are working in private bakeries and private mills."

Our key informant, a woman community social worker with the *mahalla* (lowest level of government), estimates that approximately half of the local men continue to take advantage of lucrative temporary work beyond the village, often in Russia or Kazakhstan. As she explains: "We [women] need to work and take matters into our own hands and head our households. This has had a very strong impact on the economic activity of women."

With so many men abroad, the women say they are the ones managing the community's farms, going to their local *mahalla* to "ask about new wheat technologies." They are active in the farming association and securing bank loans, as these help them to "diversify their activities, such as by combining wheat, cotton, livestock, and dairy production," explain members of the middle-income focus group.

These women, much like the women in the other transforming cases, are deeply engaged in their community's innovation processes. Especially insightful testimony about these catalytic processes and the benefits of gender equality for farming communities comes from a low-income man in this village of Uzbekistan:

> [Women] enjoy the same rights as men do. There is nothing bad about this. It's good. And the longer couples live together, they start to take decisions together related to household. It is also important to diversify household incomes and introduce new practices in crop production, innovations like [new] seedlings which will . . . [mature] much earlier and sell for a higher price; or the combined cropping of legumes with wheat which will increase soil fertility. All in all joint decision-making is good in cushioning some negative effects during

> unfavorable seasons. This helps the family to better manage available resources and control spending together, which is important in generating savings and creating some assets for buying a cow, building a barn, or even buying a home on mortgage.

These types of close and cooperative gender relations likely have strong roots in many farming households around the world, but we rarely hear men reflect on them in our focus groups with their peers. Such expressions run counter to restrictive normative expectations that entitle men to control over women. In many cases we see members of men's focus groups aggressively holding one another to account for these norms.

Meanwhile, testimonies from low-income women in Nodira suggest that they, like middle-income women of their village, enjoy greater latitude than in most of the research contexts to withdraw from some of the normative expectations constraining their daily lives. They speak of exhaustion and repeat a local saying that they need "40 lives" to manage their responsibilities. But in the transforming communities, men openly acknowledge the importance of women's contributions, and a low-income woman can confide in her focus group that in the rare times when her husband is cooking, "It turns out tasty."

6.5 DISCUSSION

Knight and Ensminger (1998, p. 105) offer a definition of social norms that calls attention to how they "structure social interactions" and "determine in significant ways the distribution of the benefits of social life." The ladder data from each case study provide a window into these distributional workings of norms and how they differentially color perceptions of opportunities for exercising agency among the different gender, socio-economic and age groups that joined our focus groups.

In Nodira, our evidence illuminates a highly beneficial transformation that may arise when an effective program of state decentralization interacts with a local normative climate that is becoming more inclusive and enabling diverse community members to contribute to and benefit from the agricultural innovation process underway in their rural economy.

In climbing villages our evidence reveals an *excluding* normative climate for some populations in the village where, depending on the social group, norms fluidly remain restrictive or relax to accommodate local women's and men's varying day-to-day interests and capacity to take decisions and mobilize resources. Gendered power relations, nevertheless, mean that these complex interactions between norms and agency most often benefit men and operate in ways that slow down or impede local transitions to more equitable gender norms. As discussed earlier, churning contexts typically present evidence of a significant share of a village perceiving exclusion from or being disadvantaged by their local development processes. These difficult circumstances may drive a relaxation of some gender norms, such as those shaping women's agricultural roles, while others remain restrictive.

In transforming contexts, by contrast, we find extensive evidence pointing to a normative climate that is becoming more *inclusive,* enabling both women and men to seek out resources, take risks, try new things, and scale their ladders. Our comparative and contextual work with the transforming cases reveals the relaxation and change of diverse norms governing women's lives. Compared to climbing and churning cases, women and men alike in transforming contexts attest to greater freedoms for women to express their opinions, be mobile in their villages, manage commercial crops, and innovate with agri-processing and other entrepreneurial initiatives. Significantly, in addition to an inclusive normative climate, the agentic capacity of women is simultaneously being buttressed by infrastructure investments, growing markets, and men on the move to better

jobs—a challenging mix that helps to explain why these catalytic processes are not found more widely in our data. Thus, what we can conclude is that the confluence of these favorable conditions appears to unleash broader mechanisms of social change that make local level institutions not only more inclusive but more effective, thereby fueling the accelerated trajectory of increased agency and poverty reduction. These are the transformative local-level social processes expressed at the heart of GENNOVATE's conceptual framework.

Nevertheless, norms do not consistently move together even in our most thriving villages. We often find, for example, women's middle-income focus groups perceiving more scope for negotiating norms and accessing opportunities than low-income and young women. In Nodira and Hom, testimonies portray men contributing to housework and care, while this was less apparent in Cheeda. Young people who joined our focus groups are more educated than their parents, and most aspired to professional jobs rather than agricultural futures (Elias et al., 2018; Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013). Still, two of the women in Cheeda's youth focus group display a more open mind: "Traditionally men and women have performed different roles in agriculture but that is gradually changing," and, "The younger generation is very keen on adopting new methods and machines." Indeed, our evidence shows that women along with men in the transforming contexts are perceiving significant opportunities in the technological and other changes underway in their village. In Hom, women speak of how new roads and use of motorbikes now enable them to access markets in other villages and towns.

While women and men of climbing and churning cases also testify to using improved seeds that mature quickly, irrigation, chemicals, tractors, motorbikes and mobiles, these technologies have yet to fuel the accelerated development trajectories of the transforming contexts. Across the cases, the fluidity of gender norms poses opportunities as well as barriers to innovation, but our evidence

makes clear that the spaces for negotiating and changing norms are greater in the transforming cases.

Before concluding, we reflect briefly on our ladder measures and research collaboration. Instruments that enable local people to assess and reflect together about the trajectory of change in their community provide powerful collaborative learning tools, both for study participants and researchers. To build the wellbeing ladders, focus groups of low-income women and of men meaningfully detail and reveal their own gendered understandings of the culture of inequality. They describe processes of upward (or downward) mobility on their ladders that are grounded in "concrete flows of people among clusters, especially clusters that differ significantly in dominance" (Tilly, 2007, p. 55). The ladder tools are also useful because they enable some comparison, while narrative data provides a starting point from which to assess the normative climate that is shaping and being shaped by these flows in women's and men's agency.

6.6 CONCLUSIONS

Technological and institutional change is vital for agricultural villages to contribute to and benefit sustainably from opportunities in the wider economy (IFA , 2016). GENNOVATE's concern for normative influences on agency, qualitative comparative methodology, and community typology contribute new approaches to conceptualizing agricultural innovation. By reaching out to learn from women and men, as well as from different socioeconomic and age groups in a community, we obtained a fresh and valuable perspective on the conditions that enable an accelerated trajectory of inclusive agricultural innovation. In the eight transforming cases, where all six focus groups observed significant empowerment and poverty reduction, we also found evidence of increasing

gender equality and agricultural innovation combined with infrastructure improvements, expanded markets, and male migration. Yet, our findings across the wider set of cases align with studies indicating that gender equality does not necessarily improve with economic growth and poverty reduction (Kabeer, 2016; Kabeer & Natali, 2013).

Some experts have long maintained that "poverty is as much a cultural as a material phenomenon in even the poorest societies" (Jackson, 1998, p. 80). Yet prevalent conceptualizations of agricultural innovation, as well as of empowerment and poverty dynamics, continue to conceive of the challenge of gender equality as largely one of increasing individual or household assets or meeting basic needs. Our findings support Jackson's claim that draws attention to the cultural context and suggest that other analytic frameworks, such as GENNOVATE's, also have much to contribute to better understanding today's agricultural innovation challenges, as well as other critical development needs.

NOTES

[1] The limited coverage of Latin America reflects regional investment priorities for international agricultural research for development.

[2] GENNOVATE's ladders build on approaches and methods developed for the World Bank global qualitative studies, including the *Moving Out of Poverty* study's Ladder of Life (Narayan and Petesch, 2005); and the *On Norms and Agency* study's Ladder of Power and Freedom (Turk et al., 2010). In the GENNOVATE methodology package (Petesch, Badstue, & Prain, 2018), the Ladder of Wellbeing is called the Ladder of Life. We substituted Ladder of Wellbeing in the chapter to make it easier for the reader to associate the poverty findings with this module.

[3] However, urban poverty declines have been far more rapid, and current trends risk further marginalizing rural populations (IFAD, 2016).

[4] In two transforming villages (of Vietnam and Uzbekistan), an exception was made to relax the thresholds for young women to 2.9. Among the churning villages, there was but one youth focus group that sorted a case into this set. In this village, from Pakistan, young women position themselves on step 1.6. Middle-income men in this context indicate a modest climb from step 2.3 to 2.5, which is a relatively low level for men; and some of their narratives, such as those about indebtedness and scarce resources for farming, are similar to men's from other churning contexts in that country.

[5] This is not to say that domestic violence has disappeared; in fact, it remains an issue in Hom and much of Vietnam (Rasanathan & Bushan, 2011).

[6] Evans (2015), Hall (2007), and Davis (2007) are insightful examples from a large literature on processes of normative and other institutional changes associated with rural-to-urban migration domestically and overseas, changes which more often do not filter back into the sending communities.

Chapter 7


ING. EDGAR ESTUARDO
MENDEZ BURGOS
Los cambios se fecundan en las ideas
se refuerzan con las palabras
se demuestran en las acciones
NEW YORK
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

General discussion: Lessons about local normative climates

The world's small farms are overwhelmingly family farms and most operate under deeply challenging and inequitable circumstances. Farms of less than 1 hectare (ha) comprise 70 percent of farms worldwide and 7 percent of all farmland; and, at the other end of the spectrum, farms of more than 50 ha represent 1 percent of farms and 70 percent of farmland (Lowder et al., 2021, p. 4). Many women work for no pay or very low pay in agriculture, often producing lower yields than male farmers—"not because they are bad farmers but because they have less access to everything they need to be more productive" (FAO, 2014, p. 35). Due to current stresses that include violent conflicts, climate change, the covid pandemic, weakened economies, and rising inequality and poverty, the world's agri-food system is under great strain, and hunger and malnutrition at critical levels (FAO et al., 2021).[1]

What if mindsets could shift and profoundly transform the social and institutional processes that fuel this inequality and hunger?

My concluding chapter for the thesis begins where Chapter 6 leaves off. I continue to work with local normative climate (LNC) and the community typology. LNC refers to the prevailing set of gender norms in a community and accounts for the contextual and fluid interplay between gender norms and agency (Chapters 1 and 3). In the section to follow, I use LNC and the community typology (Chapter 6) to address the research questions that guided the thesis. Next, in sections 2 and 3, I bring LNC and the typology into dialogue with two different but complementary theoretical contributions on the dynamics of (potentially transformative) social and institutional change. Section 4 proposes a set of bottom-up collaborative action research pilots that are informed by the lessons in the thesis. Then I conclude the thesis. As with the rest of the thesis, the

guiding stars for the learning journey are the SDGs to end poverty and achieve gender equality in smallholder communities.

7.1 REVISITING THE THREE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three questions framed my research. The first asks how gender norms interact with local development processes; the second questions the mutually influencing forces of norms, agency, and agricultural innovation; and the third queries the conditions associated with extensive poverty reduction and empowerment of diverse categories of women and men in a smallholder community. I take each question in turn with the following caveats. In response to Q1, I emphasize the relational ways that norms operate to reinforce gender and other categorical status differences. For Q2 and Q3, I shift the lens to spaces where different categories of women and men are able to maneuver and advance their interests and needs. With all questions, I discuss regularities and diversity in the study participants' observations of the changes underway in local women's and men's agency and in their community's poverty dynamics. Testimonies about these processes of local social change and development often express some of their community's various norms and how they are interacting with people's perceptions of their capacities to act on goals that may better their lives. In other words, these testimonies are often revealing of the LNC and the orderly yet disorderly norms and agency interactions that this concept registers (also see Chapter 1).

Q1 How do gender and other social norms operate to shape and accommodate the diverse and changing conditions of rural communities?

Most study participants across 79 cases in 17 countries observe falling poverty and growing agency among the women and men of their communities (Chapter

6). In most cases they testify that agricultural productivity has increased and that local farmers are benefiting from improved technologies and practices. On balance, moreover, the evidence suggests that the study villages that provide greater latitude for women to generate income are also associated with observations of greater local poverty reduction and empowerment than other villages. Yet these generally favorable trends mask variability in perceptions across and within the village cases.

A village's gender norms for women and men interact with agency and local-level development processes in ways that vary from region to region, from village to village, and from one gendered social category to another. Relative to South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa has a greater tendency toward norms that accommodate women's small-scale farming and trading activities. Yet normative expectations continue to reinforce gendered distinctions in status and in agricultural roles and opportunities in Africa as well. Chapter 3, for instance, presents a Yoruba village in Nigeria where only men can hire trucks to connect to distant markets, enabling them to earn larger profits from their agricultural production. The village women, although also deeply engaged in their agricultural economy as traders and producers, talk of norms that require their deference to men and that limit their mobility and income earning to their community.

Chapter 5 explored interactions between gender norms and poverty dynamics in a sample of 32 cases from five countries of South Asia. In those cases, norms appear to privilege men's initiatives over those of women of low-income households, regardless of whether the community is prospering or not. Still, we show women, too, contributing substantially to moving their households out of poverty, again under diverse contextual conditions. According to focus groups of both genders, the local men who move out of poverty typically manage to connect with significant opportunities—building savings through labor

migration, leasing or purchasing cropland to expand commercial farming, profiting from new agricultural technologies and practices, running shops, or, more rarely, holding a government job. By contrast, women's initiatives to get ahead often involve small-scale activities such as tending livestock or tailoring. Such activities may enable them to build up small savings to support their own and other household enterprises and prepare for emergencies. Chapter 5 then presents life stories of some women who have acquired land and effectively negotiated expectations that otherwise discourage women from pursuing the substantial commercial agricultural opportunities in their village.

In two of every five village cases in the sample of 97 communities for Chapter 6, at least one of the focus groups (and often more) perceived limited or declining capacities among the women or men of their village to make important decisions, or static or increasing rates of poverty. The changes underway in a local opportunity structure are often but not always perceived differently among the gendered social categories of a community (as represented by the six focus groups in each case). In villages sampled in Pakistan, agricultural mechanization and other technological advances have greatly reduced the need for farm labor. Yet rather than freeing up women's time to allow them to engage in other livelihood activities, innovation processes in most Pakistan cases appear to be further marginalizing women, confining them to homesteads and to housework and care activities (Chapter 4). In a case from Kenya, it was the men who reported being squeezed out of opportunities for both farming and jobs in a nearby town and observed their agency to be diminishing; women, meanwhile, have been stepping up to provision their households and saw this as increasing their agency. Both women and men nevertheless reaffirmed norms that favor men's dominance.

In sum, little should be assumed in the interplay between norms and agency, no matter how favorable or unfavorable local circumstances may appear. As shown in each empirical chapter, local norms often vary in nuanced and

contradictory ways and for seemingly countless reasons, including how gender intersects with age, life cycle phase, household position, marital status, socio-economic category, education, and more. Young women often appear to have the least freedom, especially in cases from South Asia. But again, not always. The concept of LNC, as I discuss in Chapter 1, embodies a great deal of learning about the regularities and yet diversity and unpredictability of women's and men's capacities to negotiate the various norms that marginalize them from resources and opportunities.

Q2 How do the mutually shaping dynamics of gender norms and women's and men's agency advance or impede agricultural innovation in a community?

The gender and generational norms that govern the productive and reproductive roles of farming households provide a key framework by which rural men and women conceive of their agency. These norms differentially shape and are shaped by women's and men's capacities to negotiate access to the resources and opportunities necessary for agricultural innovation and sustaining the household (also see Feldman & Welsh, 1995). Depending on the analytic scope, these gender norms often appear to have strong similarities and yet differences at the level of world regions, countries, sub-regions, villages, social categories, or individual households.

In the Ladder of Power and Freedom exercise men often gauge their decision-making capacity in relation to their status among the other men of their household and their ability to adequately fulfill their provisioning obligations (Chapters 3 and 4). In other words, men interpret their level of agency through a filter of the most basic norms of masculinity and the hierarchies that govern relations among men. Women also perceive their power and freedom in relation to the men of their household and often attribute a growing sense of agency to having gained a more supportive and cooperative relationship with their spouse

(Chapter 3). Sometimes women interpret their agency in relation to other junior or senior women, as well. Where norms are more supportive of women's income earning, women who report moving up the ladder often (but not always) identify a new or expanded livelihood role as a key reason for gaining power and freedom.

Life cycle and socio-economic forces interact with agency and agricultural innovation in deeply complex ways. Men's agency often (but not always) grows after they marry (Chapters 3 and 4). Young men across many rural communities worldwide know they stand to gain significant authority as they inherit land and/or become the senior male in their household. That is not to say that their choices are unconstrained: whether single or married, young men in most Pakistan cases perceive scarce choices, and speak to pressures to leave the village for better work or to follow in their father's footsteps (Chapter 4). For young brides, meanwhile, a new marriage is a phase when they must demonstrate subservience. As women move through their life cycle and their children grow up, they often gain status and influence in the household and, in many but not all contexts, greater capacity for engaging in livelihoods. In most of the 79 cases examined for Chapter 6, older married women, widows, and other women heading their households are more likely than younger women to be physically mobile and generating income.

The norms governing household relations in agricultural contexts can appear resistant to change, but actual practices are less so. In each empirical chapter we show women effectively negotiating access to resources and livelihood opportunities with their husbands, brothers, parents, and sometimes in-laws. Strong support and/or assets from husbands or brothers featured in testimonies from three-quarters of the women who reported moving out of poverty (or the 12 women "movers" who were among the set of 39 life stories; Chapter 5, p.163). Most of these upward movers testify to employing modern agricultural technologies, including improved seeds, chemical inputs, and

machines (also see Q3). Among the larger set of women who remained poor, most either had become widows or were separated from or abandoned by husbands, or they were their household's de facto head due to men who were disabled, heavy drinkers, and/or violent. While these "chronic poor" women also managed to negotiate resources from kin, they mainly used the assistance to cope with shocks and obtain household necessities rather than to launch productive enterprises. Among both movers and chronic poor, women's capacities to access and control the resources necessary for agricultural innovation or other economic initiatives hinge strongly on their relations with family and kin (also see, Rao, 2017).

Women, and men, alternately uphold, resist, and withdraw from local gender norms in their initiatives to carve out greater space for maneuver as they pursue projects individually and together with others. The preponderance of our evidence shows that these everyday processes of negotiating norms do not by themselves usher in the sort of normative change that actively encourages women and subordinate men to assert strong agency, mobilize resources, and significantly scale up their agricultural production or other livelihood initiatives. Although women now make up a quarter of de facto household heads in a village case from western Kenya, men's dominant status persists (Chapter 3).

Q3 Under what conditions do local men and women observe empowerment and poverty reduction in their village? Do processes of gender-equitable agricultural innovation contribute to these outcomes?

I present theory and evidence in Chapter 1 that argues for the potential role of shocks in weakening discriminatory norms and institutional rules, which then opens possibilities for more (or less) equitable norms and institutional blueprints to take hold. These same dynamics form the central theme of Chapter 6. The "transforming" village cases in the sample share contexts where diverse community members—older, younger, better off, poorer, women, men—*consistently* report significant gains in their agency and well-being over the

preceding decade. Compared to "climbing" and "churning" cases, in the transforming cases women speak of gaining greater freedom to express their opinions, move about their villages, and engage in commercial agriculture and other entrepreneurial initiatives. The evidence points to a shift in the set of norms governing women's roles and conducts in ways that signal a more equitable LNC compared to the other two types of cases. These more inclusive and accelerated social processes also appear to require a boom in resources and opportunities that diverse categories of women and men can access and benefit from. Transforming cases are marked by greater agricultural innovation, dynamic local markets, expanded infrastructure, and men's migration.

In short, under certain highly favorable local conditions, equitable gender relations contribute to more inclusive and effective agricultural innovation processes, empowerment, and accelerated poverty reduction. The evidence indicates these interactions to be powerfully reinforcing. Other village cases besides those in the transforming set are benefitting from similar booms in their agricultural economy as well as greater infrastructure and men's migration, as discussed in chapter 6; however, what appears to most distinguish the transforming cases is the set of norms that is encouraging gender equality. The challenge seems to be a local opportunity structure that is benefitting from a synchronicity of new gender rules *and* expanding resources.

7.2 BUILDING LESSONS WITH SOCIAL MECHANISM THEORY

This section works towards building a set of lessons from the thesis. For this I reach for social mechanism theory, which was introduced in Chapter 1 with the discussion of Charles Tilly's (1998) theory about the inequality-generating forces of paired and unequal social categories. While discussing additional theory may

be uncommon for the synthesis chapter of a thesis, the conceptual approach provides a compelling analytic framework for understanding the complex processes that mostly (but not always) drive exclusionary processes of social change and development.

Mechanism-based approaches are about "opening up black boxes and making explicit the causal cogs and wheels through which effects are brought about" (Hedström & Ylikoski, 2010, p. 54). Still, just as there are diverse theories about the foundational forces that mold our social lives, there are diverse approaches to defining and applying mechanisms (for 24 definitions, see Box 1 on page 559 of Mahoney, 2001). Tilly defines mechanisms abstractly as "events that alter relations among some specified set of elements" (2008, p. 139), and these "events" operate similarly across diverse settings. On the challenge of finding analytic "shortcuts or grand patterns that are useful ways to structure further research," Goldstone (2010, p. 359) suggests that "no one was more successful at this than Charles Tilly."

7.2.1 Environmental, cognitive, and relational mechanisms

Tilly (2008) specifies three primary social mechanisms: environmental, cognitive, and relational. Box 1 provides definitions with examples from the empirical chapters. While Tilly does not present the mechanisms this way, their labeling seemingly captures major theorical orientations in the social sciences: environmental mechanisms generate change at a broad societal level (e.g., systems theory); cognitive mechanisms alter the dispositions of individuals and social networks (e.g., rationale choice explanations); and relational mechanisms generate, sustain, or disrupt durable social ties (e.g., relational theories). In the jargon of mechanism theory, a robust social process then refers to a recurring mix or sequencing of mechanisms. I find this approach very powerful, but I do not begin to do justice here to Tilly's rigorous specification and wielding of a

multitude of mechanisms. In my defense, he identified a bewildering "cacophony" of mechanisms (Emirbayer, 2010, p. 412; see also Goldstone, 2010).[2]

Fundamental to understanding Tilly's approach is that he focuses mainly on relational mechanisms. In *Durable Inequality*, however, he (1998) begins with the cognitive "identity mechanism" by which rulers forge "paired and unequal categories such as male-female or black-white." The pairings then take the form of a "socially recognized (and usually incomplete) boundary between interpersonal networks" (2007b, p. 56). Other (relational) mechanisms that generate inequality (such as "exploitation" and "opportunity hoarding" by the senior male of a landowning household) incorporate the mechanism of categorical inequality into their workings. Tilly concentrates heavily on relational mechanisms because he perceives that it is most often through these agentic forces that the other two mechanisms are activated and sustained (1998, pp. 20-21).

Although it is a rarer phenomenon, a mechanism *can* reverse in ways that reduce inequalities. When opportunities for gaining power, resources, and/or status present as dynamic, "even weak and disorganized challengers can take advantage of opportunities" (Tarrow, 1996b, p. 54). Tilly expresses this mechanism as an "opportunity spiral" when possibilities for asserting claims appear more favorable. He elaborates local and national revolutionary episodes in history when such spirals take off and combine with other mechanisms, such as (cognitive) "identity shifts" that alter "prevailing collective, public answers to the questions 'Who are you?' 'Who are we?' and 'Who are they?'" (Tilly 2008, p. 143). For Tilly (2016, p. 15), the "trajectories of negotiations between individuals or groups"—or relational mechanisms—are vital to explaining whether the boundaries that define poverty and gender are rigid, so as to permit only individual boundary crossing, or more porous, enabling "categorical

boundary crossing" (Tilly, 2016, p. 15; 2007, 68). Categorical poverty escapes and identity shifts, for instance, can be seen in the case of Chinese immigrants in the United States who moved from the marginalized category of stigmatized laborers in the 19th century to entrepreneurship and other higher-status professions in the 20th century, thereby setting "a visible challenge and precedent for other underprivileged categories" (Tilly, 2007b, p. 68).

Box 1 The three primary types of social mechanisms

Environmental mechanisms "exert external influences." Such mechanisms in a village context increase or reinforce inequality, for instance, by requiring landownership to access formal credit opportunities and participate in extension opportunities (common requirements in many village cases). Alternatively, inequality could be reduced where access to extension and formal credit expands for women and men from disadvantaged categories of a village population (Chapter 6).

Cognitive mechanisms alter "individual and collective perception." These mechanisms operate at both subconscious and conscious levels. Gender norms may prescribe only men as farmers and traders in the village (Chapter 4). By contrast, a change toward more equitable norms for gender roles in agriculture is illustrated in testimonies from women and men who observe village women to be accomplished producers and traders (Chapter 6).

Relational mechanisms "alter connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks." Relational mechanisms that generate inequality can be seen, for example, in the typically narrow spaces for women to negotiate access to the types of resources and opportunities that may empower them to expand their livelihood activities or act on other important goals (Chapter 5). In the opposite direction, Chapter 6 opens with an example of a low-income woman who experiments with and benefits from leasing of cropland (discussed in greater detail below).

Note: Definitions from *Explaining Social Processes* (Tilly, 2008, p. 139).

Mechanisms can be studied on a scale ranging from micro levels (e.g., structuring household relations) to macro levels (e.g., when influential public

officials interact with leaders of industry or social movements). Mechanism-based approaches have been applied effectively to explain and compare shifts in occupational gender segregation, empowerment, poverty dynamics, and transitions toward and away from democratic governance at the level of communities, cities, and nation-states (e.g., Gibson & Woolcock, 2008; Heller & Evans, 2010; Mosse, 2010; Tilly, 2007a; Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2017). In short, mechanism-based approaches can be applied to diverse social processes at different scales, in different institutions, and over different time spans. Mechanisms can also reverse gears.

Tilly's approach to mechanisms and explanations of change in the intensity of inequality have resonated with many feminist scholars, including explicit references to this theory in three presidential addresses to the American Sociological Association (Reskin, 2003; Ridgeway, 2013; Epstein, 2016). Yet Tilly confides that he finds the gender divide to be the most challenging to explain, even when accounting for how this categorical pair "incorporate[s] long historical accumulations of belief and practice" (1998, p. 64). Ultimately, he concedes that it is not clear whether social categories persist out of "convention or depend heavily on unavoidably recurrent features of small-scale social life" (p. 64). I would simply argue that all three mechanisms are inextricably intertwined and gendered.

Collaborators and reviewers of Tilly point to varied tensions because he considered relational mechanisms to be so forceful (DiMaggio, 2007; Emirbayer, 2010; Tarrow, 1996a; Krinsky & Mische, 2013).[3] Tilly largely dismisses norms, for instance, as he considers most analyses that work with this concept to be too static. He also argues that social categories are "organizationally interchangeable" in that all forms of paired categorical differences are created and sustained through similar social processes (Tilly, 1998, p. 9). Such arguments appear to discount that gender boundaries express more often as "aggressively

exclusionary" compared to religious or ethnic boundaries (Phillips, 2001, p. 125). Nor does he address important contributions on the forces of intersectionality and diversity of identities and power relations.[4] Cecilia Ridgeway and Shelley Correll (2004, p. 512) argue that paired and unequal interactions between men and women occur much more often and at a far more intimate level ("gender goes home with you") than is the case for other social group differences. Still, the understanding of social categories as "problem-solving social inventions" (Tilly, 1998, p. 21) echo in this theory. Ridgeway (2011), for instance, in her discussions of why gender inequality endures in institutions that now have diverse rules to discourage gender discrimination, she elaborates on how change in beliefs about gender status difference lags change in women's and men's "material circumstances" (p. 185). Moreover, when people pursue new and uncertain projects, they bring their well-known social rules about gender into the "new practices and social forms that they create" (p. 185-186).

7.2.2 Framing local normative climate as a cognitive mechanism

The impetus that underpins the LNC concept is to strengthen attention to and understanding of the contextual and fluid gendered rules that constrain and yet also enable the agency of women and disadvantaged categories of men. Such agency "from below" is vital to unlocking equality-generating processes of inclusive agricultural innovation, empowerment, and poverty reduction in rural locations. I agree with Tilly's emphasis on relational mechanisms, but my empirical work with norms shows cognitive forces to be powerful, too. The agentic relational mechanisms do not operate in a vacuum. With these concerns in mind, I argue for conceptualizing LNC, normative relaxation, and normative change as three cognitive mechanisms. In Chapter 1 (section 1.2.2), I distinguish the slower dynamics of normative relaxation from the accelerated processes of normative change. My arguments for all three mechanisms follow the

understanding of cognitive mechanisms as individual and shared perceptions that "intertwine closely with social relations" (Tilly, 1998, p. 21).

With normative relaxation, women's and men's daily negotiations of norms do build pressure for some norms to change over time but these processes appear to be slow and uneven. The evidence from the empirical chapters suggests that while different norms change and do become more in line with actual practices in a community, these processes appear to have limited effects on gender power relations in the social contexts of smallholder communities. Importantly, norms express deep values and interlock in in ways that both constrain and enable agency.[5] They have both visible and invisible generative forces of their own. Across diverse contexts, the pressures to at least appear to be complying with these norms can be seen in the many women who describe their occupational status as housewives although they are economically active. Quite possibly the women and men who joined the focus groups and agreed to interviews have many more experiences with equitable roles and relations than they revealed. In the less observable subconscious realm, cognitive tests conducted in the United States indicate that "people automatically and unconsciously sex categorize any actual person that they cast themselves in relation to" and that social interaction with a person is not possible "without gendering him or her first" (Ridgeway & Correll, 2000, p. 111).

The mechanism of normative change differs from the day-to-day social processes by which women and men alternately uphold, negotiate, and withdraw from different norms. While akin to Tilly's mechanism of boundary shift, equality-generating normative change is not a process effected and sustained by the mechanism of categorical inequality. Rather the dynamics of normative change result from shocks that present opportunities for new forms of agency and rules to take hold across all the diverse social categories and institutions that organize an agricultural community. Evidence presented in Chapter 6 on the

transforming cases shows less restrictive norms cutting across generational and socio-economic categories, household relations, and other formal and informal institutions. Normative change that encourages gender equality necessarily alters all other categories of social relations in a location and thus marks a transformation to a more inclusive normative climate. An analytic lens that emphasizes the relational work of categorical pairs in a context (and thus obscures the diversity of social categories and agentic capacities), is inadequate for explaining the accelerated dynamics that cause multiple norms to shift and diverse women and men to observe empowerment.

The general mechanism of LNC is echoed in Sidney Tarrow's concept of a "political opportunity structure, which he defines this as the "consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent or national—signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements" (1996b, p. 54; emphasis in original). As I argue in Chapter 1, a process of normative change that strengthens the status, power, and resources of women and subordinate categories of men requires a kind of orchestrated social movement. This broad-based co-creation is vital for altering a local culture. A freer climate signals more space for agency and negotiating, and what appear as faster and less stressful trajectories of negotiation. A restrictive normative climate implies a shared understanding and enforcement of rules that mainly discourage agency.

Figure 1 displays the three mechanisms and confluence of desirable circumstances that mark the transforming cases (Chapter 6). While an opportunity spiral is classified as a robust relational mechanism (Tilly, 2008, p. 143), evidence in Chapter 6 suggests that cognitive and environmental mechanisms must contribute as well. Categorical change in resource access (i.e., evidence of interactional mechanisms) is expressed in the finding that both women's and men's low-income focus groups in the transforming cases observed on average

their community's poverty falling by more than 50 percent over the past decade, while in churning cases women women's groups on average indicated no poverty reduction and men 17 percent. The rapid poverty declines in the transforming cases occurred in local opportunity structures with more equitable norms (cognitive mechanism) and in macro forces that drive strong growth across various countries' interlinked economies and expand men's migration (environmental mechanism).

Figure 1 Interlocking equality-generating mechanisms of a transforming agrarian system

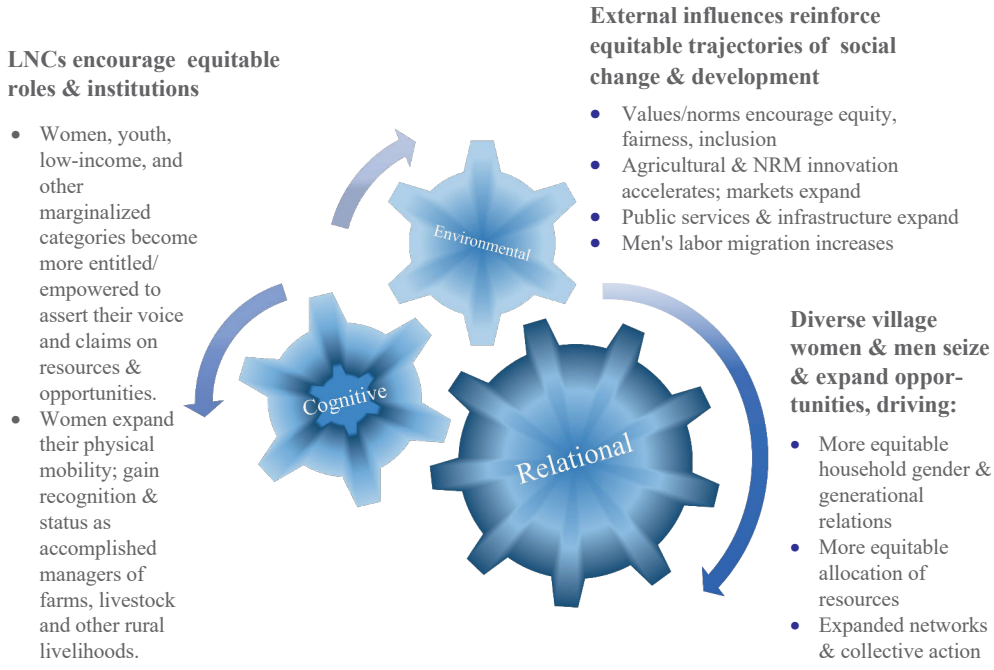
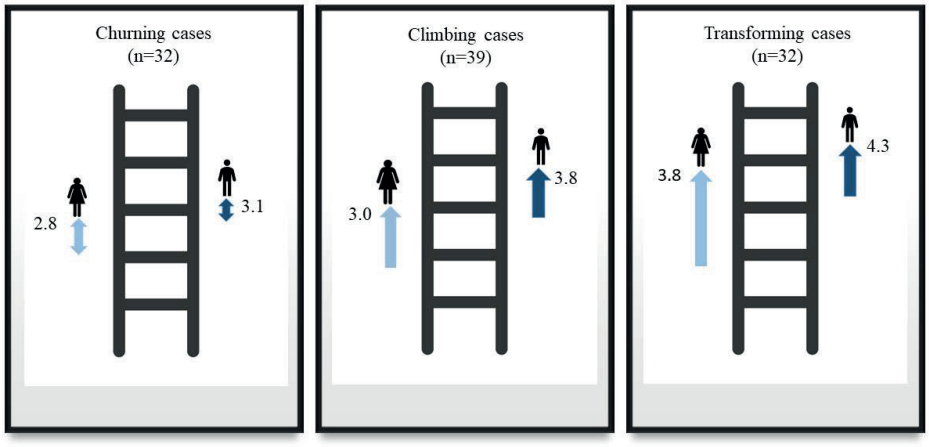


Figure 2 displays a dynamic perspective on the Ladder of Power and Freedom data presented in Chapter 6. It is noticeable that women's groups on average in the three types of cases perceive roughly similar starting positions 10 years ago.

So do the men, albeit at higher levels, as gender norms prescribe. The double-headed arrows in the churning cases show that some focus groups representing different categories of their community perceived themselves as stuck or falling on their ladder. On average women were unable to reach the relatively healthy step three, while men in churning cases showed a relatively static trajectory just above step three. Static agency and falling agency raise concerns because the changing composition and status positions of household members generally provide more space for agency as women and men move through their life cycles (albeit often in ways that often differ by gender and other social group differences).

Figure 2 Perceived median step for current decision-making capacity of most village women (left side of ladder) and men (right side) on five-step Power & Freedom Ladder (By typology and gender, 154 middle-income focus groups)



Note. Double-headed arrows of churning cases are due to some falling to lower steps.

The social processes that drive empowerment differ in that these require a "*change in the terms* on which resources are acquired as much as an increase in access to resources" (Kabeer, 2001, p. 20 emphasis added). In transforming cases, chances for accessing resources and opportunities appear to grow rapidly as more and more women and men, individually and jointly, strive to move their projects forward. These dynamics appear to encourage women and men from diverse social categories to access land, cash, improved seeds, machines, information, networks, and other resources required to participate more productively in their village's agricultural innovation process and in other livelihood activities. In one transforming case, a member of the women's middle-income focus group, when testifying to growing decision-making capacity, explains that in-laws "don't try to control their daughters-in-law" in her community (Chapter 6, p.192). Moreover, Figure 2 suggests that there is more interdependence between men's and women's agency than often recognized: men perceive the greatest power and freedom in contexts where women, too, perceive significant gains in their capacity to shape consequential decisions.

In Chapter 1, I set the stage for the differing rhythms of change revealed in the typology and a mechanisms perspective. The trajectories of negotiations that mark processes of normative relaxation appear as slow and uneven as women and men negotiate one norm here and another there. The rarer dynamics of equality-generating social change and development expressed in the transforming cases arise under tremendous collective pressure (Tilly, 1998). From this perspective, LNC could also be conceived as regulating the windspeeds of freedom in a location.

Below I draw on mechanism theory to frame four lessons from the conceptual and empirical contributions of my thesis.

Lesson 1 The mechanism of normative relaxation operates continuously in all community cases. Many norms endure that constrain the capacity of women and subordinate men to act on their interests and needs. While a woman's or man's need to negotiate a norm (or two or three) is often accommodated, the latitude for these negotiations is unpredictable and even small infractions may trigger harmful sanctions. This mechanism provides latitude for the ongoing reformulation of norms as the interests, needs, and circumstances of people's lives continuously change. Yet these daily processes by which women and men uphold, negotiate, and withdraw from different norms do not appear to create much change in gender status positions and conducts expected of women and men in the contexts of smallholder communities.

Lesson 2 The mechanism of normative change that generates equality may be triggered by a shock that profoundly disrupts local institutions. In rare cases, a window may open for diverse categories of women and men in a community to pursue goals and these agentic processes both drive and benefit from an inclusive LNC that is signaling the shift to a new framework of equitable norms. This LNC may encourage and accelerate the reinforcing dynamics of livelihood innovation, empowerment, and poverty reduction among women and men from diverse social categories of the community. In sharp contrast to these dynamics, shocks may also cause the mechanism of normative change to spiral in ways that drive a highly exclusionary LNC and extreme forms of inequality that crush most community's members' agency and access to opportunities.

Lesson 3 In smallholder agricultural villages, the sparking of an opportunity spiral is rare because these equality-generation dynamics appear to require strongly reinforcing interactional, cognitive, and environmental mechanisms in a location. Findings from the transforming cases show these interacting forces in their evidence of diverse norms that were encouraging gender equality and inclusive processes agricultural innovation, a dynamic local market, expanded infrastructure, men's migration, and a strong macroeconomy. This lesson requires further research to validate, as discussed in the section to follow.

Lesson 4 Most LNCs tend to generate inequality. The perpetual mechanism of normative relaxation contributes to this signaling no matter the circumstances of a smallholder community.

Finally, I would like to take this learning forward by refining the definition of LNC. While the initial definition can still hold—*the prevailing set of gender norms in a community* (chapter 3, p. 86)—the notion of prevailing does not adequately express the fluidity of norms. Nor does the idea of a "set of norms" convey the interlocking ways in which norms operate and retain their hold and yet also bend and change. With these concerns in mind, I offer an extended definition:

> *LNC: The normative order of a smallholder agricultural community, and the extent to which this prevailing framework of gendered social rules encourages or discourages the freedom and agency of all community members to pursue the kind of lives that they value.*

7.3 MULTI-LEVEL REFLECTIONS ON THE TRANSFORMING CASES

Here I widen the scope to reflect critically on processes that shape social change and development beyond smallholder communities. For this I reach for a theoretical framework that engages the possibility of a "niche-innovation" driving radical change to an entire system of institutions. As my evidence base is local, this remains an exploratory and speculative exercise.

The multi-level perspective (MLP) on system innovation emerged from a subfield of the innovation literature that theorizes about the potentially transformative effects of an innovation on a complex "socio-technical system" (e.g., Geels & Schot, 2007; Schot & Geels, 2008; Leeuwis et al., 2021). The

multi-level perspective builds on lessons from case studies of major institutional change in sectors that range from "transport to energy to agriculture and sanitation" (Schot & Geels, 2008, p. 541).

While the system innovation literature features a strong technological bent, the MLP conceptual model provides a helpful organizing structure to weigh macro concerns because it builds on relational approaches and can be applied to explore causes of major social change at different scales. As one might presume, this theory cautions that institutions and their rulers mostly resist pressures for sweeping change. Indeed, Leeuwis et al. (2021) employ the MLP model to explain persistence of poverty as a seemingly entrenched "property" of the agri-food system, and they review diverse institutional constraints, including in the international AR&D system which has poverty reduction as a guiding objective. So far, this literature has not addressed gender dimensions of system innovation, but the MLP's dynamic institutional orientation opens the door for this.

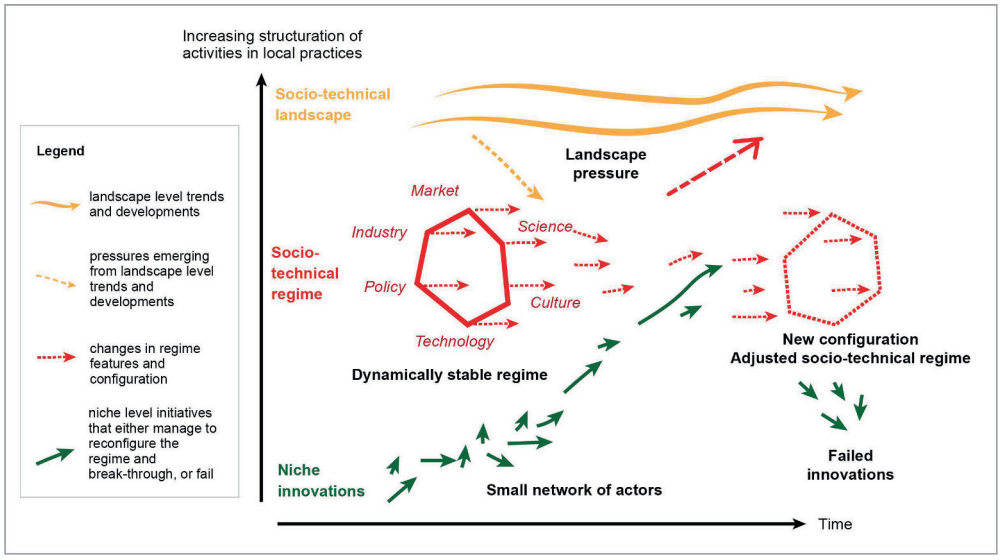
In the sections to follow, I first introduce the MLP's three levels. Then I center the MLP framework on the AR&D system at the "regime" level and explore how regularities in these forces potentially contributed to the patterning revealed in the community typology, and to the dynamics of transforming cases, in particular (Chapter 6). I conclude this look at the MLP by reflecting on experiences with technological innovations that contributed to rural women's empowerment. Along the way I also argue that LNC would strengthen the explanatory power of the MLP.

7.3.1 Introduction to the MLP

The MLP framework comprises a nested hierarchy of three tiers: *niche innovations* (micro), *socio-technical regime* (meso), and *socio-technical landscape* (macro) (Leeuwis et al., 2021; Geels & Schot, 2007; Schot & Geels, 2008). The middle tier, the socio-technical regime, receives the model's most

nuanced treatment, with a pair of hexagonal diagrams connected by arrows to show the regime transforming over time (see Figure 3). Each hexagon represents an array of institutions that include markets/user preferences, industry, policy, technology, science, and culture. Again, typically, a regime maintains its dominance and resists radical change. When faced with significant pressures, institutions are malleable and adapt. More rarely, landscape and niche pressures interact with the regime in ways that usher in a new array of institutions. For example, a new socio-technical regime gained ascendancy as cars replaced horse-powered transport, and a novel and dominant institutional configuration became "tied together with roads, gas stations, oil companies, automobile retailers, repair shops, and car drivers, to name just a few elements" (Schot et al., 1994, p. 1061).

Figure 3 The multi-level perspective on system innovation, with implications for system transformation processes



Note. Figure slightly adapted from Leeuwis et al. (2021).

Socio-technical landscape, the top tier, refers to the "exogenous environment beyond the direct influence of niche and regime actors (e.g. macro-economics, deep cultural patterns, macro-political developments)" (Schot & Geels, 2008, p. 545). The typically "stable dynamics" of the landscape, as described in Figure 3, could include the persistent ebbs and flows of capitalist labor and commercial markets, accelerating climate change and environmental damage, the persistence of poverty and inequality, massive migrations of people, or the continuous reformulations of patriarchal values and norms.

At the bottom level, niche innovations are conceived as local projects that both cooperate and compete to gain traction among the regime's institutions or, potentially, spark system change across the institutional hexagon.

In Figure 3, culture appears as one dimension of the regime's hexagon. While one might take issue with positioning culture as comparable to institutions, the narrative explanations of the model are in line with relational theories that account for strong cultural influences on innovations, including contextual and fluid aspects of social norms. Schot and Geels (2008, p. 541) signal possibilities for varied niche trajectories with "particular drivers and contexts." They further highlight the greater fluidity of norms at the niche level, which provides space for creative interaction, skills building, and experimentation. At the regime level, niche interactions with institutions then potentially contribute to transforming the system through diffusion of new "learning processes," "cognitive routines," "belief systems," "regulative rules," and "normative roles" (p. 545).

For my purposes here, what is especially useful about the MLP framework is that a system innovation can be examined at either a micro, meso, or macro level. In the discussion to follow, I start at the bottom and move upward with the MLP to consider the forces that enable a system transformation that unlocks inclusive processes agricultural innovation in smallholder communities, and this in turn speeds poverty reduction and the flowering of gender equality. As

expressed in the diagonal arrows in Figure 3, I also reflect on interactions across the levels.

7.3.1.1 Niche innovations as inclusive LNCs

For our niche innovations under observation, I can identify these as the inclusive LNCs found in the eight transforming cases (Chapter 6. The opportunity spirals and normative changes observed in these villages appear as rare, localized, and non-contagious phenomena, but longitudinal research and samples that include nearby villages would be needed to confirm this. After all, both the social mechanism and MLP analytic approaches also provide for some innovations to have unexpected consequences.

As discussed in section 2, the findings that underpin the community typology demonstrate that villagers vary in their perceptions of local women's and men's decision-making capacities or the poverty trends of their village. Working with the LNC provides different entry points for interpreting and improving understanding of similar and yet diverse perceptions about possibilities for pursuing consequential goals. Most cases express an excluding LNC that dampens the agency of women and often of many men, contributing to perceptions of limited opportunities to move forward on goals. Whether in cases from Pakistan, where women testify to norms that mostly discourage their various income generation activities, or in Nigeria, where in several cases there are some norms that appear more in sync with women's diverse livelihood initiatives, we find that some women perceive their livelihood activities as strengthening their sense of power and freedom while others never mention this. Women cannot "really have a say … when you are not contributing much," relates a 50-year-old woman trader from a village of Nigeria's Oyo State (Chapter 3, p. 88. In other words, processes of normative relaxation do alter different norms in a

location but not necessarily in ways that women indicate to be empowering or encouraging of more equitable gender relations. Many men who joined our focus groups positioned their community's men on the bottom step or step two of the Ladder of Power and Freedom. When asked for explanations of the low ratings, they often responded with silence, as a man who is powerless or lacks command of resources is subject to shame in many cultures. In a churning context from Ethiopia's Oromia State, a 50-year-old farmer and father of eight who joined the low-income focus group was among the relatively few men to offer an explanation for a low rating: "The community considers them poor, and they are discouraged about changing their lives" (Chapter 6, p. 198).

Occasionally sparks of either beneficial or harmful change suddenly appear that tumble seemingly unmovable walls. Norms, roles, and institutions sustain a severe shock and a window opens for change. Chapter 6 opens with Sonam's story from Uttar Pradesh, India. The 40-year-old mother shares that five years ago she began generating income. Through her own initiatives, she reports, she was able to overcome decades of violence, subservience, and impoverishment while raising her children. "When [my husband] lived here, he abused me physically and mentally," she says. "I lived like a servant" without "giving my opinion on any matter" (Chapter 6, p. 175). Yet during a period when her husband was away, Sonam decided to risk sharecropping for the first time in her life, and the farming proceeds allowed her to significantly improve her own well-being and that of her family. Sonam's story is possible to imagine in almost any of the 79 village cases sampled for Chapter 6, but her community is one of the rare transforming cases. Sonam's agency and achievements are nurtured by an inclusive LNC.

Although evidence for the contribution of gender equality to the dynamics underway in the transforming cases is discussed earlier in this chapter, this bears further emphasis through additional evidence. In three-fourths of the

transforming cases, key informants indicate that at least half the traders in the village market are women, but much lower shares of the climbing and churning cases have such a strong presence of local women traders (Chapter 6, p. 203). Likewise, it is common for women of varied generations and marital statuses—whether young and single, young and married, older and married, or widowed—to be working for pay in the transforming cases; however, in the other cases paid work only became common for women as they moved past their youth. Similarly, youth focus groups in all but one transforming case indicate that it is common for village women to move about independently in public, while this is the case in about half the climbing and churning cases. Young women in the transforming cases also report being less likely to marry at young ages than women in the other cases. We find greater evidence in the transforming cases of more cooperative gender relations and of women employing improved agricultural technologies and practices, experiences that they describe as both profitable and empowering. In climbing and churning cases, by comparison, women more rarely report close cooperation with their spouse or using novel agricultural technologies (Chapter 6).

The unique dynamics of inclusive LNCs are consistent with key arguments in Damon Centola's (2021) book *Change: How to Make Big Things Happen*. "Stop looking for special people," Centola advises, "and focus instead on special places" (p. 297). He marshals evidence from diverse case studies to argue that the "the best place to mobilize an insurgency is through strong ties in the periphery" (p. 72). Such was the case, for example, with a group of Iowa farmers who in 1934 adopted drought-resistant hybrid corn, enabling their peers to see with their own eyes the significant benefits of this technology. Yet this "community laboratory" trailed significant pressures from a global economic recession, the dust bowl catastrophe, loss of productivity from available seeds, and years of intensive informational campaigns and repeated rejections of hybrid corn in

(seemingly) more promising communities elsewhere in Iowa (pp. 227-233). Centola's work on forward leaps in gender equality is less convincing because it centers on the "silver bullet" of women attaining 25 percent membership in an organization. I can think of many organizations where this formula appears not to be working.

7.3.1.2 Regime institutions and LNCs

In examining the regime level, I focus on the diverse institutions in the agri-food system that operate in and provide services to smallholder communities. These institutions may be formal or informal; state, market, or civic; with urban or rural headquarters; and with missions that reach across local, subnational, national, or transnational landscapes. While more systematic evidence is needed, when the available data is filtered by community typology a clear pattern emerges of regime forces at work.

As detailed in Chapter 6, the presence of infrastructure and public services tends to vary in similar ways across the community typology. Transforming cases feature the greatest access to these resources, including electricity and relative proximity to a town with government offices. By comparison, only half the churning cases have electricity, although close to 80 percent are also close to government offices (p. 203).[6] Relative to climbing and churning cases, transforming cases are also more likely to have a daily market, teenagers enrolled in secondary schools, active producer groups, and access to a bus line. Together these conditions suggest greater connectivity among transforming cases to the regime's various state and market institutions. This unevenness across the much larger sample of climbing and churning cases points to a relatively inept and powerless agri-food regime.

Still, it is encouraging that empowering women along with poverty reduction are now routine objectives of many national and international

institutions within and beyond the agri-food system. Traces of these objectives appear unevenly in the cases. Extension programs continue to show contradictions in how they address their decades-old poverty and gender mandates. An earlier analysis of 70 GENNOVATE cases, for example, found extension services to be relatively accessible to landowning men in most (though not all) cases, but much less so for landless low-income men and women (Badstue et al., 2017; Petesch et al., 2017). Access among women varied greatly by region. At least some and sometimes many women report access to extension in 27 maize-based village cases, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa (Petesch et al., 2017). Yet women mostly, though not always, indicate limited access in the 43 wheat-based cases, which are mainly in South Asia (Badstue et al., 2017). These patterns likely reflect norms that provide greater latitude for women's productive roles in many of the contexts sampled in sub-Saharan Africa relative to the South Asian cases, as discussed earlier in this chapter. It should be noted, moreover, that even when women observe access to extension, they frequently qualify their responses by explaining that "farming activities differ by gender, that women's participation is limited due to household demands and constraints on their physical mobility, that one-on-one interactions with male extension agents (rather than in groups) could risk social disapproval for women, or that only women who head their households engage with extension services" (Petesch et al., 2017, p. 30).

Of further importance to rural women's empowerment, many countries around the world have recently strengthened their criminal laws to prevent intimate partner violence against women and/or have reformed family laws to bolster women's claims to inheritance and other rights. Gender laws are not a focus of this study, but the results of a rating exercise in the low-income focus groups (conducted anonymously by each member) may show some evidence of the laws' effects on village levels of intimate partner violence against women. Most women and men in the 70 cases perceive declining but persistent low levels

of this violence, affecting approximately 10 to 20 percent of the village women on average over the preceding year.[7] Another rating exercise explores inheritance practices, and study participants mainly observe that it is difficult in most (but not all) study communities for a woman to assert control of an inheritance should she receive one (Badstue et al., 2017, pp. 50-51; Petesch et al., 2017, pp. 40-41).

These findings suggest that many regime institutions of importance to rural communities do strive to support more equitable local-level development but have limited incentives or capacities to address key barriers that span across the MLP.

7.3.1.3 The landscape and LNCs

Finally, we move to the top tier, the socio-technical landscape, where I focus again on normative forces. In the sociological literature, norms operate in ways that appear superficial. Basic rules about femininity and masculinity, for instance, enable these influences to transcend time and space (Sewell, 1999; also see Chapter 1). The various gender-differentiated norms that operate at macro levels of a society appear as more stable and superficial than the more contextual, fluid and diverse norms that operate in social contexts where individuals interact frequently (e.g., Sewell, 1999). This is not to say that these differing social processes mean that landscape forces are not diverse or contradictory, however. On the one hand, there are the global Sustainable Development Goals, and on the other hand, various landscape influences that seemingly drive uncontrollable, unstainable, and inequitable development processes.

The transforming cases share a clear patterning that suggest they were benefiting from landscape forces that nurture equality. These cases, situated in India, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam, feature democratic political systems (albeit with mixed records[8]), middle-income status, strong macroeconomic growth, and high rates of male migration. These conditions,

however, are also present in some of the climbing and churning cases with exclusionary LNCs, including villages situated in the same countries and rural regions as the transforming cases. Given the scarcity of transforming cases (8) relative to climbing cases (39) and transforming cases (32), the findings suggest that most landscape forces filter through and influence regime and niche institutions in ways that most often (but not always) generate inequality. These findings are consistent with wider literatures that provide "accounts of global forces of power and their intersection with and utilization of local systems of oppression" (Koggel, 2003, p. 179).

In a case from a Luhya village of Kenya, village men express disempowerment due to an inability to access cropland or jobs (Chapter 3). Demographic forces in the landscape also figure in these testimonies. Elders in the village now live longer and healthier lives than previous generations. These demographic pressures are also delaying considerably the transfer of land and other assets to younger generations (mostly sons).

Further research is needed, but it may take a boom of landscape pressures to reverse mechanisms that sustain and deepen inequalities at the lower levels of the MLP. Globalization processes contributed, for instance, to a burst of women's garment factory jobs in the mid-1980s in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Within less than 18 months, these opportunities appeared to transform norms attached to young women's roles and freedom of mobility (Feldman, 2001; Kabeer, 2000b).[9] Echoes of these dynamics can be seen in a case near Mymensingh city in Bangladesh, where village women are returning from factory jobs, buying land, and raising cattle and goats (Chapter 5, p. 155). Perhaps in conjunction with other booms, such doings would provide steppingstones to normative change in this village. This might be catalyzed by a mix of opportunities for women and men such as increased access to educational scholarships; leadership and entrepreneurship workshops and other resources for producer groups of women

and men; growth in non-farm jobs that are seen to be desirable for women and for men and that are located near the village; extension services that are more responsive to women and subordinate categories of men; or forms of financing that better enable women and men with limited collateral to lease farmland, purchase machinery, expand their livestock activities, or experiment with new seed technologies or non-traditional crops (also see discussions and conclusions in the empirical chapters).

7.3.2 Gender, technology, and system innovation

As the system innovation literature tends to focus on technological breakthroughs, I conclude this section with reflections on the strong gender dimensions of capacities for innovation with agricultural and other technologies.

Technology is classified as a relatively deep (i.e., less perceptible and subject to molding) "cultural item," alongside "religious ideas, political and artistic forms, and so on" (Sewell, 1999, p. 54). Portes (2006) positions technological breakthroughs as a pathway for transforming skills repertoires, which interact closely with and thus may also alter norms. My thesis follows the GENNOVATE study in approaching technology through the lens of innovation and the gendered social and institutional processes in which capacities for innovation are embedded (Badstue, Petesch, et al., 2018, p. 7). Of concern is that men are almost always perceived as the ones solely experimenting with novel agricultural technologies. This marginalization of women reinforces gender roles and power relations, with masculine norms appearing to be "embedded in technology itself" as well as in the social processes of innovation (Wajcman, 2009, p. 146; Alsos et al., 2013; Schott & Cheraghi, 2015). In addition to the deeper cultural forces that surround technology, many feminist approaches situate technology as "a point of political leverage" (Bray, 2007, p. 39). Despite decades of research on gender, technology, and innovation processes, which I explore

further below, the system innovation literature does not yet explicitly address gender. There are good reasons, however, for system innovation theory to engage with feminist approaches and vice versa. Though they make different arguments, both literatures stress contextual influences and employ concepts such as coupling, coproduction, and performativity to express the mutual shaping of "the bio-material, the social and the symbolic" or institutional realm (Leeuwis, 2013, p. 12; Wajcman, 2009, p. 150; Faulkner, 2001; Harding, 1986; Bray, 2007; Haraway, 1988; Leeuwis & Aarts, 2011).

7.3.2.1 Expected and unexpected innovation trajectories

As shown in section 7.1, the empirical chapters find both similarities and diversity in agency and norms interactions. Like these findings, many other analyses of GENNOVATE cases also document experiences of women who observe limited agency and diverse norms that reinforce this. Nonetheless, in these same villages some (and sometimes many) women report gaining a strong voice and more cooperative gender relations over the preceding years, sometimes due to experiences with agricultural innovations (Badstue, López, et al., 2018; Badstue, Petesch et al., 2020; Badstue et al., 2017; Farnworth et al., 2019; Farnworth, López et al., 2018; Farnworth et al., 2020; Petesch et al., 2017; Locke et al., 2017; Bergman Lodin et al., 2019; Bullock & Tegbaru, 2019; Elias et al., 2018; Rietveld et al., 2020; Aregu et al., 2019; Kawarazuka & Prain, 2019). Similar complexity is found in other analyses with GENNOVATE data on men's agency and experiences with agricultural innovation. In varied contexts, some men observe limited capacity to participate in the agricultural innovation processes of their community, such as men who are young and/or from households with scarce resources (Rietveld et al., 2020; Elias et al., 2018; Bullock & Tegbaru, 2019; Badstue et al., 2017; Locke et al., 2017).

Still, interactions between technological change and local opportunity structures may sometimes serve as a lightning rod for institutional transformation. Galié and colleagues (2022) present a transforming case[10] from Rajasthan, India, where men's and women's empowerment and rapid poverty reduction are fueled by several beneficial and interacting forces. Expanding opportunities as livestock keepers, mainly for women, are being supported by an active local dairy cooperative, access to improved cattle breeds, and more plentiful and nutritional fodder from a surge in local barley production. Other villagers, mainly men, are benefiting from profitable contract farming opportunities with an international brewery. The brewery also provides improved barley seeds and technical support. The local women's and men's *simultaneous* opportunities to learn of, access, and benefit from diverse and interacting technological advances appears to occur relatively rarely. It may be that these dynamics require niche-innovations with local norms and institutional arrangements that encourage and enable more equitable access to resources and new opportunities together with external partners and networks that also benefit from and encourage these inclusive local dynamics. These synergies may then potentially enhance capacities at multiple levels that drive transformative processes of learning and institutional change on a wider scale.

7.3.2.2 Exploring the gendered niche-regime-landscape interactions that shape technological innovation

My introduction to innovation theory—and to the strong technological bent of much of this theory (e.g., Rogers, 1995)—came in the course of my earlier research on women's empowerment. Our research team asked, "Can innovations create long-term positive shifts in gender relations?" (Malhotra et al., 2009, p. 3). We scoured the literature for cases and lessons from innovations in technology use, gender norm change, and economic resilience that appeared to unlock

pathways for women's empowerment and gender equality (also see Petesch, 2012). We identified many innovations but no silver bullets. In the report resulting from this research, we concluded that a common lever of change was boundary-breaking objectives and partnerships, which, in retrospect, managed to build on "optimal timing and capitalize on multiple trajectories of social, economic, and political transformation already underway in a society" (Malhotra et al., 2009, p. 11).

In the report, we presented the inspiring case of the Grameen Village Phone Program (VPP), which enabled rural women in Bangladesh to provide cell phone services just as this new technology (along with cell phone towers) was being rolled out in 1997. The eligibility requirements for the first 50 women selected to become "village phone ladies" included strong repayment histories with Grameen's microfinance program, experience in running profitable businesses, literacy, and residing in a home with electricity located in the center of their village (Bayes et al., 1999). Once the model had proven successful, the eligibility requirements were relaxed. In other words, Grameen built on its existing women's networks and experimented with locational differences and fractures of gendered class differences as stepping-stones toward inclusion rather than exclusion. By 2011, the number of active cell phone operators earning a "modest income" from the program expanded to nearly 700,000 across 83,000 villages (ADB, 2013, p. X). The capacity of the women entrepreneurs in these villages made possible the program's success, and 95 percent of the VPP operators were women in the program's early years.

As is common with technologies that go to scale, the profitability of this innovative program dissipated over time. During 2007 and 2008, competition increased from other providers, and prices dropped for cell phones and cell phone services. Also with precedence, large numbers of men began to access and seize control of the technology, including by using their wives' or other female kin's

connections to Grameen (Hossain & Beresford, 2012; Rashid, 2017).[11] Hossain and Beresford (2012, p. 465) pose a strategic question by asking if VPP might have been more beneficial by "embrac[ing] the idea of male inclusion."

The MLP's institutional grounding and interacting analytic levels provide a useful organizing framework for examining the complex forces that mostly stymie innovations with a potential to transform a regime. The discussions above suggest that incorporating LNC into all three levels would strengthen the framework's explanatory power.

In the meantime, it is no small irony that the MLP model in Figure 3 appears to illustrate the peripheral phenomenon of a transforming village case with an inclusive LNC as a "failed innovation." These localized achievements appear to have little influence on regime institutions or other niches. The model, however, could conceivably be adapted to account for the longer trajectory—and more numerous trials and errors—that an equality-generating innovation is likely to require to influence or transform a regime's diverse gendered social norms and institutions. An innovation system model that registers positive societal outcomes more visibly, such as progress toward one or more SDGs, may provide a further means to improve understanding of innovations that contribute to easing inequalities across the MLP. Otherwise, this vital learning about the complexities of equitable institutional change is likely to remain limited and easy for powerholders to discourage.

7.4 TAKING LNC FORWARD

Here I consider implications for the agricultural research and development (AR&D) system of lessons in my thesis about LNC and the community typology. I also address concerns for gaps in the understanding of macro influences on the

norms and agency interplay. In this effort, I will suggest that chances of sparking an AR&D system innovation that generates equality are likely to be greatest where the sites of innovation aiming to achieve this goal are able to build on previous experiences with equality-generating mechanisms (also see Ridgeway, 2011, p. 188). All my proposals will be framed as pilots due to the exploratory nature of my research for the thesis.

For LNC to be of wider use to the spaces of innovation with gender and poverty goals in smallholder communities, field pilots will be needed to test and adapt the concept for applied AR&D needs. On this front it is promising that research with LNC is already advancing. One team has produced a quantitative methodology that applies LNC to inform targeting strategies in AR&D interventions (López et al., 2022). Another team is developing the notion of multiple LNCs in a single location as they work with nuanced intersectional evidence from a large Ugandan community (Rietveld et al., forthcoming).

In addition to these contributions, pilots are needed for LNC to be tested as part of the core theory of change and methodology for an AR&D program or intervention. For this piloting I propose community-based action research approaches because they can be tuned to how diagnosing an LNC builds up from local people's deep knowledge of their community. These more collaborative research processes also hold potential for nurturing processes of empowerment and the normative change that this requires (see Box 2). The community typology findings as well as LNC may also deepen this learning. As part of this piloting the ladder activities (Petesch & Bullock, 2018; Petesch, 2018b) and other group-based methods could be adapted to trace an LNC over time, the inclusivity of innovation processes, women's and men's agency, poverty levels, or other concerns of community members. This focus on change provides a truly powerful analytic tool for shared learning about different types of LNCs.

Another important area for further research is to develop and pilot learning models that improve understanding of interactions between macro and micro influences on agricultural innovation processes and the trajectory of social change and development at the local level. An MLP approach that is informed by LNC across the levels offers a promising conceptual framework for this piloting. Bottom-up collaborative action research methods that engage key external stakeholders as well as diverse community members would provide a strong fit for multi-level learning. This piloting could also provide opportunities for validating and deepening the community typology findings.

Bottom-up action research with empowerment objectives is inherently complex and unpredictable. Expert facilitation capacities will be needed to nurture and sustain the trust, reflexivity, and inclusive learning dynamics required if such research is to be authoritative and rigorous. Each of the pilot facilitation teams will need time and resources to strengthen their own capacities to guide the research process. All those contributing to the pilots will need a long-term perspective. In cases where learning models, partnerships, or experiments do not appear to be working, teams should be encouraged to fail fast, draw lessons, and *move on* to identifying and trying out other promising opportunities in that local context (e.g., Chambers, 2017; Green, 2016).

Box 2 Gathering momentum: Empowering bottom-up action research

For taking LNC forward, collaborative community-based action research and development approaches are a strong fit for reasons that include how diagnosis of an LNC is rooted in diverse local perspectives and iterative learning cycles (Chapter 2). The AR&D system is contributing to gender research and interventions that employ action research strategies to advance women's empowerment and gender equality. Much of this work engages with relational theories, gender norms, and contextualized methodologies (Elias et al., 2021, pp. 341-343). Here I highlight two of these action

research approaches: gender transformative approaches (GTAs) and adaptative collaborative management (ACM) approaches.

GTAs are rooted in a "deep understanding of people in their context and the way social inequalities affect different groups' choices and outcomes," and a "commitment to address unequal power relations and to challenge oppressive norms, behaviors, and structures" (Galie & Kantor, 2016, p. 194). GTAs feature participatory and adaptive learning methods, including "inclusive, bottom-up decision making based in shared critical reflection, including visioning and ongoing joint monitoring of process and outcomes" (Mc ouga ll et al., 2013, p. 572). The methods engage both women and men in group-based activities that encourage the participants to reflect on their own inherent power to shape and improve their lives, and on actions that they can take individually and together to encourage more gender-equitable norms. Impact evaluations of these interventions are finding reduced intimate partner violence and stronger relationship skills, among many other positive impacts (e.g., McLean et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2015; Ranganathan et al., 2021). Lasting positive effects from an intervention informed by a similar approach is evident in one of the GENNOVATE cases from Ethiopia (Farnworth, López et al., 2018). GTAs also reach beyond the community level, such as by supporting collective action to change discriminatory laws (Hillenbrand et al., 2015; McDougall et al., 2021).

ACM approaches have developed over the past two decades to build capacities for "shared learning, experimentation, and adaptation" among members of communities residing adjacent to forests, and in some cases in collaboration with external stakeholders as well (Colfer et al., 2021a, p. 1). To support the learning by doing, ACM facilitation teams set out to investigate "the process of collaboration and adaptation, as we implemented it—and thereby learn how to do it better and in other places" (Colfer et al., 2021a, p. 7). The edited volume by Colfer, Prabhu and Larson (2021b) offers a rich discussion of ACM's theories and methods (e.g., Colfer et al., 2021a; McDougall & Ojha, 2021). Two chapters present findings from qualitative and quantitative evaluations of an ACM program in Uganda that enabled diverse communities to institutionalize access to their forests and forest resources and their participation in forest management (e.g., Mukasa et al., 2021; Bomuhangi et al., 2021). The authors also reflect on struggles, as when district officials were not much interested in bottom-up and empowering action research.

7.5 CONCLUSION

My thesis advances the concept of LNC as a contribution to research on social change and development in smallholder communities. LNC directs attention to whether a social context is encouraging or discouraging of agency, and for which social categories of women and men. LNC equipped me well for answering my research questions about the interplay of norms and agency, and their importance for inclusive processes of agricultural innovation and the global goals to end poverty and achieve gender equality.

LNC follows theory about the rigidity and yet elasticity of powerful gender norms that shape daily life. LNC also builds on theory about the dynamic spaces where women and men negotiate their needs and interests, and endeavor to move important goals forward when these opportunities arise. These negotiating spaces underpin analytic arguments presented in Chapter 1 and in this chapter about the recurring social mechanism of normative relaxation. As women and men enforce, comply with, negotiate, and withdraw from different norms, these social processes do (often imperceptibly) alter some gender and other social norms over time. These processes are mostly slow and uneven, as diverse other norms continue to persist that tend to reinforce elite men's dominance. By comparison, the mechanism of normative change appears to require a major societal jolt that then opens spaces for diverse community members to co-create a new and more equitable framework of norms as they expand and accelerate their community's processes of innovation, empowerment, and poverty reduction. The diverse norms for women and men in a social context are interlocking. For an LNC to signal growing equality in the context of a smallholder community, our evidence suggests that this requires diverse categories of women and men to be able to connect with resources and opportunities that enable them to *move* their community's norms together.

The contributions in the thesis on LNC and the community typology benefited from case study evidence that spanned sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Mexico, and vantage points of women and of men from low-income, middle-income, and youth categories and of their communities. In most contexts, men express stronger agency than women. Yet we show cases where this expected patterning reverses. Throughout the empirical chapters, we presented testimonies from women and from men who are actively engaged in their local agricultural economy, but they may or may not indicate this to be strengthening their agency. Working with LNC provides a sort of compass for navigating the complex and contradictory ways that agency and norms present in case study evidence (Chapter 3).

Our evidence reveals that a persistent need to maintain appearances of complying with norms has consequences. Negotiating one norm here and another there imposes continuous stress on almost everyone in a social context. The mechanism of normative relaxation in an exclusionary LNC, which is typically the case, also appears to slow a community's social change and development. For villagers in many communities to admire and encourage an innovative and accomplished woman farmer in their midst, then a thorny knot of norms must loosen and shift about the roles and conducts deemed to be appropriate for the local men, women, and farmers. Mindsets must also change about who should move and interact freely with others in and beyond the village and who should openly access, manage, and accumulate significant resources.

The transforming cases display diverse evidence of greater gender equality compared to the other cases, and these findings imply their embeddedness in quite favorable macroeconomic and governance contexts. The findings suggest effective and inclusive agricultural and rural development policies and programs, such as those mentioned in testimonies from the Uzbekistan case (Chapter 6, pp.

205-206). We need further study on both points. What *are* the key beneficial macro forces? Under what conditions are they beneficial? And why are they beneficial only for some village cases and not others? To answer these questions, we need research capacities, models, and methods that are tuned to collaborative bottom-up learning about social change and development *and* that reach past a community's borders. This is the spirit and hope of my thesis and the additional research proposed.

NOTES

[1] As discussed in Chapter 1, LNC is a new concept and Chapter 3 is a slightly adapted version of the article introducing the concept (Petesch, Bullock et al. (2018). Chapter 6 is a slightly adapted version of the article that presented the community typology (Petesch, Feldman et al., (2018).

[2] In one article, Tilly (2001a, p. 34) specifies 21 mechanisms and processes related to democratization.

[3] "If Tilly would only come out as a sociologist of culture, he would be a very good one," argued Paul DiMaggio (2007, p. 230).

[4] In Chapter 3 of *Durable Inequality*, "How Categories Work," Tilly appears to contradict himself on the similarity of how categories function by acknowledging that they generate distinct consequences, with, for instance, the paired gender category raising the "likelihood of sexual play and predation across that boundary, while installing a racial distinction … increases the likelihood of segregated social ties outside the organization" (Tilly, 1998, p. 83).

[5] Tilly argues that "beliefs accumulate and change as a consequence of improvisation with social interaction. Once in place, nevertheless, beliefs justify, fortify, and constrain social interaction" (Tilly, 1998, p. 102). These two statements are consistent with the many testimonies presented in the empirical chapters that reveal the same norms to be both changing and yet rigid in the same location.

[6] For a World Bank study on poverty dynamics in 296 village cases from four states in India, local governance was a core area of our research. We found community members' satisfaction with their local government to mostly grow as their access increased to local political institutions, basic infrastructure, schools and health services and poverty-targeted social assistance programs. Yet, these same processes also brought "rising corruption and cronyism" (Narayan, Petesch et al., 2009, p. 126). This may shed light on why proximity to local government offices may not necessarily contribute to the type of social change and development trajectories found in the transforming cases.

[7] Focus groups can be a difficult setting in which to address sensitive topics. Also, the average ratings obscure the many study participants who indicated increased violence or little if any improvement (Petesch et al., 2017, p. 40; Badstue et al., 2017, p. l of annex B).

[8] On a scale of 1 to 10, with Norway the highest at 9.75, the democracy scores for the six countries with transforming cases range from a relatively healthy 6.91 in India and 5.56 in Mexico to 4.41 (Nepal), 4.11 (Nigeria), 2.94 (Vietnam), and 2.12 (Uzbekistan) (EIU, 2021, pp. 12- 16). The Democracy Index consists of five categories of indicators: electoral process and

pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties.

[9] It is important to qualify this, as Feldman (2001) finds that age-old patriarchal relations and norms remain important pathways to mobility (and immobility) and continue to be expressed in the conducts expected in the young women's workplaces and beyond.

[10] This case was not labeled as such for this paper.

[11] An evaluation by the Asian Development Bank (2013) still lauds the program for bringing ICT connectivity to the countryside and to poor community members far faster than would have otherwise occurred

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Summary

The first and fifth Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commit the global community of nations to end poverty (SDG 1) and achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (SDG 5) by the year 2030. The objective of my thesis is to improve understanding of microsocial processes that may contribute to achieving the two SDGs in smallholder communities. Given that rural regions hold 80 percent of the world's poor population and rural gender inequalities are often greater than urban, we need to better understand the conditions that enable these diverse women and men to access resources and opportunities and drive more inclusive development trajectories in their communities. My thesis takes on this challenge by working with and contributing to relational theory about a "local normative climate" and how this dynamic climate interacts with women's and men's agency and rural livelihoods. Local normative climate improves understanding of the contextual and fluid ways in which gender norms operate, including how norms interlock in complex ways and often vary among social categories of women and men.

Chapter 1 presents the **theory** that informs my thesis and introduces the research questions and methodology. I discuss theory about the gender norms and agency interplay, and how these social forces influence women's and men's gender roles, relations, and capacities to innovate in their rural livelihoods. The chapter elaborates theory that underpins the dynamic local normative climate of a smallholder community, and how these forces shape and are also shaped by women's and men's capacities to act on consequential goals that may better their lives. Women and subordinate categories of men often negotiate and withdraw from individual norms that confine their agency; and these processes of normative relaxation contribute to a typically slow reformulation of norms. Under conditions of major shocks that weaken institutions, such as economic booms or wars, normative change can occur rapidly in ways that strongly encourage or discourage agency and gender equality across a location.

Chapter 2 presents the ***GENNOVATE methodology***. The qualitative study engaged women and men from 136 smallholder communities across 27 countries of the global South. We discuss how the case study research design addresses gender norms and agency theory and the study's three guiding questions. We also reflect critically on how the study's concerns for "context, comparison, and collaboration" inform the research design, including the maximum diversity sampling framework, semi-structured data collection instruments, and the protocols for organizing and analyzing the data produced by the fieldwork. The field instruments explore villagers' own understandings and

experiences with making important decisions, innovating in their rural livelihoods, and moving out of or remaining trapped in poverty. Study participants also reflect on their local norms for women's and men's productive and reproductive roles and considered whether and how these norms vary due to life stage and socioeconomic status. We highlight challenges with applying the study's protocols, including with comparing evidence on norms.

Chapter 3 introduces and applies the concept of ***local normative climate*** to an analysis of 24 village cases from seven countries of sub-Saharan Africa. We present findings from a focus group rating activity on a "power and freedom ladder" that depicts village men's (if a men's focus group) and women's (if a women's group) capacity to make important decisions in their lives. The testimonies explaining the ladder ratings reveal some of the expressions of agency that are normative in that social context, and provided one means by which we made empirical arguments for LNC. The ladder findings proved to be diverse across the cases, with this evidence sometimes challenging assumptions about agency and norms interactions. We present a community case study from Kenya where women express stronger agency than men do; and in another case, from Nigeria, it is the men with more agency although women exercise significant economic roles in this village.

Chapter 4 explores the interplay of ***young people's agency, norms, and livelihood opportunities*** from 12 village cases in Pakistan. Our analysis follows theories on the interplay of agency and social norms about gender and generation, and we apply qualitative comparative research methods. The young study participants mainly observe limited agency, and they often attribute this to expectations of strict deference to elders and other norms about their gender, young age, junior household position, marital status, and socio-economic standing. Young women and men alike report that they resist and negotiate confining norms; however, young women's agency appears especially constrained by social rules that restrict their physical mobility and economic roles. We examine two villages where some youth express stronger agency and more desirable economic opportunities than others, and analyze conditions associated with these uneven dynamics. We conclude with reflections on models of young people's agency that register more strongly the importance of household relations, the gatekeeper role of elders, and the strong gender and generational hierarchies that structure access to markets and other local institutions in rural Pakistan.

Chapter 5 explores women's and men's perceptions of and experiences with ***moving out of poverty and remaining poor*** in 32 village cases from five countries of South Asia. Our analysis of poverty dynamics is informed by theories that address linkages

between agency, gender norms, and context, and we apply comparative case study research methods. We find significant commonalities as well as diversity in testimonies about the strategies and experiences of local men and women who have, or have not, been able to move their households out poverty. Focus groups of both genders emphasize men's roles, whether discussing movements out of poverty or remaining poor. The analysis then shifts from focus group testimonies to the life stories of 39 women, 12 of whom report making substantial contributions to improving the well-being of their families and to escaping poverty. The 27 others remained poor. Various dimensions set apart the "movers" from those who remained stuck: they include these women's effective negotiation of resources from husbands or brothers and their productive engagement with agricultural innovations and other livelihood activities.

Chapter 6 presents a three-part ***community typology*** derived from the patterning in evidence about agency and poverty dynamics as perceived by villagers from 79 communities of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The analysis is informed by norms and agency theory about a local normative climate and by qualitative comparative analysis methods. The "transforming" cases in the typology depict the set of villages where focus groups consistently report significant increases in women's and men's agency and poverty reduction in their village. In these cases, we find an inclusive normative climate marked by a shift in a set of interlocking norms in ways that are fueling gender equality and inclusive agricultural innovation processes. These contexts are also benefitting from infrastructural improvements, expanded markets, and male labor migration. Among the "climbing" cases with more moderate rates of favorable change and the "churning" cases with stagnant or deteriorating trajectories, we present evidence of exclusionary LNCs that is discouraging the agency of many (but not all) women and men.

Chapter 7 is the ***synthesis*** chapter where I address the research questions of the thesis, present lessons, and reflect on implications from the research. First, I answer the research questions by drawing on findings from the empirical chapters on gender norms and agency and their influences on agricultural innovation, empowerment, and poverty reduction in smallholder communities. I then introduce and use social mechanisms theory to argue that local normative climate is a social mechanism that differentially shapes perceptions of agency and opportunities across the gendered social categories of a rural location. I also argue for the importance of the ongoing mechanism of normative relaxation, whereby community members negotiate and withdraw from individual norms. This mechanism typically drives an ongoing reformulation of individual norms to accommodate changing practices in a community; however, this mechanism also appears to contribute to slow and inequitable social change and development

trajectories. The rarer mechanism of normative change, which is triggered by a major shock, can drive a shift in the entire framework of interlocking norms in a location and unleash a type of rapid social change and development marked by significantly greater (or less) gender equality and poverty reduction. Evidence of these dynamics were displayed in the "transforming cases" from chapter 6. I then engage with theory on multi-level perspective on system innovation to reflect on selected macro forces that may influence a smallholder community's normative climate and the patterning found in the community typology in chapter 6. I propose additional bottom-up action research on LNC and the mechanisms of normative relaxation and change. The need is urgent to improve understanding of interactions between micro and macro forces that may encourage smallholder communities to make faster progress on ending poverty and achieving gender equality, as called for by the SDGs.

Propositions

1. Under the restrictive normative climates of most smallholder communities, inequalities in capacities for livelihood innovation persist despite the mechanism of normative relaxation.
(this thesis)

2. The more rapidly and effectively a shock induces equitable access to resources and opportunities in a smallholder context, the more likely this triggers the mechanism of normative change that catalyzes gender equality.
(this thesis)

3. Collaborative case study methods provide robust research strategies for comparative research on social and institutional processes that shape local-level trajectories of social change and development.

4. The more a community-based research and development process encourages inclusive and iterative learning among diverse local people, the more likely this produces strategic lessons that encourage all collaborators' agency.

5. The more that diverse smallholder communities produce and share lessons about social innovations that encourage broad-based empowerment, the more likely progress will be made on the Sustainable Development Goals.

6. In the United States the short-and long-term psychosocial burden of COVID-19 will be stronger on school-age girls than boys.

Propositions belonging to the thesis, entitled

Gender norms, agency, and trajectories of social change and development in agricultural communities

Patti Petesch
Wageningen, 17 June 2022

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While key funders are acknowledged on the final page of the thesis, I still want to say thank you once more to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the CGIAR Research Programs on Maize and Wheat, and CIMMYT for supporting GENNOVATE, including my own research contributions, prior to starting the thesis.

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About the author

Patti Petesch grew up in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois, and specialized in Latin American Studies while earning a B.A. from the University of Michigan and M.A. from Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC. She lives with her husband, Peter, and two dogs in Rockville, Maryland. Her favorite things are cycling with Peter and having fun with her son, daughter, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter.

Patti began her career in human rights and moved into international development after graduate school. As staff associate for a think tank, Overseas Development Council, she authored books on poverty, global environmental risks, and multilateral institutions; managed a policy seminar series on poverty and the environment for congressional staff; and served as NGO advisor on the U.S. delegation to the 1995 World Summit for Social Development.

Patti then launched into freelancing for the World Bank and other international development organizations on research projects, operational programs, evaluations, and capacity building workshops. She contributed to the management teams for three World Bank global qualitative field studies and led comparative research projects on gender and violent political conflict for USAID and the World Bank. As discussed in Chapter 1, the thesis builds on her most recent multi-country study, GENNOVATE, for which she served as the expert advisor. Patti is also a founding officer of ICBWorld, a network of mainly international development and public health consultants.

Selected publications in order of publication year:

Narayan, D. Chambers, R., Shah, M., & Petesch, P. (2000). *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change* (Vol. 2). Oxford University Press and World Bank.

Petesch, P., Smulovitz, C. & Walton, M. (2005). "Evaluating Empowerment: A Framework with Cases from Latin America," in D. Narayan (Ed.) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (p. 39-67). World Bank.

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Patti Petesch

Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS)

Completed Training and Supervision Plan

Name of the learning activity	Department/Institute	Year	ECTS*
A) Project related competences			
A1 Managing a research project			
WASS Introduction Course	WASS	2022	1
Research proposal	KTI	2020	5
"A community typology on gender and social change: What can we learn from thriving agricultural villages?"	KTI-WGGS/Gender-SMART, WUR seminar	2019	1
Qualitative Comparative Analysis	Southern California QCA Workshop, Univ. of California-Irvine	2017	1
A2 Integrating research in the corresponding discipline			
Critical perspectives on social theory course	WASS	2020	4
"Lessons from dynamics of local normative climates"	Cultivating Equality: Advancing gender research in agriculture and food systems; WUR/CGIAR online research conference	2021	1
Research and capacity building contributions to GENNOVATE global study	CGIAR; International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT)	2014-2022	6
B) General research related competences			
B1 Placing research in a broader scientific context			
Independent reading assignment of theoretical literatures on multilevel perspective on system innovation and on social mechanisms	KTI, WUR	2022	4

Panel organizer: "What is a local normative climate? Different operationalizations of the concept"	Cultivating Equality: Advancing gender research in agriculture and food systems (online research conference; WUR/CGIAR)	2021	1
Advisory support to two research ethics workshops financed by the U.S. governmental National Science Foundation	NSF, Pennsylvania State Univ.; Cornell Univ.; California State Univ-San Marco	2017 - 2018	2
Research design and analysis contributions to qualitative component of impact evaluation of conditional cash transfer program in Egypt	International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)	2018	1
B2 Placing research in a societal context			
Blog on academic paper (and chapter 5 of thesis) https://www.cimmyt.org/blogs/moving-out-of-poverty-or-staying-poor/	CIMMYT and WUR	2020	1
Charter officer at ICBWorld, a networking organization mainly serving international development and public health consultants https://icbworld.org/about-us/	ICBWorld	2020-2022	1
C) Career related competences/personal development			
C1 Employing transferable skills in different domains/careers			
Supervised BSc thesis on girls' and young women's menstrual hygiene management	WUR	2021	1
Skills session: Planning your career after the PhD and networking	KTI	2021	0.3
Presentation: "Theory building and fieldwork planning" for PhD skills session	KTI	2020	1
Total			**31.3**

*One credit according to ECTS is on average equivalent to 28 hours of study load

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