Implementing a Gender Transformative Approach in Community-Based Breeding Programs (CBBP) and Sheep Fattening Cooperatives

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WORKING PAPER June, 2025

This working paper describes a Gender Transformative Approach implemented in Community-Based Breeding Programs (CBBP) and sheep fattening cooperatives in Doyogena, Central Ethiopia. The initiative is implemented by the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and We-Action Ethiopia, and was primarily supported by the Sustainable Animal Productivity for Livelihoods, Income, Nutrition and Gender Equity (SAPLING) initiative and the Sustainable Intensification (SI) program. The work has since continued under the Sustainable Farming initiative and the Sustainable Animal Agrifood Systems (SAAF) science program.

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Abstract

ICARDA, in partnership with WE-Action Ethiopia, has implemented a Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) in Southern Ethiopia to address restrictive gender norms limiting women's participation and leadership in Community-Based Breeding Programs (CBBP) and sheep fattening cooperatives. A gender and social inclusion analysis in *Doyogena* district identified six key barriers, including unequal roles in livestock marketing, decision-making, labor, and widespread gender-based violence and discrimination. From April 2023 to March 2025, the GTA used the four-phase SASA methodology—Start, Awareness, Support, and Action—to spark behavioral change. Through trained support staff, Positive Deviants (PDs), and Community Activists (CAs), the initiative engaged cooperatives, religious and traditional associations, households, and local institutions in norm-challenging dialogues. The GTA directly reached 8,592 individuals (60% women) and indirectly impacted 42,960 community members through local radio programming and institutional partnerships. These efforts broadened awareness and improved access to gender-responsive services. As a result, 35.1% of women and 25% of men who participated rejected the belief that men should control livestock sales—compared to only 14.7% of non-participating women and 12.8% of non-participating men. GTA has transformed cooperatives into spaces for gender dialogue and equity, offering a scalable model for inclusive, community-driven transformation in rural livelihoods.

Keywords: Gender Transformative Approach, SASA, Positive Deviants, gender norms, livestock marketing, women's empowerment, CBBP, social norm change, rural livelihoods, Ethiopia.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction……...….5
2. The GTA Design……...….6
3. Direct reach of the GTA……7
4. Indirect reach of GTA……8
5. Results obtained…….....9
5.1. Internal changes:Strengthening Gender awarness and women's agency in CBBP and sheep fatteining cooperatives…9
5.2. Extenral changes promoting postive social norms and sterngtheining community actions……...….10
5.3. Improved Institutional capacity for gender-responsive services…….……11
6.References……12

1. Introduction

A Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) has been conducted in one of ICARDA's intervention sites in cooperation with WE-Action Ethiopia. The GTA specifically aims at transforming restrictive social/gender norms through examining and challenging them using different methods (Figure 1).

At the start of the GTA, a gender and social inclusion analysis was conducted in *Doyogena* district, of Southern Ethiopia (Figure 2). Six gender norms have been identified in the targeted area where farmers use Community Based Breeding Program (CBBP) and sheep fattening agricultural innovations. These innovations are backed by collectives that incorporate gender mixed and women only CBBP and sheep fattening social innovations. The GTA strategy targeted changes both within CBBP and Sheep fattening cooperatives and in the broader community to foster positive shifts in restrictive norms from April 2023 to the time of writing this brief, March 2025.

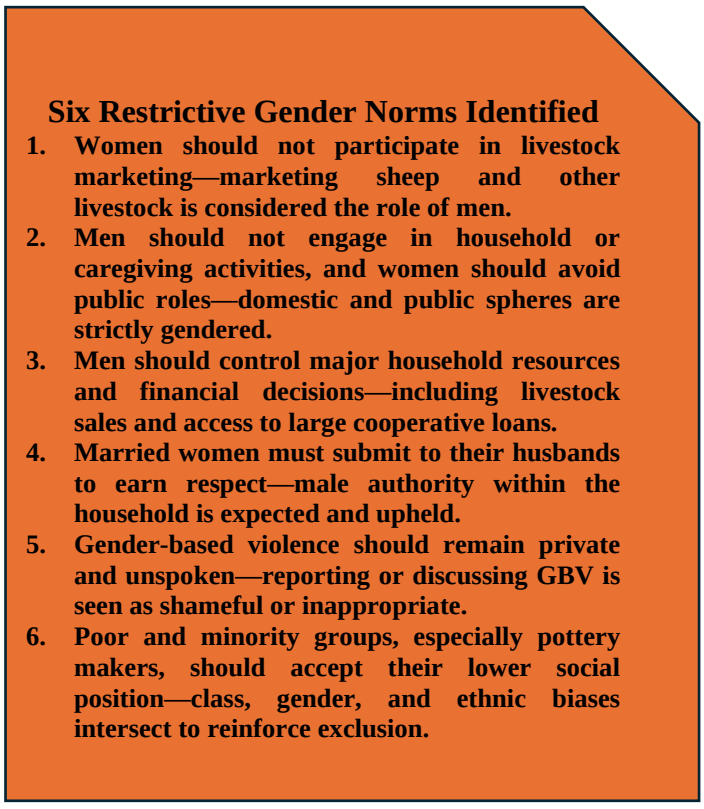


Figure 1. Dominant Restrictive Gender Norms Limiting Women's Agency in Livestock.



Figure 2. Location of GTA Research Sites in Doyogena Woreda, Kembata Tembaro Zone, Central Ethiopia

2. The GTA Design

Key methods involved in the GTA include a mixture of positive deviance (PD), community activists (CA) and the start awareness support action (SASA) approach and the intersectionality paradigm to addressing the intersectional identities, realities and experiences of women and men smallholders. The GTA is implemented both within the CBBP and sheep fattening cooperatives and outside the cooperatives.

Positive Deviance (PD) is a person who depicts behavior that departs from salient norms for positive outcomes (Mertens, Recker, Kohlborn, & Kummer, 2016). To identify PDs and community activists (CA), ICARDA's gender team conducted data collection and analysis where A total of 10 Positive Deviants (5 women and 5 men), selected to challenge the restrictive norms, and 16 Norm Setters (8 women and 8 men) were promoted as Community Activists for the GTA. These activists were trained to provide education on gender issues and restrictive norms both within the cooperatives and beyond. Since PDs may not reach out all aspects, we have supported them with CAs who have been recruited from norm gate keepers and setters and who are religious and traditional associations *Idir* (funeral associations) and *Iqub* (rotating savings groups) leaders.

PDs and CAs were guided and trained to make discussions on how and why these restrictive gender norms affect the livelihood security of communities. PDs and CAs were also trained to lead communities into developing pathways by which communities themselves bring solutions and change restrictive gender norms by themselves and for themselves. These community discussions are taking place using different community gatherings that include religious congregations, *Idir*, *Iqub* and coffee ceremonies in households. Furthermore, we have identified norm specialization for each of the PDs given their prior deviated experience against specific gender norms. We provided them with an ambassadorship position to change gender norms in accordance with the norms that they were challenging during their normal life before the GTA. PDs and CAs primarily ignite discussions among "women only"' and "gender mixed" sheep

collectives on how to manage the income from sheep, why and when to sell improved sheep and such a dialogue helps women and men sheep keepers to replicate the experience in their respective households where they also engage in gender joint discussions on how to manage sheep income, when and why to sell sheep.

Start Awareness and Support Action (SASA), a powerful GTA approach, was used to raise community awareness about restrictive norms and help community members develop their own actions to challenge these norms while promoting positive changes. SASA is a community mobilization approach that uses different methods including norm changing community discussions and radio programming (Michau & Namy, 2021). Before the GTA started, fourteen SASA support staff who are comprised of local data collectors of CBBP, researchers from agricultural research centers, journalists from a radio station with whom we later have launched a radio program on how to change gender norms, head of women and children affairs office, and local agricultural extension workers. Succeeding training was held with all the support staff on how they could support the norm changing process.

The start and awareness phases involved support staff training as well as PDs and CAs induced community discussions on six norms. The SASA method encourages using pictorial tools provided or generated by participants to identify norm-based challenges and enables discussants find solutions which our communities of practice are implementing to date. The support phase includes activities such as information dissemination through radio programs that use the local language called *Kembatisa* and *Amharic* as most Ethiopians speak Amharic. The GTA support phase also involves gender services from institutional alliance with women and children office, police office, health and education office, Omo microfinance and cooperative organizer office. The Action phase provides favorable solutions. In all the process, GTA reporting, monitoring and evaluation activities have been conducted. Findings of overall GTA implementation will be developed into a policy brief and a published scientific article, which is also part of the Action phase. The action phase will provide information to policy makers on how to transform restrictive gender norms for sustainable and gender equitable livelihoods through using agricultural innovations.

3. Direct Reach of the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA)

- The GTA directly reached a total of 8,592 individuals, 60% of whom were women, while the indirect reach extended to 42,960 people, including 51% women. This extensive outreach was made possible through multiple community-based platforms and social structures.

Direct engagement included:

- Five ICARDA-supported CBBP and sheep fattening cooperatives (both women-only and gender-mixed), with 581 members (273 women). These cooperatives hold monthly meetings that include SASA-based discussions on the six restrictive gender norms.

- Twenty-eight Idir (social associations) across two kebeles, comprising 7,170 members, meet monthly and regularly engage in norm-challenging conversations.

- Seven Iqub (self-help groups) with 341 members also participate in monthly gatherings where GTA discussions are integrated.

- 500 households in the two target kebeles host weekly coffee-ceremony-based discussions, each involving at least six participants (men and women). Positive Deviants (PDs) facilitate these sessions to spark dialogue and reflect on gender norms.

- Together, these groups formed the backbone of the GTA's direct outreach, while broader community exposure—through radio programs, institutional partnerships, and public gatherings—contributed to the initiative's indirect impact.

4. *Indirect Reach of the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA)*

The GTA indirectly impacted an estimated 42,960 individuals, based on an average Ethiopian household size of five and the 8,592 individuals directly reached through cooperative and community-level engagement. This broader reach was achieved through a combination of media, institutional collaboration, and public forums.

Key channels of indirect reach included:

- Local radio programming in *Kembatisa* and Amharic, which extended education and awareness around gender norms to a wide audience beyond direct participants.

- Institutional alliances with entities such as Omo Microfinance, the Women and Children Affairs Office, health and education offices, local police, and the Cooperatives Coordination Office, which further disseminated gender-responsive information and services within the community.

- Weekly religious congregations, where Positive Deviants (PDs) and Community Activists (CAs) facilitated norm-change discussions, each gathering reaching approximately 200 community members, contributing significantly to the initiative's indirect influence.

- Through these multiple touchpoints, the GTA fostered a wider cultural dialogue on gender equity, enabling behavioral shifts and increased awareness well beyond its immediate participants.

5. Results obtained

5.1. Internal Changes: Strengthening Gender Awareness and Women's Agency in CBBP and Sheep Fattening Cooperatives

The Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) has established a meaningful platform for gender education within ICARDA-supported cooperatives. By integrating the SASA methodology, GTA-trained facilitators facilitated regular discussions that broadened participants' understanding of gender dynamics, power relations, and the impact of restrictive norms. As a result, both women and men reported a significant shift in their perspectives on gender roles and women's empowerment. Many participants shared that, prior to GTA, gender issues were rarely—if ever—discussed during cooperative meetings. One member of a women-only CBBP cooperative reflected:



"…We didn't have a culture of discussing gender during our cooperative meetings. Now, thanks to the education provided by our facilitators, we discuss gender openly. This has deepened our understanding of our rights and gender equality. We now have the confidence to talk about our rights and stand up against violations..."

In addition to regular meetings, cooperatives formed radio listener groups, enabling members to engage with gender-focused programs aired in local languages. To ensure access and inclusiveness, equipment was also provided to allow members to catch up on broadcasts at their convenience. These efforts have fostered ongoing reflection and dialogue, reinforcing internal cooperative commitment to gender equity and inclusive decision-making.



5.2. *External Changes: Promoting Positive Social Norms and Strengthening Community Action*

The GTA has contributed to significant external shifts by promoting positive gender norms and enhancing community-led action against restrictive practices. With ongoing technical support, monitoring, and coordination among GTA actors, including Positive Deviants (PDs), Community Activists (CAs), and institutional partners, regular and constructive community dialogues were held to address the six restrictive gender norms identified during the initial analysis.

These dialogues, conducted through household visits, community gatherings, and religious forums, encouraged participants to critically reflect on entrenched beliefs and practices. The house-to-house education by PDs and gender-focused radio programming proved particularly effective in raising awareness and mobilizing action at the grassroots level.

As a result, communities began to question and challenge long-held assumptions about gender roles. Notably, there has been a visible improvement in attitudes toward Gender-Based Violence (GBV), with both women and men reporting increased recognition of GBV as a violation of human rights during field monitoring. This shift signals a growing community willingness to support gender-equitable behaviors and reject norms that perpetuate harm and inequality.

The community has increasingly begun to recognize Gender-Based Violence (GBV) as a violation of women's human rights—marking a significant cultural shift. This growing awareness has helped foster a safer and more supportive environment for women's active participation in Community-Based Breeding Programs (CBBP) and sheep fattening cooperatives. As men's understanding has evolved, many have become more accepting and encouraging of their wives' engagement in public and cooperative activities—roles that previously sparked tension within households.

There is also a rising acknowledgment of the importance of equitable division of labor, with more men starting to take on household responsibilities. One male GTA participant shared the following during a mentoring session:



"When PD educators came to my home to teach us about gender issues, I didn't pay much attention and didn't see the relevance for married households. However, after several visits and after following the teachings of our religious leaders on the same topics, I began to understand its relevance and became interested. Now, I have a better understanding, and I am more supportive of my wife, and I am participating in household chores which I had never thought of before."

These changes highlight the potential of community-led approaches to transform attitudes and behaviors, ultimately contributing to more gender-equitable households and communities.

The integrated activities within the GTA approach have played a pivotal role in fostering meaningful behavioral change. Consultations with participants revealed that the combined efforts of house-to-house education by Positive Deviants (PDs), community radio programming, and collaboration with religious leaders and local services have contributed to promising shifts in restrictive gender norms.

GTA experts conducted regular monitoring and follow-up, providing facilitation and technical support to community actors and implementers. Community facilitators and activists led targeted discussions using the SASA methodology, ensuring engagement across diverse settings—including church gatherings, Debo (traditional house construction sites), Iqub and Idir associations, and cooperative meetings. These widespread and context-specific interactions helped embed the norm-changing messages across different layers of community life.

5.3. *Improved Institutional Capacity for Gender-Responsive Services*

The GTA strengthened institutional capacity by building alliances with key government sector offices that provide essential support to cooperatives. These included the Cooperative Promotion Office, Women and Social Affairs Office, Policy and Justice Office, and various Microfinance Institutions engaged in gender-focused transformation.

To enhance their effectiveness, these institutions received GTA training aimed at improving their understanding and delivery of gender-responsive services. A district-level coordination platform was also established to ensure more aligned, collaborative, and timely service provision.

This institutional engagement has resulted in tangible improvements, as reported by cooperative members during field visits. Many noted that their access to services has improved, attributing this to the increased gender awareness and responsiveness of service providers following their participation in GTA activities.

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