



Food and Agriculture
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 **IFAD**
Investing in rural people

 **World Food
Programme**

Gender transformative approaches for food security and nutrition



GOOD PRACTICE

Community Conversations

PREPARED BY

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SECTION 1

OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

Name of the methodology**Community Conversations****Countries with implementation experience****East Africa:** Ethiopia in Amhara, Oromia and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR)**Start/end date**

2013 – 2017

Lead organization sponsoring the development and implementation of the methodology

World Food Programme (WFP) in the framework of the Purchase for Progress (P4P) programme.

Purpose of the methodology: domains of gender inequality that are addressed

Community Conversations involve a series of dialogues among community members on deep-rooted societal norms and taboos that hinder women from actively participating in farmer organizations (primary and secondary cooperatives). The aim is to:

- promote understanding of the issues involved;
- identify and explore deeper structural issues concerning women's participation, benefits and control;
- create better understanding of discriminatory practices, their different manifestations and their impacts on daily life; and
- mutually learn and decide on what should be done.

Community members engaged in the discussion are also expected to come up with solutions to address problems that have been identified and stimulate change, with the aim of sustaining and expanding these solutions.

Contribution of the methodology to wider development/organizational/project goals

Farmer organizations in this context are primary and secondary multipurpose cooperatives that are participating in marketing activities. One of the objectives of the P4P gender programme is to boost the participation of women in farmer organizations selling maize to WFP through the P4P programme. At the outset of the programme, the number of women in the primary cooperatives was insignificant. For this reason, women-based Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs) were established and, after business skill training, Community Conversations implemented integrated functional adult literacy and other economic empowerment programmes. All members of SACCOs became members of primary cooperatives and started to take part in the management committees of primary and secondary (unions) cooperatives.

The P4P gender programme assumes that economic empowerment interventions together with continuous engagement on norms governing gendered practices contribute to women's ownership, control and benefits from resources and their social empowerment. This enables women to benefit from P4P initiatives that target smallholder farmers.

The process of Community Conversations serves as mobilizing factor and the main pillar for all other project components, such as business skill training, revolving fund and income generating activities, integrated functional adult literacy, the provision of time- and energy-saving technologies, and exposure visits to successful women's organizations and individuals.

Target group

- Women belonging to SACCOs
- Rural women farmers who are poor (with low income)
- Female-headed households
- Young dropouts from school and educational programmes
- The target group are at least 18 years old and reside in the functional area of target primary cooperatives

SECTION 2

IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

Key entry points for applying the methodology

The key entry points are village-level group community gatherings.

Each discussion group comprises 25 women from the SACCOs, plus their husbands, community elders, religious leaders, grassroots-level administration leaders, justice representatives, women's association leaders, development agents, health extension worker, teachers and family members of the targeted women.

The total number of participants in one discussion group is between 50 to 60 people.

Implementing partners

This work is implemented and monitored by regional- and district-level government officers (Women and Children Affairs Bureau and Cooperative Promotion Agency) who select the facilitators, run the training of trainers' sessions and set up the groups.

Process of and criteria for selecting facilitators/champions/mentors

An equal number of women and men (six in total) were selected to act as facilitators from each SACCO by the administration of the kebele (the smallest administrative unit of Ethiopia) together with SACCO leaders and district-level officers. The selection was based on:

- good conduct and acceptance by the community;
- completion of at least an 8th grade education;
- ability to communicate in local languages; and
- willingness to volunteer to take training of trainers' sessions and conduct Community Conversations at the grassroots level.

Women members of the targeted SACCOs and local government employees who meet the criteria were also given the opportunity to act as facilitators. The facilitators were not remunerated.

Training of facilitators/champions/mentors

The major topics covered during the gender-focused training of trainers are:

- introduction, setting ground rules and reflection;
- building relationships;
- identification of concerns by participants that challenge their daily lives;
- exploration of concerns;
- the division of labour, asset creation, ownership and transfer;
- identification of assets and resources (human, material and financial) that already exist in the community;
- decision making and actions by the community and family members; and
- reflection and review.

The training of facilitators is given by consultants/government staff for three to five days and refreshed annually.

SECTION 3

IMPLEMENTATION CYCLE

Key steps in the implementation cycle

- **Step 1 Review of manual and selection of facilitators**
 - This step is taken care of by WFP and regional government implementing partners.
 - The Community Conversation manual is reviewed and adapted to the local context and translated into regional languages by gender consultants.
 - Criteria are set for the selection of facilitators.
 - Facilitators for training are selected.
- **Step 2 Training of trainers**
 - The training of facilitators is carried out and includes their self-assessment of issues. During the training, they identify practical cases that they are observing in their communities.
 - Timetable/action plans are prepared and submitted.
 - Logistical support is arranged.
- **Step 3 Community Conversations**
 - Community Conversation groups are formed from existing SACCOs and dates are fixed for meetings at the village level. The groups usually meet once a month with the number of meetings dropping to once every two months when the members are more engaged in seasonal agricultural work.
 - The meetings are conducted in a participatory way and the minutes of the day are taken.
 - Discussion starts with a review of the results of the self-assessment undertaken by the facilitators to see whether there are any additional issues to consider. The space is then open for dialogue and action related to women and their place in their household and society (e.g. norms regarding women's mobility, division of tasks, leadership, decision making, ownership).
 - Major decisions are noted and observances are made among the community members to determine whether changes are taking place at the household level. This is done through feedback at the meetings and random visits to households.
 - During the regular SACCO meetings, there is the opportunity to discuss the Community Conversation progress, exchange experiences between different Community Conversation groups and appreciate the positive work that has been done.
- **Step 4 Review**
 - An assessment is undertaken of impacts in the families and at the community level.
 - Impact reports are finalized.

Average length of the implementation cycle

- One to two years, during which time there will be 12 to 18 conversations

Graduation from the methodology

Once the participants identify the major challenges that hinder women's participation in economic and social affairs and the decisions that have been taken are implemented, the conversation ends until participants identify another issue to resolve in similar way. After resolving the main issues, the meetings start to decline but the experience and procedures are in place and can be used if necessary.

SECTION 4**MONITORING****Monitoring system**

- Internal by participants
 - All sub-groups of women check their progress as a household and at the community level. They monitor decisions on family assets and the sharing of the work burden, and note whether the husbands allow their wives to participate in SACCOs and income-generating activities, and whether men assist the women and accept women being able to bring in additional income to the family.
- External by relevant government departments and WFP
 - Quarterly reports, field monitoring and an independent consultant's evaluation based on pre- and post-baseline surveys.

Indicators

- **Quantitative**
 - Number of the target women, their family members and the community participating in the conversations, who were convinced about the importance of the issues and are now addressing them in practice.
- **Qualitative**
 - Impacts related to economically empowering women, strengthening their decision-making capacity, and increasing their participation in household affairs and leadership positions.

SECTION 5**BUDGET****Main items of expenditure**

- Consultants' fee for preparing the manual and providing the facilitator training
- Translation and duplication of manuals
- Training of trainer costs
- Stationery, facilitation and motivation costs (e.g. coffee and bread to make attendance more attractive)
- Monitoring and outcome assessment

The main budget is for the preparation of the Community Conversation manual and the training of facilitators. Budgets at the group level are only to maintain the discussion by covering stationery and refreshments.

Total budget

Specific costs associated with Community Conversation activities were USD 25 000 to USD 30 000, including manual development and training (i.e. approximately USD 1 500 to USD 1 800 direct costs per group). In addition, other costs (e.g. monitoring and overhead), were covered by the overall programme on women's economic empowerment.

SECTION 6

RESULTS

Number of beneficiaries reached

- Direct beneficiaries: 444 women members and around 1 900 others including: husbands of the women, elders, religious leaders, grassroots-level justice leaders, head of women associations, kebele-level leaders, managers, development agents, cooperative organizers, health agents, teachers and family members of the targeted women.

Main changes attributed to the methodology

The beneficiaries rated Community Conversations as the major means by which most of the meaningful changes materialized. The economic empowerment components of the programme would not have been successful without this activity. Engaging husbands and children to address discriminatory gendered practices unlocked the potential for other areas of intervention.

Community Conversations raised the awareness of community members and contributed to significant results in economic gains and changes in gendered norms that have hindered women from advancing in their lives. Changes include:

- Husbands have started to share household work (e.g. fetching water and collecting fuelwood, attending to children while their wives are busy with other activities).
- Ownership and decision making by women regarding common property has been enhanced.
- Girls and boys are treated equally and start to participate in home activities without discrimination.
- Women can join SACCOs, whereas initially some husbands prevented their wives from doing so.
- Men have been convinced to accept women as being able to bring in additional income to the family, and to plan and work together with women.
- Most women become members of a primary cooperative and are involved in management positions.
- Women start to supply produce (maize) to their primary cooperative in their own name.
- Women are able to contribute to household expenses and school costs, which enables children to attend school. Previously their access to finance and assets was limited, and most waited for their husband's handouts, even to cover small expenses.

Other benefits:

- Household income and nutrition has increased.

Key success factors and strengths of the methodology

- It combines a social and economic problem-solving approach.
- Different government implementing partners are engaged in improving women's lives. Responsibility for Community Conversation activities is given to the Women and Children Affairs Bureau, while the Cooperative Promotion Agency support SACCOs.
- It is simple, adaptive and can be implemented at a reasonable cost.
- The intended results are seen right away. Women's training, exposure visits and access to finance often result in immediate and practical changes at the household level. The targeted women were among the poorest of the poor, and the changes observed had an influence on most of their husbands.
- The practice is irreversible. Most women have started to defend their rights. Their husbands now believe that some values and traditions were not helping them and tied their families to poverty. When people heard of the changes, they started to regret the way they had previously spent their time. The position of women has become stronger economically and socially as their husbands and community start to pay attention to addressing gender inequalities. At the family level, children have also realized the burden borne by their mother and have started to assist her.
- It is the master key for realizing other empowerment components.
- Although there has not been any experience of changes being reversed, it is felt that the SACCOs would be able to handle these cases.

Challenges and measures to overcome them

The major challenges were budget shortages for follow-up activities and difficulties in coordinating different government sector offices around one activity. This was resolved by securing additional budget and working untiringly on coordination challenges.

Potential for upscaling

Requirements to support upscaling:

- Budget, preparation of manuals, experiences of implementing partners, existence of practical cases for experience sharing
- Existence of gender-related problems to be addressed in the community, willingness of implementing partners to take part in the programme, and tangible positive impacts
- Potential improvements:
- Trained and experienced government staff to scale up the practice in other places
- Adaptation:
- The manual and experience has been adapted to another 21 SACCOs by WFP and recently practiced in 10 women's SACCOs (3 000 women members) of the Joint Programme to Accelerate Progress Towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JP RWEE).

Potential for replication

Key enablers

- Budget, manuals, training and follow-up with coordinated economic empowerment components of committed government implementing partners

Sustainability of the methodology once project/external input is complete

Once the methodology starts to work, it establishes new norms and shapes cultural attitudes in the family and the community.

Implementing partners are using it as an essential tool for resolving similar community issues.

P4P programme has phased out the methodology, but government partners are using it for other programme interventions.

SECTION 7

RESOURCES

Publications

- WFP (2014) Community Conversation facilitators' manual on women's participation, control and benefits in farmer organizations
<https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000110657/download/>
- P4P Gender (Livelihood Support for Rural Women) Outcome Assessment Report (October 2017) (available upon request).

Cover photo: Sena RUSACCO – Diga District, Oromia-Ethiopia CC group discussion

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