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Agency, Gender and Development in Oromia, Ethiopia

Agência, género e desenvolvimento em Oromia, Etiópia

Kristie Drucza, Lemlem Aregu and Mulunesh Tsegaye

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Kristie Drucza

Includovate
P.O. Box 202
KEW VIC 3101, Australia

kristie@includovate.com

Lemlem Aregu

Includovate
P.O. Box 202
KEW VIC 3101, Australia

Lemlem.Aregu@ata.gov.et

Mulunesh Tsegaye

International Insect Physiology and Ecology
P.O. Box 5689 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

mtsegaye@icipe.org

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Agency, gender and development in Oromia, Ethiopia[1]

This paper argues that the postcolonial revolution in knowledge about gender and power relations has not touched the agricultural sector nor literature. Using the validation data from a medium-n qualitative data study in Amhara and Oromia, Ethiopia, the paper presents a case study on farm gate selling to show how a nuclear family model is shaped by power relations that are seeded in the colonial past and yet are reproduced in the present. Ethiopian men do not share resources equally with their wife/family. So, women need to 'help themselves' to the stored harvest to manage the household's needs. The paper shows how food security projects, and even those that aim to reduce post-harvest loss can be socially and economically disruptive.

Keywords: agency, norms, feminist, agriculture, Oromia, resistance

Agência, género e desenvolvimento em Oromia, Etiópia

Este artigo defende que a revolução pós-colonial no conhecimento sobre género e relações de poder não atingiu o sector agrícola nem a literatura. Utilizando os dados de validação de um estudo de dados qualitativos medium-n *em Amhara e Oromia, Etiópia, o artigo apresenta um estudo de caso sobre venda na exploração agrícola para mostrar como um modelo de família nuclear é moldado por relações de poder enraizadas no passado colonial e ainda reproduzidas no presente. Os homens etíopes não partilham os recursos igualmente com as suas esposas/família. Por isso, as mulheres precisam de "servir-se elas mesmas" da colheita armazenada para gerir as necessidades da família. O artigo mostra como os projetos de segurança alimentar, mesmo aqueles que visam reduzir as perdas pós-colheita, podem ser social e economicamente perturbadores.*

Palavras-chave: agência, normas, feminista, agricultura, Oromia, resistência

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The legacy from colonialism is one where those from the "global south" can catch up to those in the "global north" through financial donations and technical assistance and following in the footsteps of richer countries. Whether it is called "global development," "international development," "foreign aid," "poverty reduction" or some other term, the idea of a rich country giving money to a poor country to help them "develop" is controversial. "Development" is considered neo-colonial by many scholars because there are strings attached to the "aid" that serve to control and shape poorer societies (Alemazung, 2010; Escobar, 1995). Some of the practices resulting from development – such as a binary understanding of rich and poor, developed/developing north/south – are also disputed in more recent literature (Monks et al., 2017).

The neo-colonial lens views a country and its people as requiring control, support, labelling and capitalist growth. Giraldo (2016, p. 158) argues that this lens has also led to African citizens being portrayed in literature, movies and stories as passive or powerless, and that this legacy has lived on long after colonialism officially ended. African women are doubly affected by this lens because responses to their gender tends to ignore them. This paper explores the validation results and the impact of a pilot project on women and intra-household relations in Ethiopia. Women have different forms of protest and ways of coping that have been downplayed and oversimplified by the neo-colonial lens.

In development policy and practice, women who reside in rural Ethiopia and engage in agriculture are less researched in the agricultural development sector than men. Most interventions in agriculture seek to improve household well-being, however, data is collected at the household level and rarely considers intra-household gender relations. In the agricultural sector, women's involvement is recorded inconsistently, with many studies contradicting each other (Belay & Oljira, 2016). Where data does exist, the data shows gender disparities in access to, and control over, productive resources (Quisumbing & Pandolfelli, 2009) and reveals that women's critical consciousness is ignored (O'Hara & Clement, 2018). Agricultural policies and extension services "still do not attach equal importance to providing services to women farmers or women on farms" (Peveri & Drucza, 2017, p. 10). As such, agricultural development in Ethiopia "re-constitutes, rather than abolishes, the coloniality of gender" (Banerjee & Connell, 2018, p. 65).

Despite an Italian occupation 1939-1940, Ethiopia has never been colonized. This is a source of pride for many Ethiopians. Nevertheless, Ethiopia receives 50 to 60 percent of its national budget from richer countries (Flores, 2013). This puts Ethiopia in the category of a "least developed country" and Ethiopia is the recipient of many "development projects." Ethiopia has experienced significant

changes since 2019, having the first woman president and 50 percent of women in ministerial positions. The 2019 World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index lists Ethiopia as one of the top five most-improved countries overall (WEF, 2019). Despite these recent changes, women still face much inequality. Women provide a lot of unpaid labour that is often unrecognized (women spend 9.03 hours on care per day compared to 0.72 hours for men) (Includovate, 2020). Women are less skilled, have lower health and nutritional outcomes and marry earlier than men (Bitew & Telake, 2010; Hallward-Driemeier & Gajigo, 2015).

Development projects "cannot automatically be taken to be inclusive," universal, accepted and non-political (Horner, 2020, p. 426). During the coding and analysis of GENNOVATE[2] data in Oromia, the topic of farm gate selling was repeatedly raised. Traditionally farmers in Ethiopia have stored their harvest and sold it gradually throughout the year depending on prices and need. This had an added, albeit unintended, consequence of enabling women to covertly access the harvest as needed throughout the year. Farm gate selling was introduced as a way of reducing post-harvest loss. Instead of storing some of the harvest, where it often became exposed to mould and rodents, farm gate selling involved selling the entire harvest at one time to a salesperson who came to the farm gate. This paper finds that women resist the challenges of development by creating new economies, and new ways to share resources.

The structure of this paper is as follows: The first section describes how the concept of agency is used to frame the case study. Then the methodology is explained followed by the findings. A discussion section explores women's types of protest and bargaining and explains why there is a need to depart from a neo-colonial research and development approach. The conclusion summarises the way social relations matter to family food security and explains how discovering this link only occurred because the research adopted a feminist approach. Feminist research has a role to play in showing African women as strategic actors by offering an all-encompassing view of the system of agriculture, and women's role within it.

Agency

This article uses the concept of "agency" to frame a case study on gender relations in household food security in Oromia region, Ethiopia. Gender relates to a person's identity and how they relate to pre-described social roles and norms

[2] GENNOVATE studies gender norms in agriculture, innovation and natural resource management, see: http://gender.cgiar.org/themes/gennovate/

associated with their sex. Gender is a social construct. However, gender is also non-binary and exists on a spectrum leading some authors to suggest gender is an "analytic category within which humans think about and organize their social activity" (Scott, 1986). Agency, like gender, exists on a spectrum and is a fluid process. Women can exercise agency in many different ways: as individuals and collectively within the family, and through their participation in markets, politics, and other formal and informal networks. Agency can take a number of forms: "bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as the more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). People have different degrees of agency (for example, partial agency). We are all subject to subconscious influences and social norms and thus, the concept of full agency is debatable.

For Kabeer (1999) agency can go beyond observable actions to include values that give meaning, motivation and purpose. This means that the way an individual interrelates with structures of power and opportunity can also indicate agency. Agency can be expressed and reflected upon at the individual and collective level (O'Hara & Clement, 2018, p. 113). Thus, agency can have a combination of structural, collective and individual elements that relate to choice, values and action (Kabeer, 1999).

The way women resist and take advantage of and change inequalities and imbalances will be different to men. Women have different ways of displaying and practicing agency because the available space they have to practice within is different. There are different rules for women and men and different sociocultural frameworks that enable and constrain change across the socioecological model.[3] Women have different spaces of power than men and different ways of bargaining, resisting, manipulating and deceiving. Different strategies can be utilized to achieve certain desired goals. Hence, different research methods are needed to capture women's agency because it is a process that can be different to men's.

Ethiopia: Agriculture in Oromia

Ethiopia's economy is highly dependent on agriculture contributing 46 percent to GDP and employing 75 percent of the total employed population (MoFED, 2011). Ethiopia suffers from recurrent drought, erratic weather and fluctuations in production and food prices. Ethiopian agriculture is subsistence in nature,

[3] The socio-ecological model (SEM) is often illustrated by nesting circles that represent micro-meso-exo-macro-chrono systems that can influence individuals (Kilanowski, 2017, p. 295). Lee et al. (2017) finds the SEM relevant to agricultural safety and health.

characterized by low productivity, limited utilization of technologies and inputs, poor infrastructure and market institutions and vulnerable to climate variability.

The severity of food insecurity among female-headed households in Ethiopia has increased two-fold compared with their male counterparts (Negesse et al., 2020). Women's workloads increase with drought (Tsige et al., 2020). Cooperatives are male dominated and are given the power of a monopoly to distribute fertilizers to farmers (Habte et al., 2020). Women are not able to access shared labour pools as easily as men and are traditionally barred from selling bulk items or livestock (Tsegaye et al., 2019). As a consequence of this discrimination, female farm managers produce 23.4 percent less per hectare than male farm managers (Aguilar et al., 2014).

The gendered division of labour in agriculture in Ethiopia has been well established. Women do not plough or control the income earned from large livestock or cash crops. This gendered restriction on women ploughing is usually justified by referring to "honour" and women's physical ability (Alesina & Nunn, 2013; Pankhurst, 1992; Tadele & Gella, 2014). Peveri and Drucza (2017) found that "the right to decide on types of crops, timing and farming management is taken away from women." Women in rural areas have limited access to community power structures, land, labour, oxen and extension services and technical programs (Frank, 1999). However, this does not mean that women do not display agency.

Oromia

The national language of Ethiopia is Amharic and the native language in Oromia is Oromifya. Oromia has diversified agroecology and topography suitable for agriculture and forest. Oromia region in Ethiopia plays a central role in the national crop production, accounting for 43.72% of total pulses, 49.82% of oilseeds, 40.81% of root crops and 21.79% of total fruit crop production (Shikhur, 2020) and 36.99% of the total vegetable product of the country (CSA, 2018). The Oromia region has 63 rivers and 688 tributary streams that provide about 58 billion cubic meters of surface water, half the country's surface water resources (Wodon & Zaman, 2010). The Ethiopian government is prioritizing agricultural and rural development in the region.

Women in Oromia have frequently missed out on the benefits that development brings. In Tsige et al. (2020) study on irrigation, women's user rights to large pumps is not even considered to be an issue since they are expected to be represented by their husbands. Women struggle to become members of cooperatives where inputs and knowledge are shared because membership requires secured land rights and household headship, which women do not possess. Instead, most

women tend to be members of informal community groups such as *Idir* or *Equib* (Tsige et al., 2020).

According to gender norms, women in Oromia should be obedient, subservient, respectful, and faithful to men, whereas men should be powerful and authoritative (Alemu, 2007). Although new laws and policies, especially on gender equality are bringing changes, implementation of these changes are often constrained due to local norms (Tsige et al., 2020). Men still take major decisions, women rarely obtain property after divorce, and women's engagement in transfers of land and livestock remains limited (Farnworth et al., 2019). But women resist and subvert these norms in creative ways.

The ways in which men use established social structures to resist change are clear, but women's strategies are less documented (Farnworth et al., 2019). There is evidence that women in West Arsi, Oromia are challenging institutional structures by speaking openly against power imbalances and their desire for change (Hebo & Shigeta, 2014). Debsu (2009) also finds that pastoralist Guji-Oromo women have more cultural and economic rights than immediately apparent. Meanwhile, some women remain loyal to traditional norms as a way to "bargain with patriarchy" (Kandiyoti, 1988). Research methods that capture women's strategies are needed in order to emphasise, rather than downplay, women's agency.

An emerging body of literature on gender and agriculture in Africa is drawing similar conclusions. In Nigeria, Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2009) describe it as "ironical" that women's contributions to agriculture are seldom noticed and argues that "rural women farmers deserve better recognition and greater appreciation of their tangible contributions to agriculture and rural development and food security." Integrating women's empowerment into existing and future projects in western Kenya will have the additional advantage of reducing poverty faster and achieving greater food security (Diiro et al., 2018). Mkwambisi et al. (2011) argue that in Malawi the government and NGOs should target poor women with agricultural extension and development project support. In Ethiopia, Negesse et al. (2020) conclude that cultural and social restriction of women's involvement in every aspect of agricultural activity affects household food security. Thus, it has been empirically proven that women matter to agricultural development, and yet they are still overlooked.

Methodology

Originally data was collected from 275 individuals (99 adult women, 96 adult men, 39 adolescent girls, 41 adolescent boys) from four wheat-growing villages in Ethiopia using the GENNOVATE[4] methodology. Study participants were asked about gender norms relating to behaviour and agency as it pertains to agriculture development, innovation and natural resource management. Seven qualitative data collection instruments were used, including single-sex focus group discussions, participatory instruments, and semi-structured individual interviews. The data was organized and analysed using NVivo software.

A validation process occurred to check outliers, or perplexing data. The validation process occurred from September 18, 2017 to October 6, 2017 in the four villages where the original data collection occurred. A total of 316 participants evenly distributed between the four sites were involved in the validation process out of which 132 were adult female and 183 adult male as well as 32 young females and 33 young males, all above the age of 18 (table 1). Please note that pseudonyms are used for the woreda/village names to protect respondent's identity.

The validation was done through qualitative tools: four Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), six Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and one Community Conversation (CC) per village. These different data collection tools were employed because people answer the same question about norms differently depending on whether it is conducted individually, in a small group or in the community; and because the original GENNOVATE methodology also used KIIs and participatory methods for FGDs and CCs. Validation instruments were prepared and translated into local languages (Amhara and Oromia).

Most of the questions asked during the validation were in the form of vignettes or statements that required participants to indicate their level of confirmation on a Likert scale. This is in line with the literature on social norms that suggests vignettes are the best way to get beyond normative answers to understanding how beliefs, actions and expectations may differ (Bicchieri, 2016). It is also aligned with the validation literature that argues a researcher should not pursue evidence to agree with their findings, but that validation should be considered a form of due diligence to uncover additional information that supports or contradicts the data (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Moreover, Likert scales can help to understand if outliers are a data collection anomaly or sit within an acceptable range of possibility, without pressuring respondents with a binary choice.

[4] For more information on the GENNOVATE methodology, please visit: http://gender.cgiar.org/themes/gennovate/

Table 1

Time, place and number of validation participants from Oromia

	Date of field visit	KII		FGD		Youth		CC[1]	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Oromia									
Chala	Sept 18 – 21	4[2]	0	21	16	10	9	16	7[3]
Akkela	Sept 12 – 15	3	0	21	17	6	7	21	9
Amhara									
Badero	Sept 28 – 30	3	0	18	19	7	8	18	4[4]
Gobado	Oct 4 – 6	3	1	15	19	9	9	9	8
Total		13	1	75	71	32	33	64	28

[1] Majority of the CC participants in Gobado (Amhara) were female and male youths as male farmers were engaged in harvesting because untimely rain was forecast.
[2] In both Chala and Akkela of Oromia the religious leaders interviewed were from protestant Christian religious groups, and hence, decision was made to add one informant from an Islamic background which is also one of the major religions in both villages.
[3] The date of the CC was a market day and as a result the participants were lower in number and it was started late.
[4] The date of the CC was also on a market day but to make things worse a small girl from the village died and therefore there was a funeral where almost all female community members were engaged in mourning. The CC could not start at 11am as planned, but rather it started at 1pm and had less female participants than optimal.

Source: Hailemariam et al. (2018)

The FGD was used to explore the immediate outcome of the farm-gate intervention for men and women. The FGDs involved a maximum of 10 participants in each sex specific group (men, young men, women, young women). To facilitate their vote on the Likert scale, cards with the different choices (strongly confirm, confirm, neither confirm nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree and do not know) were prepared and rocks were provided for participants to indicate their levels of agreement with the validation points raised. Once the voting process was over, discussions were held on each choice and people were encouraged to speak their views. This paper presents the results of this voting associated with two vignettes that were used during FGDs and designed to probe more deeply on the idea of "stealing" the harvest and farm gate selling. The data collected was coded and analysed using NVivo.

Results

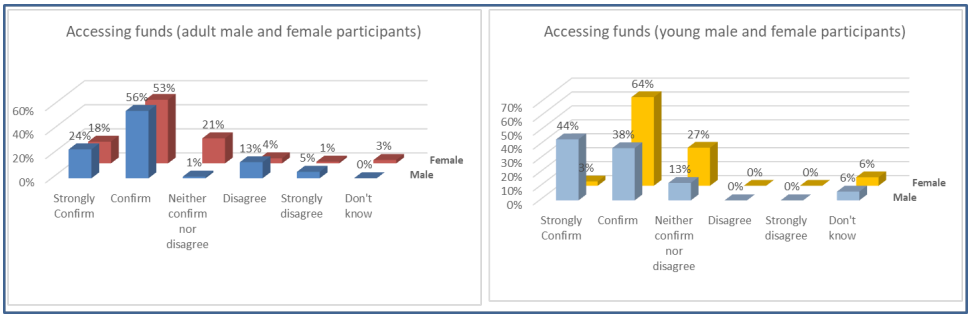
Secretly "stealing" the harvest (Amhara and Oromia)

FGD participants were asked to vote on whether they can confirm or deny if this vignette is likely to occur in their community:

> There is a woman whose husband tells her that she has no right to what happens to the harvest. So, every year she secretly stores away some food without her husband knowing. She keeps it hidden so that the family can use it if food runs low, or she can sell it for some extra money that she might need.

Eighty percent of adult men and 71 percent of adult female participants, 82 percent young male and 67 percent young female participants "confirmed" that women secretly store away some food without the husband knowing (Fig. 1). Whether this means the husband tells her she has no right to the harvest seemed less of an issue for respondents, suggesting male authoritarian rule is a widely accepted norm.

Figure 1: Access to fund: Total levels of agreement from all four villages of Amhara and Oromia



In households where the man is the sole decision maker there is very little discussion about household consumption. For example, in such households, according to one young female from Gobado, the man

> has the authority to decide and dictate on everything and as a result, the women have no say in any household decision.

While other respondents suggest women do have some say, this quote was frequently heard to explain why women help themselves to the harvest in secret. It is easier for women to do this than asking their spouse. Consequently, this practice is labelled "stealing" by respondents, illustrating a patriarchal society.

Both female and male participants from the two regions quoted a popular saying, '"ባል ሊበላ የሴት ሌባ", literally translated as "a woman is labelled a thief to feed the man", indicating that even if a woman "steals" crops, she uses it to feed her husband and her family. This was confirmed by a local shop keeper from Badero; "some men hide crops which he will sell, without his wife's knowledge." According to the shop keeper, the difference is:

> Usually women exchange the crop with some household necessities or use the money to buy items such as soap, oil, salt, sugar and the like for her house, while the men often do not use the money for such expenses.

The following quotes further confirm that going directly to men is not a good option. A female participant from Akkela indicated that:

> Men never understand what is required to run the household. They will allocate some crop that they think is enough for a certain period of time; like say for a month. He does not care if it is small or not, he expects the house to be full without giving enough.

Another one also added:

> Men give what they assume is enough, if she tries to indicate it is not enough, he will say "what do you know?..."

This highlights the absence of cooperative household discussions around the family budget and that women have little room to negotiate. It also suggests that masculine norms of inferiority may be triggered if women ask for more. Across generations and sex and village, the practice of an authoritarian head appears to be the masculine norm. According to a male participant from Chala:

> Men never ask where the good food came from when she gives delicious food, knowing what he gave her. He just eats….

Despite this lack of concern for where the food comes from, many male respondents reported knowing that women help themselves to the crop without discussion with their spouse. However, the men did not report confronting their wife over this issue and women are careful not to "steal" too obviously. This emphasises that complex power relationships between established public gender norms and privately held ones may exist.

Respondents confirm that women display agency. A young man from Chala comments on this:

> I am always intrigued to see how women do manage to cover their family's need. I know she does steal to make us eat, but she never even shows it … it is fascinating.

It is widely acknowledged that women do what they can to make ends meet without always deferring to the authoritarian head. Upsetting gender norms may prove more harmful for some women than quietly subverting them. There are constant trade-offs women make when navigating gender norms and these trade-offs will vary according to intrahousehold dynamics, and an individual's own strategies and opportunities. Women exert agency in the way they fulfil strategic choices, obtain opportunities and deliver changes, even if unspoken and under-researched.

In applying the theory of agency, it is possible that women undertake "stealing" as a way to resist the challenges of development. Women use their agency to find ways around this norm, as a young male participant from Akkela explains:

> Mothers use whatever they have to support their children and the household. They try to make ends meet through engaging in different income generating activities.

Women will engage in homemade baking or alcohol and sell it during local events, they will make jewellery or engage in other homebased enterprises to earn a little money. Women do not sit by idly and wait for their husband to command them.

Meanwhile, men dismiss women's knowledge and downplay the challenges women face. A participant from Chala observed:

> Some women even do not know where their farm is located, let alone what and how much is produced. And in such cases, it is easier for the man to control everything by himself.

Another adult male participant from Akkela commented: "women do not know their rights, they do not go to meetings. They do not learn…" Such opinions serve to perpetuate male authority and to exclude women from decision making.

In the way men publicly maintain the norm of their superiority over their wife, women maintain the norm of being a caring mother in the house so that children approach them, before fathers. For example, a young male from Badero stated that:

> We often do not ask for necessities from our father, we ask our mothers. And therefore, in instances where she has no extra income, she takes the crop and sells part of it to fulfill our needs.

An adult female FGD participant from Badero explained:

> There are lots of necessities for girls, a man does not understand these, it is the mother who understands and provides such necessities… children especially daughters ask for such necessities from mothers not fathers.

The role of fulfilling a child's needs sits with mothers. Potentially, some men and some wives are content in subscribing to these norms. To do so requires men to ignore women's problems, and women to not ask for too much. The next section reveals that not all women and men subscribe to these norms, as some try to subvert them.

Farm gate selling

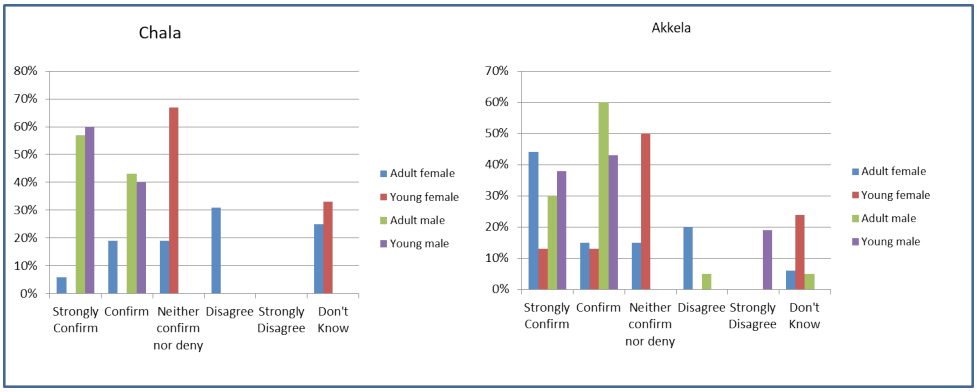
At a later point in the FGD, the following question was asked specifically about farm gate selling:

> Please place your rock on a number to confirm if farm gate selling has made it more difficult for women in your community to manage household expenses because they no longer have access to the stored harvest?

All participants from Amhara said that farm gate selling was not implemented in their area. This is because the government introduced farm gate selling as a pilot program only in some selected parts of Oromia to see how it works. Consequently, this section only presents results from the two villages of Oromia where farm gate selling is piloted.

Predominantly male participants from both villages (i.e. Chala 100 percent both adult male and young male and Akkela 81 percent adult male and 50 percent young male) "confirmed" that farm gate selling is affecting women's access to stored crops thereby making it difficult to manage household expenses and food security. Figure 2 shows that farm gate selling makes it difficult for women to manage household expenses because they no longer have access to the stored harvest which women traditionally "steal" from at times of shortages, or when their husband does not provide enough for the family's needs.

Figure 2: Total levels of agreement on farm gate selling and effect on women's ability to manage household expenses in two villages of Oromia



Women need alternative income sources to ensure food security. The 20 percent of women in Akkela who "disagreed" that farm gate selling had a negative impact explained that women with alternative means of income would not suffer. The following quote from an adult female participant from Akkela summarizes the argument:

> Families who depend on farming are not only growing wheat. Rather, they tend to have different crops as well as other means of getting income.

Another adult female participant from Akkela also added that women are increasingly "engaged in preparing and selling *arekie* (local alcoholic drink)" which is another potential means of off-setting the loss from farm gate selling. Some of the difference in responses between women in Chala and Akkela could relate to varying levels of implementation of the pilot "farm get selling program" as well as the range of livelihood options open to women in these two communities. Additionally, alternative income sources may be a way for women to subvert the gender norm of men's superiority as the provider and patriarch.

The differences between the two communities require further investigation. In Chala, less adult and young women confirm the practice and more women disagree, than in Akkela. Young women in Chala appear to have less idea about the implications of farm gate selling than in Akkela. A woman from Chala explained that:

> Women benefit from stored crops and also the hay (used to feed the animals) when the crop is harvested in the traditional way.

But was not able to draw conclusions about the change in practice:

> I am not sure, but this may harm the woman, especially if he uses the money by himself.

Meanwhile, more adult and young men confirm that farm gate selling affects women's ability to manage household expenses in Chala. This may indicate that gender norms in Chala are more entrenched and therefore women are more likely to subscribe, rather than subvert them.

It is possible that communication between the sexes is more divided in Chala than in Akkela. It is unlikely that men in Chala are more benevolent than those in Akkela, given that men from Chala have confirmed that farm gate selling would be more difficult for women. Those from Chala who confirmed the negative impact of farm gate-selling on women's access to stored crops, explained that the impact of farm-gate selling depends on intra-household decision making practices. For example, a young male participant from Chala indicated that:

> It is difficult for women to get adequate resources to cover household expenses especially in households where the man is a dictator and makes every decision by himself.

Another young male from the same village indicated that:

> There is a probability that the man will not bring the money from the farm-gate selling back home, rather he may decide to use the money for something else. In this case, the wife would have difficulty fulfilling her household needs.

Their arguments suggest that a benevolent household head that shares equally and consults his family is a myth and that women and men use different strategies to subvert and subscribe to gender norms. It also suggests that gender relations in Chala are less equal than in Akkela which upholds the idea that gender norms in Chala are more entrenched. More entrenched gender norms, limit the strategies women can use to subvert them and instead their strategies are covert and seemingly reinforce gender norms.

Discussion

The well-intentioned farm gate selling pilot project illuminates the way the Ethiopian state can adopt a neo-colonial approach to women and rural development, despite never having been colonized. The extension services and projects

related to food security that target men as project beneficiaries assume that the entire family will benefit through the head of the household. Hegemonic development practices and associated research interventions have a tendency towards instrumentalist views of gender relations that reinforce a view of women as passive (without agency) who operate in an apolitical and paternalistic agricultural development sector, and rarely need to be consulted (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004; Kabeer, 1999; O'Hara & Clement, 2018).

Responses from women about the lack of access to harvest associated with farm gate selling suggests that women will always find new ways to resist development projects that reduce their space for negotiation. The results on "stealing" crops reveals women's creativity. Such creativity has been observed in other literature in this region. Farnworth et al. (2019, p. 18) discuss the way women use voice and silence to push forward their agendas or goals and articulate their preference through "doing rather than speaking". Women's agency is different to men's agency. Women use different strategies and embrace different forms of power and dissent.

Only interviewing the household head about food and expenditure makes little sense. He may think (or act) as though he has full oversight and control over the household finances but in reality he does not. Similarly, a woman may claim to have no knowledge of such things when she has a well-practiced strategy. What these findings reveal is that gender relations are complex and the reality of power negotiations around gender norms will not come from only interviewing one member of the household. However, by not interviewing women and men and comparing their responses, agricultural development practices can undermine women's strategies and reinforce a neo-colonial myth of women as passive.

The case study on farm gate selling shows how the nuclear family model, with a benevolent male head who shares equally with everyone within the household, is shaped by power relations that are seeded in the colonial past and yet are continually reproduced in the present through development projects. While women's stealing of harvest is considered a normal response to food and resource shortages by women, the pilot project removed this opportunity and rendered women more dependent on men. Thus, farm gate selling established "new configurations of masculinized power" (Banerjee & Connell, 2018, p. 65). A failure to understand local gender relations can cause more household disharmony and even more food insecurity.

Conclusion

This paper argues that the postcolonial revolution in knowledge about gender and power relations has not touched the agricultural sector. The ways in which research findings are framed, communicated and disseminated can have implications for the research and development process (Leung et al., 2019, p. 432). This includes the type of evidence collected and evaluated such as social norms and gender relations associated with food security, as well as the participants (active or passive) in the design and implementation of the research or development project. By overlooking the existing gender power relations at individual, household and community level and the mechanisms by which most women use to cope with food and resource shortages, the "farm gate selling" pilot hampered women's own food security mechanisms; but this is rendered invisible by usual research practices.

Feminist research approaches are rarely used in development projects relating to agricultural and natural resources management (Drucza et al., 2019, p. 55). Using feminist research methods exposes women's agency, their social roles and their disadvantage. More feminist research methods that recognize women's agency are required to ensure policies and programs have the necessary impact on empowering women, addressing gender inequalities and ensuring food security. For this to be done well, intra-household relations including bargaining strategies, and intra-household resource allocation must be documented and analysed. Moreover, understanding the constraints faced by women in participating in decision-making at different stages of the agriculture cycle, such as the food harvest, is crucial to the design and implementation of successful development projects that improve food security and gender relations. The concept of agency provides a useful lens through which the strategies used by women can be captured and analysed.

Even if structural inequalities such as patriarchy are present in neo-colonial and agricultural development approaches, individuals also display various degrees of scheming, and various degrees of intrahousehold relations. As an indication, some men (husbands or sons) know women "steal" but never mention it, and others do not. Some women will "steal" but will never mention it and others will boast about their strategic actions. The way an individual interrelates with structures of power and opportunity can indicate agency. Thus, there is more than one value and strategy governing gender relations and power in rural Ethiopia.

There is a reason for why developmental strategies, and an emerging body of literature across African agricultural development has been focusing strongly on women and the interrelationship between gender norms, structures of power and response strategies. The values around gender relations and power are negotiated and changed in complex and subtle ways. This can occur differently between and within spaces and across the socioecological model necessitating different research strategies that can unpack "silence" and "stealing" to truly decolonize agricultural research for development. Similarly, the way gender roles are negotiated and even challenged requires more scholarship to ensure power and gender norms are not oversimplified.

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