



## Integrating behavioural change to accelerate women's economic empowerment

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For development interventions to be successful we rely on people to behave and choose in certain ways. For example, for new advanced agricultural practices to provide benefits, farmers must adopt and use them. Behaviour thus affects whether the provision of advanced farming technologies have the effect they are intended to achieve. An increasing trend in development is therefore to look at a specific problem through a "behaviour" lens to enhance our understanding of the problem and people's behaviours, also referred to as behavioural design.

The main objective of behavioural design is to improve the reach and effectiveness of interventions to address development challenges. To give an example, in many developing countries women's productivity in agricultural businesses is lower than that of men. The key question is then: how do we diagnose this problem? Possible reasons for the lower productivity of women in agriculture may be that women have less access to inputs, finance or markets. It is also possible that female farmers have less access to knowledge, for example around advanced farming techniques that could improve productivity. Each of these diagnoses is based on the presumption that a female farmer who has access will also make use of this access and benefit from it. These diagnoses and assumptions in turn determine the solution that will be chosen: focusing on increasing access.

Whereas increasing access to inputs, finance, markets and knowledge for female farmers makes sense in areas where access is lacking, it is also important to examine factors that could influence whether female farmers will actually make use of this access and benefit from it. To get a better understanding of the barriers that female farmers and entrepreneurs face, the ['Enhancing Opportunities for Women's Enterprises' \(EOWE\) programme](#) conducted various gender studies in [Kenya](#) and [Vietnam](#). These studies show that women entrepreneurs in agriculture indeed lack access to resources and business assets, but it also shows that gender norms and intra-household power relations influence female farmers' control over resources and decision-making power in their households and the community. Increasing access to inputs by for example making fertiliser cheaper by subsidising it or by informing female farmers about the benefits of fertilisers may therefore not be sufficient when intra-household power relations and gender norms prevent women from making any decisions on fertiliser-use.

**The need to  
integrate business  
support and  
behavioural change  
interventions**



📷 Household dialogue session in Samburu (Kenya).

The EOWE programme therefore complements its business support and policy influencing interventions with activities that focus on transforming key gender norms and power relations that prevent female farmers and agri-business entrepreneurs from equally participating in and benefitting from economic activities. Through the gender-transformative [Balancing Benefits](#) approach the EOWE programme is working with both women and men from the household through to the marketplace to generate equal income and business opportunities and to increase women's economic empowerment. The programme implements Household Dialogues and Behavioural Change Communication interventions to change gender norms and power relations in order to promote more equitable relationships between men and women and a more socially enabling environment.

The Household Dialogues are facilitated discussions among couples that operate in the agricultural sector and focus on critically examining, challenging and questioning gender norms and power relations that underlie gender gaps. The key gender norms that will be addressed in Kenya are: 1) time-use of women (spending less time on domestic chores and more time on productive activities), 2) women's lack of control over use of income, and 3) lack of access to and decision-making power over credit. The first two gender norms also turned out to be major barriers to gender equality and women's economic empowerment in Vietnam. Our baseline studies, however, show that lack of access to and decision-making power over credit is less of a barrier for female farmers and entrepreneurs in Vietnam. Gender norms around women's leadership, on the other hand, turned out to be a critical barrier and will therefore be addressed in the Household Dialogues in Vietnam.

Both in Vietnam and Kenya, time-use turned out to be the biggest barrier for women to equally participate and compete in economic activities. In both countries, taking care of household chores is perceived a women's job, with women spending four times more time on household chores than men. Leah Njeri, SNV's Senior WEE Policy and CSO Advisor in Kenya, explains that these gender norms are deeply-rooted in society.

Often men still have fear of empowering women. "A win or empowerment of women is a loss or disempowerment of men" says Mr. Peter Muriuki, participant from Laikipia, Kenya. During one of the Household Dialogue sessions one of the male participants explained that "if I help my wife with household chores she may say it to other women when visiting a salon and then I become the laughing stock in the village." Peter explains that "the Household Dialogues work towards removing the fear and create a better understanding on women's empowerment."

Discussion around these gendered differences and perceptions in society, with facilitators that have experience with dealing with culturally and socially sensitive issues, could lead to finding solutions that benefit both husband and wife. Another male participant shared that he is willing to cook, but that a smoke free kitchen would make this task easier. The adoption of an energy efficient cook stove will be a win-win solution from which both husband and wife can benefit.


Nguyen Cong Nhue, SNV's Climate Change and Gender Advisor in Vietnam, describes that behavioural change communication with farmer couples is build-up in different stages from awareness, self-analysis on gendered

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differences within the household to getting commitment for specific actions. To address a gender norm like time-use, for example, couples from farming household couples start with mapping the tasks and activities of both husband and wife. Mapping these activities increases awareness and self-reflection and forms the starting point of a discussion around the differences that are found. Based on these findings and insights, the farmer couples create a vision for change and document the actions that they want to take to achieve the change.

Nhue explains that the results after one dialogue session were really impressive. "During one of the first Household Dialogue sessions, Mr. Nguyen Thanh Sy firmly stated that his spouse would have nothing to do if he would do the household chores. After one day of working with our facilitators and going through different sessions/tools, his wife shared "I found my husband different in the evening after one day training and dialogue. He is more caring". On the second day, when the couple developed their vision of change for a period of 6 months, he committed to spend more time on raising their chickens and to cook for his wife to enable her to join the rice farmer groups for training. At the same time, his wife is eager to regularly share decision-making over daily household expenditures, to learn new production techniques for rice cultivation and to share her knowledge with her husband to form a good team together."



 Farmer presents his vision for change within his household at household dialogue session in Ninh Thuan (Vietnam).

Both in Kenya and Vietnam, the first Household Dialogues with female farmers and entrepreneurs and their spouses show a promising first step in changing behaviour around gender norms. SNV is currently developing community level tools, like gender-transformative radio shows and poster campaigns, to accelerate a wider change beyond the participating couples to make the investment in changes at the household level more sustainable by engaging neighbours, family and friends as well as village elders and political and religious leaders in the same localities, so they will develop together in becoming more gender-equitable in their attitudes and behaviours. "I found the sessions in which I worked with the farmer couples very interesting", says Nhue. "Even though we still have a lot of work to do to make behavioural change happen, I believe that if we use our behavioural change communication interventions to inspire farmers they will become role models for wider social and behavioural change."

*This blog post was written as part of the blog series of the ['Enhancing Opportunities for Women's Enterprises \(EOWE\) programme](#), a 5-year women's economic empowerment programme funded by the Department of Social Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands under the ['Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women' \(FLOW\) framework](#). The programme aims to increase women's economic participation and self-reliance in Kenya and Vietnam by catalysing a conducive national and local environment for female entrepreneurship.*

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