TRANSFORMATIVE ENGAGEMENTS WITH GENDER RELATIONS IN AGRICULTURE AND WATER GOVERNANCE

Stephanie Leder¹, Gitta Shrestha² and Dipika Das³

ABSTRACT

Despite frequent calls for transformative approaches for engaging in agrarian change and water governance, we observe little change in everyday development and research praxis. Empirical studies on transformative engagements with gender relations among smallscale or tenant farmers and water user groups are particularly rare. We explore transformative engagements through an approach based on critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996) and transformative practice (Leder, 2018). We examine opportunities to promote empathy and critical consciousness on gender norms, roles and relations in agriculture and resource management. We developed and piloted an innovative “Participatory Gender Training for Community Groups” as part of two internationally funded water security projects. The training consists of three activities and three discussions to reflect on gender roles in families, communities and agriculture, to discuss the gendered division of labour and changing gender relations over time and space, and to create empathy and resolve conflicts through a bargaining role play with switched genders. The approach was implemented in twelve villages across four districts in Nepal and India (Bihar, West Bengal). Our results show how the training methods can provide an open space to discuss local gender roles within households, agriculture and natural resource management. Discussing own gender norms promotes critical consciousness that gender norms are socially constructed and change with age, class, caste and material and structural constraints such as limited access to water and land. The activities stimulated enthusiasm and inspiration to reflect on possible change towards more equal labor division and empathy towards those with weaker bargaining power. Facilitators have the most important role in transformative engagements and need to be trained to reinterpret training principles in local contexts, and to apply facilitation skills to focus on transforming rather than reproducing gender norms. We argue that the gender training methods can initiate transformative practice with the gender-water-agriculture nexus by raising critical consciousness of farmers, community mobilisers, and project staff on possibilities of social change “in situ”.

Keywords: gender, transformative practice, critical pedagogy, agriculture, water, participatory action research, social learning

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INTRODUCTION

Participation in resource governance has been considered highly important but the literature has not been short on demonstrating failures (Agarwal, 2001; Mosse, 1994; Mosse, 2004). Gender and other social inequalities remain in access to and control over natural resources such as water and land, and agriculture more broadly (Sultana, 2011; Zwarteveen and Meinzen-Dick, 2001). Feminists, researchers and policymakers have long been advocating for the greater inclusion of women in decision-making processes on natural resources (Agrawal, 2000). Several developing countries such as Nepal introduced a women quota in water user groups at the local level. However, there is a rising concern if gender equality could be achieved by simply adding women to user groups as this might not address power relations and structural inequalities (Shrestha and Clement, 2019). There is even a danger of antagonistic attitudes among community members and aggravated inequalities (Ahlers and Zwarteveen, 2009; Cleaver and Hamada, 2010; Zwarteveen and Neupane, 1996; Harris, 2008). In South Asia, gender relations are set within axes of other social and economic differences such as class, age, ethnicity and caste, which shape water access and irrigation management (Panta and Resurrección, 2017; Leder et al., 2017). These complex social relations are often hidden in mainstream water and agricultural research, government schemes and development projects. However, these are vital to understand in order to move towards greater inclusion in water resource governance and to address the unequal division of agricultural labor and decision-making (Leder et al., 2019). This is particularly of importance in contexts of climate change and rural out-migration of mostly young men, with an increase in labour burden for women accompanied by limited access to and control over water and other resources (Sugden et al., 2014). Addressing gender inequalities through open dialogue is essential for small-scale agriculture, water security and more inclusive water governance.

Despite frequent calls for transformative approaches for engaging in agrarian change, water governance and climate change by feminist and critical development scholars (Sultana, 2019; Nightingale et al., 2019) there are only few theoretically and empirically grounded approaches to transformative engagements which open up spaces to discuss opportunities for greater inclusion in water governance and agriculture more broadly. The literature on social learning is in particular insightful. Social learning is taking place through deliberative interactions amongst multiple stakeholders in which participants learn to work together and build relationships that allow for collective action (Cundill and Rodela, 2012; Rodela, 2013). The promotion of social learning in forest management groups has shown positive effects on multi-directional information sharing and collective action (Hegde et al., 2016). Creating ‘contact zones’ between different groups to meet and engage can reduce conflicts or redress asymmetrical power relations (Hegde et al., 2016). Furthermore, particularly gender-responsive participatory approaches have been considered as promoting socially-
inclusive and sustainable natural resource management practices (Elias et al., 2016). Morales and Harris (2014) suggest to draw attention to subjectivity and emotion for meaningful participation. Knowledge co-creation, empathy and a shifting sense of own subjectivities can promote new ways of relating to water resources and water infrastructures (Tremblay and Harris, 2018). Building on these insights, we see the need for empirically tested methods to deeply engage with context-specific gender relations in resource governance which address the unequal division of agricultural labour and gendered norms on mobility, speaking up and being heard.

We argue that approaches that build on critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996) and transformative practice (Leder, 2018) can initiate transformative engagements with gender relations in agriculture, natural resource governance and research. Critical pedagogy was developed by the Brazilian educationist Paolo Freire (1996) and builds on the concept of critical consciousness. Freire’s pedagogy is oriented towards promoting social justice in which marginalised individuals can become transformative democratic citizens through reflection and dialogue and thus contribute to national development (Freire, 1996). We also draw on principles of transformative practice for sustainable development based on democratic and visual learning methods as developed by Leder (2018). The approach promotes critical thinking on controversial human-environment relations through visual methods and a weak framing in which the facilitator has less control over the communication of participants in order to encourage participation.

This paper explores opportunities for transformative engagements through the development, piloting and implementation of a “Participatory Gender Training for Community Groups” (Leder et al., 2016). The training methods are derived from principles of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996) and transformative practice (Leder, 2018) in order to promote empathy and critical consciousness on the role that gender plays in communities’ everyday lives, and to create opportunities for reflections on how to transform towards more equal gender and labor relations. The training aims at openly engaging with gender inequalities in small-scale agriculture, domestic labor and resource management institutions, e.g. in irrigation systems, or collective farming. We will exemplify how gender-focused activities and discussions provide valuable space for encouraging farmers to bring their own ideas and stimulate critical reflections and dialogue on gender perceptions and practices in their particular cultural setting while avoiding prescriptions based on particular “Western” view on gender relations.

In the next section, we review recent literature on gendered struggles in agriculture and water resource management. In section three, we address the importance of bargaining in the context of gender inequalities in natural resource governance. We then introduce in section four the approach of the “Participatory Gender Training for Community Groups”, and outline our methods in section five. We will then present participants’ response to the different training methods which 1) reflect on gender norms, 2) discuss
the gendered division of labour 3) create empathy through a bargaining role play with switched genders. We then discuss the role and perceptions of the community mobilisers and the process of facilitating and reinterpreting training principles in local contexts. Finally, we reflect on the opportunities and the challenges around shifting and reproducing gender norms through such social learning engagements.

GENDERED STRUGGLES IN AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The influence of gender norms and relations in managing natural resources such as agriculture, forests and water has been widely recognised in the literature (Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen, 1998; Agarwal, 2001). On the one hand, gender norms attach particular traditional feminine and masculine roles for women and men, on the other hand, changing rural dynamics such as male out-migration reconfigure gender roles and added responsibilities to women which were previously performed by men. While women carry a triple labour burden of reproductive, productive and community work in the absence of men in the villages, unequal resource access and exclusive spaces of decision-making hinder equitable use and management of natural resources. In opposition to men, women often have lower mobility and limited access to their husbands’ social networks, and women receive lower recognition as irrigators than men. Thus, women have to repetitively request the pump owner for water and spend more time arranging irrigation than men.

One major policy measure to tackle gender inequality in agriculture and water resource management is the 33 percent reservation in water user associations in Nepal. However, evidence suggest limited impact of such policy due to failing to take into account social and cultural factors that largely shape an individual’s access to resources and decision-making spaces (Shrestha and Clement, 2019). Feminists further stress the need for an intersectional analysis to demonstrate how differentiated access, use and control over water is conditioned by poverty, livelihoods, and landlessness (Harris, 2008). A gender analysis of the Chhattis Mauja irrigation scheme in Nepal shows that some women, despite being excluded from the management of the scheme’s organisation, use the prevailing perception of women as physically weak to develop a privileged position for getting their irrigation needs accommodated without spending time participating in maintenance and meetings (Zwarteveen & Neupane, 1996).

Gender norms vary over time and space, and often put women at disadvantaged position affecting livelihood and well-being of women farmers adversely. Intra-household relationships have important implications on who takes part and who benefits from agriculture and water interventions (Leder et al., 2017). The exclusion of women from decision-making bodies has severe consequences in how interventions are shaped and resources allocated (ibid). Gendered vulnerabilities increase during water scarcity for household or agriculture use as women have to travel longer distances to collect
water which increases their workload (Gurung and Bisht, 2014). In the context of increasing male migration from the rural areas, research indicates increasing reliance of the left-behind women on male relatives to access information, services, and opportunities (Shrestha and Clement, 2019).

**THE IMPORTANCE OF BARGAINING IN AGRICULTURE**

Agriculture and the management of natural resources are linked with bargaining relations on and beyond the farm. Bargaining is an act of negotiation that uses power to achieve an outcome (Martin, 1992). At the intra-household level, bargaining power depends on an individual’s fallback or a breakdown position (Agarwal, 1997). The fall-back position is determined by how well-off someone would be if the cooperation failed. A person having stronger fallback position has better bargaining power and often receives a better choices in the family (Agarwal, 1997). The process of bargaining can involve discussions, logic and arguments as well as comprises of subtle resistance such as emotional manipulation (Locke and Okali, 1999).

In agriculture, the meaning of bargaining power can be described as the ability of a person to use their agency to make a fair share of farm income or crop produce, as well as the ability to make choices related to it. Bijman et al. (2012) argued that agricultural value chains have persistent bargaining imbalances between farmers with their upstream and downstream partners. Farmers, particularly women smallholders, often have low bargaining power due to a lack of productive resources and low levels of literacy and numeracy knowledge (Dorward et al., 2003). In the Tarai area of Nepal, for example, traders who visit smallholders’ farm to collect vegetables also allocate the price of agricultural products which has the effect that smallholders often bear a loss due to the traders’ stronger bargaining power (Bastakoti et al., 2017).

Bargaining power is vital for both women and men farmers in their everyday activities. In farming, bargaining power becomes essential to manage tasks like the allocation of labour to various activities, including household, agriculture and wage work (Doss, 2013). Despite its importance, Agarwal (1997) noted bargaining power is subjective to individuals based on their gender and age, caste and experience. Women’s bargaining power within a household is influenced by her education level, health, education of children and general wellbeing. In addition, women’s active participation in agriculture is steered by socially constructed gender norms (Farnworth, 2011). Hoyt and Murphy (2016) explain that men tend to have better bargaining power while women feel less comfortable when it comes to bargaining. Hence, it is important to consider bargaining against the background of existing gender norms and power imbalances in particular contexts.
A NEW APPROACH: PARTICIPATORY GENDER TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

As researchers of an international research organisation\(^4\), the first two authors developed a “Participatory Gender Training for Community Groups” (Leder et al., 2016)\(^5\) to inform an internationally funded action research project\(^6\). The approach was developed to be used by Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) staff to hold discussions with community members and fellow colleagues on gender norms and relations. Furthermore, methods were used by researchers for a gender analysis.

The training methods are rooted in principles of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996) and transformative practice (Leder, 2018). The key objective of critical pedagogy is individual liberation through promoting capabilities for individual development and the collective struggle for social justice (Freire, 1996). Freire considers transformation as a praxis which combines both reflection and action. Through dialogue, education becomes a democratic and emancipatory process, in which the oppressed are freed from their “culture of silence” (Freire, 1996, p.12). He suggests countering the social reproduction of inequalities through reflection and dialogue for an educational awakening. Freire developed teaching methods concerned with the actual experiences of rural peasants in Brazil and available material from their cultural background. This approach led to an influential social and educational movement to create empowerment through critical consciousness, "la conscientização" (Freire, 1996, p.17).

Transformative practice describes an intermediate, transitional form of engagement which aims to shift practices of social reproduction to practices of transformation (Leder, 2018). Unequal power relations such as gender can be addressed by drawing on principles of democratic learning theories (Dewey, 1916), participatory approaches (Bunch, 1995; Chambers, 1994) and network thinking (Vester, 2002) to develop a visualising and communicative approach to promote the interlinkage of diverse knowledge (Leder, 2018).

In this spirit, the training methods were developed to provide a space for farmers and staff to share their perceptions, to learn from another, and to engage

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\(^4\) The authors worked with the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and the CGIAR research program “Water, Land and Ecosystem”.

\(^5\) The participatory gender training manual is published by Leder et al. (2016) and includes step-by-step descriptions for each activity and discussion, as well as tips for facilitation and pictures to use in the training. A 12’ film documentary, webinar slides, and an interactive homepage of the implemented training can be found at https://wle.cgiar.org/solutions/participatory-gender-training-community-groups (last checked 8 Jan 2020).

\(^6\) The research project was funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, and was called “Improving Dry-season irrigation for marginal and tenant farmers”.
in a dialogue. To avoid imposing pre-determined social and gender values, space is provided for participants to come to their own conclusions by guiding them through reflections on gender and activities which promote empathy. This can lead to collective ideas evolving and a critical consciousness (Freire, 1996), which contributes to social change.

The objective of the Participatory Gender Training is to create a space for critical discussions on gender norms, roles and relations in agriculture and water and natural resource management groups. Participants are encouraged to reflect around their capabilities, value and belief systems in regard to existing gender relations in agriculture. The training aimed at bringing the fluidity of gender as a rather academic and development-oriented discourse into discussions with marginalised community groups.

The training is designed to be culturally grounded and regionally adaptable through using local examples and pictures. The training provides methods

- to reflect on gender roles in families, communities and agriculture,
- to discuss the unequal division of labour and changing gender relations and across time and space, and
- to create empathy and resolve conflicts through a bargaining role play with switched genders

The development of the activities was guided by specific principles, objectives and methods (cf. Table 1). We developed three activities and three discussions for a three-hour gender training workshop for approximately 5 to 12 participants, which we will shortly introduce in the following sections.

### Table 1: Principles, objectives and methods of the training activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network thinking (Vester, 2002)</td>
<td>Extending and sustaining knowledge</td>
<td>Photo networks as visual input</td>
<td>1 - Boy or Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying social constructions (Chambers 1994, Leder, 2017)</td>
<td>Demystifying ascribed gender traits and roles in the community (e.g., women’s triple work)</td>
<td>Discussing reasons for boy or girl preferences</td>
<td>2 - Gender Position Bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking on a Continuum (Leder, 2017)</td>
<td>Demonstrating the relativity of gendered labor division</td>
<td>Arranging agricultural labor on 5 varying degrees of women and men’s involvement</td>
<td>1 - Boy or Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role switching</td>
<td>Raising empathy and awareness for the other gender’s constraints</td>
<td>Switched gender role play with own bargaining story</td>
<td>2 - Gender Position Bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation and farmer orientation (Bunch, 1995, Chambers, 1994)</td>
<td>“local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge and conditions, to plan and act” (Chambers, 1994)</td>
<td>Farmers’ choice of pictures, space for discussing own reasons, spontaneously integrating farmers’ issues in the training schedule</td>
<td>1 - Boy or Girl 2 - Gender Position Bar 3 - Bargaining Role Play</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first activity “Boy or girl?” enables farmers to understand and discuss their own gender constructions. We build the idea on a similar activity in a gender training by the non-governmental organisation iDE (2015). Participants have to choose between a boy or a girl picture if they could decide their offspring’s gender – given an imaginary medical condition which allowed them to have only one child. By giving reasons for their gender choice to the group, the activity promotes reflecting on own gender assumptions within the personal sphere as per “the personal is political”. Ascribed gender traits and roles can be demystified through those participants who chose the other group, and a discussion may evolve.

In the second activity, the gendered division of labour was discussed with photos of different types of labour as visual input (Vester, 2002). The photos should reflect the local context so that the participants can relate their everyday life activities to it. The photos had to be placed along a “Gender Position Bar” (cf. Fig. 4). In the Gender Position Bar, pictures of different types of labour shall be arranged along a continuum of labour attributed as “only female”, “mostly female”, “both male and female”, “mostly male”, or “only male”. This demonstrated the relativity of and changing gender divisions in reproductive and productive labour as well as community roles (triple work load), reflecting on women’s tasks with a life cycle approach (Chambers, 1994). Participants are encouraged to describe, explain, discuss and arrange visual inputs in the form of pictures (Vester, 2002). The idea of a visual continuum builds on the didactic teaching method developed for a doctoral dissertation on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) for India’s formal educational system (Leder, 2018).

The third activity is a “Bargaining Role Play” to encourage bargaining between male and female farmers in switched roles. The role play challenges farmers to represent the other gender in a humoristic manner, and to act and speak like they perceive the other gender. Themes covered are balancing domestic tasks such as cooking and fetching water with agricultural tasks, landlord-tenant negotiations or in-law’s working demands on daughter-in-laws. Participants are encouraged to opt for any situation, problem or story relevant to them to act on. Role-switching can promote empathy and awareness of the other gender’s constraints without directly criticising current gender roles and relations.

Guided discussions help connect the activities and provide participants space to ask questions and talk about gender norms and gender roles in their households and community. These spaces for discussions allow to spontaneously integrate any issues which farmers might bring up during the activities of the training (Bunch, 1995).

While the Participatory Gender Training laid out in a detailed manual (Figure 1) can be used any time to generate discussion and reflection on the role of gender in a community, there are four times when this specific training may be particularly necessary. First, when new projects are starting in villages and community groups are formed. In this case, the training can be used to sensitise field staff and farmers on
gender relations in communities. Second, when there are gender-related tensions in a community. This may happen often in communities where men are out-migrating and women are left behind. Third, when conducting participatory research to understand how gender effects community relations and practices in villages. Lastly, when project staff is working with communities. It can help to reveal one’s own gender perceptions before addressing those directly or indirectly in villages.

After the implementation of the activities and discussions, facilitators and farmers can discuss opportunities to repeat these activities to observe whether their perceptions have changed. It is important to view this workshop as an initial engagement tool within a greater development process which can be linked to other project interventions. For this purpose, the approach can identify community-specific challenges regarding gender relations which shape developmental interventions in unpredicted ways.

Figure 1: The Participatory Gender Training Manual (Leder et al., 2016)
METHODS

The training activities were piloted and modified by two researchers in collaboration with project field staff and farmers in six villages in the Eastern Tarai of Nepal and Bihar and West Bengal in India. In these villages (Table 2), groups were formed by local partner NGOs as part of a larger action research project, and we were asked by the project team to develop a gender training for the groups to accompany other technical trainings which promoted horticulture, solar irrigation and other improved agricultural techniques. The trainings were conducted twice per village, twelve times in total. The training was tested with both female only (4 groups) and male only (1 group) as well as mixed gender (7 groups). Each group had a maximum of 12 farmers, whereas we noted much better communication happening in smaller groups of 6 to 8 farmers.

We employ action research methods in order to promote the co-creation of knowledge. We involved local field assistants and social mobilisers as supporting facilitators in the training. Before we conducted the training, we met with four support facilitators to prepare their roles in the training as well as to integrate their views on the training and modify it accordingly. During and after every training, modifications and variations were incorporated in the training structure, e.g. timings per activity were adjusted and instructions were changed or specified. The data collected was transcribed, summarised and paraphrased for each activity and discussion relying on principles of a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2002).
Table 2: Characteristics of the 12 groups in 6 villages in which the training was piloted (DSI4MTF Census Survey, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste and gender composition of groups</th>
<th>Khoksar Parbaha, Saptari, Nepal</th>
<th>Koiladi, Saptari, Nepal</th>
<th>Bhagwatipur, Madhubani, Bihar</th>
<th>Mahuyahi, Madhubani, Bihar</th>
<th>Dholaguri, Cooch Behar, North Bengal</th>
<th>Uttar Chakowakheti, Alipur, North Bengal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 x Tharu women group</td>
<td>1 x Mixed caste groups women</td>
<td>1 x Mixed caste women</td>
<td>1 x Mixed caste group</td>
<td>1 x Dalit group mixed gender</td>
<td>2 x Rajbanshi mixed gender</td>
<td>2 x Scheduled Tribes (SC) mixed gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 x Dalit and Muslim women group</td>
<td>only</td>
<td>only</td>
<td>mixed gender (Castes: Singh Mandal, Mukhiya, Dalit, Muslim)</td>
<td>mixed gender (Castes: Yadav Mandal Mukhiya Jha (upper caste))</td>
<td>mixed gender (Castes: Mandal, Brahmin Muslims )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Mostly illiterate</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Mostly illiterate</th>
<th>Mostly Illiterate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>35-49 years</td>
<td>25-55 years</td>
<td>30-62 years</td>
<td>18-58 years</td>
<td>18 – 60 years</td>
<td>24 – 55 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social structures in the village</th>
<th>Lower inequality among landlord and tenant, strong community in terms of gender and caste</th>
<th>High inequality among landlord and tenant, Caste system Strong Patriarchy</th>
<th>High inequality among landlord and tenant, Caste system Strong Patriarchy</th>
<th>High inequality among landlord and tenants, Caste system Strong Patriarchy</th>
<th>Inequalities in landowners, tenants and agricultural wage workers, gender and caste inequalities</th>
<th>Lower inequalities in terms of gender and landownership, tribal village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village remoteness and market access for women</td>
<td>Close to highway, periodic market at 10 minutes walk</td>
<td>Remote from highway, periodic market 15-20 minutes walk</td>
<td>Remote from highway, market and periodic market 20-25 minutes walk</td>
<td>Close to highway, Periodic market 15-20 minutes walk</td>
<td>Close to highway</td>
<td>Remote from highway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women involvement areas</td>
<td>Household, Farm, market (home, farm and haatiya)</td>
<td>Household, farm, selling produce from farm and home</td>
<td>Household, farm, selling produce from farm and home</td>
<td>Household, farm, marginally also in selling to local traders</td>
<td>Household, farm, marginally also in selling to local traders</td>
<td>Household and mostly subsistence farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility opportunities for women</td>
<td>Independent and open: bicycle, motorbike, within the village and to the market</td>
<td>Partly Restricted: bicycle, city rickshaw</td>
<td>Partly Restricted: bicycle</td>
<td>Partly restricted: Bicycle autorickshaw</td>
<td>Partly restricted: Bicycle autorickshaw</td>
<td>Partly Restricted: bicycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation access</td>
<td>Mostly ground water irrigation, tubewell and pumpset, solar</td>
<td>Canal irrigation, ground water using pumpset</td>
<td>Mostly ground water irrigation, tubewell and pumpset, solar</td>
<td>Mostly rainfed, lower level of ground water resources</td>
<td>Mostly rainfed, lower level of ground water resources</td>
<td>Mostly rainfed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leder et al. Transformative engagements with gender relations
After several modifications of the pilot version, the training was implemented as part of a different international development project\(^7\). 36 community mobilisers were trained for a day by two research consultants who were experienced in gender research and training. Afterwards, in two consecutive days, the community mobilisers conducted the training themselves in pairs with three mixed farmers groups in two villages in the Far-Western Nepal districts Dadeldhura, Kailali and Baridya. The implementation process was documented by the research consultants. In total, our empirical material draws from both project implementations totalling in 24 conducted trainings with 65 community mobilisers and field staff of 15 staff of different NGOs and government organisations in 12 villages, and approximately 200 farmer participants.

**ENGAGING WITH GENDER NORMS IN A PARTICIPATORY TRAINING**

In the following sections, we will present our observations of the training process and present results of farmers response to each activity.

**Activity 1: Boy or Girl? Creating awareness on gender norms in the community**

At the introductory state, the training aimed at creating a safe and comfortable space, and to raise awareness on local gender norms in the community. The training starts with an ice-breaker in which the participants sit in a circle on the ground and introduce the person next to them to the group. A few minutes are allocated to discuss in pairs. The pairs then introduce their partners to the wider group by name, age, number of members in the family, and the types of crops they grow. This interaction created a positive atmosphere, and first giggles were heard.

**Figure 2. Step-by-step guide to the training activity “Boy or Girl?”**

For the first activity “Boy or Girl?” (Figure 2), farmers chose whether they prefer a boy or a girl, if they were able to have only one child and were given the choice for the sex. This imaginary task required some effort to explain, as farmers initial reply

\(^7\) The DFID-funded Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) “Anukulan” in Far Western Nepal.
often was: “God will give”. In all groups, the farmers almost equally divided and moved to the two pictures of a boy and a girl which were placed at different ends of the room. In those two groups, local facilitators encouraged a discussion on the reasons why they prefer to have a boy or a girl. We found that the reasons mentioned for a particular gender could be organised into the four categories: financial security, lineage, gendered tasks and gendered traits. The examples (Table 3) demonstrate valuable insights how relevant the role of gender is within a specific community’s beliefs.

Table 3: Reasons for participants’ son or daughter preference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reasons for son preference</th>
<th>Reasons for daughter preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Security</td>
<td>Income/remittances through migration&lt;br&gt;Sons can migrate abroad and bring good income.</td>
<td>Religious belief&lt;br&gt;Daughters are regarded as goddess of Laxmi, so having girls, is considered as good source of income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Son earns and supports parents during emergencies such as natural disaster (e.g. earthquake), they can migrate and send remittances, whereas if daughter opt for migration for job, she can fall prey to sexual and physical violence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Dowry</strong>&lt;br&gt;The dowry of the son’s bride contributes to the family’s welfare.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lineage</td>
<td>Race&lt;br&gt;Sons continue the race as they stay in the family and pass on the family name.</td>
<td>Developing Relations&lt;br&gt;Having a girl creates, extents and strengthens relations with another family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social tag of ‘aputro’ (those who cannot bear son)&lt;br&gt;Discrimination within family and by the society in case there is no son at home.</td>
<td><strong>Daughters are important to bear children</strong>&lt;br&gt;Receiving family honor&lt;br&gt;By marrying a daughter to another family, the in-law family will be honored for giving their daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Heritage/Property</strong>&lt;br&gt;Property is passed to the son and therefore it stays within the family; sons can buy land and build a house</td>
<td><strong>Marrying = soul cleansing</strong>&lt;br&gt;When we marry daughters to a man, our (parents) soul will be cleared, as marrying is one of the best things to do in life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gendered tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gendered tasks</th>
<th>Ploughing, building, managing</th>
<th>Household work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male manpower is required to work on the field. Ploughing can only be done by male, as a drought will come if female plough (based on a legend). Similar activities such as livestock management and building houses are considered male tasks.</td>
<td>Daughters are responsible and help with all household work (cooking, washing, cleaning etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cremation (Daagbathi)**

Sons can cremate parents and perform funeral rites.

**Household help through daughter-in-law**

The son will bring a daughter-in-law who will take care over cooking

Household work

Daughters are caring and look after their parents. Daughters bring happiness and brightness at home.

Daughters carry motherly love; they understand problems of the family, problem of other people.

**Obedience/ Responsibility**

Daughters come when we call them. Even if they are married, they come to their parents if they are old or called.

Daughters respect culture. Daughters are important for Tihar, Teej and other cultural festivals.

Daughters make family lively, son could not be trusted, he never stays at home.

**Gendered traits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gendered traits</th>
<th>Security and safety</th>
<th>Discipline, honesty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sons will stay with the family and look after the parents when they are old</td>
<td>Girls have discipline, boys quarrel and create conflicts. Daughters are important for positive society/cleanliness/education. The house with daughters are well managed, well decorated, they keep relations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son has strong physical built up so they can do hard work, whereas daughters have weak physical built up</td>
<td>They play important role and voice against negativities widespread in the society. Daughters are very honest.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society prefers son, it brings family honour. If son spent a night outside the house, it brings no shame. However, if daughters spend a night outside home, it defames the family.</td>
<td>Compared to sons, daughters are more tolerant and patient. They can endure more hardships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters are soft in nature, become easily nervous; son can handle everything by ease.</td>
<td>Looks and Decoration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters look cute and can be decorated with ornaments and jewellery, and the sound of jewellery is a pleasure.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A range of disagreements between the “boy” and the “girl” group came up, and sometimes a discussion generated, if supported through good facilitation and open questions. Participants disagreed: “Girls can also earn!”, “My son takes very good care of me!”. This was the very intention of this activity: to shed light on the diverse gender norms on traits and roles perceived in the community, but also to generate an awareness that these are not generalisable and can be contradictory. The danger of this activity is that particular gender traits or roles become manifested instead of critically reflected upon. However, with appropriate facilitation and critical questions, these norms can be destabilised and reflected upon collectively. Respondents shared their experiences on how gender norms in communities have been gradually changing. For example, one participant shared how men who would help women at home are tagged ‘jaitingre [nepali version of henpecked]’, which is slowly changing now. Similarly, women participants shared how changing gender and cultural norms such as disregarding ‘Chhaupadi’, the practice of untouchability during menstruation, is allowing more women to participate in education and economic activities. It was also shared that in few places women have also started challenging rigid norms and activities by engaging in ploughing, funeral rites, migration etc., which traditionally is performed by men. The discussion on the variability and change of gender perceptions promoted critical consciousness on gender norms.

**Discussion 1: Sex vs. Gender**

To generate further reflection on those gender norms, a short lecture of 5 minutes and afterwards a discussion was held on the differences between the biological “sex” and the socially constructed “gender” (cf. Table 4). As a response, several farmers shared their own perception why girls should be educated like boys, or how they can fulfill the same role as boys. The farmers were well-aware of the gendered restrictions to women and the need to challenge these, but the recurring reason named for this was social pressure and that “people will talk”, and that it takes a long time to change the community’s mindset. Examples to explain gender norms and roles by participants during the discussion were: “women are kind-hearted”, “women milk cows and buffaloes”, “men sit in the tea shop and chat” and “men plough, break stones and paint houses”.

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(*Transformative engagements with gender relations*)
Table 4: Training guidance to explain the difference between biological sex and socially constructed gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological—Male and Female Inborn/ innate cannot be changed</td>
<td>Social—Masculine and Feminine Not inborn/innate, can be changed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Examples:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only women can be pregnant and give birth</td>
<td>Women do domestic chores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only men can supply sperm.</td>
<td>Men are breadwinners of the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only mother breastfeeds her child</td>
<td>Women wear sari/kurta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only women menstruate</td>
<td>Men plough agricultural land, drive tractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women cut and collect grass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activity 2: Gender Position Bar: Imagining shifts in the gendered division of labour in agriculture

The activity “Gender Position Bar” focuses on the gendered division of labour in domestic or reproductive tasks as well as agriculture, water and forest management. To understand and work with the gendered perceptions associated with particular tasks in these domains, every farmer chooses one picture of a particular labor being performed, describes it in front of the group and places it along a position bar below one of the five varying degrees over women’s or men’s involvement (Figure 3): either as female only, mostly female, male only, mostly male, or conducted by both gender equally. The farmers had also to give a reason for their choice. This was particular important, as farmers were challenged to think beyond “it has always been like this”. Most attributes given for male labour were “heavy/hard”, “technical”, “dangerous”, “income-generating” and “energetic”. Female labour was remarked as “low in production”, “no skill needed”, “caring”, “cleaning”, “better concentrating”, “better vision”, “时间 intense”, “not difficult”, “at home” and “calm. The reasons given for particular agricultural activities are listed in Table 5. This activity demonstrates valuable insights how relevant the role of gender is within the community’s beliefs. Farmers were well-aware of the gendered restrictions to women and the need to challenge these, a recurring was theme of social pressure and the slow change of community’s mindset.
Figure 3: Gender Position Bar activity

Male labor
mostly male labor
male and female labor
mostly female labor
female labor
Table 5: Farmers’ response to the Gender Position Bar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agricultural Task</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Farmer’s reasons for the task being gendered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Livestock</td>
<td>Mostly female</td>
<td>not hard work for female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ploughing</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Not allowed for female, too technical, to respect women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digging</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Now allowed for female, too hard, women are busy with household work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation/ Pump handling</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Too heavy, women are not strong enough to rotate the handle and its operation, too technical, only male have knowledge on electricity and current flow, it is too dangerous, an electric shock may happen, women’s sari will get rolled into the wheel and this could lead to the death of a women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transplanting</td>
<td>Both/ Mostly female</td>
<td>Men do not take care of plants, they are busy with other work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Only labour, no skill required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Mostly female</td>
<td>When production is less, female will do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drying harvest</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Not much power and physical labour required, women have a better vision, it is related to caring and cleaning, women can better concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling vegetables at the market</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>if crop good, man sells, if not good and we have to sit for a long time, women do, mostly women, as they save money, men waste money, if they are free at home, some men engage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money handling</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>women sell, but women often can’t calculate, then men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying seeds</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>men used to go, sometimes if easily available, women also go, Women select well because they are working in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tractor Driving</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>rule by society, but it is driven by women in other countries, e.g. in Punjab, women can drive a small tractor and replace male farmers, do all their labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying Fertiliser</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Difficult for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage of crops</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Men are busy with income generating work, women work at home, women as they are more at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesticides</td>
<td>Mostly male</td>
<td>Men have more free time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning crops</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male do not do the cleaning grains work because they are not good at concentration, they are ‘Chanchal’ highly energetic in nature so cannot stay still doing one thing. Women are by nature very calm and can do such things easily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reproductive Tasks | Gender | Farmer’s reasons for gendered tasks
--- | --- | ---
Childcare | Mostly female/ both | Woman do it because they are more kind to children, men slap them. Such type of love and affection is not seen in a man; women are kind-hearted, when children are small, women show more affection to baby.
Healthcare | Mostly female | smaller things women do, bigger outside travels men; men are mindless and not caring.
Cooking | Female/ mostly female | Women do, because husband says: I married you, so you have to cook for me, men cook only outside or in exceptions, e.g. when wife is sick; women do rotis at home.
Washing | Female | Male can only wash their own clothes if needed, but not wash for others.
Vegetable garden | Both | Whoever is free.

Discussion 2: Challenges for female and male farmers

Based on activity 2, farmers discussed in group work the challenges and opportunities for becoming successful male or female farmers (cf. Table 6). The prior mentioned gendered division of labour seemed to be a major problem for female farmers, as they have limited opportunities to plough, apply fertilizer, pesticides or irrigate. For male farmers, mostly structural constrains such as limited access or lack of irrigation, pesticides, fertilizers, crop choices, market prices etc. were listed. Opportunities were seen in trainings, group savings, discussions and learning from each other, and provided inputs such as seedlings, irrigation. This task showed that the farmers were well aware of the objectives of the projects, and the addressed challenges help being tackled through project interventions.

The challenge in this activity was to challenge participants to think beyond “it has always been like this” when they describe why a certain labour activity is a challenge for the other gender. Participants argued, for example, male tasks to be too “dangerous” and “heavy”, while women’s tasks “take time” and are “safe to do at home”. Here is again a danger of reproducing existing gender roles which the facilitator can avoid by giving space for contradicting opinions within the group.
Table 6: Challenges and opportunities for female farmers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHALLENGES FOR FEMALE FARMERS</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEMALE FARMERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Not being allowed to plough</td>
<td>• Collective labour support through other farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Household workload results in coming late to meetings</td>
<td>• Confidence to speak up in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not allowed to start water pumps</td>
<td>• Increasing cropping areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of confidence</td>
<td>• Exposure visits, trainings and workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of technologies</td>
<td>• improved nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Illiteracy</td>
<td>• access to government services, e.g. subsidy from District Agriculture Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge on market rates, crop insurance, access to local services</td>
<td>• Work load</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activity 3: Bargaining Role Play: Switching gender roles to create empathy

The final activity was a creative role play in which some farmers took the role of the opposite gender in a bargaining act. The aim was that farmers become more conscious about the feelings of the other gender and thus create empathy for someone else’s struggles. This activity was perceived as the most entertaining, and several farmers enthusiastically started to dress up as the opposite sex through shawls and headcovers. The farmers imitated typical dialogues, which would present the opposite gender in a stereotypical manner. For example, male farmers (played by females) were complaining that women were late to bring food, and yelling at them to quickly and nicely serve plates and water, while the female farmer (played by a male) was shy, excusing herself for being busy with a lot of household work and child care, and then quickly fulfilling the demanded tasks. The scenes the farmers played also indicated which aspects of behavior and communication they consider relevant to address, and the role play provided a safe space to do so.

Once farmers are sensitised on gender issues through prior activities, the bargaining role play gives them an opportunity to think about how do they perceive their opposite gender as a farmer and perform gender roles according to it. This has as a mirror effect because farmers can see how they are dealing with their partners when the group switches their gender and perform. This spontaneous role play of the training challenges farmers to think of and react to gender distinctive behaviours. The role play promotes creativity and fun by demonstrating asymmetrical gender roles on farms.

There are few requirements for a successful bargaining role play. First, as the role play is a spontaneous activity, farmers must be given sufficient time to develop their script.
and plan their dialogues. In case the time to think the script is not adequate, it may lead towards less interesting or ineffective role play as the farmers might not be able to identify and prioritise the important gender issues. Second, not only identifying the gender issue becomes critical for farmers but also they must think on how the role play session could be an excellent opportunity for them to bargain on the gender issues they are suffering since a long and they had barriers to convey and discuss on it. The group role play gives farmers more autonomy particularly to women farmers to bring out important issue that would not be possible for them to speakup alone. Third, farmers may also bring upon the feel by using some props in the role play. For example, the role play in Kanakpatti village, women farmer when played a male farmer they had a feeta that is a long shawl on their head and to become a women they used their towel to cover the head as a symbol of purdah that women usually do to bring actual feel of changed gender roles.

On other side, as this role play is considered to bring out gender issues on farm, it might bring out some gender sensitive issues to the context. Such topics might involve challenging any gender taboos or religious belief on farm. Hence, facilitators of the training must play important role to become aware of the issue that is being brought up and take the time to discuss it afterwards.

Photo 1: Role play with changed gender roles

With a little help from the facilitators, this seemed the participants’ favorite activity. Having random props (such as farm tools such as a spade, kitchenware, like plates and cups, vegetables etc.) may help generate ideas. In our workshops, women were excited to get a chance to tell men to bring them food and tea constantly, while men enjoyed covering their heads with a scarf and playing an obedient housewife. We
found that participants have lots of ideas once they realise that this is supposed to be a fun and light-hearted exercise. At the same time, some important realisations seemed to trigger thinking:

“It felt weird to play a landlord and harass people older than me, it was good to have that power but at the same time he was an elderly person and I played a younger person’s role.” – Birkuti agriculture group, Gulariya, Bardiya, 14.11.2016

“It’s the first time playing a woman (for me), I didn’t know how to speak as a woman, as a daughter-in law, it’s difficult to attend meetings and walk in a saree as well.” – male community mobiliser, Gulariya, Bardiya, 12.11.2016

After one bargaining role play, an elderly woman started to spontaneously sing a traditional Maithili song, and participants joined in or listened in awe (translated from the local language Maithili):

“Your wife, son, is much bad-mannered; she broke her water pot and left for her mother’s place.(…)”

“She had slipped out and broke the water pot, what is the crime of my wife here?”

“I saw a lady pouring tears from her eyes under the Bel Babur tree.(…)”

“Come back my lady! Let’s return home, let’s return home. My mother has become old, will die shortly, sister will get married to her home, remaining will be my brother, I will separate him, we both will rule our regime.”

This unexpected but deeply meaningful song revealed cultural connotations participants drew to the gender engagement on the ground – that is, injustices felt by a husband towards his wife, reproduced through his mother.

At the end of the training, participants are requested to reflect on their day long involvement in the training and if this discussion has succeeded to meet their expectations. The feedback should be reflected upon collectively and consider how to integrate ideas in future trainings.

THE ROLE AND PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY MOBILISERS

Community mobilisers and project staff have the key role to facilitate the trainings, and more generally, are important for reaching out and interacting with the communities in rural areas, whether it is for mobilising farmers for collective action in farming, technology adoption, or knowledge sharing. However, community mobilisers rank lowest in project hierarchies, and often have to ‘deliver’ results such as functioning user groups or accompany project’s technological implementations, often without having been trained on gender and social relations in communities. While being close to communities, there is a danger that they may reinforce existing gender and social inequalities in rural communities as they
are unaware of how power relations shape everyday lives. Limited gender awareness among staffs have been documented in many sectors including water and irrigation (Udas and Zwarteveen, 2010).

During the training of community mobilisers on the principles and methods of the “Participatory Gender Training”, all community mobilisers acknowledged that this was their first platform to be introduced to basic concepts around gender and intersectionality, and the practical implications of it on their everyday work. The majority of community mobilisers, both male and female, expressed positive learnings from the day long discussion. Many shared that they learned about the distinction between gender and sex for the first time. Such discussions, as the majority of community mobilisers shared, enable them to provide an understanding of why understanding gender relations is important for increasing agriculture productivity. For example, one community mobiliser shared:

“I learnt about sex and gender [...] that gender is culture specific and its impact in agriculture sector. I feel that if both male and female should divide work equally, more benefits could be derived.” (male community mobiliser, Gulariya, Bardiya)

“I learnt that change is possible. We have unequal workload and it should be shared equally. I will share this in community. I had the understanding that men and women share workload equally, I realised today that women bear more responsibilities.” (male community mobiliser, Dadeldhura)

Some also reflected how the training helped them to reflect on their own positionality in relation to the farmers.

“I did not have much knowledge on gender. I did not know we also practice this in the community. I learnt that challenges and opportunities are context specific. It is important to understand how change is required and is possible within ourselves. I will share and implement this knowledge in my project activities and with my community.(...) I liked the second activity. I realised that we practice discrimination in our own lives. So, I think I will try to apply this knowledge in my life” (female community mobiliser, Gulariya, Bardiya)

“[...] It felt as if there are many things which I need to improve. So far we had learnt about gender only verbally however, through different activities and through photo activity, we experienced it practically. May be these activities could be effective at the community level.” (male community mobiliser, Gulariya, Bardiya)

However, there were some participants who shared about their unmet expectations. Although they agreed that they gained knowledge on gender, sex and gender relations, their expectations that they will receive gender solutions to the problems they face in the community level remained unmet: “We thought we will get the solutions of our problems [...] the problems we face at the community level.”
Especially the discussions helped them to realise how gender shapes their everyday practices and decisions. For example, at the personal level, examples were shared which indicated how gender is socially constructed, and how it is different across spaces and changes with time. Several participants shared these insights during the introductory discussions:

“Change is gradual with increasing awareness. I have seen it in my society. Women have jobs, male do not have. So, in those situations, men are taking care of children and doing household work – may be 25%.” (male community mobiliser, Dadeldhura, 4.11.2016)

“Nature never formed caste division. Caste division was formed on the basis of occupation. For example, I am Brahmin, someone is Chettri and someone is Dalit. These divisions have been formed by the society.” (female community mobiliser, Dadeldhura, 4.11.2016)

“Society is different here. Here male and female both can say ‘no’ to conceive more babies. Couple bear children with mutual understanding.” (male community mobiliser, Dadeldhura, 4.11.2016)

At the professional level, the discussion revolved around the challenges community mobilisers face while ensuring women’s participation in the user groups:

“In the village, it is difficult to convince women to participate in the meetings. They are very busy, especially in this season.” (male community mobiliser, Dadeldhura, 4.11.2016)

“Community and family support is important to make women successful farmers. Women lack time and income. These are the biggest challenges.” (male community mobiliser, Dadeldhura, 4.11.2016)

Project field staffs are little equipped to address issues related to social and gender inequities, and they seldom receive opportunities to learn such skills through trainings. For instance, community mobilisers receive an orientation on community mobilisation in general at the time of joining but not a specific training on gender norms and relationships:

“This is the first time we have gained this detailed knowledge about gender roles and relations. No one before has helped us to understand the concepts. We have never applied this in our work besides following instructions of including different representatives from different groups in the user groups.” (female community mobiliser, Gulariya, Bardiya, 12.11.16)

Similarly, many shared that they had not realised the relevance of gender to the project beyond women’s involvement in numbers. It was shared that before attending the training, it never occurred to them that gender could be linked to their work in substantial ways:

“I learned that men and women need to understand each other’s needs. I will now ask my husband...
to work alongside and help me grow vegetables.” (female farmer, Phulwari village, Kailali)

“I thought we would argue about gender differences but we discussed very specific things that were previously ignored- it forced us to think about it.” (community mobiliser, Gulariya, Bardiya)

**FACILITATING AND REINTERPRETING TRAINING PRINCIPLES IN LOCAL CONTEXTS**

We observed that successful implementation of the gender trainings depends on excellent facilitation skills, group size and composition, and training locations which encourage a safe space for women and marginalised community members to speak up.

The facilitators should have both conceptual clarity on gender and power relations, and the expertise to adjust the gender discussions and activities to the specific local context. One challenge we observed is to find clear linkages of gender relations to specific agricultural and resource management practices relevant in the community. Most effective tools are pictures of agricultural activities from the community itself. In addition, local words need to be used to explain gender (e.g. “Laingik” in Nepali). Precaution should be taken not to confuse participants by using abstract concepts such as gender equality without referring to specific examples and to demonstrate in the activities and discussions how gender roles change and shape everyday lives.

In the introductory part, facilitators should clearly emphasise the objective and principles of the gender training. They may explain the training schedule, and the nature of targeted discussions to create a safe space to discuss and understand locally practiced gender roles and its possible impact on agriculture. Training facilitation should aim at minimising power differences in groups and maintain ethical conducts. Discussions on cultural, social and gender norms in any local context are very sensitive topics. Therefore, facilitators should be trained beforehand how to act neutral and discourage conflicts and controversial discussions. Specific facilitation skills to practice are asking open ended question, making appropriate probes, using words and language comprehensible to the participants, using life experiences and local examples, explaining the objective of each activity, linking the activities to discussions, and keeping discussions focussed on agriculture and gender roles.

We observed the important role of group compositions and small-sized groups to encourage good discussions. We experienced that a workshop can be effective with as few as 5 or 6 participants, but recommend a maximum number of 12 participants to ensure for everyone the possibility to participate and speak in the discussions. It is important to allow sufficient time to select participants of different age, caste, and class, as well as to form groups in which all participants feel comfortable speaking. To encourage women’s participation in meetings,
crèches (daycare) for children or similar appropriate incentives may be arranged. The groups should ideally be mixed, but sex-segregated groups often allow for a more secure space to speak. The choice between mixed or single sex groups depends on prior interventions in communities and how much women feel comfortable speaking about these topics in front of men. If there is significant hesitancy among the women to speak up, then single sex groups may provide greater individual participation.

Finally, it is important to chose an appropriate place and time suitable for the diverse participants’ needs. A place for the training should be well chosen, and open space with lots of disturbances, e.g. at religious places such as temple or a mosque should be avoided. The props such as clothes and utensils for the role play must be arranged beforehand.

**CONCLUSION**

**Shifting and Reproducing Gender Norms**

Gender equality is central to international development agendas such as the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals, both as a goal in itself (SDG 5), and as cross-cutting issue in goals such as “Zero Hunger” (SDG2) and “Clean Water and Sanitation” (SDG6). Yet, studies on transformative engagements with gender relations among smallscale or tenant farmers and water user groups are particularly rare. In this paper, we developed and tested methods based on critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996) and transformative practice (Leder, 2018). We found that these initiated transformative engagements with the gender-water-agriculture nexus because they raised critical consciousness of farmers, community mobilisers, and project staff on possibilities of social change “in situ”.

The development and implementation of the Participatory Gender Training demonstrates that the training methods provide an open space to discuss local gender roles within households, agriculture and natural resource management. Discussing own gender norms promotes critical consciousness that gender norms are socially constructed and change with age, class, caste and material and structural constraints such as limited access to water and land. Visual, interactive and discussion-oriented training methods stimulated enthusiasm and inspiration for participants to further join gender discussions. Sufficient space to reflect on possibilities of change allowed rethinking practices towards more equal labor division and generated empathy towards those with weaker bargaining power. Such knowledge co-creation and empathy may promote new ways of human-environment relations (Tremblay and Harris, 2018). Particularly the bargaining role play activity provides opportunities to bring up relations of dependency and unequal power positions in a humoristic manner. What participants and facilitators learn may differ from workshop to workshop, but many participants left with new ideas about how gender impacts their daily lives, and how they might change those impacts.
This approach is different from already existing approaches as it is a theoretically led and empirically guided gender training which combines principles of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996) and transformative practice (Leder, 2018). The reliance on those principles is important for social learning when it aims at addressing unequal power relations and promoting more socially-inclusive and sustainable natural resource management practices (Hegde et al., 2016, Elias et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, various challenges remain throughout the implementation. We observed several situations in which gender norms were further reinforced rather than critically deconstructed and shifted. To avoid this, a well-trained and skilled facilitator has to guide well discussions. Facilitators have the most important role in transformative engagements and need to be trained to apply facilitation skills to focus on transforming rather than reproducing gender norms. Furthermore, the approach is applicable to different contexts as long as training methods are reinterpreted according to local norms. This can be best done through using photographs of agricultural and domestic labor conducted in the village or region, and collaborating with local facilitators.

Further research is needed on how to build and interact in relationships that result in collective action in diverse contexts of agrarian change or resource management conflicts.

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