





# Empowering young rural women to pursue productive livelihoods

Chapter 3

**Y**oung rural women face greater constraints than their male counterparts do in seeking to become productive, well-connected individuals in charge of their own futures. Social norms regarding gender roles shape livelihood options for young men and women as they transition into adulthood. In many contexts, these norms put more constraints on women than men, and the constraints are likely to be stronger in rural areas, especially in less-connected locations. Being young, rural and female thus represents a triple burden that may result in less human and physical capital accumulation, a lower labour force participation rate and lower productivity, along with the associated lower welfare outcomes.

In the most highly transformed countries, young women often outperform young men in terms of educational attainment, although this is often not reflected in their participation in the labour force. These countries need to enable young rural women to transition into productive – not only reproductive – lives so that they can reap the returns from their investment in their human capital.

In the least transformed countries, young rural women still lag behind in educational attainment, economic participation and productivity. Investments in these countries need to improve the human capital endowments of young women so that they can transition into productive livelihoods. Evidence suggests that the pay-offs to secondary education in the least transformed countries are especially high for women. Investments thus should focus on bringing girls to school, having them stay in school longer, facilitating their transition into employment and improving their health care.

Empowering young rural women by lifting the constraints on them and connecting them more closely with their peers, communities and markets is particularly important for three reasons. First, fully incorporating young women into the economy and raising their productivity can significantly speed up the rural transformation process. Second, empowered young women are more likely to marry later and have fewer children, giving them a greater chance to obtain better health and economic outcomes for themselves and their children. Third, lower fertility speeds up the demographic transition and contributes to the realization of the demographic dividend (see chapter 5). Empowering young rural women, therefore, requires investments not just in the productive but also in the reproductive spheres of their lives. Successful programmes in these areas involve young women themselves, along with their parents, siblings, partners and communities, in helping to bring about social change.

### **Being young, being rural and being a woman poses a triple challenge**

The triple burden of being a young rural woman poses various challenges that must be met in order to advance in life and, in particular, to engage in the economy in a remunerative way. The intersection of these three factors makes assets more difficult to accumulate,

reduces mobility and inhibits access to networks and services that are important in order to gain access to desirable occupations; as a result, young women often enter occupations that deliver lower returns (Doss et al., 2018).

**Young rural women face more constraints than young rural men do as they seek to accumulate the assets they need in order to transition into productive livelihoods**

The unequal accumulation of human, physical and social capital often stems from the existence of social norms that give parents incentives to invest differentially in their children, traditional rules of land inheritance, and social, political and economic networks that discriminate against younger and female participants. While the rural transformation process improves access to human, physical and social capital, gender differences generally persist, especially in rural areas.

First, although the long-standing gender gap in human capital accumulation has been narrowing, it still exists in many countries and especially in rural areas. In many settings, parents prefer boys over girls due to social norms around women's domestic duties and the consequently higher expected returns to boys' education. In poorly connected rural areas, schools and health services are often far away, making it riskier for girls to reach them safely (WHO, 2013).

Second, the gender gap in access to productive assets and in the chances of accumulating those assets persists in rural areas. This puts young women on a lower trajectory in terms of economic opportunities that is difficult to correct later on. Though data on asset ownership and control that are disaggregated by gender and age are scarce, the evidence in countries where such data do exist shows that men own more assets of much greater value (Deere and Doss, 2006). In Ghana and Ethiopia, for example, young rural women mainly own consumer durables, while young rural men own more productive assets (Doss et al., 2018). With fewer, less valuable and less productive assets, women are at a disadvantage when seeking to use their assets as collateral for financial services, secure themselves against income shocks and attain higher incomes through the use of productive assets (Dupas and Robinson, 2013; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that women's control over resources affords greater benefits in terms of their children's health, nutrition and education and, by improving their agency, in terms of their own well-being (Quisumbing, 2003).

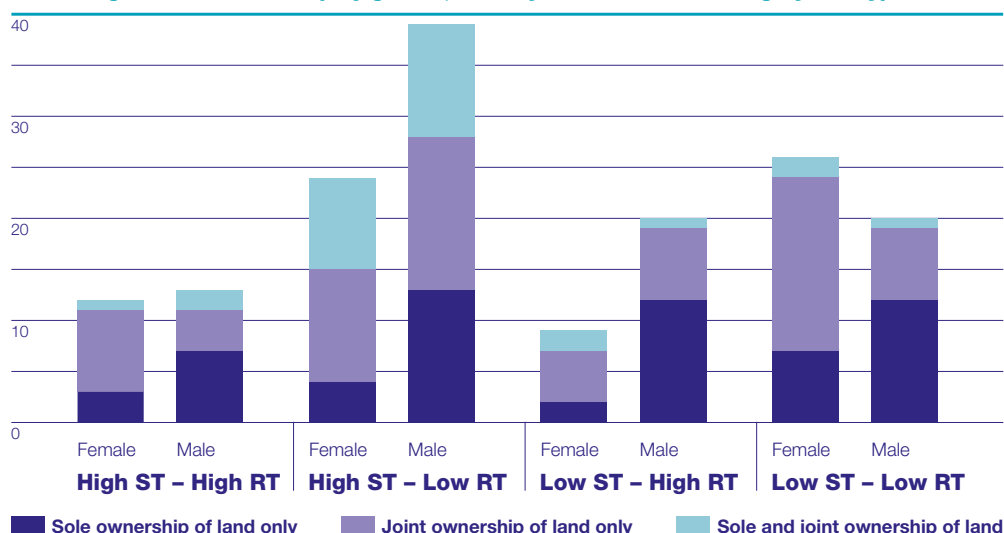
Land is one of the most important productive assets in the rural areas of developing countries. Control over land and its secure tenure are associated with better access to markets, social institutions and other natural resources, together with a greater capacity to deal with shocks and greater incentives to invest in agriculture and other productive activities (World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 2009). In SSA, women own less land than men, regardless of their age and of how ownership is conceptualized (Doss et al., 2015). In Latin America, significantly fewer women than men own farms, and female-owned farms are smaller than male-owned ones (Deere and Doss, 2006). This puts rural women at a disadvantage.

**Young rural women are half as likely as young men to own land by themselves**

**FIGURE 3.1** shows the percentage of rural youth who own land, either solely or jointly, by gender and country transformation category. The level of transformation does not seem to influence gender differences in terms of sole ownership of land. In the least transformed countries, young women own more land than young men, but this difference is because

**FIGURE 3.1** Young women are less than half as likely as young men to own land by themselves, and this difference is affected very little by a country's level of transformation<sup>19</sup>

**Percentage of land ownership by gender, country transformation category and type**



*Note:* The figure plots the share of land ownership by ownership type, gender and country transformation category. ST: structural transformation; RT: rural transformation.

*Source:* Doss et al., 2018, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) data.

a larger share of them have joint ownership, which is probably attributable to the higher likelihood that women in this age group will be married.

The gendered constraints on land access take on greater importance when considered in the light of several dynamics of change that are currently under way. First, the rising life expectancy of parents means that it will take their children longer to inherit land from them. At the same time, growing population densities are reducing the amount of available land per capita and pushing land prices up (Yeboah et al., 2018) (see chapter 6). Even if land becomes available, inheritance laws generally favour men over women (Kosec et al., 2018; Fafchamps and Quisumbing, 2005), and gender norms often restrict access to the financing needed to purchase land. For example, while 40 per cent of young Burundian men expect to inherit land, only 17 per cent of young Burundian women have similar expectations (Berckmoes and White, 2014). Finally, climate change is expected to heighten land ownership constraints for rural youth, thereby potentially further exacerbating the challenge for young rural women (see chapter 7). Land rental markets can facilitate young people's access to land, but there is as yet little evidence on the question of whether or not young women face discrimination in these markets (Yeboah et al., 2018) (see chapter 6).

**20** The following Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) datasets were used: Colombia 2015, Dominican Republic 2013, Egypt 2014, Ghana 2014, Guatemala 2014/15, Honduras 2011/12, Indonesia 2012, Kyrgyzstan 2012, Namibia 2013, Peru 2012, Philippines 2013. The high structural and low rural transformation category (high ST-low RT) includes the following datasets: Bangladesh 2014, Cameroon 2011, Gambia 2013, India 2015/16, Lesotho 2014, Senegal 2016, Zambia 2013/14. The low structural and high rural transformation category (low ST-high RT) includes Côte d'Ivoire 2011/12, Chad 2014/15, Nigeria 2013, Pakistan 2012/13, Tajikistan 2012. The low structural and low rural transformation category (low ST-low RT) includes Afghanistan 2015, Benin 2011/12, Burkina Faso 2010, Burundi 2010, Cambodia 2014, Ethiopia 2016, Guinea 2012, Kenya 2014, Malawi 2015/16, Mali 2012/13, Mozambique 2011, Myanmar 2015/16, Nepal 2016, Niger 2012, Rwanda 2014/15, Sierra Leone 2013, Tanzania 2015/16, Togo 2013/14, Uganda 2016. Data from Bangladesh, Egypt, Tajikistan and Peru are included only for estimates of the proportion of youth who ever married, as there are no data on male youth for other outcomes.



### **Gender norms constrain young women's connectivity and agency**

Gender roles constrain young women's connectivity by restricting their mobility and hence their job choices, particularly in rural areas. One reason for this is the existence of social attitudes whereby it is seen as inappropriate for young women to move about outside their household without the guardianship of an older woman or a male relative or husband. Young women also face safety risks on their way to school, work or public and private services due to the prevalence of gender-based violence (WHO, 2013).

Migration can offer an opportunity for young women to escape the confines of restrictive gender roles or to pursue a higher education. However, this option is restricted by the higher risks they face when on the move and the limited availability of assets to finance the move. Evidence from Haiti shows that young female migrants are less likely to receive financial support from their birth household than young male migrants (Heckert, 2015). These mobility constraints are, however, highly specific to each cultural context.

Constrained mobility also lessens young rural women's agency by limiting their access to networks that can enhance their economic, social and political participation. Where weak institutions for contract enforcement incline employers to rely on word-of-mouth recommendations, people without such networks will find it hard to demonstrate their skills. Beyond the economic sphere, limited mobility means that young rural women's visibility in society remains low, which may prevent with their needs from being heard and addressed. These patterns often lead to a low level of participation by young women in youth-focused programmes (Chakravarty, Das and Vaillant, 2017; Doss et al., 2018).

Finally, inadequate public services interact with gender norms regarding "women's work" to further increase young women's time burdens (Dey de Pryck and Termine, 2014). Gender roles in most societies assign domestic and caregiving work to women. In rural Ghana, for example, mobility constraints and household work burdens were found to have more negative implications for the schooling outcomes of girls than of boys (Porter et al., 2013). Access to public water sources and electrical power plays a central role in reducing the time that these duties require. In rural areas, the provision of such services is scarce, and women therefore have to cover longer distances to obtain them (Porter, 2008; Porter et al., 2011). Restricted mobility then makes it even harder for young rural women to access these services. Improvements in public infrastructure are thus likely to bring high pay-offs for young rural women.

### **The constraints faced by young rural women result in occupational choices that generate lower returns, and this pattern is often accentuated in less connected areas**

Women's occupational choices are often dictated by what is deemed socially appropriate and legally condoned. Even today, 104 countries in the world have laws that forbid women from working in certain occupations (World Bank, 2018).

In agriculture, established gender norms are such that men are often assigned the more physically demanding tasks but also the better-quality plots and more profitable crops. For example, on Ethiopian farms, ploughing, sowing and threshing are seen as men's work, while women tend household gardens, clean animal pens and milk the livestock. Though women may work alongside men in the fields, they are often regarded as "helpers" rather than workers (Gella and Tadele, 2014). This makes it much more difficult for women, particularly young women, to increase their productivity in farming activities (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014; Peterman, Behrman and Quisumbing, 2014; Oseni et al., 2015; Kilic, Winters and Carletto, 2015).

Similar gender divisions prevail in rural non-farm businesses, where women engage more in food preparation and delivery, while men focus on machinery- and technology-intensive jobs with higher labour productivity potential (Dey de Pryck and Termine, 2014). Because access to land and other productive assets is more restricted for young women, it is likely that the gender productivity gap is even wider in the youth population. Although these constraints are likely to be less evident in more connected areas (near secondary cities and rural towns and in the DO and SMLA spaces in the rural opportunity continuum), structural discrimination against young women on the demand side may limit their participation and occupational choices even in these areas (see chapters 1 and 2).

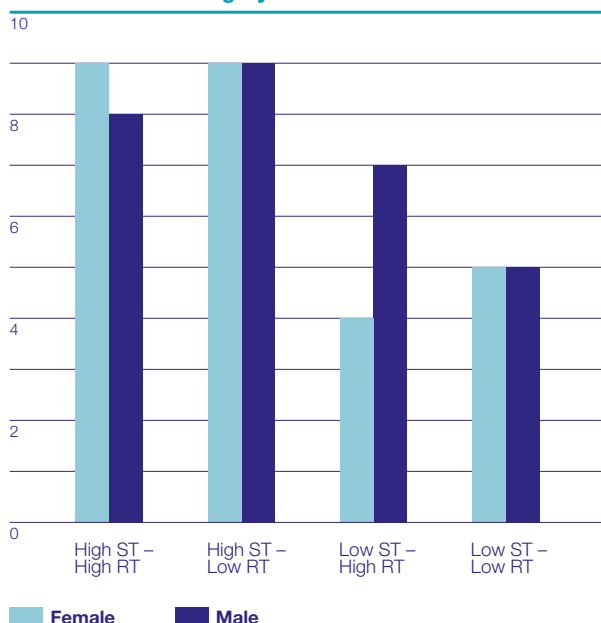
Rapidly transforming rural economies generate opportunities for young women to engage in the economy and help to lift some of the constraints that they face. When young rural women become more educated and economically active, parents have more incentives to invest in their daughters, young women themselves are more likely to have fewer children, and employers become more likely – although perhaps this effect will be lagged – to hire them. Earning their own income empowers young women and positively affects their children’s outcomes, thus improving the prospects for the next generation (Quisumbing, 2003; Chari et al., 2017). These interlinked outcomes help drive the rural transformation process, creating a virtuous cycle that dramatically improves young rural women’s economic and social prospects.

## Rural transformation and the rural opportunity space shape young rural women’s livelihoods

**The gender gap in education narrows as the structural transformation process advances, but the rural transformation process by itself does not have this effect**

**FIGURE 3.2** Structural transformation reduces the gender gap in education, but rural transformation alone does not

Number of years of schooling, by gender and country transformation category



Note: ST: structural transformation; RT: rural transformation.

Source: Doss et al. (2018) based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) data.

Structural and rural transformation shape young rural women’s livelihoods by influencing everything from their education and their marriage and childbearing choices to their selection of an occupation. In less transformed countries, the educational attainment of all youth remains low and young women lag behind young men (see **FIGURE 3.2**). In countries with higher levels of structural transformation, all categories of rural youth have higher levels of education, and young rural women are at no disadvantage in this regard. In countries with high levels of both structural and rural transformation, women even outperform men. In contrast, the rural transformation process alone does not correlate with a smaller gendered education gap. In fact, this gap is wider in countries with low levels of structural transformation but high levels of rural transformation than it is in the least transformed countries. When educational attainment is measured in terms of harmonized learning outcomes, a similar pattern is found, although a small gender gap remains even in the more transformed countries (Fox, 2018).

Household transformation categories also correlate with young rural women's educational attainment. The household data for 13 low- and middle-income countries in LAC, APR and SSA presented in chapter 2 point to a very similar relationship between gender gaps in education and household transformation type. The gender gap in secondary education is wide in households that have transitioned out of subsistence farming and into commercial agriculture without diversifying into non-farm activities. This gap narrows only among households that earn larger shares of their income off the farm – mirroring the effects of structural transformation at the country level.

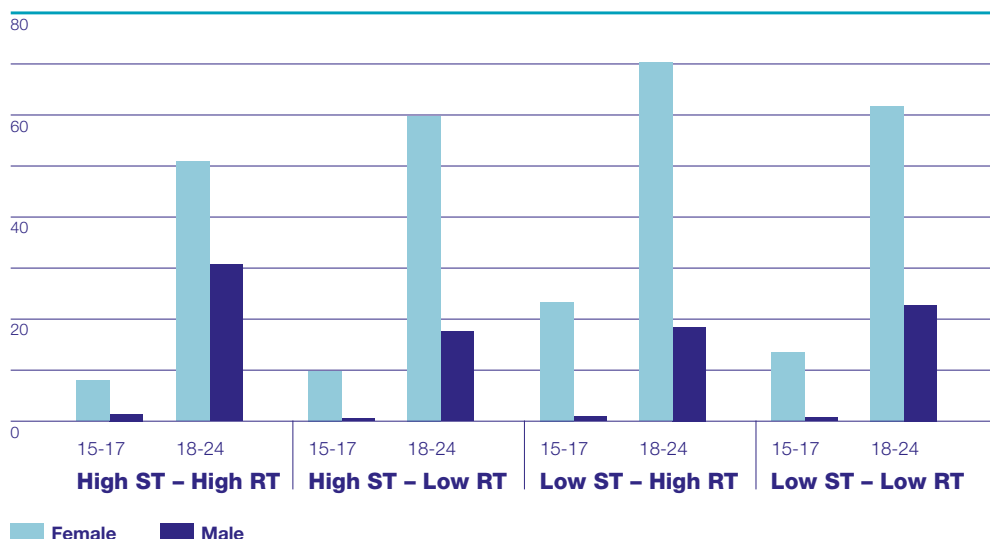
**The number of girls entering into early marriages also falls dramatically in step with structural transformation, but not with rural transformation**

Early marriage is one of the reasons for lower levels of educational attainment among young rural women. Marriage before the age of 18 is more prevalent in countries with low levels of structural transformation, but young rural women marry earlier than young rural men regardless of their country's transformation level. These rates are especially high in sub-Saharan Africa. Among rural women between the ages of 18 and 24 in all country groups, 60 per cent are married (see **FIGURE 3.3**). In contrast, only around 20 per cent of rural men in this age group are already married. This indicates that young rural women are likely to be married to older men (above the age of 24). This pattern is further confirmed by the larger share of rural adolescent girls (15-17 years) who are already married; almost no adolescent boys in this age group are married. Marriages contracted before the legal age for marriage are more common in less structurally transformed countries, but this is heavily dependent on the cultural context.

Marriage is associated with childbirth in most cultural contexts. Social norms exert a strong influence on the age at which a woman has her first child, birth spacing and the total number of children desired, women's agency, family planning knowledge and availability, and the life expectancy of infants and children. Young women between the ages of 15 and 24 years want to have fewer children than the average desired number for all women; in addition, the stated ideal number of children decreases as population

**FIGURE 3.3** Structural transformation is associated with lower rates of early marriage among rural girls, but rural transformation alone is not

**Percentage of ever-married youth by age, gender and country transformation category**



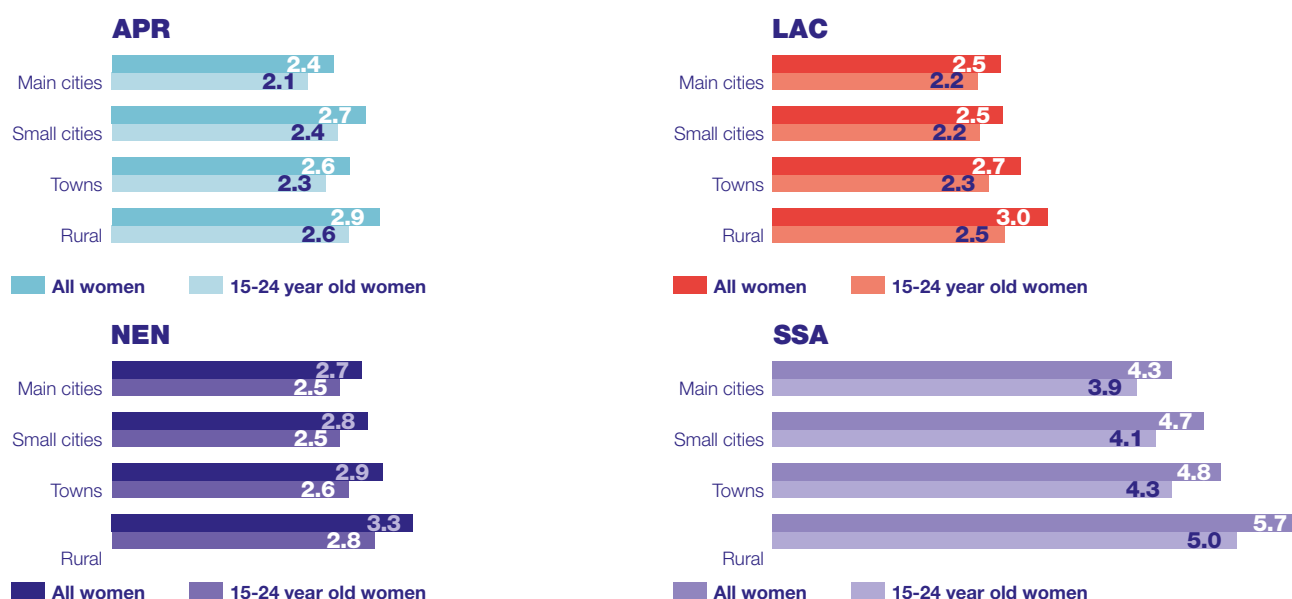
Note: The figure plots the proportion of ever-married youth, by age, gender and country transformation category. ST: structural transformation; RT: rural transformation.

Source: Doss et al. (2018) based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) data.



**FIGURE 3.4** Rural women want more children than urban women, and women in SSA want more children than women in other regions

**Ideal number of children identified by women, by age group, region and rural-urban gradient**



Source: Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) data and Stecklov and Menashe-Oren (2018).

density increases (see **FIGURE 3.4**). Sub-Saharan Africa, however, stands out in this respect. Even young women in cities voice a desire for a larger number of children than women (young and older) in the rural areas of other regions. High infant mortality rates in rural areas of SSA, especially for young mothers, may partially account for these high fertility rates (see chapter 5) (Stecklov and Menashe-Oren, 2018; De la Croix and Gobbi, 2017).

Two conclusions follow from an analysis of these patterns. First, public health investments have not reached the more remote rural areas in this region: the contraception needed for successful family planning remains underprovided in many countries (Bradley et al., 2012). Second, while evidence from various countries supports the argument that higher education and female labour force participation reduce the desired number of children (Martin, 1995; Bongaarts, 2010; Keats, 2014; Cannonier and Mocan, 2014; Lavy and Zablotsky, 2011), young women in SSA appear to expect no more than small pay-offs from their education and their participation in the labour force.

**Labour force participation rates for young rural women are much lower than they are for young rural men, and do not vary systematically with the country transformation or the rural opportunity space typologies**

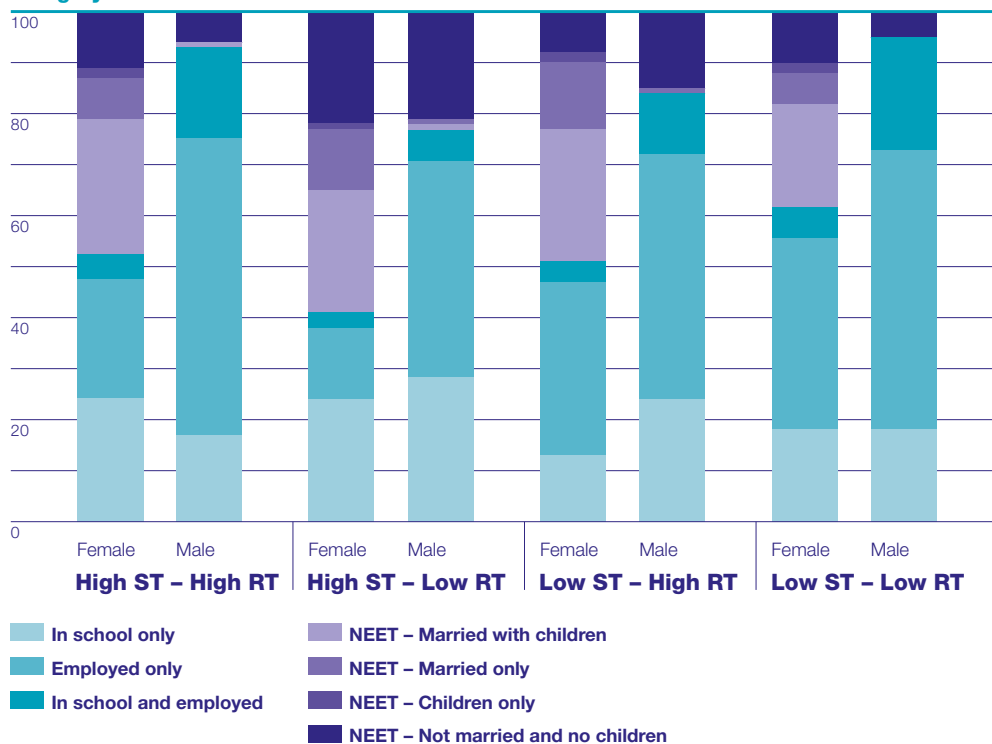
An early transition into marriage and parenthood impedes the entry of young rural women into the labour force. An important component of the transition into adulthood is the school-to-work transition. How much education young people acquire and how easily they find employment after leaving school are important determinants of the economic path they will follow over the course of their lives (Fox, 2018). More education is generally associated with easier access and higher returns to employment.

However, structural transformation is not necessarily associated with a decrease in the employment gap between young rural men and women. Two key patterns of school-to-work transitions for young rural men and women persist across all transformation levels (see **FIGURE 3.5**). The share of employed rural youth is in all cases higher among young men, and the share of rural youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) is in all cases higher for young women. Most of these differences can be explained by the fact that more women in this age group are married and/or have children. The share of NEET young rural women who are neither married nor have children is comparable to the share of NEET young rural men in most countries. In India, however, 25 per cent of young rural women are NEET even though they are not married or raising children (this is reflected in the large size of the portion of the column for females shown in light blue in the high ST-low RT category in **FIGURE 3.5**). This statistic points to the existence of structural discrimination against young women's participation in the Indian economy and society (Doss et al., 2018).

Within countries, higher population densities – correlated with greater potential connections to markets, information and ideas – do not correlate with higher labour force participation rates for young women. **FIGURE 3.6** presents the results of calculations using household data for 13 countries to produce estimates of the probability for young rural women and men to be either in school, in school and employment, in employment only or none of the above. Young women are significantly more likely to be in school only or neither in school nor employment, while young men are highly likely to be employed only or while still in school. These patterns change somewhat along the rural-urban gradient but the percentages of persons who neither work nor attend school remain very high in all

**FIGURE 3.5** Large percentages of young rural women are not engaged in employment, education or training. Marriage and child-rearing tasks are the main explanation for this

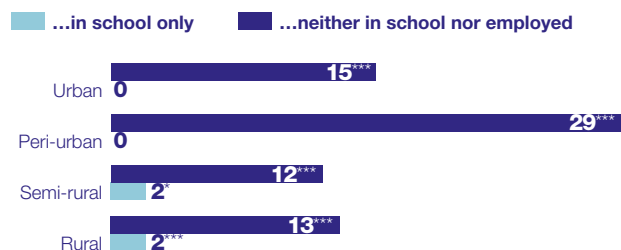
**Percentage of rural youth in different activities by gender and country transformation category**



Note: This figure plots the activity status of rural youth between the ages of 15 and 24, by gender and country type. ST: structural transformation; RT: rural transformation; NEET: not in employment, education or training.  
Source: Doss et al. (2018), based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) data.

**FIGURE 3.6** Young women are significantly more likely to be neither employed nor in school, especially in peri-urban areas

**Percentage point difference along the rural-urban gradient between the probabilities of young women and men being...**



Notes: The figure plots the differences between young women's and men's probability of being in one of these two categories of school-to-work transitions. Level of significance: \* = 10 per cent; \*\* = 5 per cent; \*\*\* = 1 per cent.

Source: Authors' estimates based on data from 12 household surveys conducted in LAC, SSA and Asia (excluding Bangladesh).

areas. In peri-urban areas, young women are almost 30 percentage points more likely than young men to be neither in school nor to be working, while the differential is between 12 and 15 percentage points in all other areas.

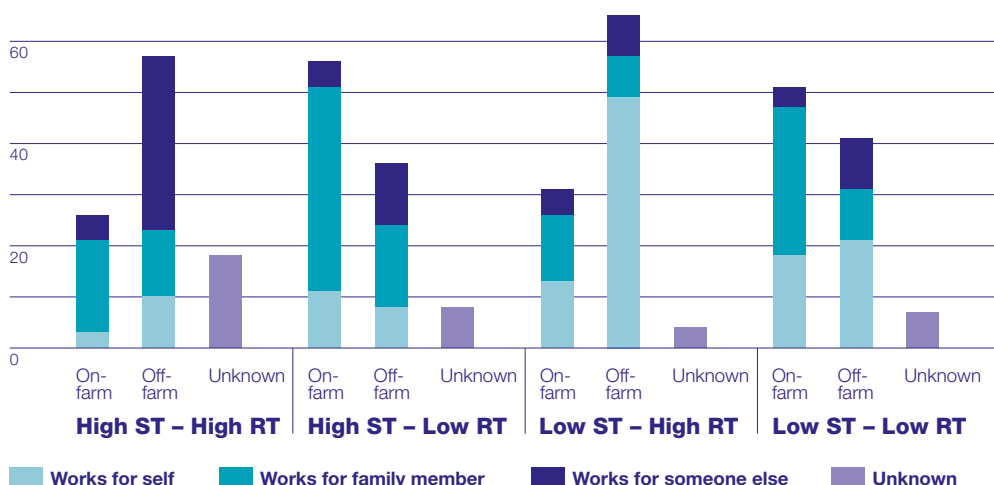
One notable pattern for women who are working is related to whom they work for. Among young rural working women, those who work on a farm mainly work for a family member, which may reduce their control over the income that they generate (see **FIGURE 3.7**). Research shows that women's off-farm employment income makes a significant contribution to their economic empowerment in many contexts (Buvinić and Furst-Nichols, 2014). In Nigeria, for example, young women prefer off-farm work because they can control their earnings, whereas, when they work on the family farm, other household members control what is done with the income (Bryceson, 2002).

Young women's engagement in off-farm employment can thus increase their control over income and strengthen their intra-household bargaining positions and, hence, their agency.

In less transformed economies, around 20 per cent of young rural women are employed on farms as own-account workers. More research is needed on this segment of the population in order to assess the challenges they face. The literature indicates that there are significant differences in productivity between plots managed by males and females, and structural issues appear to account for the majority of this productivity gap (Kilic, Winters and Carletto, 2015). Given that access to land and other productive assets is more restricted for young women, it is likely that the gender productivity gap is even wider in the young population. However, no research results on this subject appear to be available.

**FIGURE 3.7** Young rural women working on farms mainly work for a family member, while when they work off the farm, they are chiefly working for someone else or on their own account

**Percentage of employed young rural women, by work sector, type of employer and country transformation category**



Notes: The figure plots the percentages of employed young rural women (15 to 24 years of age), by work sector, type of employer and level of structural transformation. ST: structural transformation; RT: rural transformation.

Source: Doss et al. (2018) based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) data.



### The work performed by young women who are employed varies greatly with education and over the rural-urban gradient within countries

Wage employment is typically a highly sought-after form of employment in developing economies, especially if it is somewhat formal and thus more stable and potentially offers social benefits. Access to off-farm wage work is therefore an important indicator of the quality of work that a young person can attain. Data from 13 developing countries show that access to such work varies significantly depending on a young rural woman's level of education and over the rural-urban gradient within the rural opportunity space. Two patterns stand out (see **FIGURE 3.8**).

First, secondary education is significantly correlated with an increased likelihood that a young rural woman in the labour force will obtain wage employment off the farm. The difference associated with education is 10 percentage points and above in rural and semi-rural areas, decreasing to 7 percentage points in peri-urban areas.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the probability of obtaining this kind of employment increases with secondary education in the most rural areas,<sup>22</sup> where fewer such opportunities are available.

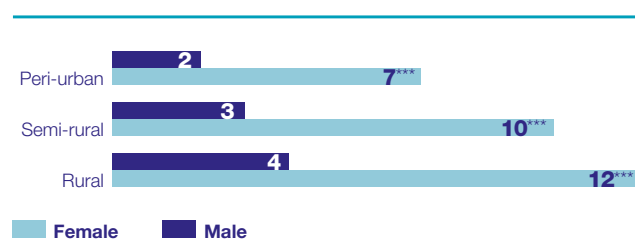
Second, the impact of a secondary education is greater for females than for males in all areas. This is perhaps not surprising, since males without a secondary education are much more likely than girls without a secondary education to have found wage employment.

Though this finding is not reflected in the figure, the analysis also revealed that residence in areas of greater commercial potential (proxied by population density) is associated with a much higher percentage of wage employment for both young women and young men, even for those without a secondary education. For young women with no more than a primary school education, the share of their total work effort accounted for by wage employment is more than three times higher in peri-urban areas than it is in rural areas (about 9 per cent versus approximately 33 per cent).

In their study of five African countries, Van den Broeck and Kilic (2018) found that the gender gap in off-farm wage employment declined in rural areas between 2010 and 2016. They show that marriage reduces women's and increases men's participation in off-farm employment, which points to the role that intra-household dynamics and social norms play in determining women's economic participation. Contrary to what one might expect, the most common sectors of off-farm wage employment in rural areas are not part of the agrifood system (AFS). In the 13 countries studied in this report, the wage employment share of youth in the AFS is relatively low even in rural areas (see **FIGURE 3.9**). However, young women are equally likely to work in the AFS as young men, indicating that, as this sector grows, more opportunities for young rural women will also become available (Tschirley et al., 2015) (see chapter 6).

**FIGURE 3.8** Secondary education is associated with enormous increases in young rural women's access to wage labour

**Percentage point difference in the probability of young women or men with secondary schooling being wage earners compared to those with less education, along the rural-urban gradient**



Notes: The figure plots the differentials for each category of the rural-urban gradient between young rural women's and men's probability of being in wage work if they have a secondary education compared to the probability for young women and men who have only a primary education or less. Level of significance: \* = 10 per cent; \*\* = 5 per cent; \*\*\* = 1 per cent.

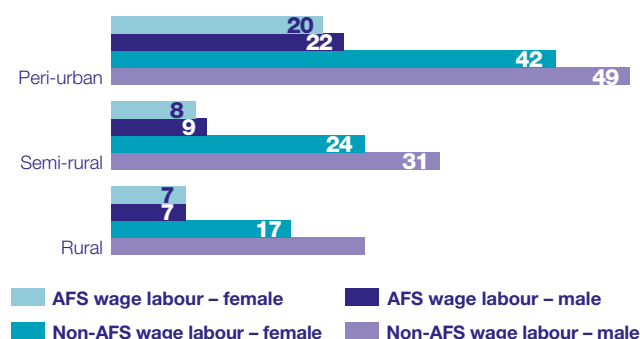
Source: Authors' own calculations of the differentials based on data from 13 household surveys conducted in LAC, SSA and Asia.

<sup>21</sup> These results should be interpreted with caution, as the surveys did not fully control for other unobserved factors that may be associated with access to wage work.

<sup>22</sup> As noted in chapter 2, the term "rural" is used to refer to all three of the less densely populated areas in the four-category rural/urban classification. The other two non-urban areas are semi-rural and peri-urban.

**FIGURE 3.9** Young women are equally likely to work in the AFS as young men

**Percentage of youth in wage labour along the rural-urban gradient, by gender and sector**



Notes: The figure plots the percentages along the rural-urban gradient of persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years who are wage earners in the AFS or in a non-AFS sector.

Source: Authors' own calculations based on data from 13 socio-economic household surveys conducted in LAC, SSA and Asia.

## Programmatic agenda for empowering young rural women

Educational and health outcomes for young women have improved significantly over the last two decades. At the same time, the structural and rural transformation processes are opening up opportunities for everyone in rural areas. Yet young rural women generally continue to be at a disadvantage, and sometimes deeply so, due to the multiple layers of exclusion discussed earlier. Redressing this situation will require a programmatic approach that deals with the specific constraints that young rural women face and that targets both the productive and reproductive spheres of their lives.

### The evidence suggests that the majority of existing youth employment programmes have failed to address gender-specific constraints in an effective enough manner

There is very little evidence on programmes designed to boost employment among young rural women because most of the interventions that have been evaluated have not been ones that specifically targeted this segment of the population. Reviews of youth employment initiatives in low- and middle-income countries have covered very few programmes in rural areas. Overall, vocational training initiatives do not seem to have been very effective in raising youth employment rates (Fox and Kaul, 2018; Fox, 2018). Reviews of programmes on the economic empowerment of adolescent girls (Baird and Özler, 2016) and of programmes focusing on young women's employment (Chakravarty, Das and Vaillant, 2017) have found that most programmes have an urban bias. One programme that was implemented in urban and rural communities stands out for its success in the productive and reproductive empowerment of young women: the Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) programme of BRAC International (see [BOX 3.1](#)).

The existing evidence suggests that young women fare worse than young men or older women in part because their lower initial endowments or heightened constraints prevent them from participating in wage-work and self-employment promotion programmes (Chakravarty, Das and Vaillant, 2017; Doss et al., 2018). Young women in rural areas are probably even more constrained, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Most of the existing programmes have not addressed gender-specific constraints such as the distance from the programme site and the lack of childcare support or access to credit, which is more limited for young women. These oversights have likely been contributing factors in these programmes' failure to have a major impact or their high dropout rates. Designing programmes for young rural women thus requires a careful assessment of their situational contexts and binding constraints.

In agriculture, interventions are increasingly being designed to be responsive to constraints that women in general face, but little attention has been paid to the additional limitations of younger women. Gender mainstreaming has been a long-standing focus of attention in agricultural development initiatives, and there are a number of success stories in this connection in some areas (World Bank, 2011). For example, farmer field schools (FFSs) in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have been successful in reaching female

farmers (50 per cent of the participants have been female) and resulted in significant income gains, with relatively larger gains for women in Uganda (Davis et al., 2010). Improving the productivity of female-run farms is particularly important in areas where more women are farming than men and where productivity gaps remain. It will be important to determine whether and how constraints that reduce productivity are disproportionately affecting young rural women. For example, not enough research has yet been done to assess how land constraints may be addressed differentially for rural young men and women through the land rental markets that are rapidly emerging in some transforming economies (see chapter 6) (Yeboah et al., 2018).

**Reducing fertility and increasing schooling and labour force participation among young rural women are complementary targets that contribute to their empowerment and a faster pace of rural transformation**

The productive participation of young rural women in the economy can significantly speed up the rural transformation process. To increase young rural women's labour force participation and their productivity on and off the farm, investments need to provide direct ways of improving their human capital (especially in less transformed countries), address the constraints that are specific to them and complement targeted interventions with improvements in overall rural development processes that will boost productivity.

While primary schooling is almost universal, there are still large gaps in secondary education and all the more so in the case of girls. Two types of interventions are needed. One is to increase the availability of secondary schools in rural areas for both boys and girls alike. The other is to improve connections to schools and to make travel to the schools and back and the schools themselves safer for girls. For example, the provision of bicycles to rural girls in India as part of a conditional cash transfer (CCT) programme increased secondary school enrolment by 30 per cent, as this made the trip to school faster and safer (Muralidharan and Prakash, 2013). Building gender-differentiated toilets in schools also helps to keep adolescent girls in school (Adukia, forthcoming).

Access to productive assets, especially land, can be improved through gender-sensitive land reforms (Ali, Deininger and Goldstein, 2014) and land rental markets that ease land constraints (Yeboah et al., 2018). Such interventions will challenge cultural gender norms and may have unintended negative effects if not carefully implemented.

**BOX 3.1 The BRAC Programme on Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA)**

The Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) programme comprises a set of interventions that are being implemented by the non-profit BRAC Foundation in order to improve the lives of adolescent girls in multiple dimensions. The programme offers girls training in vocational skills and life skills, along with a safe place to meet and socialize with other adolescent girls. The organization operates in six countries with the world's highest child marriage and teenage pregnancy rates (Uganda, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Haiti and Sierra Leone). The goal of the intervention is to empower girls by unlocking their potential through education, life skills and livelihood opportunities.

What is special about this programme and is one of the main reasons for its success is its multidimensionality, as the programme interventions address both the productive sphere, by providing "hard" vocational skills that will enable adolescent girls to start small-scale income-generating activities of their own, and the reproductive sphere, by providing training in "soft" life skills aimed at building knowledge that enables girls to make informed choices about sex, reproduction and marriage. The other novel aspect of this programme is that it does not work through schools but rather in designated "girls' clubs", which are safe spaces close to home where school dropouts as well as girls who are attending school can discuss problems with their peers in small groups and build their social networks, away from the pressures of family and male-centred society.

In the case of Uganda, after four years in operation, the programme had increased the likelihood that girls would engage in income-generating activities by 48 per cent, with the bulk of this increase being attributable to increased participation in self-employment. Teenage pregnancy rates fell by 34 per cent, early entry into marriage/cohabitation was reduced by 62 per cent, the share of adolescent girls reporting having had sex unwillingly in the past year was 5.3 percentage points lower in treated communities than in the control communities, and the girls' stated desires regarding the ages at which they wished to marry and start having children were moved further into the future (Bandiera et al., 2018). Furthermore, at a cost of US\$100 per participant, the programme has been proven to be highly cost-effective and has been seen to be applicable across countries and highly scalable (Kashfi, Ramdoss and MacMillan, 2012). The programme has thus helped to give a big push to adolescent girls' empowerment along potentially interlinked dimensions that are likely to set off a virtuous cycle of gains.

Source: <http://www.bracinternational.nl/en/what-we-do/empowerment-livelihood-adolescents-ela/>



For example, a land reform initiative in India that was intended to provide daughters with greater access to land instead ended up heightening the preference for male babies and increasing the rate of female feticide (Bhalotra, Brulé and Roy, 2018).

Higher levels of education and labour force participation significantly reduce fertility (Heath and Jayachandran, 2017). As shown by the ELA programme in Uganda, influencing young women's reproductive decisions has a significant impact on their livelihood choices in such areas as education and employment (Bandiera et al., 2018). An intervention in the Dominican Republic that helped to build stronger non-cognitive skills significantly improved young women's employment outcomes, increased their aspirations and reduced their fertility (Acevedo et al., 2017). Although this intervention was in urban areas, non-cognitive skills are equally relevant in rural areas, and similar education interventions aimed at complementing cognitive skills with non-cognitive ones are therefore needed in these zones. Expectations about labour market opportunities appear to have a significant impact on young women's livelihood decisions. Jensen (2012) reports that recruiting services that targeted women in rural villages of India over a timespan of several years succeeded in reducing the share of women between 15 and 21 years of age who married or had a child and raising their aspirations with regard to the possibility of continuing to work after marriage.

The structural and rural transformation processes can open up opportunities in "soft" manufacturing activities and services in which women may have a comparative advantage over men. Within the AFS, a meaningful number of opportunities is expected to open up for women in such areas as food preparation activities sited away from their homes (Tschirley et al., 2015) (see chapter 6) or emerging commercial farms (Maertens and Swinnen, 2012). In Bangladesh, the increase in low-skilled jobs in the garment sector has significantly increased employment among young women and delayed their age of marriage and the age at which they have their first child (Heath and Mobarak, 2015). Thus, the structural and rural transformation processes have the potential to increase young rural women's economic opportunities, which will, in turn, speed up the transformation process by boosting productivity and lowering fertility rates, thereby contributing to the realization of the demographic dividend.

Caution is called for, however, in assessing the potentially negative effects of increased female labour force participation. For example, Heath (2014) found that a greater incidence of domestic violence was associated with women earning their own incomes. It is also commonly known that working women under most circumstances continue to perform domestic work and are therefore shouldering even greater workloads. Finally, concerns about health and safety conditions in the workplace may be especially important in the case of young women (Fox, 2015).

**Investments should be designed to help connect young rural women to markets and social networks in order to reduce gender-specific constraints and increase their productivity and agency**

In the least transformed economies and in the least connected areas, the priority for investments should be to improve basic infrastructure. Although roads and ports benefit everyone, investments in water and energy sources and distribution systems can have a disproportionately large impact in reducing rural young women's time burden (World Bank, 2011). Better and more available health care should improve infant survival rates and mothers' health, along with family planning options (Bhalotra, Venkataramani and Walther, 2018; Ito and Tanaka, 2018; Bradley et al., 2012). In more highly transformed

economies, access to additional services (beyond water and energy, which typically are already available) that reduce young rural mothers' time burdens could be influential. While it is unlikely that childcare will be provided as a public service in low-income countries, there have been some experiences with time-sharing contracts among women in rural Senegal who work on horticulture plantations (Maertens and Swinnen, 2012). In more highly transformed economies with better infrastructure, extending childcare services to rural areas or introducing flexible, home-based self-employment arrangements could be options to pursue. The latter could be facilitated by mobile applications. To fully exploit the transformative potential of ICTs, however, the improvements achieved thus far in providing access to mobile phones and the Internet in rural areas need to be expanded upon, and inequalities in access between young men and women in some areas need to be addressed (Bertini, 2011).

Emerging off-farm opportunities in growing secondary cities and rural towns are promising to raise women's workforce participation and productivity. Whether young rural women will be able to seize these opportunities will depend on their education, their access to productive assets and the cultural context that conditions their access to value chains and markets.

Aside from physical infrastructure investments, investments are needed in ways that will help young rural women be connected to economic and social networks. Some farmer field schools have been gender-inclusive, but they have yet to be assessed with regard to their capacity to include young rural women on an equal footing with young rural men (Davis et al., 2010). Business skills programmes have been shown to be useful for women (although they have not yet been evaluated on this specific point) because they help young women to overcome constraints on access to social networks and because they enhance peer interaction and learning, especially in socially conservative communities (De Mel, McKenzie and Woodruff, 2014; Valdivia, 2015; Field, Jayachandran and Pande, 2010).

**Investments should empower young rural women to gain agency in making their livelihood choices, especially with regard to the age at which they marry and have their first child**

Young women's ages at the time of programme interventions influences their livelihood choices. Bandiera et al. (2018), in a study focusing on rural Uganda, found that targeting adolescent girls while they were still in school through the ELA programme boosted their subsequent school attendance rates, raised their aspirations, led to greater job success and delayed the age at which they had their first child (see [BOX 3.1](#)). The success of this project suggests that the age at which young women are engaged in such training can significantly influence their reproductive choices. Furthermore, Chari et al. (2017) and Quisumbing (2003) have shown that delayed marriage, reduced fertility and female empowerment in the form of control over resources significantly improve children's health, nutrition and education outcomes.

Conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes can, under certain circumstances, bring about a significant change in parents' investments in their daughters, and especially in their educations, in ways that will improve their life prospects (Chakravarty, Das and Vaillant, 2017). Female role models can play an important role in changing young rural women's aspirations and educational outcomes. In India, affirmative action in the form of quotas for women's local political representation has had a substantially positive effect on girls' education by changing girls' aspirations and their parents' aspirations for them (Beaman et al., 2012).

Increasing young rural women's sense of agency thus entails changing their aspirations and the attitudes of their parents, husbands and society at large. Given the influential nature of cultural norms and the difficulty of changing them, programmes need to address young rural women's social and cultural environment. Along the same lines as the ELA programme, the Ishraq ("Enlightenment") programme in Egypt, a country with very conservative gender norms, has been working to improve educational, health and social opportunities for adolescent girls in rural areas of Upper Egypt since 2001. Brady et al. (2007) assert that it has raised literacy rates, helped beneficiaries to develop life skills and build their self-confidence, and led to greater mobility and community involvement for participants. Crucially, the programme has engaged with the "gatekeepers" of young girls in conservative societies – parents, brothers and community leaders – and this has been a key element in its success. Approaches that involve all household members in such settings are believed to lower gender-specific barriers faster and in a more sustainable way. (For further information on the household methodology used by IFAD, see **BOX 3.2**.)

### **BOX 3.2** IFAD's household methodologies: empowering young rural women

IFAD is one of the leading development agencies which is applying household methodologies (HHMs) to improve intra-household gender relations and to uncover rural households' full potential. This methodology employs participatory methods at the household level that involve all members of the household, particularly women and young people. Women are usually discriminated against within the household, and young rural women face a triple burden, as discussed earlier, that often results in their needs being subordinated to those of their parents or other male members of the household. The purpose of this methodology is to detect inequalities in terms of responsibilities and decision-making power within the household with a view to strengthening the overall well-being of all members.

The HHM process involves the creation of a household vision, where members decide together where the household would like to be in two to three years' time. At this stage, young people gain a voice within the household by identifying their own visions and sharing them with other household members. The next step is the action plan, in which a household identifies the opportunities and actions needed to realize that vision. Intra-household relations can be redefined as a result, and opportunities for youth to play a role in achieving the household vision are identified. At this stage in the process, household

members start to work towards their target for the year, with everyone playing their different and complementary roles and shouldering their particular responsibilities. A household can be considered to have "graduated" when the methodology has become embedded within the household planning cycle. The involvement of the community is essential in order to create a supportive environment in which households and individuals can undertake transformative changes.

Starting in 2009, IFAD has piloted different household methodologies in its grant and loan-financed operations, such as the household mentoring approach and the Gender Action Learning System (GALS). Building on lessons learned, IFAD has integrated HHMs into its programmes across sub-Saharan Africa and, to a lesser extent, in other regions. By mid-2015, more than 100,000 people had benefited from these methodologies as applied in IFAD-supported programmes and, by July 2017, HHMs were in the design stage or being implemented in more than 40 programmes in 28 countries. The benefits of HHMs are visible and tangible. Both women and men see that they benefit economically and personally from a more equal relationship with each other and with their children and, as part of the HHM process, they realize that inequalities in gender roles and relations can be part of the reason why they remain poor.

### **Key elements of household methodologies**

Community level and wider environment	Service provider and facilitator system	Household level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select communities</li> <li>• Secure support from leadership</li> <li>• Engage with men</li> <li>• Identify groups and their members</li> <li>• Identify households for individual mentoring</li> <li>• Establish partnerships</li> <li>• Provide implementation support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select approach: group-based or individual mentoring</li> <li>• Select and build capacity of facilitators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a vision</li> <li>• Analyse the current situation</li> <li>• Identify opportunities and address challenges</li> <li>• Create an action plan with indicators</li> <li>• Implement with support from facilitators and peers</li> <li>• Monitor and keep on track</li> <li>• Graduate and ensure sustainability</li> </ul>



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