

August 12, 2025 | Using Delphi for Needs Assessment

Building Consensus but Appreciating Divergence: A Delphi Study on Inclusive Small-scale Agriculture

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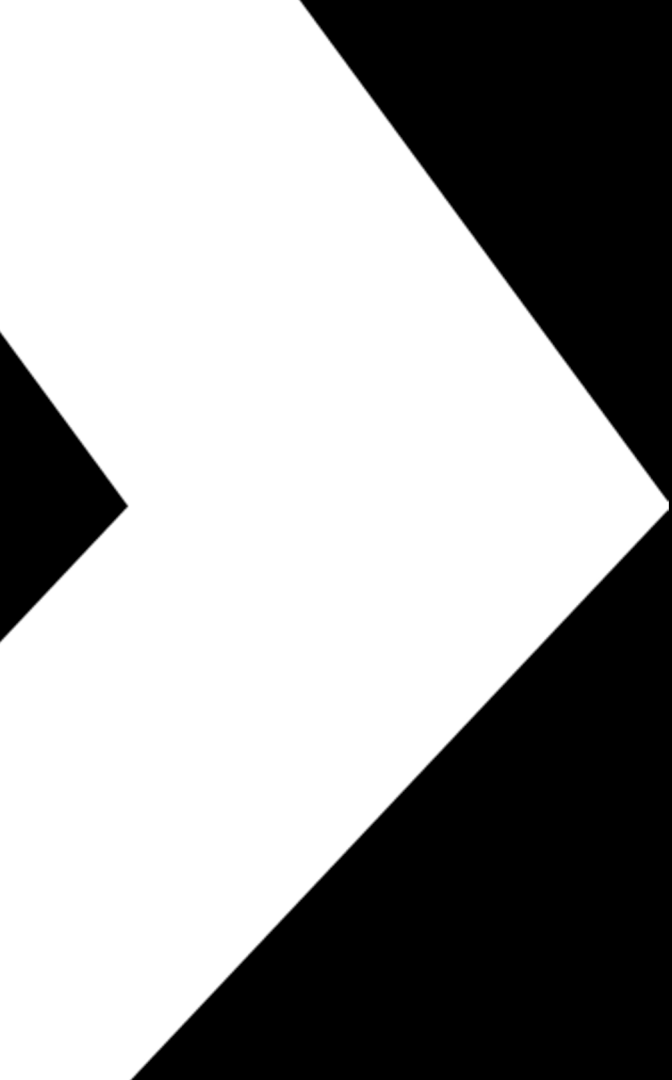
Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture



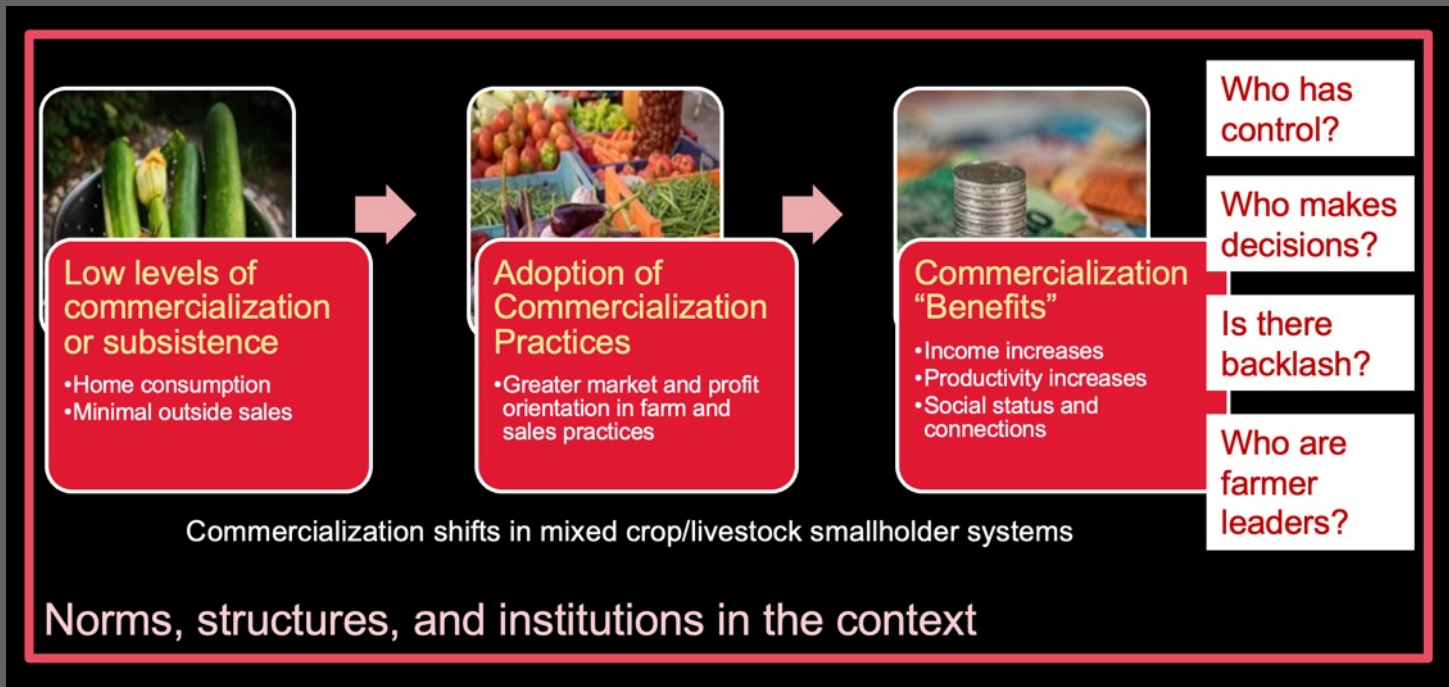
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FEARLESSLY
FORWARD





Applying Delphi to Inform Design and Implementation



Towards more innovative, transformative approaches for “better” investments and facilitation

- GTA potential for small-scale commercialization to positively impact social relations
- Lack of wide sharing and agreement on turning theory into best practices and overcoming barriers

Delphi To Assess Needs and Inform Good Practice

- Match program designs and resources with the needs of your target audience
- Prioritize resources
- Strengthen external funding proposals
- Build connections and trust with stakeholders
- Needs change with time!

Level of “what should be”




Gap = Need



Level of “what is”





Aims and Methods

Delphi Recruitment and Sampling

Focus of Questions: 1) Types of changes to target, 2) Barriers, and 3) Solutions and strategies



Purposive and snowball sampling to recruit 23 global experts from 17 organizations with firsthand experience implementing and researching gender and smallholder agricultural development

Emailed a one-page overview of the study and offered to have a pre-meeting before participation


Delphi Consensus Building

qualtrics.^{XM}

Round 1: Participants provided open-ended data




Round 2: Participants rated importance of items (5-point agreement scale; $\geq 3/5$ consensus to continue)




Round 3: Participants rated importance (5-point agreement scale; $\geq 3/5$ consensus to remain)



Divergence
Captured



Divergence
Captured



Finalization: Stakeholder validation and action planning

Why Divergence via a Consensus Focused Approach?

- Experts requested we capture their unique perspectives due to the highly contextualized and complex nature of the topic
- We know that “the masses” usually don’t pave the way for innovation (Rogers, 2005)
- “It is important that decision-makers and analysts... develop methods which acknowledge the diversity of expert perspectives and reasoning on the key uncertainties and choices involved.” (Kattirtzi & Winskel, 2020, p. 8).





What to do with Delphi findings?

Visualizing Consensus

Use funnel chart
function in Excel

Approaches should tackle the root causes of power relations affecting smallholder commercialization by promoting behavioral change at various levels and stages – and not only from the women involved in the commercialization but from all actors in the value chains.

81.0%

≥ 2/3
Consensus

Being context specific – Commercialization interventions successful in one context may not be so in another under different conditions. Consider context-specific factors that curtail success (e.g. cultural norms, infrastructure and other social economic dimensions).

66.7%

≥ 3/5
Consensus

Using more participatory methods to set the agenda. These exercises should be contextualized and driven by the intended beneficiaries. For the interventions to be gender transformative we must first understand what transformation means and could look like for the smallholders we are targeting.

61.9%

An important and overlooked consideration is the big picture of agriculture commercialization, and the unequal terms in which smallholders (men and women) are incorporated into corporate market systems, and how much control they have over such things like seeds, inputs, knowledge, and land when the agriculture markets and land markets themselves are concentrated in so few hands – including those few donors and private sector conglomerates that write agriculture and development policy. 57.1%

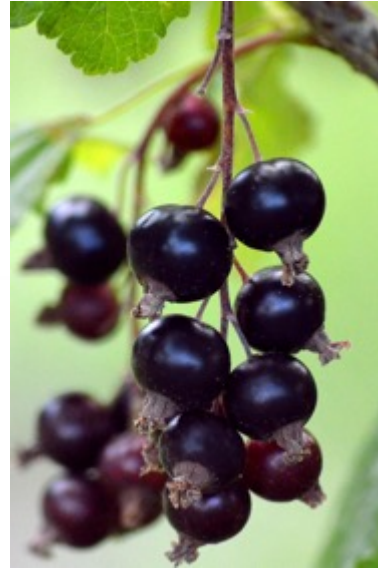
< 3/5
Consensus

A disciplinary and moral obligation is to ensure women and women's empowerment are not instrumentalized to further exogenous and/or neoliberal development agendas. It is vital that Western development agendas (so common in commercialization of smallholder farming systems reliant on patriarchal/capitalist labor structures) very carefully interrogate and co-develop their definition of "gender transformative change" for each specific project. (Who needs to be transformed in smallholder farming systems? Why? And to what ends? Is this transformation aligned with the needs, aspirations, and goals of project beneficiaries? If not, how can a compromise be made?). 57.1%

In understanding relational power dynamics, practitioners must accept that commercialization and increased marketization of ag/livestock products do not exist outside of gender power relations – and that gender power and meaning are embedded in the commodities themselves, in addition to the wider value chain actors that structure the hegemonic gender power dynamics – and crucially, label some as 'pariahs' (outcasts) for operating outside of that system. 47.6%

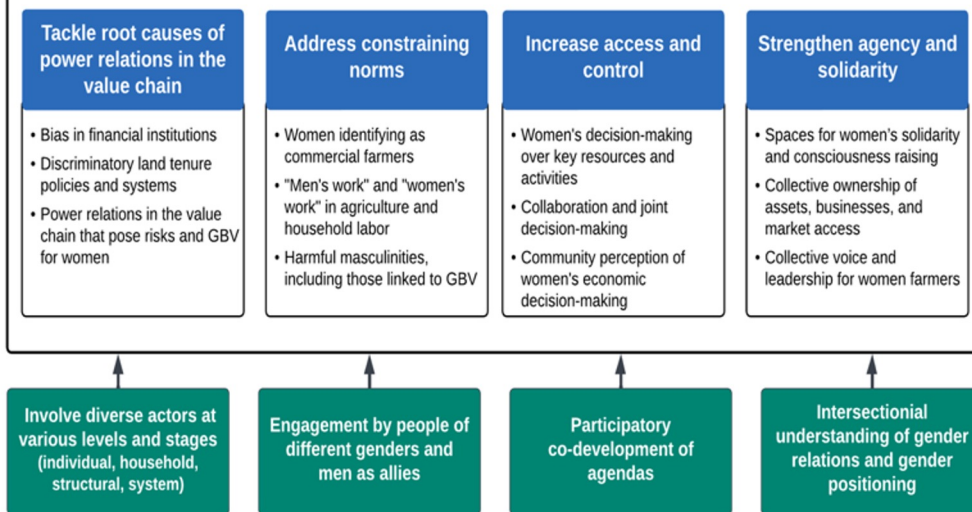
The Experts Debate Practice: Where to Target and Start?

“I believe we need to start with the **“low hanging fruit”** **in any project conceptualization** first to have immediate and short term-impact, building on those successes to tackle longer ranging challenges such as gender transformation. This involves a gender analysis with key stakeholders up and down the smallholder value chain to co-develop objectives and outcomes and then implementing a few targeted participatory activities **rather than tackling something multi-faceted from the beginning** such as intersectionality. Such an approach would allow gender champions to highlight successes and develop projects and programs that build for genuine transformation.”



Develop Simplified and Summary Frameworks

Potential Target Changes in Smallholder Agriculture



GTA Design and Implementation Fundamentals



AND! Don't forget practical report-back and action-planning to your panel and stakeholders

	Standard Gender Integration	Gender Transformative Solutions and Strategies
DONOR		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with donors that understand the challenges and needs for gender transformative approaches – to enable longer time frames and investments in teams far beyond the token 'gender specialist'
ORGANIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include gender program managers and sufficient gender officers in organization chart, proposal, and budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting with (practitioner) individuals and organizations themselves, it is very helpful to put themselves through gender transformative processes to both understand the approach and surface and challenge their own barriers Build gender skillsets and capacities by recruiting adequate, qualified gender specialists, valuing them equally with market specialists (in positions of authority and influence). This also depends on the political will of the organization(s)
DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrating gender perspective at the start of programs and not in hindsight Include gender-specific activities with proper funding and staffing in proposal (even if donor does not require it) Train using inclusive techniques (visuals, appropriate language, times and locations that work well for women) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not limiting the vision and analysis to the project or locality level, but also looking at the constraints in the political and policy environment, while committing to empowering smallholders collectively to have voice in these decisions
MONITORING & EVALUATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MEL advisor should work with gender advisor/program manager to include and monitor gender indicators and ensure a gender lens is applied to analysis and reflection Make sure baseline studies or inception phase studies include a gender analysis or even a gender specific study to set the tone for implementation and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor changes in norms and attitudes among women and men (working at different nodes of the value chain) about gender equality at household, farm, and market levels





Closing reflection on Delphi challenges and solutions

Key Challenges	Solutions and Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieving and maintaining response rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage and build ownership early (especially for smaller niche panels) Remind, remind, remind Use Qualtrics feature to determine response status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of data = lots of analysis AND long consensus surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committed panelists Incentives Narrow questions in round 1 (when appropriate) Analysis to reduce and combine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delphi bias towards agreement and oversimplification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider ways to capture and analyze divergence too Engage your panel beyond consensus building
<p>Work with others! Build a Delphi team!</p>	



THANK YOU!

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