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Afghanistan's First Female Deminers

An Analysis of Perception Changes among Deminers, Families, and Communities



Female deminer at work in Bamyan, 2018 - © UNMAS

End-line Report 2019-2020

FINAL

Acknowledgement

This study is the product of the collaboration between Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the Afghan Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC), the Danish Refugee Council and the Danish Demining Group (DRC-DDG).

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Executive Summary

For the first time in the thirty years of mine action in Afghanistan, as part of an initiative of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), in June 2018 a mixed-gender demining team was deployed by the Danish Demining Group (DRC-DDG) to clear landmines in Bamyan Province, in the central highlands of the country. A minefield was successfully cleared in six months. Following the success of the first project, in 2019 the same demining team was deployed once again to Bamyan to clear other hazards, including the last known minefield in the province. Bamyan has since been declared the first province in the country free of legacy minefields¹.

This Perception Study assesses if and to what extent the recruitment of women in demining work has contributed to a change in gender norms in the province. The study is a joint initiative between the United Nations Mine Action Service, the Danish Demining Group, the Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC), and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).

The study adopted quantitative primary data collection methods, consisting of a baseline (May 2019) and an end-line survey (October 2019). Male and female deminers, as well as the latter's family and community members, were surveyed on their views and attitudes in relation to the socioeconomic empowerment of women. The study covered an average of **92** respondents, with **101** individuals interviewed in the baseline survey, and **83** in the end-line data collection. Except for a few absentees in the end-line survey, the same groups were interviewed in both rounds of data collection to ensure an objective and reliable comparison of findings.

The findings of the study are largely positive and provide initial evidence that recruiting female deminers supports gender equality by promoting positive attitudes towards women's socioeconomic empowerment, even in more conservative societies. The study highlights how the recruitment of female deminers not only contributes to their own financial independence, but also promotes their agency as proactive family and community members. Notably, by the end of the data collection many female deminers reported being more confident and outspoken. Family and community members of both genders also expressed more respect for women's opinions, appreciation for their work, and recognition of their capabilities.

Among the most relevant findings are the following:

- The percentage of male respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that *women can do the same jobs as men* increased **from 72%** at the start of the project **to 100%** by the end of it;
- **100%** of male and female family members strongly agreed by the end of the project that *they would encourage a female relative to work as a deminer*, compared to **20%** and **89%** respectively in the baseline;
- The percentage of men who by the end of the data collection did not believe that *the job of a deminer is not appropriate for a woman* increased **from 59% to 82%**;
- Both female and male deminers became much more confident by the end of the project that *women have the necessary strength to work as deminers* (from **50%** to **100%** and from **46%** to **75%** for women and men respectively);
- Female deminers were more likely than their male colleagues to believe that *demining is too dangerous for a woman* by the end of the project;

¹ Other explosive hazards remain in Bamyan Province, including in firing ranges and battlefields.

- At the end of the project female deminers believed to be *taken seriously* in the same way by male and female community members (86% in both cases, compared to 50% and 90% respectively in the baseline);
- **100%** of female deminers agreed by the end of the project that *they were able to influence decision-making in their community*, compared with **60%** in the baseline;
- Female and male deminers were almost as likely to identify with the statement ‘*I participate actively in community discussions and decisions*’, both at the beginning (**90%** for women, **92%** for men) and at the end of the project (**86%** for women, **83%** for men).
- **100%** of male heads of household (HOHs) of families including female deminers believed both at the start and at the end of the project that *women should be able to influence decision-making in the community*.

Whilst these findings should not be deemed representative of the whole country due to the limited size and geographical scope of the study, these results are encouraging as they depict how perceptions on women’s role in society can begin to change in a period of time as short as that of this project. The findings may be used as evidence to support similar projects on women’s empowerment and gender equality in other parts of the country, and inspire more work on mine action’s contribution to the transformative change of gender norms in Afghanistan at the individual, family, and community level.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Impact of conflict on the civilian population of Afghanistan

Four decades of war have taken an immeasurable toll on all aspects of Afghan society. The repeated targeting of civilian infrastructure, along with structural problems in the public sector and inefficient resource management, has led to widespread vulnerability across communities, with long-term socioeconomic implications. In 2020 alone, 309,372 individuals² were forced to flee their homes in 31 out of the 34 provinces in which the country is divided. The large-scale return of millions of Afghan refugees in recent years is also adding pressure on the country’s already fragile institutions.

Education is among the sectors most affected by the conflict. Despite recent progress in raising enrolment levels, an estimated 3.7 million children are out-of-school – 60% of them are girls, who still lack equal access to education. The literacy rate, currently estimated at 43% of the adult population (55% for men, 30% for women), is among the lowest in the world, with high variations between urban and rural areas.³ In spite of positive economic developments in recent years⁴, job opportunities are scarce and a quarter of the labour force is unemployed. As many as 66% of young Afghan women (age 15-24), 66% of whom were not in employment, education, or training in 2017, compared with 18% of young men, making this one of the most vulnerable groups in the country.⁵

² 60% children under 18, 20% adult women, 20% adult men. Data retrieved from [UN OCHA, 2020](#).

³ [UNESCO, 2018](#).

⁴ [World Bank, 2020](#).

⁵ [ILO, 2019](#).

1.2 Explosive ordnance contamination

As of 2020, Afghanistan is one of the countries most affected by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the world. Around 32,000 hazardous areas have been cleared or otherwise cancelled since 1989, yet some 1,495 communities remain affected by explosive ordnance (EO) to this day.

Over 38,000 explosive ordnance casualties have been recorded since 1979 (2,090 women, 2,322 girls, 14,646 boys, 19,590 men). of which almost 10,000 resulted in death and more than 29,000 in injuries.⁶ In recent years, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have become one of the leading causes of civilian casualties in the country.⁷ In 2019 alone, , explosive ordnance contamination resulted in 1,692 casualties (143 girls, 122 women, 716 boys, 711 men), resulting in 650 deaths and 1,042 injured victims. The accidents were almost entirely caused by ERW and improvised mines (IM).⁸

Men and boys tend to be killed and injured at a far higher rate than women and girls. Numbers for all groups at least doubled in 2014-2019 compared to 2008-2013, largely due to a sharp increase in IM casualties⁹.

Casualty rates also vary significantly across geographical areas, with the southern part of the country reporting almost five times the number of EO casualty than the central highlands between 2015 and 2019.¹⁰ There can be many reasons behind these variations across locations, including differences in mobility patterns. The overwhelming majority of victims has been reported among community members, while casualties among internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees represent a much smaller group.

1.3 Bamyān Province

Located in the central highlands of Afghanistan, the Bamyān Province hosts a population of around 450,000 inhabitants¹¹, mostly Hazara, which is the third largest ethnic group in the country. Hazaras speak Hazaragi, a dialect of Dari, and are largely followers of the Shi'a sect of Islam. Hazaras have been historically discriminated against and targeted with violence by other ethnic groups in the country.¹² It was only with the introduction of the current Constitution of Afghanistan in 2004 that Hazaras were granted full and equal rights as other Afghan citizens before the law.¹³ Since then, the living conditions of Hazara women, girls, boys, and men have reportedly improved.¹⁴

Compared to other groups across of the country, Hazara communities are perceived as relatively progressive about women's rights¹⁵. However, the intersection between gender and ethnicity has meant that Hazara women have long experienced major barriers to accessing their rights on an equal basis and continue to face situations of vulnerable to this day. The approval of the 2009 Shi'a Personal

⁶ [Information Management System for Mine Action, September 2020](#)

⁷ Action on Armed Violence, 2018.

⁸ [Information Management System for Mine Action, September 2020](#)

⁹ Figures for IM casualties are very low until 2013. From 2014 onwards, the numbers of Syrians killed or injured by IM have significantly increased.

¹⁰ [Information Management System for Mine Action, September 2020](#)

¹¹ [Office of the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, n.d.](#)

¹² [Minority rights group international, n.d.](#)

¹³ [Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2004.](#)

¹⁴ [Minority rights group international, n.d.](#)

¹⁵ [Minority rights group international, n.d.](#)

Status Law.¹⁶, which contains controversial restrictions on women's rights, has further threatened their freedoms.

2. BACKGROUND AND AIM OF THE STUDY

For the first time in the history of mine action in Afghanistan, a group of 14 women¹⁷ was trained by DRC-DDG to clear landmines in June 2018. The clearance operations were aimed at removing the last remaining hazards in Bamyan Province, which had been primarily contaminated by explosive ordnance during the Soviet-Afghan war between 1979 and 1989.¹⁸

Started as a collaboration between DRC-DDG and UNMAS to facilitate the inclusion of women in the mine action sector, which is commonly thought of as a male-only space, the project has received extensive media coverage and the female demining team was selected as runner-up in the 2019's edition of the Arms Control Person(s) of the Year award.¹⁹ In the second year of the project, four of the female deminers were further trained in explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) in order to upgrade their skills and expertise with the aim of promoting them to the positions of Team Leader and Section Leader in the future.²⁰

Following the success of clearance operations in 2018, a second similar project was implemented by DRC-DDG with the support of UNMAS, employing both female deminers from the previous project and newly trained ones. The project was concluded in late 2019 and Bamyan Province was declared the first mine-free province in the country.

Prior to the deployment of the teams, in April 2019, UNMAS, DRC-DDG, DMAC, and the GICHD agreed to carry out a Perception Study to gather evidence on the impact of the project on the socioeconomic empowerment of women at the individual, family, and community level in Bamyan. More specifically, the study explores how perceptions among and towards women change when the latter are employed in demining work, becoming income providers as well as operating in a sector traditionally accessible only to men.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Survey design

Through a baseline and an end-line survey, the Perception Study was designed to collect quantitative data from a sample of respondents in Bamyan Province, Afghanistan. The surveys were first designed in English by UNMAS and the GICHD in consultation with DRC-DDG and then translated into Dari to reach target groups. A mixed-gender team representing UNMAS, DRC-DDG, and DMAC collected

¹⁶ English Translation, Shiite Personal Status Law, 2009.

¹⁷ 10 deminers, one paramedic, one survey/explosive ordnance disposal operator, and one explosive ordnance risk education instructor.

¹⁸ Additional contamination resulted from the Mujahedeen fighting against the Taliban movement (1995-2000) as well as from North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s forces using the areas as firing ranges from 2001 onwards.

¹⁹ Arms Control Association, 2019.

²⁰ Given the historical heritage and status of Bamyan and the commitment to improve collaboration between mine action and other sectors, in 2018 the female deminers were also trained in archaeological search in collaboration with the Archaeology Institute of Afghanistan, and other livelihood activities. The aim of the collaboration with the Archaeology Institute was to facilitate these women's future access to employment in the sectors of tourism and archaeology, once clearance operations had been completed in the province. This additional training complemented the comprehensive demining training and resulted in significant skill acquisition during the project.

the data. All enumerators, two males and three females, were members of national staff proficient in Dari. The enumerators were trained by UNMAS on data collection and the use of tablets.

3.2 Overview of methodology

3.2.1 Geographic location

The surveys were carried out across the Bamyan Province in Afghanistan.

3.2.2 Target groups

The following target groups were identified as the most critical to ensure that the Perception Study would be as comprehensive as possible:

- DRC-DDG female deminers
- DRC-DDG male deminers
- Family members of female deminers
- Community members of female deminers

The deminers were surveyed in the premises of DRC-DDG in the city of Bamyan, while family members were interviewed both in Bamyan city and across the Yakwalang District. Community members were all interviewed in the village of Paymuri, in Shibar District.

For each female deminers, four family members were surveyed, preferably two females and two males. A list of available community members was prepared by DRC-DDG in consultation with the head of the community. It was ensured that women represented at least 50% of the list of survey respondents.

Individual consent to proceed with the survey was requested to each respondent at the beginning of both baseline and end-line data collection. The aim of the study was explained to all respondents.

3.2.3 Scope of the survey

The study was based on answers by an average of **92** respondents (**101** at baseline data collection, and **83** at end-line data collection). The respondents of the baseline survey were the following:

Survey respondents (baseline)	Female	No. %	Male	No. %	Total %
Deminers	10	10%	13	13%	23%
Family members of female deminers	15	15%	9	9%	24%
Community members of female deminers	32	31.5%	22	21.5%	53%

Total	57	56.5%	44	43.5%	100%
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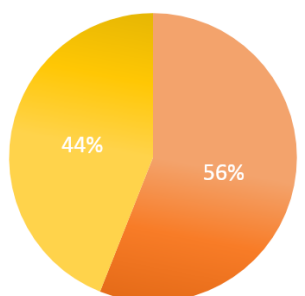
Table 1

The same subjects were surveyed for both baseline and end line data collection (**Table 2**). However, some absentees were recorded for each target group during the end-line data collection. This contraction can be attributed to the fact that the end-line survey coincided with the potato harvesting season, which prompted many male respondents to leave for Kabul to sell their crops at the time of the data collection.

Survey respondents (end-line)	Female	No. %	Male	No. %	Total %
Deminers	7	9%	12	14%	23%
Family members of female deminers	13	15%	8	10%	25%
Community members of female deminers	30	36%	13	16%	52%
Total	50	60%	33	40%	100%

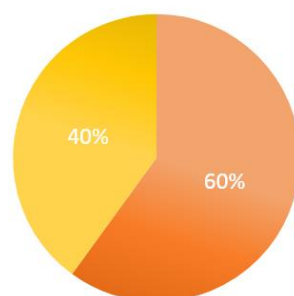
Table 2

Both baseline and end-line surveys incorporated a relatively gender-balanced sample, with **56%** female and **44%** male respondents in the baseline survey, compared to **60%** women and **40%** men in the end-line data collection (**Figures 1 and 2**). All respondents were adults (>18).



Women (56) Men (44)

Figure 1: Breakdown of respondents by gender (baseline)



Women (50) Men (33)

Figure 2: Breakdown of respondents by gender (end-line)

In terms of target groups (**Figures 3 and 4**), the composition of respondents in the baseline and end-line data collection remained fairly similar. Among deminers, **10** women and **13** men were interviewed in the baseline, against **seven** female and **12** male respondents in the end-line. This represents a decrease by **10%** for female deminers and **8%** for male deminers, as a percentage of the sample size. **15** female and **nine** male family members answered the baseline survey, compared to **13** and **eight** respectively in the end-line. As such, there was an **8%** increase in the former target group, while no % change was reported for the latter. Female community members were the most interviewed group in both survey rounds, with **32** interviewees during the baseline and **30** in the end-line. Lastly, the number of male community members who were surveyed decreased from **22** to **13**. This represents a **26%** decline, making male community members the target group with the largest decrease between baseline and end-line data collection.

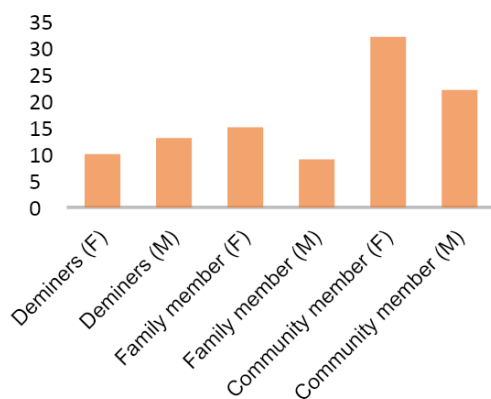


Figure 3: Breakdown of respondents by target group (baseline)

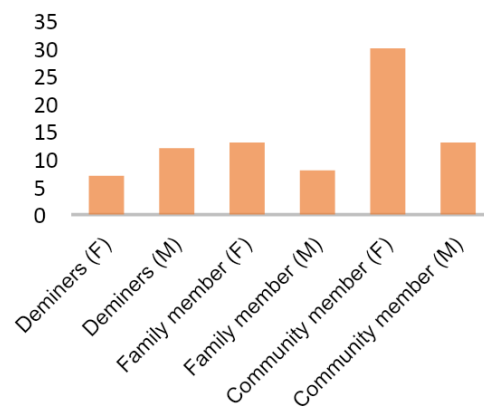


Figure 4: Breakdown of respondents by target group (end-line)

The 23 deminers interviewed in total were part of four clearance sections, of which two were mixed-gender and the remaining two were all-male. Section and Team Leaders were all male. All female deminers interviewed were between 18 and 26 years old. 70% were single, while 30% were married. Only the married respondents reported having between one and two children. The majority of female deminers were unemployed before their recruitment in mine action, while those who previously had a job used to be mostly teachers.

For specific questions, HOHs across all target groups were interviewed. As HOHs tend to have a relevant role in family and community dynamics in Afghanistan, it is likely that a shift in perception among HOHs would have a significant impact on attitudes towards women in the family. Therefore, it was deemed important to analyse their answers to the surveys separately. A total of **34** HOHs, all male, were interviewed in the baseline survey.

Survey respondents (baseline)	Female	No. %	Male	No. %	Total %
HOH deminers	0	0%	13	38%	38%
HOH family members of female deminers	0	0%	5	15%	15%
HOH community members of female deminers	0	0%	16	47%	47%
Total	0	0%	34	100%	100%

Table 4

Size and composition were different during the end-line data collection, with **27** respondents and the following breakdown:

Survey respondents (end-line)	Female	No. %	Male	No. %	Total %
HOH deminers	0	0%	12	44%	44%
HOH family members of female deminers	0	0%	3	11%	11%
HOH community members of female deminers	1	4%	11	41%	45%
Total	1	4%	26	96%	100%

Table 5

3.3 Themes and Indicators

The following themes and indicators were used to compare responses at the beginning and at the end of the data collection process:

Theme	Indicators
Perceptions of female deminers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of respondents that think women are capable of performing the same jobs as men; - % of respondents that think the job of a deminer is not appropriate for a woman; - % of respondents that think the job of a deminer is too dangerous for a woman; - % of respondents that think women are not strong enough to be deminers;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of respondents that think female demining teams clear less ground than male teams; - % of respondents that would encourage a female relative to work as a deminer.
Resource management in the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of respondents that think it is the role of a man to provide income for the family; - % of respondents that think it is the role of a woman to provide income for the family.
Decision-making in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of female deminers who think that they are able to participate actively in community discussions and decisions, compared to male deminers; - % of female deminers that think male community members take their opinion seriously, in the community compared to male deminers; - % of female deminers that think female community members take their opinion seriously, compared to male deminers; - % of female deminers that think they are able to influence decision-making in their community, compared to male deminers; - % of male HOHs that say that think women should be able to influence decision-making in the community, compared between HOH community members and HOHs family members of female deminers.

Table 3

3.4 Challenges and limitations

The following challenges were faced during the implementation of the study:

3.4.1. Data collection methodology and survey forms

- The socioeconomic section of the baseline and end-line questionnaires for male and female deminers lacked relevant information, such as: family size; whether the respondent was the sole breadwinner in the household; and the extent to which other family members contribute to household income.
- There was confusion among deminers regarding the purpose of the survey. Whilst all respondents were read a statement on the aim of the study at the start of the data collection, many deminers, both male and female, mistakenly understood that the survey was intended to measure their financial situation. It cannot be excluded that some respondents exaggerated or gave conflicting answers to questions on household expenditures and needs for financial reasons.
- The use of negative questions caused confusion and misunderstanding among respondents in some instances.
- Not all questions were asked to the same target groups for both baseline and end-line data collection, making a comparative analysis not feasible in specific cases. For example, some questions were addressed to all HOH target groups in the baseline, whereas HOHs among male deminers were not reached in the end-line. Answers from a HOH female deminer were recorded in the end-line survey, but not in the baseline, thus compromising the ability to make comparisons over time.
- The lack of qualitative data collection or the option to discuss results with survey respondents limited the quality of the data analysis.

3.4.2. Community entry

The enumerators faced initial challenges with community entry, as community members were reportedly reluctant to be interviewed due to dissatisfaction with the implementing partner (IP). Only after explaining that the enumerators did not belong to the IP was the data collection possible. Yet, it cannot be excluded that the dissatisfaction with the IP influenced some of the respondents' answers.

3.4.3 Access to target groups

The families of the deminers were scattered around Bamyan city and Yakawlang district, causing at times challenges in reaching them.²¹

3.4.4 Decrease in number of respondents

The number of participants in the surveys decreased from **101** in the baseline to **83** respondents in the end-line data collection. This variation can be expected to slightly reduce the scientific validity of the sample. Moreover, it slightly affects the validity of the comparative analysis between baseline and end-line survey results.

It is worth mentioning that, given the study's narrowly defined geographical scope and the small number of respondents, the findings should not be considered representative of other areas of Afghanistan.

4. FINDINGS

The findings of the study can be divided across the following three themes: perceptions of female deminers; resource management in the family; and decision-making in the community.

4.1 Perceptions of female deminers

Key findings

- **100%** of male respondents in the end-line either strongly agreed or agreed that *women can do the same jobs as men*, compared to **72%** in the baseline;
- **100%** of female and male deminers by the end of the project supported the claim that *women can do the same jobs as men*, compared to **70%** and **69%** respectively in the baseline;
- By the end of the project, men were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement '*The job of a deminer is not appropriate for a woman*' (from **59%** to **82%**);
- The number of male deminers who believed that *demining is too dangerous for a woman* dropped from **61%** at the start of the project to **0%** at the end of it;
- All target groups except female community members displayed a positive perception change in relation to *how appropriate it is for a woman to be a deminer*;
- Both female and male deminers became much more confident by the end of the project that *women are strong enough to work as deminers*;

²¹ It is worth noting that this obstacle was addressed and resolved thanks to the support of a DRC-DDG Explosive Risk Education (EORE) Instructor who had previously conducted EORE sessions in the province with her husband, and thus had knowledge of the families' locations. Access to this person expedited the data collection process.

- **100%** of male and female family members strongly agreed by the end of the project that *they would encourage a female relative to work as a deminer*, compared to **20%** and **89%** respectively in the baseline.

100% of male respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that *women can do the same jobs as men* at the end of the project (**Figure 5**). The number of men strongly agreeing more than doubled, in comparison with the baseline.

In addition, all female respondents (**100%**) believed by the end of the project that women could do the same jobs as men, compared to **93%** in the baseline. At the same time, the **11%** decrease among women in the 'strongly agree' category by the end of the survey may require further qualitative research to be fully explained.

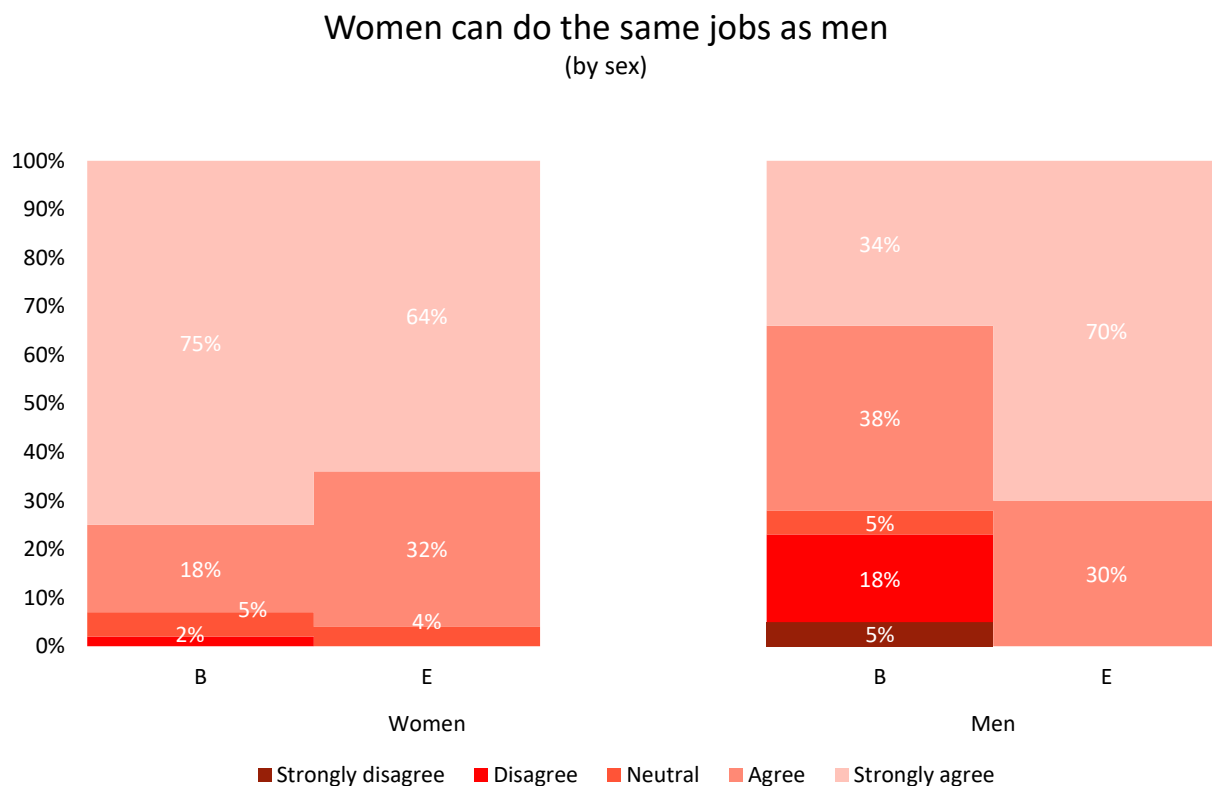


Figure 5

*B= Baseline; E= End-line

By the end of the project, **100%** of female and male deminers believed that *women can do the same jobs as men* (**Figure 6**). For the female deminers, this result could be attributed to these women's increased exposure to traditionally masculine jobs through their employment in mine clearance. For male deminers, knowledge and direct evidence of women's work in demining is expected to have positively influenced their opinions on the topic.

A positive perception change was reported among the remaining target groups. For example, the percentage of male community members who supported the statement increased **from 69% to 100%**. However, the opposite direction can be observed among female community members. While the overall positive answers remained almost identical in the two data collection rounds (from **97%** in the baseline to **93%** in the end-line), there was a sharp decline in the 'strongly agree' answers (from **94%** to **50%**), paired with a marked increase in 'agree' answers (from **3%** to **43%**). The significant reduction in strongly positive answers may require further investigation.

Women can do the same jobs as men (all target groups)

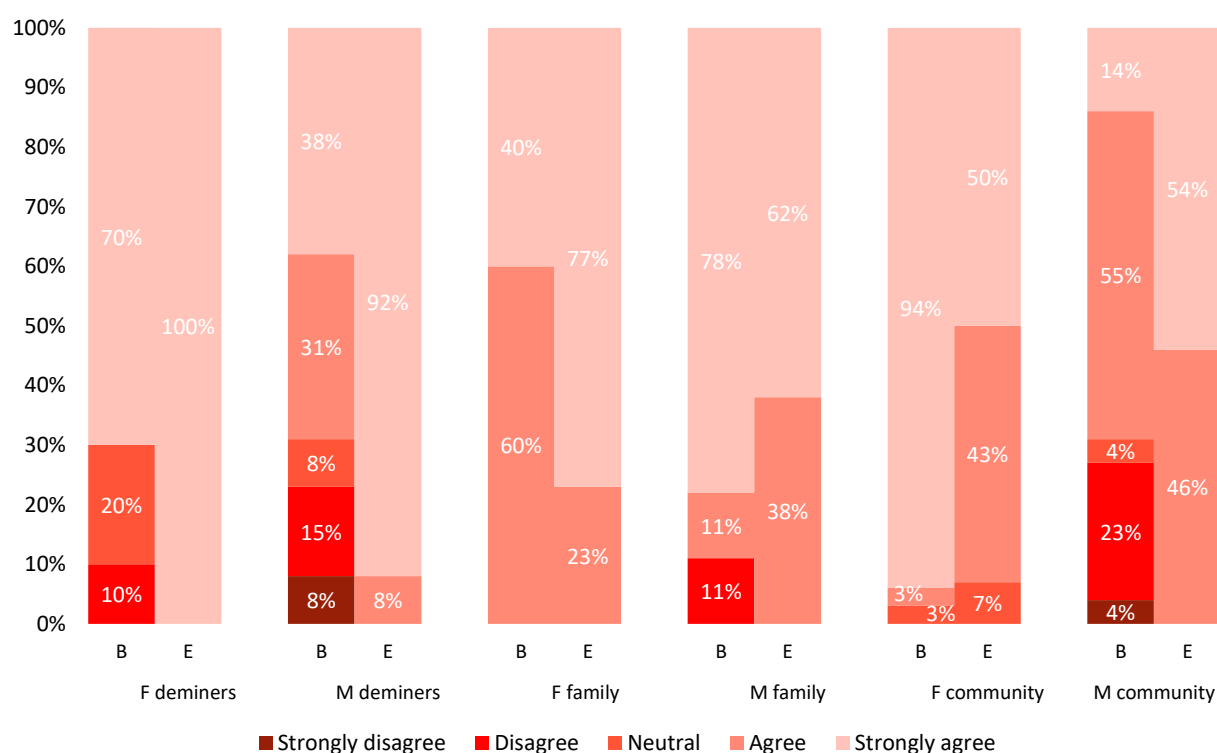


Figure 6

As shown in **Figure 7**, by the end of the project men were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement '*The job of a deminer is not appropriate for a woman*' (from **59% to 82%**). Interestingly, there was no significant positive change in female respondents' attitude towards the same statement. These findings contradict female respondents' answers to the previous question '*Can women do the same job as men?*', for which an overall improvement of **46%** was recorded. Focus group discussions or in-depth individual interviews with the respondents could be useful to explain the reasoning behind what seems to be a contradiction. An option that cannot be excluded is that this contradiction is the result of the negative formulation of the statement, which may have been misunderstood by a number of respondents. Nonetheless, results remained overwhelmingly positive,

as marked by an **80%** rate of female respondents who rejected the claim that demining is not an appropriate position for women by the second round of data collection.

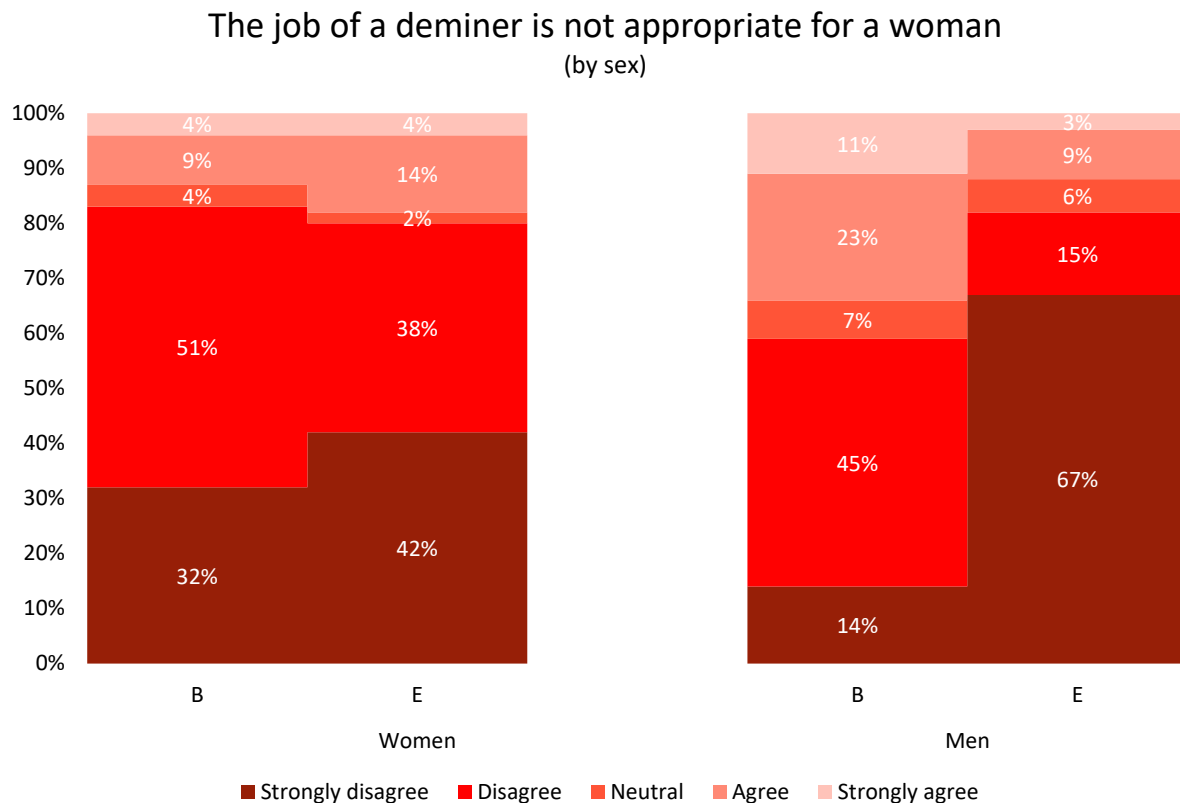


Figure 7

All target groups except female community members displayed a positive perception change in relation to *how appropriate it is for a woman to be a deminer* (**Figure 8**). Female community members who either agreed or strongly agreed that demining is not appropriate for women increased **from 12% to 30%**. Further qualitative research would be needed to understand the reasoning behind this exception among female community members. A positive perception shift was instead observed among their male counterparts, as well as male family members, female family members, female deminers and male deminers. Female family members were the only group that both at the start and at the end of the data collection fully believed that it would be appropriate for women to work as deminers. Among male deminers, the perception that demining is an appropriate job for a woman slightly increased in the end-line, compared to the initial data collection. This is an indication that the expansion of demining to women is generally perceived positively by their male colleagues, which could have implications for the appropriateness of promoting female deminers to supervising roles.

The job of a deminer is not appropriate for a woman (all target groups)

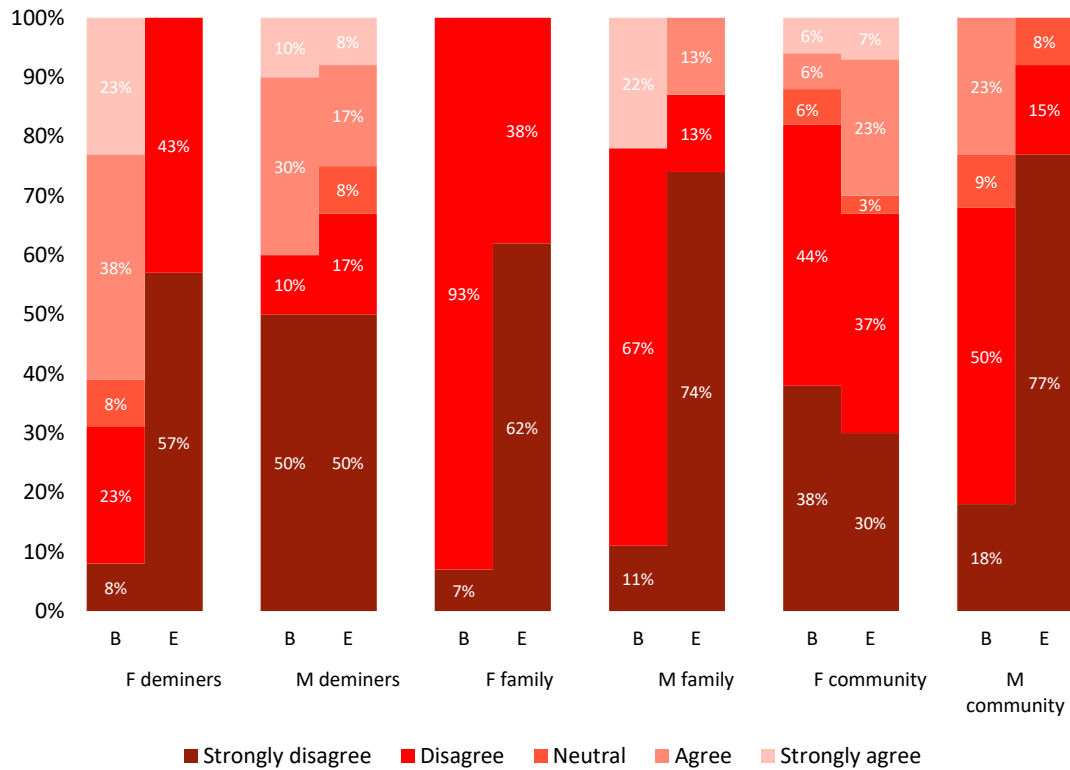


Figure 8

Surprisingly, more women than men thought that *it is dangerous for women to be deminers* (Figure 9), both in the baseline and end-line data collection. Further research should be conducted to understand the causes behind the opposite trend observed among female respondents.

The job of a deminer is too dangerous for a woman (by sex)

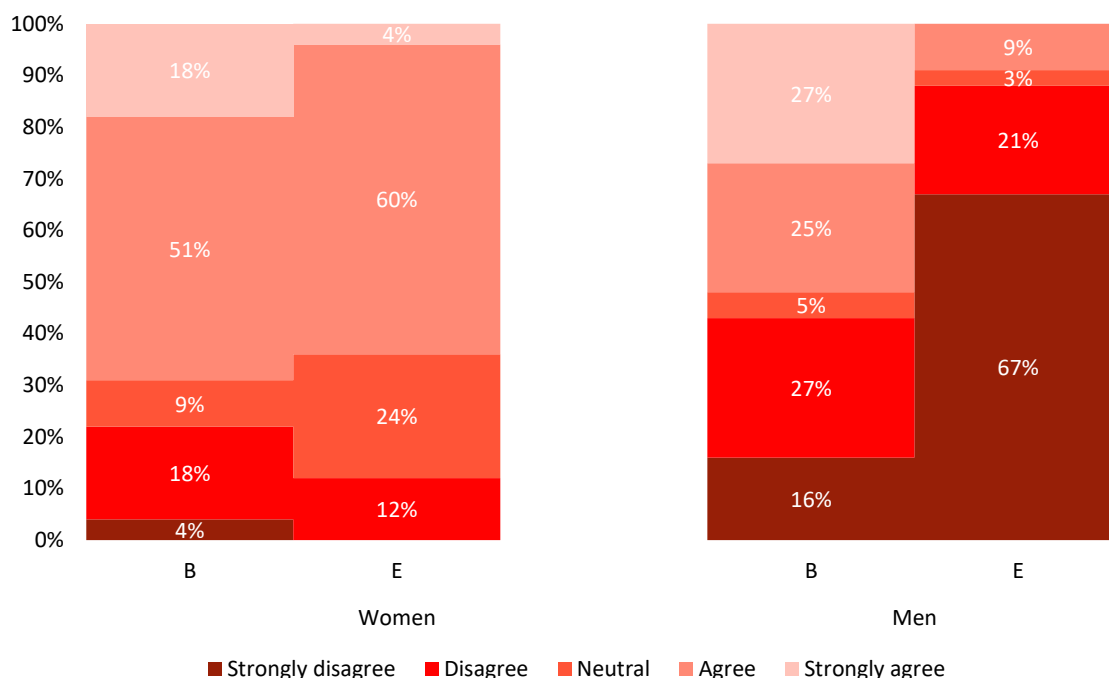


Figure 9

By the end of the project, the percentage of male deminers who disagreed or strongly disagreed that *demining is too dangerous for women* (**Figure 10**) had increased more than three times, **from 31% to 92%**. Direct knowledge of the tasks contributed to male deminers having an understanding of the danger of the job in a way that was largely unaffected by gender stereotypes.

In addition, none (**0%**) of the male family members surveyed believed that demining is too dangerous for women by the end of the project, compared to **78%** at the start. Male community members who rejected the statement also increased over time. There is convincing evidence that due to repeated exposure to female deminers, male respondents became progressively confident in their ability to withstand risk, possibly confirmed by the absence of accidents.

Female deminers were more likely than their male to agree or strongly agree that *demining is too dangerous for a woman* by the end of the project (**92%** of male respondents against **14%** of female respondents at the end of the data collection). Whilst the data collected in this study is not sufficient to identify the reasons why more women than men saw demining as too dangerous for them, this is a relevant finding which may require further research.

The job of a deminer is too dangerous for a woman (all target groups)

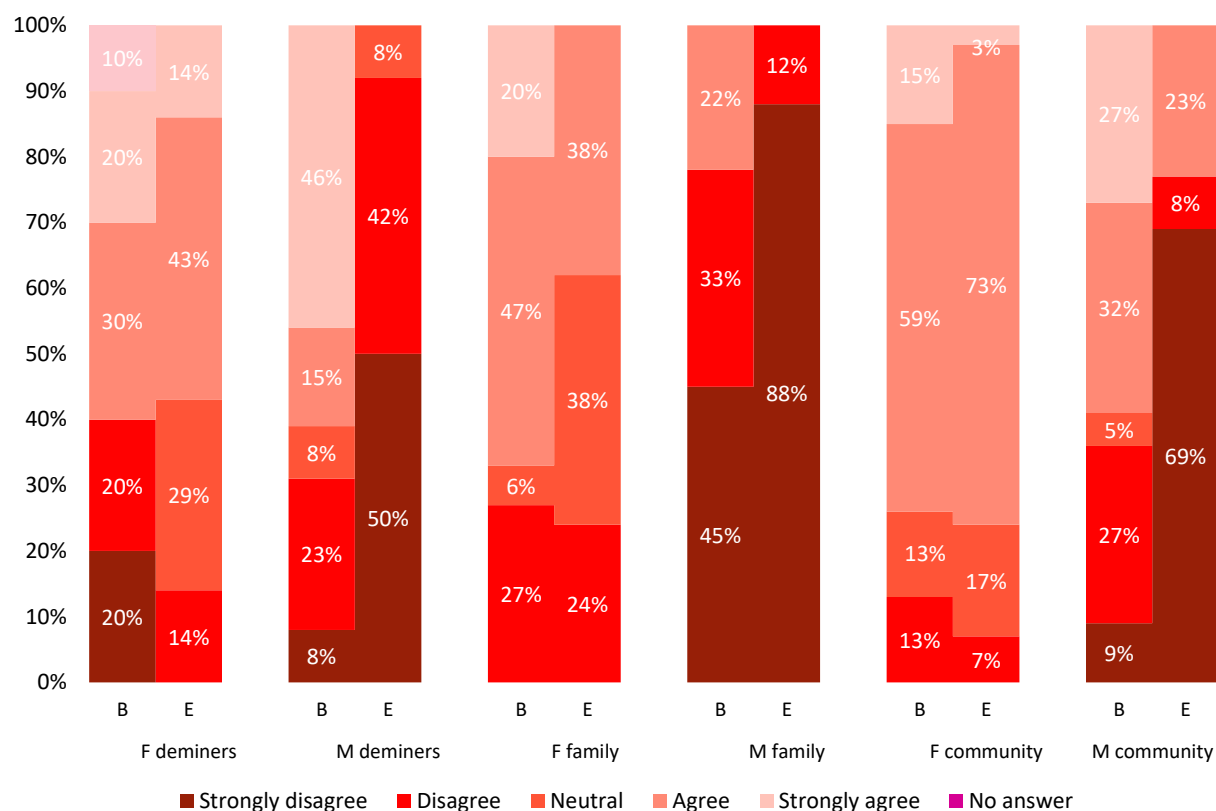


Figure 10

As shown in **Figure 11**, the number of men who supported the statement '*Women are not strong enough to be deminers*' decreased by more than half (**from 41% to 15%**). By the end of the project, 0% of women strongly agreed with the statement, and **96%** rejected it (compared to **75%** in the baseline). Therefore, these findings indicate an overall positive impact on both groups.

Women are not strong enough to be deminers (by sex)

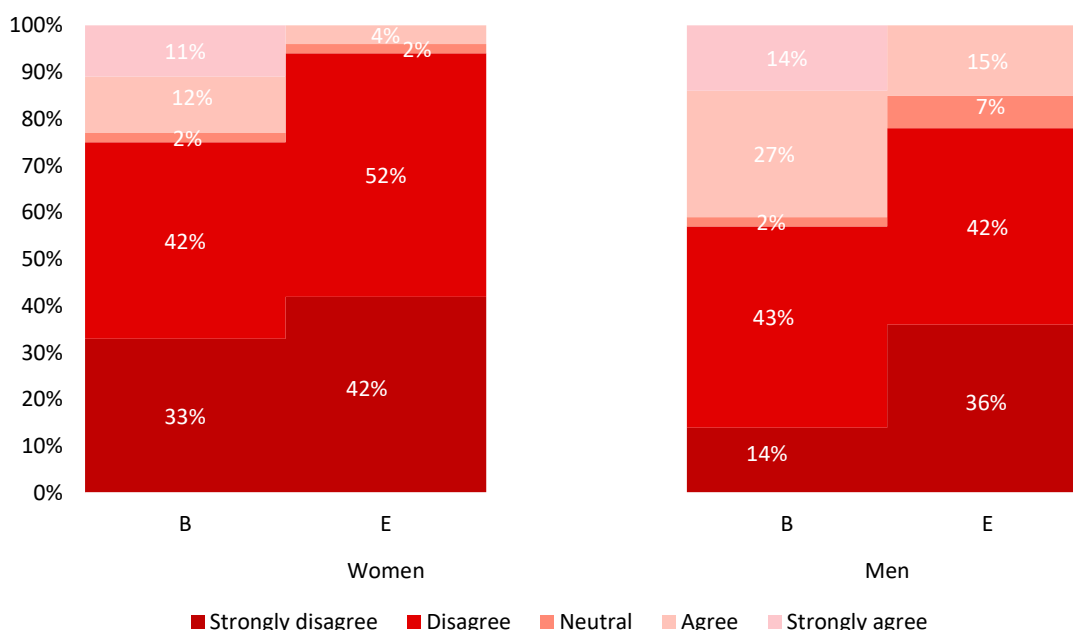


Figure 11

As shown in **Figure 12**, both female and male deminers became much more confident by the end of the project about *women having the necessary strength to work as deminers*. This is exemplified by the rise in ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ responses to the claim that women are not strong enough for the job by both groups (**from 50% to 100%** among female deminers, and **from 46% to 75%** among their male colleagues).

For female deminers, this finding is in contrast with the decline in the percentage of respondents who believe that their job is *not* too dangerous for women, as reported above (**from 40% to 14%**). These positive results indicate that demining work increased these women’s confidence that women in general in have the necessary strength to work in the field.

The positive change among male deminers corroborates previous findings on their increased confidence that demining is not too dangerous for women, providing evidence that direct exposure to women’s work can significantly shift perceptions.

Positive trends can also be observed for male and female family members. By the end of the project, **100%** of respondents in both target groups believed that women are strong enough to be deminers, compared to **78%** and **67%** among male and female relatives respectively, at the start of the data collection. The number of male and female community members who stated that women have the necessary strength to be deminers also increased over time, but it did not reach **100%**. Close interaction and inside knowledge of the job of female deminers can be expected to explain why the positive shift was more significant within the household than in the broader community.

Women are not strong enough to be deminers (all target groups)

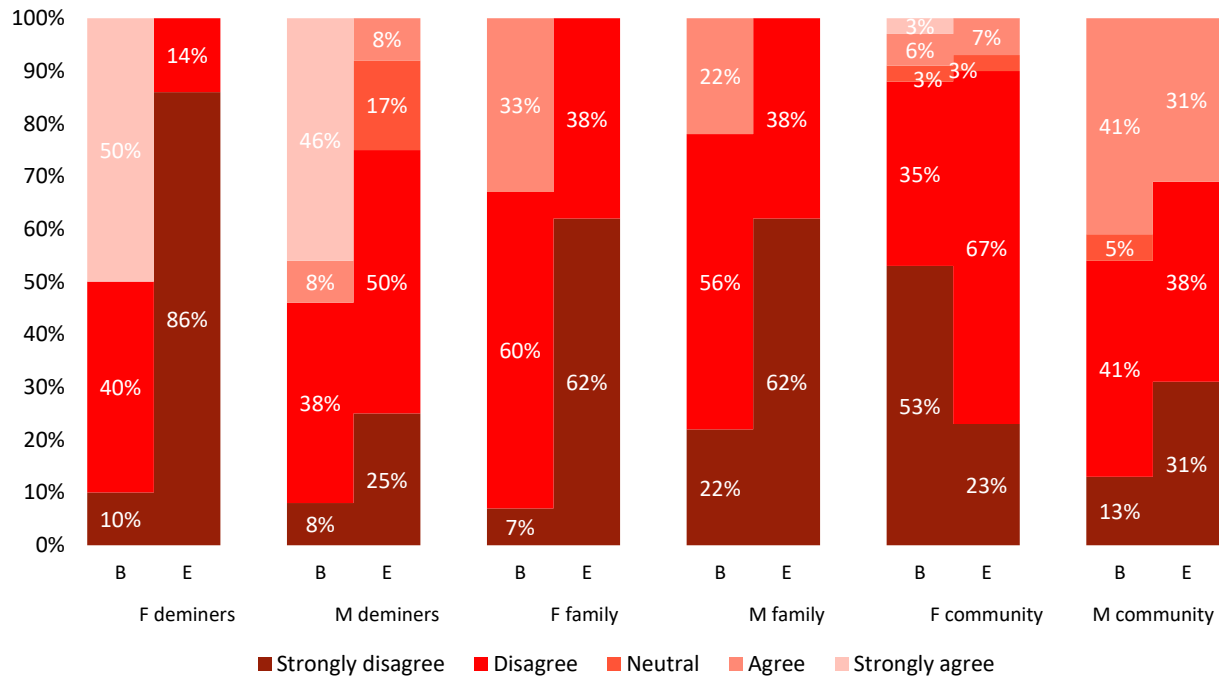


Figure 12

Both men and women were more likely by the end of the project to reject the claim that *female demining teams clear less ground than male teams* (**Figure 13**). The number of female respondents who over time rejected the statement was larger (**from 41% to 86%**) than that of male respondents (**from 43% to 55%**). In addition, the percentage of men who strongly agreed that female deminers are less efficient than their male colleagues dropped **from 13% to 0%** by the end of the project. Furthermore, it must be highlighted that a separate research into the productivity rate of female and male deminers during the implementation of the first project in Bamyar in 2018 showed no significant difference.

Female demining teams clear less ground than male teams (by sex)

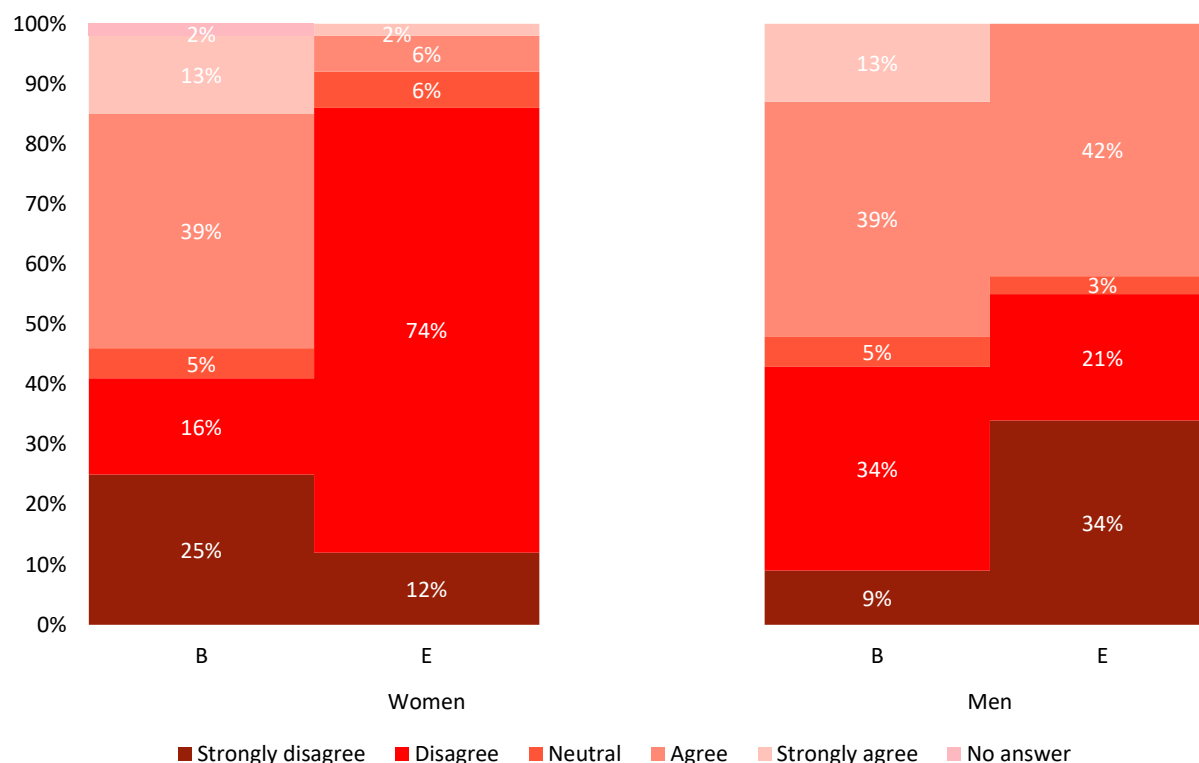


Figure 13

Female family and community members were more likely than their male counterparts to believe that *women clear as much ground as men* (**Figure 14**). By the end of the project, female family members were almost four times more likely to reject the assumption that female deminers are less efficient (**100%** ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ answers combined, compared to **27%** in the baseline). The percentage of female community members who rejected the claim more than doubled over time (**from 38% to 80%**), whilst for male community members there was also a positive change, yet to a lesser extent (**from 32% to 46%**). Overall, this is evidence that the presence of female deminers improved the perception of female deminers’ efficiency among their family and community members. In addition, it is worth noting that by the end of the project none of the target groups strongly agreed with the statement. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the percentage of male deminers who agreed that female teams clear less ground than male teams remained almost unaltered (from **31%** to **33%**), meaning that a relevant portion of male deminers maintained the same beliefs on the efficiency of female demining teams. The perception of the efficiency of female deminers among their male counterparts may require further qualitative investigation to ascertain the validity of these claims and debunk gender-based stereotypes on operational efficiency if needed.

Female demining teams clear less ground than male teams (all target groups)

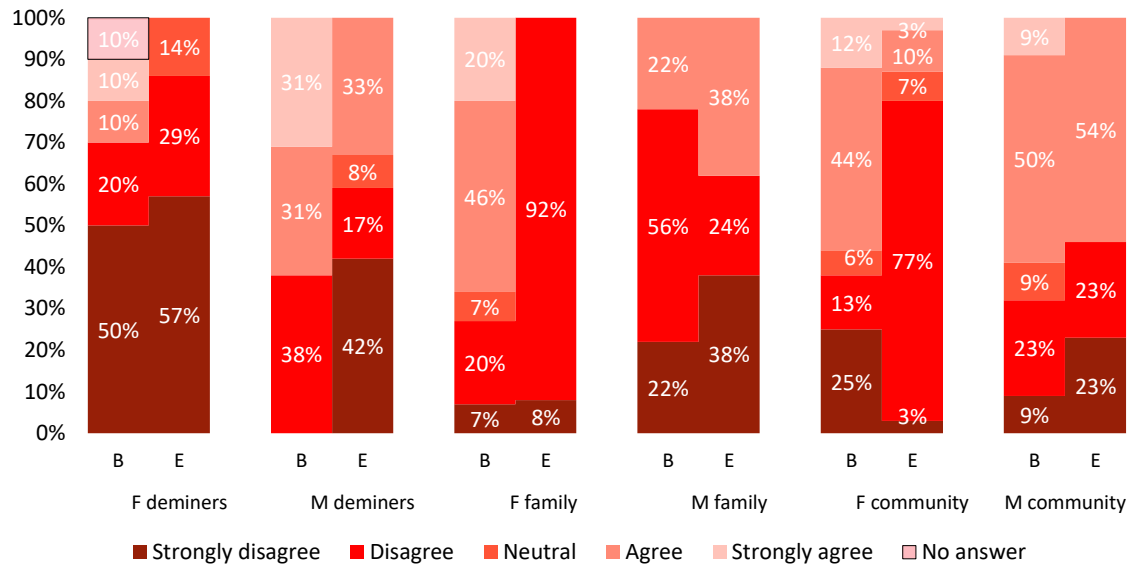


Figure 14

Figure 15 shows that the overall likelihood to *recommend demining work to female relatives* did not change for either men or women at the end of the project. This is due to the fact that results were already overwhelmingly positive for both groups during the baseline. In addition, neither group strongly disagreed with the statement by the end of the project, compared to **9%** of male and **4%** of female respondents in the first survey round.

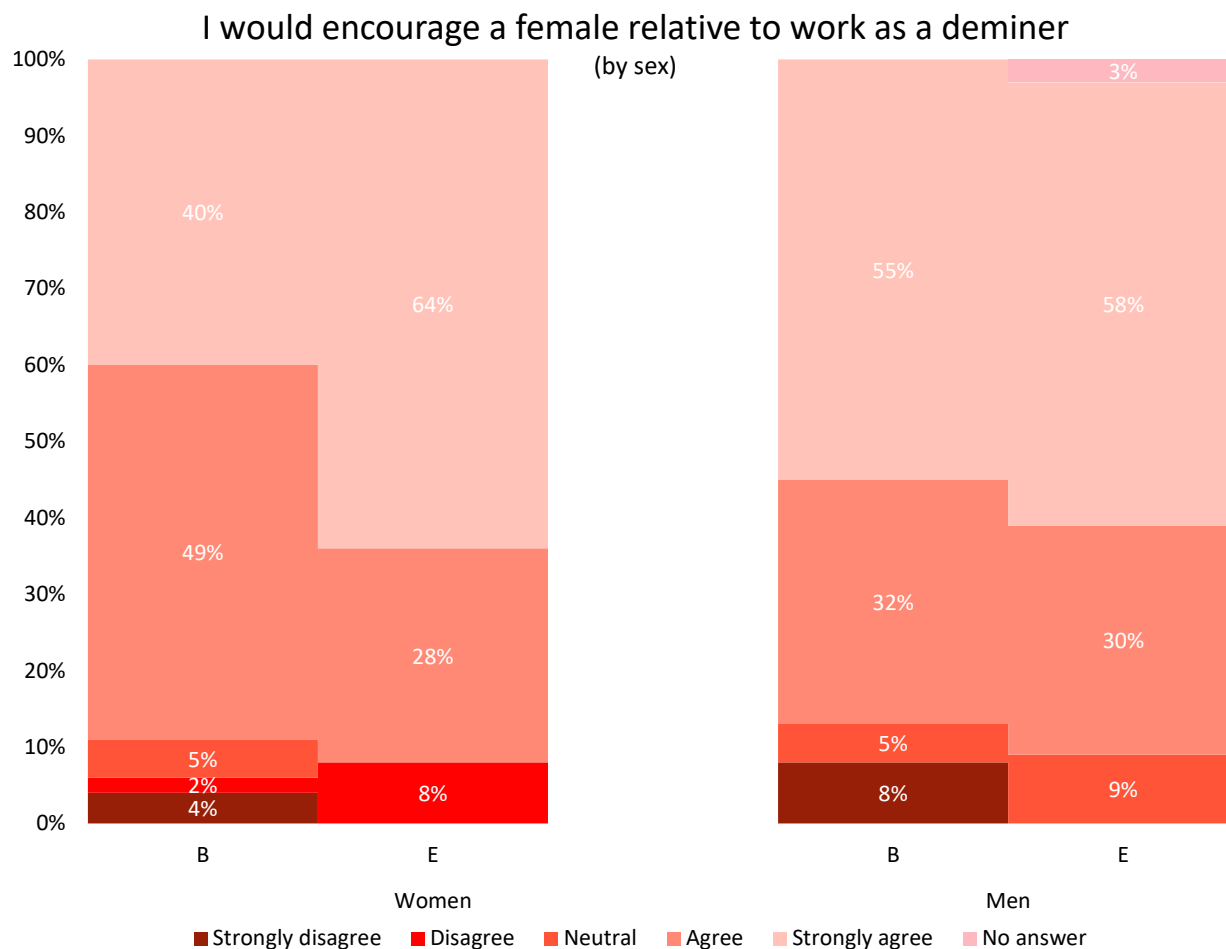


Figure 15

100% of male and female family members strongly agreed by the end of the project that *they would encourage a female relative to work as a deminer*, compared to **89%** and **20%** respectively in the baseline (**Figure 16**). These findings confirm previous ones on family members' increased confidence in women's strength, as well as mine clearance efficiency, which can be expected to be linked to their close contact with female deminers.

Interestingly, the opinion of male and female community members remained very similar between the two rounds of data collection. This contrast with family members may be attributed to community members possibly not having the same level of contact with female deminers and knowledge about their work as relatives. Based on these results, it is possible to expect that close and regular interaction with female deminers (which could be expected for family members) makes these women lead by example, encouraging other women to apply and increasing support for women's engagement in this profession among men as well.

I would encourage a female relative to work as a deminer (all target groups)

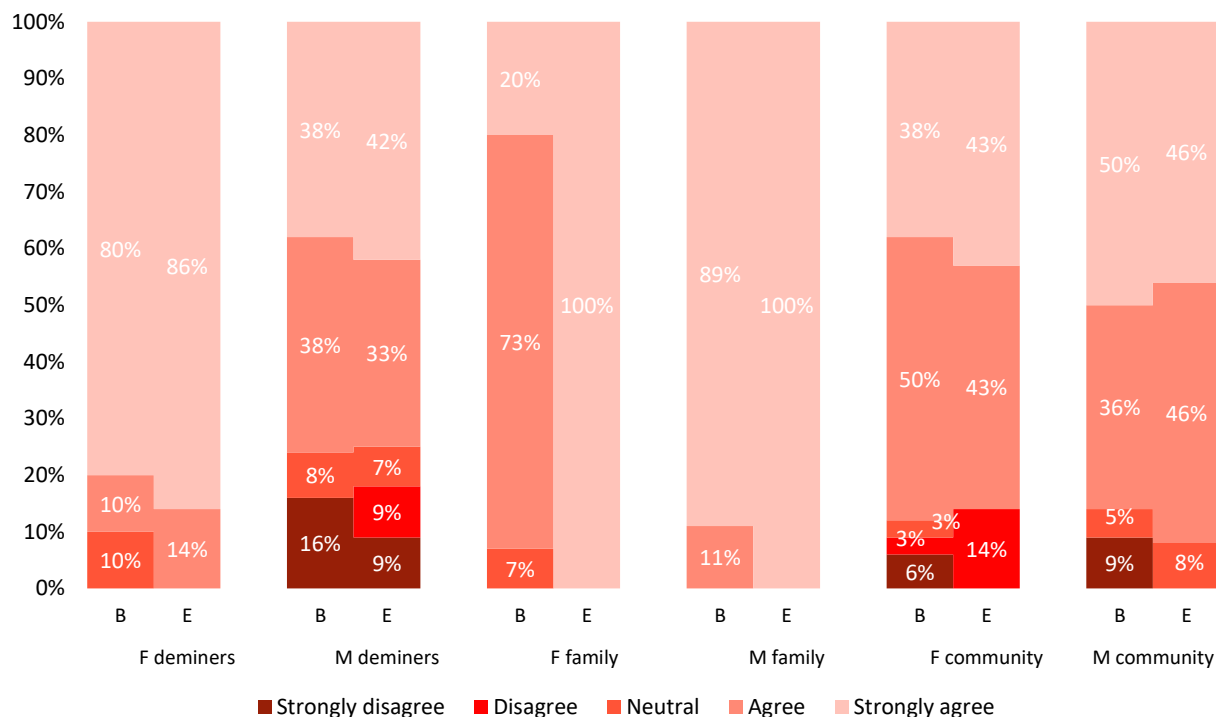


Figure 16

4.2 Resource management in the family

Key findings

- Men were ten times more likely to agree that *men should financially provide for the family* by the end of the project (from **7%** to **70%**), as shown in **Figure 17**;
- Men were also much more likely to support the statement '*It is the role of a woman to provide income for the family*' by the end of the project (from **14%** to **61%**);
- Female deminers strongly disagreed with the idea that *women are financially responsible for the household* more than any other group by the end of the project (**14%**, compared to **40%** in the baseline);
- Male community members who agreed that *women should financially provide for the household* increased from **0%** to **69%**.

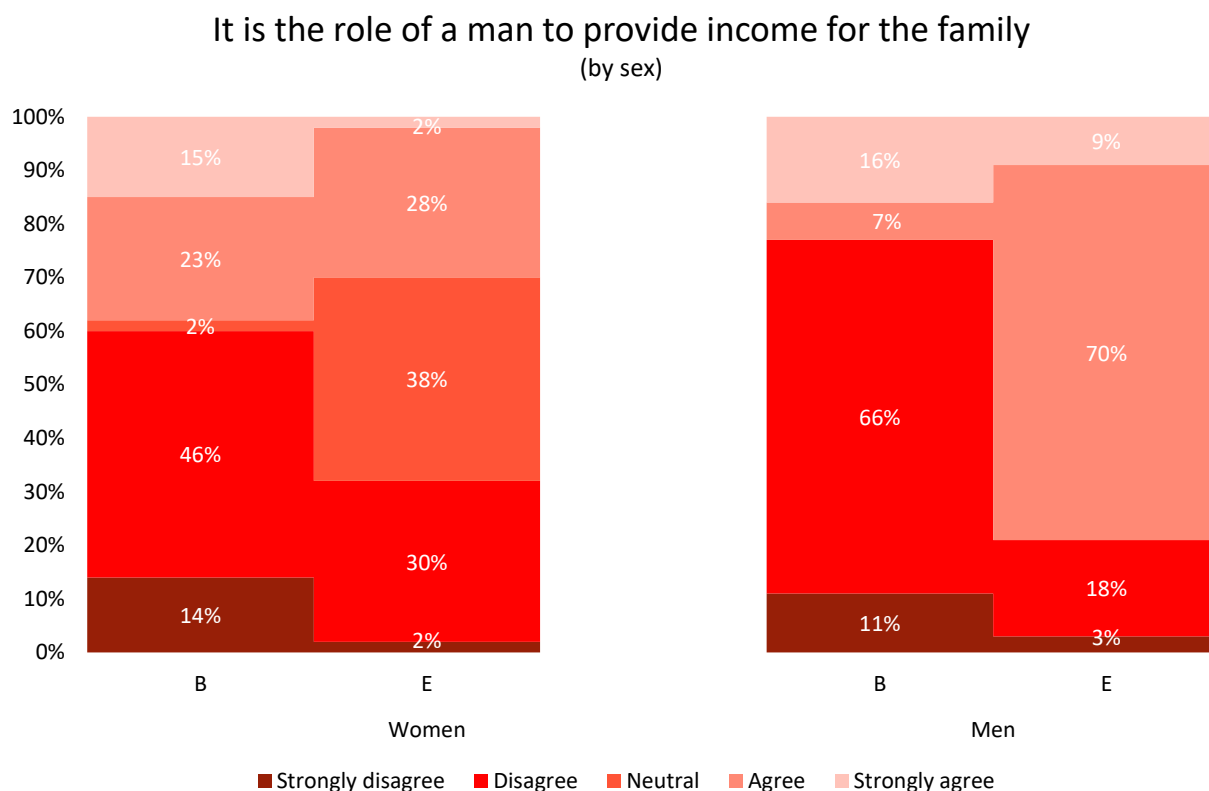


Figure 17

100% of male family members agreed that *men should financially provide for the family* by the end of the project, compared to 0% in the baseline (**Figures 18**). Among male deminers, the percentage of men who supported the statement also increased **from 46% to 67%**. Among female deminers, the opposite trend can be observed, marked by an increase (**from 57% to 80%**) in women who did not believe that men should have this responsibility in the household. The different trends displayed in the answers of male and female respondents would require further qualitative research to be explained. One option could be that the statement was interpreted differently by different groups. For example, male respondents may have assumed the role of providing income for the family to be exclusively related to the primary breadwinner in the family, while female respondents may have understood the role in terms of individual financial contribution to the household. The possibility that the phrasing of the question led to different interpretations cannot be excluded and further qualitative data collection is deemed necessary to explain these findings.

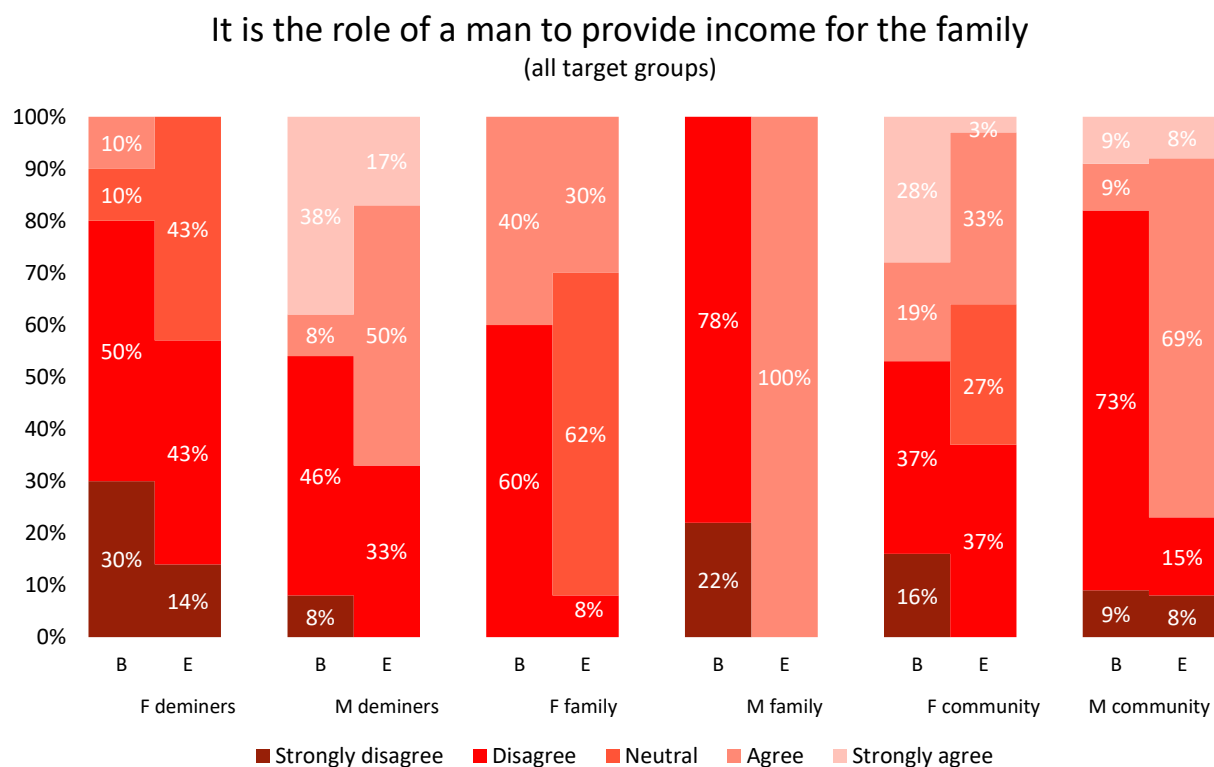


Figure 18

At the same time, men were also much more likely (**61%**) than women (**16%**) to support the statement '*It is the role of a woman to provide income for the family*' (**Figures 19**).

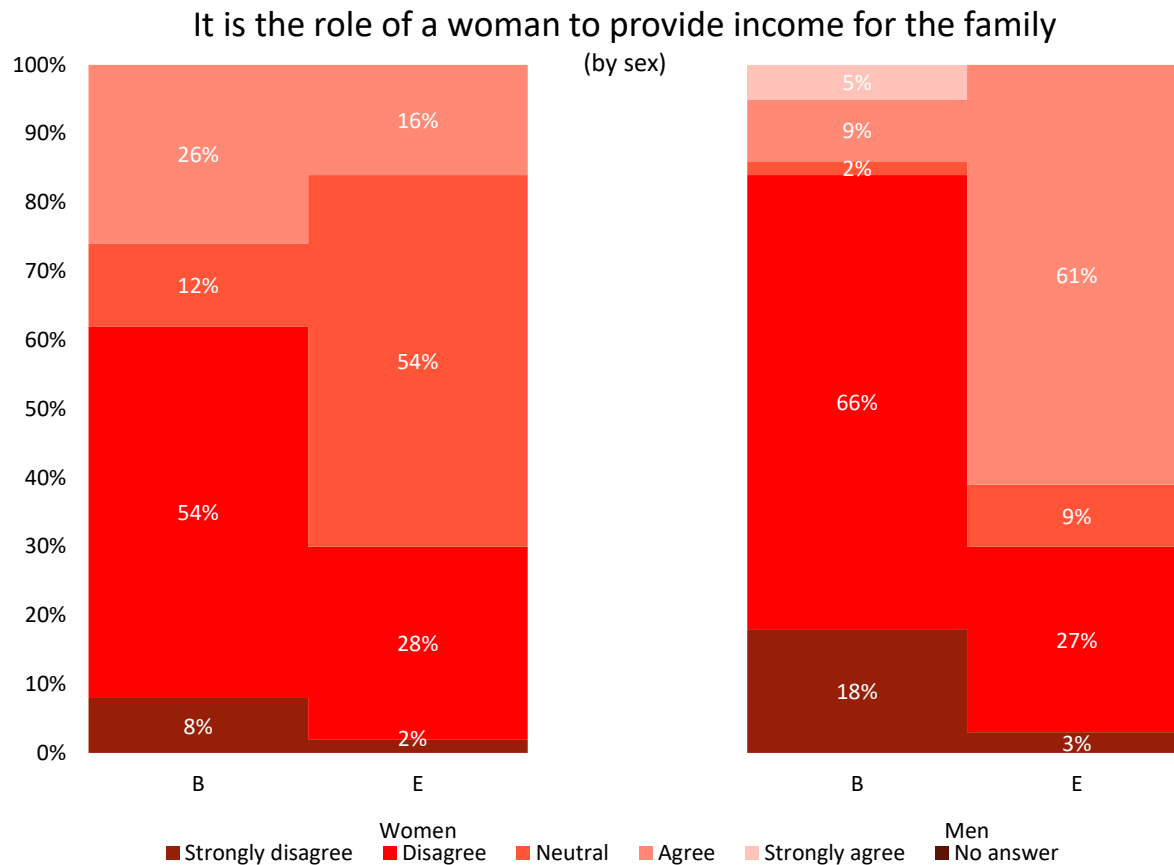


Figure 19

It is worth noting that, by the end of the project, female deminers strongly disagreed more than any other group with the idea that *women are financially responsible for the household (Figure 20)*. However, as this response is based on a high starting point (**40%**), a positive change can be witnessed overall, marked by a decline to **14%** of responses by the end of the project. Therefore, the above findings should not obscure the presence of a positive perception shift among female deminers regarding women's working responsibilities.

It is worth noting that there was a significant increase in neutral responses was reported among women across all groups (**from 10% to 57%** for F deminers, **from 7% to 62%** for F family members, and **from 16% to 50%** for F community members).

In addition, a significant perception shift among male community members can be reported, as the percentage of respondents who agreed that women should financially provide for the household went **from 0% to 69%**. Interestingly, the same trend cannot be observed among female community members.

It is the role of a woman to provide income for the family (all target groups)

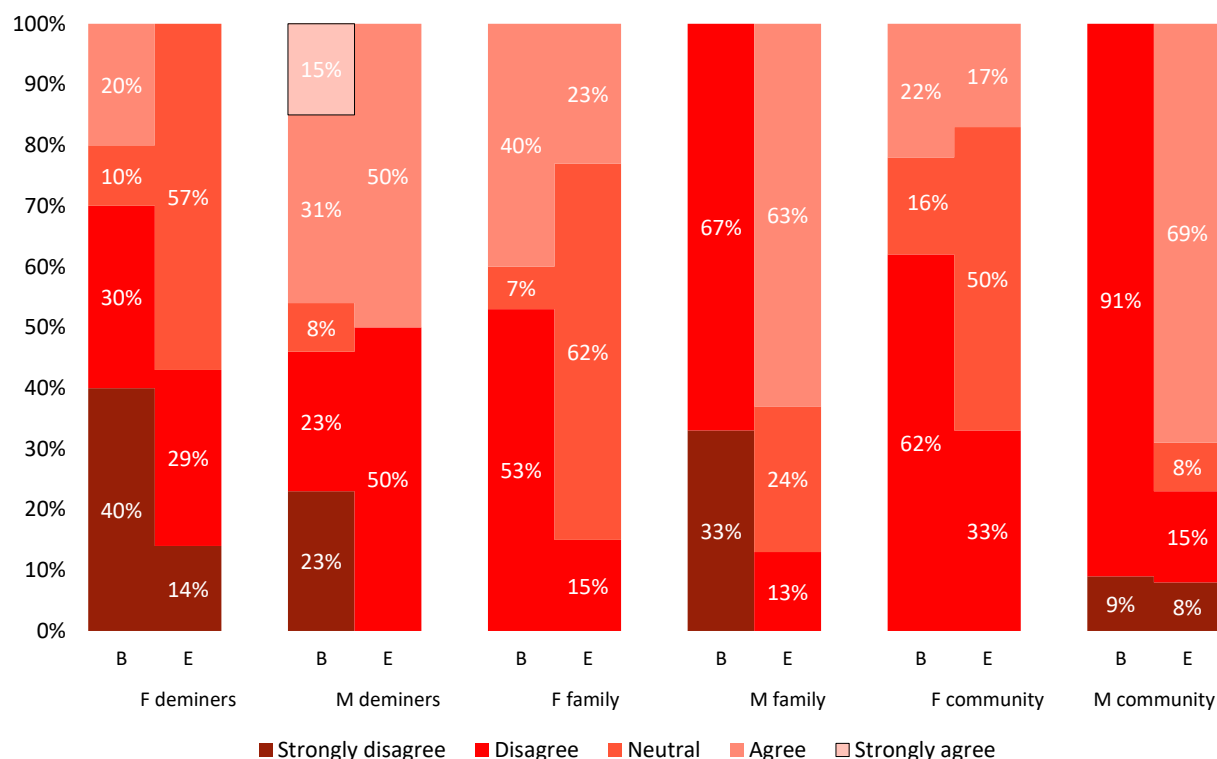


Figure 20

4.3 Decision-making in the community

Key findings

- The percentage of female and male deminers who identified with the statement '*I participate actively in community discussions and decisions*' slightly declined from the beginning (**90%** for women, **92%** for men) to the end of the project (**86%** for women, **83%** for men), as shown in **Figure 21**;
- Female deminers were more likely than their male colleagues to have increased the perception that *male community members took their opinions seriously* in the end-line data collection;
- By the end of the project, female deminers believed to be *taken seriously* in the same way by male and female community members (86% in both cases, compared to **50%** and **90%** respectively in the baseline);
- **100%** of female deminers stated at the end of the project that *they were able to influence decision-making in their community*, compared to 60% in the baseline;
- **100%** of HOHs male family members of female deminers believed both at the beginning and at the end of the project that *women should be able to influence decision-making in the community*.

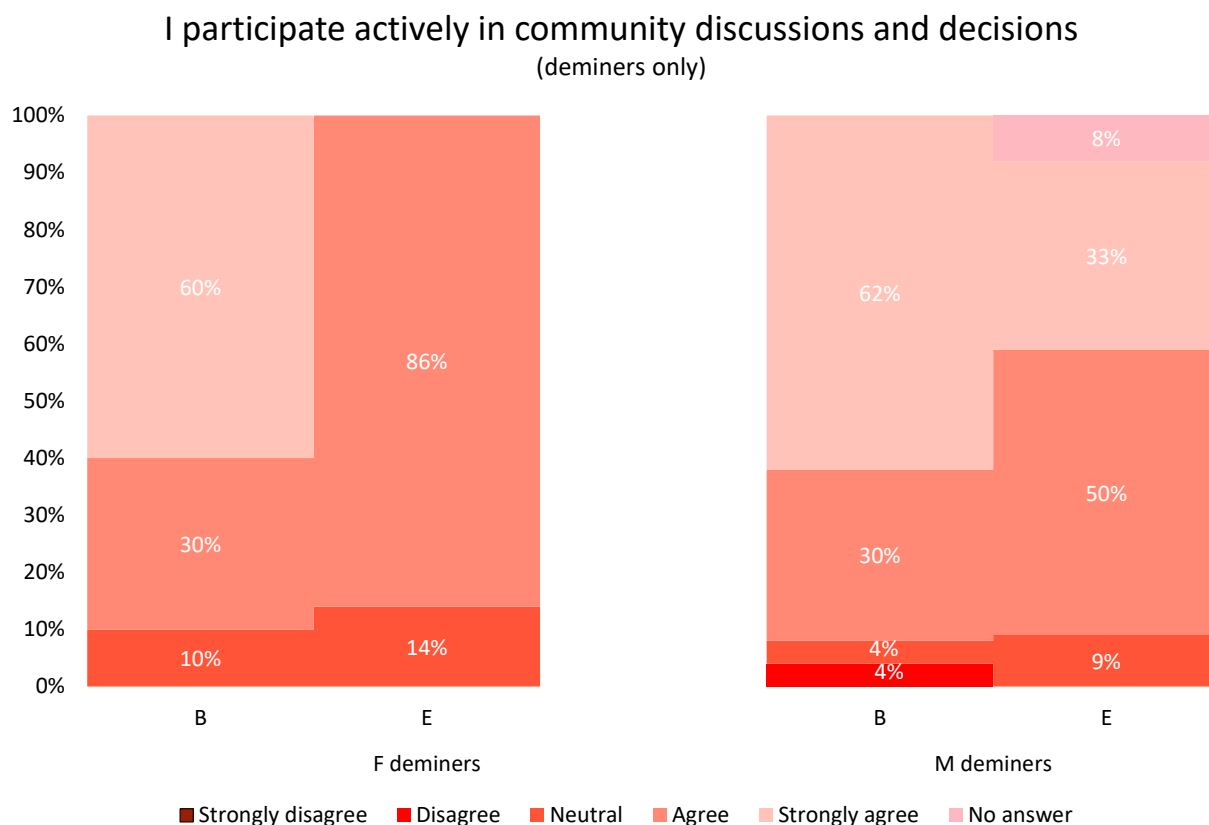


Figure 21

As shown in **Figure 22**, female deminers were much more likely by the end of the project to believe that *male community members took their opinions seriously* (**86%** positive responses in the end-line, compared to **50%** in the baseline). Interestingly, there was almost no positive variation (**from 90% to 86%**) on the extent to which the same respondents believed that *female community members took their opinions seriously*. Furthermore, the number of women who strongly agreed with the statement sharply declined from **70%** to **29%**, while those who agreed increased from **20%** to **57%**. What prompted this change may require some further investigation. Overall, based on these results, at the end of the project female deminers believed to be taken seriously (**86%**) in the same way by male and female community members.

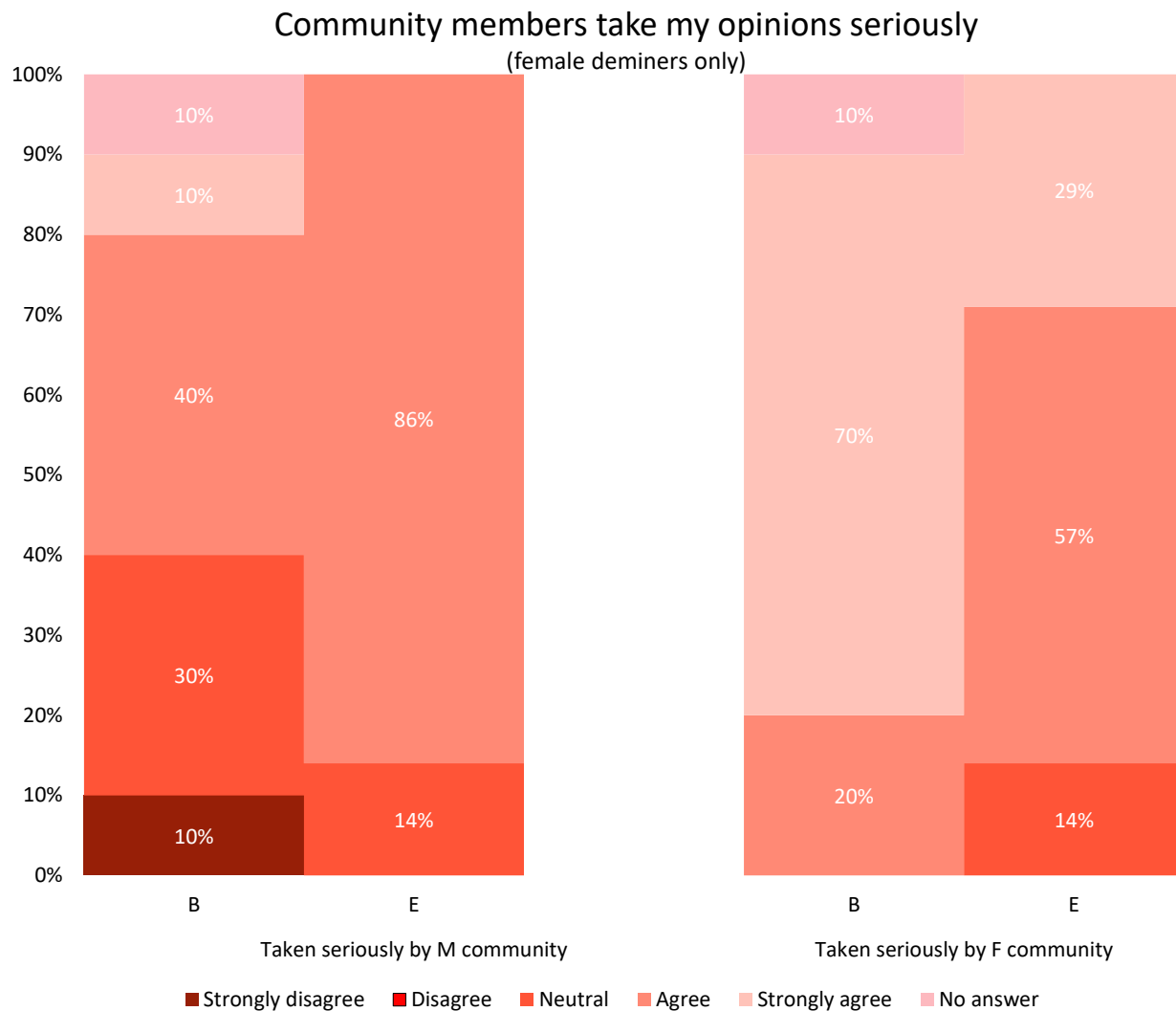


Figure 22

As displayed in **Figure 23**, male deminers were just as likely to believe that *male community members took their opinions seriously* at the start and at the end of the project. They were also no more likely to believe that *female community members took their opinions seriously*.

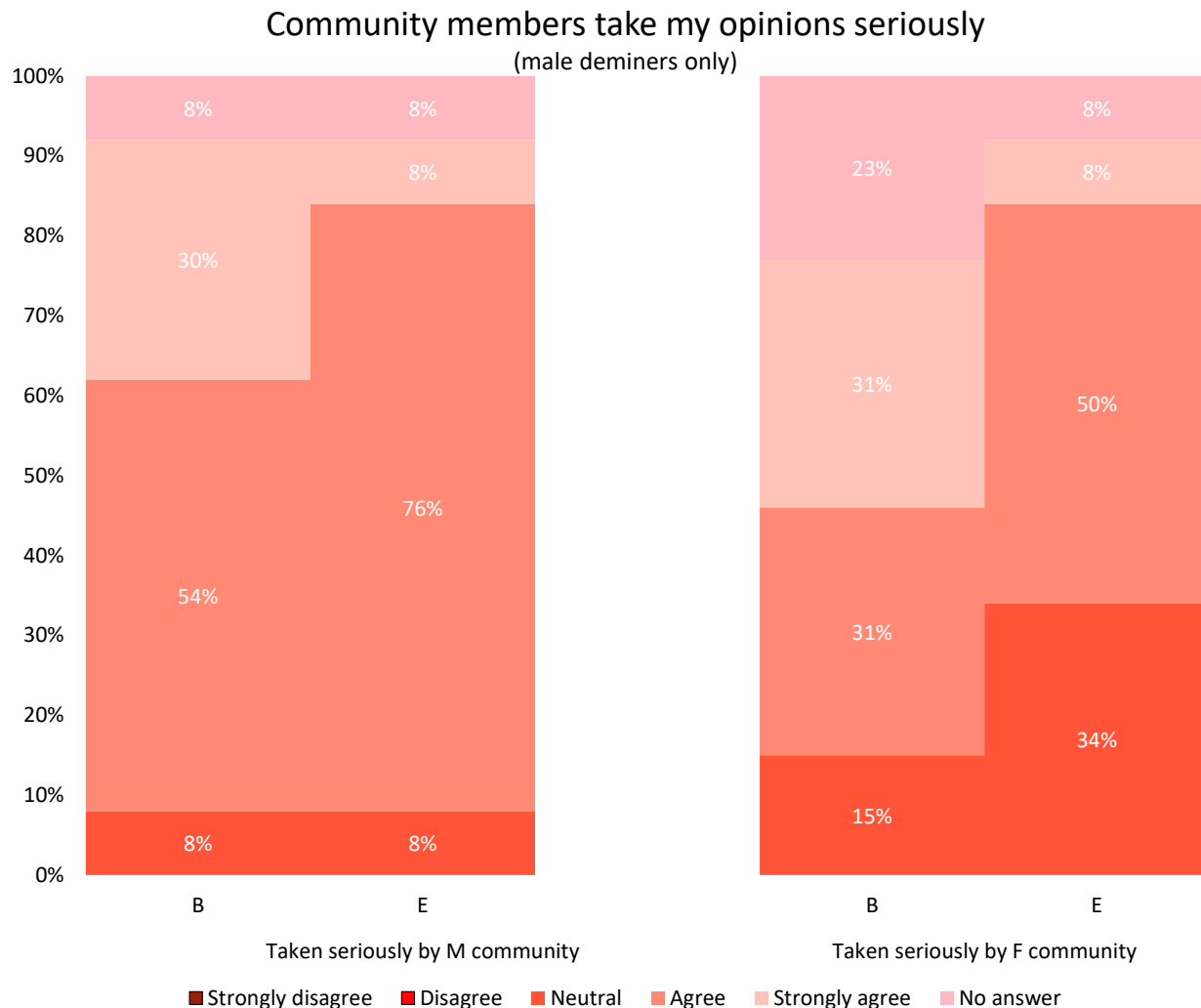


Figure 23

Female deminers were more likely than male deminers to believe by the end of the project that *they were able to influence decision-making in their community* (Figure 24). **100%** of female deminers agreed that they could influence decisions in the community at the end of the project, compared to **60%** at the beginning. While this result displays an overall increase in self-confidence among female deminers, it should however be noted that the number of women who strongly agreed with the statement declined from 40% to 0%.

While male deminers mostly remained confident of their decision-making influence in the community, respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement declined **from 84% to 58%**. Meanwhile, neutral opinions increased **from 8% to 34%**. Therefore, while a positive self-perception shift can be observed among female deminers, the same conclusion does not seem to apply to their male counterparts in this context. It is possible to deduce that employment in mine action had a more marked impact on women's life, as they were faced with a traditionally masculine job and possibly needed more adjustment to it than male deminers. This exposure to a very different working

environment and responsibilities could have increased their confidence, as well as that of their family members in these women, thus contributing to female deminers being taken more seriously.

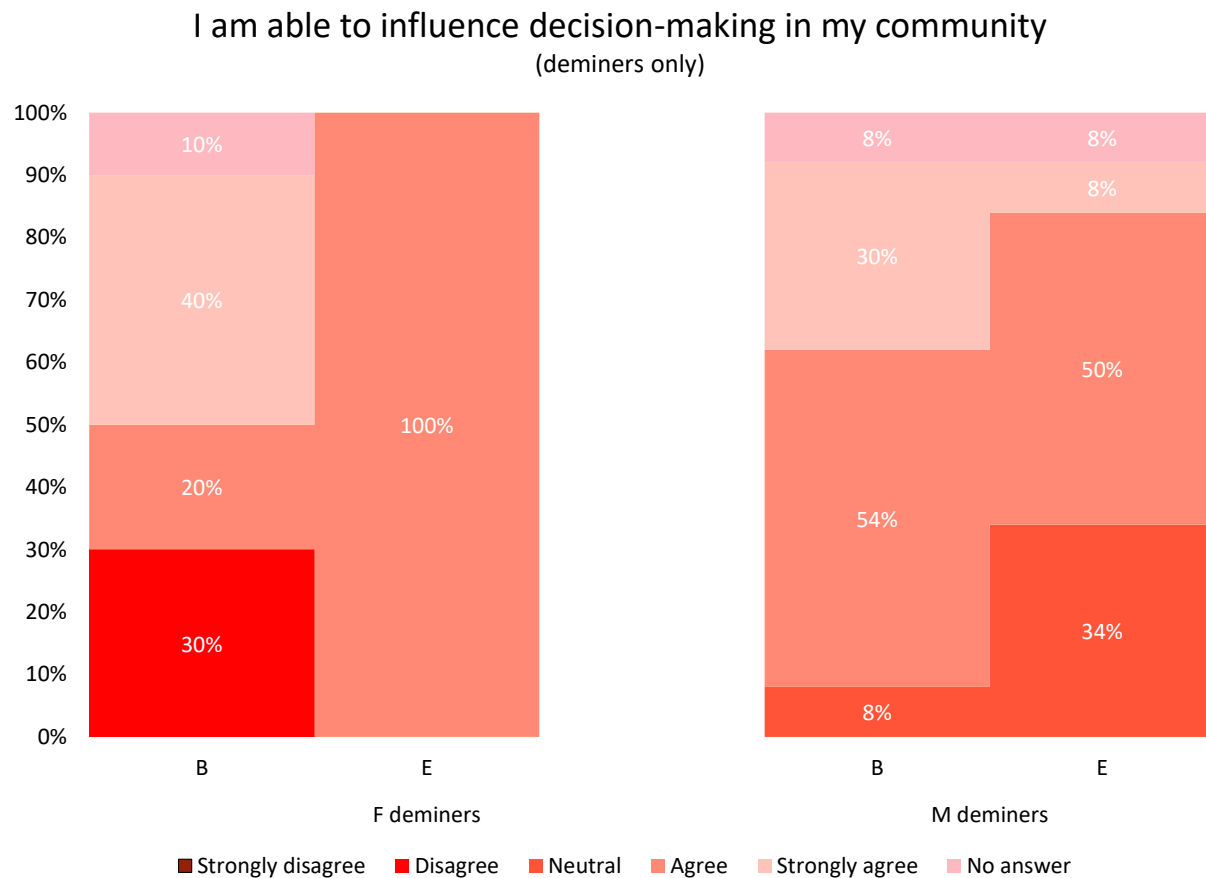


Figure 24

100% of HOHs male family members of female deminers believed both at the beginning and at the end of the project that *women should be able to influence decision-making in the community* (**Figures 25**). It can be expected that performing a dangerous job that highly benefits the community contributed to the female deminers' status and influence. Providing additional income to the household can also be expected to have increased the positive view of women in the family. In addition, it is possible that the female deminers gained more confidence in themselves as a result of their challenging job, which encouraged a more outspoken attitude. At the same time, the decrease in 'strongly agree' answers from 20% in the baseline to 0% in the end-line may require further analysis.

Among HOHs male community members, results were less positive, marked by a decline in 'strongly agree' and 'agree' answers **from 100% to 91%**. While results remained overwhelmingly positive throughout the data collection process, this is again evidence that closer contact with female deminers and knowledge of their work (as is the case for family members) influences perception changes on gender norms. The additional income provided by female deminers to family members but not to

community members can also help explain the difference in answers between the two groups of HOH respondents.

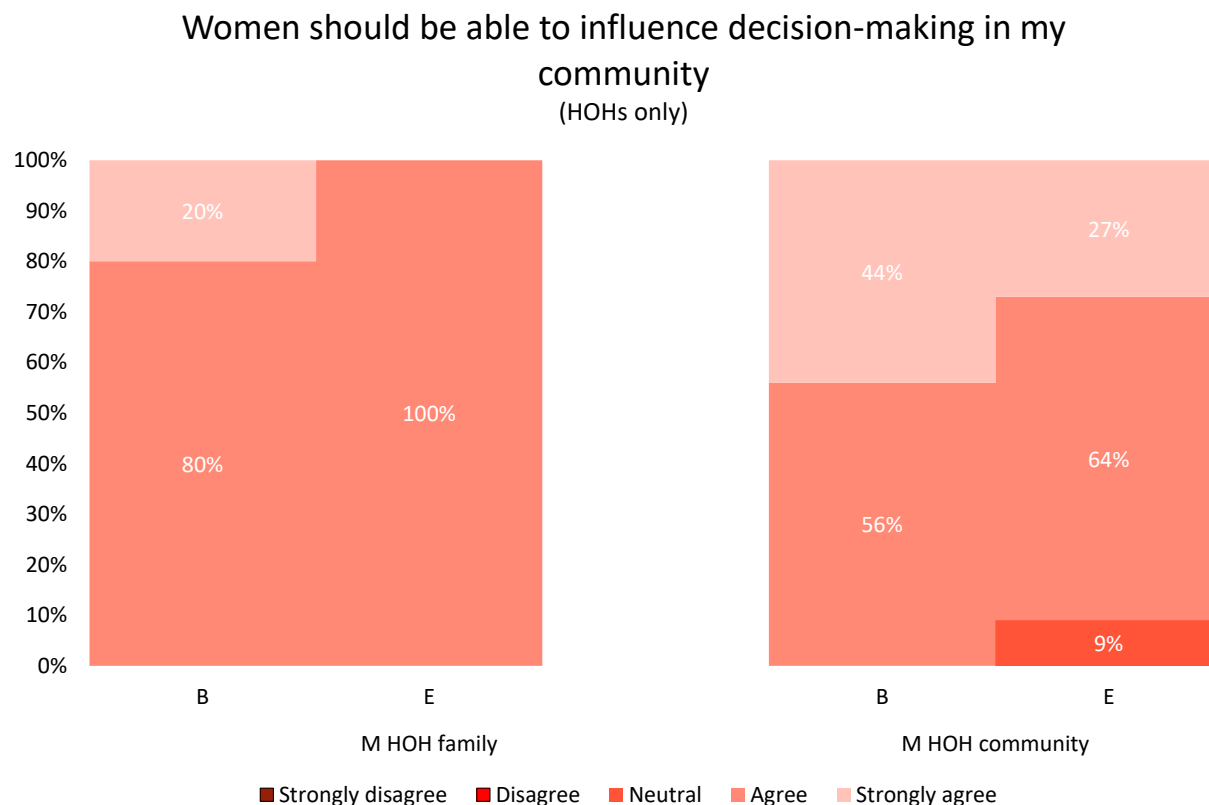


Figure 25

5. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the Perception Study covered an average of **92** respondents, with **101** individuals interviewed in the baseline survey, and **83** in the end-line data collection. Respondents were either based in the city of Bamyan or across the Yakwalang and Shibar Districts of Bamyan Province. Both baseline and end-line surveys incorporated a relatively gender-balanced sample, with **56%** female and **44%** male respondents in the baseline survey, compared to **60%** women and **40%** men in the end-line data collection. All respondents were adults (>18).

Broad categories of target groups interviewed covered an average of **8.5** female deminers (**10** in the baseline and **7** in the end-line), **12.5** male deminers (**13** and **12**), **14** female family members of female deminers (**15** and **13**), **8.5** male family members (**9** and **8**), **31** female community members (**32** and **30**), **17.5** male community members (**22** and **13**), **4** HOH male family members (**5** and **8**), and **13.5** HOH male community members (**16** and **11**).

As a result of the decrease in the number of respondents between the two survey rounds and other challenges and limitations in the methodology, some of the findings may not be reliable beyond doubt. In addition, due to their narrowly defined geographical scope, the findings should not be considered representative of other areas of Afghanistan.

Some of the findings were unexpected and may prompt further research. For example, it would be relevant to investigate why male deminers disagreed or strongly disagreed more than their female colleagues that *demining is too dangerous for a woman* by the end of the project. Another interesting topic of research is why female community members who either agreed or strongly agreed that demining is not appropriate for women increased during the data collection.

In many cases, men demonstrated a larger shift in perception than women. This is partly due to men being at a lower starting point to begin with, which made attitude changes more significant in terms of percentage changes than for their female counterparts. At the same time, it is also an indication that even the most reluctant respondents gradually started to see the role of women in the workplace and in the community at large in a less conservative way. Given that the baseline and end-line surveys were carried out in the span of a few months only, these perception changes among men are even more significant.

Female deminers showed more confidence in their own abilities by the end of the project. They were also more convinced about the influence that they could play in the family and the community. While more research needs to be carried out to establish with certainty what prompted these changes, the increase in self-confidence that female deminers demonstrated at the end of the project is positively linked to these women's growing ability to influence decision-making.

By the end of the project, male deminers also became increasingly more convinced in their female colleagues' skills to carry out clearance operations, and in women's work-related capacities and financial responsibilities in the household. This is evidence that direct exposure to women efficiently performing their same tasks altered male deminers' previous assumptions on their female colleagues, and this change contributed to a transformative shift in attitudes towards women's role in the household more broadly.

Some of the most significant improvements were recorded among male and female family members, whose attitudes, initially reluctant towards female deminers for some of the survey questions, had been largely transformed by the end of the project. Family members became progressively more confident in female deminers' strength and efficiency in carrying out clearance operations, but also more positive about the role that women have and *should* have in the household and in society. It can be affirmed with conviction that close contact with female deminers and knowledge of their work had a large impact on the perception of family members. The **100%** rate of male and female family members who strongly agreed by the end of the project that they would encourage a female relative to work as a deminer is one example of the overwhelmingly positive perspective that both target groups demonstrated at the end of the data collection.

Transformative change was also observed among male and female community members. The perception shift was in some cases less significant than among family members, providing additional evidence that the more a person's life was intertwined with female deminers, the larger was the impact on gender norms. This finding could inspire more work on perceptions and beliefs at the community level.

Overall, the findings of this Perception Study are very encouraging on the extent to which the recruitment of female deminers can influence perception changes in societies characterised by conservative gender norms. Positive changes were recorded among female deminers, their male colleagues, as well as their family members and the community to which they belong. These findings also contribute to previous anecdotal evidence on the impact that including women in traditionally male-dominated jobs such as demining can have on women's socioeconomic empowerment. It is hoped that this study will inspire more research in the same direction, and in particular will result in the creation of a sufficiently large dataset to unequivocally show the contribution of employing women in clearance operations to gender equality.