



2021

Post Project Sustainability Study Report

Berchi- Claiming Rights - Promoting Gender Equality:
Women's Empowerment and male engagement for
gender transformation in post conflict and chronically
food-insecure setting of Ethiopia" (2013-2015)

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This post project sustainability study was conducted by a team of consultants from PATH Development Consulting and Research namely Mr. Eshetu Demessie and Mrs. Martha Nemera, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ASCI	Amhara Saving and Credit Institution
CBO	Community Based Organization
CFIRW	Chronically Food Insecure Rural Women
CVCA	Community Vulnerability Capacity Assessment
EI	Expertise Interview
EP	Empirical Expectations
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GEF	Gender Equality Framework
KII	Key Informant Interview
MFI	Micro Finance Institutions
NE	Normative Expectations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PPS	Post Project Sustainability
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Program
SAA	Social Analysis and Action
SNAP	Social Norms Analysis Plot
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
VSLA	Village Saving and Lending Association
WCYA	Women Children and Youth Affairs
WEF	Women Empowerment Framework

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Executive summary

Introduction: The project Berchi – “Be Strong!” in Amharic, fully named “Claiming Rights - Promoting Gender Equality: Women’s empowerment and male engagement for gender transformation in post-conflict and chronically food-insecure settings of Ethiopia” was an Austrian Development Agency (ADA)- and CARE Austria-funded project and was implemented during the period of 2013 to 2015. Its strategic objective was to empower chronically food insecure women so that they can achieve sustainable livelihood security in the Ebinat and Simada districts of South Gondar Zone within the Amhara Region of Ethiopia.

The purpose and scope of the study is to assess the impact and sustainability of these outcomes after the project has ended. These results are compared with outcomes from the end line evaluation. Furthermore, this study is tasked with assessing the extent to which the key project results and social norm changes have been sustained after the project was phased out.

Methodology: The study combined both qualitative and quantitative data collected through household surveys, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs – of study participants), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Expert Interviews (EIs). A total of 531 respondents participated in household surveys (71% female) while 137 participated in FGDs and KIIs (66% female).

Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) framework was used for the social norm analysis to understand the predominant social norms, by analyzing the empirical and normative expectations of the community as well as sanctions on deviating from the expected norms.

Ethical review was conducted at different stages of the study (development of tools, data collection and on draft report) by an independent review committee established for the purpose.

Key Findings:

Expected Result (ER) 1: *Women have equitable access and control over productive assets to ensure their livelihood security*

- The annual average income from different sources increased to 7,248.74 ETB from the end line results, which were 4,225.31 ETB. Adjusted for inflation rates until 2019 in Ethiopia as reported by the World Bank, the end line is 7,233 – 7,890 ETB when 2020 inflation is 10-20% (in line with previous years). This suggests that income has kept up with, but not outpaced, high inflation rates (between 6%-16% from 2016-2019).
- Women’s and men’s access to different productive and economic resources is increased and are both able to diversify their income sources
- Households in the two study districts have been transformed to joint decision with their spouses on most decisions on selling and/or buying productive assets, as confirmed by 88.2% of respondents.
- Women have demonstrated improved agency and as a result developed confidence speaking in public. It is only 14.4% (n=53) who reported they feel “not at all comfortable” to speak in public regarding gender issues.
- 92.9% (n=459) of respondents reported that the Berchi project has improved their life
- Berchi has brought food security and enabled 35.8% of its target population to successfully graduate from the government’s PSNP food aid program. During the interviews and focus groups, study participants confirmed that they are food self-sufficient, indicating that the result is sustained.
- The study confirmed that the results obtained on improved access and control over productive assets during the end line evaluation is significantly increased. Improved

knowledge, attitude, and practice of individual and household are basis for the sustainability of the obtained results.

Expected Result (ER) 2: Meaningful representation and participation of women at all levels

- Women's representation in formal and informal structures is encouraging. 85.87% (n=456) survey respondents confirmed that women are represented in different government and community decision-making structures. The qualitative discussions with both women and men confirmed that the participation of women in different community structures increased as a result of improved community awareness.
- 81.9% of women respondents agreed that women are good leaders and should be given opportunities to lead, which is a clear indication of development of self-confidence

Expected Result (ER) 3: Transform key institutional and socio-cultural norms, relations and attitudes for gender equality

- The negative perception on women's leadership ability has significantly changed compared with the end line evaluation results. For example, the percentage of female respondents reporting "agree" or "strongly agree" on the norms that expect women not to lead or organize community work decreased to 3.95 % from 11.4 % of the end line results.
- The percentage of men reporting that they have "never" beaten their wives due to failing to complete household chores has increased from the end line value of 86.62% to 94.2% from this study. Comparably, the percentage of men who reported "never" expecting their wives to be beaten if going somewhere without permission has increased from the project evaluation value of 76.61% to 93.5%.
- Access to reproductive health services increased to 85.7% from the end line result of 70.84%.
- Access to micro finance has significantly increased from end line 66.24 % to 82.9%.
- The perception is that incidence of GBV is decreasing. 92.5% (491) of survey participants reported that the level of GBV towards women has decreased.
- 76% (403) of the total respondents reported that the community's perception on women's leadership is encouraging and is an indication of community transformation to gender equality perspectives.

Most Significant Changes

- The project contribution on households' capacity for food self-sufficiency is one of the most significant changes. This has been realized through VSLAs providing household economic opportunities.
- The VSLAs established by the project have opened tangible platforms for women's representation at both formal and informal structures. They have given women opportunities to take up leadership roles as well as developed their confidence,
- Ongoing community dialogues on social norms have significantly contributed to engaging norm setters to actively incorporate gender equality topics and models within their own communities.

Social Norms:

- Based on the responses received it is striking to note that the attitudes on gender equality of the communities that participated in Berchi have shifted. From those who interviewed, 78.3% now strongly agree that women should have equal access to productive resources, while 89% strongly agree that women should have equal control over productive resources, 84.9% strongly agree that women should equally be

represented in leadership roles, and 83.4% strongly disagree that women should tolerate Gender Based Violence (GBV).

- The empirical expectations measures (what participants think that others do) revealed that gender equitable norms are fairly practiced in the community.
- The normative expectations of the community (what participants think others expect them to do) are encouraging. 63.5% of the total respondents strongly agree that women should have equal access to productive resources, while 66% strongly agree that both women and men should have equal control over productive resources. Moreover, 72.9% strongly disagree with social norms that expect women to stay home and 62.2% strongly disagree with the idea that exposing gender based violence is a cause of “shame”.
- Sanctions and sensitivity to sanctions have changed. 72.9% of survey participants strongly disagree with sanctions that discriminate women’s equal access to productive assets, 67.6% of those interviewed strongly disagree with sanctions that discriminate women’s equal control of resources, and most importantly, 71.2% strongly agree that it should be normal for women to lead community groups.

Functionality of VSLAs and SAAs

- Most VLSAs are active and functioning after 4 years of the project and 66.79% of the respondents confirmed that their VSLAs are active and functioning. Among reported active VSLAs, 11.1% reported their VSLAs have transformed to RuSACOs while the rest (88.9%) confirmed their VSLAs have not transformed but are still functioning as VSLAs.
- 95.6% of respondents confirmed that they know who their VSLA leaders are. This is strong indication that the VSLA leaders are active in leading members. The leaders are actively conducting regular VSLAs meetings; 59.9% of the respondents confirmed that their VSLAs meet twice a month, while another 33.1% reported meeting once a month.
- VSLA members have strong opinions that VSLAs should continue as informal groups due to high flexibility for the poor and small membership for transparency.
- Voluntary establishment, ongoing capacity building and flexibility of VSLAs were found to be contributing factors for sustainability of the VSLAs.
- Membership expansion of VSLAs is one of the indicators of sustainability and model effect of VSLAs in the study area. In this regards the findings of the study indicated that 26.2 % of respondents reported VSLA membership has increased, 35.5 % reported membership decreased, and 38.4% reported the membership size has not changed.
- VSLA has brought spillover and model effects. New VSLAs have been established due to the benefits that Berchi project VSLAs have shown, particularly for their household livelihoods. VSLAs have also built social capacity for the poor households.
- VSLAs that have dissolved have met their purposes.
- The SAAs in the study area have been active since fully completing their lesson.
- Proper capacity building during establishment, membership of different community structure, and segregation of duties of SAA core groups, facilitators, members, and field agents contributed to the functionality of SAA.
- Women have participated in SAA membership and are represented in leadership of the SAAs. Of the total respondents, 47.2% of respondents confirmed that the SAA meetings were facilitated by both men and women, 30.2% reported leadership by women only, while 22.6 % confirmed the meetings had been facilitated by men only.

Recommendations:

1. Recommendation on sustaining livelihoods change

- Lessons from the Berchi project include the necessity of an integrated intervention approach that brought changes at individual, household and community levels. Improving knowledge and skills on diversification of economic opportunities, improved household power dynamics, and community awareness on gender equality for equitable decisions on resources are key contributing factors for livelihood changes.
 - Women's economic autonomy on their income is crucial for an equitable household power relationship. Women economic empowerment interventions need to consider strategies that transform women's rights; increased income alone is not sufficient. Rather, successful interventions go beyond and give women power and confidence to demand their rights, which is a key lesson of Berchi.
- 2. Recommendation on sustaining social norm transformation**
- The gender equality and women empowerment program need to strategically design strategies to engage norm setters. The engagement of norm setters in women's empowerment and gender equality is very crucial for constructing positive and supportive norms while deconstructing negative and restrictive norms. The Berchi project has demonstrated that the engagement of norm setters contributed to the sustainability of changes on restrictive social norms through SAAs.
- 3. Recommendation on sustainability of the VSLA and SAA**
- Interventions on VSLAs should plan to lobby the government to consider VSLAs as a small structure of RuSACO, but not combine them.
 - Ongoing capacity building and proactive engagement of VSLAs and SAAs and ensuring their independence before project phase out is key for the sustainability of VSLAs and SAAs.
- 4. Recommendation on role of government in sustaining the obtained changes**
- There should be strong lobby of the government to integrate strategies and approaches that are tested by the project in the sector development program for sustainability of obtained changes.
 - Systems that ensure government accountability to sustain the obtained changes through the promotion of social accountability should be integrated.

4. Introduction

1.1 Project overview

The intervention Berchi (which means “be strong” in Amharic), is also known as “Claiming Rights - Promoting Gender Equality: Women’s empowerment and male engagement for gender transformation in post-conflict and chronically food-insecure settings of Ethiopia”. The project was jointly funded by both the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and CARE Austria and begun implementation in 2013 and ended in 2015.

Its strategic objective was to empower chronically food insecure women so that they can achieve sustainable livelihood security in the Ebinat and Simada districts of South Gondar, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. To achieve the above objective, the project had four expected results:

- **Expected Result (ER) 1:** Women have equitable access and control over productive assets to ensure their livelihood security
- **Expected Result (ER) 2:** Meaningful representation and participation of women at all levels
- **Expected Result (ER) 3:** Transform key institutional and socio-cultural norms, relations and attitudes for gender equality
- **Expected Result (ER) 4:** Promote key Learning and Impact Measurement for women’s empowerment

The project intended to reach 11,000 chronically food insecure women and their households. CARE Ethiopia served as the primary implementer working with relevant government and local formal and informal organizations.

To achieve the intended results, the project was designed based on the CARE-CFIRW Theory of Change (ToC)¹, CARE’s Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) framework as well as Gender Equality Framework (GEF). These frameworks guided the overall implementation approaches and is indicated in the below points. Additionally, the project was able to actively integrate the Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) approach to encourage a culture of saving so that members could access external financial resources, develop solidarity amongst women, and to promote women’s empowerment. To provide BERCHI communities, and especially women in those communities, with increased economic opportunities, VSLAs were established. These Village Savings and Loan Associations also focused on incorporating gender and empowerment components to enhance the effectiveness of financial resources. VSLAs are groups of self-selected, voluntary members that save money in the form of shares, which are invested in a Loan Fund. Members who need cash can borrow from this fund as long as they repay the loan with a service charge added, functioning as a bank or credit union for communities that struggle with accessing formal financial services. In addition, VSLAs typically have a Social Fund which can provide small grants to members in distress. Key principles of a VSLA is autonomy and self-management; associations are generally 10-30 members that meet regularly, though the content and frequency of meetings depends on member consensus. Transparency is also important, as all transactions are public and decisions are led by the VSLA management committee but driven by members.

Furthermore, the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach was employed to understand the unique risks of women and instigate social changes focusing on cultural norms & attitudes that affect women’s access and control over resources and psychosocial wellbeing. To tackle the empowerment of women and to engage community members in changing social norms, the SAA approach was implemented. This Social Analysis and Action approach was developed by CARE to address the social, economic, and cultural factors that influence health. This is done primarily through facilitating regular dialogue within communities about social conditions, linkages between social factors and health, and ways to address challenges to achieve poverty reduction, improved health, and other individual and

¹ Sustained life changes of CFIRW can be achieved through making institutions responsive and accountable on gender issues; ensuring access to control over resources; and catalysing cultural and social norm change in the target communities.

community benefits. It also allows the community to have ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning about these topics and collective progress towards reaching their goals. The general CARE approach was tailored in BERCHI specifically to address gender roles and expectations, empower women, and engage men in community conversations about harmful social norms. For BERCHI, groups were formed and a series of trainings took place, including for facilitators and for gender and climate vulnerability and capacity assessment training, before conducting sessions. These sessions revolved around the 4 core elements of SAA: reflect, challenge, explore, and learn. They aim to incorporate 4 key principles: gender transformation, sexual reproductive health as a cross-cutting issue, personal transformation among implementers, and community-led action.

Finally, a Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (CVCA) tool was also used to gather and analyze information at the community level and to improve the communities' capacities to overcome climate change related challenges.

Overview of the frameworks:

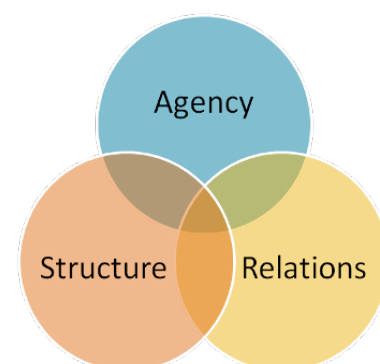
CARE's Gender Equality Framework (GEF) Gender equality and women's voice is a central element of the CARE program strategy. At its core, the framework recognizes that gender is fundamentally about power relations and thus changes need to occur in all the below named three domains to ensure that people of all genders have equal rights and opportunities to live a life of their choosing:

- **Build Agency:** Building confidence, self-esteem and aspirations (non-formal sphere), knowledge, skills and capabilities (formal sphere);
- **Change Relations:** The power relations and social networks (non-formal sphere) and group membership, citizenship, activism, and market negotiations (formal sphere);
- **Transform Structures:** Eradicating discriminatory social norms, customs, values and excluding practices (non-formal sphere) laws, policies, procedures and services (formal sphere).

According to the **Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)** approach, gender equality will never be achieved while women have fewer economic rights, less control over economic resources, and have less access to economic opportunities, than men. CARE defines women's economic empowerment as *"the process by which women increase their right to economic resources and power to make decisions that benefit themselves, their families and their communities. This requires equal access to and control over economic resources, assets and opportunities as well as long-term changes in social norms and economic structures that benefit women and men equally"*. The WEE as a strategy focuses on four interrelated and key pathways to economic empowerment and these are financial inclusion, women and value chains, dignified work, and entrepreneurship. This study will thus focus on women's entrepreneurship combined with resilience.

End of project evaluation findings

The project conducted an end line evaluation in 2015 and the findings showed positive trends in the livelihood and socio-cultural outcomes for participating communities, as well as strongly indicating their sustainability beyond the life of the project. The evaluation concluded that there was strong confidence amongst community members that their culture of saving practiced during to Berchi project will continue in the absence of the donor agency. Moreover, it was identified that the SAA discussions which focused on recognizing harmful socio-cultural practices, the benefits of such discussions in abolishing gender-based violence, structures within which these associations operate in, as well as the bylaws developed have been cherished by the community and will continue after the end of the project. The flexible approach adopted by the project with regards to VSLAs have



instantly won acceptance by local communities and government agencies alike. Therefore, the respondents noted that the VSLAs can be owned and maintained by the local community in the absence of CARE.

The project approaches to sustainability

As a strategy, the project used participatory design and implementation approaches as well as employing a gradual phase out strategy. This means that, depending on the type of intervention, the exit strategy passes through ‘phase-down’ and ‘phase-over’ stages² through the three major elements as outlined below:

1. **Key interventions and capacity building needs were identified at the planning stage.** The project provided a complete set of capacity building activities to participants and relevant actors so that the skills and experiences acquired will remain locally and will continue to bring about change. These trainings covered saving methodology, financial literacy, business skills, and value chain productivity that far outweighed the provision of credit through MFI or asset transfers. Moreover, technical and managerial capacity building training were also provided to government stakeholders at the district and Kebele levels.
2. **Stakeholder(s) and key individuals or groups that were responsible for each project component were identified and supported.** Here, the project established VSLAs and SAAs groups for a sustained project results. VSLA members were selected from the community and were supported through technical guidance and qualified community facilitators. This ensured that these groups established by the project are either prepared for independence or transitioned into the care of the relevant stakeholders to ensure that they are “active” and “functional”. VSLAs have helped to establish and strengthen social networks and provide effective informal safety nets (through ‘social funds’), incentivizing a lasting and positive impact on the livelihood and social capital of participating members. SAAs and VSLAs (beyond the financial component) will be the springboards for sustainable women empowerment and household gender equality that result in social change. Besides the active involvement of women in the leadership roles and their economic gains, the social groups and structures, gender sensitive sector offices, and financial institutions (MFIs) are supports for sustainability of achievements.
3. **The CVCA approach was implemented in order to support communities during disasters.** The impact of disasters can be substantially reduced if people are well informed and motivated towards a culture of disaster prevention and resilience. For this, the project used CVCA to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that the knowledge and models developed over the course of the project, such as collection, compilation and dissemination of information on hazards, are incorporated into future programming.

1.2 Purpose and Scope of the study

This post-project sustainability study is designed to assess whether the economic and social norm changes obtained during and after the project have continued thereafter. All findings will be compared with outcomes identified in the end line evaluation and focus on:

- Assessing the impact of the Berchi project on women’s access and control over productive assets, and women’s participation and leadership and any transformation in

² Phase-down’ exit strategies refers to the gradual reduction of programmatic inputs or resources, often prior to a ‘phase-over’ strategy. The ‘phase-over’ strategy seeks to transfer full responsibility for programmatic interventions to governmental entities, community groups or individuals depending on the success of outputs, outcomes or impacts or their combination.

- socio-cultural norms,
- Assessing to what extent the social and economic impact of Berchi project have been sustained,
- Assessing the effectiveness of the project's innovative approaches of VSLAs and SAAs in catalysing social norm change and gender transformation in the target communities,
- Documenting key lessons and best practices in social norm change and gender transformation programming worth scaling up in future interventions.

1.3 Study questions

The study focused on responding to the key sustainability questions stated in the ToR including looking at issues related to:

- Which of the project social and economic outcomes have been sustained 4 years after completion of the project?
- Has Berchi brought about changes which have resulted in positive impacts in the lives of participating communities 4 years after completion of the project?
- Have the VSLAs and SAAs groups established during the project remained 4 years after completion of the project?
- Is the use of VSLAs and SAAs approaches effective in facilitating and causing social norm and gender transformation within rural communities?
- What learning and best practices have emerged out of the project with regards to social norm and gender transformation intervention 4 years after the end of Berchi?
- How can CARE Ethiopia further scale-up successes, learning, and best practices gathered from the Berchi project into future programming?

1.4 Methodology

Approach of the Study

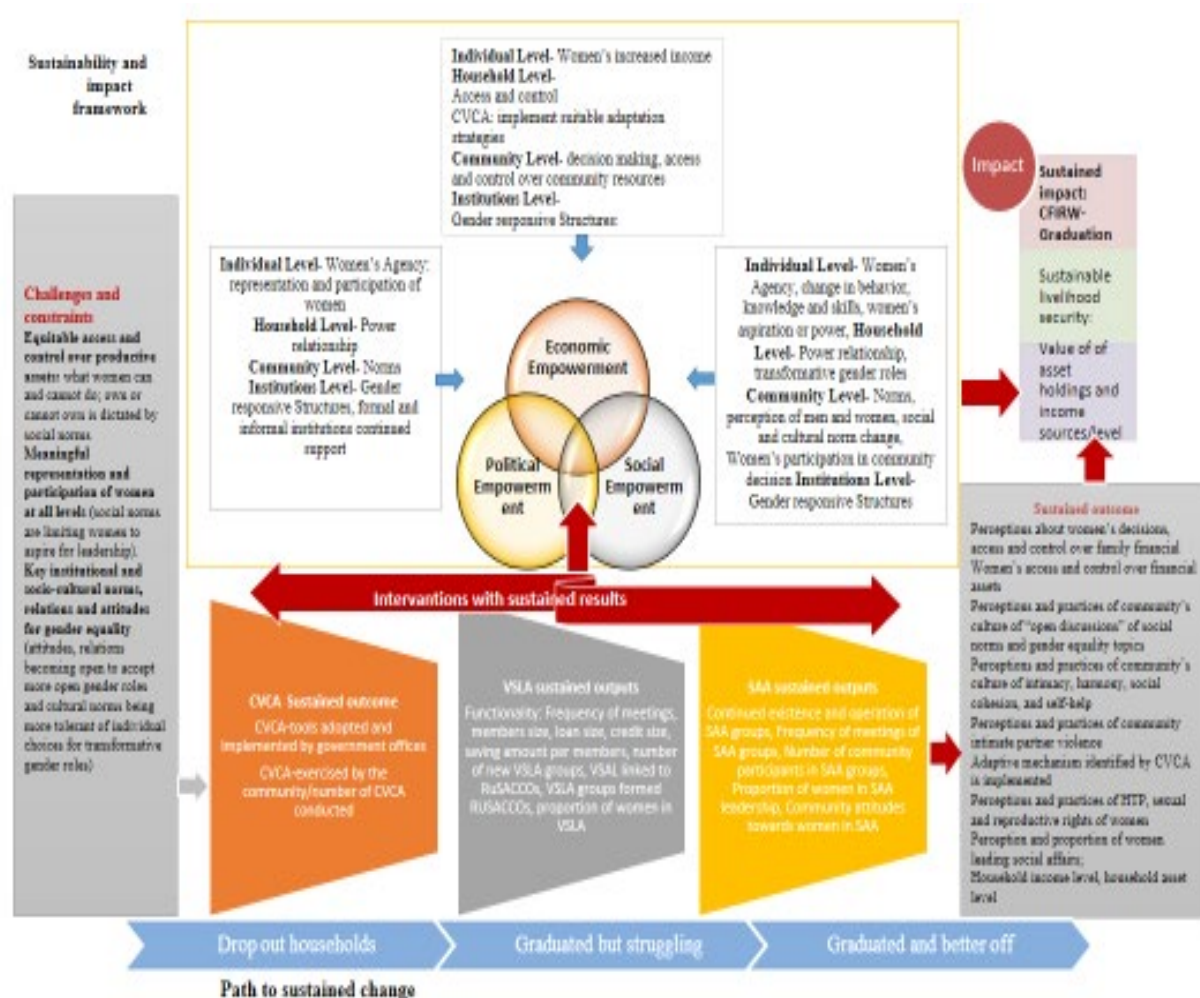
This study combined both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. Methods included structured interviews with program participants, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Expert Interviews (EI). For the data collection process, the data collection instruments were designed based on the sustainability questions, judgment criteria. and study objectives. These tools can be found in Annex 1.

Sustainability framework

“Sustainability” in this study was defined as “the extent to which the positive social, economic, and environmental effects of BERCHI's and structures that are VSLAs, SAAs, and CVCAs are maintained—and negative effects mitigated—after formal project support has ended”.

To inform and direct the study design, the below “Sustainability and Impact Framework” was prepared and utilized.

Figure 1: Sustainability and impact framework



The framework is derived from CARE Ethiopia's WEF and GEF frameworks, project implementation approaches, expected results, sustainability assumptions, and the study objectives as stated in the Terms of Reference. The study's Sustainability and Impact Framework outlines the project system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, the presumed relationships among them, what the outcomes are, and contributing factors. The framework also takes into consideration the challenges and constraints identified by the project such as women's challenges in achieving equitable access and control over productive assets, meaningful representation, participation of women at all levels of government, and key institutional and socio-cultural norms, relations, and attitudes for gender. Furthermore, the Sustainability and Impact Framework also incorporates CARE's innovative interventions such as VSLAs and SAAs approaches and assessed the role of VSLAs and SAAs in sustaining project outcomes.

Parallel to this, the framework indicates the overall linkage and path to the project impact and sustainability at different levels such as from project output to outcome and final impact (graduation from PSNP beneficiary). Likewise, to further organize the data, the "Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP)" framework was used. Data collected through the SNAP framework was organized into 5 components of social norm with signs of changes. The SNAP components and definition are presented in figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Social Norm Analysis Plot components and definitions

SNAP Components	Definition
Empirical Expectations (EE)	What I think others do
Normative Expectations (NE)	What I think others expect me to do (what I should do according to others)
Sanctions	Anticipated opinion or reaction of others (to the behavior) – specifically others whose opinions matter to me
Sensitivity to sanctions	Do sanctions matter for behavior? If there is a negative reaction from others (negative sanction), would the main character change their behavior in the future?
Exceptions	Under what circumstances would it be okay for the main character to break the norm (by acting positively)?

Data sourcing and methods of collection

The study team used a variety of data collection methods as outlined below:

- a) **Document and file review:** The team systematically reviewed project documents, including the project's end line evaluation, CARE-Ethiopia CFIRW ToC, WEF, SAA and VSLA approaches, focusing on the sustainability questions to design the data collection tools and triangulate and substantiate the findings.
- b) **Interviews with project participants:** structured interview questions were used with project participants to capture impact and sustainability of the project expected results and issues related to change in the five components of social norm such as Empirical Expectations, Normative Expectations, and Sanctions, Sensitivity to sanctions and Exceptions. Additional semi-structured and open-ended interview questions were also developed to further guide interviews. A total of 531 respondents from female-headed and dual-headed households participated and both qualitative and quantitative information collected (non response rate was 3%).
- c) **Key informant interviews:** semi-structured interview questions were used, and in-depth discussion conducted with selected officials from government institutions who have direct influence over and have knowledge of the project. The purpose of the KIIs is to capture stakeholders' views on the sustainability of Berchi structures and integration in government structures after completion of the project. The KII used the Most Significant Change (MSC) interview technique and the interviews included experts from Food Security Office, Cooperatives Promotion Office, Amhara Saving and Credit Institution, and Justice Office in both study districts. Although the plan was to conduct 10 KIIs, a total of 13 KIIs were completed. This happened due to the interviewees referring to other professionals for further information.
- d) **Expert interview:** the interview questions were designed to engage CARE experts, who have been involved with the project from the start and have thorough understanding about the 'before' and the 'current' situations, into an in-depth discussion to enable the study team to understand regarding the project impact and sustainability. This type of interview was conducted with 1 male expert who had been there since from the beginning of the project.

- e) **Focus Group Discussions:** open-ended questions on key elements of the project were used. During the FGDs, participants discussed issues surrounding project results, impacts, changes on social norms surrounding women access and control of productive resources, women leadership, women's rights and gender-based violence.

Follow-up probing questions were also used to extract and capture participants' lived experiences and thoughts on the sustainability of social norm changes. The diverse group of respondents represented Female-Headed Households (FHH), Male-Headed Households (MHH), Dual-Headed Households (DHH), and community influential groups (religious and traditional leaders, mothers-in-law, etc.) participated in these FGDs. Among the total of 124 participants, 87 women took part (70.1%).

Table 1: Summary of qualitative data respondents

Qualitative Method	Number Conducted	Number of participants		
		Male	Female	Total
Focused Group Discussions	32	37	87	124
Key Informant Interviews	10	10	3	13
Expert Interviews	1	1	0	1

F) Most significant change: During FGDs and individual interviews, an in-depth discussion explored the most significant changes that participants observed in the project implementation process. These were validated with field observation and feedback from KIIs. This approach enabled the study to capture the project impact as viewed by the participants themselves.

1.4 Study Ethics

Ethical considerations, including protection of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were an important part of this end line evaluation. Respondents' involvement was completely on a voluntary basis and prior to participation, all respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, informed that they have the right to refuse to participate and were asked to provide verbal consent.

Moreover, to ensure the ethical standards were met, an ethical review committee was established to review ethical considerations of the overall research process and quality of the study. Accordingly, an ethical review checklist was developed and used through the entire process of the study.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

The findings of the study were compared with the results identified by the end line evaluation to ascertain if these results have been sustained, further improved, or have declined. This post-project sustainability study assessed social norms in CARE's Berchi project communities using the Social Norm Analysis Plot (SNAP) approach. However, because social norms were not assessed in the end line, there is little point of comparison. Efforts were made to triangulate some of the findings of social norms with the secondary data on gender equality and women empowerment contexts of the study area before four years.

For economic data, comparisons to end line findings also pose a challenge because of the high rates of inflation of the Ethiopian birr, the local currency. Despite this, financial well-being of Berchi participants mostly rely on their ability to buy everyday products, which are not affected to the same extent as foreign exchange rates. However, the real rate of change of Berchi participants' financial well-being is difficult to measure quantitatively.

Additionally, data were primarily self-report, particularly social norms data. This may have caused bias, but efforts were made to ensure that interviewers and focus group moderators

took special care to develop appropriate rapport before beginning questions; questions also begin with demographic information to prime participants to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences.

Lastly, because of the timeframe of this study, as well as other development-related interventions that have been conducted in the communities involved, there are several confounding factors that may influence the results.

5. Key Findings

This post-project sustainability study of CARE's Berchi project compares its findings to the results identified by the end line evaluation to ascertain if these results have been sustained, further improved, or have declined. Moreover, this research has also sought to look at what elements have been sustained and factors lead to their improvement, maintenance, or decline.

2.1 Respondents Profile

The study was conducted in the Ebinet and Simada districts in South Gondar region of Ethiopia. Two-hundred and sixteen (40.7%) households were sampled from five villages in Ebinet and 315 (59.3%) households were from six villages in Simada. Due to harvesting season, which is extremely demanding on household labor, it was challenging reach the planned sample of respondents in Ebinet district.

Respondents' gender and marital status: Out of the total 531 respondents, 377 were women (71%) and 154 were men (29%). The proportion of female respondents is higher because the aim of project is to empower women to gain sustainable livelihoods. Thus, in Ebinet and in Simada, 182 (48%) and 195 (52%) women took part. Even though the number of respondents vary within the two districts, the proportion of women in the two districts is similar. From the total respondents, FHHs accounted for 26.4% (140) while the rest, 73.6 % (391), were dual-headed households. The number of FHHs engaged in this study was 85 (60.7%) in Simada and 55 (39.3%) in Ebinet.

Out of the total respondents, 386 were married (72.2%), 63 divorced (11.9%), and 63 widowed (11.9%), and 19 single (3.6%).

Table 2: Proportion of respondents by sex and marital status

	Male		Female		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Head of the HH						
• Female Headed	0	0	140	37	140	26.4
• Dual Headed	154	100	237	63	391	73.6
• Total	154	100	377	100	531	100.0
Marital status						
• Single	0	0	19	5	19	3.6
• Married	148	96	238	63	386	72.7
• Divorced	5	3	58	15	63	11.9
• Widowed	1	1	62	16	63	11.9

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

Respondents' religion: The religious affiliation of the respondents indicate that Orthodox is the dominant religion in the two study districts (97.2%), while the rest of the respondents are Muslim (2.3%), Protestant (0.4%), and Catholic (0.2%).

Respondents' educational status: The findings indicate that 67.6% of respondents (359) are illiterate, 14.9% have acquired primary education grade 1 to 4 (79), 11.3% have junior education (60), 4.5% have secondary education, (24) and only 0.4% have achieved grade 11-12 education (2). The findings here indicate that the illiteracy amongst respondents is slightly higher compared to the end line evaluation which is 65.68%.

Amongst the total respondents who are illiterate, a high proportion 275 were women (76.6%) and 84 men (23.39%).

In this regards, the qualitative field data also revealed a critical gap for women to assume the leadership position particularly at government structures because they often require basic literacy skills. The KIIs with the women and children affairs office evidenced that women's low literacy skills remain one of the main challenges to women's assuming different positions in government structures.

"...now opportunities are given for women to be represented in different positions of government structures. However, despite the opportunities, the participation of women has not reached the level required due to their low literacy skill are discriminating them ..."

A voice from Government KII participant

The study findings highlight that education is the key factor for women empowerment that enables them to respond to challenges, confront traditional gender roles, and change their lives. This may be a future consideration for CARE social norms interventions.

Table 3: Respondents' religious affiliation and level of education

	Male		Female		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Religious affiliation						
• Orthodox	150	97	366	97	516	97.2
• Protestant	0	0	2	1	2	0.4
• Catholic	0	0	1	0	1	0.2
• Muslim	4	3	8	2	12	2.3
Level of education- HH head						
• Illiterate/ Cannot read and write	84	55	275	73	359	67.6
• Primary education (1-4)	33	21	46	12	79	14.9
• Junior education (5-8)	28	18	32	8	60	11.3
• Secondary education (9-10)	3	2	21	6	24	4.5
• Grade 11-12 (preparatory)	2	1	0	0	2	0.4
• College and above	4	3	3	1	7	1.3
• Total	154	100	377	100	531	100.0

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

Respondents' age and family size: The oldest respondent was 83 years old and the youngest was 18 years old. Out of all the respondents, the youngest woman was 18 while the youngest man was 24. The average family size was 5.1, while the minimum was 1 and the maximum is 11. There are no significant differences in the average family size between this study's findings and the end line evaluation which was 4.7.

Table 4: Respondents' age and family size

Descriptive Variable	Gender	#	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age of the head of the household	Male	154	24	74	45.0	10.66
	Female	377	18	83	39.4	11.60
	Total	531	18	83	41.0	11.60
Family size	Male	154	2	11	5.9	1.61
	Female	377	1	10	4.8	1.65
	Total	531	1	11	5.2	1.71

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

Respondent's participation in PSNP and Berchi project: Berchi specifically targeted chronically food-insecure households under the Ethiopian government Productive Safety Net

Program (PSNP), which focuses on food security, public works, and social safety nets for those in need across Ethiopia. The household surveyed in this regard indicated that 388 (73.1%) have taken part in PSNP program while 143 (26.9%) did not enroll into the program. About household PSNP graduation status, the data indicated that 61.9% are currently in PSNP (never graduated), while 35.8 % are graduated, and 2.3 % are graduated and re-entered.

With regard to Berchi project participation, 487 participated in the Berchi project (91.7%) while 44 did not (8.3%). Although the post-project sustainability study targeted the project participants, the qualitative data revealed that most of the non-Berchi-participant respondents joined a VSLA group after the project phased out. The findings therefore indicate that the VSLAs' membership has expanded even after the end of the project which provides evidence of the sustainability and functionality of VSLAs. This points to VSLAs being well-institutionalized within their settings and building participants' social capital, positively impacting the livelihood of their members. The Berchi project has improved household food and livelihood security as indicated in the household survey; 82.8% reported that they are better off after the project ended. Many respondents (64.6%) also reported that they are able to meet their family food needs for the last 12 months while 85.9 % were able to send their children to school for the full academic year.

Table 5: Respondents' participation in PSNP and Berchi project

	Male		Female		Total	
Have you ever been part of the PSNP program?	#	%	#	%	#	%
• Yes	130	84	258	68	388	73.1
• No	24	16	119	32	143	26.9
• Total	154		377		531	
If yes, which one best describes you?						
• Currently in PSNP never graduated	73	56	167	65	240	61.9
• Graduated but re-entered	1	1	8	3	9	2.3
• Graduated	56	43	83	32	139	35.8
• Total	130	100	258	100	388	100.0
Did you participate in Berchi project ?						
• Yes	145	94	342	91	487	91.7
• No	9	6	35	9	44	8.3
• Total	154		377		531	
After the project ended, at this moment in your opinion are you:						
• Better off	129	89	274	80	403	82.8
• Worse off	0	0	2	1	2	0.4
• The same	16	11	66	19	82	16.8
• Total	145	100	342	100	487	100.0
Are you able to meet your family's food needs for 12 months?						
• Yes	102	66	241	64	343	64.6
• No	52	34	136	36	188	35.4
• Total	154	100	377	100	531	100.0
Are you able to send your children to school for the full academic year?						
• Yes	130	84	326	86	456	85.9
• No	24	16	50	13	74	13.9
• I have no child to school	0	0	1	0	1	0.2
• Total	154	100	377	100	531	100.0
Can you cover unforeseen costs like, medical costs?						

• Yes	135	88	325	86	460	86.6
• No	19	12	52	14	71	13.4
• Total	154	100	377	100	531	100.0

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

Respondents' access to other programs: Respondents' access to other support provided by the government and NGOs was assessed. The survey results revealed that 95.3% of the respondents reported not receiving any additional support in the past three months before the study. In-depth discussion conducted both with women and men participants revealed that the Berchi project groups had not received any support from other projects or entities, and respondents confirmed that only Food for the Hungry (FH) in Simada district and World Vision in Ebinet district were operating.

"...it has been 4 months since FH reorganized some households who were members of Berchi VSLAs. We had never participated in other projects except continuing our activities in our VSLAs.....

A voice of women group in Semada, District

Table 6: NGO or government support during the last 3 months

Received support?	Male		Female		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
• Yes	3	2	22	6	25	4.7
• No	151	98	355	94	506	95.3
• Total	154		377		531	
Type of support						
• Cash in birr (from 300-2000)	2	67	9	41	11	44.0
• Poultry	0	0	1	5	1	4.0
• Food (oil, flour, soap, pea)	1	33	9	41	10	40.0
• Loan access	0	0	3	14	3	12.0
• Total	3		22		25	

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

2.2 Sustainability of project results

Expected Result (ER) 1: Women have equitable access and control over productive assets to ensure their livelihood security

a) Women's equitable access to productive resources

To assess results on women's access to economic and productive resources in the post-project period, data were collected on self-reported earned income and income sources. The household survey data on access to different income sources indicates that male- and female-headed households earn income from different sources in similar proportions (31% from business or trade, 54-60% from crop sales, and 78-81% from sales of livestock or poultry). In terms of who is the income earner, men and women are equally likely to be the sole household earner of income from either business or trade (13.3% women vs. 10.0% men) or crops sales (12.8% women vs. 9.6% men). Women in a household are more likely than men to report earning income from poultry or livestock sales (30.3% women vs 15.3% men). It may be challenging for any household in the study area to access a new source of income through business or trading opportunities because of the remote and rural nature of the communities.

Table 7 : Respondents' income sources

Who earned income from the following activities in the past years?		Male		Female		Total	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
	Men	27	18	26	7	53	10.0

From business or trade activities	Women	3	2	67	18	70	13.2
	Both	18	12	25	7	43	8.1
	No one	106	69	259	69	365	68.7
	Total	154		377		531	
From crop sales activities	Men	25	16	26	7	51	9.6
	Women	6	4	62	16	68	12.8
	Both	61	40	116	31	177	33.3
	No one	62	40	173	46	235	44.3
	Total	154		377		531	
From sales of livestock or poultry business activities	Men	41	27	40	11	81	15.3
	Women	18	12	143	38	161	30.3
	Both	66	43	111	29	177	33.3
	No one	29	19	83	22	112	21.1
	Total						

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

The qualitative data confirms that women now have improved access to different sources of income and that there are fewer constraints for women to participate in income-generating activities as compared to the past. In in-depth discussions with women, they expressed strongly that fewer constraints have meant not only increased income sources, but also have allowed them opportunities to improve their skills and capacity to engage in different activities to further diversify their income source.

*“...we started business with a very small amount of money, no more than 200 ETB as we were skeptical since we did not previously take part in business activities and nor have the skills. Now the VSLAs have changed our perspectives; women’s businesses are now diversified and both financial and social barriers are improved. **Now no one questions if a woman wants to engage in any type of business, as long as she has capital...**”*

Female FGD participant, Ebinet District

Both the quantitative and qualitative data gathered during the end line evaluation had revealed that women’s access to productive resources had improved and women were able to engage in a variety of income sources activities compared to before the intervention. Similarly, this study’s results strongly indicate that restrictive norms that had prevented women from accessing equitable productive resources before the project have improved due to gender equitable attitudes. The project was successful in supporting individuals to better understand the value of women’s participation in productive economic activities and to show that they can contribute to the overall household income. The discussions held with the men has further evidenced that they now have willingly embraced a supportive role. It is this change and awareness that has been a key factor that has continued to encourage the involvement of women into economic activities beyond the project life.

*“...we now have realized that **our women’s accessing economic resources benefits the whole family** as they know how to manage their income as well as any additional income for the household. So, now, most men in our community are actively encouraging and pushing their wives to get involved whenever there are any opportunities such saving and credit groups, meetings, trading, etc...”*

Male FGD participants, Simada District

Moreover, this change has allowed women to further strengthen their position in negotiating their right to access productive resources and may have led to improvement in their annual income earnings.

The average report annual income was 7,249 ETB (range: 120 ETB - 84,000 ETB). This is

nearly 3000 ETB above that average report annual income at end line (4225 ETB). Adjusted for inflation rates until 2019 in Ethiopia as reported by the World Bank, the end line is 7,233 – 7,890 ETB when 2020 inflation is 10-20% (in line with previous years). This suggests that income has kept up with, but not outpaced, high inflation rates (between 6%-16% from 2016-2019). Even so, respondents seem to report a higher quality of life. This could be because the products that many rural Ethiopians rely on for daily living are usually not exported, so their prices fluctuate less based on inflation. It is also possible that benefits to the whole family refers to lower stress on each half of the couple, more time for leisure, more stable income sources, and other quality of life improvements that are not directly related to gross income.

Table 8: Respondents' average annual income from different sources³ in Birr

Average Total Income by gender	EL1 (n=548)	PS (n= 531)
Average total income from different sources	4422	7249
Average total income for Female	4361	6285
Average total income for Male	4561	9668

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

There are clear differences in annual average incomes between men and women; in general, women have a slightly lower annual earning. Women also reported earning less money than men at the project end line (4361 ETB vs 4561 ETB).

The focus group questions about monthly income of men and women also revealed a slight gender difference. Despite this, the study did not reveal any barriers on women accessing markets, but rather showed that women do not easily decide to sell assets because they prefer to maintain them.

In general, the study findings showed a significant increase in household income, indicating that the Berchi project has improved household income diversification skills and capacity. The study further assessed whether households continue the gained results; the qualitative data in this regard shows that households strongly believe that the project has helped them change their attitude on how to improve their livelihoods. In particular, the women recognize that the skills of saving and investing their income directly contributed to the increase of their income and as a result they have no doubt that their livelihoods will continue to improve.

“...what Berchi did is to change our mind. We used to just wait on income generated from only one source either farming or food aid. Then we started to save a small amount of money from the only income source we had. No one was sure this will work, but it did. Through this project, we used our own money to diversify our income...”

Female FGD participant, Ebinet District

b) Equitable decision-making over productive resources

The end line evaluation findings confirmed that the project has improved households' joint (women and men) decision input on income from sale of crops to 44.77% while inputs of decision on sales of livestock and poultry have increased to 53.33%. The result of the post-project sustainability study reveals that households in the two study districts have been transformed where women and men have more equitable input in decision making on key household productive resources. Most households exercise joint decision making with their spouses on most selling and/or buying of productive assets-related matters. As indicated in Table 8 below, out of the total respondents, 88.2% confirmed that their household (321)

³ Income sources are livestock, crop and petty trading

exercises joint decision-making on the selling of large livestock.

When asked who decides on whether to sell large livestock (oxen, cattle), 85% of the women respondents confirm that they make the decision together with their spouse, showing a clear improvement over the figures from the end line evaluation finding which stood at 53.3%.

Table 9: Decision-making over productive resources

Decision on selling of productive assets (Resources? To be consistent)	Male		Female		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Who decides whether to sell large livestock (oxen, cattle) most of the time?						
• Self	2	2	26	11	28	7.7
• Partner/Spouse	4	3	7	3	11	3.0
• Self and partner/spouse jointly	124	95	197	85	321	88.2
• Self and other male household member	1	1	3	1	4	1.1
• Total	131	100	233	100	364	100.0
Who decides whether to sell small livestock (goats, sheep) most of the time?						
• Self	3	3	44	23	47	15.9
• Partner/Spouse	10	10	13	7	23	7.8
• Self and partner/spouse jointly	92	88	127	67	219	74.2
• Self and other female household member	0	0	4	2	4	1.4
• Self and other male household member	0	0	2	1	2	0.7
• Total	105	100	190	100	295	100.0
Who decides whether to sell farm equipment most of the time?						
• Self	8	6	30	13	38	10.2
• Partner/Spouse	45	34	54	23	99	26.6
• Self and partner/spouse jointly	80	60	151	63	231	62.1
• Self and other male household member	0	0	4	2	4	1.1
• Total	133	100	239	100	372	100.0
Who decides whether to sell house and other physical assets most of the time?		0		0		0.0
• Self	4	3	78	24	82	17.2
• Partner/Spouse	10	7	11	3	21	4.4
• Self and partner/spouse jointly	134	91	227	69	361	75.5
• Self and other female household member	0	0	9	3	9	1.9
• Self and other male household member	0	0	4	1	4	0.8
• Partner/Spouse and other female household member	0	0	1	0	1	0.2
Total	148	100	330	100	478	100.0

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

Similarly, the qualitative field data demonstrates that the communities have improved attitudes regarding women's equitable control over productive resources. The SAA community dialogues and regular discussions during VSLA meetings have had remarkable contribution to households and community transformation promoting women's equitable control over productive resources. In our discussions with the men group, the participants have confirmed that the project has brought about behavioral change in them with regard to women's participation in decision of key productive resources:

"...there is change, women no longer have restrictions. For example, here in the market you might not see women selling livestock, however this does not mean that our women have no

control over these assets. Equal control and decision making does not mean that husbands and wives should both appear at the market selling their livestock. Rather they jointly discuss and reach a decision and either of them can perform the activity after the decision has been agreed to. That is how we show respect for our women. It is not denial of their rights but if they want to be at the market to lead the selling, they can do so... ”
A voice of community elders in kebele 36 Simada

The study noted that beyond the changes in attitude and skills at the individual level, the project has improved the attitude of the community influencers and norm setters as shown in the above quote. Their attitude and behavior changes have enabled men and key norm setters to play a supportive role when it comes to women’s equitable control and decisions on productive resources. Their roles have changed from restrictive to supportive, which is a cornerstone for the sustainability of the achieved project results.

c) Women’s agency and solidarity

The data from the household survey indicated women have both agency for and confidence in speaking up in public. Few female respondents 51 (13.9%) reported that they do not feel comfortable speaking in public, while 87 (23.7%) have confirmed that they feel comfortable with little difficulty, and 81 (22.1%) are very comfortable speaking in public (Table 10). Similarly, when asked about their confidence in speaking on gender-related issues in public, less than 15% of female respondents (14.4%) reported that they are not comfortable at all, while 22% (83) feel comfortable doing so, and 89 (14.3%) reported they do so with little difficulty.

In the qualitative discussions, both men and women respondents strongly argued that VSLAs have been instrumental in improving women’s agency. The VSLAs have social and economic benefits for its women members in particular that have directly improved their skills in saving and facilitated their access to credit. The regular meetings and discussions during VSLAs have given women opportunities to rethink their positions in their households and within their wider community.

“...our community clearly now know that the VSLA women have better capacity and confidence to resist anyone denying them their rights ... there are times when women who are not members of a VSLA come and consult with us when they face violation of their right in marriage... this is because they think that VSLA women are conscious of their rights. It is true our VLSA has enabled us to be self-reliant and confident...”
A voice of VSLA women in Ebinet District

Table 10: Women's confidence speaking and participation in public activities.

Do you feel comfortable speaking in public to help decide on infrastructure (like small wells, roads, water supplies) to be built in your community?	Female	
	#	%
• No, not at all comfortable	51	13.9
• Yes, but with a great deal of difficulty	76	20.7
• Yes, but with a little difficulty	87	23.7
• Yes, fairly comfortable	72	19.6
• Yes, very comfortable	81	22.1
Total	367	100.0
Do you feel comfortable speaking in public about gender issues (e.g., women’s rights, access to common resources, etc...)?		
• No, not at all comfortable	53	14.4
• Yes, but with a great deal of difficulty	74	20.2
• Yes, but with a little difficulty	89	24.3

• Yes, fairly comfortable	68	18.5
• Yes, very comfortable	83	22.6
total	367	100.0

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

Female respondents also reported that they were able to participate in decisions related to marriage and family size. Very few female respondents report having no input into these decisions (3% for decisions to limit family size and 0% for decisions on early marriage). A near majority of female respondents (46%) report that they have input into all decision related to limiting family size (46%) or related to early marriage (50%). These proportions are similar to those reported in the end line evaluation, which were that 50.89% of female respondents had decision input on limiting family size and 48.33% had input on early marriage.

Table 11: Decision on family size and early marriage by gender

How much input do you have on the following types of decisions?	Male		Female		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Decision to limit family size						
• No input	1	1	11	3	12	2.3
• Input into some decisions	46	30	101	27	147	27.7
• Input into most decision	40	26	87	23	127	23.9
• Input into all decisions	66	43	175	46	241	45.4
• No opinion or not applicable	1	1	3	1	4	0.8
Total	154	100	377	100	531	100.0
Early marriage						
• No input	21	14	0	0	61	11.5
• Input into some decisions	27	18	83	22	110	20.7
• Input into most opinions	34	22	66	18	100	18.8
• Input into all decisions	72	47	188	50	260	49.0
• No opinion or not applicable	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Total	154	100	377	100	531	100.0

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

Female focus group participants reflected that they have confidence in raising and discussing a variety of topics and have capacity in articulating and presenting their ideas. Their participation in VSLAs, SAAs, and different trainings provided contributing factors for women's improved capacity. However, the women realize that their limited literacy and numeracy skills are barriers to their empowerment and improvement.

“...most women in our community have no education except for leading and managing our VSLAs. So it is difficult for a women who cannot read and write to represent in a position that demands literacy skills...”

Government stakeholders interviewed also see low literacy and numeracy as a barrier to women's representation in different community and government structures. The KII with Simada district women, children, and youth affairs revealed that the VSLA women have strong capacities and as such, government institutions have huge interest in engaging them in different activities and positions but most lack literacy skills.

Having said the above, it has been confirmed from different sources that the results obtained on women's agency have been sustained beyond the life of the Berchi project. The project has enhanced the women's individual capacity to value of themselves and to realize and utilize their potential to challenge barriers to their own empowerment. VSLA participation has created vibrant women that the community consider as role models and the VSLA space has been a great platform to develop and maintain solidarity amongst them, which is key to

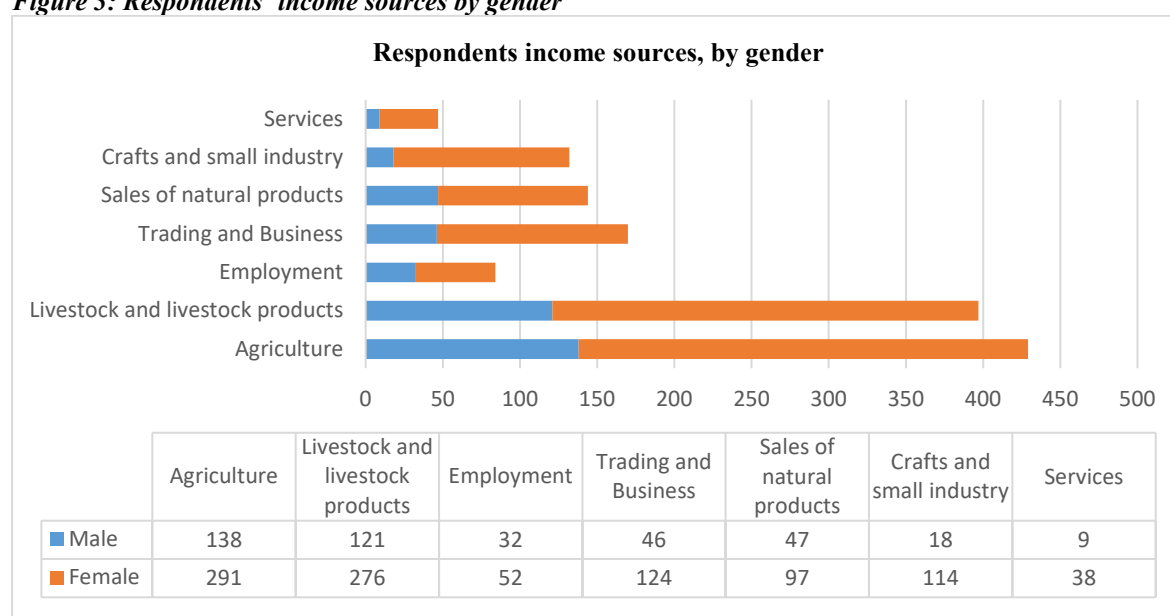
developing their collective voices to combat violation of their rights.

d) Households' food security

To improve households' food security, the Berchi project paid special attention to the different needs, vulnerability, and capacity of the women to gain and sustain a varied means of livelihood. The VSLAs have been the key instrument and pathway for poor women and men, helping them to develop hope, realize their potentials, exercise their knowledge and skills, and move out of poverty using what they already have as a means. The VSLAs' access to finance is the entry point for chronically food insecure women and men to diversify and improve their income.

The study participants noted that the project enabled many households to diversify income sources through engagement in VSLA and business skills improvement. Most households reported income from livestock production (74.76 %) and agriculture (80.8 %). However, a significant minority of households reported income from other sources, including trading and business (27.1 %) and sales of natural products (32%).

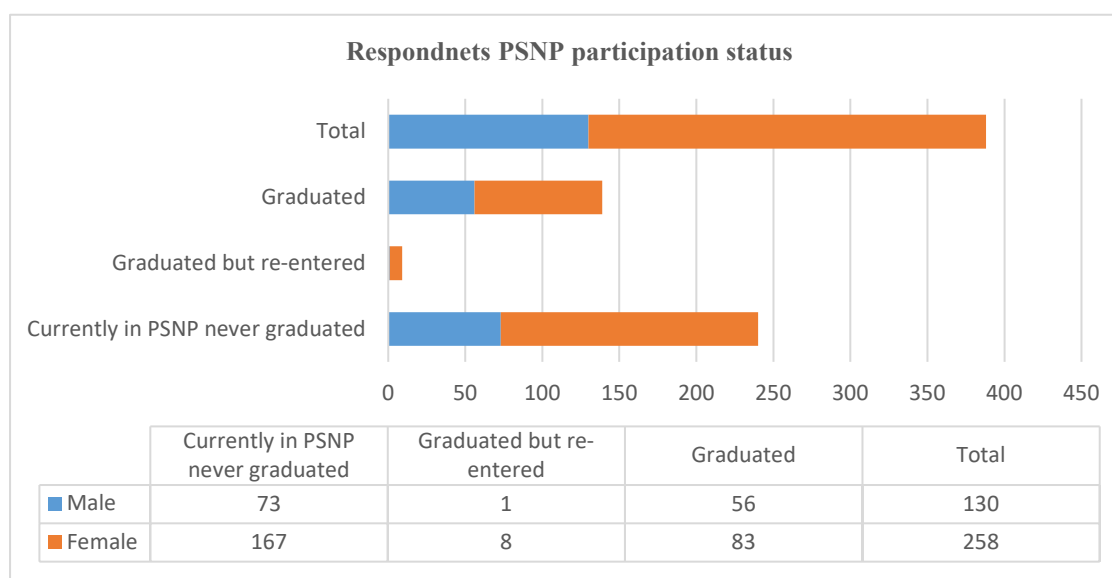
Figure 3: Respondents' income sources by gender



Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

This has enabled them to improve their food security and out of the total respondents, 35.8 % (139) have graduated from the government PSNP program. Among the respondents who have not graduated from the government's PSNP program, 61.9% (240) have joined a VSLAs after the project phased out. However, this study was able to identify that large number (61.8%) of the Berchi project participants are currently still in the PSNP program, and this will require further attention.

Figure 4: Respondents' PSNP participation status



Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

The focus group data reveal that many households are confident that the changes in their food security will not be lost, as they have developed strong business capacity, diversified their income sources, and enhanced their knowledge of business and productivity.

"...my living condition has totally changed. I was a woman who had nothing. I now have managed to buy my own refrigerator and I have developed my own sustainable liquor house (a pub). No one believes that the foundation of all these changes is my membership in a VSLA. The biggest change for me is that I no longer consider myself poor..."

Local woman business owner, Simada district

There is strong recognition amongst focus group participants that VSLAs are powerful means for individuals and households to improve their livelihood and food security by providing savings and loan access to engage in income-generating activities. The government sector offices expressed a similar perspective about VSLAs and their ability to contribute to greater food and livelihood security. Many expressed that they saw VSLAs as a platform for enabling individuals to rethink their perspective on being poor and to enhance knowledge and skills they need in order to diversify their incomes.

"...it does not mean that all those involved in VSLAs become food self-sufficient. VSLAs are powerful in changing the minds and perspectives of the household on poverty. There are no miracles that VSLAs bring but rather they change our perspective on being poor, and realizing what we have and our potentials. I was one of those considered poor, struggling to cover my family's food needs. As a young household I had been migrating to find work, I had no hope to offer for my children. Now we have no worries about food; we have become self-sufficient on that regards. The small loan that I received from my VSLA is just a means rather than the change. It is in our knowledge, skills and beliefs that stay with us ..."

A voice of key informant in Kebele 12, Simada District

The project has brought food security and enabled 35.8 % of its target participants to successfully graduate from the food aid program; the results achieved by the project on food security have been sustained. It is the individuals' improved knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained through the project that has enabled the households to diversify their income which

have been the vital element for the sustainability of obtained results. The government stakeholders strongly believe that the participating communities have improved and sustained the household capacity:

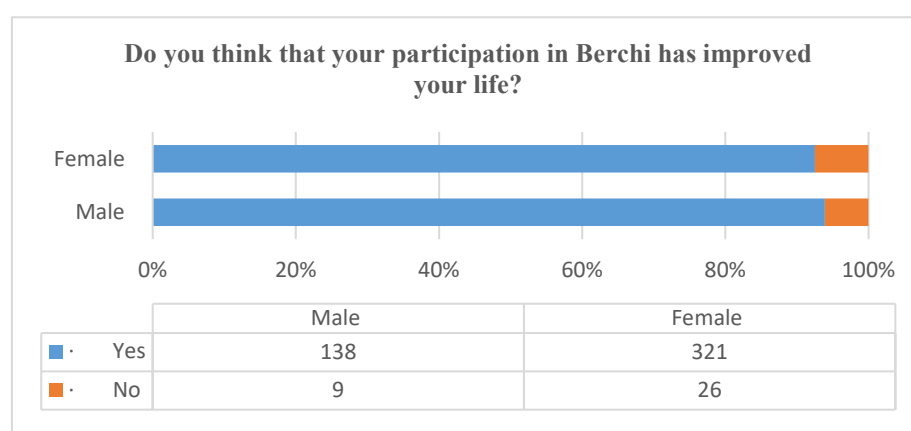
“...the Berchi project contribution is not only graduating out of the government food program. We have seen households not just graduating but continuing to be food self-reliant.”

A voice of key informant in government stakeholders Ebinet District

e) Most Significant Changes (MSC)

Based on all the data gathered, it is evident that Berchi has brought about remarkable changes in the lives of some of the chronically food-insecure households, with 92.9 % of those interviewed reporting that their participation in the project has improved their life as shown *Figure 3* below.

Figure 3: Respondents’ perceptions on whether their participation in Berchi has improved their life



Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

The in-depth discussions conducted with the study participants raised a number of most significant changes at individual, household and community levels. These are identified and discussed below:

Most Significant Changes (MSC) under Expected Result (ER) 1

i) Transformed women’s agency

The Berchi project’s VSLA approach directly contributed to most significant changes for participating communities as identified by participants. The VSLAs have been the pathway by which women have been able to realize their potential and convert their knowledge and skills into income-generating activities and transformed their agency.

“...I am a widow and have been struggling to raise my 4 children by myself. But as the project came to our village, “Berchi” lived up to its name; it made me strong. With support, I became very active and confident that I have been able to change my life in all aspects. The Berchi project helped me realize my hidden potential and make use of it ...

Female VSLA member, Ebinet district

Evidence and stories from other study participants further indicate that women’s economic independence and their contribution to households’ expenses have opened spaces for them to resist violation of their rights. This is strong evidence that women’s increased income goes beyond improving household livelihood; it also gives women power and confidence to

demand their rights. This confirms that Berchi has brought the real empowerment of women:

*“... we had not realized that we, women, have equal rights to men to participate in any activities and even lead community groups. While the project supported us to form our VSLAs with men, most of them thought that we simply had come to join the group because of our interest in the project. **They had never thought that we could contribute.** In most of our first meetings, opportunities were always given to men to speak. I had been raising my hand for permission to speak but no one trusted that I could share and contribute something of value. Even the women in the group kept telling me to put my hand down. One day, I just stood up without waiting for permission and the men told me that I was not given permission to do so. I was offended and said I do not need permission to exercise my right. That day our field agent was with us, I felt supported, so I shared my thoughts.*

*The Berchi project provided us training on women's rights and **raised our consciousness, which enabled me to resist when I felt my right were being denied.** The project enabled the women in our community to develop their capacity to say no and resist violation of their rights.*

A voice of women in dual headed household.

The VSLA approach has therefore been a powerful strategy that has boosted women's agency by providing them the opportunity to generate income and independence to freely exercise their rights, which is a significant change compared to the past when women had suffered when trying to exercise their rights.

ii) Transformed to food self-sufficient household

The Berchi project implemented an intervention to enable chronically food-insecure households to graduate out of the government food aid programme. Additionally, women's empowerment was at the centre of this approach as a key driver of change. As mentioned above, the participating women's economic independence thus increased their capacity to gain and sustain an income source as well as increasing their agency.

The SAAs also impacted social norms that restricted women's participation and control over productive resources. The project created awareness in poor households of the value of engaging their women; with this, they can change their lives and become food self-sufficient. Discussions conducted with both women and men has revealed that the change that the project brought about with regards food security is the most significant one. The VSLA's contribution to poor household's additional income is remarkable. The community's both women and men are of the opinion that the income they have through VSLA small loans have increased their household's asset owning capacity. Most of the households have invested their annual share from their VSLA on small and productive assets like purchase of poultry, small ruminants, petty trading, etc. The women in particular strongly argue that the income from the VSLA is the only source of income that they have sole power over. This income has enabled them to improve their engagement in income-generating activities and reduced their reliance on men.

“...as we are chronically food insecure receiving food aid for long time, we had lost hope. We had never thought that we can move out this food insecurity status. However, Berchi first raised our hopes ... and then helped to become food self-sufficient which we still are now...

A voice of FHH in Jemandeber Kebele, Ebinet District

The project has enabled households to develop their capacity to graduate from the food aid program. Moreover, the households who have graduated from PSNP through the Berchi project have improved their diversified livelihoods and remain self-sufficient:

“...the livelihood of my family was at risk and as result, we had been under Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) receiving food aid. The food aid we had been receiving from PSNP could not even cover our food needs throughout the year. So, I had been migrating to work in oil seed production sector as a casual laborer. The Berchi project came to our village while most of us had begun to lose hope. By the time I heard that the project supported poor households to improve their livelihood, my hope revived. Although most of my community were skeptical, I trusted that the project could improve even though the CARE team had said that the project will not provide cash but help us change our situation by assisting us to organize ourselves in VSLAs and start personal saving and exercise internal lending...”

A voice of VSLA field agent in Kebele 12, Simada

Government stakeholders, in particular the food security and cooperative promotion office, are of the strong opinion that the project’s approach that brought about household food sufficiency is the most significant change considering food security status.

Expected Result (ER) 2: Meaningful representation and participation of women at all levels

The Berchi project recognized that women’s meaningful representation and participation is decisive to enabling households to get out of poverty and becoming self-secure. Under the expected result (ER) 2, the project had worked on building women’s capacity as well as transforming household’s and the wider community’s understanding of gender-power relationships. And in fact, this study has been able to clearly document the changes demonstrated within the end line evaluation report, the project has significantly contributed to increasing women’s representation in different key decision-making positions; these results have been sustained after the life of the project.

a) Increasing women in leadership for representation and participation

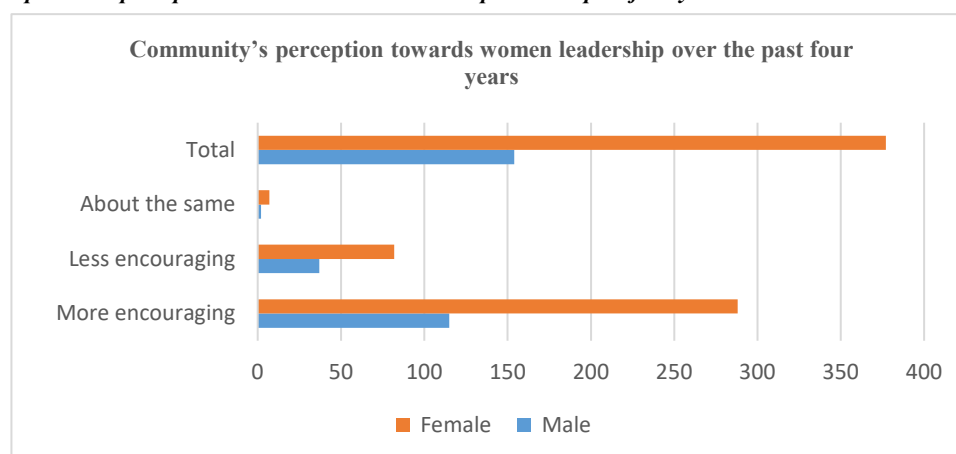
As identified by the Berchi project, women in the study area had limited opportunities to participate and lacked information, opportunities, support to develop their confidence and influence their family and community decisions. As a result, women’s representation in governmental, formal, and non-formal structures were extremely low in both districts. However, the Berchi intervention created the opportunities for women’s participation in different activities through the VSLAs, SAAs, and different forums and trainings. This investment in building women’s agency enabled women to proactively participate and build their capacity to engage.

“...we do not just come and sit in the meeting covering our mouths with our scarves. That was what we used to do. Everyone knows now women do not just sit in silent in meetings but proactively participate and share constrictive ideas...”

A voice of women’s group in Ebinet district

For women to take up leadership and decision-making roles requires a supportive environment. Unless positive norms that empower women and girls are promoted and restrictive norms are deconstructed, the realization of women’s participation and representation in key decision-making structures will not be achieved. The project focused on working restrictive social norms through the SAAs and delivered different trainings that contributed to raising men’s and women’s consciousness on women’s rights. The perception of both women and men on women’s representation in leadership has improved and as indicated in the figure 4 below, a large percentage – 76% (403) – of the total respondents report that the community’s perception on women’s leadership is encouraging.

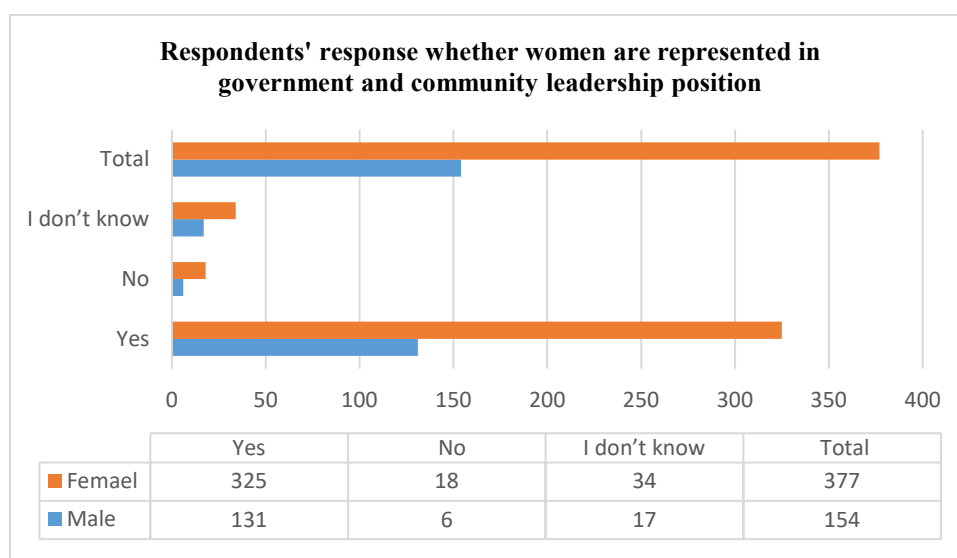
Figure 5: Respondents perception towards women leadership over the past four year s



Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

The project intervention in improving women's capacity and reducing social restrictive norms consequently achieved growing representation of women in community leadership and key decision-making structures. The household survey results indicates that 85.87% of respondents (456) feel that women are represented in government and community decision making structures (Figure-7). Compared with results on women's participation on leadership with the results of end line evaluation which was 71.3% (391), the sustainability study ascertained that the end line results were not only maintained but also increased which is an indication of their sustainability.

Figure 6: Respondents' response on women's representation in government and community leadership positions



Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

b) Most Significant Changes (MSC) under Expected Result (ER) 2

i) VSLAs opened the way for women's representation in leadership roles

The qualitative field data, the household survey findings, and the in-depth discussions conducted with women and men group reveal that the trends for women's representation in key positions has changed in the last 5 years. The main reason as pointed to by the study participants was community awareness and women's improved capacity which has enabled

women to take up leadership positions. The study's qualitative data demonstrates that women's representation in leadership positions has significantly improved since the project's evaluation results. The end line evaluation witnessed that the attitude of men and women had begun to change and as a result they had begun to work together in VSLAs and SAAs. The VSLAs are well recognized social capital for resource poor women, only building upon opportunities for economic and social capacity since Berchi ended.

In both of the study districts, in addition to the economic contributions, VSLAs had made remarkable contributions for households in improved gender relationships. Most of the study participants have strong views that discussions in VSLAs meetings enabled both men and women to improve their attitude and as a result women's confidence increased and men adopted a supportive role. Women's participation in VSLA and SAAs therefore improved their capacity and opened a chance to be nominated in different decision-making structures.

"...I was nominated by my community to lead the government's women, children and youth affairs office in our village. I was not sure that I deserved or was capable of doing the job. I had no confidence and resigned after only one month in the position. As soon as the Berchi project, I joined the VSLA and got the chance to lead the group. I had no worries in the VSLA since it was a small group, we all knew each other, and we had all received capacity building training together. I was effective in leading the group and I started to regret my decision to resign from the government position. After serving in our VSLA for a year, I applied for my old job and got the chance to re-join. I am still serving in that role, but my capacity and confidence now is totally different. In my position, I represent women, children and youth in my community and work to make sure their voices are heard. I have big plans and in fact I have started raising youth unemployment-related issues and influencing local government decisions on supporting youth business ideas..."

A voice of key informant women represented in WCYA through the VSLA, Ebinet district

VSLAs created opportunities for women to improve their skills and demonstrating their capacity and are therefore recognized as the most significant change of the project both by women and government stakeholders.

Expected Result (ER) 3: Transform key institutional and socio-cultural norms, relations and attitudes for gender equality

Cultural practices and social norms are significant in how the community perceive men and women's role in society. Social norms are therefore powerful in shaping a community's perception on gender equality. Thus, challenging attitudes and norms that disempower women and promote gender inequality is critical. The Berchi project recognized from the start the critical role that norm setters could play in bringing about women's empowerment in sociocultural norms, relations, and attitudes of the community.

a) Gender equitable attitude and behaviour at household and community levels

The Berchi project promoted community dialogues on gender transformation through the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach and the VSLAs and enabled different groups of the community, influential leaders, and norm setters to analyze, reflect, and take corrective actions collectively on key community beliefs and norms around religious and sociocultural practices of the community. The project planned and implemented transformative gender activities through its Women Empowerment Framework to shift women's and men's attitudes. The community dialogue approach was powerful in changing attitudes and behaviors of men and women towards gender equality and challenging social norms and practices that are disempowering. The study findings indicate a positive change in the community's perception of norms and their disempowering elements for women and girls.

As shown in *table 12*, the quantitative findings indicate that the proportion of women reporting positive perceptions towards women's leadership has significantly changed compared with the end line evaluation results. For example, the percentage of female respondents who reported "agree" or "strongly agree" on the norms that expect women not to lead or organize community work decreased to 3.95% from 11.4% at the end line. Similarly, significant changes are noted on the perception on women's skills at management decision-making and the percentage of women who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement "Women do not have good skills at managing decision making meetings" decreased to 4.85% from the end line result of 55.24%. On the contrary, a slight increase was noted on the percentage of women who reported "agree" or "strongly agree" on the statement "Women are reluctant to express their ideas in community decision-making meetings" increased from the end line value of 26.92% to 30.2% currently. This is opposite to the qualitative findings which confirmed that women are vibrant and proactive in expressing their ideas in community decision making. The qualitative field data revealed that women have been proactively raising and discussing their ideas in different community meetings.

The post-project sustainability study asked both men and women respondents on their perceptions regarding whether women are good leaders and should be given more opportunities to lead community decision making. 81.9% of women respondents agreed that women are good leaders and should be given opportunities to lead (Table 12).

Table 12: Female perception on women leadership

Response Category	EL1 (n=548)	PS (n= 531)
% of female reporting "agree" or "strongly agree" that women should not organize community work	11.4	3.95
% of female reporting "agree" or "strongly agree" that women have difficulty making hard decisions	15.68	14.55
% of female reporting "agree" or "strongly agree" that women do not know enough about community issues to make good decisions	13.55	3.5
% of female reporting "agree" or "strongly agree" that women are reluctant to express their ideas in community decision-making meetings	26.92	30.2
% of female reporting "agree" or "strongly agree" that women do not have good skills at managing decision-making meetings	55.242	4.85
% of female reporting "agree" or "strongly agree" that women are good leaders and should be given more opportunities to lead community decision making process	-	81.9

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

With regard to male's perceptions on women's leadership, the average results shown in *table 13* indicate that men now have an improved and positive attitude to women's leadership. The average results on norms that discourage women from leadership roles indicate that men disagree with norms that disempower women's leadership. In contrast, the average result on a scale on norms that promote women's leadership (question #6, table 13) shows that men have positive attitude on norms that promote women's leadership.

Table 13: Average results of perception on women's leadership in scale measure

No	How do you rate your perception on women's leadership?	1= I Strongly disagree, 2= I disagree, 3= I agree, 4=I strongly agree, 5=No opinion		
		Gender of the respondent		
		Male	Female	Total
1	Women are generally not very good at supervising, so they should not be responsible for organizing community work.	1.7403	1.8249	1.8004
2	Women have difficulty making strong decisions.	2.0325	1.9496	1.9736
3	Women do not know enough about community issues in order to make good decisions.	1.8571	1.8674	1.8644

4	Women are reluctant to express their ideas in community decision-making meetings.	2.2143	2.2149	2.2147
5	Women do not have good skills at managing decision-making meetings.	2.0974	1.9867	2.0188
6	Women do not have good skills at managing decision-making meetings.	1.8636	1.8462	1.8512
7	Women are good leaders and should be given more opportunities to lead community decision-making processes.	3.2727	3.2706	3.2712

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

The findings demonstrate that the project has brought changes in community perceptions on women's representation in community leadership positions. In particular, norms that discharge women's representation in leadership decreased while norms that encourage women's leadership participation are improving.

b) Enhanced access to quality services for women

Gender-aware institutions and service providers are crucial for gender responsive services that meet the needs and interests of the community, particularly given that men and women have different needs. Guided by the women empowerment framework, the Berchi project had intervened to create awareness about differing needs of the two genders amongst service providers and supporting the development of structures and institutions that can implement a gender responsive approach. This has directly led to an improvement of household access to key services.

The household survey result shows significant improvements in access to services even since the project's final evaluation. This study found that 85.7% of women respondents report that they have no problems accessing reproductive health services (end line results were 70.84%). Similarly, access to micro finance has significantly improved, showing that 82.9% have no problems accessing the services (end line results were 66.24%).

Table 14: Female respondent's access to services compared result with end line evaluation

Response Category	EL1 (n=548)	PS (n=531)
% of female respondents reporting "service available and accessible" from health extension/reproductive health services	70.84	85.7
% of female respondents reporting "service available and accessible" from micro-finance services	66.24	82.9

There are no significant gender differences in access to services in the study districts, and access to micro finance and reproductive health services are equitably accessible for both genders. As indicated in *table 15*, 79% of men respondents (122) confirm that they have no problem accessing micro finance services and likewise 81.0% of men respondents (125) confirm that they have no problem of accessing reproductive health services.

Table 15: Gender differences in accessing services (microfinance and SRH)

How do you describe your access to the following services and public resources	Male		Female		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Access to micro-finance services						
• I have no problem accessing it	122	79	318	84	440	82.9
• I have difficulty accessing it	21	14	31	8	52	9.8
• The service/resource is not available in my area	11	7	26	7	37	7.0
• No opinion	0	0	2	1	2	0.4
• Total	154	100	377	100	531	100.0
Access to reproductive health services						

• I have no problem accessing it	125	81	330	88	455	85.7
• I have difficulty accessing it	24	16	32	8	56	10.5
• The service/resource is not available in my area	4	3	11	3	15	2.8
• No opinion	1	1	4	1	5	0.9
• Total	154	100	377	100	531	100.0

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

C) Gender Based Violence (GBV) and community action

The study showed that the incidence of gender-based violence has decreased which indirectly indicates that Berchi project interventions have had transformative impact at the individual, household and community levels. The SAAs and VSLAs dialogues have improved the awareness of the community on women's right and as indicated in *table 16*. A large number of men and women respondents "agree" that women should ask permission of their husbands to seek health service, attend meetings, etc. The qualitative discussions with women also confirmed the same findings. However, the in-depth discussion conducted both with men and women groups disclosed that these are more consultations rather than strictly asking for permission. The study therefore noted that joint exercise and consultation in all aspects of household issues are the practice of most of the households in the study districts.

Moreover, the qualitative results of the study reveal an improved awareness of the community on women's rights. The men study participants in the two districts reported that men have developed positive attitudes regarding women's rights. This is strong indication that women never need permission to exercise their right:

"...women do not need any permission from their husbands to participate in different activities. There are times where they do not even inform us... and we do not ask them. We know that if they are outside the house, they will be attending meetings organized by the government or NGOs, VSLAs or some social affairs. We even learned that is their right. They might just be expected to inform us.... A voice of men FGDs respondents in Ebinet district

The study result of focus group discussion indicated that the Berchi project through ongoing household and community discussion has contributed to gender equitable attitudes towards women's rights and their capacity to exercise their rights.

Table 16: Respondents perception on women's rights (mean value

Response Category	1= I Strongly disagree, 2= I disagree, 3= I agree , 4=I strongly Agree,		
	Gender of the respondent		
	Male	Female	Total
A wife should seek permission from her husband or other family member to go to seek service from a health care facility/hospital.	2.7	2.6	2.6
A wife should seek permission from her husband or other family members to go to a community meeting.	2.6	2.7	2.7
A wife should have the same opportunity as a husband to undertake an income-generating activity that requires her to leave the house at least sometimes.	3.1	3.1	3.1
When a wife brings home money from her own personal income generating activities, she must hand the money to her husband whether she wants to or not for him to decide how to use it.	2.5	2.5	2.5
When a wife brings home money from her own personal income generating activities, she can add the money to the common household money for both her and her husband to decide how to use it	3.2	3.1	3.1

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

Consequently, the changes on community awareness about women's rights have also improved their actions on preventing GBV. As indicated in *table 17*, the communities have a perception that GBV cases are decreasing significantly. Out of the total respondents, 92.5 % (491) confirmed that the level of GBV towards women has decreased.

Table 17: Respondents response on trends of Gender Based Violence (GBV)

What do you think about the level of GBV towards women in your community?	Male		Female		Total	
	#	%	#	percent%	#	%
Increasing	3	2	7	2	10	1.9
Decreasing	141	92	350	93	491	92.5
The same	10	6	19	5	29	5.5
No opinion	0	0	1	0	1	0.2
Total	154	100	377	100	531	100.0

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

The perception of men on social norms that expect men or husbands to beat women or wives has positively improved. The household survey findings show significant changes when compared with the end line evaluation results. As shown in *table 18*, the percentage of men reporting that they have “never” beaten their wives due to failing to complete household chores has increased from the end line value of 86.62% to 94.2% from this study. Comparably, the percentage of men who reported to “never” expecting their wives to be beaten if going somewhere without permission has increased from the project end line evaluation value of 76.61% to 93.5%. Unlike the end line evaluation, the post-project sustainability study also assessed the perception of men on women's rights of knowing how their household income is spent. In this regards, 96.8% of male respondents agreed that women are “never” beaten because they question how the household money is used or spent (*table 18*). This is strong indication that community expectations and sanctions on deviation from norms are improved and women have a conducive environment to exercise their rights on household income and expenditures.

Table 18: Men's perception on normative role expectations on GBV

Response Category	EL1 (n=548)	PS (n= 531)
% of male respondents reporting "never" on beating wife for failing to complete household chores	86.62	94.2
% of male respondents reporting "never" on beating wife for going somewhere without approval	76.61	93.5
% of male respondents reporting “never” on beating wife if she questions how the household money is used or spent?	-	96.8

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

There are no significant gender differences regarding gender differences in the perception of normative role expectations around GBV. This can be seen from *table 19*. The figures both for male and female respondents showed over 90.0% of them reported “never” for expecting a woman should be beaten for not fulfilling a gendered role.

Slight gender differences noted on the normative role expectation that a women should be beaten if she goes somewhere without the approval of husband. In this regard, 93.5% of males reported “never” while the figure for female respondents is 88.6%. These results again confirmed that women do not need permission of their husband to exercise their mobility right. This is strong indication that the Berchi project has improved social restrictive norms that had been reported in the study area.

Table 19: Gender differences in perception on normative role expectation around GBV

Response Category	Gender of respondent	% Value			
		Always	Sometimes	Never	No opinion
In your opinion, is it acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she fails to complete her household chores?	Male	0.0	5.8	94.2	0.0
	Female	0.0	8.0	92.0	0.0
	Total	0.0	7.3	92.7	0.0
In your opinion, is it acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she goes somewhere without his approval?	Male	0.0	6.5	93.5	0.0
	Female	0.0	11.4	88.6	0.0
	Total	0.0	10.0	90.0	0.0
In your opinion, is it acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she questions how the household money is used or spent?	Male	0.0	3.2	96.8	0.0
	Female	0.0	5.8	93.9	0.3
	Total	0.0	5.1	94.7	0.2

d) Most significant changes (MSC)**i) Norm setters transformed role from restrictive to empowering**

Community influencers, particularly elders and religious leaders, are key norm setters and are references for the rest of their community. Additionally, these norm setters have crucial roles in advising the community on social norms and communal issues arbitration including marriages within their community.

Cognizant of their influential role, the Berchi project actively incorporated community norm setters within its Social Analysis and Action (SAA) activities. The MSC discussant has chosen the changes on norm setters' attitudes and behaviours towards gender equality to be the most significant change of the project on community gender transformation. The study participants strongly argue that the SAAs have brought gender transformation, the norm setters in both districts have demonstrated gender equitable practices, and contributed to positive changes on restrictive social norms:

"...men and women are equal in the eyes of our lord. There are no gender differences to enter heaven and instead our lord labels us according to our work. This is not a new concept that we have learnt now but the SAA discussions have enabled us to realize the fact. Despite this fact, we expected our women to be submissive in their marriages and lives ..."

A voice of community elders and member of an SAA in Kebele 36, Simada district

The SAA is a powerful approach to enable the community to rethink their restrictive social norms with regards to the women and girls' empowerment. Moreover, the discussion enables the community influencers to realize their responsibility and their ability to take collective action. This can be completed through their role as arbitrators in community social issues. The norm setters in the study demonstrated a role change from restrictive to supportive in promoting positive social norms as quoted below:

"... although humans, both men and women, have equal rights according to the bible, women in our community had been treated unfairly. No one in our community ever thought that women should have a voice during marriage arbitration cases. At my age, I have seen many women cry due to unfair treatment when their God-given rights have not been respected. Who are we to deny them their given rights? I thank the Lord, who has enabled me to see these changes during my lifetime. Community elders are now sensitive to both women's and men's issues and rights. They now actively listen to both women and men before deciding. Thus, the number of women crying due to unfair treatment when it comes to equitable property sharing during divorce proceedings have been reduced. Nowadays, a woman who chooses to divorce, she will get equal share of their marital property after her divorce ..."

A voice of community elders in Simada district

The SAA therefore changed norm setters' attitudes and practices and transformed their role from promoting restrictive social norms to promoting supportive social norms for the empowerment of women and girls. This has been recognized as the most significant change by study participants.

2.3 Social Norms

2.3.1 Social norms around women's access to economic and productive resources

Social norms around women's access to economic and productive resources are very detrimental in shaping both men's and women's attitudes and expectations, roles and behaviors. Access to productive resources in the study area had been more gendered with men having dominant access to key productive resources, which was an indication for the existence of restrictive social norms. The differential access to productive resources is a barrier for women's empowerment. It limits their ability to generate their own income and improve their livelihood, consequently challenging their economic independency that boosts their confidence to claim their rights and resist violation of them. This study has shown that restrictive social norms do not remain static but rather change through ongoing community dialogue. This is evidenced in Berchi project where the community positively changed restrictive social norms that discriminate women's equitable access of productive resources to gender transformative norms that are supportive and encouraging of women's equal access at all levels.

The "attitude" of the community regarding women's equitable access to productive resources is positive and highly encouraging. The household survey on Social Norm Analysis (SNA) in this regard has revealed that the communities, both men and women, in the study districts have positive attitudes towards women's equitable access to productive and economic resources. As indicated in table 20 below, the average figure on scale measures that ask respondents' attitudes on whether "women should have equal access to economic/productive resources" is 1.2, confirming that the respondents "agree a lot". In percentage measures, the proportion of respondents who "agree a lot" that women should have equal access to economic/productive resources is 78.3%. With regard to gender differences, out of the total female respondents, those who reported they agree a lot that women should have equal access to productive resources are 75.9% while the figure among the male respondents is 84.4%.

The qualitative conducted made with SNA discussants of both women and men groups on social norms around women's access to productive resources revealed that the majority of women and men in the study districts have strong beliefs that women and men should have equal access to economic and productive resources. The reason that most of the respondents mentioned is that those are the rights of women and they learnt not to violate women's rights. The attitude of the community towards women's equal access to economic resources in both the study districts thus were positive and the community confirmed that it is changing compared to the previous time. Particularly, it is reported that men have developed positive attitudes regarding women's economic access and they are even transformed to positively encouraging and pushing women to ensure their access to economic resources as quoted in the focus group with men in Ebinet district below:

"...we know that our women's access to economic resources benefits the family because they know how to manage it and it is additional income for the household. So we believe that no one denies the importance of women's equal access. Rather, most men in our community are now encouraging and pushing their wives to engage whenever there is any opportunity for economic access like saving and credit groups, meetings, trading, etc..."

A voice of men in Ebinet District

Women's economic contribution to the household is a key factor for improved attitude towards women's economic access. Most of the men in the study have developed positive attitudes and they understood the importance of their wives' additional income to household livelihood improvement which is a key element for sustainability of the obtained changes in attitude.

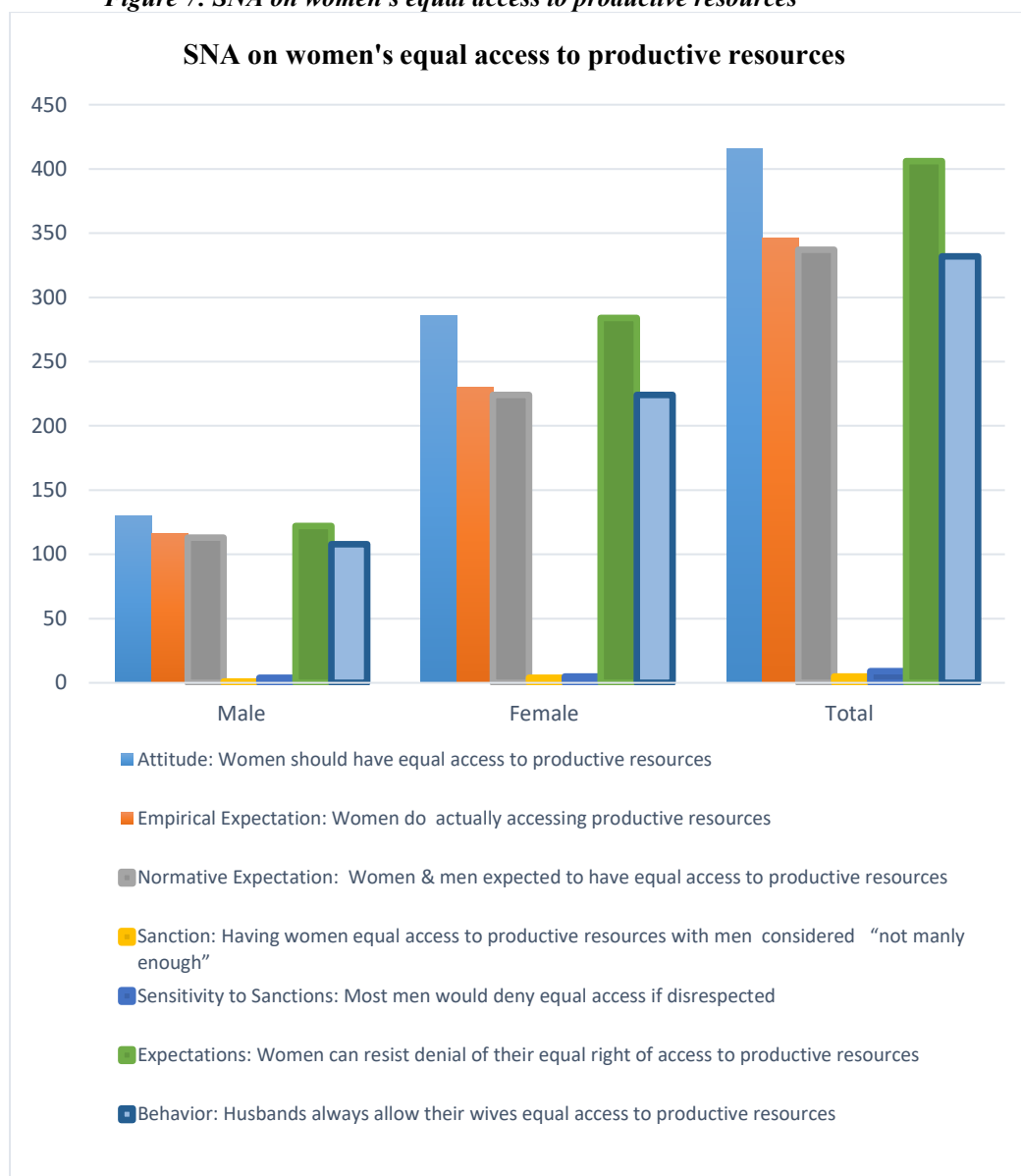
The “*empirical expectation*” of the community revealed that due to changes in attitudes, women are accessing productive resources in their locality as much as men. The quantitative results from household SNA survey on community empirical expectation revealed a “1.4” average result on the scale measure which indicated that most of the respondents (65.2%) “agree a lot” that women in their community do access available economic and productive resources equally with men. The practical expectations of the women and men in the community indicated that barriers that prevent women's equal access to economic and productive resources are improved. A lot of changes are mentioned as compared to before that demonstrate women have now equal access to economic resources that used to be mainly accessed by men only. This was repeatedly mentioned by the community as quoted below:

“...there are lot of changes. For example, in previous times women had no access to large economic activities and big assets. They had no voice on household decisions, buying and selling of livestock, renting out or renting in of their farm land. Now the change is at least the men consult their wives and in any case they do not decide anything without their knowledge...”

A voice of men community elder in Ebinet District

There are also men who have strong feelings that women are even accessing more resources than men in the community due to most organizations addressing women's economic empowerment. The quantitative data collected on women's access to productive recourse under the expected result one of Berchi project has also revealed that women's access to productive resources and services has significantly improved from the end line evaluation, an indication of improvement of social restrictive norms. In this regards, the obtained result on women's access to micro-finance is increased to 82.9% from the end line result of 62.24%, while access to reproductive health service increased to 85.7% from the end line results of 70.84%. This is strong indication of changes on social norm expectations of women's equal access to productive resources.

Figure 7: SNA on women's equal access to productive resources



The “*normative expectation*” of the community for both men and women is encouraging. As indicated in figure 6, the normative expectation of the community showed positive increases. Similarly, as indicated in *table 20*, the average result on the scale measure of community empirical expectation on “women and men should have equal access to economic or productive resources is 1.4, which indicates that 63.5% of the total respondents “*agreed a lot*” that women should have equal access to productive resources while 34.1% reported they “*agree a little*,” which indicated that the community’s positive normative expectation is increasing.

The qualitative discussions made with SNA study participants have also provided evidence that the community has positive normative expectations regarding women’s equal access to economic and productive resources. As compared to four years ago, improvements were made on community expectations regarding women’s equal access to high value economic resources. The voice from women groups also confirmed that the community have now improved positive normative expectations regarding women’s equal access to economic

resources. They further indicated the improvement made is more encouraging, confirming that in some circumstances women's opinions matter more as quoted below:

"...for example, there is a big change as compared to four years ago with regards to women's equal access and benefit from household resources and assets during divorce. Because now the community believe that women's opinion matters more in such circumstances ..."
Voice of study participants in Simad District

Despite the result on empirical expectations of the community revealing that above half of the respondents' confirmed improvements made regarding the communities' attitude on women's equal access to productive resources, there are still community members who have low expectations regarding women's equal access to resources as quoted by a men's FG discussant below:

"...the change is remarkable in our community regarding women's rights. However, there may be some who have still difficulties believing in women's equal access to resources. As our looks are different, our thinking is also different but what matters is there is no one who supports women's right violation...."
Voice of men study participants in Ebinit District

However regardless of the fact that the community is not yet fully transformed to positive normative expectations, the in-depth discussion conducted with SNA discussants indicated that the system is not supportive of those who have not changed their minds. The community as a whole has developed strong confidence that no one tolerates violence, especially not the norm setters and those who are involved in meditation of different violence cases. The project has therefore impacted the community system responsive to gender equitable norms beyond improvement of individuals' attitude, which is strong indication for systemic changes, a key element for the sustainability of changes in community attitudes towards norms that restrict women's access to economic and productive resources.

Table 20: Respondents mean value of social norms on women's access to economic/ productive resources on scale measure

SNAP	Norms	1=Agree a lot. 2=Agree a little, 3=Disagree a little, 4=Disagree a lot , 5= Don't know		
		Average Response by Sex		
		Male=154	Female=377	Total=531
Attitude	I think women/ wives should have equal access to economic/ productive resources with men/ husbands	1.2	1.2	1.2
Empirical Expectation	I think men/ husbands and women/ wives do actually access available economic/ productive resources equally with men/ husbands in my locality	1.2	1.4	1.4
Normative Expectation	Community members expect women/ wives and men/ husbands to have equal access to economic/ productive resources	1.3	1.4	1.4
Sanction	Having equal access to economic/ productive resources with women/ wives is considered as being "not manly enough" by his neighbors and relatives	3.7	3.7	3.7
Sensitivity to sanctions	Most men/ husbands would deny women/ their wives' equal access to economic/ productive resources, if (it causes disrespect) disrespected by the community	3.6	3.6	3.6
Exceptions	Women/ wives can resist denial of their right of access to economic/ productive resources, if they are legally literate/ conscious of their rights	1.3	1.3	1.3

Behavior	Women themselves have equal access to economic/ productive resources like agri inputs, credit, etc. like my husband	1.3	1.4	1.3
Behavior	Husbands always allow their wife equal access to economic/ productive resources like agri inputs, credit, etc.	1.3	1.4	1.4

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

The community “*sanctions*” on the predominant norms on women’s equal access to productive resources and sensitivity from deviation of the norms were also assessed. Changes around social sanctions and sensitivity to sanctions are crucial for sustainability of positive changes on attitude, empirical expectations, and normative expectations because social sanctions are the mechanism for enforcement of social norms. Therefore, sanctions encourage behaviors that are considered to be appropriate while deterring behavior that are not. Sensitivity to sanctions is any reaction from others to the behavior of an individual or group which has the aim of ensuring that a given social norm is obeyed.

In this regard, following the observed changes on attitude and empirical and normative expectations of the community towards women’s equitable access to productive resources, the study focused on community sanctions and sensitivity to the sanctions on these norms. The study therefore analyzed the sanctions focusing on whether the community consider a man is “*not manly enough*” if his wife has equal access to economic or productive resources. In this regard, the quantitative SNA findings on the scale measure indicated “3.6” confirming that 72.9% of the total respondents “disagreed a lot” while 22.4% “disagreed a little”. The result indicated that there is no significant sanction on men or women if wives have equal economic access with husbands.

The qualitative discussion conducted with SNA participants also indicated that women’s equal access to economic resources is perceived as a positive and remarkable contribution to household livelihood. The community has no sanctions and men have developed positive attitudes on this topic. The positive perception on contributions of women to household food security contributed to change in community sanctions of gender equitable access to productive resources as below:

“...there is no need for a man to feel not manly enough due to his wife’s equal access to economic resources even if women access more than men because we have seen households able to secure their food security due to their wives’ engagement in income generating and income contribution to the household...”

A voice of men study participants in Ebinet District

The changes around “*sensitivity to sanctions*” are very crucial for sustainability of the new norms. In this regard, the study critically assessed the community sensitivity to social norms through both quantitative and qualitative SNA tools. An in-depth discussion was conducted with women, men, and community norm setters particularly on the sensitivity of men to community sanctions if they deviate from the role they are expected to perform. Respondents were asked whether men would deny women’s equal access to productive resources if it would cause the community to disrespect them and the qualitative findings revealed that this does not occur. There is strong belief and confidence that men who support women’s equal access to productive resources are not disrespected, as quoted by women groups below:

“...if in case someone disrespects that we do not think that the men in our community considered it as big deal and deny their wives economic access as they used to do. Now there are a lot of changes. They learned a lot and they realized the benefit of their women’s access to economic resources and bringing additional income to the household...”

A voice of SAA group in Kebele 36, Simad District

The results from household SNA survey quantitatively substantiate the qualitative results. The average result of the total respondents on the scale measure on sanctions to social norms is 3.6, which confirms that most of the respondents (66.5%) “*disagree a lot*” on the norms that expect men to deny their wives equal access to productive resources if it causes disrespect by the community, while 23.2% “*disagreed a little*”. The result is an indication of men’s behavioral changes which is a vital factor for the sustainability of these new social norms.

The results of the assessment as confirmed through different data sources is that communities’ restrictive norms on women’s equitable access to economic resources are changing. This is evidenced by women interviewed in both study districts confirming that their access to different productive resources like micro finance credit, agricultural inputs, health services, trainings, etc. are improved. The household survey in this regard has also confirmed that women’s access to micro-finance is significantly increased to 82.9% from the end line result of 62.24%, while access to reproductive health service increased to 85.7% from the end line result of 70.84%. The households have transformed to a norm that encourages women’s participation and equal access to productive resources.

2.3.2 Social norms around women’s control and decision over economic and productive resources

The SNA result indicated the attitudes of the community, both men and women, on gender-equitable control over productive resources have positively changed. The community has the opinion that women and men should have equal control over productive resources. It is the majority’s view that there are no circumstances where it would be acceptable for a woman not to have equal control over productive assets. In particular, the men have reflected that the communities’ attitudes improved, and men developed positive attitudes regarding women’s equal control over productive resources. The awareness of women’s rights were mentioned as the main factor that led to joint decisions from independent decisions on selling and buying of high value assets.

The quantitative SNA survey results also revealed that the attitudes of the community have changed compared to the gender equality contexts four years ago. As indicated in *table 21*, the average result on the scale measure of community attitudes on “*women should have control over productive resources equal with men*” is 1.1, which indicates that 89% of the total respondents “*agreed a lot*” while 10.7% “*agreed a little*”.

The ongoing community dialogue through VSLA and SAA meetings were the major contribution mentioned by most of the community members that brought improved awareness on gender equality and consciousness of women’s rights.

The *empirical expectations* of both women and men reflected that women are fairly exercising equal control over productive resources. In this regard, most households report a joint decision-making process. The men have strong feelings that both wives and husbands discuss key issues, and that final actions may be performed by either of them after this consultation.

“...there is change where women have no restriction to participate on their household resources. For example, here in the market you might not see women selling livestock. However, this does not mean that women have no control over these assets. Equal control and decision does not mean that husband and wife should both appear in market and sell their livestock. Rather they jointly discuss and reach a decision while either of them can perform the activity after the joint decision. That is the respect for women not denial of rights, but if they want to sell by themselves, no discrimination as we used to have...”

A voice of men KII in kebele 36, Simada District

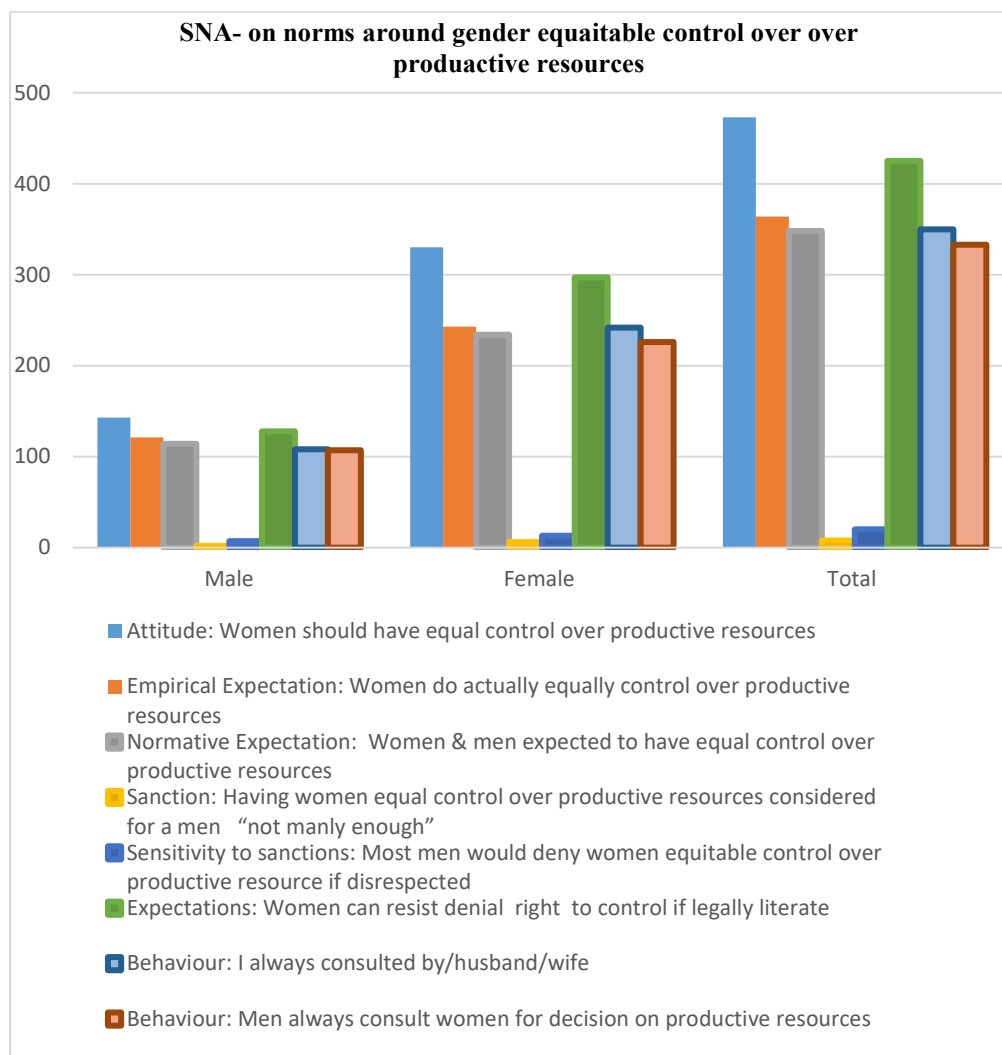
The women group also had strong belief that the women in their community know what to do and where to go if they are denied equal control over productive resources. Similarly, the quantitative finding of the SNA household survey indicated that a large number of respondents have positive empirical expectations of women's equitable control over productive resources. In this regard, the average result for empirical expectations on the scale measure revealed 1.3, which means that 69% of the total respondents reported that they "agree a lot" on the empirical expectation that women are actually leading community groups in their locality while 29.9% confirmed they "agreed a little".

The "normative expectation" on women's and men's equal control over productive resources showed positive change. Changes are observed in key norm setters. For most of Ethiopia including the study districts, fathers- and mothers-in-law are key norm setters in a marriage and they are a prominent reference group for any advice in a marriage. In this regard, the study found that the role of these groups has shifted towards gender equitable perspectives as quoted below:

"...we know a case where the father-in-law of the woman challenged their son for equal rights of property for their daughter-in-law during divorce... this is a big change we have seen in our community. The role of fathers- and mothers-in-law are completely different..."
A voice of community group in Simada District

The study noted that the community, particularly the men and key norm setters, have become sensitive and responsive to women's issues. There is no significant negative attitude in the community towards women's equal access to productive assets despite a few cases mentioned in Simada district where the normative expectation on women's equal right seems low in rural villages. The data from the SNA household survey also confirmed that the normative expectations of the community on women's equal control over productive resources is positive. As can be seen in the *table 21* below, the average results on the scale measures for community normative expectations on gender equitable control over productive resources is 1.4, indicating that 66.0% of the total respondents "agree a lot" that the community expects women and men to have equal control over productive resources while 33.5% confirmed they "agree a little".

Figure 8: SNA- on norms around gender equitable control over productive resources



The “*sanctions*” for deviation from or violation of norms that are disempowering of women equitable control over productive resources is very weak. This is indication of the positive norm changing. The community in both of the study districts confirmed that there are no sanctions either on men or women if women equitably control productive resources. Women’s equal access to resources is not an issue that causes any disrespect in the community as most of men and women understand the importance of women’s equal right in this field.

The discussion with both men and women groups indicated that most of the women in the community are exercising equal control over resources and there are even women who challenged their husbands to stop their sole and independent decision over key resources. Both men and women believe that men have not been considered “not manly enough” by engaging women in household resource decisions. The in-depth discussions conducted with the SNA framework have provided evidence that women have developed strong capacity to challenge inequitable situations:

“...there are lots of women who stopped their husbands in the market from selling their assets and no one disrespected these men because of their wives’ equal control and we believe that the men do not feel not manly due to such actions by women...”

The discussant further emphasized women's actions to stop unfair decisions on productive resources have never been considered as disrespect of men; rather, the community supports women's actions.

The SNA household survey result on community sanctions revealed positive changes as well. In this regard, as indicated in *table 21*, the average result on community sanctions on women controlling productive resources in the scale measure indicated 3.6, which means that 67.6% of the community “disagree a lot” that the community consider the men “not manly enough” just because women have equitable control over productive resources equally with men while 27.0% confirmed they “disagree a little”.

The “*sensitivity to sanctions*” has also changed. Most of the women and men in the study districts have the opinion that men would never accept if someone disrespected them just because of their wives' equal control over productive resources. The study participants confirmed that there are observed changes with regard to community attitudes of disrespecting men who support their wives' equal control over productive resources. The men would never also deny their wives economic rights whether disrespected by the community or not just because of their wives' equal control over resources. In this regard, the quantitative result from the SNA household survey indicated that the average result of the respondents on community sensitivity to sanction is 3.5 in scale measure out of 4. 65.0% of the total respondents reported that they “disagree a lot” that men would deny their wives equal control over productive resource if disrespected by the community while 25.0% reported they “disagree a little”.

Table 21: Respondents mean value of social norms around women's control and decision over productive resources on scale measure

SNAP	Norms around women's control and decision over economic and productive resources	1=Agree a lot. 2=Agree a little, 3=Disagree a little, 4=Disagree a lot, 5= Don't know		
		Average Response by Sex		
		Male=154	Female=377	Total=531
Attitude	I think women/ wives should control over productive assets equally with men/ husbands	1.1	1.1	1.1
Empirical Expectation	I think men/ husbands and women/ wives exercise equal control over productive assets in my locality	1.2	1.4	1.3
Normative Expectation	Community members expect women/ wives and men/ husbands to have equal control over productive assets	1.3	1.4	1.4
Sanction	Having equal control over productive asset with women/ wives is considered as being “not manly enough” by his neighbors and relatives	3.6	3.6	3.6
Sensitivity to sanctions	Most men/ husbands would deny their wives' equal control over productive resources, if disrespected by the community	3.6	3.5	3.5
Exceptions	Women/ wives can resist denial of their right of control over resources, if they are legally literate/ conscious of their rights	1.2	1.3	1.3
Behaviors	I am always consulted by my husband whenever we need to sell or exchange productive assets like animals, agri products, etc.	1.3	1.4	1.4
Behaviors	Men always consult their wife whenever they want to sell or exchange productive assets like animals, agri products, etc.	1.3	1.4	1.4

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

With regard to “*expectations and behaviors*,” the study findings indicated remarkable changes to women’s capacity to challenge violation of their rights of equal control over productive resources. The overall analysis on social norms around gender equitable control over productive resources indicated that women’s participation and control over productive resources in the study area improved. The program has improved the confidence and consciousness of women about their rights. The study team have witnessed that women both in homogenous and mixed group demonstrated improved capacity to voice their opinions through proactive participation, rising and discussing their ideas freely, and challenging men during the discussion. Most of the women are also confident resisting denial of their rights of control over resources due to their participation in VSLAs and SAAs. The SNA household survey also confirmed that the community members have positive perceptions about women being able to resist denial of their rights of control over productive resources. As can be seen from *table 21*, the average result of respondents on the scale measure on expectations that women can resist denial of their right if legally literate is 1.3 out of 4, which indicates that 80.0% of the respondents “*agreed a lot*” that legally literate women can resist violation of their rights while 16.6 % confirmed they “*agree a little*”.

The men also have strong views that women in the community resist denial of their rights after having engaged in VSLAs and SAAs that raised their consciousness regarding their rights. As a result, it is confirmed that a lot of women are actually controlling their household productive resources equitably as quoted below:

“...women have strong say in decisions. For example, last week we decided to sell our ox and I was the one who went to the market. My wife had told me not to sell below ETB 8,000.00. She was calling me through phone and following and checking the market prices.....”

A voice of men from Simada District

The community “*behavioral*” changes are a key element for sustainability of positive norm changes. The SNA household survey asked if “*a women feels that they are always consulted by husbands whenever there is a need for decisions on productive resources.*” In both of the study districts, the women confirmed that they are always consulted by their husbands whenever there is need to decide on key productive resources and husbands do not decide on household resources without the knowledge of women.

The result of SNA household survey also showed positive results as can be seen from *table 21*. The average results of respondents on “men always consult their wives in productive resource decision” is 1.4, indicating that 63.0% of respondents “*agreed a lot*” that men always consult their wife while 36.0% reported they “*agreed a little.*”

Analysis was also conducted on whether women feel they are always consulted by their husbands in key resource decision. The quantitative SNA finding indicated that 64.0% of the total female respondents (n=377) reported that they are. The qualitative discussion conducted with female SNA discussants supported that men have improved and developed culture of discussion and as result most households exercise joint decision-making. This is quoted by women in Simada below:

“...most of the household now discuss on their issues jointly. The behavior of the men is changed. They had never wanted to discuss every issue with women or the rest of the household members. Rather, they used to yell whenever requested for discussion but that culture is now changed...”

A voice of women in Simad District

The women have also strong opinion that if men do not consult their wives, most of the women do not just accept it. Rather, they report the case to women, children, and youth affairs or the community police which enforce men to stop their unfair actions.

i. Social norms around women's agency and representation of leadership

The attitudes of community members have been improved regarding women's capacity to lead community groups. Most of men interviewed believe that women should lead and have confirmed that women have been demonstrating their capacity in practice. The attitude of women regarding women's leadership has also improved. The participation of women in VSLAs is recognized as an entry point for women to develop their leadership capacity and confidence.

Women also believe that the community have improved attitudes regarding their ability to lead community groups as quoted by women in Simada below:

"...nowadays no one thinks that women cannot lead... rather, they develop trust in women assuming that they have qualities and commitments...and we demonstrated this. In our village, women-only VSLAs are still active while mixed-group and men groups dissolved... we are exemplary of women can lead...."

A voice of women in Simada District

The quantitative result from the SNA household survey on attitudes of the community on women's leadership has also revealed support for this view. As can be seen in *table 22* below, the average result of the respondents on "women should lead community groups equal with men" measures 1.2 out of 4, which means that 84.9% of the total respondents "agreed a lot" that women should lead community groups equally with men while 13.7% reported "agreed a little".

There is strong view by most of the study participants that a prominent impact of Berchi project is improved community awareness and attitude towards gender-equitable community leadership. Women's participation in VLSAs and the ongoing community dialogues of SAAs contributed to these positive changes.

The "*empirical expectations*" of women's representation in community leadership indicated that the community has strong opinion that women are represented in different community leadership position. As compared to 5 year ago, women are represented both in formal government structures and informal community-based institutions. The participation of women in VSLAs opened up opportunities for women to participate in activities outside of the home and lead small groups which gave them opportunity to develop confidence and capacity for leadership. The VSLAs have also made women role models whom the community consult in their social problems. Moreover, the ongoing community dialogues through the SAAs were mentioned as key contributing factors for women's representation in leadership because they reduced community restrictive norms on women in leadership. Study participants said that community members expect women's representation in key decision-making positions. The participants confirmed that, in addition to expecting women's representation in leadership, they have claimed space for women as quoted by field agent in Simada below:

"...now if you ask the men why they represented women in the leadership or management position of their VSLA....they would rather ask you why you asked them since it is the right of women to be represented..."

A voice from VSLA field agent in Simada District

There is slight difference in the Ebinet district. The discussion with study participants confirmed that the community does not resist women's participation and representation in

community leadership. However, they do not advocate for women's representation whenever women are left out. The quote from the field agent below shows the community empirical expectations for women's representation in community leadership and weak advocacy for it:

"...if the women got the opportunity to be represented, the community does not resist or deny... this is the change... However, the community doesn't challenge women's less representation in key leadership positions. So it is up to the women to challenge for their representation ..."
A voice for VSLA field agent in Simada

Despite improved community restrictive norms towards women's leadership and women being able to aspire to representation in leadership positions, women have been challenged by low literacy level and in most cases, they are refused representation in leadership that require some level of literacy. The KIIs from government sectors have also raised women's low literacy as a critical factor for women's low participation in leadership positions despite the sector's strong interest in bringing women to leadership.

The "normative expectations" of the community also positively improved. The SNA household survey, as can be seen from *table 22*, showed that the community encourages women's participation in leadership and public activities and the norms that expect women to be at home, considering public activities men's domain, is changing.

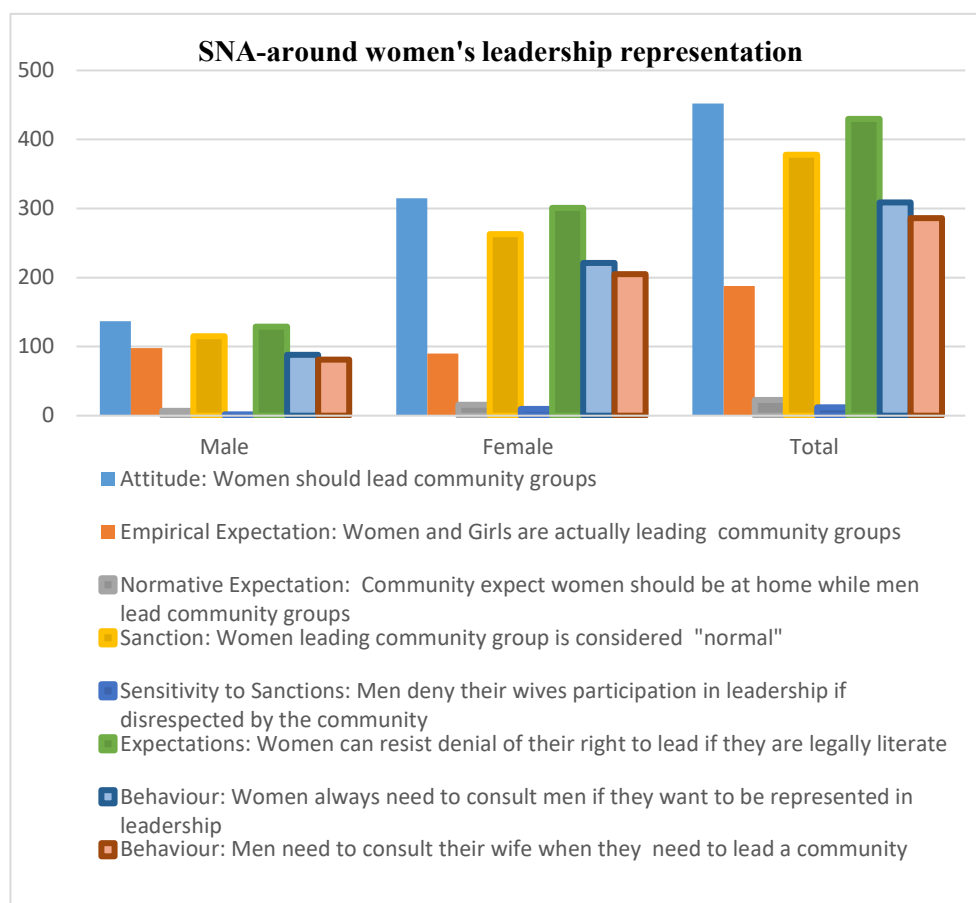
The average result of community expectations that "women should stay at home while men should lead community groups" is 3.6, which indicated that 72.9 % of the respondents "disagree a lot" on the norms that discriminate against women's participation in public activities and expect them to stay at home, while 17.7 % of the respondents confirmed they "disagree a little".

The SNA interviews also confirmed that normative expectations on women that limit their participation in public activity are becoming less widespread. The community participation in VSLAs and SAA ongoing dialogues were recognized as the main factors for the changes in normative expectations. Particularly, the dialogue enabled norm setters to improve their expectations on certain norms which is critical for the sustainability of changing norms. Study participants believe that participation in Berchi program has contributed a lot in particular to improving the in-laws' expectations on their daughters-in-law as quoted below:

"... for a woman spending time in public, particularly for young married women, was not acceptable to the mothers-in-law... they considered their daughter-in-law as if she do not qualify a good wife if she spent time in public. However, this is now changed ..."
A voice of Female only VSLA in Simada

The norm setters' engagement in SAAs has made greater impact in improving the restrictive norms which is the strong foundation for sustainability of observed changes on social norms restrictive to women's leadership participation.

Figure 9: SNA- around women's leadership representation



The “*sanction*” to deviation from the restrictive social norms on women equitable representation in community leadership is not significant. The study participants are confident that in the first place, the community never disrespected anyone just because of his wife’s equal participation in leadership. There is strong view that the community attitude in this regard improved due to their participation in social discussion in the presence of all community members. The men groups have opinion that as most of the community have developed positive attitudes, the men in their community are never in a position to deny women’s participation in leadership whether there is disrespect or not. As indicated in the figure 7 above, the positive reinforcements on women’s leadership are increasing; 71.2% of respondents “agreed a lot” that women leading community groups is “normal” while 26.6% reported they “agree a little.”

The “*sensitivity to sanctions*” on deviation from the social norms that expect and limit women’s participation in community leadership has significantly improved as compared to 4 to 5 years ago. The SNA household survey result in this regard indicated that the average result on “*men would deny their wives’ participation in community leadership, if disrespected by the community*” on the sale measure is 3.5 out of 4, indicating that 66.5% of the total respondents “disagree a lot” while 23.7% reported they “disagree a little.”

The “*expectations*” on women to resist their rights violations are high and there is strong belief about the importance of legal literacy of human rights both for men and women. The men have opinions that knowledge of women’s rights is not only important for women but also for men to enable them respect women’s rights. Similarly, women also have strong

opinions that women's knowledge of their rights, education, and participation in community leadership enable them to resist any violation of their rights. Women's participation in VSLAs and SAAs is an opportunity for women to develop knowledge of their rights as quoted by women group below:

"...our community knows that the women in VSLAs have better capacity to resist denial of their rightsso there are times when women who are not in VSLAs come and consult us when they face violation of their rights in marriage... this is because of they think that VSLA women are conscious of their rights..."
A voice from VSLA women

The result from the SNA household survey on expectations of women to resist their rights violation supported the qualitative results. As can be seen in the *table 22* below, the average result of community expectation on women to resist their rights violation if legally literate is 1.2, indicating 81.0% of the community "agree a lot" that women can resist denial of their right of participation in community leadership, if they are legal literate or conscious of their rights while 16.4 % reported they "agree a little."

The "behavior" changes on social norms are very vital for sustainability. The SNA noted changes around behaviors on gender-equitable leadership. Most of the community members believe that women need to consult their husbands whenever they need to lead community groups, attend meetings, etc. However, no one was of opinion that women need permission for these activities. In this regard, the study team noted that most of the households developed a culture of consultation and discussion that leads to a joint decision on key household issues. The SNA household survey asked if men or husbands always consult their wife whenever they want to be members of community groups. As can be referred from *table 12* below, the average results of respondents on "men always consult their wife whenever they want membership of any community groups" is 1.5, indicating that 53.9% of the respondents "agreed a lot" that men always consult women, 40.9% reported "agree a little," and 3.2% "disagree a little."

Similarly, the survey asked the respondents if they think that women always need to consult their husbands whenever they were nominated to lead community groups. The average quantitative result on scale measure indicated 1.5 which indicates that 58.2% "agreed a lot" and 32.8% "agreed a little," while 7.3% "disagree a little". There is no gender difference; both men and women reported they need to consult each other when joining community groups, which is strong indication that the community is transformed more into joint consultation and discussion on decision of such issues.

Table 22: Respondents mean value of social norms on women's representation in leadership on scale measure

SNAP	Social norms around women's representation in leadership	1=Agree a lot. 2=Agree a little, 3=Disagree a little, 4=Disagree a lot, 5= Don't know, 6=Refuse to answer		
		Average Response by Sex		
		Male=154	Male=154	Male=154
Attitude	I think women/ wives should lead community groups equally with men/ husbands	1.2	1.2	1.2
Normative Expectation	The community expect that women/wives should be at home while men/husbands lead community groups.	3.6	3.6	3.6
Sanction	Having women in community leadership is considered normal and encouraging by community members and her husband	1.3	1.3	1.3

Sensitivity to sanctions	Most men/ husbands would deny their wives' participation in community leadership , if disrespected by the community	3.6	3.5	3.5
Exceptions	Women/ wives can resist denial of their right of participation in community leadership, if they are legally literate/ conscious of their rights	1.2	1.2	1.2
Behaviors	Women always need to consult their husband whenever they decided or nominated to lead community groups.	1.6	1.5	1.5
Behaviors	(Men/Husbands) always consult their wife whenever they want to be membership of community groups, etc.	1.6	1.5	1.5

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

ii. Social norms around gender-based violence (GBV)

The “attitude” of the community towards GBV is changing. Different awareness-raising tactics, particularly the participation of the community in SAAs and VSLA meetings and ongoing training on women’s rights and gender equality improved the attitudes of the community. As voiced by the study participants, GBV is not an acceptable practice in the study districts.

The community participation in SAAs was a contributing factor for more positive attitudes toward the prevention of GBV. The SNA household survey result indicated that GBV is not considered normal and acceptable practices by the communities. As can be inferred from table 23, the average respondents’ result on perceptions on whether GBV is acceptable and normal was 3.6, where 83.4% of the total respondents “disagree a lot” that GBV is acceptable and considered normal in their community. The result is an indication that the attitudes of the community on GBV improved and the practices are not considered and justified as the norm of the community. The result of the in-depth discussion with SNA discussants supports the quantitative result and highlighted the change in attitude regarding attitudes on GBV as quoted below:

“...in previous times, everything that women face is normal and considered our norms and culture that we should respect so no one challenged that perspective. However, this is changed now...”

A voice of women in Simada District

The “empirical expectation” of the community indicated that both women and men have the opinion that women and girls in the study community do not actually suffer from different forms of violence as compared to a previous time. Improvements were made regarding community attitudes towards norms that expose women and girls to several forms of violence. As repeatedly quoted by the study participants, community participation in SAAs and VSLAs has sparked remarkable changes in decreasing GBV cases. The men believe that GBV cases have reduced in their community because households developed a culture of discussion on every aspect that affects their marriage and household as quoted below:

“...there are decreasing trends regarding violence against women. For example, divorce cases are decreasing due to households developing culture of discussion, taking lessons from our SAA participation ...”

A voice of men in Simada District

Similarly, the women believe that GBV incidence has reduced due to improved awareness on it and its consequences. The voice of women study participants as quoted below indicated that men have demonstrated improved behavior on some forms of violence.

“...now we can say that our men do not beat their wives. They totally stopped this practice. Rather, there are some men who insult their wives...”

The discussions conducted with government stakeholders indicated that GBV cases have showed declining trends as compared to four years back. However, new trends were observed since the outbreak of COVID-19, particularly rap cases, though not significant compared to other areas. The study team noted that norms that expose women and girls to several forms of GBV is decreased and GBV has declined, particularly sexual violence.

The result from the SNA household survey is also in support of the qualitative findings and as can be observed in *table 23*. The average result of respondents on the empirical expectation that “women and girls actually suffer from different forms of GBV” is 3.4, of which 63.1% of the respondents “disagree a lot” women and girls are actually facing GBV, 19.0 % “agree a little”, 13.9% “disagree a lot”. The results from both the qualitative and quantitative SNA tools revealed that the empirical expectation of the community indicated that GBV has been decreasing in the community and women are not now suffering from GBV as they did before.

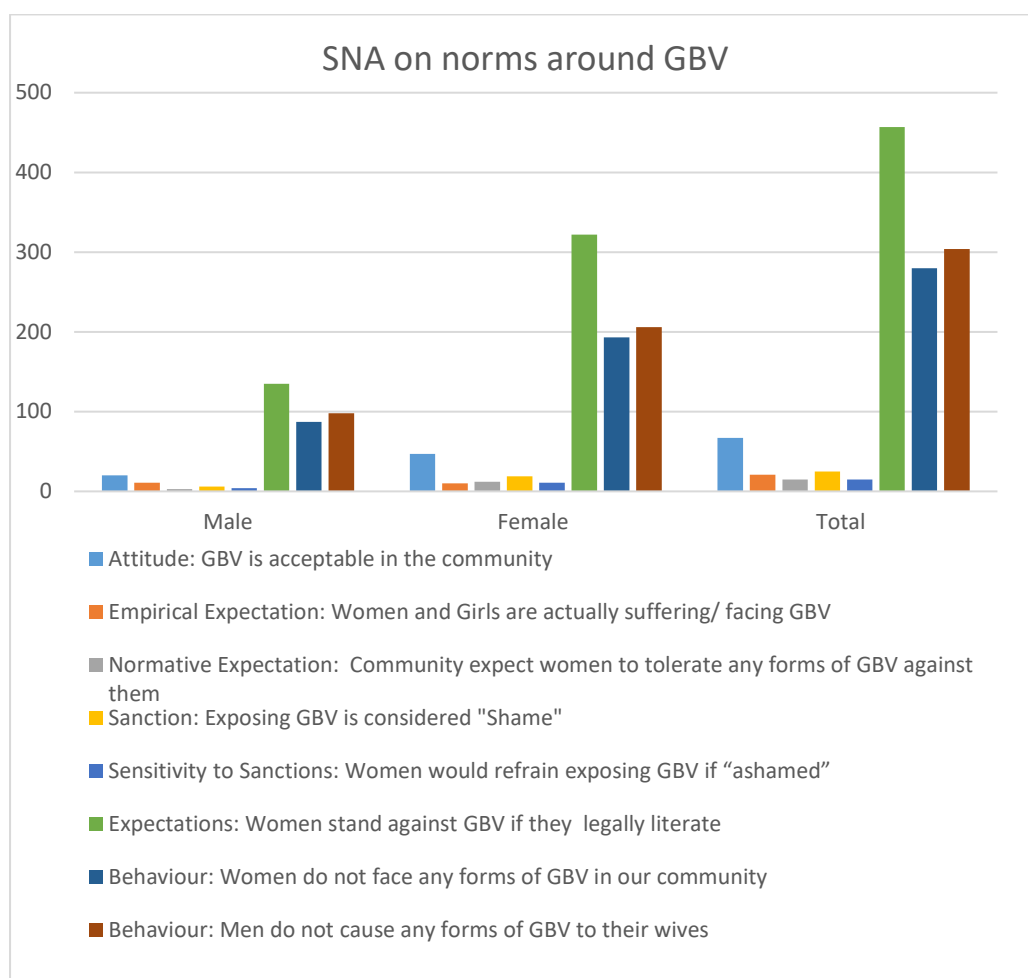
The “*normative expectation*” that expect women and girls to tolerate gender-based violence is decreased. There is strong view from men that women are aware of their rights and have improved economic capacity due to their participation in SAA and VSLAs, as a result they do not accept if the community expects them to tolerate GBV.

The normative expectations of norm setters have also improved. The women who participated in SNA discussions thought that these norm setters were very influential in expecting women and girls to tolerate violence against them in the name of respecting and protecting marriages and relationships. However, the engagement of these groups in SAAs improved their expectations and they became sensitive to women’s rights violations as quoted by women study participants below:

“...in previous times, families, friends, and community elders or religious leaders are the ones who expect women to tolerate GBV, particularly domestic violence, assuming that this protects marriage. However, this is now improved. These groups are now giving ears for women issues so no one accepts to tolerate any forms of violence...”

A voice of women in Ebinet District

Figure 10: Social norm analysis around GBV



The community “*sanction*” that restricts women and girls from exposing GBV cases is significantly decreased as can be seen in figure 8 above. The quantitative SNA results in this regard revealed that of the total respondents, 62.2% reported “*disagree a lot*” that exposing gender-based violence brings “shame” to husbands, 18.5% reported “*agree a little*,” while 15.6% “*disagree a little*” and 4.7% “*agreed a lot*”.

The in-depth discussion conducted with both women and men study participants also confirmed that there are improvements on norms that ashamed GBV survivors and their families just because they exposed their cases. However, many still believe that the GBV survivors’ families feel ashamed despite not feeling community disrespect because of it. With regard to community “*sensitivity to sanctions*”, the participation of the community in SAAs helped the families developed positive attitudes regarding exposing GBV cases that their women and girls might face. The families never shame the girls from exposing or reporting their cases. However, the community still hesitate to report violence against married women, particularly rape, for fear that this will affect the marriage. Therefore, the tendency of married women to refrain from exposing gender-based violence, particularly rape, is high.

In this regard, the quantitative SNA result shown in *table 23* showed that the average result of the respondents on sensitivity to sanctions on the scale measure is 3.6, with 72.1% of the respondents saying they “*disagree a lot*” that women and girls would refrain from exposing GBV if they faced shame by the community and relatives while 12.0% reported “*disagree a little*”.

The community “*expectations*” on women and girls to stand against GBV is encouraging. Women’s education, legal literacy and economic capacity has been valued by the community as critical capacity for women to act against gender-based violence. As can be seen in figure 8, the community’s positive expectations on women’s ability to stand against GBV is rising. The SNA household survey as can be referred to in table 23 also indicated the average results of the respondents on the scale measure on community expectations that women should stand against GBV is 1.2; 86.1 % of the respondents “*agree a lot*” that women and girls can stand against GBV of any forms, if they are legally literate and/or have own economic resources while 12.4% reported “*agree a little*”.

The ongoing capacity building and participation in VSLAs and SAAs are recognized as a contributing factor to raising women’s and men’s consciousness on human rights and gender equality. Women particularly have strong views that their engagement in VSLAs and SAAs enhanced their confidence and ability reject any forms of violence. However, they cannot act on their own. There is strong opinion that law enforcement is crucial to women’s capacity to act against gender-based violence. Despite women’s knowledge of their rights, law enforcement is reportedly weak, particularly on child marriage, hindering further progress.

The “*behaviors*” of GBV have been decreasing and violence is much lower than before. However, there are still some forms of violence that women and girls are facing as quoted by women study participants below:

“...beating is totally reduced. We have never heard of any physical violence on women for a long time. Rather, there are some who insult their wives because the men are aware that no women report insulting as violence as most do for beating ...”

Voice of women in Simada District

The SNA household survey asked if men in the community don’t cause or inflict gender-based violence of any form on their wife and the quantitative result as can be seen in the table 23. The average results of respondents on the scale measure 1.6, with 57.3% of respondents saying they “agree a lot” that men in the community do not commit GBV against their wives while 33.5% reported that they “agree a little”. The qualitative and quantitative findings of the SNA tool showed behavioral change on GBV and as a result its incidence has been declining. However, as compared to the positive results on the other aspects of social norms measures (attitude and normative expectation), the changes around behavior on GBV is not as significant, which is a finding that requires more intervention.

Table 23: Respondents mean value of social norms around gender-based violence on scale measure

SNAP	Norms around Gender Based Violence	1=Agree a lot. 2=Agree a little, 3=Disagree a little, 4=Disagree a lot , 5= Don’t know		
		Average Response by Sex		
		Male=154	Male=154	Male=154
Attitude	I think gender based violence against women and girls is acceptable/ normal	3.6	3.6	3.6
Empirical Expectations	I think women and girls actually suffer from different forms of gender based violence in my locality	3.3	3.4	3.4
Normative Expectations	Community members expect women and girls tolerate gender based violence they face	3.7	3.6	3.6
Sanction	Exposing gender based violence to pertinent authorities by women is considered “shame” by husbands, neighbors and relatives	3.3	3.4	3.3
Sensitive to Sanction	Most women and girls would refrain from exposing gender based violence they face, if ashamed by husband, neighbor, relative and the community	3.6	3.6	3.6

Expectation	Women and girls can stand against gender based violence of any form, if they are legally literate and/ or have own economic resource	1.1	1.2	1.2
Behavior	Women in our community don't face gender based violence of any form by their husbands and the community	1.6	1.7	1.7
Behavior	Men in the community don't cause/ inflict gender based violence of any form on their wife and daughters	1.5	1.6	1.6

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

2.3.5 Sustainability of changes in social norms

Social Norm Analysis (SNA) was conducted on norms around i) women's access to productive resources, ii) women's control over productive resources, iii) women's equitable representation in community leadership, and iv) gender-based violence. The result of the SNA analysis as indicated in the previous section revealed that the community improved attitudes on gender-equitable norms.

Particularly, the normative expectations of the community are very vital in shaping roles that men and women are expected to play. In this regard, the SNA of the study revealed a positive normative expectation that promotes gender equality. The sustainability of the positively changed norms relies on individual, household, and community gender transformation.

Berchi reached these different levels. The in-depth discussions conducted with SNA participants has revealed that the changes that brought on key social norms will not be lost due to the project's multi-level focus:

- **Norm setters became champions of gender-equitable norms**

Community influencers, particularly religious leaders, elders, mothers-in-laws, etc. are key players in setting community norms. They are also the reference group for the community when advice is needed. These groups are key players enforcing community sanctions on social norms; therefore, changing the attitudes and practices of this groups is very vital for sustaining positive social norms.

In this regard, the Berchi project ensured the sustainability of positive social norms by purposefully targeting influential groups at different levels. The SAAs contributed to transforming the gender equality perspective and practices of the norm setters. As a result, the norm setters are transformed to supporting and encouraging women's empowerment and gender equality and weakening the community sanctions on norms that disempower women and girls.

The community is confident that influential leaders are not biased in their arbitration on social issues. Moreover, the norm sectors become champions of gender equality, supporting construction and promotion of positive norms which is the key foundation for the sustainability of these norms.

- **Individual consciousness on gender equality raised**

The gender-related social norms are not only embedded in institutions but also rooted in people's minds. Changes at the individual level is therefore crucial for household and community gender transformation and sustainability of behaviors that promote positive social norms. In this regard, the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of men and women is central to challenge the power difference at the household and community levels. Berchi created a strong foundation enhancing individual-level capacity and agency for sustained changes on gender-equitable norms. The engagement of women and men in VSLAs and SAAs raised the consciousness of both women and men on women's rights and the ongoing discussions enabled individuals to re-think their attitudes and practices on gender

equality. Therefore, individual transformation is further evidence for sustainability of the obtained results.

▪ **Household and community culture of discussion promoted:**

The project has also demonstrated positive changes on communities' culture of discussion on social issues. The community still sustained the culture of discussion on their social issues. The SAAs have had spillover effect and the impact has been seen in households beyond the community, which now have a culture of consultation and family discussion. The new culture developed on household discussion and community dialogue is encouraging; the community will openly discuss any issues rather than considering them "private" matters. This practice is key for sustainability.

In general, the Berchi project, guided by the gender equality framework, is strategically designed to bring results at the individual, household, community, and institutional level. The changes at different levels are a cornerstone for the sustainability of the project and it is likely that results will continue and be sustained in the future.

b. Functionality of actors and structures

2.4.1 Functionality of VSLA

The independence, functionality, and sustainability of the VSLAs established by the project were also assessed. The study confirmed that fewer VSLAs were active than during the time of the study. Most of the active VSLAs had their most recent meeting on the 12th and 29th of November. As indicated in *figure 10* below, 515 respondents from 84 VSLAs were asked if their VSLAs are active. 66.79% of the respondents confirmed that their VSLAs are active and functioning. Among those who reported that their VSLAs are active, 11.1% reported their VSLAs have been transformed into RuSACOs while the rest, 88.9%, confirmed theirs is still functioning as an independent VSLA (*figure 10*).

Transformation to a RuSACO was one of the exit strategies of the project and as a result, most of the VSLAs were given assistance to start the transformation but only 7.4% were transformed. In this regard, the VSLA members were of opinion that VSLAs should continue as it is informal group due to high flexibility for the poor and transparency because of the small membership as quoted by the groups' discussion in Semada:

"... we just joined RuSACO because we had been requested to join during the end of the project though we had no interest to join... in fact it is not bad that we joined as long as we are also saving there...however, we still want our VSLA for its flexibility, small membership, open discussion. We know each other – that is why we are still active..."

A voice of women group in Simada District

The qualitative discussions conducted both with women and men indicated that most of the VSLAs transformed to RuSACOs have not dissolved. This, along with widespread desire from members to keep the VSLA structure, is strong indication for the need to advocate for the VSLAs to be linked with RuSACO as VSLAs but formally recognized as a branch of RuSACOs. It would be highly beneficial for the community to operate this way as RuSACOs provide support and structure but small VSLA groups can maintain the confidence, flexibility, and trust that they find in their VSLA.

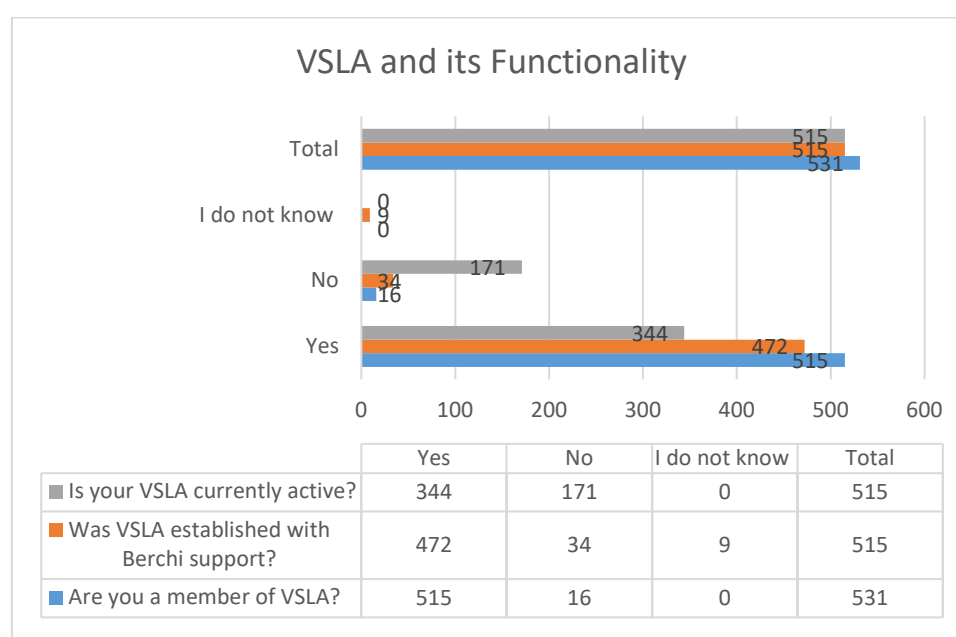
There are also VSLAs who have dissolved; these seem to have closed because their intended purpose was met. Even in these cases, the groups often met after Berchi was ended and closed in between the end of Berchi and this study. The members of dissolved VLSAs are confident expressing that the VSLA met its purpose and was no longer needed, as quoted by the study participants in Simada district:

"...in the VSLA principle, we have the right to continue or dissolve after sharing our annual share out. However, we continued for 6 years as VSLA but agreed to dissolve the group as most of us do not need small savings and loans..."

A voice of community group in kebele 36 Smada district

Voluntary membership and flexibility of VSLAs rules are mentioned the key factors for VSLAs' sustainability. Members believed that small membership enabled them to flexibly amend their rules to meet their needs and transparently manage their money.

Figure 11: VSLA and its functionality in the study district

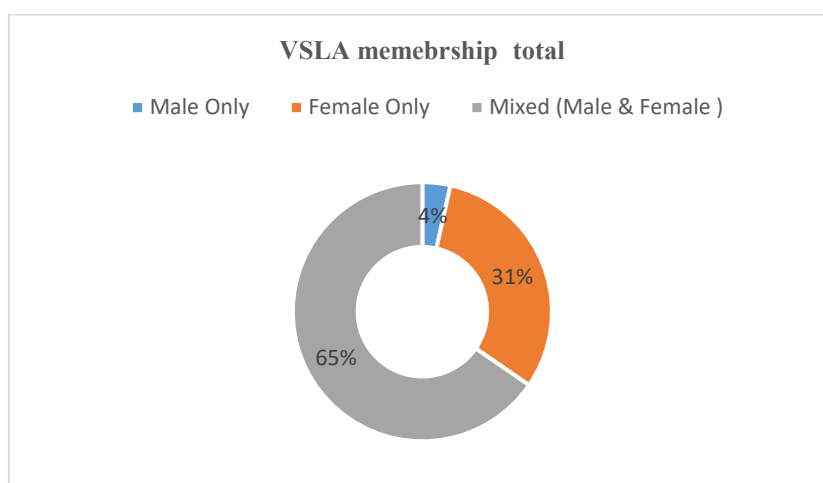


Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

The membership composition of VSLAs is varied, where 65% are mixed sex, 31% are female-only and 4% are male-only (*figure 11*). Membership expansion of VSLAs is one of the indicators of sustainability. The findings of the study indicated that 26.2% of respondents reported VSLA membership increased, 35.5% reported decreased, and 38.4% reported the membership size did not change. The qualitative data from both women and men in focus group discussions revealed that the benefit that members obtained from being member of VSLAs inspired other non-members and as a result most VSLAs were receiving new membership requests and registered new members. This is an indication that VSLAs are more flexible and they revised their membership bylaws to be inclusive of new membership. The study team also noted that VSLAs inspired new VSLAs to be established; neighbors saw the benefit that Berchi project VSLAs brought, including sustained household livelihoods and social capacity for the poor.

Women's representation and participation is significant in VSLAs. The study participants believe that the role and participation of women in VSLAs had given due consideration during the formation of VSLAs. Members were trained on the importance of women's participation and contribution. Women are therefore represented in different leadership structures of VSLAs, both in mixed sex groups and women-only VSLAs.

Figure 12: VSLA membership by sex



Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

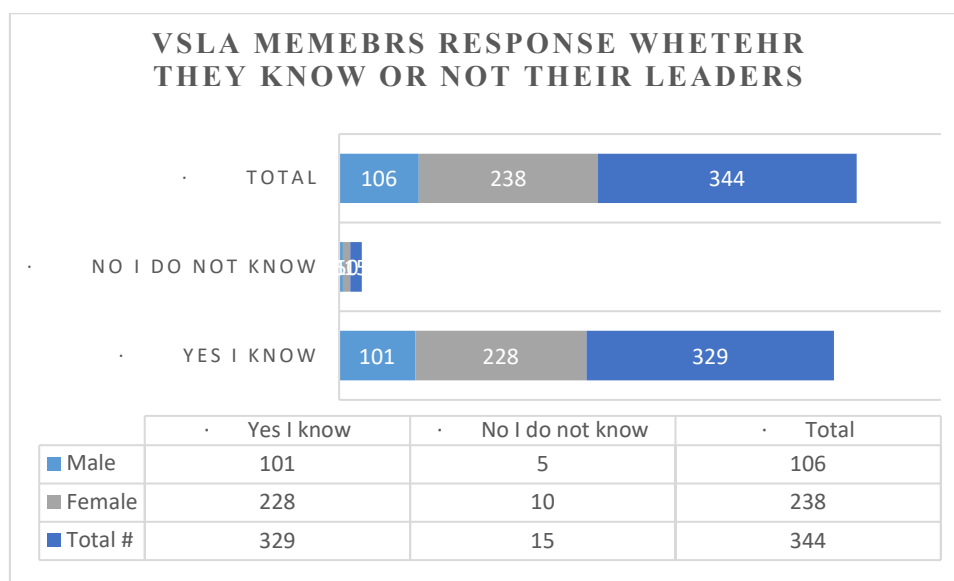
The role of the VSLA leaders is very crucial for functionality and sustainability of VSLAs. In this regard, as indicated in figure 12 below, 95.6% of respondents confirmed that they know who their VSLA leaders are; this is strong indication that the VSLA leaders are active in leading members. The leaders are actively conducting regular VSLAs meetings and 59.9% of the respondents confirmed that their VSLAs meet twice a month, while an additional 33.1% reported meeting once month.

The qualitative data also revealed most of the VSLAs leaders are very active leading their groups and moreover exercised rotational leadership where they nominate new leaders every two years. Rotational leadership has also been used in the women-only VSLAs as quoted in the VSLA discussion below:

“...our VSLA is women-only membership so we all are women in the management position. But every two years we change those in the management so that all will have chance...”
A voice from Kebele 12 VSLA

Transparency of VSLA management and rotational leadership were found to be crucial elements for the functionality and sustainability of VSLAs. Among the 33.2% respondents who confirmed that their VSLAs are not active, 43.9% cited lack of leadership transparency particularly in managing loans, timely reporting saving and loan balances, etc. as the main reason for their VSLA to be dissolved.

Figure 13: Respondent response whether they know their VSLA leaders



Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

The Berchi project has intensively built the capacity of VSLA management and membership. The capacity building and voluntary formation has enabled VSLAs to ensure their independence and kept them active and functioning after end of the project as noted during the post-project sustainability study. However, the study noted that the project plan to transition to the care of stakeholders, particularly transforming to RuSACOs, has not contributed to the sustainability of VSLAs. Rather, the study noted that advocacy for VSLAs to formally recognized as separate sub-structures of RuSACOs would be more beneficial.

2.4.2 Functionality of SAA

The SAAs in the study area have been active until they fully completed their lesson. Some of the SAAs were active until the COVID-19 outbreak. Of the total interviewed households, 20.7% of the respondents were SAA members while a large number of respondents (79.3%) were not.

There are no critical challenges reported on the functionality of SAAs in either of the study districts. As indicated in *table 25*, of the total SAA members, 70.9% of the respondents confirmed that their SAA conducted meetings once a month. Proper capacity building during establishment, membership of different community structures, and segregation of duties of SAA core group, facilitator, members and field agents contributed to the functionality of SAAs. The representation of community influential leaders, particularly religious leaders and community elders, and those who have key roles in setting community norms and mediating social issues had contributed to functionality of SAAs.

The community developed strong interest in participation in SAAs. As indicated in *table 25*, 98.16% of those who reported being a member of an SAA agreed that their participation in was beneficial in improving community awareness on different social issues.

Table 24: Respondents response on functionality of their SAA

	Male	Female	Total
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Are you a member of the social analysis and action (SAA) forum in your village?	#	%	#	%	#	%
• Yes	36	24	74	20	110	20.7
• No	118	80	303	80	421	79.3
Total	154	104	377	100	531	100.0
How often do you hold SAA meetings						
• Once a week	3	8	0	0	3	2.7
• Twice a month	5	3	17	23	22	20.0
• Once a month	23	16	55	74	78	70.9
• Less frequently than once a month	5	3	1	1	6	5.5
• No meeting conducted	0	0	1	1	1	0.9
Total	36	31	74	100	110	100.0
Who facilitated (led) the last the SAA meeting						
• Male	19	58	13	18	32	30.2
• Female	0	0	24	33	24	22.6
• Both	14	42	36	49	50	47.2
Total	33	100	73	100	106	100.0
Are women represented in SAA committees?						
• Yes	30	86	46	67	76	73.1
• No	5	14	23	33	28	26.9
Total	35	100	69	100	104	100.0

Source: Berchi PPS household survey- December 2020

Women have participated in SAA membership and leadership. As indicated in *table 25*, of the total respondents, 47.2% confirmed that their SAA meetings are facilitated by both men and women, 30.2% reported female-only, while 22.6% confirmed the meeting had been facilitated by men only. The qualitative discussion also revealed that women are adequately represented in different levels of SAAs.

Participants also noted that some SAAs were active until they fully completed their agenda with some active SAAs only recently stopping their activity due to COVID-19. The representation of different community structures, facilitation of meetings by local community members, and the agenda of the discussion drawn from community issues are some of the factors the community reported that helped their SAA to be active.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

The Berchi project recognized the importance of gender transformation for household livelihood security and as a result had put women's empowerment at the center of the intervention. This enabled chronically food-insecure women achieve sustainable livelihood security. Women in the Berchi project-targeted area had been struggling to exercise their rights due to power differences in the home and lack of supportive social norms to enhance and utilize their agency. As such, the project challenged households and community power differences on women's and girl's equitable control and decision-making over productive resources.

The sustainability study found that end line results were mostly sustained, and in some case improved, 5 years after the end of Berchi. The project activities had contributed to project beneficiaries becoming food sufficient, with 35.8% of the targeted households successfully graduating from the government's PSNP food aid program, and many reporting diversified sources of income as well.

VSLAs are well institutionalized within their settings and are considered as social capital positively impacting the livelihoods of their members. VSLAs have been a key instrument and pathway for poor women and men, helping them to develop hope, realize their potential, exercise their knowledge and skills, and move out of poverty using what they already have as a means.

The Berchi project has improved women's access and control over productive resources as well. As a result, household income was sustained. The annual average income from different sources significantly increased to 7,248.74 ETB from the end line results which is 4,225.31 ETB. Adjusted for inflation rates until 2019 in Ethiopia as reported by the World Bank, the end line is 7,233 – 7,890 ETB when 2020 inflation is 10-20% (in line with previous years). This suggests that income has kept up with, but not outpaced, high inflation rates (between 6%-16% from 2016-2019). While inflation-adjusted income may be the same, people are still reporting higher quality of life.

The results of Berchi project and its structures have, in general, been sustained. VSLAs have expanded their membership after completion of the project and new VSLAs were established, inspired by the vibrant VSLAs in the community. Most of the VSLAs were active and functioning at the time of study and 66.79% of responses (from 84 VSLAs) confirmed that their VSLAs are active. Those that dissolved cited insufficient support and transparency as reasons for dissolution.

The social norms around women's access and control over productive resources, women's participation in decision making, and norms around gender-based violence are encouraging. The study noted improvements in attitudes, normative expectations, sanctions, and sensitivity to sanctions on related norms compared to the gender equality context of the study area five years ago.

The project investment on individual, household, community and institutional gender transformation provided a strong foundation for the sustainability of social norms under the project's expected outcomes during the end line evaluation.

The study team therefore confirmed that the result from the end line evaluation not only sustained but some continued to improve due to strong changes on individual, community and households attitudes and practices on gender equality.

Recommendations

From the results of the post-project sustainability study, we have identified key elements for sustainability of project results and structures, successes, learning, and best practices from the Berchi project that can be scaled-up in similar interventions. The key recommendations drawn based on the findings and conclusion of the study are:

6. Recommendations on sustaining livelihood change

- Lesson from Berchi project recommended that to bring and sustain livelihood changes integrated intervention approach that brought changes at individual, household and community level is very crucial. Improving knowledge and skills on diversification of economic opportunities, improved household power dynamics and community awareness on gender equality for equitable decision-making are key contributing factors to livelihood changes.
- Women's full autonomy on their income is crucial for equitable household power relationship. Women's economic empowerment interventions need to consider strategies that transform women increased income but also give women power and confidence to demand their rights.
- Addressing women's literacy may be a strong area for future development. Inability to read and write was cited in several instances as hinderances to women's participation in leadership at all levels.

7. Recommendations on sustaining social norm transformation

- The gender equality and women empowerment program need to strategically engage norm setters. Their engagement is crucial in constructing positive and supportive norms while deconstructing negative and restrictive norms, both of which must be done. The Berchi project has demonstrated the engagement of norm setters contributed to the sustainability of changes on restrictive social norms through SAAs.
- Men and in-laws are just as important as women and community leaders in social norms transformation. These groups are often those who impose sanctions on women who try to exercise rights that they learn about, and they must be engaged to ensure that they are willing and able to support women in doing so.
- When physical violence is prevented, other forms of violence/abuse, such as emotional or verbal, should also be included in programming. As found in Berchi, insults and similar non-physical abuse can increase as an alternative to physical violence if not addressed.
- It is possible to adapt program goals and ideals to the local situation. For example, in Berchi communities, women are still "asking" men before they leave the house. However, the fundamental purpose of this discussion has changed, and is not more ceremonial and consultative than asking for permission.
- Providing leadership and facilitation opportunities through forums such as SAAs and VSLAs was crucial to actually changing social norms in Berchi communities. Women were given the chance to learn their skills and show them off in a way that was valued by the communities, and norms setters had the opportunity to view it for themselves. This was improved further with the rotational leadership model, which increased the number of women who were able to learn and grow through participation in these groups.
- Willingness of the women, children, and youth affairs offices and community police to

respond to GBV reports was a critical part in empowering women to speak up. It is important to engagement law enforcement and provide women with a way to gain support and backup if they experience violence, including non-physical violence.

- The SNA framework is useful in understanding how social norms have been changed and what needs remain. This approach should be integrated into programming at the beginning, which can facilitate evaluation by providing benchmarks to assess progress in community change.

8. Recommendations on sustainability of the VSLAs and SAAs

- Intervention with VSLAs should plan to lobby the government to maintain some level of independence for VSLAs, even if they are branches of or associated with RuSACOs. Many participants wanted the flexibility and intimacy of the VSLA structure.
- Ongoing capacity building and proactive engagement of VSLAs and SAAs and ensuring their independence before project phase out is key for their sustainability.
- Support for the leadership and membership of VSLAs and SAAs is extremely helpful for continual operation, as well as clear and simple procedures for expanding on membership.

9. Recommendations on the role of government in sustaining the changes

- There should be strong lobby with the government to integrate strategies and approaches that are tested by the project in the sector development program.
- Systems that ensure government accountability.

10. Recommendation taken from workshop

- It is advisable to link VSLAs with RuSACOs for structure and support, this could be the next step for government office.
- Government sector offices need to follow up with technical advice to VSLA groups, and work with other NGOs working in a similar capacity.
- The support for VSLAs should depend on their interests. Some are not interested in joining RuSACOs, while some find value in joining one. There should be enough flexibility to accommodate different wishes.
- CARE Ethiopia needs to share the key findings to relevant stakeholders, it is good if the findings are also translated into the local language, this is a very good study;
- Why VSLA members are not interested to join RuSACOs needs further study, because the government's plan is to push this practice.

5. Annexes

5.1 Most Significant Changes case story

5.2 Terms of References (ToR)

5.3 Study instruments

5.4 Check List for Ethical Review

5.5 Sustainability framework

5.6 SNAP tool

5.7 list of consulted individuals