

SYSTEMS-LEVEL CHANGE EVALUATION BRIEF SERIES ETHIOPIA



Evaluating System-level change and impact

Findings from the evaluation of the Seizing the Moment project in Ethiopia

Key take aways

- The project was instrumental in leading the first-ever National Gender Policy in Ethiopia, and the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth adopting gender transformative approaches across its activities.
- The project enabled Ministry staff to reflect on how gender norms affect their own attitudes, lives and their work, leading to changes in work practices and significant impacts on their work with communities.
- The project institutionalized gender transformative approaches across the Ministry, creating a Gender Levelling Tool with integrated Gender Responsible Budgeting to support policy and programs.
- The project guided a context analysis and HR assessment which facilitated a more gender inclusive organizational culture and workplace within the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth.

Background

CARE’s ten-year strategy, [Vision 2030](#), seeks to deepen the organizational focus on systems-level change and impact, recognizing that this is essential to expanding CARE’s reach and fulfilling our mission to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice. To support this, CARE launched a systems-level impact initiative to **measure the effect of our programs that have influenced or changed systems, and the impact of this systems-change on people’s lives**. The initiative also increased capacity across the CARE confederation to design, finance and implement high-quality systems change programs, and to strengthen the focus on systems-level change within our Country Office organizational frameworks and strategies. Four CARE Country Offices were selected to evaluate a project or program, and to synthesize the results for national and global learning.

CARE’s pathways for Systems-Level Change

Systems-level change goes beyond the individual-level to achieve positive shifts in the underlying structures and supporting mechanisms which cause interpersonal, community, organizational, institutional, corporate and other systems to operate in particular ways. CARE achieves systems-level change through the cumulative effect of its own and its partners’ programs and actions across multiple systems-level “pathways to scale”, namely: 1) Advocacy to influence policies, programs and budgets of governments and other power holders; 2) Supporting and advancing social and gender norms change; 3) Supporting social movements to take collective action for change; 4) Service system strengthening and citizen social accountability; 5) Inclusive market-based approaches for economic and environmental sustainability; and 6) Scaling and adapting proven models through CARE and our partners, and indirectly with governments, private sector or the social sector. CARE conceptualizes **systems-level impact** as the changes people experience in their lives because of effective systems-level change through these pathways.¹



¹ CARE is focused on systems-level change impacting the lives of people in six different domains (or “impact areas”) – 1) gender equality, 2) right to health, 3) right to food, water, and nutrition, 4) climate justice, 5) women’s economic justice and 6) humanitarian response.

1. Systems-level challenges and the Seizing the Moment project

Problem: The remit of the Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY), to advance the needs of women, children and youth, and hold other line Ministries to account for doing so, was made more explicit in 2018. However, this Ministry had limited organizational capacity to confidently address gendered barriers and limited tools with which to support and hold other ministries accountable on gender issues. The current National Policy on Ethiopian Women does not conceptualize the subordination of women as related to socially constructed gender roles and relations, nor does it consider fully the multi-dimensional forms of inequality that shape women's lives. Despite Ethiopian law stating that all sectors and Ministerial offices should address the affairs of women in their policies, laws, development programs and projects², government does not have capacity to do so.

Solution: Funded by the UK's former Department for International Development (DFID), the project, *Seizing the Moment (STM): Working towards Gender Equality in government structures and policies with a focus on the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY)*, was a pilot project implemented by CARE Ethiopia between the period of July 2019 and June 2020, later extended until October 2020. The project worked with MoWCY to transform its internal organization while also supporting it with the external application of its Ministerial mandate. The project also leveraged on the recent more open legislative space within Ethiopia for civil society organizations (CSOs) and development partners to undertake advocacy and engagement towards the government.

Expected outcomes and impact: The two project outcomes were: (1) Improved organizational capacity and working culture, especially around gendered norms at MoWCY – ensuring Ministry staff are more confident in addressing gendered barriers that constrain their effectiveness; and (2) In line with its new remit, MoWCY has better systems and tools with which to support and hold other Ministries accountable on gender issues. The project also sought to achieve systems-level change through employing a range of CARE's pathways to scale.

2. Evaluation questions and methodology

The evaluation aimed to systematically measure and determine the systems and structural changes achieved by the Seizing the Moment (STM) project. To do so, it explored the following questions. **1) Process:** What did Seizing the Moment do and how were the systems-level pathways integrated across its activities? **2) Systems change:** What changes were achieved by Seizing the Moment through different systems pathways (applying the Vision 2030 pathways to scale framework)? How did systems-level changes across these pathways reinforce or support each other? **3) Population-wide impact:** Did these systems-level changes result in changes in gender equality or other direct impacts on people's lives? **4) Sustainability:** How sustainable was this systems-level effect?³

The evaluation employed the **Outcome Harvesting (OH) methodology** (see box) to answer these questions. Using the OH steps detailed below, the evaluation harvested data outcomes due to the actions of Seizing the Moment, the significance of the outcomes and the contributions of the program to the outcomes.

Outcome harvesting is a qualitative participatory approach in which the harvester facilitates the collection of evidence of what has been achieved, and works backward to determine whether and how the project or program contributed (or not) to those changes

Preparatory work (May 2022): CARE Ethiopia was trained on both CARE's systems-level approach and the OH methodology. As STM was not conceived as a systems-level project, a short write-up was developed mapping project achievements to each of the relevant CARE systems-level pathways.

Step 1. Design the outcome harvest (May 2022): Actors, organizations, institutions and change agents to be interviewed were identified. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with project implementers and Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MOWCY) focal persons to agree on the information to be collected, the potential outcome description and MoWCY and CARE Ethiopia's role in this change. Specific useful questions were developed to

² Article 46 of Ethiopian Proclamation No.691/3A/3

³ Sustainability, in this context, is defined as the extent to which the output/practices of the project are utilized today and whether or not MoWCY has taken ownership of the tools/practices brought forth by the project.

capture observable or measurable changes during data collection to answer the evaluation questions, taking into account the time and resources available. **Step 2. Gathering data and drafting outcome descriptions (June 2022):** Secondary data analysis was undertaken of various project documents, which was complemented by primary data collection, including interviews with project staff and focal persons at MoWCY. The evaluation team wrote preliminary outcome descriptions, with questions for review and clarification. The outcomes described the changes, their significance and CARE's contribution to this change. **Step 3. Engagement with change agents on outcome descriptions (June 2022):** Draft outcome descriptions were shared in a workshop with the STM implementing team and MoWCY staff. Through a participatory process, all participants provided input into the three elements of the outcome description (change, significance, contribution), which were then updated. The evaluation team also conducted interviews with participants following the workshop to clarify outcome descriptions and seek additional information. **Step 4. Substantiation⁴ (June 2022):** The views were sought of individuals knowledgeable about the outcome(s), but independent of the project - the Minister's advisor, UN Women, UNICEF, ActionAid, and CARE WE-GO project staff - in order to substantiate the outcome descriptions. Using a questionnaire, participants rated their level of agreement with the three aspects of the outcome description (change, significance, contribution) and provided additional comments and insights. **Step 5. Analyze and interpret (July 2022):** The evaluators organized outcome descriptions to make sense of them, analysed and interpreted the data, and provided evidence-based answers to the useful harvesting questions. The evaluation team further aligned the findings with the relevant pathways to make them verifiable and show credible contribution of the project to the identified outcomes. **Step 6. Support use of findings (July-August 2022):** The findings were shared with CARE Ethiopia's Program Quality and Learning (PQL) Team, and program management team, for learning and to support further engagement in systems-level work. Results were also shared with MoWCY to inform its work.

3. Evaluation findings

The evaluation found the STM project achieved both system-level change and impact. This section explores these achievements by systems-level change, systems integration, individual-level impact and sustainability.

(i) Systems-level change related to the different pathways

The evaluation identified 6 systems-level changes or outcomes as a result of the project. These are summarized for each of the systems-level pathways below. Under each pathway a key related outcome description example is provided. The complete outcome descriptions can be found in the full Ethiopia evaluation report.



Advocacy to Influence Policies and Programs (2 outcomes identified)

The Seizing the Moment project played a pivotal role in the **groundwork and advocacy for Ethiopia's first ever National Gender Policy**. To inform this advocacy, the project **reviewed the current National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW)**, adopted by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in 1993 to institutionalize women's political, economic, and social rights and provide a foundation for further legal reforms and interventions. This desk review highlighted that while forward looking in its time, the current National Policy on Ethiopian Women remains focused on symptoms rather than root causes of inequality and does not serve the current needs of women in Ethiopia – lacking an analysis of power relations, gender roles, and multi-dimensional intersecting structures of oppression. It also did not address climate change, internally displaced persons and refugees, migration, human trafficking, conflict and violence - all of which have implications for the pursuit of gender equality.

CARE then mobilized funds to **undertake expansive primary data collection**, when it became evident that it was necessary to go beyond the above desk review and more fully capture the impact and the gaps of the NPEW in the lives of women today, in order to support MoWCY in the adoption of a new transformative National Gender Policy. CARE advocated extensively to attain additional donor funds and raised almost US \$500k for data

⁴ Confirmation of the substance of an outcome by an informant knowledgeable about the outcome but independent of the program

collection from 68 woredas and all zones and regions of Ethiopia. This work also included an overall review of the current National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW), including analyses of the policy, an assessment of how the NPEW fits into national, regional, and international policy contexts, a context analysis of the functioning of the MoWCY internally and its relations and coordination with other line ministries, and a nationwide assessment of stakeholders’ perceptions on how women’s lives have changed in the last 25 years. This process generated recommendations and action plan, **providing a starting point for government to move forward with the new National Gender Policy.**

An unintended outcome what that his initiative attracted the attention of many different development partners, stakeholders and Ministries and became a national effort. In partnership with CARE, and with funding from Gates Foundation and Irish Aid, in 2019 the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY), involved stakeholders in **defining the strategic direction of this new Gender Policy and its intentions for programming on gender-transformative change.** A Technical Committee and national Taskforce were setup, with a core group consisting of 14 organizations, including CARE. Policy briefs were prepared on a breadth of thematic areas related to women’s rights. The scope of work and budget for the activity expanded significantly, leading to greater impact than originally envisaged. A further positive, unintended, outcome of the project was the **drafting of a National Policy for the Prevention and Protection against GBV.** The topic of GBV and its coverage in the new gender policy was discussed thoroughly and a recommendation that emerged in the policy review process was that this sensitive and highly relevant issue needed its own policy, leading to the separate drafting of the GBV Policy.

A further major goal for the project was to advocate for the **adoption of a Gender Transformative Approach across all activities** of the MoWCY, including not only in the new National Gender Policy but for a shift across the Ministry’s work from its then ‘women in development’ approach to being clearer about its ambitions for gender transformation across its remit. There was initial resistance towards the concept of gender transformation due to it being misinterpreted as associated with gender identity and sexual orientation. The Ministry acknowledged that it was previously working to address the disadvantages faced by women, without emphasizing gender and social norms as a key barrier to gender equality and to women reaching their potential. Supported by CARE’s systems strengthening (see below), gender transformative approaches and working at the three levels of agency, relations and structures – in line with CARE’s Gender Equality Framework - has become part of their agenda and is included in the Ten Years Perspective Development Plan (2021-2030) of the MoWCY, now the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA).⁵

Outcome Description example: advocacy to influence policies and programs		
Outcome: Since 2021, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs is in the process of drafting a National Gender Policy. This policy will address the gaps in the existing National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW) and ensure it answers to the issues of women today.	Significance: The NPEW has been in effect for nearly three decades (since 1993) and is now outdated and no longer serves the needs of women today. Previous attempts to review the policy did not have political and leadership buy-in, and only ended in forming a women’s strategy or package.	Contribution: CARE Ethiopia extensively reviewed the NPEW, collected primary data (after obtaining funding) and engaged with CSOs, government offices and communities at all levels, which informed and supported advocacy efforts for the decision to draft a new Gender Policy which includes the need to address norms.



Promoting Social Norms Change (1 outcome identified)

The project used CARE’s **Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach** to work intensively with government staff members (including senior leadership) to explore their own attitudes and societal mindsets and traditions that inform their practices towards gender equality. SAA is a gender

⁵ The Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCY) was merged with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) to establish the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA) under the proclamation number 1263/2014.

transformative approach developed by CARE which involves facilitating individual and group reflections and actions to explore and challenge social norms and practices. CARE conducted an SAA Training of Trainers (ToT) with 50 MoWCY staff. These trained facilitators then cascaded the SAA reflection sessions to 150 co-workers. As Ministry staff who work for the rights and opportunities of women, **understanding how gender norms affect their lives and work improves the outcomes of their work as a Ministry.** The discussion notes and post reflection interviews found that, following the sessions, many staff had a greater understanding of how gender and power affects their lives and committed to taking practical steps to challenge harmful norms, including where these norms negatively impacted their own lives (see box). The reflection sessions also helped staff to understand how their own views are gendered and increase their gender sensitivity in their day-to-day activities in the workplace. These sessions supported the integration of SAA in the Ministry’s community discussion manuals (see systems strengthening). Staff reflected that their new TG-informed approaches using these manuals had a tremendous impact on local communities – with negative norms highlighted as something the community recognizes and seeks to change (see box).

“I used to allow things to happen in my life but the training made me reflect on why I allow this to continue.” *MoWCY staff member*

“We used to get resistance; they would feel their values and cultures are being changed but now we are challenging the root causes and allowing conversations that lead to participants believing in the needed change.” *MoWCY Staff member*

Outcome Description example: social norms change		
<p>Outcome: Since July 2019, staff in the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs are more aware of social and gender norms and are taking practical steps to challenge harmful norms after a series of SAA discussions by CARE where ToTs were provided and cascaded.</p>	<p>Significance: Ministry staff who work to advance the rights and opportunities of women are still products of society and adhere to gender and social norms without reflecting on how it affects their work and lives. The project equipped staff with greater self-awareness and created a more equitable and transformative work environment.</p>	<p>Contribution: The project ran a ToT with 50 MoWCY staff using CARE’s key tool for gender transformation, Social Analysis and Action (SAA). The trained facilitators then cascaded SAA reflection session to around 150 of their co-workers. The project supported the integration of SAA tools into the Ministry’s community discussion manuals.</p>



System Strengthening (3 outcomes identified)

The project built the capacity of the MoWCY to institutionalize a gender transformative (GT) approach throughout its work. Separate to the SAA training above (see Social Norms pathway), MoWCY staff were trained on integrating GT approaches, exploring what the Ministry and its projects should do at all stages to be gender transformative. The Ministry was supported to incorporate GT approaches and CARE’s SAA approach into its community discussion manuals - **manuals on social norms and on male engagement** - and expressed confidence that it had the capacity to push forward this work in line with its mandate. As a result, the **Ministry seeks to move beyond individual self-improvement among women and towards transforming the power dynamics, structures and other root causes which seek to reinforce gendered inequalities.** The GT concept is well understood by the Women’s Directorate of MoWCY, which is in the process of moving from a ‘women in development’ approach to a ‘gender transformative’ approach, being clearer about what is meant by these concepts and being more ambitious in its remit. MoWCY staff also commented that the SAA approach has changed the way they give training (see box). An unintended positive outcome is that these manuals no longer only focus on negative norms, but also support, appreciate and encourage positive norms in the

“We used to do mostly PowerPoints and had a teacher to learner approach. Now we learn together and facilitate their conversations. SAA allows the participants to resolve their own problems.” *MoWCY Staff member*

community. Overall, this project **put CARE Ethiopia on the Ministry's map as the one of the key partners for technical advice on gender.**

The project further strengthened the Ministry's ability to design, evaluate, and monitor the implementation of policies, laws, programs, projects and plans that support the participation of women and youth. A Gender Leveling Tool was initially developed by UN Women in 2018 to support this gender mainstreaming and institutionalization, but the tool required reviewing, updating and being put into practice. The STM project **reviewed the Gender Leveling Tool and revised the 16 indicators from a gender transformation perspective.** The review process supported greater understanding on the functionality and practicality of this Tool to foster learning, reflection, and accountability; and ultimately to adapt and improve it for better outcomes on gender equality. The piloting of the reviewed Tool in the Ministry of Agriculture was agreed by MoWCY to test its functionality. This was **complemented by the development of implementation guidelines/directives,** in collaboration with the MoWCY legal services directorate, which gives a new/improved mandate to MoWCY to hold other line Ministry offices accountable for gender transformative outcomes. The directive outlines clear roles and responsibilities, as well as the lines of accountability of key sectors and the mandates of the MoWCY (as the oversight body) in implementing gender mainstreaming. The directive provides guidance not only to the Ministry but also those sectors responsible for gender mainstreaming in terms of points of accountability. Both **the revised Gender Levelling Tool and draft directive were finalized** and Amharic translations provided. The Levelling Tool remains to be utilized by line ministries to yield the intended outcome.

In addition to the above, the project facilitated the integration of **Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)** into the Leveling Tool revision and undertook a specific **GRB study** to input into the policy review informing the National Gender Policy (see policy advocacy). GRB ensures that line Ministries plan and submit gender inclusive budgets and to influence the funding available for this work via the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED). GRB was added as the 17th indicator in the revised Levelling Tool. The GRB study included a thorough literature review and qualitative interviews with staff at the MoWCY and the MoFED. This covered current trends and identified gaps in the national budgetary allocation, expenditure and mainstreaming process and posed a methodological blueprint to draw from best practice case studies to explain how a GRB should be conducted. Informed by the GRB study, an existing **GRB implementation manual** was strengthened, and the project supported the Ministry in facilitating training of this GRB implementation manual by MoFED to other line ministries.

The project undertook a further **context analysis and human resources (HR) assessment** of the MoWCY to explore its organizational performance and capacity to deliver on its mandate and support more gender inclusive governance. This process analyzed the internal culture, staffing, procedures, capacity and legitimacy of the Ministry. The context analysis (building on the one above) revealed inconsistent communication across sectors and units, unclear budget formulation processes, low staff morale, insufficient and non-transparent capacity building training and opportunities for staff, mismatch in technical expertise and roles, few women in technical positions, and an overall apprehension on MoWCY's current capacity to implement its mandate and to lead a transformative process. The analysis of HR policies and practices reviewed the organogram, staffing of women in different positions, analysis of job descriptions and grading, recruitment practices, appraisal processes, and specific policies, exploring the extent to which they were gender transformative and conducive to a positive organizational culture. The review ended with a series of recommendations, including adopting an HR strategy, staff attraction and retention models, a comprehensive communication system across the Ministry, aligning recruitment, promotion and staff transfer with the needs and requirements of the role, and **adopting Human Resources Information System (HRIS) developed by the Civil Service Commission (CSC).** The project was successful in gaining buy-in from the leadership, and many of the recommendations from the HR review were integrated into a new **draft HR strategy,** which was endorsed by MoWCY leadership. CARE provided training to support these recommendations. The HRIS started to be utilized for certain HR functions, such as requesting annual leave or letters of recommendation. While the full-scale adoption of the new HR strategy was planned for this year, it has been put on hold due to plans to restructure the Ministry, and will take place once re-organizing of the directorate and staff is fully implemented and will require a re-assessment.

Outcome Description example: system strengthening		
<p>Outcome: The revised Gender Levelling Tool is actively utilized and used as a key tool to grade other line Ministries on their work, allowing MoWCY/MoWSA to exercise its mandate of holding other line ministries accountable on gender transformative outcomes.</p>	<p>Significance: The absence of accountability mechanisms on gender mainstreaming was the primary bottleneck for the Ministry to discharge its mandate. The project provided an opportunity to review and simplify the tool, which is a key gender accountability mechanism, and add a Gender Responsive Budgeting component.</p>	<p>Contribution: Originally created by UN Women, CARE Ethiopia provided technical input and advocacy to revise the Levelling tool together with the Ministry to include a more gender transformative approach and indicator on Gender Responsive Budgeting</p>

(ii) Systems pathway integration

The evaluation was also concerned with understanding how the integration of systems-level pathways (using more than one pathway concurrently) can reinforce or support each other, strengthening systems-change and impact. The successful focus on embedding a gender transformative approach within the work of the Ministry required all three pathways - advocacy to influence policy and programs, promoting social norms change, and system strengthening - to become mutually reinforcing. Advocacy for policy change required the support of systems strengthening on gender transformative approaches to facilitate a more enabling environment among Ministry staff and leadership. Equally the changes in policy and advocacy for commitments to adopt a gender transformative (GT) approach provided the mandate on which to engage government in systems strengthening, including gaining agreement to integrate GT within the governments Gender Levelling Tool and human resources review/strategy and increasing acceptance for training of staff on this topic. Social norms and systems strengthening were integrated as part of a focus on more gender inclusive policies and culture, reflected in the Levelling Tool (by adding indicators/questions around norms), the government's social norms manual (which included CARE's SAA approach) and the policy review (focused on gender norms and power).

(iii) Impact on people's lives (due to systems change)

The evaluation did not include a detailed focus on individual impact (as a result of systems-level change), as much of MoWCY/MoWSA's work is at the national level with minimal direct contact with individuals. However, the policies and decisions made at the national level do impact the lives of individuals. The assumption can be made that the review of the National Policy on Ethiopian Women and adoption of a new Gender Policy will impact the lives of millions. One more direct way that MoWSA's work reaches individuals is the Social Norms and Male Engagement manuals that are cascaded from national to regional to community levels. The integration of the SAA approach and the transformation of the gender outlook of the individuals working in the Ministry has allowed the SAA approach and focus on social norms to be cascaded to the community through using these manuals.

(iv) Sustainability of system level effects

Many of the effects of STM are still evident and progressing nearly two years after the project, including.

- The policy changes initiated by the project continue to move forward:** MoWSA is pushing for the adoption of the new National Gender Policy soon and made a public announcement on this desire in 2022. The recommendations from CARE's review of the current Women's Policy are being applied, the technical committee is continuing to meet to advise government and to engage a variety of stakeholders, a budget has been secured to develop the new policy, and a consultant appointed to draft it. The commitment has been presented to the Ethiopian Parliament's Standing Committee and is on the schedule to be presented to the Council of Ministers in 2023. In addition, the draft National Policy for the Prevention and Protection against GBV is currently under review. These policy changes will have lasting impacts on gender equality in Ethiopia.
- The Levelling Tool is close to completion:** MoWSA held several consultations to gain additional inputs on the

draft completed by CARE, and has piloted the tool with the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry now plans to disseminate the final tool in the coming months to allow transparency and objectivity while also making sure line ministries are aware of what they are going to be graded against ahead of time.

- **The ongoing focus of social norms within the community-level work of the Ministry continues.** CARE's persistence around the adoption of the SAA methodology into the Ministry's social norms manuals will continue to have a lasting impact on the focus of the Ministry's work and how it seeks to promote gender transformation in communities.
- **The impact on inclusive governance within the Ministry continues to inform its culture and work:** The context analysis and HR assessment is informing the restructuring of the Ministry today, and continues to support a more inclusive and gender equitable culture, processes and procedures.
- **The transfer of knowledge and sharing of resources has been crucial to creating Ministry ownership for sustainability:** The project engaged the Ministry's technical experts in every step, co-developing, reviewing and finalising outputs in collaboration with MoWCY/MoWCY staff. The SAA ToT cascade approach intentionally transferred knowledge so that activities could continue without CARE's direct implementation.

4. Limitations and challenges

The implementation of the project faced a number of challenges. This included some initial friction with UN Women, who supported the creation of the original Gender Levelling Tool, and were not engaged in the subsequent revisions nor felt that their earlier work was sufficiently credited, and understandably felt excluded in the process. Ensuring their engagement and providing sufficient credit for their formative work on the Tool was important to move forward. In addition, several other national and international organizations that were engaging with the Ministry desired to become involved in this initiative. At times, during the review of the NPEW or Levelling tool, some of these organizations expressed feeling excluded from such an important and national initiative. To address this, the project expanded its technical working group. While this allowed for a diversity of input and transparency, it also caused delays and indecision on urgent topics. The project had to ensure that MoWCY took responsibility over and closely monitored all activities in order to meet its donor requirements in terms of time and budget. The pilot nature of the project also posed a limitation on measuring impacts. Due to its short duration, the project was conceived as only delivering outputs, though the evaluation surfaced many outcomes. While many activities have sustained, the pilot was designed with the intention to have a follow-on project to ensure sustainability. While CARE has maintained its presence, it has not secured resources for an ongoing project which has made it difficult to request staff's time to engage in ongoing activities.

A major challenge for the evaluation and sustainability of the impact of certain project activities has been the subsequent government restructuring and change in leadership. The Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY) has had three different Ministers since 2019 and was restructured in 2021 – the third restructuring in the last ten years – to become the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA). For the evaluation, it was challenging harvesting results related to a time when the Ministry was called MoWCY and to engage stakeholders and report these results consistently when this Ministry is now under a different name. In terms of sustainability, this most recent restructuring has affected the progress of the HR strategy, as staff are hesitant to further roll it out until the realignment is complete. The HR assessment is no longer accurate, and will require being redone, as additional staff have been added from the Social Affairs department due to the merger, and is now in a new location with several new leaders. One of the challenges that has also risen with the restructuring of the Ministry to the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs is the inclusion of other vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities. The Levelling tool only grades on gender outcomes, which has now brought criticism as the Ministry serves a variety of groups. Finally, the new Ministry faces challenges holding other ministries accountable after grading them using the Levelling tool, with best practice needing to be developed to support this.

The evaluation also faced challenges with the timeframe and methodology. The timeframe provided for the outcome harvesting was less than one and a half months. The evaluation team made many efforts to meet the

concerned stakeholders, reverting to phone calls and one-to-one office visits when pre-planned meetings were not possible. The methodology of OH also raised expectations that another project was likely forthcoming. While the intention of the workshop was made clear, it still led to participants suggesting upcoming activities and expectation for a full project, particularly since STM was a pilot. The fact that the project had also been completed and did not have related resources, created challenges for CARE staff to dedicate sufficient time to the evaluation.

5. Lessons learned

The evaluation provided several lessons both on systems-level change and impact, as well as on the outcome harvest evaluation methodology for this purpose. The most salient lessons include:

- **Need-based activities work best when partnering with government.** Two of the key project activities that proved to be most impactful - the review of the National Policy on Ethiopian Women and the Levelling Tool - were proposed by the MoWCY during a workshop to design and launch the project. These activities also provided a platform to build a strong relationship between CARE and the Ministry. This demonstrates the benefits of engaging in activities which government considers as priorities, both as fertile ground to maximise project success and to strengthen partnerships to promote gender equality.
- **Building rapport and relationships is critical.** As a newcomer to the Ministry's list of partners, the often intangible focus on building rapport and acceptability brought CARE manifold benefits. Buy-in from, and a close working relationship with, high level officials and decision makers in government was critical to success. The project built on the strong and deep relationships and partnerships that were developed with the different departments and key personnel at the Ministry, ensuring their inputs were included early on, regularly and flexibly in what is often a changing context.
- **Working with governments require unique approaches.** The motivations and dynamics of staff in government offices are very different to those of NGO partners and require understanding and flexibility. Government is constantly balancing varying interests, and may have to shift priorities quickly should Ministers change focus. This leads to a unique working culture and power dynamic, where having specific CARE staff members who become known to the Ministry and are seen as bringing technical value-add is essential for navigating the government offices and to move things forward. This collaboration must ensure activities are completed while upholding CARE's principles and ethics and whilst also meeting donor expectations.
- **Engage all relevant stakeholders from the outset, while balancing their engagement.** It is important to engage all relevant national and international stakeholders from the outset, ensuring key partners do not feel excluded and that credit for any groundwork is sufficiently attributed. This will also support project success and sustainability. At the same time, it is important to strike a balance between ensuring appropriate transparency and open consultation to share learning, build ownership and reduce duplication, with the need for maintaining efficiency and direction and to prevent unnecessary delays in implementation.
- **The political economy analysis (PEA) or context analysis should take place at the onset of any project.** The context analysis and HR assessment undertaken were important not only for building an in-depth understanding of the structural and cultural constraints for accountability around gender equality, but enabled conversations which might not otherwise have taken place. Thus, such analysis should take place at the onset of any project and continually be aware of relationships, power dynamics, and functions that would affect the project activities.
- **The frequent change in leadership and restructuring of government requires a constant presence to remain relevant, exercise influence and support sustainability.** The restructuring of departments and new leadership creates challenges both for effective project implementation and the sustainability of impact. Maintaining an ongoing presence and relationship with government, and running refresher activities for new staff/teams, is therefore key. CARE has faced challenges due not securing funding for its expected follow-on project, which would have supported sustainability, but has been able to continue inputting into, or funding, key pending activities through other projects. However, CARE's influence and presence is starting to dwindle

due to the Ministry's restructuring and change in leadership, and the lack of a dedicated follow-up project.

- **Build in flexible timelines and adaptive management when engaging government.** While CARE's initial project plans were for only six months, the process itself took nearly two years. This was partly due to a surge in government interest and priorities for this work. The expansion of the work and budget, while creating much greater impact, added more activities and workload than originally envisaged.
- **Misunderstanding of focus of gender transformative approaches.** Government initially misunderstood discussions on using the term 'gender transformative' to be solely about gender identity and sexual orientation. Highlighting the importance of GT to be rooted in an analysis of gender and power, particularly between men and women, and addressing the root cause of inequalities, facilitates greater understanding.
- **Importance of SAA facilitators in government being well-vetted and trained.** The nature of Social Analysis and Action (SAA) brings forth sensitive topics that could bring backlash if not kept confidential or facilitated properly. It is therefore important that government ensure SAA facilitators are well trained and appropriately vetted. To facilitate this, the SAA manual indicates characteristics of a good facilitator.
- **Systems-level evaluations can surface outcomes not originally anticipated.** Given the nature of a pilot project, the original impact anticipated by the STM project was only at the output level. The evaluation has facilitated a range of successful outcomes to surface, even two years after the project ended.

6. Recommendations and future directions

1. For CARE Ethiopia

- **Provide platforms to discuss and create clarity and understanding on gender transformative approaches.** Although the project earned the buy-in and agreement on the use of the GT approaches from the Ministry, the Ministry still has challenges explaining and championing this approach to other departments and stakeholders. This partly relates to the misunderstanding of the term gender transformative (see above). CARE Ethiopia, in collaboration with MoWSA, should sensitize and advocate for the full and common understanding of this approach among all actors, such as policy makers, many of who continue to utilize a 'women in development' approach.
- **Improve consultation and communication with development partners and non-state actors.** CARE Ethiopia should ensure to creatively engage all relevant stakeholders in future projects, and ensure sufficient acknowledgement of prior groundwork. This will prevent any feelings of exclusion among stakeholders. CARE should build on the lessons around the need for a balance between ensuring appropriate transparency and open consultation to share learning, build ownership and reduce duplication, with the need for maintaining efficiency and direction and also ensuring the progressive benchmarks were being met.
- **Strengthen the use of the Gender Levelling Tool and its Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) component.** CARE Ethiopia should support MoWSA in its plans to create a Guideline document to support the use and uniformity of the Gender Levelling Tool. It should also support advocacy to other Ministries for the Tool's implementation. CARE Ethiopia should also support the simplification and awareness of the GRB implementation manual.
- **Conduct another context analysis and human resources review for the restructured Ministry of Women and Social Affairs.** Due to the restructuring, there is a need for clarity on the current state of the Ministry and its priorities. The previous context analysis is being used as an input in the restructuring but CARE Ethiopia can provide added value by conducting another context analysis that considers the recent changes.
- **Shift from project-based approach to program-based approach for work with government ministries.** CARE Ethiopia should prioritize continued relationship building to inform its subsequent projects with government.

While CARE has maintained a reduced presence and relationship, there is a need to have constant presence through a program-based approach where CARE Ethiopia can have seconded staff and funds available to influence and support the government Ministries. This is particularly important due to the restructuring and changes in leadership which leads to CARE having to reintroduce itself and build relationships repeatedly.

- ***Apply similar activities to the highly decentralized regional bureaus.*** The STM project activities could further impact individuals at the community level if they were cascaded to the regions. The federalism arrangement of the Ethiopian government gives great autonomy of regions, where national government can often only advise or share resources to the regional bureaus, and the regions make decisions about priorities and allocated funding. CARE Ethiopia should work directly with regions and support the national government to cascade project activities to ensure greater reach.
- ***Secure funding to continue supporting the Ministry with critical areas from this project.*** The implementation of the new Gender Policy, the work of the technical committee and the completion and anticipated rollout of the revised Gender Levelling Tool would benefit from ongoing inputs and support from CARE. CARE Ethiopia should raise additional donor resources to continue and expand this work with the Ministry.
- ***Build on this project to invest and strengthen systems-level work across CARE.*** CARE Ethiopia's program management team should leverage on the results of this evaluation to further expand its systems-level work within its operational and strategic plans. CARE's Program Quality and Learning (PQL) Team should explore ways to expand internal learning and sharing on systems-change and impact using the evaluation.
- ***Explore the impact of CARE's systems-change activities in other programs:*** CARE Ethiopia should apply the learning from this evaluation to evaluate systems change and impact through its other focus areas.

2. For Ethiopia policy makers or stakeholders

- ***Endorse and widely disseminate the Gender Leveling Tool.*** This Tool, and its draft implementation guidelines/directive, requires to be endorsed by the Council of Ministers. This should take place as a matter of priority. MoWCY/MoWSA should widely disseminate the final Gender Leveling Tool to ensure transparency, while also ensuring line Ministries are fully aware ahead of time on what they will be graded against.
- ***Engage regional government to use the Gender Levelling Tool.*** The Gender levelling tool requires further consultation and familiarization at the lower levels within the federal system. This should be taken forward, and can be supported by the proposed Guideline document for the tool.
- ***Hold other Ministries accountable for using Gender Levelling Tool, including Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB).*** MoWCY/MoWSA should go further with legal adoption and accountability among other Ministries to ensure grading using of this Tool and integration of GRB. It should explore the most effective ways to hold other Ministries accountable, including collaborating with the Ministry of Finance on possible sanctions for non-compliant Ministries, such as holding off on their budget approval until GRB is integrated.
- ***Explore use of the outcome harvest methodology.*** Building on its interest in this approach, MoWSA should explore use the outcome harvest methodology to evaluate other areas of its work.

3. For CARE Global

- ***Strengthening knowledge and skills on doing systems-change work:*** Staff at CARE and its partner organizations should be made more aware of systems change tactics and their importance and how to operationalize them, in order to adapt and adjust their strategies to expand a focus on this work.
- ***More deliberate focus on systems-change during design, monitoring and evaluation (M&E):*** As the STM project did not set out to deliberately do systems-change, and has done so more organically, a more

deliberate integration of these strategies within project design, M&E and the articulation of the intended impact should be encouraged across the CARE confederation. This will deepen the impact of CARE's work.

- **Expand the approaches CARE Ethiopia used for successful gender transformative systems change through government to other locations:** Support learning from, and use of CARE Ethiopia's successful approaches to embed a GT approach within government – particularly using the SAA with Ministry staff and the Gender Levelling Tool - across other CARE offices and contexts.
- **Expand social norms pathway to include social norms change with government personnel.** The social norms change pathway often focuses primarily on changing norms among communities. The STM project highlighted the significant benefits of applying this approach with government staff and actors, and the power of shifting personal attitudes and practices among these decisions-makers and duty bearers.
- **Expand systems strengthening beyond service strengthening.** The STM project highlighted the impact of systems strengthening activities focused on capacitating and empowering government – through training, technical advice, tools, and assessments - to support them to be more focused on women's rights and gender transformation both internally and externally. This broader focus of the systems strengthening pathway beyond only service strengthening should be explored within CARE's wider work.
- **Support analysis of systems-level change and impact across other CO projects:** CARE should support further evaluations of systems-level change across its portfolio, deepening an understanding on the systems change that the organization has achieved.

4. For research and evaluation practitioners

- **Provide sufficient capacity building on the OH methodology:** Meaningful OH requires the identification of good quality outcomes. It is important to ensure the OH process is well understood by all program implementers and that the need to provide strong evidence is emphasized. There is a need to provide intensive capacity building including training, mentoring and regular review of harvested outcomes.
- **Ensure clarity on how programs included systems-level activities before undertaking the evaluation:** Some programs have their own original goals which may not be specific to how CARE describes the systems-level approaches. It is important to spend time exploring how these goals, and related activities, relate to the systems-level pathways before the evaluation (where this was not originally its focus).
- **Build CO capacity on systems change before selecting the evaluation:** It is important to support understanding on what systems change is and the different pathways before organizations select programs and projects for evaluation, ensuring organizational-wide understanding on the purpose and utility.
- **Consider the time needed to complete an outcome harvest:** Outcome harvesting can be a lengthy process, and requires sufficient time to undertake data collection (where appropriate) and to process and analyze the results. This should be considered as part of planning timelines for future evaluations.
- **Support the MoWSA to use the Outcome Harvesting approach:** Given the Ministry's expressed interest in the OH approach, they would benefit from support and training on how to roll out this methodology.

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The full Ethiopia Outcome Harvesting Evaluation report is available for further information [here](#).