



Evaluating Systems-Level Change and Impact in CARE's Programming in Ecuador, Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda

Global Report

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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 the organization's mission to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice (see further below). To support this, CARE launched a systems-level impact initiative to measure the effect of its programs that have influenced or changed systems, and the impact of this systems-change on people's lives. The initiative also aimed to increase 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 CARE Country Office organizational frameworks and strategies.

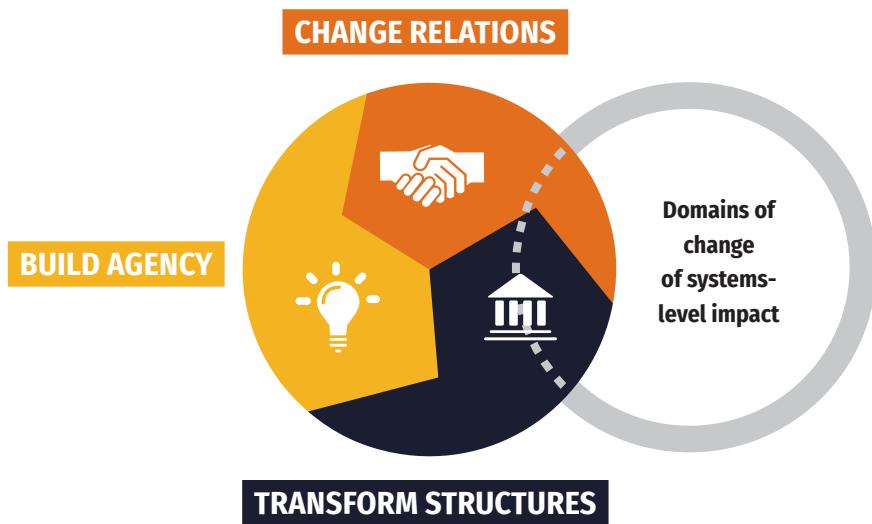
Four CARE Offices – Ecuador, Ethiopia, Nepal, and Uganda – evaluated a project or program and synthesized the results for their own learning and to share globally to strengthen CARE's broader systems change actions. Their work was

evaluated using CARE's systems-level framework and its six pathways to scale, as outlined in [Vision 2030](#) and the organization's [Impact at Scale Guidance](#). This work was situated under CARE USA's FY2022-FY2025 strategic plan focus on globally scaled, and equally sought to make direct connections to both [gender equal and locally-led](#) as the other two critical "impact drivers" for the organization.

This work represents the first known time CARE has undertaken a deep-dive evaluation into its systems-level approaches. This was an iterative and collective learning journey, where engagement with the CARE offices and the broader confederation continually shaped the focus and lessons being learned around how to implement and improve CARE's systems-change approaches and best understand their outcomes and impact.

What is systems-level change and impact?

Figure 1: CARE's Theory of Change and systems-level impact



CARE conceptualizes systems-level impact as the changes people experience in their lives as a result of systems-level change achieved by a project or program.

CARE's systems-level work aligns with, and directly supports the realization of, CARE's Vision 2030 Theory of Change (ToC).

CARE's ToC centers agency, relations, and structures as the levels of change required to address the injustice of poverty and gender inequality. Systems-level change and impact supports CARE's actions to 'change relations' and 'transform structures' (see Figure 1), and in doing so supports more sustainable impact among individuals reached.



Four country evaluation – methods and overview

Each of the countries followed the six standard steps of the outcome harvest process (see Figure 2), which were adapted for the purposes of evaluating systems-level change and

impact. A detailed overview of the specific steps followed by each country, including similarities and nuances, can be found [here](#).

Figure 2: Data collection approaches used by the four countries

| COUNTRY | Ecuador | Ethiopia | Nepal | Uganda |
|--------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| PROJECT | Humanitarian Portfolio | Seizing the Moment | SAMARTHYA | NPRP |
| QUESTIONS | Methods | | | |
| 1. Process | Not collected | Secondary data analysis | Analysis of Secondary data and OH data | Secondary data analysis |
| 2. Systems change | OH data collection (KII& FGDs) | OH data collection (KII& FGDs) | OH data collection (KII& FGDs, field observations and HH survey) | OH data collection (KII& FGDs) |
| 3. Impact | OH data collection | Not collected | OH data collection & Secondary data analysis | Analysis of Secondary data and reflections from OH data |
| 4. Sustainability | Reflections from OH data (not asked directly) | Reflections from OH data (not asked directly) | Reflections from OH data (not asked directly) | OH data collection & Secondary data analysis |

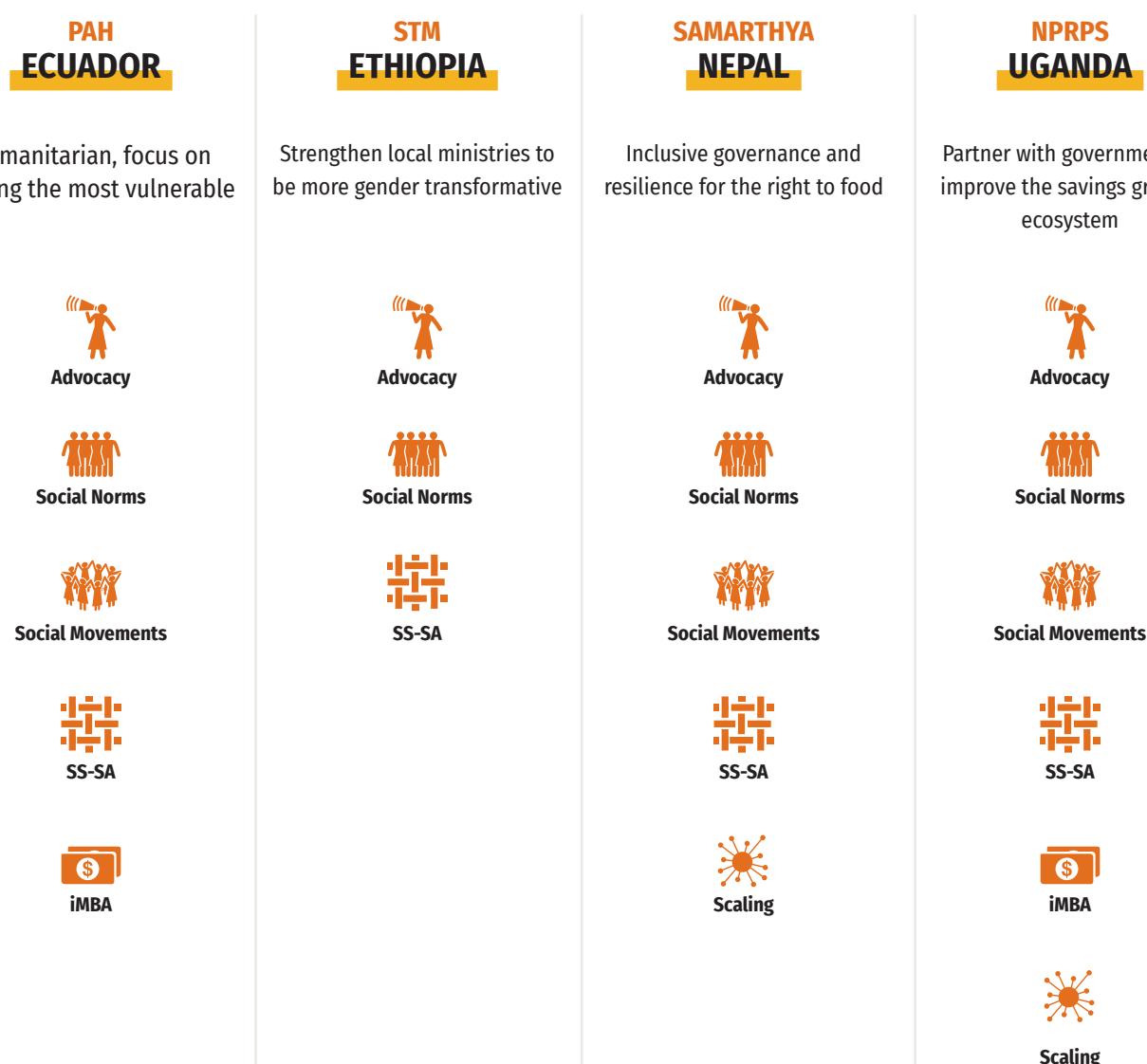
KII=Key informant interview; FGD=Focus group discussion; HH=Household.

Results

CARE's work overall had a significant impact on changing and strengthening systems, which will result in real impact in the lives of people in the communities where the evaluated programs operated. Combined the four evaluations identified 62 outcomes related to systems change. These outcomes covered all six pathways. While broader generalizations must be treated with caution (as these projects were not similar in focus nor a representative sample of CARE's work, it is

noteworthy that the greatest number of outcomes related to social movements followed by systems strengthening and accountability and social norms. The area of advocacy proved to be a key area of strength among the COs and the overwhelming priority action among the evaluated projects. **Notably some outcomes results from work integrated across more than one pathway.**

Figure 3: Systems-level pathways employed by the evaluated projects



KEY SYSTEM LEVEL CHANGES ACHIEVED BY CARE PROGRAMS

1. Changes to policy and programs through advocacy

- Changes occurred at **different levels of government, from regional to national to sub-national**, and in the case of Ecuador to **transnational**.
- Programs had significant influence on progressive policy change post-project.** Results in Ethiopia and Uganda—where evaluations were conducted post-project end—demonstrated further policy changes highlighting that advocacy has the potential to continue to pay dividend into the future and that the full impact of advocacy may not be measurable at project end.
- Advocacy did not always achieve direct changes in laws and policies yet nonetheless and importantly **strengthened the enabling environment**. For example, advocacy for the regularization of rights and identity of refugees in Ecuador.
- Programs influenced budget allocations.** For example, in Nepal results indicated expanded local government funding allocations for small-scale farmers.
- Social movements** were crucial in supporting CARE's advocacy wins by facilitating those movements to conduct their own advocacy both through capacity strengthening and through enhancing their legitimacy with government stakeholders.

CARE programming often builds on **policy wins** by sequencing them with initiatives—often on collaboration with governments—to strengthen government systems and to support policy implementation at sub-national level. This is a crucial strategy for **ensuring that policy wins result in meaningful change for people**.

2. Systems-level approaches to transform social norms

- Engaging men and boys to promote more positive masculinities.** For example, in Ecuador and Nepal.
- Supporting community-wide changes in household-level gender relations and decision-making.** For example, in Nepal and Uganda.
- Shifting norms among **duty bearers**, typically **government stakeholders** or **community leaders**. For example, in Ethiopia and Uganda.
- CARE's **partners** and **social movements were engaged around their own gender and social norms**, which facilitated greater gender-transformations within those organizations. For example, in Ethiopia and Nepal.
- Attending to social and gender norms **enhances the success of some system-level activities**, for example work with social movements or in conducting advocacy.

3. Social movements

- Social movements and partners were found to be a key approach used to drive social and political change.**
- CARE has successfully worked with groups to **create new social movements and supported their collective action**. For example, in Ecuador and Nepal.
- Enhanced the impact and effectiveness of social movements by **strengthening their technical skills and organizational structures** and **informed, empowered and supported their actions, particularly around advancing gender equality**. For example, in Nepal and Uganda.
- CARE's actions **supported connections and allyship across movements** and networks, including collaborations and exchanges. For example, in Uganda.
- Being strong and more effective allowed social movements to be **recognized as legitimate voices for their communities and members**.

4. Systems strengthening and social accountability

- Improved attitudes and greater gender sensitivity of service providers** towards their clients, in Ecuador.
- The adoption of new health protocols and tools to **improve quality of care**, in Ecuador.

- Improved the quality, availability and accessibility of government **climate-resilient agricultural services**, in Nepal.
- **Greater responsiveness of the protection system** to violations of human rights, in Ecuador.
- **Institutionalization of a gender transformative approaches** in government structures. In Ethiopia and Uganda.
- **Improved internal government operations**, including systems to guide the implementation of new policies and plans, in Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda.
- CARE is seen as a key go-to technical partner for government on advancing gender equality and gender transformative approaches across all programs evaluated.

5. Inclusive market-based approaches

- Savings groups provided a **platform for women's empowerment**, in Uganda.
- **Strengthened entrepreneurship** through seed capital and loans, in Uganda.
- The **range of banking services for women increased**, in Uganda.
- **Innovative health care funding** techniques were employed, in Ecuador.

6. Scaling of models and approaches

- Results highlight strong examples of **coordination and trusting collaboration with local government** to develop

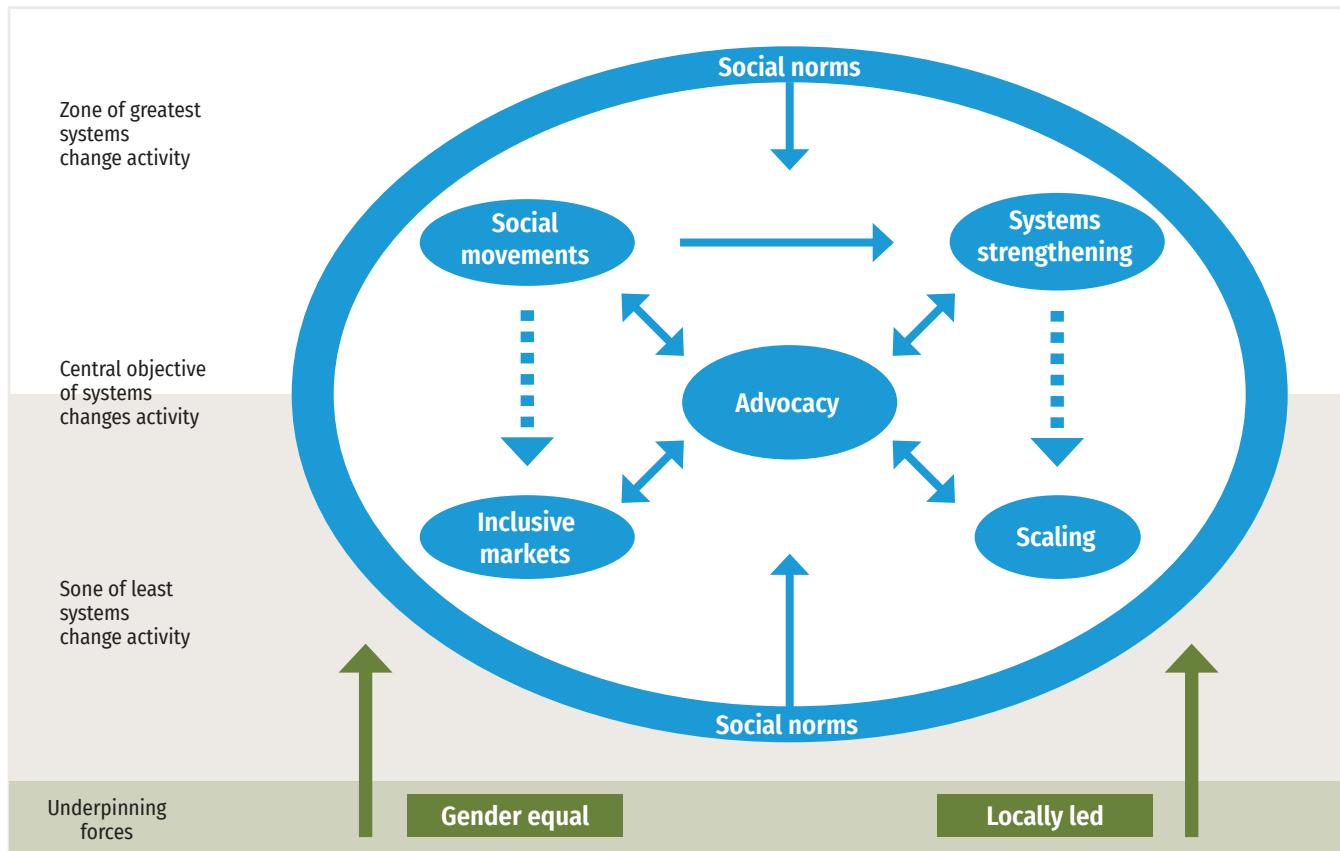
and scale-up models which addressed the needs of the target groups. For example, in Nepal, supporting local government implementation of the Farmer ID card.

- **Scaling through national government.** For example, in Uganda scaling of savings groups by the Government of Uganda in their current [Parish Development Model](#).
- **Scaling with Civil Society Organizations.** For example, in Nepal. CSOs worked with the subnational government to scale implementation of the Farmer ID card and as well to scale-up climate resilient models for small-scale farming piloted under the SAMARTHYA project.



INTEGRATION OF PATHWAYS AND APPROACHES IS KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF CARE'S SYSTEM-LEVEL PROGRAMMING

These four evaluations provide evidence of where and how approaches across the six pathways are integrated. In addition, results identified areas of greater or lesser integration. These interrelationships and zones of activity are show below.



SYSTEMS-LEVEL APPROACHES CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO ADVANCING A GENDER-EQUAL VISION

These four evaluations provide important evidence as to how CARE advances a gender equal agenda and the systems-changes that have resulted, at least in Ecuador, Ethiopia, Nepal, and Uganda. This includes:

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Advancing an approach which addressed the root causes of gender inequality, not only the symptoms. | Working with men and boys and challenging harmful masculinities as part of addressing the root causes and to advance relational approaches to gender justice. | Addressing structural gender inequality not only among households and communities but among duty bearers. | Integrating a stronger focus on gender equality at all stages of advocacy and changing policies to advance women's rights. | Deliberately engaging, supporting, and advancing women's rights organizations, women's movements, and women's voice. |
| Embedding a gender equality focus within service systems strengthening. | Embedding a gender transformative programming within government. | Advancing gender equality as part of working to make markets inclusive. | Institutionalizing gender equality approach through scaling models within local government. | |



SYSTEMS-LEVEL APPROACHES ARE A KEY PATHWAY TO CARE BECOMING LOCALLY LED

Evaluation results also provide evidence that being locally led also underpins CARE's programs, though this may not have been a deliberate explicitly focus, and thus directly supports CARE's vision of being locally led. This includes by and through:

Supporting localization through policy advocacy.

Local social movements as central to successful systems change.

Engaging with key partners and local implementers as an important mechanism for implementing CARE's systems-change work.

Supporting localization through systems strengthening, scaling, and building more inclusive markets.

Bottom-up solutions reflecting local realities were key to achieving systems-level change.

Systems-Level Changes realized by CARE's programs result in a range of impacts for people

| Types of impact | Ecuador | Ethiopia ¹ | Nepal | Uganda |
|---|---------|-----------------------|-------|--------|
| Individual empowerment (agency, self-esteem, self-confidence, and skills) | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Awareness and assertion of personal human rights | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Greater employability and economic & business opportunities | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Women's financial autonomy & economic empowerment | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Enhanced leadership and participation | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Greater equality in the household | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Stronger networks and solidarity | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Improved health/SRH knowledge | ✓ | | | |
| Better access to resources and funding | | | ✓ | |
| Livelihoods and economic development | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Increased climate resilience | | | ✓ | |
| Improved protection outcomes | ✓ | | | |
| Reductions in intimate partner violence | ✓ | | | |
| Food and nutrition security outcomes | | | ✓ | |
| Health outcomes | ✓ | | ✓ | |

¹ 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.



Raeagan Hodge/CARE

Recommendations

ONE

Support a more deliberate and strategic focus on systems-level change across CARE's programs, supported by systems-level capacity building to facilitate concept internalization, tools and guidance, best practice hubs and greater internal spaces for learning and sharing. This will unlock huge potential for strengthening this programming and for evaluating future systems-level change and impact across the federation.

TWO

Clarify areas of conceptual misunderstanding within CARE as it relates to systems-level change. This includes the fact that individual/agency-level change is not part of systems-level change, and clarifying the approach towards the community system given it is both a mechanism for achieving systems change across certain pathways and an area of impact due to systems change. Greater conceptual clarity will support more impactful and focused future evaluations.

THREE

Elevate the critical role and effect of CARE's social norms and social movements work in achieving systems-level change and impact. Social norms and social movements can receive less focus within the broader work of CARE USA, while this evaluation review found them to be central to the success of CARE's sustainable impact at scale.

FOUR

Expand and deepen the linkages between systems-change and CARE USA's gender equal and locally led pillars. This evaluation review found that the four systems projects/program significantly impacted on gender equality and supported localization. As CARE expands its work on those pillars (in addition to the globally scaled pillar), promoting those linkages and the role of systems-level approaches in advancing all three areas will be important.

FIVE

Prioritize and deepen the focus on measurement and reporting of systems-level change and impact across CARE. Before undertaking further evaluations of systems-change, support programs and staff to more deliberately measure and report on systems change and impact within their project MEAL frameworks and their broader MEAL systems. Provide example indicators and tools to support COs to do so. Support changes to broader CARE measurement systems and PIIRS indicators to support this pivot and strengthen alignment between global and project reporting.

SIX

Undertake future systems-level evaluations, including the use of the outcome harvest methodology, with other programs. These evaluations should seek to build further knowledge and understanding around integration of systems-level pathways and the impact of systems-level change at population-level.

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Further information on individual Country Systems-level Evaluation Reports can be found at the following links: [Ecuador \(English and Espanol\)](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Nepal](#), [Uganda](#), and [global](#).