

# FORGING LINKS:

DISCOVERING HOW GENDER  
CHANGE PROMOTES FOOD  
AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

A LINKAGES publication







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# ASKING QUESTIONS

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How do we know whether our development interventions are effective?

What are the best methods for helping us learn about development problems and sustainable solutions?

How can we strengthen our skills to learn about the effects of local gender dynamics on our proposed outcomes?

How do we hold ourselves accountable to poor, rural women and girls?

At CARE Canada, no project is complete without a process of learning and accountability that asks questions such as these. Development change, and especially gender change, is messy, involves a variety of people, and takes a long time. We recognise that designing and implementing strong development programming requires dedicated time for teams to critically reflect on outcomes and on the context within which these outcomes are achieved. It requires a nuanced, systematic and methodologically diverse monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) system that uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Finally, it requires a focus on how gender dynamics change over the life of the project so that we can understand how our programs can—and cannot—address gender inequalities.

## FORGING LINKS

The Linking Initiatives, Stakeholders and Knowledge to Achieve Gender-Sensitive Livelihood Security (or LINKAGES) project provided CARE Canada, along with CARE in Bolivia, Ethiopia, Mali and Ghana, with an opportunity to further develop a MEAL system that can respond to the mess of real-life change. Carried out with the financial support of the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada, LINKAGES aims, in line with CARE's Women's Economic Empowerment framework, to improve the livelihood security and resilience of vulnerable women, girls, men and boys in four countries:

- Bolivia, through a project called Tukuy Yanapana,
- Ethiopia, through a project called Abdishe,
- Mali, through the Initiative for Food and Nutrition Security in Segou (IFONS), and
- Ghana, through a project called Promise.

Everyone involved in the program decided that, as a complement to more traditional monitoring and evaluation activities, LINKAGES would rely on a participatory research process to unpack and delve deeply into the impact that gender equality and inequality has on each project. At the same time, we determined that the program would not merely uncover new and useful data and knowledge, nor would it outsource research projects, as is common in CARE programs. Instead, our four project teams would design, refine, carry out and analyse the research. Thus, we would not only build our capacity to design, collect, organize, categorize, analyse and present data, but also enhance our understanding of gender inequalities in four unique contexts. This approach is a step away from traditional project management responsibilities. As such, these LINKAGES teams required added time, effort and resources. And in keeping with any new process, the learning curve was steep and not always steady.

Despite the challenges inherent in this approach, LINKAGES is a clear example of CARE “walking its talk” when it comes to focusing on and developing our own individual thinking around gender equality, so that this learning can be considered for use in future programs. Involving project teams in bringing new knowledge to the surface for themselves is a markedly different process—especially from the perspective of adult education—than hiring an outside expert to generate knowledge in an exercise that is removed from the day-to-day of project implementation. In this process, implementers themselves apply research and analytic concepts to generate learning that is necessary to develop and adapt programs. By using this process, the four LINKAGES research teams developed and refined one powerful component of a MEAL system that is fit to address the messiness of gender change.



# SHARING KNOWLEDGE

All of the CARE offices involved in this process learned key lessons about carrying out this type of research, including the need to:

- Appoint someone who is primarily dedicated to leading the research and liaising with project teams.
- Reserve resources for the research project lead to travel to each country office to provide regular face-to-face guidance.
- Describe the use of the research and results clearly at the beginning of and throughout the process, and develop a plan to disseminate the results.
- Build partnerships in each country to multiply the impact of our learning.
- Motivate project teams by explicitly naming team members in publications and thanking them for their work.
- Develop research over the course of the project and give space to teams to share their research results with each other and with others.

This document summarises the activities and findings of the four LINKAGES research and learning projects.

It highlights key discoveries that LINKAGES research teams made about gender dynamics in development programming and key lessons that the teams learned about doing gender-conscious research. Four summaries of the larger research reports appear in the pages that follow. Following these summaries, the document provides a description of the process that teams pursued. This description shares not only the methodological approach taken for the projects, but also the journey of staff transformation and learning that informed and inspired the LINKAGES research and learning projects.

We hope personnel in CARE country offices in Mali, Ethiopia, Ghana and Bolivia will use the revealing information within this document to integrate the LINKAGES research and learning process into their future research initiatives, with a goal of improving current and future programs. And while the methodology used by LINKAGES program teams was applied to gender equality issues, this flexible analytical process can be applied to solve virtually any problem that requires analysis. As such, we also hope other CARE country offices harness the experiences outlined in these summaries to inform their efforts to resolve the challenges they confront in other areas of their work.







# BOLIVIA

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## LINKAGES PROJECT: TUKUY YANAPANA

## FROM HOUSEHOLDS TO SMALL BUSINESSES:

## THE CHANGING ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN IN REPRODUCTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE SPHERES

### THE RESEARCH QUESTION WE WANTED TO ANSWER

The purpose of our research was to understand, from the perspective of rural women and men, what changes, if any, are occurring in the traditional division of labour at home and in small and medium-sized enterprises, and the factors that have contributed to this change.

### WHY WE UNDERTOOK OUR RESEARCH

Women around the world play multiple reproductive, productive and community roles. In the four municipalities of Chuquisaca, Bolivia, where we implemented the Tukuy Yanapana project, women not only perform the majority of reproductive work, but are also involved in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The theory of change that inspired our research is that if reproductive roles are shared between men and women, and if women's work, both reproductive and productive, is recognized and appreciated, then women will have better opportunities to increase their participation and their incomes in SMEs.

Tukuy Yanapana supports 21 SMEs, four of which are made up entirely of women. Of the SMEs with both male and female members, women and men serve on their boards of directors, although it is still rare to see women in these positions. Although women play integral roles in the chilli, peanut, amaranth and honey value chains associated with SMEs, they are not recognized publicly as family members who contribute to household resources, or as SME members who contribute to improved businesses. Women plant, weed, harvest, select and package, but they are considered “additional help” and not vital contributors and knowledge-holders who make decisions. Women are neither recognized nor remunerated for the work they do in productive or reproductive spheres.

We hypothesised that by intensely training women, men and local municipal authorities on gender equality and the value of women’s roles and shared roles—especially with reference to new national decrees that decentralize the responsibility for local economic development, as well as new national gender equality laws—women’s and men’s knowledge and behaviours would change so that women’s roles would be recognised and remunerated. In addition to training, Tukuy Tanapana promoted women-only SMEs, developed new internal regulations for SMEs to recognise women’s work, and promoted local economic development initiatives with municipalities. We wanted to find out if these strategies, or other factors and processes, would promote changes in reproductive or productive roles toward greater equality in the division of labour.

**CHALLENGES WE FACED AND LESSONS WE LEARNED WHILE CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Our biggest challenge was unpacking our own understanding of gender equality, bringing new meaning to this term and understanding it further—

not only through the research itself, but also through the support of gender experts that contributed to the reflection around the research. In this way, our capacity to recognise and work with gender equality and inequality has increased, as has our recognition that every project activity comes loaded with gender assumptions and potential “gender blindness.”

**OUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

We carried out semi-structured interviews with 113 women and 98 of their male partners on gender roles in households and the sexual division of labour at the household level. The 113 women were chosen based on a statistically representative calculation of the total number of people who have been involved in the training that the project has carried out. Fifteen of the women did not have spouses or partners, resulting in a lower number of men. Of these semi-structured interviews, 21 women and 40 men responded to an additional section in the interview about their perceptions of women’s positions within SMEs. The semi-structured interviews were complemented by in-depth “life story” interviews with three women and two men, and with two different age groups. We carried out four all-female focus groups and four all-male focus groups, two in each of the four municipalities. All focus group participants were members of SMEs. The focus groups discussed gender roles and the sexual division of labour, perceptions around changes in these roles in both reproductive and productive spheres, and the factors and effects in the change of these roles, including how women’s reproductive and productive work is valued. Women interviewed women and men interviewed men in private parallel interviews.

**TWO MAIN DISCOVERIES**

**1. WOMEN’S AND MEN’S ROLES ARE CHANGING A LITTLE IN THE REPRODUCTIVE SPACE AND SIGNIFICANTLY IN PRODUCTIVE SPACES. WOMEN AND MEN VIEW THESE CHANGES DIFFERENTLY, BUT BOTH AGREE THAT WOMEN ARE THE GATEKEEPERS OF REPRODUCTIVE LABOUR AND MEN ARE THE GATEKEEPERS OF PRODUCTIVE LABOUR.**

This view changed when participants considered productive work in enterprises. On one hand, interviewees said that it was still a challenge for women to reduce their long days of reproductive and productive work. On the other, as women’s household economic contribution has increased through their participation in productive work, women are increasingly involved in making decisions in their households and in businesses.

**Reproductive work at home:** Women and men with children younger than six years of age tend to see less change in terms of the gendered division of roles. Fifty-three percent of women do not see any changes in gender roles and the household division of labour. Men’s perceptions correspond with this finding. The perceptions of women and men with children older than seven are quite different. Sixty-two percent of men perceive a change in the division of labour and 55 percent of women affirm changes. However, part of this result was due to children taking on household tasks following a traditional gendered pattern. Girls help their mothers and boys help their fathers, each with their traditional tasks. Still, some respondents observed men starting to care for children (helping them with homework) and even cooking, especially if their wives are engaged in productive work. Decision-making around child education and food and health costs lay principally with women, although joint decision-making around schooling is the norm. Both men and women still

consider household work as mainly the domain of women. Both groups consider this work essential for maintaining functioning households. Men recognised the importance of this reproductive work during interviews.

**Productive work at home:** For the families involved with Tukuy Yanapana, home-based productive work is the key link with small and medium-sized enterprises because each of the four value chains rely on raw materials produced at the household level. Of the women interviewed, 89 percent participate in planning, managing and harvesting crops, but men lead all soil preparation, planting and harvesting processes, and decision-making on what to plant. Both women and men said that women were increasingly involved in this decision-making. Just as reproductive tasks are seen as women’s domain, with men as “helpers,” men and women see productive agriculture work as men’s domain, with women as “helpers.”

**Productive work in small and medium-sized enterprises:** Ninety-two percent of women interviewed believe that women should be able to work outside their homes, while 56 percent of the men interviewed share this opinion. Men and women who believe that women should not work outside of their homes consider women’s public work as an abandonment of household tasks, and described children not taken care of or households in disarray. A small percentage of women (three percent) also stated that women shouldn’t work outside their homes because they shouldn’t have to work for such low pay. Men and women who were in favour of women working outside of their homes were familiar with women who are doing this work already. According to 46 percent of men interviewed, greater opportunity exists for women to become either partners or members of SMEs (those supported by Tukuy Yanapana specifically) or to represent their husbands at SME meetings.





*“Participation in the process of researching and learning about gender issues, along with the findings from that research, give us a better understanding of gender relations at the household level and in micro-enterprises, and enable us to make adjustments to project-implementation strategies.”*

**BOLIVIA TEAM**



In SMEs with mixed male-female memberships, 30 percent of the women interviewed stated that they either participate in meetings and assemblies, or on the boards of directors or administration of SMEs. However, even if some women occupy these roles, 67 percent of women said the majority of women are still only replacing their husbands when these men can't attend meetings, and that their contributions are limited. Sixty-two percent of women stated that men are the ones who are ultimately responsible for negotiating and making decisions in mixed SMEs. The remaining 38 percent are women are either presidents or vice-presidents on boards of directors within these associations. Seventy percent of men noted a change toward increased participation by women in mixed SME administration and decision-making.

**2. CHANGE IS SLOW AND IS BEST GENERATED THROUGH A VARIETY OF CAMPAIGNS AND ACTIVITIES.**

One of the greatest motivations for men and women to change household gender relations is related to the new Local Economic Development Decree, which is promoted by the Bolivian government and supported technically by Tukuy Yanapana. The project outlined the rights and roles of women and men in reproductive and productive spheres in a variety of ways. It provided structural opportunities for women to participate in income-generating activities, including changing laws and regulations at the municipal and SME levels. It provided capacity-building support in the form of business-plan development to both men and women. And it provided gender-equality training.

Both women and men cited Tukuy Yanapana activities—especially capacity-building sessions focused on both gender-equality and business-plan development—as forming positive spaces in which

to question and negotiate the traditional division of labour. Sessions helped women understand their rights and apply new negotiation techniques, and changed men's perceptions of traditional divisions of labour. While findings show that these changes are happening in baby steps, they also show that enough critical mass exists to inspire other actors. For example, family, neighbours and friends have begun to explore traditional divisions of labour. During our research, we also observed all-female SME members who proclaim themselves as role models to other women.

**SHARING KNOWLEDGE TO CHANGE PRACTICES**

Research results were used first and foremost to improve Tukuy Yanapana's capacity-building strategies—in particular, those that focus their capacity-building on men to explore and change behaviours, perceptions and practices. The university students who were part of the research team presented these results at their universities as part of their thesis work. This sharing generated interest and demand to incorporate gender equality and local development into regular curricula, as well as to open up opportunities for other students to partner with development projects.

We will also provide these results to SMEs and municipal authorities so they can continue to reflect and refine their own approaches (specifically decrees and bylaws) to promote gender equality in economic development. And we will share our findings with NGOs that work in the same region as Tukuy Yanapana, especially those linked to the gender platform Fundación Participación y Sostenibilidad,

Société de Coopération pour le Développement International, and Coordinadora de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil Canadiense en Bolivia.

**PROMOTE WOMEN'S EQUALITY FOR RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS**

Women's work needs to be recognised, and rural Bolivian women have a right to define what "recognised" means. The women interviewed for this research noted that while monetary recognition for their productive labour is an important step in recognising women's contribution to household economics and decision-making, money is not the only form of recognition. Recognition also means valuing women verbally and taking action. Women will feel recognised when men take shared responsibility for cleaning and childcare, when women are named to boards of directors or receive assistance to develop business plans, and when municipal councils approve those plans. Our research

shows men are beginning to recognise the value of monetary reward for women's reproductive and productive labour through local municipal decrees and changes to internal SME regulatory frameworks.

**USING RESEARCH PROCESS AND FINDINGS TO IMPROVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

During this research process, we learned that our efforts to contribute to deep social change around gender norms are part of a slow but sure process that needs to happen at various levels of a system. Change in a local economic development system involves government authorities, boards of directors, members of small and medium-sized enterprises, and families. The sensitization process, capacity-building and amendments to bylaws show that changes around gender norms need to be approached with multiple strategies. Future development programs should consider this multi-actor systems approach to gender-equitable local economic development.

*“We were proud that we were providing childcare at workshops so women could attend workshops, but we never questioned why women couldn't leave their children at home. This research has helped us confirm the nuances of the domains of reproductive and productive work and who does what within households and within enterprises.”*

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER





# ETHIOPIA

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**LINKAGES PROJECT:**  
ABDISHE

## **FINDING THE MISSING LINK FROM EMPOWERMENT TO RESILIENCE: WHO GETS THE DOUBLE DAY IN SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA?**

### **THE RESEARCH QUESTION WE WANTED TO ANSWER**

How can women's engagement in economic activities be realised without women being overburdened? With this question, we set out to learn, from women's and men's perspectives, what factors contribute to mitigating any potential overburdening women could experience when involved in such activities, and what are the potential risks of any overburdening. Our research sought to understand how work and responsibilities are divided and shared between household members, and what coping mechanisms or changes in gender relations are employed by couples in less-burdened households.

### **WHY WE UNDERTOOK OUR RESEARCH**

Women around the world play multiple reproductive, productive and community roles. The international development field has tracked the effect of encouraging women's increased economic activity ever since it was first noted that this activity adds to their already-long days without a guarantee of commensurate benefits. Understanding this risk, the Abdishe project team initially assumed that engaging rural women in additional income-generating activities would increase their time burden





if they did not also implement processes to foster a more equitable distribution of work between women and men. As a CARE Ethiopia program team, we reasoned that appropriate and well-designed strategies to engage men and boys in household work could free up more time for women to engage in productive roles, and that this engagement, in turn, would foster greater overall wellbeing for women. We conducted this research to understand the range of factors and opportunities that contribute to minimizing women's additional overburdening when active in income-generating activities, and to create evidence-based knowledge that can be used in future livelihood security programs.

#### **CHALLENGES WE FACED AND LESSONS WE LEARNED WHILE CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

We were initially challenged to clearly identify what we wanted to know, what questions to ask in order to solicit this knowledge, and who to ask them of. We had to distinguish between our interest in assessing the impacts of the Abdishe project on gender dynamics and our research objective. Some members of our team were also concerned about the validity and reliability of a small qualitative sample size. We learned that reflection and discussion is crucial to establish a research focus, and that targeting specific participant groups enables researchers to obtain information directly related to the overarching research question. It was essential

to clarify the core question before we collected data to ensure the data we gathered spoke to, revealed and reflected multiple aspects of our knowledge quest. We gained valuable analytical skills such as seeing the issue from many and different angles and considering the contribution of other factors.

#### **OUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To answer our research question, we identified households in Fedis district, East Hararghe zone, where women find their workloads are not increased substantially by involvement in income-generating activities. We relied on both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. We used a survey of 120 randomly selected women in Fedis who are beneficiaries of the Abdishe project. Considering the relative homogeneity of agro-ecological conditions, environment, farming systems and food insecurity, 40 households each from three kebeles (Muleta, Tuta Kenisa and Anani) were selected randomly. From the 120 women, we selected 20 for in-depth interviews (along with their husbands, for a total of 40 in-depth key informant interviews). Moreover, we held three focus group discussions (one with women, one with men, and one with both sexes—between eight and 12 participants in each group). Women researchers were involved in all interviews and focus groups with women. The qualitative approach used open-ended questions that focused on time use, gendered division of labour, couples' reasons for changing their division of labour, and the relationships between these changes and food security. We triangulated our qualitative and quantitative data, then used reflexive inquiry and CARE's women's empowerment framework and core areas of gender equality inquiry to analyse findings. We took an appreciative approach to our inquiry by comparing gender relations in households in which women were highly economically active and yet not reporting overburden with gender relations in households in which women were economically active but reporting overburden.

## **THREE MAIN DISCOVERIES**

### **1. ALTHOUGH THEY MAY REPORT MORE OVERALL EQUALITY, WOMEN STILL SPEND THE SAME 17 HOURS A DAY DOING A COMBINATION OF PRODUCTIVE AND REPRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES.**

They have made way for income-generating activities by rearranging the work they do within the traditional division of labour or by negotiating a new division of labour to allow for five hours of work on their income-generating activities.

In some cases, women remained responsible for the same reproductive tasks but were just able to alter how they were done in order to save time. Women are still primarily responsible for cooking, but some have negotiated with their husbands to cook only one meal a day (in the morning, and which the family then eats three times a day) to free up time for income-generating activities. In other cases, women have resorted to strategies that potentially reinforce gender inequalities. For example, they are increasingly engaging female children and mothers-in-law in reproductive labour. They have also decreased the amount of time they spend in productive agricultural work by about an hour. Given that cash cropping is still the economically and socially most valued source of income in the household, when women reduce their labour in this type of work in order to invest it in a type of productive work with of lesser value, they are potentially removed from the important area of farm management without challenging the gendered division of labour in a sustainable way. Women also reported cutting in half the time they devote to chewing khat with friends.

On the other hand, 85 percent of women surveyed said their husbands increasingly fetched water, prepared firewood for cooking and engaged in

childcare. Seventy percent of men surveyed said they spend an extra hour per day feeding and caring for young children. To adjust for taking on new reproductive responsibilities, men have cut in half the time they chew khat and socialize with friends, and reduced the amount of sleep they get. Women note that men's extra time spent fetching water and preparing firewood has decreased their triple burden of household chores, farm labour and economic activity. These households have, in this way, seen a slight shift in gender relations in which men exercise the power to give up the privilege of leisure so that household income can be subsidized through women's increased cash earnings.

### **2. SOCIAL CHANGE DOES NOT HAPPEN IN A STRAIGHT LINE. WHILE IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND THE CAUSE AND THE EFFECT OF GENDER CHANGE, CARE ETHIOPIA CAN IDENTIFY FACTORS AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT IT CAN HARNESS TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY.**

This research provides a local example of one of the greatest questions concerning how to bring about gender change: Is the deep change to social rules and cultural practices the cause or the effect of women's increased economic empowerment? The women and men involved in this study showed just how complex the answer to this question really is. In some cases, changes to gender roles were occurring among those people where these changes typically occur—among the young and better educated, and among women whose children are older and more independent. These respondents were driven to change by personal motivation as well as by necessity.

At the same time, one of the greatest motivations for men and women to change household gender relations lies in the Oromiya region's socio-economic context. The region continues to experience climate challenges, high inflation and low crop yields,





*“Working on a research and learning project not only has positive outcomes for the project itself, but also for other projects that are being implemented side-by-side. These other projects can now follow a similar approach and investigate critically the impact of what we do.”*

ETHIOPIA TEAM



such that it is not possible for men to be sole breadwinners. Households are no longer able to rely on just the fruits of the family farm, and the community's stock of social and physical capital, which previously acted as a safety net, has dwindled. Interviews with men showed this situation motivated them to change their roles in order for women to have opportunities to contribute to household finances; however, the situation didn't quite convince them to change deeply held beliefs about the breadwinner stereotype and male privilege.

Government service agencies' policies and NGO women's economic empowerment programs reinforce the attitude change described above by drawing women more directly into the market economy. Both women and men cite development activities—and especially awareness sessions focused on changing gender norms—as positive spaces in which to question and negotiate the traditional division of labour. Sessions help women understand their rights and apply new negotiation techniques, and strengthen men against community backlash to their changes. At the same time, research findings clearly show there is no good way to disentangle change motivated through these sessions and activities and change motivated by the wider socio-economic circumstances discussed above.

**3. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER CHANGE IS MOTIVATED BY ENVIRONMENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR A PERSONAL DESIRE TO CHANGE, THE SMALL WINS THAT WOMEN DO MAKE IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND INCREASED CONTROL OVER PRODUCTIVE ASSETS PRODUCE A VIRTUOUS CYCLE THAT INCREASES THEIR BARGAINING POWER.**

"I said to him, if you help me, I can work hard to get more money and cover more of our expenses. Then

he said, just work for more money and I will support you as much as I can." As this quote shows, women's involvement in cash earning and household decision-making provides a platform from which women are able to further negotiate the marital support they need to continue these activities. This virtuous cycle of incremental increases in economic activity and household decision-making has been able to push gender change only so far. Men still request additional support for their own income generation activities in order to reinforce their perceived "natural" place at the head of households. About 25 percent of women, on the other hand, suggest that changes to gender roles need to go further for women's and men's reproductive labour to be truly equal.

**SHARING KNOWLEDGE TO CHANGE PRACTICES**

We plan to share our research findings with our key project partners: the program quality advisor at Haremaya University; government partners; CARE Ethiopia and its offices at Woreda level; VSLA members; community-based legal advisors; producer and marketing associations; the Food Security Task Force; and CARE Canada. We will use dissemination methods such as publishing, recording a documentary film, and holding dissemination workshops. We hope that these efforts promote women's equality. In particular, we hope they help to shine a spotlight on:

- sustaining men's involvement in household activities while involving mothers-in-law and community leaders in awareness-raising activities;
- making it easier for women to get to markets with their produce;

- involving more men in cooking demonstrations; and
- reinforcing gender equality and social analysis and action training of trainers to address the lack of gender awareness in government-organized "1 to 5" groups.

**USING RESEARCH PROCESS AND FINDINGS TO IMPROVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

Efforts and methods to share knowledge should also strive to improve development programs. In particular, the research process and findings have made it clear that future Abdishe social analysis and action sessions should be more frequently available to the project's target group and include additional outreach to non-project beneficiary households. This step will further change traditional gender-based attitudes in the community and enhance men's involvement in household tasks. Training should be offered when it is most convenient for women. And government organizations and CARE should work together on strategies to further reduce women's workloads

when involved in economic activities in the district.

Despite the messiness of social change, our research shows that CARE's work to make deep social change, implemented through the social analysis and action methodology, stirred the centrifuge of change, even if it didn't set the whirlpool moving. The research provides insight into how concentrated gender-specific work on changing social norms and attitudes is effectively integrated into and adds value to food security programs. Discussion sessions, awareness-raising activities, men's engagement and women's leadership programs provided women and men with the marital resources they needed to take advantage of opportunities to make change in gender relations as those opportunities arose in their individual lives. In other words, the research and its findings reinforce a recommendation commonly made by those who work on gender equality in food security: ensure a strong balance of gender-specific and gender-integrated programs exists to give rural women and men the skills and confidence they need to be able to make changes to gender roles and relations in their own lives.

*"We have been going into communities and hearing about things, but we have never before collected these data systemically. Now we have the capacity to be sensitive to this information, and data can be collected in a way that is sex-disaggregated and has a gender lens to it. The right questions are being asked and they are making it possible for the right evidence to emerge."*

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER





# MALI

**LINKAGES PROJECT:**  
IFONS – INITIATIVE FOR FOOD AND  
NUTRITION SECURITY IN SEGOU

## WOMEN ARE OUTSIDERS IN THEIR OWN HOMES: GENDER INEQUALITY AS A BARRIER TO FOOD SECURITY IN SEGOU

### THE RESEARCH QUESTION WE WANTED TO ANSWER

How do the gender and power relations linked to women's management and control over their productive land affect food security in rural Malian households?

### WHY WE UNDERTOOK OUR RESEARCH

The Mali LINKAGES baseline study showed that only 3.4 percent of women have access to land, compared to 55.6 percent of men. The gender gap is even greater when it comes to land control. Only five percent of the women who have access to land actually control the use of that land, compared to 80 percent of men who access land. Not surprisingly, during a process to design village conventions<sup>1</sup> on food and nutrition security, women identified access to and control of land and inputs as a significant problem. Women contribute substantially to food and nutrition security in households but their involvement in decision-making regarding the management of household assets is restricted.

<sup>1</sup> Gender-sensitive preventive plans, which account for all the villages' key priorities, were put in place to reduce food and nutrition insecurity. The plans were developed by the communities and supported by the communal authorities.



With this fact in mind, we set out to document the basis of inequality between women and men in access to and control of land and other assets and resources of households. We wanted to better understand the logic and socio-cultural norms that maintain inequalities, to highlight the disadvantages that inequalities create for women and men, and to identify the benefits that can be derived from greater gender equality. By understanding the logic that holds inequitable norms in place, and by highlighting the benefits of greater equality, we expected to identify ways to promote a change in socio-cultural norms. We also hoped that the villagers we work with would recognise the benefits of increased equality in access to and control of land.

**CHALLENGES WE FACED AND LESSONS WE LEARNED WHILE CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

We faced three main challenges in this research project. First, we had to clearly identify and understand the problem being studied. Second, we needed to see if there was a gap between researchers’ and participants’ understanding of the research problem. Finally, we needed to take ownership of the research project’s methodology and implementation. Indeed, some team members had never led a qualitative research project before. We also learned valuable lessons:

- Anyone can initiate a research project if they have identified a problem they want to solve.
- It is important to choose the appropriate tools to conduct research and to understand why we are using these tools and not others.
- The research methodology outlined in this document is applicable to analysis of a wide range of problems and issues.

- Conducting qualitative, gender-conscious research helps highlight the interactions between a social environment and the individuals who live in it.
- Any research project will not only trigger answers to the problem studied, but will also impact the researcher’s mindset and will most probably ask him or her to question his or her own beliefs and opinions.

**OUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

We reviewed 71 village agreements and other information from a prior action research project to identify the general issue that would inform our central action research question. We then held a general assembly in Zangourabougou II<sup>2</sup> —which included the village chief, village authorities, heads of households, women members of the village savings and loans associations, youths and villagers—to ensure that the issue of gendered access to and control over land was a concern and priority for village women and men as well. In this community forum, participants showed interest in being a part of the research. Two individuals (one woman, one man) were chosen by the community to join the research team and represent them. On the basis of the initial research and this community meeting, we were able to formulate the central research question.

After we designed our interview guide, we held a second general assembly to launch research activities and update the community on our research objectives, methodology and timeline. We used a participatory process to select a representative sample of women from 20 of the 39 households based on their access to plots of land and their ability to answer questions about access to and

control of land, equipment and agricultural inputs. We originally trained and supervised four male and four female external interviewers to conduct in-depth interviews. Yet after a preliminary data analysis, we discovered that gaps in the information required a second analysis. Accordingly, we redid the analysis and decided to undertake a second round of data collection. We also revised the interview guide and then two members of our team undertook ten additional interviews with six women and four men. Finally, we held a third general assembly to discuss the research results with the community and incorporated assembly participants’ recommendations into a final report.

**THREE MAIN DISCOVERIES**

**1. MOBILE AND OUTSIDE: ACCORDING TO CUSTOM, WOMEN ARE NOT GRANTED CONTROL OF LAND BECAUSE THEY ARE CONSIDERED “MOBILE INDIVIDUALS” IN THEIR OWN FAMILIES AND “OUTSIDERS” IN THEIR HUSBANDS’ HOUSEHOLDS.**

First of all, land in Zangourabougou II is owned by two families and plots are loaned down many generations to the majority of (male) households’ heads. Generally, women are excluded from customary property inheritance because when women marry they move out of their families’ households and join their husbands’ households. Women usually have access to plots of land through their husbands, but they cannot own or control land because they are seen as “outsiders” in their husbands’ families. That said, if a woman’s husband dies, the woman can continue to access the land if she stays in her husband’s family in the village. Women may also be loaned plots of land through uncles, brothers or village chiefs, but the length of these loans can be unpredictable.

There are a few unusual cases where a woman has been granted land and controls it. For example, if a male relative specifically instructs that a plot of land be left to a female relative when he dies, the community respects the wish. A woman can ask to borrow a plot of land directly from a landowner, but it is not her custom to go around her husband to make this request. This custom would go against the local precept that an increase in women’s economic power decreases men’s authority over women.

**2. SOCIAL NORMS ALLOW MEN TO MAXIMIZE THE AMOUNT OF LAND THEY CONTROL FOR PRODUCTION OF CASH CROPS AND SUBSISTENCE FOOD, LEAVING WOMEN’S LAND TENURE EXTREMELY INSECURE.**

Due to growing family size and poor land quality, a family’s collective fields are often not sufficient to meet the whole family’s nutritional needs. Men are aware of the important role women play in household food security due to their labour and crops. Yet in trade-off decisions about what to do with small parcels of poor-quality land, sometimes individual men and sometimes community norms restrict women’s control over—or access to—land. In Zangourabougou II, women have no legal right to the plots they exploit. They can be taken back by a landowner or husband at any moment, without any sanctions. Men also face this risk but from the landlord only. The land parcels transferred to women are often less than a quarter of a hectare and can be replaced by another one (often of very poor quality) at any moment. A man may also reduce the amount of land a woman can access by dividing it with an incoming co-wife or by using it as part of a collective field. In addition, women do not control farming equipment. Women can access family equipment, but it is used first on collective fields that nourish the whole family. Moreover, the compost produced by women’s animals is controlled by male relatives, who use it to fertilize collective land.

<sup>2</sup> The village is located 23 kilometres from Segou, where the bulk of the research was conducted.





*“This study will help us better understand the problems of access to—and control of—land by women. This understanding will make it possible for us and others to use research results to lobby municipal and village authorities, so that women can enjoy their right of access to—and control of—land and share the benefits of farm activities at the household level equally.”*

MALI TEAM



**3. THE “OUTSIDER” STATUS OF WOMEN AND SOCIAL NORMS HAMPERS HOUSEHOLDS’ FOOD SECURITY.**

When they do have access to plots of land, women can control harvests and what is done with them. Women generally use harvested crops for cooking extra meals for their immediate families to supplement meals prepared for whole households. (Household meals, which are prepared by each co-wife on a rotating basis, are not always sufficient to cover all household members’ dietary needs). Women can also sell portions of their products to generate income that, in itself, contributes to food security. All expenses for these supplementary meals are covered by women only. Moreover, it is common that any surplus from women’s land parcels are shared with whole households (co-wives, children and parents) when there is a food shortage in the lean season. Thus, if a woman cannot adequately cultivate her individual plot because of restricted or delayed access to farming equipment, she can no longer contribute her crops to the food security of her family and household when needed. If women lose their well-maintained and fertilized plots due to redistribution, they lose their capacity to produce good quality food for their own families and to contribute to the food security of their extended families. However, women’s essential role in ensuring household food security has no impact on their social status. Men might express their appreciation to women, but women are still not involved in decision-making processes that concern the acquisition and management of plots of land for households or the management of collective harvests or farming equipment. This finding reveals a contradiction between the recognition of women’s important role in food security and the behaviours observed toward women in the community. These behaviours, which are dictated by social norms, prevent women from exercising their important role.

**SHARING KNOWLEDGE TO CHANGE PRACTICES**

This research was valuable to use because, as a team, we were able to bring these “discoveries” back to the community as evidence of deeply rooted gender inequalities that hamper good nutritional and food security practices. This practice of holding up a mirror forces villages such as Zangourabougou II to reflect on contradictory behaviours and discuss points of action. We found this method to be most effective to change behaviour. We then used internal meetings to discuss the research results with CARE Mali staff. To disseminate our findings, we produced communication materials and held diffusion workshops. We have also scheduled households’ visits with community members, women’s groups, communal authorities, technical representatives and the partner organization AMAPROS. The visits will reinforce lessons learned. Furthermore, we plan to continue disseminating our findings throughout the CARE federation to integrate good practices into future interventions.



**FIVE MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

As a research team, we have five primary recommendations to promote women’s equality and to nurture more resilient livelihoods for women. First, farming equipment and other inputs should

be available at the community level for women to access and use via women’s asset groups. Women’s groups can invest portions of their budgets in this equipment to foster buy-in. In fact, this recommendation was adopted by the project’s beneficiaries as soon as the findings were presented in Zangourabougou II. IFONS co-funded ten women’s groups (12 percent from women’s groups, 88 percent from CARE) each to acquire a plough and two work oxen, as well as three threshers (20 percent from women’s groups, 80 percent from CARE) that are shared among project communities. Our other recommendations are as follows.

- Women should be encouraged to use their family links to increase their access to land.
- Women’s groups and village bank leaders should organize general assemblies to inform village women about available financial products.
- In households, men and women should talk and work together to change the norm of women being outsiders in their husbands’ families, to value women’s contributions and to improve women’s access to farming equipment.
- Advocate with landowners to develop contracts that make land transfers official. Contracts will ensure that if an owner wants to take back a plot from a woman or man, he (or she) has to allow a certain period of time before doing it,

so that the woman or man can benefit from the investments she or he has made on the plot before handing it back to the owner.

**USING RESEARCH PROCESS AND FINDINGS TO IMPROVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

What is next for us? In addition to giving rise to these recommendations, our process has enabled us to identify key points on which to plan further research and dig into the root causes of various phenomena. For example: how does increasing women’s access to more land and farming equipment affect power relations within households? Knowledge gained from our research—along with that which makes up this section of the document—can be integrated into programs and projects to bring about significant changes in communities. In fact, CARE Mali encourages others to share this knowledge to improve the organization’s programs and methods. Much work remains because entrenched customs and habits are hard to break. For example, giving women greater control over their land is still not seen as a priority in Mali because some men still do not control the land they cultivate. This attitude shows that more than a thousand mirrors are needed to shine a light on social norms and gender inequalities related to food and nutrition security.

*“I have learned that we don’t necessarily need to be trained researchers. Equipped with a framework, an engaged team like ours can easily deepen our understanding of a problem and identify possible solutions.”*

SEÏBA KONATE, PROJECT MANAGER, IFONS





# GHANA

LINKAGES PROJECT:  
PROMISE

## A WOMAN WHO KILLS A PYTHON MUST NOT GO ON TO CUT OFF ITS HEAD: WOMEN'S PRODUCTIVE WORK AND GENDER INEQUALITY IN NORTHERN GHANA

### THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS WE WANTED TO ANSWER

How is decision-making power constructed in households in northern Ghana? How can women and men become more equal in making decisions? How would equality help women who produce and process soybeans and cowpeas to control the resources they need and benefit from marketing activities?

### WHY WE UNDERTOOK OUR RESEARCH

Women in Ghana are a powerful force in the country's agricultural sector. They form more than half of its labour force and produce 70 percent of the country's food. Even more impressive, they constitute 95 percent of those involved in agro-processing and 85 percent of those in food distribution. This immense contribution is spurred by a basic need for food and by social obligation. In northern Ghana, a "good wife" is expected to contribute significantly to her household's food basket. Women do this, in part, by growing soybeans and cowpeas. Both are considered crops that women almost exclusively work and manage. This social assignment of soybeans and cowpeas as "women's crops" also creates an expectation that women can count on the processing and sale of soybeans and cowpeas as



a valuable and sustainable livelihood in a country in which many of the most valuable commercial activities are reserved for men.

Over the course of its experience in northern Ghana, CARE has observed that this expectation does not always match reality. Women show high physical participation in the upstream processing stages of the value chains for soybeans and cowpeas, and are under pressure to engage in viable livelihood activities. At the same time, they do not benefit from crop production or economic activity to the same extent as men benefit from crops that are predominantly under their control. Women remain constrained by their lack of access to and control over key resources and lack of decision-making power within their households and communities. These inequalities restrict the extent to which women can harness soybeans and cowpeas and turn them into livelihoods.

In its poverty-reduction strategy, Ghana recognizes that gender equality is key to growth in the agriculture sector. At the same time, CARE in Ghana uses its programs to help women reduce and even eventually eliminate social injustice and marginalization. As a research team, our rationale for this research project is to help Ghanaian women overcome gender inequalities in access, control and decision-making in their households and in community-level agricultural production, so that women and men are able to engage in livelihoods of equal value and security.

**CHALLENGES WE FACED AND LESSONS WE LEARNED WHILE CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

In the process of designing, conducting and reflecting on its data, we sharpened our appreciation of how questions are posed and of “learning to listen,” particularly when interviewing women. Our data-interpretation exercise revealed that we needed

a more precise definition of what “access to land” means. It also became evident that women describe their reality through a lens in which male control is normalized to the point that women do not see it. This evidence led us to gain increased self-awareness and an ability to perform more gender-conscious analysis of what it means for women to have access to land.

We also gained experience in exploring and analysing deeply rooted gender inequalities. In realizing that women’s access to land and other key resources in the soybean and cowpea value chains is conditional, we were able to identify and ask questions that helped us to understand the norms, values and social structures that validate that conditional access. Even more significantly, we recognised what knowledge is needed to understand signs of gender change and to design interventions that change gendered access, control and decision-making dynamics.

**OUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

We carried out research in four communities in East Mamprusi and Garu-Tempane. The major languages spoken in these communities are Mampruli, Lekpakpa, Kusaal and Moar, so we chose four communities based on geographic and language distribution. We randomly selected one community from among those speaking each of the four languages. In each community, we then selected eight women who were between 30 and 51 years of age, lived in households headed by men, were members of village savings and loan associations, and who had experience in the soybean and cowpea value chains. To get the views of men, we selected 24 men (six per community). The men were household heads, male gender champions or traditional leaders. Through our interviews, we undertook an in-depth analysis of the soybean and cowpea value chains, focusing on the division of labour and decision-

making in households. The main community-level data-collection methods were individual household interviews and focus group discussions conducted with men and women separately. We also interviewed key CARE Ghana personnel who had worked on projects that addressed gender inequality in relation to agricultural value chains. This method gave us a deep and historic perspective of the approaches being implemented to address gender inequality in the region.

**THREE MAIN DISCOVERIES**

**1. A WOMAN WHO KILLS A PYTHON MUST NOT GO ON TO CUT OFF ITS HEAD.**

This local proverb summarizes the extent to which women are made insecure by socially ascribed male privilege: a woman is not allowed to cut the head off a dangerous snake even though she holds that snake in her hands. The insecurity evident in this metaphor is shown in the effects unequal access and control has on women’s ability to participate in and benefit from the production and processing of soybeans and cowpeas. Our research found that, while women are able to access lower-value items such as small farm implements, kitchen utensils or sacks, they are unable to control the resources that really add value within the value chains. These include land, women’s labour, bullocks for traction, grinding mills, and the means to transport raw beans or processed goods to market. On the flip side, women are able to control the resources they have the money to purchase, such as small farming articles. In other words, women control the items required for small-scale, home-based soybean processing, most of which is done through their own kitchens.

By comparison, men have relatively even access to all farming resources, including resources needed to add economic value to soybean and cowpea crops. Men retain control over land distribution, women’s time and labour, as well as traction, manure and grinding mills. They also own means of transport such as motorized tricycles, donkeys and carts. Significantly, men have the ability to second women’s labour away from women’s soybean and cowpea production, and have the ability to delay key production activities on women’s fields. Research findings imply that this level of resource control is a key factor that gives men an upper hand in making decisions in their households. This dominance directly affects the extent to which women are able to produce and process soybeans and cowpeas, and thereby achieve any kind of real economic prosperity and independence.

Which brings us back to the python. These gender dynamics leave women in the same double bind as someone who is not allowed to cut the head off of the dangerous snake in their hands. Women’s insecure access to the means of production means that, while they dominate in the production of the crops, it is men’s decisions around animal traction and women’s labour that determines whether women are able to produce soybeans and cowpeas of quality and volume sufficient to participate in local and larger markets. It is considered women’s jobs to engage in the traditional processing labour that adds value to soybeans and cowpeas, but it is men who decide when and how to use grinding mills. Finally, while communities consider women the main marketers of soybeans and cowpeas, their actual ability to do this task independently is limited by men’s decisions to divert transportation time and resources to marketing women’s crops. As long as women must rely on men for resources, they cannot be equal partners in decision-making. Without this equality, women will be unable to command sufficient resources to gain the decision-making status necessary to engage in secure livelihoods.





*“We believe that carrying out this research will help us positively transform the behaviours, relationships and practices of individuals at household and community levels.”*

GHANA TEAM





**2. DEEPLY HELD BELIEFS ABOUT WOMEN’S AND MEN’S IDENTITIES AND ABILITIES REINFORCE INEQUALITIES IN DECISION-MAKING.**

The dilemmas described above are constructed through social norms that assign men with a greater status and worth than women. In interviews, respondents considered these social norms as standard. Girls and women are thought to be outside the norm—not completely members of their own families or of their husbands’ families. This prejudice is used as justification to assign men the privilege of deciding how land will be distributed. It also justifies men controlling women’s time and labour. Women are considered to be a source of property because they come into men’s homes. Northern Ghanaian societies deem it acceptable for women to be involved in agricultural activities that are typically lower in value but unacceptable for women to make decisions about overall farm management. Management is considered “men’s work.” Women are believed to react too impulsively, so men retain a privilege to receive and sift through information

before passing on what they chose. Women are also considered to be too weak physically to use high-value farm equipment and animals, leaving decisions about their use to men. Through reflexive inquiry and community feedback, CARE staff and project respondents came to see how such social constructions of identity reinforce the idea of men’s dominance in decision-making, and affect women’s ability to make sustainable livelihoods in soybean and cowpea value chains. Indeed, respondents identified 47 different barriers to women’s benefit from the value chains, 44 of which relate to social rules rather than technical skill or the economic enabling environment.

**3. MORE EQUAL DECISION-MAKING REQUIRES DEEP CHANGE FROM MEN AS WELL AS WOMEN.**

Personal and societal change is interconnected. Both female and male research participants expressed a desire to change the access, control and decision-making status quo. That men as well as women were even able to envision and openly discuss

gender change in reference to deep-seated beliefs shows how they have overcome gender blindness and are getting ready to become more equal. The desired changes that men listed include letting go of sole control and decision-making in the division of farmland and family labour. Male respondents have also begun to take on reproductive tasks. For their part, women recognise an opportunity to take on larger farm sizes and economic activities that are of greater value in order to step into decision-making roles that are linked to resource control. Women also recognise that the general desire for change supports them in expressing their desire for a better quality of life. In other words, participants recognise how men’s engagement and women’s empowerment are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. In sum, to become more gender equal, participants realised that women and men must begin to enact new social rules. The rules should concentrate on more equitable divisions of land and labour, greater sharing of household chores, and increased scope for women’s activity in valuable spheres of the economy. These actions will enable women to break the current double bind—kill the python and cut off its head—and ensure women enjoy greater resource security and empowerment.

**SHARING KNOWLEDGE TO CHANGE PRACTICES**

We expect to use our research results to promote women’s equality in achieving more resilient livelihoods. In particular, our results show that:

- building women’s capacity to uphold their rights to land is vital in achieving more resilient livelihoods;

- involving women in village savings and loan associations increases their incomes and ability to purchase farm inputs;
- improving women’s capacity to add value and negotiate processing enables them to increase profitability; and
- helping women organise strong networks makes it possible for them to attract more profitable markets and have stronger bargaining power.

We are also planning to share our research results to campaign for gender equality at multiple levels.

- Research will be shared with communities to raise awareness of attitudes and behaviours that are barriers to gender equality and resilient livelihoods.
- Results will be shared with district governments and civil society organizations to increase awareness and generate action from decision makers. This added knowledge will be especially relevant at project-implementation committee meetings.
- Research results will be shared with national government ministries and INGOS to inform policymakers of the yawning gender imbalances and available strategies, and to supply information relevant to developing gender-conscious programs.

**USING RESEARCH PROCESS AND FINDINGS TO IMPROVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

We are not immune from the need to share learning. Research results must be shared via CARE internal program meetings to integrate new knowledge into programs and projects. The Promise research process and findings can be used to improve development programs in five ways:



- Our programs should facilitate sustainable linkages between produce-buying companies and smallholder farmers.
- Our programs should intensify discussions among men and women at the community level to change gender relations.
- Our programs should emphasize eliminating negative socio-cultural practices in community education and advocacy activities.
- Our programs should continue to focus on increasing women's access to resources and education to enhance women's capacities to be productive farmers and to generate income.

- NGOs and governments should continue to focus on women's economic development because these efforts have shifted the social, cultural and economic determinants of women's inequality in household relations.

Promise research shows clearly that these five measures are likely to contribute to women having the conditions needed to make strategic life choices, and will therefore lead to women's empowerment—a primary goal of all CARE programs.

*“When the chief and elders briefed the community on the importance of helping women to farm, my landlord gave me his bullocks to work on my farm this year, which surprised me. This is good: the men are changing.”*

MADAM AWINBIL





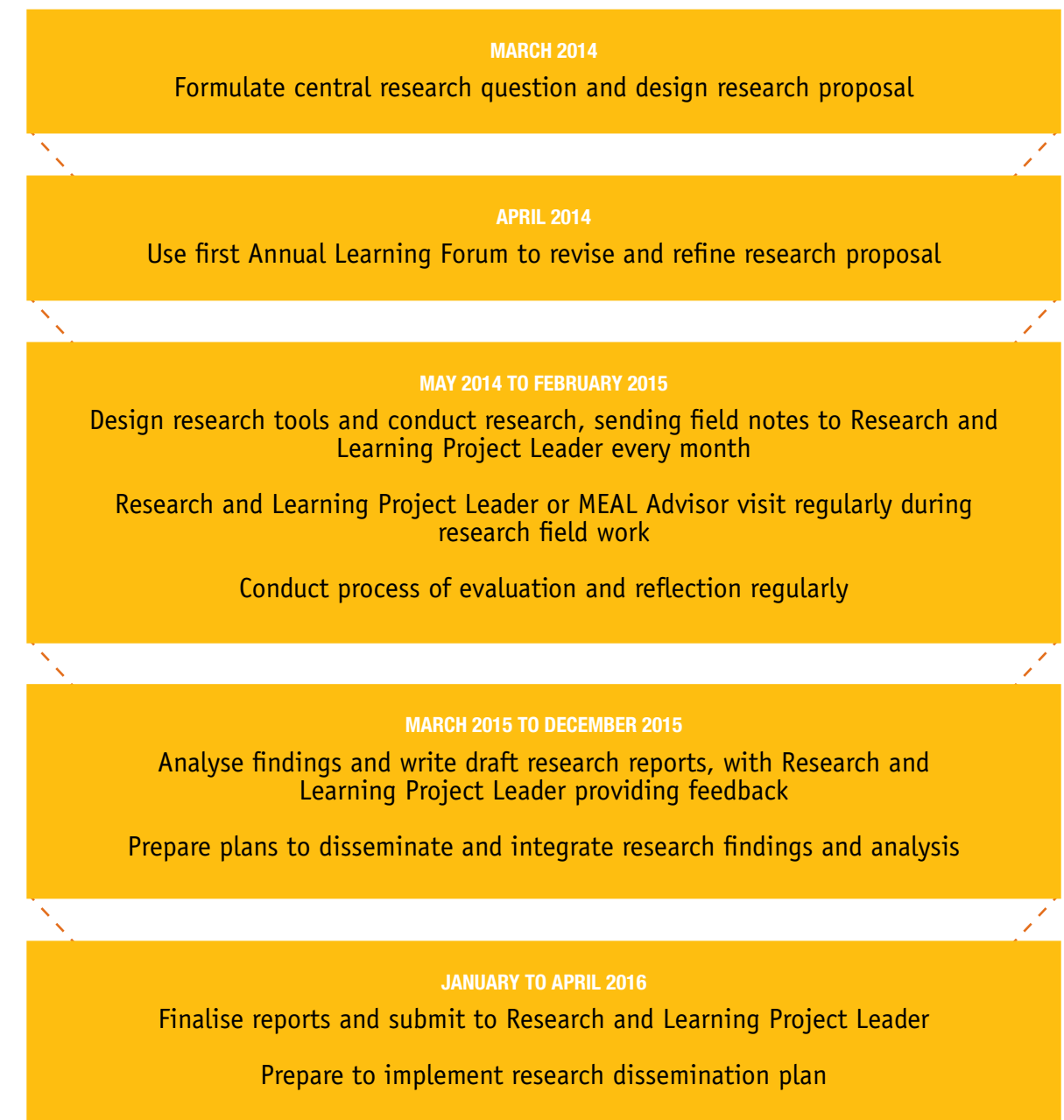
# OUR RESEARCH APPROACH AND PROCESS

During implementation of the LINKAGES program from 2012 to 2016, each of the four country offices (Bolivia, Ethiopia, Ghana and Mali) conducted research specifically related and relevant to its LINKAGES development project. This section of the document<sup>1</sup> describes the process the country offices went through to design their research, collect and analyse data, and disseminate findings.

<sup>1</sup> This section written by Anne Webb, LINKAGES research and learning project lead.

The LINKAGES program was already running when the four research and learning projects were designed. Once the LINKAGES research and learning project lead designed the overall research and learning process in September 2013, each of the four country offices formed a research team. These research teams were made up of as many as seven members. Team

composition varied, some including community members, graduate students, an academic research facilitator and/or civil-society organization staff members. Each team was guided through a process to identify central research questions relevant to each LINKAGES project. The main activities that followed are shown in the chart below:



The research and learning process lasted two years and was coordinated by a consultant—the LINKAGES research and learning project lead—who guided teams to build their capacity to undertake their research. While the research process required that staff time and budgets be designated for it, the fact that team members were also engaged in multiple LINKAGES field activities at the same time meant this designated time was dispersed over an extended period.

## OBJECTIVES AND BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH AND LEARNING PROJECTS

The two main objectives of the research and learning projects were to acquire gender-conscious research findings and analysis, and to learn a gender-conscious approach to conducting qualitative research. Country office research teams would attain findings and develop analyses that provide evidence-based, transferable, relevant and useful insights into gender inequality in their project contexts. These learnings would inform the design of innovative programs and approaches that address deeply rooted gender-inequality barriers that prevent women and girls from achieving livelihood security, resilience, and sustainable futures for households and communities.

The benefits of the qualitative research process and projects are many:

- Local researchers contribute their own understanding and experiences to the development of a context-specific research design.
- Research respondents’ knowledge and experiences contribute to knowledge creation that informs gender-conscious development interventions in their own communities. In other words, their knowledge stays in their communities and contributes to change.
- Increased gender-conscious research and reflection capacity developed by CARE researchers supplements their tool-box of skills and knowledge, which can be applied to multiple activities and responsibilities.
- Participating in a research process that respects local knowledge may increase the research participants’ reflection on and questioning of current norms, their discussion of possibilities and solutions, and subsequently their contribution to change processes.
- Designing development interventions that are informed by insights gained through an in-depth inter-active learnings-creation process are likely to be relevant and impactful, and likely to strengthen development partnerships with communities.
- Designing and conducting such research requires heightened self-awareness on the part of researchers. The approach acknowledges the centrality of the researchers’ capacity to identify and “unpack” their assumptions and pre-conceptions, reflect on the research processes themselves, and recognize how interpreting the significance of qualitative data is an interactive process informed by diverse contextual factors, including both themselves and the respondents.

## DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECTS

### IDENTIFY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

When undertaking research to fill an identified knowledge gap, before deciding on the central research question, the LINKAGES program staff in Canada and in the four country offices worked through an unpacking process. This process involved analyzing current gender-equality programs in relation to intended intermediate outcomes of the LINKAGES program and those of each country project. The unpacking process also involved examining aspects of country office programs, expectations and knowledge that allow for a reality to continue, or to challenge that reality. Finally, the process enabled staff to scrutinize the social, cultural, religious, and economic aspects, values and norms of the community in question (or that influence the community) that constrain or support change.

Recognizing these realities, the point of this step is to think beyond constraining layers to visualize what country office research team members would like to see (the reality they imagine would be better) in terms of gender equality and the intended intermediate outcomes for their country’s LINKAGES project. Research team members then identified what it would take to shift from the current reality as they have presented it, to what they would love to see, including what needed to change for their vision to become a reality and what they needed to know and understand better to contribute to that change. This process

is intended to strengthen the rationale and bring to the surface the theory of change that informs the research design, and subsequently strengthen the research design itself and the relevance and usefulness of learnings. Once each research team gained clarity about what they thought they need to know or understand better to be able to contribute to increased gender equality in the specific context of their LINKAGES project, the teams developed their central research question and designed their research methodology and tools.

### RECEIVE GUIDANCE ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Each research team followed standard qualitative research procedures, and received guidance from the LINKAGES research and learning project lead. The training included guidance on several subjects, including:

- research validity and quality;
- how to conduct “Research for Change”<sup>iii</sup>;
- integrating evaluative thinking into research design;
- the research process, including writing research proposals;
- selecting research methods and designing research tools;
- integrating quantitative and qualitative data;
- identifying who the research respondents need to be given the phenomenon the research team wants to understand;
- researcher self-awareness, knowledge, continuity and community understanding, all of which contribute to why data gathering and analysis are best done by the research team members themselves; and

<sup>iii</sup> Barnsley, Jan and Diana Ellis. 1992. *Research for Change: Participatory Action Research for Community Groups*. Vancouver: Women’s Research Centre.





- keeping a daily record of research experiences, observations and reflections, as these record each researcher's learning process and can be integrated into the reporting on the research process, findings and analysis.

Writing also requires researchers to articulate what they discover, which contributes to learning. How to undertake qualitative analysis<sup>iii</sup> and write a research report can be challenging. It takes time and focus to become immersed in one's data to the degree required to identify and validate key findings, interpret significance and present relevant evidence-based insights. Each research team produced and received feedback on a number of drafts of their research report.

#### RESEARCHER SELF-AWARENESS

Along with and integrated into the process guidance, research teams were encouraged to reflect upon and integrate into their processes various considerations that are particularly relevant to producing learnings to better understand phenomenon that are exacerbating or reducing gender inequality. These considerations include recognizing the power and assumptions held as a researcher; recognizing

one's subjectivity, and the inter-subjectivity that is part of jointly producing learnings with research participants; considering feminist research ethics;<sup>iv</sup> and ensuring that one's thinking evolves along with changes in process, increased self-awareness, and learnings acquired in the process of conducting the research, so that one does not inadvertently step back into asking questions and interpreting information from the initial, less well-informed perspective. This research approach combines adult-education values and processes; respect for and recognition of local knowledge, experience, expertise and capacities; and critical context-specific gender-based analysis embedded in a rigorous implementation of qualitative research methodologies.

#### INTERVIEWING WOMEN

Factors to consider when interviewing women were approached from a few different angles. In some cases, research teams—the majority of members being men—engaged women interviewers to join the research team to interview and co-conduct focus groups with women. Other teams drew upon the expertise of the CARE country office or their region's gender advisor to assist with aspects of their research design and/or analysis of their findings. Members of research teams were made aware of not reproducing in the researcher-respondent relationship the subordination women experience in their society. What women are comfortable and ready to share may be constrained by the perceived and real power of the interviewer to interpret and analyse what they say. How interviewees share (the way they describe and phrase things, what they emphasize, what they don't say or share, the logic that makes

their activities and actions make sense to them) may be self-serving, self-preserving, and rooted in and rationalized by past experiences. Recognizing the subjectivity and the inter-subjectivity of the researcher-interviewee relationship requires "learning to listen"<sup>v</sup> to one's self, to the respondent and to the subtle dynamic between the two. While interviewing or conducting focus groups that take into account biases, assumptions, motivations and the multiple manifestations of normalized gender inequality, a further challenge is drawing women's focus to their own capacities and aspirations that lie outside of their current experience. Women may be in a situation of having a "fairly deep moral attachment to norms and beliefs that directly support their own degradation"<sup>vi</sup> as individuals with capacities and aspirations left underdeveloped. This situation constrains their envisioning of alternative possibilities.

#### APPRECIATE THE REQUIRED LEVEL OF EFFORT

Conducting gender-conscious qualitative research requires a significant level of effort. It requires heightened self-awareness on the part of research team members and often involves personal change, including a new understanding on how team members are shaped by underlying social norms around them. Thus, in addition to developing a schedule that accounts for all the steps and processes involved in conducting qualitative research, researchers need time for their own evolution. Furthermore, analytical writing requires that reflections and ideas have time and stimulus to develop. This time needs to be given consideration when scheduling to allow minds time and conditions conducive to focusing on critical analytical gender-conscious thinking.

## ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF THIS RESEARCH PROCESS

New research approaches bring with them advantages and challenges. The advantages of this research process are it enables researchers to conduct investigations that reveal complex and interconnected factors that contribute to an identified problem, barrier, limitation or success. It also provides evidence-based insights and understandings regarding how to address a particular situation in innovative ways. The process helps researchers increase their self-awareness, reflective and analytical capacities, gender-equality knowledge, and understanding of the issue being focused on—all of which can be applied to their projects and programs.

Three challenges of this research process are noteworthy. The first is staff turnover. Turnover in a country office research team can result in the research process taking more time and in the loss of knowledge with the loss of a team member if all activities and reflections have not been thoroughly documented. This challenge stems from the centrality of the researcher in this process of defining and conducting qualitative gender-conscious research. Another challenge is the time commitment required may result in research teams depending on external resource people to conduct aspects of the research, which tends to have implications for the consistency, quality and depth of the data gathered. The third challenge relates to communication. Communication between the LINKAGES research and learning project lead and the research teams was carried out primarily by email and sometimes via Skype. The complexity of the research concepts and processes are more readily discussed and integrated through in-person collaboration.

<sup>iii</sup> Ezzy, Douglas. 2002. *Qualitative Analysis: Practice and Innovation*. London: Routledge.

<sup>iv</sup> CRIAW. 1996. *Feminist Research Ethics: A Process*. Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.

<sup>v</sup> Anderson, Kathryn and Dana C. Jack. 2006. "Learning to Listen: Interview techniques and analyses." In Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.) *The Oral History Reader*. London: Routledge.

<sup>vi</sup> Appadurai, A. 2004. "The capacity to aspire: culture and the terms of recognition." In V.Rao and M. Walton (eds.), *Culture and Public Action*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.





## ENABLING FACTORS FOR COUNTRY OFFICES TO CARRY OUT THIS TYPE OF RESEARCH

Research of this kind takes careful planning and preparation. Research teams need sufficient time and resources to devote to research implementation, analysis, learning and writing. Research team members need to be involved directly and consistently in all aspects of the research process. Also key is having an experienced gender-research expert as the research and learning project lead to design the overall project; to provide research

guidance, resources, learning processes, substantial feedback and encouragement; and to recognize the expertise and capacities of local country office research teams. Another vital factor is commitment. Country office and research team members need to be committed to the objectives of their research and learning projects, gender equality, the issues being researched, and in learning the research approach and methodology. In multi-country initiatives like LINKAGES, these team members also benefit significantly from having opportunities to meet and work in-person with teams from other countries and with the research and learning project lead. These opportunities enable researchers to sharpen their focus, engage in dynamic learning, and share ideas, information, experiences and learning.

## PUTTING RESEARCH RESULTS TO USE

Each country office research team has produced a detailed report of their research context, central research question, methodology, findings, analysis and conclusions. These reports serve as thorough references to draw from when creating materials and activities to disseminate information about what these teams have learned and how it is relevant to CARE programs and projects. In addition to the spontaneous integration of the process and issue-related learnings into their daily work and interactions, each research team planned ways in which its research learnings will be shared and integrated into future programming. Dissemination and integration of learnings includes presenting and discussing findings with research participants, communities, women community leaders, traditional leaders, community and local government partners, CARE project managers, program coordinators, country directors and officials at other levels of CARE. Presentation and discussion has been carried out via workshops, short documents and training; by integrating research learnings into Social Analysis and Action discussion sessions; and by incorporating knowledge into country office staff ways of working.

# OUR RESEARCHERS AND COLLABORATORS

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