

# Women's Empowerment:

## Strategic Impact Inquiry Research Summary

**The Context:** The Jiboa River basin in El Salvador, with a population of 32,000, is prone to flooding during the rainy season, leaving communities in the lower basin vulnerable to emergencies. The risks of flooding are exacerbated by environmental destruction in the upper basin due to construction. Because of frequent emergencies, residents living in the river basin mainly engage in subsistence agriculture without access to financial services. These disasters particularly affect women who are disproportionately represented among the country's poor.

**The Project:** CARE El Salvador assessed the Early Warning System in the Jiboa River Basin (JIBEWS) for the Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII). Designed in the wake of Hurricane Mitch and tested in its implementation by Hurricane Stan.

**JIBEWS** (2005-2006) aimed to reduce community vulnerability to disasters. The project strengthened Early Warning Systems and communities' capacities to respond to flood emergencies, manage risk and engage in hydrological and meteorological monitoring. It coordinated and integrated its work with local, municipal and national levels of government. The project strategies included:

- Organizing/restructuring local emergency committees;
- Training Local Emergency Committees;
- Installing communication systems in each community;
- Training municipal committees, local committees, teachers and students in risk management; and
- Coordinating with municipalities in regard to protection of the river basin.

While the project did not have a women's empowerment focus in its objectives and results, it promoted gender equity by facilitating women's participation through the scheduling of meetings and activities, engaging female staff, using inclusive language, taking measures to facilitate women's empowerment, coordinating with women's organizations and using a gender sensitive approach to training activities.

The [Strategic Impact Inquiry](#) (SII) seeks to evaluate CARE's impact on women's empowerment. For CARE El Salvador's full SII report, please contact: [pqlibrarian@care.org](mailto:pqlibrarian@care.org).

### CARE El Salvador's Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII):

CARE El Salvador incorporated the SII framework in its 2006 evaluation of JIBEWS, to explore the extent to which it addressed women's empowerment. Specifically, CARE El Salvador explored:

- What were the project objectives, strategies and stakeholders?
- To what extent did the project emphasize empowerment of women and how did it impact empowerment?
- What factors facilitated/inhibited women's empowerment?
- What has CARE El Salvador learned about women's empowerment from this project?

**The Methods:** In El Salvador, the SII utilized qualitative and participatory research.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

- **Research Team:** CARE Bolivia Staff
- **Workshop:** Meet with other participating country sites in the region to discuss women's empowerment, plan and select evaluations to be reviewed for the SII

#### DATA COLLECTION

- **Document and Secondary Data Review:** Evaluation report and Terms of Reference, monitoring information
- **Interviews/Group Discussions:** Project staff, partners and participants

#### DATA ANALYSIS

- **Triangulation:** Data validation across methods, locations and researchers
- **Participatory Analysis:** Team analysis of findings, emerging conclusions and lessons

# EL SALVADOR

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### Women's Own Views on Empowerment:

#### AGENCY

Sense of being useful, capable and skillful  
Self-esteem, confidence and value and responsibility  
Set goals and ideals  
Help and value others  
Share knowledge,  
Lead groups, fight for rights  
Mobility and participation in meetings and trainings  
Don't be afraid to make mistakes  
Accept responsibilities  
Independent financially  
Make own decision

#### STRUCTURE

#### RELATIONS

Relate to other people  
Build relations with other organizations

### Impact on Empowerment

**Implications:** Overall, the JIBEWS study showed that in many cases, focusing on women as respondents without engaging cultural values/norms meant that women wound up shouldering much of the response burden that had once been in men's hands and there were no structural changes in gender inequity..

#### **CARE promoted empowerment in ways that women valued**

- Access to new knowledge/technical information and use of drills impacted women's agency, but had little impact on other dimensions of empowerment.
- Access to and control over emergency response materials/tools gave women a sense of security, comfort and respect within the community but did not alter power relations.
- Participation in local groups provided a sense of community, an opportunity to broaden knowledge and the ability to gain team work skills.
- Recovery/dissemination of women's experiences via visits and media allowed women to reflect on experiences and be acknowledged by men and others.

#### **The intervention also had harms, and did not deal with structural drivers of gender inequity**

- CARE must be conscious not to assign all responsibility in emergencies to women.
- Men had vague notions of women's empowerment and often gave negative views of it.

#### **CARE should include empowerment from project design, and develop concrete definitions and strategies for empowerment**

- JIBEWS indicators on women's participation were made without gender analysis.
- Vague definitions of strategies for empowerment made them difficult to operationalize.
- Engaging partners/coordination can strengthen CARE's work to promote empowerment.
- No resources were allocated for women's empowerment.
- Short project duration limited the project's ability to make substantial changes.

#### **It is critical to train staff on gender and women's empowerment in order to work effectively with women**

- Project training addressed gender issues to promote clearer understanding of gender inequality and the importance of women's participation.
- Personnel training on women's empowerment allowed teams to establish equal relations with women based on respect, motivation, and acknowledgement.

Agency*	Structures	Relations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive self-image: useful, capable and self-esteem, importance</li> <li>• Confident and feel acknowledged in home and community,</li> <li>• Greater care for personal appearance, grooming</li> <li>• Self-sufficiency in emergency: control radio communications</li> <li>• Willingness to help others and the community</li> <li>• Able to make decisions , value learning and knowledge</li> <li>• Overcome difficulties speaking, giving opinions, participating</li> <li>• Aware of rights: participation, respect, self-defense</li> <li>• Information and knowledge on emergency management</li> <li>• Value information management during emergency, but placed burden for emergency response solely on women</li> <li>• Skills in group coordination, information management, shelter management, first aid, radio communications, rescue</li> <li>• Visit other places freely and speak publicly (on television)</li> <li>• Sense of belonging to local community, commissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided training opportunities, meetings, drills, exchange, interviews</li> <li>• Access to resources: rope, pumps, coolers, casting nets, seeds</li> <li>• Home environment: men and children respect women's participation and value</li> <li>• Women have a role in coordinating local emergency committees and commissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater sense of inter-dependence and need to participate in local groups</li> <li>• Community consults women for advice</li> <li>• Expanded relations with institutions</li> <li>• Greater trust among women and with men</li> </ul>

\*Changes in agency impacted a small group of women only.

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