

Women's Empowerment:

Strategic Impact Inquiry Research Summary

The Context: Despite laws upholding women's rights and gender consciousness, Afar women in rural Ethiopia often live in poverty and are subject to harmful traditional practices, like female genital cutting and male dominated gender roles. While CARE's Female Genital Cutting elimination project has been acclaimed as a success, the Strategic Impact Inquiry critically assesses the strengths and limitations of its impact on fulfilling women's needs and rights.

The Project: For the Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII), CARE Ethiopia focused on its Female Genital Cutting (FGC) elimination project. Initiated in 2003, the FGC elimination project identified fundamental issues of women's marginalization within Ethiopia's pastoralist context. The project aimed to eliminate FGC and other harmful practices, realize women's rights, promote safe reproductive health, prevent HIV/AIDS and strengthen community-based health through:

- Civil society advocacy;
- Sexual reproductive rights awareness-raising and information dissemination at the village level; and
- The engagement of men and powerful leaders (imams, elders, chiefs) to raise awareness of the harmful effects of FGC

CARE Ethiopia's Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII): For the SII, CARE Ethiopia explored a number of questions:

- How do Afar women define empowerment?
- How have FGC practices changed?
- How do changes in FGC relate to women's empowerment, CARE's work, pastoral institutions and local context?
- How has the FGC project impacted women's empowerment?

Methodology: CARE Ethiopia led the SII and involved staff throughout the research design, collection and analysis.

RESEARCH DESIGN:

- **Workshop:** Overview of SII principles, collective draft of research design
- **Researchers:** CARE staff from both field and country office levels, with outside lead research support

DATA COLLECTION

- **Total Time in Field:** 5 visits, 2 sub-districts
- **Focus Group Discussion** (8 women groups, 7 male groups, 1 mixed group): Issues related to gender inequality and women's empowerment
- **In-Depth Interviews** (5 respondents): Perspectives on gender inequality and women's empowerment
- **Field Notes:** Direct observation, researcher inferences, analytic note-taking, personal journals

DATA ANALYSIS

- **Triangulation:** Data validation between interviews and focus group discussions
- **Interpretive Approach:** Researchers reflect and interpret data collection, incorporating views of Afar people
- **Reflective Process:** Research team debriefed on inquiry process

Limitations:

- Time constrained quantity/quality of work.
- Operating in three languages (Afar, Amharic, and English) was a challenge.
- No translation for 'empowerment' in Afar.
- Lack of training of team in qualitative research methods, observation not used.

The [Strategic Impact Inquiry \(SII\)](#) is a three year study that seeks to evaluate CARE's impact on women's empowerment. For CARE Ethiopia's full SII report, please contact: pqlibrarian@care.org.

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ETHIOPIA

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Women's Own Views on Empowerment:

Afar women related empowerment to the traditional concept of Hilaly/Dieto, which means *powerful/capable* and only applies to married women. Hilaly/Dieto is tied to social status and acceptance of communal norms and values, though it may negatively impact individual women. Qualities include:

AGENCY

Efficiently run house (care for family, maintain livestock, construct home effectively)
 Adhere to religious beliefs
 Be capable and able to manage household needs
 Express self quietly and with dignity
 Keep marital disputes to self (including violence)
 Strong, independent, carries out duties outside home
 Exercise choice: husband, FGC, education, household
 Self-motivated, self-respect, faithful

STRUCTURE

RELATIONS

Care for sick, family
 Obey husband
 Be respectful, hospitable, live according to social values

Programming Strategies: *Despite information pertaining to the dangers of FGC and other harmful traditional practices, adherence to traditional, cultural and social expectations prohibits change in FGC practices.*

Commit to communities long-term and expand target area, for sustainable change in FGC.

- CARE's partnership with Muslim religious leaders, government and traditional leaders at multiple levels provides a strong foundation for the eradication of FGC.
- CARE's rapport with the community is paramount for future participation and positioning in the area.
- Ingrained gender roles impede advancement of and CARE must find entry points within the community (like education) to strengthen moves for positive change.

Engage the entire community, males and females, in a holistic approach to pursue broad-based women's empowerment.

- Address issues of women's/girls' rights in household decisions.
- Focus education curriculum on both informal and formal areas to create a foundation for greater community impact.
- Continue to engage males and females in discussions around FGC.
- Work toward equal status/income for traditional birth attendants.
- Engage birth attendants to disseminate knowledge/end FGC.

Adapt interventions to fit the local contexts and realities.

- Understand and engage traditional communication systems to extend program coverage throughout region.
- For pastoralist communities, schools should also be mobile.
- Be aware of community perceptions of CARE staff.

Changes in Empowerment

Agency	Structure	Relations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion, knowledge and awareness of women's rights/health implications of FGC • Voice opinions within community • Discuss topics that were formerly taboo • Evidence of limited, individual acts of resistance (i.e. women's migration to Djibouti to avoid marriage) • Young women feel they have the right to choose FGC and marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FGC remains widespread, despite important symbolic pockets of change • Marriage required for (Hilaly/Dieto) • Tradition, religion, social demands and patriarchy limit change/women's rights • Change in legislation on FGC • Sharia Court, local leaders, Women's Affairs and CARE impact community and sometimes uphold women's rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FGC support groups for women who choose to not cut daughters • Collaboration between health services, women's affairs and local leaders