

Women's Empowerment:

Strategic Impact Inquiry Research Summary

The Context: With 62 percent of Malawians living below the poverty line, the people of Malawi struggle within a challenging political landscape with chronic poverty, HIV/AIDS and severe food shortages. In order to address issues in food security, poverty and their impacts on women as well as orphans and other vulnerable children (OVCs), CARE initiated a number of livelihood projects in central Malawi.

The Projects: CARE Malawi investigated the impact of its village savings and loans (VSL) programs, based on CARE Niger's MMD VSL model, on women's empowerment and the well-being of OVCs. Specifically, CARE Malawi's study focused on the impacts of three projects:

- **Improving Livelihoods through Increased Food Security (I-LIFE)** and **Supporting and Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS for Livelihood Enhancement (SMIHLE)**, initiated in 2004, which aim to enhance agriculture, marketing, enterprise, nutrition and institutional capacities through VSL; and
- **Central Region Livelihood Security Program (CRLSP)**, which ran from 1999 to 2005, and aimed to strengthen organizational capacities and partnerships of small holder farmers, raising agricultural productivity, water availability and household earnings.

CARE Malawi's Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII): For the SII, CARE Malawi examined its work through a meta-evaluation centered around four key questions:

- Does the program empower women economically?
- Does the program improve the well-being of OVCs?
- Does the program empower women socially and politically?

Limitations/Constraints

- Comparison groups were from villages where CARE had not implemented any activities and generally more vulnerable than participant groups (that had received other interventions).
- Financial and human resource constraints.
- Scope too broad, trying to balance international requirements and country office needs.
- Time between phases may have affected responses given seasonality of food security.
- Study demands exceeded staff capacity.
- No baseline data on women's empowerment and no linguistic equivalent for empowerment.

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

The Methods: CARE Malawi's SII used both qualitative and quantitative approaches:

RESEARCH DESIGN

- **Preparation:** Define research questions, approach and literature review, consulting communities, staff and other stakeholders
- **Design Workshop:** Conceptual framework, operational framework, design document
- **Training of Research Team:** Two consultants, CARE staff

DATA COLLECTION

- **Overview:** 25 days, 418 Respondents, 4 sites
- **Questionnaires:** Heads of household, women, and OVCs (7 to 9 years old)
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Women's empowerment and well-being
- **In-Depth Interviews:** VSL and women's empowerment
- **Data Entry and Cleaning:** Department of Population Services, Chancellor College, constituent college of University of Malawi.

DATA ANALYSIS

- **Triangulation:** Between locations, methods, researchers and respondents to ensure validity
- **Workshop:** Joint analysis of findings

MALAWI

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Women's Own Views on Empowerment:

AGENCY

Basic Needs: food, clothing, blankets
 Able to support others in the community, including OVCs
 Employ others,
 Money, house, livestock
 Dress well, health, happy, food secure
 Invest in productive assets
 Buy agricultural inputs like fertilizer for food security

RELATIONS

Respect husband
 Gets permission to sell assets

STRUCTURE

Impact on Women's Empowerment and OVC Well-Being

Main Conclusions:

In terms of economic empowerment: CARE Malawi's VSL model benefited women's productivity and income through group support and trainings -- its impact on women's empowerment has applied mainly at the agency level.

Socially and politically, the program impact is smaller. Women have cited more consultative relations in the household and participation in the community, but have not engaged in community leadership roles.

In terms of VSL and OVC well-being: VSL households demonstrated greater care and support for OVCs, but had no effect on reducing child labor among them.

Implications:

Incorporate a Focus on Broad-based Women's Empowerment in CARE Malawi's VSL Programming

- Include capacity building for staff and participants in gender, rights and sexual/reproductive rights issues
- Adopt indicators for women's empowerment and institutionalize them through CARE Malawi's monitoring and evaluation system.
- Integrate the SII analysis methodology into programs and incorporate women's empowerment into program design, monitoring and evaluation – in particular, focus on relational and structural levels of empowerment.

On Conducting Impact Inquiries

- The involvement of many stakeholders helps sharpen the SII process.
- Before designing a study, it is critical to analyze and understand the context of the program and communities.

	Women	OVC in VSL Households
Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-image, esteem, confidence to speak in public (30%) • Decision-making in children's education, property and spending BUT not family planning • Decide who to vote for, but don't run for office • Income/assets through income generating activity • Knowledge from trainings and business skills • Access health services more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More likely to stay with biological parent(s) • More meals per day • More likely to attend school • Less play among, perhaps to take on tasks of parents involved in VSL activities • Engage equally in piecemeal work (child labor)
Impacts on Structures not found (in terms of kinship/marriage norms or political representation).		
Relation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement in community conflict resolution (small percent) and organizations • Consultative decision-making, more respectful relationship with husband, lower violence against women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss decisions-making, education with parents (but not health or HIV/AIDS) • Greater participation in youth-related civil society organizations in the community

*In many cases, within the category of VSL women, there were wide ranges of answers, indicating inequalities within the group in terms of impact, which require further study.