

Women's Empowerment:

Strategic Impact Inquiry Research Summary

The Context: Gender relations in Yemen are complex and diverse given its diverse religious, cultural, social and political traditions, particularly in light of the country's deteriorating economy and the out-migration of men from rural to urban areas in search of work. In geographically remote, socially isolated villages throughout Yemen, there is a clear separation of women and men in public and private life, except within the core family. Women are generally seen as weak, and their worth is measured by their contribution to domestic work and children-bearing.

The Projects: CARE Yemen assessed two projects for the Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII):

- **Poverty Alleviation in Al Mahwit District,** 2003 to 2004, which aimed to reduce poverty through supporting villages in sustainable economic and agricultural development, through the development of women's associations; and
- **Improvement of Small Farmers' Agricultural Production and Strengthening of Rural Self-Help Structures in the Western Highlands of Yemen,** 2003 to 2005, which aimed to strengthen self-help initiatives through men's and women's groups as well as increase food security through greater agricultural production.

CARE Yemen's Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII): For the SII, CARE Yemen assessed both projects in a total of four villages in order to answer the following questions:

- How is empowerment of women expressed and felt by women, particularly who have been involved in association formation? What has changed for them and to what do they attribute change?
- Why do women (not) join associations and why do they remain (or leave)?
- To what extent has change occurred beyond the individual and how?
- Has association formation had any negative effects?

The [Strategic Impact Inquiry](#) explores CARE's impact on women's empowerment. For CARE Yemen's full SII report, please visit: pqlibrarian@care.org.

The Methods: In the SII, each phase of the study followed a similar process, rooted in qualitative and participatory research.

RESEARCH DESIGN

- **Indicator Workshop:** Principles of women's empowerment, bias and data collection with CARE Yemen staff
- **Research Team:** All female, not related to CARE activities, but familiar with rural life and village women in northern Yemen
- **Research Sites:** 4 villages (one control)

DATA COLLECTION

- **Introductory Visit:** Familiarize community to researchers, researchers to community
- **Semi-Structured Interviews, Small Group Meetings, Focus Group Discussions** (5 days per village): Mind maps, timelines, photographs and poetry on women's views about empowerment, the community and the impact of associations
- **Feedback Meeting:** With women, verify initial findings, check inconsistencies, provide an overview of results and initial analysis

DATA ANALYSIS

- **Triangulation:** Data validation across methods, locations and researchers
- **Reflective Process:** Debriefed on challenges and observations throughout data collection
- **Participatory Analysis:** Team, staff and CARE UK met to disaggregate indicators for empowerment

Limitations:

- Limited access to non-members and men
- External team lacked community context
- Taboo around issues of bodily integrity
- Difficult engaging men in study
- Limited time for qualitative research

YEMEN

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Women's Own Views on Empowerment:

AGENCY

Education, literacy
Decision-making in the family
A good mother
Freely speaks, travels
Overcomes obstacles
Defends self

STRUCTURE

RELATIONS

Negotiates with males in the family
Networks with unrelated men
Pursues/defends rights to others

Impact on Empowerment

Implications:

Staff must support women to manage associations transparently, learn from one another and problem-solve independently.

- With the goal of 10 associations established in a year, staff focused on association registration and infrastructure, with less time or incentives to guide women board members, detect problems or monitor operations (quantity over quality).
- CARE staff need more training in participatory learning. They often instructed members without enabling them to explore options/make their own decisions.
- Financial non-transparency in two of the three villages with associations may lead toward malpractice, and association collapse.
- Exchange visits between associations could provide platform for learning and exchange around empowerment.

Associations should be strengthened to be able to work effectively with men, without being dominated by them.

- Minimize/avoid involvement of men that dominate associations by increasing the managerial, administrative and financial capabilities of board members.

Broad-based Empowerment Requires Long-term Support and Strategies

- Supporting income generating activities effectively requires longer financial support and more training so women can develop experience and skills.
- Literacy initiatives are important to women, but need support through reading materials and follow up courses. Also, literacy materials and curriculum can play a strategic role in fostering discussion on sensitive issues, like family planning.
- To support women's agricultural work and reduce labor time, the project should consult animal husbandry specialists and veterinarians on how to care for livestock, as well as train women to use and maintain time-saving farming tools.

Agency	Relations	Structure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-esteem and confidence from involvement, roles, skills/knowledge • Education through literacy and communications, though administrative and management weak, and few reading materials • Unaware/do not exercise legal rights • Less economic dependence through women's income, though limited control on spending and some leaders abused role for self-benefit • Increased workload for women, as association work adds to tasks • Mobility and influence on household decisions • Group membership and activism, though distrust in financial handling of associations due to internal communications problems • No changes in health awareness, though literacy and self-esteem may potentially influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded social network • Communication with men • Negotiate more with family and neighbors • Men's participation overtakes, interferes with the roles of women in association – especially when they see economic benefits/opportunities in projects 	

Internally, female staff reported greater confidence from their participation in the project. However, male staff continue to have more power within CARE Yemen, and expressed negative attitudes toward working on 'women's issues'.

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