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IS RIPA-NORTH TRANSFORMING RESTRICTIVE GENDER NORMS?

Evidence from the 'Gender Outcome Mapping' study

Gender transformation is a major cross-cutting approach of the Mercy Corps-led RIPA-North program which aims to build resilience in the lowlands of Ethiopia. A key pillar of this approach is to address restrictive gender and social norms which limit female participation in market opportunities, exclude women from having an active voice in community institutions, and undermine nutrition improvements. The approach, led by CARE International, is a process of Social Analysis and Action (SAA) in which participants in RIPA-North community and market platforms engage in dialogue with their communities to identify and ultimately address the restrictive norms.

This evidence brief summarizes the outcomes from RIPA-North's 'Gender Outcome Mapping' Study, conducted in February 2023, which aimed to assess how communities themselves measure their progress towards gender equality. The findings indicate very positive signs of progress, with almost 75% of women reporting 'high' or 'medium' levels of change for all eight main categories of gender norm that pose a challenge for women's participation and gender equity.

Background

The challenge that RIPA-North is trying to address

RIPA-North recognizes that an individuals' gender, age, and socio-economic status have the potential to support or undermine their economic and nutritional resilience. CARE's initial gender analysis identified eight main categories of gender norm that pose a challenge for female participation, which are the eight 'areas for inquiry' of the Gender Outcome Mapping study:

1. *Gendered division of labor*: Women and girls devoted most of their time to heavy, exhausting, and unpaid domestic labor. Nearly 85% of people agree that acquiring information and skills cannot outweigh existing norms that keep a woman's role in the kitchen and men's for traveling to pasture animals.
2. *Household decision-making*: Most people said fathers/male household heads are the ultimate decision-makers on issues.
3. *Control over productive assets*: women and girls' ownership and control over productive resources is very low. People did not see a lot of room for change and highlighted that "government policies and laws cannot dismantle existing norms and cultures that favor men."
4. *Access to public spaces and services*: More than 95% agreed that existing programs or strategies that intended to promote women's and girls' access to services; public spaces are being implemented ineffectively.
5. *Participation in public decision making*: While there has been limited impact from advocacy and organizing by women's groups, NGOs, and the government, people agreed that women's participation in public spaces remains limited.
6. *Control over one's body*: Men, women, and key informants disagree about the level of sexual harassment that happens in households: men say there is none; key informants say it does exist, especially early and forced marriage.
7. *Restorative justice*: People confirmed that services as one-stop centers are available in government hospitals in addition to the traditional justice system services. Women are most likely to seek support from clan leaders and get compensation through traditional restorative justice. NGOs, the police, and formal courts also provide options to seek justice and support.
8. *Aspirations for oneself*: The lack of productive resources and women's restricted mobility, together with their economic dependency, puts them in a subordinate position in the transfer of resources as compared to men. This restricts their aspirations for themselves in their futures.

Implementation approach

RIPA-North aims to address and transform these restrictive gender and social norms through a process of community dialogue and action using the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) process and tools. The SAA process is implemented in five-step cycles:

- Step 1. *Staff transformation*: This is the foundational step of SAA that encourages ongoing, critical self-reflection within the program team on gender, social, and power norms. The aim is that staff members increase their own understanding, comfort with the topics, and their skills for facilitating dialogue on gender.
- Step 2. *Community reflection*: Facilitated by a member of the community, this second step is a continuous process of exploring the underlying causes of gender, social, and power norms.
- Step 3. *Planning for action*: This is the third vital step in turning motivation for change into individual and collective action for sustainable transformation, centring around communities' own identification and prioritization of practical actions to challenge gender, social, and power norms.
- Step 4. *Implementing plans*: The fourth step is implementing plans where social, gender, and power inequities are challenged through increased community activism to adopt and maintain positive changes.
- Step 5. *Evaluation*: Finally, these on-going processes provide opportunity for monitoring, evaluation, and learning which is the fifth step.

Since RIPA-North is a systems-strengthening program, the CARE approach on RIPA-North is to layer the SAA process onto different governance and market platforms in communities. These include Rangeland Councils (RLCs), government-established Mother-to-Mother Support Groups (MtMSGs) and Male Champion Groups (MCGs) which promote improved nutrition outcomes, and Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs). To-date, RIPA-North has facilitated the SAA process through 350 groups, involving more than 5,000 members.

Methodology

The gender outcome study was conducted in February 2023 using a qualitative approach (*gender outcome mapping tool*) across seven woredas in Oromia, Afar and Somali Regions where the SAA process has been implemented. Twenty-one (21) FGD interviews involving 212 participants were conducted with members of five Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA), eleven Mother to Mother Support Groups (MtMSGs), four Rangeland Councils (RLC) and one Male Champion Group (MCG). The assessment focused on the eight areas of inquiry defined above. The progress markers for each area of inquiry were evaluated against a four-scale score of Nil (0-25%); Low (26-50%); Medium (51-75%) and High (76-100%).

Evidence of change

Perceptions of change

The Gender Outcome Mapping Study shows extremely positive changes across all the key gender progress markers, for both female and male reporting, though it should be noted the study looked only at direct participants in the SAA process and not at the changes in the wider

community. Table 1 shows women’s perceptions of change and Table 2 shows male perceptions.

Table 1: Female perceptions of progress against key progress markers (areas of inquiry)

Progress Markers	Progress Level (%)			
	Nil	Low	Medium	High
Division of labor and workload sharing	1.9	1.9	40.7	55.6
Household decision-making	0	3.7	35.2	61.1
Control over productive assets	5.6	20.4	33.3	40.7
Access to public places and services	3.7	22.2	20.4	53.7
Participation in public decision making	1.9	25.9	33.3	38.9
Control over one’s body	3.7	7.4	51.9	37
Violence and restorative justice	0	7.1	46.4	46.4
Aspiration for oneself	0	24.1	46.3	29.6

Table 2: Male perceptions of progress against key progress markers (areas of inquiry)

Progress Markers	Progress Level (%)			
	Nil	Low	Medium	High
Division of labor and workload sharing	0	0	33.3	66.7
Household decision-making	0	11.1	33.3	55.6
Control over productive assets	0	44.4	11.1	44.4
Access to public places and services	11.1	0	22.2	66.7
Participation in public decision making	0	22.2	55.6	22.2
Control over one’s body	0	0	66.7	33.3
Violence and restorative justice	0	22.2	33.3	44.4
Aspiration for oneself	0	0	33.3	66.7

Key findings were:

- The study shows extremely positive signs of progress in transformation of gender norms. More than a third of women (37%) reported ‘high’ level of change for all areas of inquiry except ‘aspiration for oneself’. Almost three-quarters of women (74%) reported ‘high’ or ‘medium’ change for all the eight ‘areas of inquiry’, which correspond to the different challenges women face in participation and gender equality.
- For both women and men, division of labor and workload sharing, household decision making, and access to public places and services were the highest and most consistent areas of improvement.
- Male and female reporting on change was broadly consistent, though men tend to report slightly more and faster progress than women do; on average, 50% of men scored progress as ‘high’ across the eight ‘areas of inquiry’, compared with 45% of women.
- The most striking difference in perceptions of men and women was for ‘Aspiration of oneself’, where 66.7% of men perceived ‘high’ level of change whereas only 29.6% of women perceived the change as ‘high’. Men also perceived significantly higher change than women for ‘Division of labor and workload sharing’ and ‘Access to public places and services’.

- Mother-to-Mother Support Groups (MtMSGs) and VSLAs had the highest and most consistent scores reflecting progress against gender equality outcomes.
- In all three RIPA-North target regions, 'Household decision-making' and 'Access to public spaces and services' were consistently in the top three 'areas of inquiry' with change.
- Afar was the region with the highest scores in terms of perceptions of gender progress, and Somali region had the lowest scores.
- 'Division of labor' in Oromia was the highest score of all, with 80% of people responding high progress in that area.

Perceptions of change compared with expectations

There are two ways groups score their progress towards equality. The first is by asking "how much progress have you made in this area?" Corresponding responses there include high, medium, low, and nil. This is a straightforward way to measure progress generally. Another way communities score their progress is "expect to see, like to see, love to see." This allows them to think about how their progress compares to what they thought was possible when they started the work. It gives an additional pressure test to see not only if progress is happening, but also if it is happening faster or more completely than they had planned. It gives communities a chance to set baseline goals and stretch goals for themselves.

This second area of scoring shows that communities are making progress, and there are clear areas to continue work:

- 78% of women and 75% of men say that there is high progress in the areas where they 'expected to see change' based on the work they were doing.
- 44% of women and 54% of men are scoring high progress on things they would 'like to see change'.
- 13% of women and 21% of men are reporting high progress on things they would 'love to see change' - their stretch goals for themselves.

This means that while most community members feel they are on track, men are more likely to think they are meeting stretch goals. With one year of the program left, there are opportunities to help communities find ways to meet these stretch goals for equality.

Evidence of change per gender norm

Progress is starting in the household and family space, and slowly moving to more public spheres. This is a very normal progression of transformation in gender equality—with people often more comfortable changing their own behavior before they speak out for public change.

1. **Division of labor** is one area that reflects the biggest progress so far. 55% of women and 67% of men say there has been significant progress here. More detailed analysis of the results reflects both significant progress and places to focus for continuing the momentum for deeper change. The highest progress is in division of labor among children's chores, and in encouraging boys to help girls with household chores. This is an area that is relatively easier for everyone to encourage at young ages. On the other hand, there is less

progress with community leaders advocating for more equitable division of labor at the community level. However, women are less likely to ask adult men for help doing chores that are traditionally allocated to adult women. Change among youth represents critical progress, especially when adults are bought into that change. Long term community changes that include adult division of labor will be necessary to address the underlying challenges women face, particularly access to public decision-making forums and business opportunities.

2. **Household decision making** shows high progress for 61% of women and 56% of men. The biggest progress in this area is around discussing decisions together, women having space to offer opinions, and collaborating on making the decisions themselves. This area represents the most consistent and deepest progress towards equality of all of the domains.
3. **Control over assets** is another area with progress on the early end of a change process, and where there is more to do to get to long term transformation. Men and women are much more likely to discuss how assets get used, purchased, and sold compared to the beginning of the project. However, men are still the final decision makers after those discussions.
4. **Access to public places and services.** 53% of women and 67% of men report high progress to their goals on equality for women's access to public spaces and services. Men encourage and allow women to go to public spaces and access services, especially trainings related to income generating activities and economic benefits. Women are more likely to get permission and go to those spaces. Women do not yet report having the independent right to go to those spaces and services without asking permission. This is an area for further progress and deepening impact over time.
5. **Public decision making** is an area to focus on for deepening progress. Men and women ranked this medium and low, rather than high. Women are also much more likely to participate (89% of women rank this as high) and speak (61% rank this as medium) in public spaces, than they are to lead (67% of women rank this as low). One of the big obstacles the data reveals is that men are not yet taking on household chores like childcare that would allow women to participate in public decisions, but only by requiring men stay home and take care of those chores. Men are also less likely to influence the laws and norms that prevent women from taking leadership roles. 67% of men rank that as low progress.
6. **Control over one's body** shows high participation in awareness raising sessions, but little progress towards meaningful change for women and girls. Women's interest particularly in community level engagement to fight HTP and GBV shows very limited progress.
7. **Gender based violence** work shows substantial progress in having more discussions and conversations about the issues. That is especially true for discussions inside families, and within same-sex groups. Public advocacy around the issue is an area to focus on to accelerate and deepen change.
8. **Aspirations** have progressed the most for groups that have direct connections to income generation—especially savings groups. There is less progress for areas that focus on

political or community leadership. Those can be areas to strengthen to lead to deeper and more sustained progress towards gender equality.

Recommendations

1. **Focus on deepening impacts.** The data shows that there are successes to build on, and that getting SAA groups to continue discussing the areas of lower change—like moving from women’s participation in public spaces to leadership in those spaces—will help reinforce and continue progress across the spectrum towards “love to see” outcomes.
2. **Tackle the unequal unpaid care burden with adults.** Progress on equality with unpaid care has largely come with boys taking on more household chores alongside girls. Less progress has happened with adult men taking on unpaid care, and this is preventing more progress on other outcomes. More work engaging men to share tasks can unlock a range of benefits across all of the outcome areas.
3. **Dive deeper with women’s discussion groups.** Women generally ranked lower progress than men did. Exploring why this is true, and what would need to change, with women themselves can help shape next steps and potential discussion guides or activities to add to the current set of activities so that women get to the results they want to see.
4. **Create more activities around public decision-making.** This was an area of lower progress. Explore with men and women what it would take to move the needle on women actually leading in those spaces, instead of just attending.
5. **Explore public advocacy.** Progress was much faster on individual and household behaviors than public ones. Expanding dialogue and encouragement about both men and women becoming public advocates for equality across issues like workload sharing, decision-making, and GBV, could accelerate a shift in social norms and progress towards outcomes.



For more information about RIPA-North please contact:

WILLIAM BARON
Chief of Party
wbaron@mercycorps.org



KIDIST MANAYE
CARE Team Lead
kidist.manaye@care.org

Resilience in Pastoral Areas – North (RIPA-North) is a five-year, \$38 million USAID-funded program operating in lowland areas of Somali, Oromia and Afar regions of Ethiopia (2020 – 2025). RIPA-North aims to improve the resilience capacities of households, markets, and governance institutions, collectively contributing to enhanced food security and inclusive economic growth.