

# Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment in Uganda:

## Results from the Systems-Level Evaluation of the NPRPS Project

Josh Esty/CARE

### KEY TAKEAWAYS



NPRPS played a catalytic role in improving government systems for women's economic empowerment, including new platforms, research, information systems and recognition of savings groups.



NPRPS advocacy led to a new National Savings Group Policy Framework and draft Self-Help Group Operational Guidelines, both of which have transformed the savings group ecosystem in Uganda.



Households and communities better appreciate women's role in financial decisions and financial enterprises, and women enjoy greater financial autonomy and improved economic empowerment.



Financial institutions now offer a greater range of products, services, and finance to women in Uganda.



Women's Economic Collectives (WECs) have been adopted as the platform for scale-up of the government's Parish Development Model.



Existing WECs have become more informed, empowered, and have flourished.

## Systems-level challenges in Uganda and the National Policy Regulatory Program Support (NPRPS)

Women in Uganda, particularly poor and rural women, women with disabilities, or widows and single parent families, face huge challenges in accessing finance and markets and in setting up small business.<sup>2</sup> Despite

the viability of savings groups as a vehicle for women's economic empowerment (WEE) in Uganda, the savings group landscape in the country is fragmented, with limited guidelines and regulations.

CARE Uganda launched a three-year National Policy Regulatory Program Support (NPRPS) in January 2020 to test and build Women Empowerment Collectives (WECs) in Uganda, particularly savings and women's groups funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

The program aims to both transform the ways women and girls participate in economies – especially the most vulnerable – and to enable the use of collectives as a platform to address asymmetries of power, agency, information, and access to markets. The program also sought to achieve systems-level change through employing a range of CARE's pathways to scale.

## Evaluation Questions and Methodology

Outcome Harvesting (OH) methodology was used to answer the following questions:

- 1. Process:** What did the program do and how were the systems-level pathways integrated across its activities?
- 2. Systems-change:** What changes were achieved by the project through different systems-level pathways to impact at scale?
- 3. Population-wide impact:** How did those systems-level changes result in improving individual lives?



**Outcome harvesting** is a participatory approach in which the harvester facilitates the collection of evidence of what has been achieved and works backward to determine whether and how the project or intervention contributed to the change.

## Evaluation findings

The evaluation found the NPRPS program achieved both significant system-level change and impact.

### Systems-level change related to different pathways

#### *Service systems strengthening and social accountability*

NPRPS funded the design of a new Grant Management System (MIS). As a result, the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Program (UWEP) improved its research, monitoring, and implementation capacities.

#### *Advocacy for policy change*

Ugandan Microfinance Regulatory Authority (UMRA) was supported to develop self-help group operational guidelines, creating an enabling environment for the savings ecosystem.

#### *Social Movements*

NPRPS support has enabled Women's Empowerment Collectives to become better understood, empowered, networked, and better able to take collective action on women's economic empowerment.

#### *Inclusive market-based approaches*

Financial institutions increased their range of banking services to women, including digital wallets. The project also helped build greater trusts on women without collateral.

#### *Scaling and adapting proven models*

A study conducted by NPRPS informed the government about the benefits of scaling self-help groups. In 2021, the Government of Uganda adopted the WECs to serve as the platform for the forthcoming Parish Development Model (PDM).

#### *Social norms pathway*

NPRPS undertook household dialogues, engaged with men and boys, and used gender transformative approaches to challenge existing gender norms and promote greater equality for women.





Hajarah Nalwadda/CARE

### Systems Pathway Integration

The NPRPS successfully integrated several pathways to maximize its success. Advocacy for policy change was supported by service systems strengthening, which was bolstered by strengthening social movements, who could take action to support changes in laws and policies. Finally, social norms change cut across many of the NPRPS approaches.

### Impact on people's lives due to systems change

The NPRPS program had a significant impact at the individual level on people's lives, including women's individual economic empowerment, increased financial autonomy, greater solidarity amongst women, and easier access to funding.

### Sustainability of system-change effects

Sustained system level effects due to NPRPS include establishment of a bimonthly technical working group (TWG), provided a framework to attract funding, built and strengthened relationship with government departments and academic institutions, enhanced capacity of NRPS actors, supported sustainability of women's economic collectives and NPRPS will be a key tool used by government in future government initiatives.

### Limitations and challenges

The short two-month duration and the scope of the evaluation meant that it was challenging to validate and report on some of the longer-term outcomes. The OH was also conducted at a time when government officers were busy with the closure of their 2021/2022 financial year, making it difficult to reach some targeted respondents.

### Lessons learned

The generation and sharing of evidence with government ministries and agencies directly supported advocacy that achieved the development of policies, guidelines and regulations, ultimately driving systems changes for WEE. Working with government requires a lot of flexibility given that achieving systems change at government level, such as the development of new policies and guidelines, takes time and tenacity on behalf of the program implementation team.

## Recommendations for future directions

### FOR CARE GLOBAL

- **Expand CARE's focus on working through grass-roots women's rights organizations and enabling social movements to flourish:** CARE's important work with partners, as part of its locally led agenda, often remains at the level of national CSOs or larger organizations, rather than with smaller more grassroots organizations. CARE should leverage on the experiences of NPRPS to promote greater work across the confederation engaging with grassroots women's rights organizations and social movements, enabling them to flourish and addressing the funding challenges many such small organizations are facing.
- **Deliberate focus on systems-change during design, monitoring and evaluation (M&E)** across the CARE confederation should be encouraged. This will deepen the impact of CARE's work.
- The social norms change pathway should be **expanded to include social norms change with government personnel** and not only focus on changing norms among communities.
- **Innovative models to engage financial services to expand access for women:** CARE should promote NPRPS learning on responding to the specific needs and motivations of the corporate sector, to improve availability and access for women to a greater range of financial products and services.
- **Support programs to improve their documentation of outcomes and not only outputs:** Several NPRPS reports documented activities rather than outcomes. As part of supporting future evaluations using the OH methodology, CARE should encourage existing programs and projects across the confederation to expand their documentation of successes (as part of their standard M&E) to include outcomes, not only activities implemented/outputs, which will support stronger outcome statements in the future.

### FOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PRACTITIONERS

- It is important to **ensure the OH process is well understood by all evaluation implementers.**
- **Ensure clarity on how programs included systems-level activities before undertaking the evaluation.**
- **Build CO capacity on systems change** before selecting a program for systems-level change evaluation.
- **Consider the time needed to complete an outcome harvest** as it can be a lengthy process.

## Acknowledgements

Godfrey Bwanika, Uganda Management Institute, undertook the outcome harvest. Technical coordination and support were provided by Edton Babu, Melch Natukunda, and Jimmy Toko of CARE Uganda. Global coordination was undertaken by Brittany Dernberger and Caitlin Shannon of CARE USA, supported by Tim Shand of ShandClarke consulting. Thank you to the many stakeholders and beneficiaries who participated in this evaluation.