

Water for Food Security, Women's Empowerment and Environmental Protection Project

Gender Assessment II



East and West Belesa Woredas of
Central Gondar Zone, Amhara Regional State

December 14 to 23, 2020

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List of Acronyms

SAA	Social Analysis and Action
VSLA	Village Saving and Loan Association
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
NRM	Natural Resources Management
WASHCO	Sanitation and Hygiene Committee
WSMCO	Watershed Management Committee
<i>WCY</i>	<i>Women, Children and Youth</i>
<i>ADA</i>	<i>Austrian Development Agency</i>
<i>ADC</i>	<i>Austrian Development Cooperation</i>
<i>SWEEP</i>	<i>Water for Food Security, Women Empowerment and Environment Protection Project</i>
<i>WASH</i>	<i>Water, Sanitation and Hygiene</i>
<i>CM</i>	<i>Child Marriage</i>
<i>FGM</i>	<i>Female Genital Mutilation</i>
<i>RuSACCO</i>	<i>Rural Savings and Credit Cooperatives</i>

I. Introduction

East and West Belesa woredas (districts) are located in the central Gondar zone of Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. The people of East and West Belesa woredas are dependent on subsistence farming and rain fed agriculture in a context of recurrent drought and severe land degradation. The overwhelming majority live in extreme poverty and face food shortages as a result of the frequent shocks these conditions expose them to. The condition is more devastating for women, girls and marginalized households – for example, female-headed households and households including persons with disability who are often excluded from social and economic entitlements.

CARE, with the financial support from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and funds from Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) has implemented a three years' (October 2017 to September 2020 – then extended to February 2021) project titled "Water for Food Security, Women's Empowerment and Environmental Protection (SWEEP)" to address the socio-economic and environmental problems causing food insecurity in 20 kebeles of east and west Belesa woredas. The project was implemented by CARE in collaboration with local government, communities and universities. To increase the resilience of households, the SWEEP project followed an integrated and holistic project implementation approach, which put marginalized people at the center.

At the end of the project period, a gender assessment was conducted to see and capture the changes in the lives of women; especially the results of the women empowerment and the social norms change components of the project. Findings from the Rapid Gender Assessment (May 2017) and In-depth gender Assessment (May 2018) were used as a baseline to compare the before and after situation of women in the community. This report is prepared to share the findings of the end line gender assessment II, which was conducted between December 14 and 23, 2020.

1.1 Objectives

The assessment has two main objectives. These are to:

- Track and analyze the impacts of the activities of the SWEEP project in relation to the social norms and beliefs identified at the beginning of the project; and
- Capture positive change in the lives of marginalized people, and share lessons and evidences that are relevant for future and similar programming.

II. Methodology

The assessment mainly used primary qualitative research methods (focus group discussion, observation, and key informant interviews). However, it was also informed by secondary quantitative and qualitative assessments conducted by external evaluators and the local government.

Accordingly, relevant project documents were reviewed, focus group discussion was made with different groups such as Social Action and Analysis (SAA), Village Saving and Loan Association

(VSLA), Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Natural Resources Management (NRM), and Irrigation committee members. Also, key informant interviews (KII) with individual project beneficiaries, as well as heads and experts of government sector actors at different levels and along with site visits.

2.1 Overview of the study sites and study population

The study was conducted in four kebeles, taking two Kebeles from West Belesa (Kalay and Tala) and two from East Belesa (Dengora and Chamakorach). Participants of focus groups were adults (30-65 age range), boys and girls (14 to 29 age range), with both persons with disability and without disability.

Overall, the study used 14 focus group discussions involving 115 individuals: 20 men (of which 2 with disability), 51 women (of which 6 with disability, and 27 single and widowed); 31 girls (of which 3 with disability) and 13 boys (of which 3 with disability). Also 21 (13 male and 8 female) key informants that are heads and experts of government organizations from Water, Health, Education, Women, Children and Youth Affair, Cooperatives, Agriculture, and Labor and Social Affair from the Region, Central Gondar Zone and East and West Belesa Woredas were interviewed.

In addition to reviewing relevant documents such as gender specific assessments, mid-term and end-line evaluations, periodical reports from CARE and an activity report from the woreda women and children office, the assessment team observed communities in their day to day activities, convening meetings and using the different facilities installed by the project.

III. Major findings and discussion

This section has three parts. The first section highlights the **findings of the gender assessments** conducted to inform the design of the SWEEP project, section two gives an overview of **activities accomplished to accelerate the women empowerment** component of the project and finally section three gives details on the **results of the women empowerment component of the project** supported by testimonies of individual beneficiaries and government staff.

3.1 Section I - Gender assessment results before the implementation of the project

People can be excluded or marginalized from the majority because of a number of reasons; that includes but is not limited to sexual orientation, language, culture, beliefs, and impairment. SWEEP recognizes the different forms of marginalization and its impact on society. However, the project focused on women, and paid special attention to women head of households and persons with disability for its empowerment target. To unpack the types and reasons behind marginalization of these groups, SWEEP conducted two assessments that focused mainly on women but also consulted persons with disability. Accordingly, a Rapid Gender assessment was conducted in May 2017 to get a highlight on the bigger picture of the situation of women in east and west Belesa woredas and an In-depth gender assessment was conducted from 29 April to 11 May 2018, to get a detailed understanding on the situation of women, and the norms and beliefs that women and girls are subjected to and how this affects their wellbeing.

The SWEEP rapid gender and in-depth gender assessments reveal that women and girls

- have heavy workload
- have no or limited access and control over high value resources
- have no decision making power (e.g. buying and selling high value goods, family planning, etc.)
- have no access to finance (e.g loan), especially persons with disability
- are restricted in their mobility
- do not participate or engage in development activities; especially persons with disabilities
- have no access to information and education
- are not considered fit for leadership by the communities
- are primary victims of gender based violence, discriminatory norms and harmful practices.

Both the rapid gender and in-depth gender assessments showed that women in east and west Belesa woredas engage in very time and effort intensive works without enjoying any real recognition or dignifying rewards for their work. The persistent discriminatory norms and harmful traditional practices (HTP) also prevent women and girls from enjoying their social, economic and health rights. According to the baseline study and gender assessment conducted by CARE, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) such as domestic violence by an intimate partner, verbal abuse and rape are common practices in both woredas. According to FGD participants during the baseline study, girls are often exposed to rape on their way to fetch water, collect firewood, or upon returning home from the market and school. Also, a significant proportion of respondents (72% m, and 86% f) of the baseline study reported that there has been physical violence perpetrated on girls and women; and the practice of GBV (beating, insulting and rape) are common. Women and girls also endure harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM).

The studies found out that women could neither practice leadership roles in their community nor engage and benefit from development activities such as trainings and access to finance. This is because of a combination of their workload, denied opportunities and perception of the community (including women) towards women's capacity to contribute to development

activities and play leadership roles. The situation was the same – if not worse - for persons with disabilities (PWD) – especially women with disabilities.

3.2 Section II - Project activities focused on marginalized people

Project activities with critical focus on marginalized groups

- Access to water and water filtration kits
- Energy saving stove production and promotion
- Access to finance: Village saving and loan association
- Female graduate students trained on entrepreneur skills and business planning and establishment.
- Internship support to female university graduates
- Capacity building: Training on business skill and saving, Income Generation Activities, negotiation and life skills.
- Challenge social norms and beliefs: Social Action and Analysis Groups
- Inclusion of persons with disability
- Capacity building for woreda government female staff on leadership, norm identification and barrier analysis skills
- Women participation and leadership in Committees (WASH, NRM, Watershed)
- Leadership skill for women in Committees

The goal of the SWEEP Project was to improve food security and resilience of chronically food insecure families. To achieve this, it has developed three overarching strategic objectives. These were to improve and protect water resources for domestic and productive uses; empower marginalized groups to contribute productively in their household and communities; and strengthen learning, adaptation and accountability mechanisms between communities and local government. In all these, SWEEP put marginalized people – such as women head of households and persons with disabilities - at the center of its work.

3.2.1. Addressing basic needs:

The entry point for the SWEEP project was to create access to domestic and productive use of water to its target population. The project constructed 134 new and rehabilitated 208 non-functional water supply schemes. In addition, 329.5 hectares of land were irrigated due to the rehabilitation work on 4 irrigation schemes. Also, 2,469 household water filtration kits were distributed to project beneficiaries, of which 991 went to persons with disabilities, which included 454 women with disabilities. In addition to the health benefits to the entire community, quicker and safer access to safe drinking water alone helped women in targeted communities to save time and energy, which used to be spent travelling to look for water and queuing in line. Quicker access to water also prevents women and girls from facing sexual harassment, and other forms of GBV such as rape and beating. Greater access also helps avoid conflicts with other community members and water guards, as previously it was common to queue for water for hours and women sometimes tried to jump the queue desperate to get home to their children.

The project also trained women VSLA members in the production of energy saving stoves; and some as sales agents. According to the energy saving stove production group in Chamakorach, although the current price escalation on raw materials such as cement affected the production, some women in the targeted kebeles were able to benefit from the energy saving stoves as it

reduced their time spent in firewood collection. Furthermore, Cheqlit Sisay, from Dengora commented that the absence of smoke from the open fire also improved their health, especially for their eyes and lung.

3.2.2. Social and economic empowerment:

SWEEP established and supported 101 **Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLA)** that have a total of 2,132 (including 58 women with a disability) members. VSLAs are associations of women who come together to save money and try new businesses by taking loan from their own saving but with minimum interest. Each VSLA group has a management committee of five members that includes a chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer and two key holders to the savings/collection box. The project provided relevant trainings to all members on financial management and life skills, leadership skills such as visioning leadership, communication and conflict resolutions skills. Each group also received materials such as a collection box, savings book, ledger and manual for the group use. At the end of the project period the 101 VSLA groups were able to save about Birr 1,210,731 and 2,132 women took out loans amounting to Birr 1,122,790 and engaged in income generation activities. *“Our VSLA group is composed of 22 women and each one of us contributed ETB 30 each month. I took out ETB 2,000 loan against the pool of savings from my VSLA group which amounts to nearly ETB 45,000, and I used the funds to buy onion seedlings. The production was fruitful, I made a profit of a little over ETB 2,000 after settling my loan. I used the profit to a cafe with simple offerings like tea and coffee. When the crop regenerated the next season, I made a profit of ETB 7,000. I used the earnings to expand my offerings at the cafe, adding meals and even liquor to the menu,”* Mulunesh Tsegaye.

SWEEP also established 30 **Social Action and Analysis groups (SAA)** in 8 selected kebeles. The purpose of the SAA groups is to bring community members together to discuss typically sensitive issues such as HTPs, discriminatory gender norms and practices, and other issues relating to holistic community wellbeing, and find ways through dialogue to come to a more inclusive and egalitarian perspective on rights and norms.

Members include men, women, youth, elderly persons and persons with disability. Amongst these, a “core group” was established with traditional / cultural / religious leaders and key stakeholders such as performers of HTPs. A woman and man selected from each SAA group were trained in facilitation skills. The facilitators received five days’ training on different tools and steps, including facilitation and communication skills, gender awareness and exposure to the common norms and beliefs identified by the SWEEP project. The SAA groups held regular meetings to table, dialogue and address social, economic and cultural factors that affect the society. These include gender equality, division of household chores among family members, childcare and development, and prevention of GBVs and HTPs. During the formation of VSLA and SAA groups, widowed, divorced as well as mistresses were highly encouraged and targeted as the different assessments conducted to inform the design of the SWEEP project revealed that these specific groups are highly affected by social and economic shocks. A woreda-level advisory group consisting of focal persons/experts from each sector office and the kebele-level core group provided technical support to SAA groups and oversaw the progress based on reports submitted by the facilitators.

3.2.3. Participation and leadership:

The different infrastructural activities of the project such as construction and rehabilitation of water supply schemes, irrigation schemes, and watershed development activities were implemented with the full participation of communities and in collaboration with relevant government experts. For these works to serve the needs of the communities – at least for the full designed period, communities are required to take ownership, and ensure maintenance and management of the services. In all these, women and persons with disabilities were active participants and both men and women were involved in the management team of the water supply schemes, watershed/NRM committees, and irrigation committees. As per the guideline of the project, communities elected their representatives while taking into consideration that 50% have to be women and 50% of leadership positions should be assigned to women.

3.2.4. Job creation:

In addition to the income generation activities by the VSLA groups based on loans securing from their saving, a total of 33 female university graduates were trained on basic entrepreneurship skill, business planning and management. Following that, 29 (14 from west and 15 from east Belesa) who fulfilled the legal requirements were given time to prepare and submit business plans based on their preferences. Of the 29 female graduates, 17 (grouped in groups of 4 and 5) finalized their business plan and secured licenses to establish joint businesses. These two groups are now running their businesses - one in the supply of construction material and the other a cafeteria – supporting themselves as well as their families. SWEEP also provided internship opportunities to about 15 female university graduates and provided material support to persons with disabilities to engage in businesses.

3.2.5. Ensuring backstopping service:

Working with local government entities especially the women, children and youth affairs office and capacitating the government experts (for example in norm identification and leadership skills), enabled them to provide the right support to women in the communities, and take over the role that they jointly played with CARE on their own. A good example for this is the support provided by the office to the self-initiated VSLA groups both in east and west Belesa woredas. In addition to the VSLA groups established and supported by the project, more than 133 self-initiated groups were established and started to save money and access loans. The office provided the required training and CARE supported them to access a collection box, registration book and savings books. The woreda level advisory group established by the project is also providing support to SAA groups in terms of following-up progress, based on reports submitted by SAA facilitators, and by supervising SAA activities and advising members when they face challenges: *"In our effort of awareness creation and women's empowerment within the community, we struggled to get the women out – either their husbands won't permit or they are far too inundated with household chores to come to any meetings we call. It was not until SWEEP trained employees of the Bureau that the Bureau started to fully engage women in the area."* Atala Fenta, from West Belesa Women, Children and Youth Office.

3.3. Section III - Results of marginalized group empowerment activities:

3.3.1. Access to basic services and role sharing reduced women's workload

Results of the SWEEP intervention

- Reduced women's work load
- Male engagement in household chores allowed women to take other roles
- Women's decision making, access and control over resources improved
- encouraging progress made on women's free movement
- Capacity building and exposure improved women's skill and confidence
- Perception on women's participation and leadership role improved
- Women's engagement in IGA contributed to household economy and resilience capacity
- Progressed in controlling HTPs, GBV and FGM

The establishment of water distribution points closer to home, and the distribution of energy saving stoves has reduced the amount of time and effort women typically spend on collecting water, firewood and cooking. According to the SWEEP baseline survey, 22% of households traveled 30 minutes to an hour and 78% travel more than an hour to fetch water. According to the end line evaluation, 57% of the respondents had access to safe water sources within 30 minutes of round trip, and 37% of them had access to safe water sources between 30-60 minutes of a round trip. The focus group discussion with adult men and women showed, as a result of the debates and actions discussed by the SAA groups, that access to basic services improved, and both men and women respondents also confirmed increased participation of men in household chores. Discussions in all focus groups revealed that men are now becoming more and more willing to handle activities such as cooking, taking care of kids, and taking grains to grinding mills, fetching water and collecting firewood. *"Taking grains to the grinding mills was totally women's role. After I joined the SAA group, my son and I also started to take this role"*, Priest Mekuanint, Dengora. *"Previously*

woman takes care of all the household chores. Now that both men and women have started talking about this, there is so much more cooperation within the household. When I visit my neighbours, I see the wife making food and the husband cleaning up the kids, or vice versa. That was unheard of just five years ago." Aster – facilitator of Kalay kebele SAA group.

This understanding also encouraged men who used to perform household activities discreetly – afraid of the naming and shaming - and now become open in what they do. *"Even before the project, I used to support my wife at home. Especially, whenever my wife gave birth, I used to cover the household activities by myself – including washing her clothes. I am capable of preparing foods. At that time, my neighbors used to tease me. I even did some of these activities discreetly to avoid their mockery. Now I am the facilitator in my SAA group and influenced many of my neighbors not to be afraid of household activities,"* Admasu Mekonnen, Kalay. *"we have*

also started to take care of ourselves – we eat food on time and take bath frequently”, Mare and Lemlem from Kalay kebele FGD. “I no more warm water and wash my husband’s feet. This has become a history”, Yeergobahir, Kalay.

3.3.2. Male engagement in household chores allowed women to take other roles

The increased understanding and practice of community members in role sharing, access to safe water and the hands-on support provided by male members of the society gave women the opportunity to play different roles and engage in other development activities. Thanks to this understanding and support, a significant number of women are able to participate in meetings of SAA and VSLA groups, engage in income generation activities, and even have leadership roles in WASH, NRM and Irrigation committees.



Both men and female members of the FGDs said that women are capable of engaging in any activity and so are the men. *“I used to give out my land for rent because it was considered uncultured for women to engage in farming. After the SAA discussion, I started to plough my land and when I need it I request my neighbors to support me. I can also pay for the laborers if I want to. Because of that I am now getting more crops.*

Before, the tenant would give me what he says was my share. Now, not only I own the whole production but I also benefit from the ‘geleba’ that remains on the land.” Tiku Hailu, SAA group member

Although this is an encouraging achievement by the project and targeted communities, the increased understanding is not practiced unanimously by all. Some FGD members, for example, Chamakorach said, *“...there are men who found engaging in household activities still difficult.”* With the exception of Kalay kebele, all FGD groups also said, women are not still allowed to access ‘awdima’ – where farm products are collected.

3.3.3. Decision-making, access to and control over resources:

The SAA and VSLA groups' debates on social and economic issues include gender equality in access and control over resources and decision-making. According to focus group discussions, these debates brought meaningful changes not only to the women's life but also to the entire family in the household. All women FGD participants said they have more control over resources than before. Joint decision-making by spouses for major household decisions also increased. According to the end line evaluation, 51% of the target women can equally participate in major income and expenditure decisions in the household compared to the baseline (11%).

Women in Chamakorach FGD said, *"Before, men used to sell valuable items without consulting us. We have no any power then except crying. But now, if they do it without consulting us, we argue and often times succeed in making them change their decision. Slowly, they are accepting the fact that they need to discuss with us before making decisions that affect the household"*.

'I once said no to my husband when he wanted to sell our farm land. He is now glad that we passed the hard time that tempted him to sell the land and appreciates that we are still using the land for ourselves," Ashumar, Chamakorach. Another area with increased consultation and decision-making is family planning. Before, women used to take contraceptives discreetly and if husbands found out, it used to be a reason for conflict and even divorce. Now, it is common to discuss about it and make the decision jointly.

On the other hand, the discussion with more than three FGD members showed that men as well as women are not totally convinced about women's access and control over resources such as guns and high value livestock. According to the endline evaluation, 51% of the target women can equally participate in major income and expenditure decisions in the household, which was 11% (baseline) and 38% (mid-term evaluation). In the same report, most women reported that their spouses consult them on how the income or product earned is utilized. However, only less than a quarter of them participate in decisions involving selling and buying livestock (such as oxen, sheep and goats). A transaction involving chicken and eggs is, however, dominantly left to women.

3.3.4. Women's free movement

One of the harmful gender norms that affect women's life is restricted mobility. Women were not allowed or require permission to travel to places far from their village (e.g. to access bigger markets). When they got permission, they needed to be accompanied by their husband, or any male member of the family. Such restrictions limited their access to sexual reproductive health services, information or exposure to training opportunities and their participation in development activities. Through discussions in the SAA groups and SWEEP's mandatory requirement for women's participation in the different components of the project, communities started to have a better understanding on women's right to free movement. That allowed women to freely plan and take part in the project interventions and other development initiatives of the government.

“Before, women need to get permission from spouses for any movement including travelling to family members’ funeral, wedding, market place, etc. Going to meetings was not even thought about. Since this project came in our village, women are taking part in meetings quite often – even more than men; they inform their husbands or any family member if they need to go to funeral, wedding etc. when the place is not far. When the place is far, they are still free to go but will have to be accompanied either by their husband, children or male relatives,” said the adult male FDG group from Dengora. The female adult FGD group from Chamakorah agreed on this response and added, *“the reason why we are accompanied by our partners or relatives is for our own safety”*. However, the response from the newly established SAA & VSLA groups in Tala is different. They said, *‘Women are not allowed to leave the house without permission. It is different for men. They can go anywhere they want without even telling where they go’*. The last quote shows the importance of conducting SAA discussions over a longer period of time to bring about a common understanding and changes in norms and beliefs that positively affect the society.

3.3.5. Capacity building and exposure improved women’s skill and confidence

The different trainings and the created platform (such as regular meetings in the SAA, VSLA, WASHCO, NRM and Irrigation committees) helped to exchange experiences and lessons learned by the communities; especially women. These, FGD respondents said, exposed them to new knowledge and helped to build their confidence to play their role effectively. *“...Because of the trainings and the discussion in our group, we have become alert in unnecessary spending. ...We didn’t have any vision before. Now, each of us know what we want to do in 10 or so years’ time. ...We are now heard, before we used to only listen”* were some of the remarks of the women SAA group members in Dengora. According to the end line evaluation, the project intervention contributed to building women's self-confidence to convey their messages in public meetings and their assertiveness in dialogues and decision-making processes. The survey result also showed that more than 90% of the beneficiary households believe that the SWEEP project contributed to their social, economic and leadership participation and assertiveness in dialogues and decision-making processes. Senait Abay, West Belesa Women, Children and Youth Office Head said, *“When we call meetings, the women who comes from CARE intervention kebeles are different. First, there is more turnout from those kebeles. Second, those women express themselves very well. They are good in agenda setting and open in sharing their thoughts. That was not the case before”*.

3.3.6. Improved perception and action on women’s participation and leadership role

Women and men alike used to perceive women as being unable to contribute to development activities or to play leadership roles. Now that women and women with disabilities were extensively engaged in the SWEEP project and proved their potential, this perception by men and women has changed. According to the SWEEP project final evaluation, the view that women are able to hold and play leadership roles in targeted kebeles has risen from 56% (baseline) to 93% (end line). In the SWEEP project, women are active members of the WASH, NRM and Irrigation committees; they are members of the management team within the committees and hold leadership positions. Women are also members of the SAA and VSLA groups and hold 50% and 100% of the leadership positions respectively. These and women’s increased confidence and ability to express their views have contributed to the change on community’s perception

(including women) on women's leadership capacity. Some FGD members even agree that women are trusted to better manage finances than men. *"It is good when women are leading WASH committees. They have no fear to express their views. They report quickly when they face challenges. They also manage the finances better than we do"*, Kalay adult men FGD members. Abreham Dessie, Deputy Head of east Belesa Agriculture office also said during the KII, *"Before, the number of irrigation committee members was not more than 4. Working with CARE, members increased to 11, of which 50% are women. They also play leadership roles. The women are open to share their challenges, they have frequent meetings and are trusted by their group to take the cashier and secretary positions"*. This reveals women's knowledge of the water need and their commitment to sustain the services so that they will not go back and face previous challenges.

In addition, encouraged and empowered by the project intervention, two VSLA members from East Belesa and another two from West Belesa are now Kebele cabinet members, five are members of the women association and league in their respective kebeles.

The table below shows participation and leadership roles by women and persons with disability in the SWEEP.

Type of platform	Women		Persons with disability	
	Membership (%)	Leadership (%)	Membership (%)	Leadership (%)
WASHCO	53.4	55	0	0
WSMCOs/NRM	50	50	2.08	8
Irrigation	50	45	0	0
SAA	50	50	7.6	8.3
VSLA	100	100	2.72	2.57

Note: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Committee (WASHCO), Watershed Management Committee (WSMCO), Natural Resources Management (NRM), Social Analysis and Action (SAA), Village Saving and Loan Association (VSLA)

3.3.7. Women's engagement in income generation activities contributed to improved household economy

One of the major successes of the SWEEP project is its accomplishment in improving women's economic capacity – targeting chronically food-insecure and marginalized households. According to the end-line evaluation, key informants stressed that by empowering women and girls through improved access to income-generating activities and livelihoods they were able to improve their food security status. In addition, more than two-thirds of the households believe that they have a better capacity to withstand environmental shocks compared to before.

The Village Saving and Loan Association which targeted marginalized groups (women and female head of households including divorced/widowed women and mistresses) showed promising results with regards to women's economic empowerment. Most of the members are now engaged in income generation activities such as poultry and egg production, multiplication of vegetable seeds, rearing goats, local beverages production, and petty trading. *"Before, it was very difficult for me to educate my children because I didn't have any source of income, but now, thanks to my saving, I am financing my children's education. Not only that, I have also started to participate in maize reselling business which will help me earn additional income."* Alemitu, East Belesa.



"Since we became members of the VSLA group, we all are engaged in some sort of income generation activity. Some of us brew and sell local drinks and others rear goats. Re-selling crops with reasonable mark-up, preparing malt for sale and small breakfast café's are some of the business we are working on. Now that we make money, our children are not worried about their

exercise book, our social cohesion has improved, we can cover expenses of household needs though we are just beginning," said the women FGD members from Chamakorach. *"I started business taking 300 birr loan to provide breakfast service in a very small café. Within two years I bought a place with 15,000 birr."* Enatenesh, Chamakorach.

SWEEP also trained 33 female university graduates on basic entrepreneurship skill, business planning and management. Following that the project supported two groups (5 and 4 members each) who showed interest and fulfilled government requirements with start-up materials. The two groups now own and run - Alemtsehay construction material supply in East Belesa and Fiker BeBelesa Café in West Belesa. *"We no longer ask for money from our families. They are thrilled to see us leave for work each day, but more than that, they feel the relief of knowing we are taking care of ourselves,"* says Naniye, who, collectively with the other four partners, has saved over ETB 15,000 in the café business.

According to the end-line evaluation, the average income per household increased to 29,021 birr from 3,400 birr from the baseline; and these income generation activities are the main contributors to reducing households' vulnerability from chronic food security.

3.3.8. Progress in controlling in HTPs, GBV and FGM

The regular discussion in SAA and VSLA groups also showed encouraging results in increased awareness on all harmful practices as well as good progress in some such as controlling child marriage, reduced sexual abuse and FGM. According to the end line evaluation, nearly all the surveyed households (96%) believe early marriage (marriage under 18 years of age) is a harmful practice that affects girls' lives. The same report showed that GBV (physical violence and sexual harassment) in households in the targeted kebeles significantly decreased from the baseline (69%) to 27.5%. Similarly, Child Marriage (CM) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in households in targeted kebeles have shown a continuous decrease from the baseline 22%, to 5.7%.

However, Senait from Women, Youth and Children office of west Belessa reported a step back on this since the COVID 19 outbreak. She said, *"...yes, there was a good progress in controlling child marriage as the police and our office was working with the schools. School children have been instrumental to give us information when there are attempts of child marriage. With the support of the police and Justice bureau, we managed to stop these attempts. Now that schools are closed because of COVID, the rate of child marriage has risen again."*

Another area of progress is improved perception towards the needs of persons with disability and being more inclusive and supportive. Before, it was challenging for persons with disability to come out let alone engage with persons without disability. Now, more and more persons with disability demand to be part of the SWEEP project components. *"SWEEP has been an eye opener in our area. The number of persons with disability who are engaged in the SWEEP project and in income generation activities has increased. This helped to change the society's perception towards persons with disability. Our office also plans to demand other sector offices integrate the needs of persons with disability in their annual plans. But we have financial as well as structural challenges."* Muhammed Zerfu, Labour and Social Affair, team leader. Fasikaw Asmare, East Belesa Labor and Social Affairs Process Owner also said, *"We encouraged and convinced participation of persons with disability in the SAA and VSLA groups. That helped for their voices to be heard. We also noticed that kid with disability are joining schools. Before parents used to hide their children if they have disability."*

Areas that are still challenging for community members include reducing the practice of men keeping mistresses, men entering into conflicts with other men, use of gun during community events such as weddings and funerals, and extended mourning and related expenses. Policy implementation, support from the government organizations and action by the religious leaders were recommended by FGD participants to bring meaningful changes in these challenging areas.

Addressing the needs of persons with disability	Beneficiaries		
	Female	Male	Total

From water supply schemes	210	164	374
From household water filtration kits	454	437	991
Members in VSLA groups	58	0	58
Trained on Social Analysis and Action (SAA) facilitation methodology and facilitating SAA groups	-	3	3
Engaged in SAA groups	20	31	51
Engaged in different income generation activities (toilet and shower services, tailoring and shoe shining)	11	8	19
Total	753	643	1496

IV. Lessons

The SWEEP Project has several lessons that are worth sharing and institutionalizing so that they feed in to the design of future projects that have a women's empowerment component. The following are some of the lessons captured by the Gender Assessment II.

- Women's empowerment requires an integrated approach: The challenges rural women face in countries like Ethiopia are multi-faceted. One of the reasons that make the SWEEP project successful is its use of overarching strategic objectives and an integrated project implementation approach. For example, in addition to addressing the basic practical needs of the communities, it has also worked on the social and economic empowerment of marginalized groups, with a focus on women. The potential for social and economic empowerment would have been challenged and limited if the basic needs and rights of women and other marginalized groups had not been addressed. Women would have been struggling to fulfil their basic needs and put little or no time and energy on the social and economic empowerment aspect.
- Village Saving and Loan Associations have proved to be crucial support systems in times of emergency conditions (e.g. delivery, sickness, drought, etc.). More importantly, access to finance and loans enabled VSLA group members to start income generation activities and this has been a major contributor in improving household economy and resilience capacity.
- Village Saving and Loan Groups can be used as catalysts of other development activities such as hygiene and sanitation promotion, increased energy saving stove promotion and uptake, discussion forums for social and economic challenges. VSLA groups in SWEEP have proved to facilitate all of these by providing a space where its members can gather and discuss common challenges and access peer support.

- Integration of SAA with VSLA could facilitate women's empowerment. For example, significant number of SAA groups in the SWEEP project saved money and took loans while VSLA groups also debate on social norms and beliefs. But the right balance has to be maintained so that the focus on challenging gender based norms and beliefs is not undermined or shadowed by financial gain.
- Bringing on board all stakeholders (such as the Women, Children and Youth Affair and the Labor and Social Affair who are mandated to address the challenges of women and persons with disabilities respectively) from the beginning and maintaining their active participation throughout the project life has paid off in SWEEP. Ownership of the SWEEP project by the local government and the community has exceeded expectations. In addition, bringing together different government sector actors in a number of platforms to plan, monitor, evaluate and facilitate the SWEEP project contributed to the project's success and has been a good indication for all to take their share and sustain what has been initiated (including the women empowerment component).
- Some of the discriminatory norms are firmly established and were not rejected by the community. We realized that such norms require longer time to change and might require a different approach such as creating linkages with the law enforcement.

V. Conclusion

This assessment has tried to document changes in the lives of marginalized people especially women and persons with disability as a result of the SWEEP Project. The assessment found out that the lives of marginalized people – especially women in the target kebeles have been positively impacted.

Women, girls and women with disabilities have been able to access safe drinking water close to their home. This in turn helped to reduce their workload and time they spent for water and firewood collection. By organizing into Village Saving and Loan Associations and taking loans with minimum interest, women started to engage in income generation activities and to contribute to the household economy. The key to this success was the decision made by the VSLA group members to improve their savings habit, cut unnecessary spendings and women's increased confidence. This in turn contributed to improved resilience capacity of households.

Encouraging results have also been recorded due to the Social Analysis and Action group's debate challenging social norms and beliefs. Areas that show positive progress due to the SAA groups include male engagement in household activities, women starting to perform activities that used to be considered only men's work, and changes in societies (including women) perception towards women's leadership capacities. In addition, the SAA discussions not only helped increase understanding of the impacts of HTPs and GBV including female genital mutilation, but also in starting to make progresses in these areas. However, some of these progresses were limited

such as the reduction of child marriage, which is a practice that has typically increased across the developing world as the outbreak of the COVID pandemic has taken a hold, and schools have had to close. Other practices such as male infidelity and dangerous or wasteful traditional practices such as violent conflict between male household head, firing guns during community events (such as weddings and funerals), and extended mourning and related expenses have not shown any progress and require more and frequent intervention. Focus group participants recommended support from government organizations in making sure peace and security policy is implemented; and from religious leaders to engage in teaching and otherwise take action on people who for example continue to keep mistresses and firing gun at community events.

VI. Recommendations

In conclusion, the SWEEP project has shown encouraging results in its empowerment component compared to the magnitude of the problem identified at the beginning of the project and the relatively short time spent to implement the project. Having this in mind, and based on the findings of this assessment, the following recommendations are made for future implementation of similar projects.

- CARE and other stakeholders need to build on the positive lessons gained from the SWEEP project in future and similar project designs and implementation. This includes addressing the basic and strategic needs and rights of women in an integrated manner; inclusion of the needs and participation of persons with disability; working in partnership with government stakeholders from the beginning and throughout the project life – and especially bringing on board the women, children and youth as well as social and labor affairs who have the mandate to empower women and persons with disability respectively;
- Consider and incorporate additional time and budget for the norms change component especially in areas with deep-rooted norms and beliefs that require more time; resources and robust effort.
- Good to also work in collaboration with other actors (non-government) in the area who have similar interest. For example, we learnt during this assessment that *Unicef* is working on GBV in the same woredas but there is no collaboration between Unicef and CARE even though both have been working on GBV. The Women, Children and Youth office at different level, that has the information and the opportunity, will need to also lead and initiate such collaboration and cross-learning.
- The way to strengthen VSLA groups and enable them to access bigger loans is to grow them into RUSACCOs. However, during the assessment, we observed frustrations and uncertainties among VSLA member not wanting to join RUSACCOs as they have no trust in them. They said they are happy with the way their VSLA groups are functioning. We have also learnt from our discussion with the Women, Children and Your offices as well as Cooperative office that they are working jointly to address the policy gap that requires

approval of the regional cabinet to address the VSLA members' concern in a positive manner. The current policy allows only one RUSACCO to be established and legalized per kebele; and if there is already a RUSACCO established in a kebele, the VSLA groups established by CARE have to join that RUSACCO but cannot form their own RUSACCO. Similar projects in the future need to take this lesson into consideration and should analyze and lobby for changes on such policy gaps that have impact on the success of the project.

