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USAID/Ethiopia
Resilience Learning
Activity

**Brief:** Systems Mapping of Gendered Impacts from Conflict

Credit: CARE Ethiopia

*This brief presents highlights from a Resilience Learning Activity (RLA) systems mapping analysis of gendered impacts of conflict on communities' resilience to shocks across U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)/Ethiopia–supported resilience-based interventions. It provides an overview of the methodology, findings, and insights for adapting existing resilience-focused program interventions.*

## Methodology

RLA is a five-year activity implemented by LINC that seeks to support USAID/ Ethiopia and its implementing partners (IPs) to better understand what relief and development interventions make households, communities, and systems more resilient to increasingly persistent shocks and stresses. As part of its support for resilience partners'

adaptive management, RLA conducted a rapid gender gap analysis with local IPs that identified a need for an in-depth understanding of the complex and interrelated impacts from conflict experienced by women, men and youth. In line with the activity's goals, RLA identified an opportunity to apply and promote the increased integration of systems thinking and rapid feedback into IPs' toolboxes to build a better understanding of the drivers of these gendered impacts of conflict.

# Context

Since November 2020, conflict in northern Ethiopia has disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, including women, girls, youth, the elderly, and disabled. This has severely limited their access to resources, education, and basic human rights, compounded by existing challenges from a complex landscape of social, political, economic and ecological factors, all hindering household resilience.

To improve IPs' understanding of how vulnerable households have responded to conflict and enchance programming aimed at helping them rebuild their lives, communities, and resilience to future shocks, RLA employed a systems mapping approach focused on how mobility differs between women and men, as well as their access to labor, input, finances, and markets. By identifying key drivers and potential areas of leverage within this complex issue, RLA also seeks to help IPs mitigate gaps and barriers to gender equality and better address the needs of women and girls in conflict-prone settings.

## Methodology

This research explored dynamics around gender's intersection with armed violence and conflict by mapping factors at the community level and the relationships between them, as identified through ethnographic data and IP reports. The research focused on ten war-affected and drought-prone communities in the North and South Wollo administrative zones of the Amhara Region.

### Data Collection

First researchers hosted a series of consultative meetings with IPs working under USAID/Ethiopia's resilience programming to understand their specific needs related to gender and conflict. Next the researchers conducted a desk review of relevant IP gender-focused reporting to enhance their understanding of the context and factors affecting vulnerable households. Finally, a local team of ethnographers carried out a series of key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD) with separate groups of male- and female-headed households, and boys and girls youth groups.

### Data Analysis

The researchers then analyzed the reports and transcripts from the KIIs and FGDs using a process called purposive text analysis (PTA), which extracts causal statements from rich text to explore cause-and-effect relationships between factors.

For example, in response to a question about how they support their livelihood, an FGD said, "We are recruited by the safety net because of the shortage of agricultural products in our area, and we are not able to raise our children properly because of the limited resources in our area." Using the PTA process, the research team identified three cause-and-effect relationships in this statement, including *shortage of agricultural products — ability to support their children; limited resources — recruited into the safety net program; and safety net program — ability to support their children.*

Repeating this process throughout the KII and FGD transcripts, the researchers created a database of factors, and their causes and effects on one another. The researchers then aggregated, analyzed, and visualized these relationships to one another to create a systems map of the factors and relationships driving gendered impacts and responses to conflict across the focal communities (see Figure 1).

They analyzed and ranked the factors based on how influential they are on the system (influence), how connected they are to other factors (centrality), and the role they play in driving system outcomes (feedback). The higher rankings
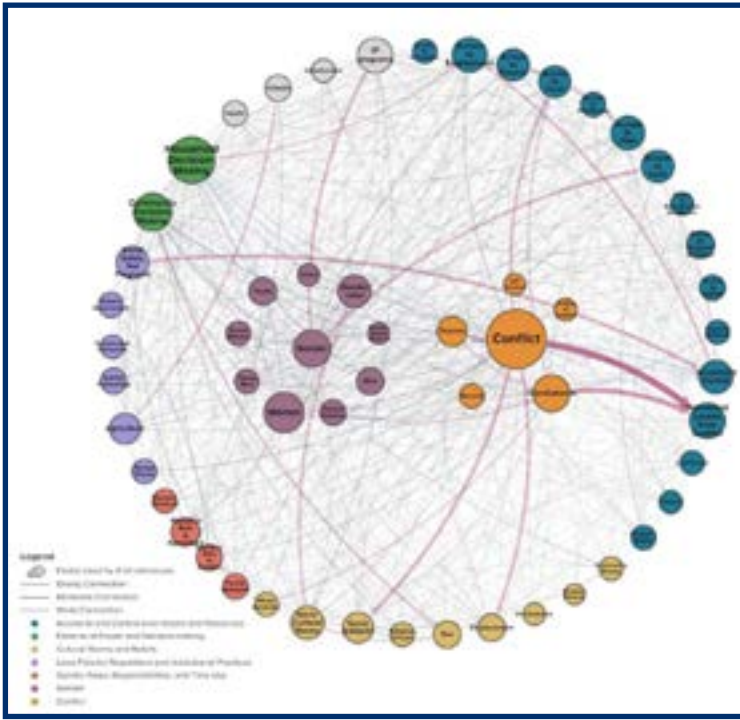
Figure 1: Systems map shows factors (circles) and connections (arrows). Factors are colored by gender domain and sized relative to the number of references of each factor. Connections are also sized relative to the number of references extracted from the text. Gender factors are shown at the center of the map for clarity. All map excerpts throughout the report contain the same information as this map. An interactive version can be viewed on Kumu.

a factor has across these three categories, the more likely it is to drive the outcomes of the system and present an opportunity for leveraging systems change.

# Findings

Combining the analysis of the systems map with insights from the KIIs and FGDs, the research team identified both drivers of the gendered responses to conflict as well as opportunities for leveraging interventions for systemic change.

## Drivers of Gendered Responses to Conflict

**Household decision making** is central to nearly all aspects of vulnerable households' responses to conflict. In many communities the fear of reprisals from warring parties drove men to leave. The loss of their labor directly disrupted household decision making and placed a burden on women who had to balance the need to seek food, water, and resources for their families with the risk to their safety from enemy combatant threats, such as assault and harassment.

**Women's workload,** and its effect on **household income,** increased in times of conflict as a result of the lack of men's labor. This



Household Decision Making: The norms, rules, and customs around how women—and men—allocate their resources to provide for their families livelihoods and resilience to shocks.

Figure 2: The rankings show:
Influence = 4
Centrality = 1
Feedback = 22 (out of 56 factors)

change was most notable regarding **women's role in agriculture**, where men and boys had previously done a majority of the work. The loss of **critical infrastructure** further compounded changes in workload, for example, the destruction of electrical grid functionality resulted in the milling of agricultural products by hand.
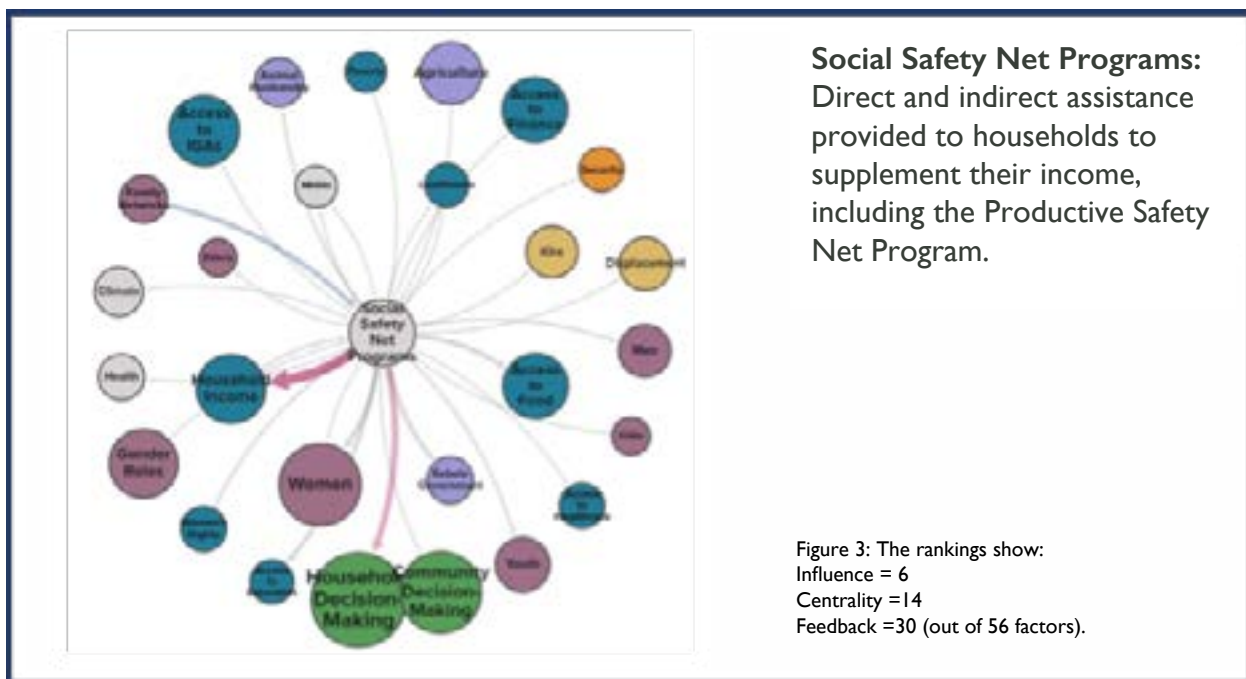
This increased workload was in addition to women's normative responsibilities, which did not shift throughout the conflict due to longstanding **socio-cultural norms** that reinforce **traditional gender roles**. Moreover, women also had to increasingly care for family members and other people displaced by the conflict who had come to their households seeking safety.

## Opportunities for Leveraging Systems Change

The goal of systems mapping and analysis is to identify leverage points in a system or areas where smaller shifts in factors and relationships between them lead to larger changes throughout the system, ultimately improving outcomes such as, in this case, household livelihoods and gendered household decision making. The systems analysis identified three areas where targeted, strategic efforts could lead to improved livelihoods for men, women, and children living in conflict-affected areas:

- ❯ **Productive safety net programs (PSNP)** played a critical and influential role in responding to conflict by supplementing household income in the face of multiple economic shocks. Alongside these programs, community groups such as Kire provided food, shelter, and resources to local community members, demonstrating the resilience of local institutions and community decision making in the face of extreme social disruption.

- ❯ **Socio-cultural norms** greatly underpin many of the mechanisms that drive decision making both at the household and community level. As these norms have a direct connection to both household and community decision making, they exert a strong influence on households' access to finance, education, employment, and other income-generating activities, leading to substantial impacts on men's, women's, and youth's health and livelihoods.



**Social Safety Net Programs:** Direct and indirect assistance provided to households to supplement their income, including the Productive Safety Net Program.

Figure 3: The rankings show:
Influence = 6
Centrality =14
Feedback =30 (out of 56 factors).

**Socio-Cultural Norms:**
The accepted expectations, behaviors, and beliefs shared by a society, in this case, governing the roles of gender in the household.

Figure 4: The rankings show:
Influence = 7
Centrality = 33
Feedback =15 (out of 56 factors)

**Access to employment, finance, and income-generating activities (IGAs)** are factors that all serve as both key outcomes of gendered responses to conflict as well as areas that can be leveraged for systemic change. In particular, many KII and FGD participants pointed to the ability to access finance as a necessary precondition to achieve access to land, IGAs, and education. This indicates that focusing on improving access to these three resources can have a direct, near-term influence on individual and household livelihood outcomes.

**Household decision making** ultimately influences all of these areas as it plays an important feedback role in affecting other factors' responses to gendered impacts from conflict (see Figure 2).

# Recommended Actions

The systems analysis of factors and interconnections affecting gendered responses to conflict were presented in a detailed technical [report](#) with the goal of providing recommendations to IPs for improving the effectiveness of interventions targeting conflict-affected households.

**Expand Social Safety Net Programs**
The systems analysis identified PSNP in particular as a core leverage point affecting nearly all aspects of men's, women's, and youth's livelihoods because of its connections to household income. As security, conflict, and other contextual factors continue to affect livelihoods in the study area, it will be essential to maintain and expand these programs (see Figure 3).

**Mainstream Gender Equality Alongside Livelihood Programs**
Because they are closely connected to many aspects of responsibilities and decision making, programs that seek to shift socio-cultural norms can have an outsized impact on many of the factors that affect individual, household, and community livelihood outcomes and resilience. Therefore, program interventions focused on improving household livelihoods may be able to simultaneously shift outcomes of women's household decision making by including components that mainstream gender equality

alongside activities targeting access to finance, education, and IGAs.

**Support Women's Decision Making for Improved Resilience**

Decision making is central to the household response to conflict and other shocks, especially women's autonomy to make decisions for their own households during times of crisis. Designing interventions that seek to shift the way women's household decision making is informed can lead to more beneficial outcomes in other factors, particularly household income, access to employment, access to finance, access to land, access to education, and access to food. Additionally, programs focused on women's decision making, such as trainings on financial management, legal rights, and farming skills, present unique opportunities to promote women's equity and equality in the household by demonstrating the linkages between improvements in household income and resilience to shifts in socio-cultural norms.

**Support Community Institutions**

IPs should investigate the viability of using existing structures such as neighborhood Kire groups for rebuilding community cohesion and supporting trauma-affected community members. Kire and other community groups play an important role in galvanizing community decision making in times of shock so they are a key area of focus for improving household resilience.

# Lessons Learned

RLA's systems mapping analysis revealed several important takeaways for IPs, USAID/Ethiopia, and other resilience partners working in conflict-affected areas:

## Understand Complex Issues Using a Systems Lens

Development challenges with a large number of interconnected factors often defy conventional analytical approaches. Systems mapping provides a way to not only disentangle the complexity of these issues, but also keep the analysis grounded in local perspectives through the use of hybrid qualitative/quantitative methods like PTA.

## Drivers Can Also be Opportunities for Systems Change

Factors that are highly interconnected to a complex issue can simultaneously be strongly affecting a system and affected by it. In this case, the role of household decision making serves as a key focal point to target with interventions because of its central nature to the problem and connections to incomes, gender, and livelihoods.