



# ISSUE BRIEF

## Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Voice Through Social Analysis and Action

**OVERVIEW** Strengthening gender equality and women’s voice (GEVV) is one way CARE aims to address the underlying causes of poverty and social injustice. Social Analysis and Action (SAA) is a facilitated process through which individuals and communities explore and challenge the norms, beliefs, and practices that lead to gender inequality, and take steps to catalyze social change. This brief provides a short introduction to SAA and how it supports each part of CARE’s GEVV framework under the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) program.

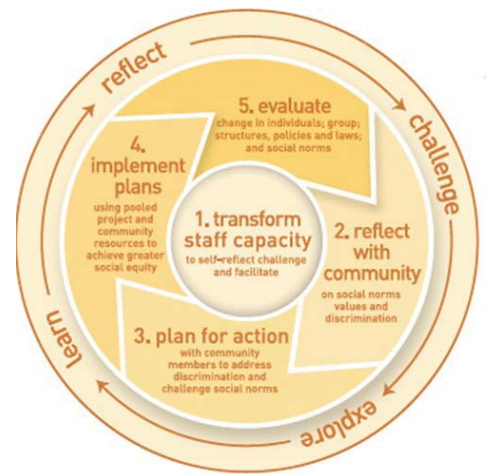
### The SAA Approach

#### OBJECTIVE

SAA was designed to facilitate vulnerable communities’ empowerment through the advancement of equitable gender, social, and power norms. Through the use of participatory reflection and dialogue, participants explore and challenge their own biases, beliefs, and values as well as the inequitable norms present in their households and communities. Throughout the process, participants discuss and learn how norms affect their sexual and reproductive health and rights and explore ways to adopt alternative norms and practice healthy behaviors.

#### IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

SAA is implemented in five-step cycles (see figure on right): 1) staff transformation, 2) community reflection, 3) action planning, 4) implementing plans, and 5) evaluation. The first step (staff transformation) is based on the idea that “systematic consideration of gender and sexuality in intervention design and implementation is critical to improving sexual and reproductive health.”<sup>1</sup> Staff members are invited to think critically about the same issues that will later be discussed with the community, learning the concepts that justify the SAA methodology and internalizing the core values around empowerment, sexuality, human rights, gender constructs, and hierarchies of power. Ongoing staff reflection creates space for deeper analysis of existing norms, helps build staff capacity for facilitating critical reflection, and creates a solid base for programs to grow and shift to support and sustain norm changes. The staff transformation step alone supports two of CARE’s gender standards for GEVV: enhanced staff capacity and an enabling organizational culture.<sup>2</sup>



With staff transformation as the basis, the SAA cycle proceeds through the remaining steps. In the second step, CARE staff or trained community members facilitate reflective dialogues with program participants. Groups are supported to explore and challenge restrictive norms while envisioning ways things could be different and better to support their SRHR needs and goals. The third step (action planning) prompts participants to think of ways to promote new and positive norms, considering not only how feasible and effective their actions might be, but also whether or not their plans are addressing the needs of vulnerable women and girls. Eventually, community groups implement their action plans, and CARE supports them by advocating for services or policy changes to overcome any structural barriers to accomplishing stated goals.

### GEVV THEORY OF CHANGE:



## SPOTLIGHT ON STAFF TRANSFORMATION

*A staff member from CARE India found that SAA dialogues helped her to listen and provide non-judgmental care to sex workers participating in a program she was implementing. “I experienced immense distress until I became conscious of the fact that I am not so different from them,” she explained. “We are women who have similar concerns about feeding our children. When I realized our commonality, my tension began to lessen.”*

### How Does SAA Impact GEWV?

CARE believes that GEWV can only be achieved through transformative change – defined as sustainable change across three domains: 1) agency, 2) relations, and 3) structures. SAA, when properly implemented, enables programs to achieve and magnify gains in each of these areas.

#### BUILDING AGENCY

Every step of the SAA process contributes to building individual and collective agency. It occurs through staff transformation and community reflection, as participants reflect on and challenge personal biases and harmful social norms. It occurs through action planning and implementation, as participants take steps to fight inequality in their homes and communities. Finally, it continues through evaluation, as participants reflect on their challenges and successes before starting the whole process again.

#### CHANGING RELATIONS

Inequitable power relations make it difficult or impossible for marginalized individuals and groups to achieve their goals and live up to their potential. Challenging these relations requires engagement and effort from those who have historically been exploited and those with substantial power, with the mutual understanding that a more equitable society is better for everyone. SAA takes a gender-synchronized approach, involving women, girls, men, and boys in the fight for equality. Key community influencers are also invited to participate in an effort to promote collaborative and accountable relationships between power-holders and marginalized groups.

#### TRANSFORMING STRUCTURES

According to CARE’s Gender Equality Framework, “structures” include norms, values, customs, and practices as well as laws, policies, and procedures.<sup>2</sup> The action planning, implementation, and evaluation steps of the SAA process are where participants work together to replace or improve inequitable or discriminatory structures in both the formal and

informal spheres, making them more responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable in society. SAA facilitates consensus-building and supports the inclusion of marginalized groups, so they have the opportunity to become active members of the community and have equitable access to information and services.

### Why Use SAA?

After over a decade of implementation experience, the impact of SAA has been well documented. One evaluation from TESFA (an adolescent girl’s empowerment program in Ethiopia) revealed that where communities were engaged with SAA, sector outcomes were accompanied by large gains in couples’ communication, decreased gender-based violence, and improved mental health. Married girls who participated also demonstrated improved optimism about their future, social support, gender attitudes, and satisfaction in their marriage.<sup>3</sup>

#### COST-EFFECTIVENESS

SAA is not a standalone intervention – it is most effective when integrated into the activities and structures of new or existing programs. For example, a reflective dialogue about women’s household workload might be logically incorporated into a program designed to address access to reproductive health services, exclusive breastfeeding, and maternal nutrition. This integration requires more investment in program staff, partners, and community groups than might otherwise be needed, but it also reduces administrative burden and makes efficient use of participants’ time by addressing multiple related issues in the same platform.

#### ADDED VALUE

SAA can be used to compliment any of CARE’s sector-specific programs. By directly addressing root causes of poverty (gender norms and inequitable power structures), SAA facilitates participants own actions to overcome social barriers, strengthening GEWV, which results in more gender-equitable, SRHR-supportive households, families, and communities.

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#### REFERENCES

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2. CARE International. (2016). *Guidance note: Gender equality and women’s voice.*
3. Edmeades, J., Hayes, R., & Gaynair, G. (2014). *Improving the lives of married adolescent girls in Amhara Ethiopia: A summary of the evidence.*

