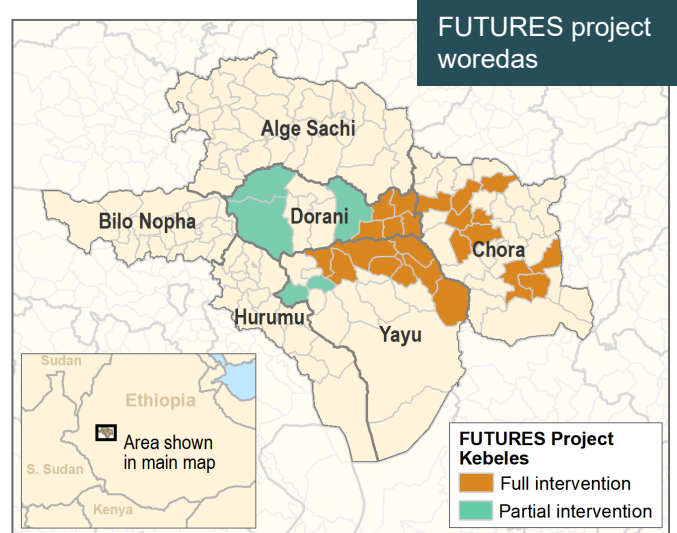


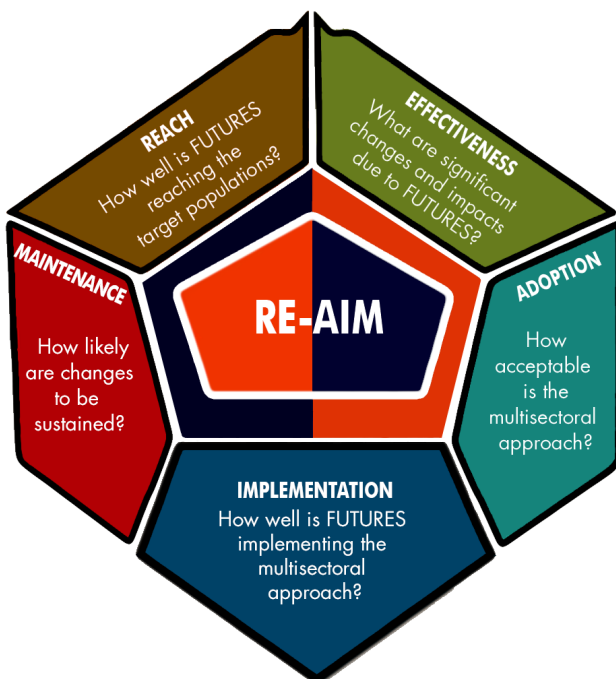
FUTURES Project Midline Evaluation: Key Findings

Background

The FUTURES—My Forest, My Livelihood, My Family—Packard Foundation-funded project is implemented by CARE Ethiopia and its local partners in the Yayu Coffee Forest Biosphere Reserve of southwestern Oromia, Ethiopia, through an integrated, multisectoral approach with a focus on women and youth. The project is designed to deliver targeted services at the individual, household, and community levels. The project is coordinating with stakeholders from the economic, agricultural, conservation, and reproductive health (RH) sectors to efficiently address the complex and interrelated needs of individuals and communities in the Chora, Dorani, and Yayu woredas.



The FUTURES project evaluation, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is implemented by Data for Impact (D4I) in collaboration with local research partner Jimma University. A qualitative midline evaluation was conducted to understand knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and the most meaningful outcomes to date of the project’s multisectoral approach to improving RH, livelihood opportunities, and agricultural and conservation practices. The evaluation aims to contribute to knowledge about the implementation of integrated, multisectoral programs.



What methods were used?

The midline evaluation used the Reach, Effectiveness, Adoption, Implementation, and Maintenance (RE-AIM) framework to conceptualize the implementation and outcomes of the project as a product of the interaction among the framework’s five dimensions. These dimensions were used to guide data collection and analysis. Midline research questions were answered through **26 focus group discussions (FGDs)** and **30 key informant interviews (KIIs)** and **Most Significant Change (MSC)** interviews with youth and adult participants, non-participant community members, and project implementors and collaborators to understand their experience and perceptions of the integrated approach. A total of 234 respondents (104 females and 130 males) participated in the FGDs, KIIs, and MSC interviews. Data were collected from April to May 2023. Transcripts were coded and excerpts were organized into thematic matrices for further analysis and then summarized by each RE-AIM dimension.

This brief summarizes the [Evaluation of the FUTURES Project: Midline Report](#), by Mitiku, F., Millar, L., Bekele, A., Barden-O’Fallon, J. (2023).



What are the key results by RE-AIM Dimension?

Reach: Respondents felt participation was well-defined and that the project reached its target population. Some respondents felt there were financial barriers to participation in the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) — one of FUTURES’ most popular interventions—as it required individual financial contributions. There was also a perception that participation in project activities was more limited for youth, particularly male youth.



There were women that couldn't participate in the cooperative established as VSLA because of the lack of money. There are those who are not members of the savings group because they are poor and cannot save.

—Adult female project participant, Chora woreda



The whole community was invited and participated in trainings for forest resource conservation, family planning and the importance of VSLA for livelihood generating. Also, training was given on improved agricultural practices such as poultry, beekeeping, animal fattening especially... These and other activities contribute to livelihood improvement of the participants, especially poor women, which in turn contributes to the well-being of the community.

—Youth male project participant, Dorani woreda

Effectiveness: Increased opportunities for **livelihood** generation were seen as the most significant change resulting from project activities, accomplished through VSLA groups, nursery enterprises, the introduction of improved agricultural practices, and capacity strengthening interventions. **Improved agricultural practices** such as beekeeping and poultry production; increased access to **family planning (FP)/ RH** services through training and awareness raising, support for youth-friendly health services, and provider training; and knowledge and shifting **gender norms** were also viewed as important contributors to improved livelihood and wellbeing. **Forest conservation** activities were seen as relatively less effective and less well-established.

The FUTURES project has changed my life in many ways. I have gained more knowledge about saving culture and strategies, family planning, health education, and also improved my financial literacy.

—Youth female project participant, Yayo woreda



I have been participating in this seedling production consecutively for the last few years. However, there was no market for the seedlings. After the FUTURES project came to our kebele, I got the market through the project and sold all that I had last year.

—Adult male project participant, Chora woreda

Adoption: Knowledge and acceptance of the FUTURES project and the multisectoral integrated approach were high. VSLAs were seen as an important hub for linkages to other sectors and services. The most successful strategies named were VSLAs and FP/RH services, training, and outreach, while the least successful were Youth SLAs (YSLAs) due to low participation of youth, conservation activities (such as participatory forest management) due to low participation and community acceptance, and the need to further support and raise awareness on the importance of forest conservation and alternative livelihood opportunities.



The project was very effective in family planning and livelihood improvement plans that the project implemented in the communities. However, there is less participation of the youth and women in conservation of the forest. This has happened because community attitudes towards the forest are too low.

—Adult female project participant, Dorani woreda



Implementation: Multisectoral integration happened mostly at the project and activity levels, whereas coordination and collaboration across sectors occurred at all levels—government, project, and implementing partners. Project partners reported successful communication, collaboration, and coordination with local stakeholders, including local government. Perceived barriers to implementation included a limited project area and intensity of activities, a need to improve local ownership of the integrated approach, pressure for immediate results, and high community expectations.

We are four different organizations, but we have one common plan. The implementing partners have a review meeting every Monday at the zonal level. The same is true at the woreda level. They have review meetings every Thursday. This saved our time, energy resources, and reduced duplication of effort.

—FUTURES staff, male



In my opinion, the greatest strengths of the project are its multi-sectoral collaboration and coordination with many signatory government sectors, continuous efforts on improving the existing gaps for the beneficiaries (for example, in relation to capacity building), and also the transparency of the project about its activities being implemented jointly with many stakeholders.

—Local government collaborator, Women and Children's Affairs, female

Maintenance: Respondents expressed a positive outlook on the sustainability of the integrated approach due to buy-in but also expressed a need for increased government ownership. Additional suggested project improvements to increase impact and sustainability included: increasing the intensity and reach of project activities; improving male youth outreach; strengthening conservation activities; providing seed money for VSLAs and YSLAs; providing more seeds/seedlings, irrigation materials, and market linkages; and increasing trainings on life skills, financial literacy, and improved agricultural techniques.

One best experience I personally learned is how integration can be made at the sectoral level. The integration is highly scalable. We thoroughly understood integration saves resources, time, and energy. This approach saved farmers time and provided a complete package in changing the livelihood of farmers at the grassroots level.

—Local government collaborator, Office of Agriculture, male



What do these results mean?

The FUTURES project employed an integrated multisectoral approach to address health, environment, and livelihood concerns of communities living in the Yayo Coffee Forest Biosphere Reserve region. The project has been largely well-received by the communities served and has been perceived as more successful in addressing complex problems compared to single-sector approaches. Interventions that improved livelihood opportunities, including through improved agricultural and savings practices, were popular. Livelihood interventions, such as VSLAs, provided important links to FP/RH information and services. Interventions related to conservation were seen as less successful, and future success in this area may depend on strengthening linkages between conservation and livelihood issues. Sustainability of the integrated approach will depend on local government commitment and capacity to continue the multisectoral integration established by FUTURES.



Recommendations

The FUTURES midline evaluation has generated several recommendations for the project.

- **FP/RH services:** Continue to provide and expand FP/RH education for youth, including support for and awareness of youth-friendly health services. Ensure a consistent supply of FP/RH methods and materials.
- **Agriculture and conservation activities:** Reinforce training through follow-up visits; strengthen participatory forest management groups and/or add activities to address community concerns related to the forest; and consider additional support for agricultural market linkages, provision of high-quality seeds/seedlings, and tools and water irrigation materials.
- **Livelihood activities:** Continue to support VSLAs and expand where possible; strengthen support to and outreach for YSLAs; consider ways to involve the poorest community members in FUTURES activities; provide additional education on basic financial literacy; and ensure that the project is reaching rural youth.
- **Multisectoral project approach:** Continue coordination and capacity strengthening for a multisectoral approach; plan for the eventual transfer of ownership to local government agencies; advocate for allocation of funding from the public sector; and continue to manage the expectations of community members through publicizing project goals and implementation activities.

How have the evaluation findings been used?

CARE Ethiopia and its implementing partners incorporated midline findings into their work plans for the second phase of FUTURES. While continuing to implement the key activities initiated in the first phase, project implementers intend to increase youth engagement, provide refresher trainings, and enhance the adoption of conservation practices, among others. The next phase will place more attention on the inclusion of the poorest households, persons with disabilities, and unemployed youth. The second phase will also focus on systems strengthening within the current intervention kebeles and on strengthening partner capacity to continue programming after the two-year phase ends, which will include the development of an exit strategy document shared with all stakeholders.

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