



Synthesizing CARE Ghana's Evidence on Agriculture Collective for Gender-Transformative Food Systems

Literature Review

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List of Acronyms

AGREE	Agricultural Governance, Resilience and Economic Empowerment Activity
ALP	Adaptation Learning Programme for Africa
BoC	Banking on Change
CAAPs	Community Adaptation Action Plans
CBA	Community-based adaptation
CBEA	Community Based Extension Agent
CBOs	Community-based organisations
CIS	Climate Information Services
CSI	Cocoa Sustainability Initiative
DAGI	District Agricultural Governance Index
DASGOP	District Agricultural Sector Governance Platform
DMTDPs	District Medium-Term Development Plans
DoA	District Departments of Agriculture
FASDEP	Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy
FBOs	Farmer-based organisations
FFBS	Farmer Field and Business School
GADS	Gender and Agriculture Development Strategy
GGP	Good Growth Project
GPSNP	Ghana Productive Safety Net Project
GSID	Ghana Seed Inspection Directorate
GSOP	Ghana Social Opportunities Project
GTA	Gender Transformative Approach
HESP	Economic Security for Poor Women Smallholder Farmers Project
LAW	Land for Women
LCF	Local Cocoa Facilitator
LEAD	Local Extension for Agricultural Development
LINKAGES	Linking Initiatives, Stakeholders and Knowledge to Achieve Gender-Sensitive Livelihood Security
MMDAs	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies
MRC	Market Research Committee
NASTAG	National Seed Trade Association of Ghana
NGGA	Northern Ghana Governance Activity
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NOW	Nutrition Outcomes for Women
PATHWAYS	Pathways to Secure and Resilient Livelihoods Project
Pfj	Planting for Food and Jobs
PSP	Participatory Scenario Planning
RASGOP	Regional Agricultural Sector Governance Platform
SARI	Savannah Agriculture Research Institute
SEEDPAG	Seed Producers Association of Ghana
SfTW	She Feeds the World
SLATE	Sustainable Land Tenure
UER	Upper East Region
UWR	Upper West Region
VSLAs	Village savings and Loans Associations
WAP	Women in Agriculture Platform
WA-WASH	West Africa Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Programme Household

1.0 Introduction

Many multilateral and bilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are seeking ways to achieve profound and sustainable development objectives by tackling the root causes of gender inequality. They recognize that while it is necessary to focus on treating the symptoms of gender inequality, such as unequal access to productive resources, this is not enough on its own to effect change. Gender transformative approaches (GTAs) that revolutionize the lives of participating individuals and their families, groups and communities have gained traction during the last decade or so in the context of food security and agriculture (FAO, IFAD & WFP, 2020). However, many implementing organizations in Ghana are grappling with similar issues such as how to capture the transformative impacts of GTAs; how to strengthen their outreach and take them to scale in a context-specific manner; and how to convince others of the power of GTAs to generate sustainable social and economic benefits. GTAs aim to change existing power dynamics, structures, and social norms that are the root causes of gender-based inequality as a means of achieving development objectives (Cornwall & Rivas, 2016; Hillenbrand, Karim, Mohanraj, & Wu, 2015; Kabeer, 2015). CARE Ghana's commitment to GTAs and their efficacy in supporting gender transformative food systems is supported by the fact that, for well over two decades, the organization has focused on the economic empowerment of women through the promotion of VSLAs (e.g. BoC, ALP, NOW, LEAD, HESP, LINKAGES, PROCOCO, CSI etc.) within the broader context of FFBS (through the PATHWAYS Program and other initiatives for instance); and in recent times, the Women in Agriculture Platforms (WAPs) under the NGGA/AGREE projects. These agriculture-focused interventions have largely created opportunities for individuals (women) to actively challenge gender norms, promoted positions of social and political influence for women in communities, and addressed power inequities between persons of different genders.

As iterated by CARE International (2009): “Over the years, gender work has engaged men as ‘the authorities’ whose permission we need in order to help women learn new skills, as ‘the partner’ whose support is needed in order for women to thrive, and ‘the oppressor’ whose abuses and privileges must be ended in order for women to be free. Each of these approaches, however, reduces men, their relations to women, and the institutional forces that shape them on a societal scale, to a thin slice of a more complex reality.” In contrast to these past approaches, GTAs aim to engage men in a more careful and purposeful way that acknowledges their nuanced relationships with women, aiming to position them as agents of change on the path to gender equality while strengthening the interdependent and mutually supportive relationships that exist between men and women. It is in light of this that Kantor (2013) states that in order to address gender inequality in agriculture, it is essential to begin with a rigorous participatory analysis that examines several elements of a given society, including: how social norms, values, and power relationships shape and are shaped by women's and men's understandings of their roles and capacities; societal expectations of what is appropriate for women and men to be and do within the agricultural sector; and how these expectations and differences are institutionalized in the way the market, family, community, and state work. This understanding has shaped the focus of CARE Ghana's programming so far, which explains why the agricultural collectives (VSLAs, FFBS, WAPs etc.) are viewed as GTAs in the context of this review.

With Agenda 2030's commitment to gender equality and leaving no-one behind, coupled with the Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028, the timing of this exercise to understand how CARE's agricultural collectives contribute to the change areas of the [She Feeds the World \(SFtW\) framework](#) in Ghana is opportune, particularly, after about some decade of implementation of gender transformative projects/programs such as NGGA/AGREE, Pathways, Agro-Source, CSI, HESP, LINKAGES (PROMISE) etc. Understanding CARE's existing learnings and evidence base relating to agricultural collectives and their ability to contribute to the SFtW framework is vitally important to understand where the evidence strengths and gaps are regarding CARE Ghana's understanding of how well agricultural collectives promote and create gender-transformative food systems as defined by SFtW framework. This report is the outcome of a comprehensive systematic review of project/program documents to establish the evidence base in Ghana focusing on the six areas of the SFtW framework, i.e.: Women's Empowerment; Increasing women's access to and control of productive resources; Enabling women's access to inclusive markets; Improving nutrition; Promoting social protection; and Multiplying the impact of agriculture through women small-scale producers.

1.1 Summary of Evidence of CARE Ghana in the SftW Change Areas

1.1.1 Women's Empowerment

The evidence from six program/project reports (49 in total) reviewed on CARE Ghana's focus on capacity strengthening at the community level to help women increase their confidence and skills, and cope with the challenges they face, including in farming, marketing, and negotiation skills – is very robust. The foundation of this strong evidence base that has enlarged the freedoms of poor and marginalized women to make choices and take actions to shape their lives, is composed of inter alia;

- VSLAs being used as conduits through which farmers acquire knowledge and skills in agronomic practices (e.g. crop water requirements, rainfall calendar etc.) through annual participatory scenario planning (PSP) sessions that their group leaders attend and subsequently share or disseminate the seasonal outlook they utilize in planning for the production season. Farmers are able to select crops such as soya (janguma and afayak varieties) and groundnut (yenyawoso) that best suit the predicted amount of rain fall for the period using the crop water requirement chart (ALP and PATHWAYS initiatives).
- All VSLAs that the PATHWAYS worked with, each received a “Talking Book”, they listen to a message every week after their weekly contributions and then a member gets to send the device home to listen to messages each week. Farmers' knowledge and skills are enhanced on nutrition and gender through the “talking book” which has improved intra household relationships and given women voice to contribute to important household decisions. The talking book is an audio device with agriculture extension, nutrition, gender and climate resilience education programmes modelled in the local language. The talking book added value by allowing project participants listen to the messages at their own convenience with other members of their families who are not part of the project.
- The FFBS model places emphasis on hands-on learning. Particularly, the demonstration fields have been successful in exposing women farmers to improved methods of production. Practices such as row planting to ensure adequate plant population, appropriate plant spacing and timely weeding are now strictly adhered to by women farmers. At endline, the percentage of farmers who reported adopting all improved farming practices they were exposed to was 56%; this is a significant achievement compared with the baseline figure of 16.2% (Final MACP Report, 2017).
- The community Based Extension System (CBES) model that is being used under the FFBS has been successful in narrowing the extension officer farmer ratio. The model has complemented the inadequate, aged and male dominated agricultural extension officers in the system (1:1500). The project communities now record an extension ratio of 1: 25 (one CBEA is to 25 farmers), which is a greater improvement over the 1:1500 as reported in government extension services delivery. Women smallholder farmers' access to climate and agricultural information from their colleagues is crucial for rural livelihoods activities. The presence of CBEAs also triggered responsiveness from government extension agents because the CBEAs established links with them to provide periodic technical support. As a result of this, the percentage of project participants in Female Headed Households who reported meeting with a government extension agent increased from 39.2% at baseline to 58.7% (Final MACP Report, 2017).
- Promotion of diversification of income sources through alternative income generating activities with VSLAs via the organization of collective processing and marketing for current products (e.g. soya and groundnuts). CARE Ghana's approach to VSLAs is financial inclusion that is first based on a deliberate and holistic analysis of men and women in their context and the ways in which gender inequalities influence their choices, opportunities, and livelihoods. The approach is characterized by a deep understanding of how people live their lives, and how their context influences their choices, actions, and livelihoods. Through a gender lens, and in contrast to mainstream entrepreneurship and management approaches, the CARE VSLA ecosystem encompasses more than access to markets, financial institutions, and enabling regulatory systems; it also includes what goes on in the family, at home, and at the level of cultural and societal norms. The focus on soya and groundnut value chains for example, are grounded on an excellent understanding of the socio-cultural context that these crops

are “women crops” and their value chains support activities that are also largely women-dominated. It is thus important to note that, the transformative change CARE is seeking through agricultural collectives such as VSLAs is nonlinear and cannot be attributed to the simple act of providing accessible and affordable credit to poor people. CARE Ghana’s VSLAs are making financial systems ‘women-able’ rather than simply making women ‘bankable’.

- PATHWAYS and ALP built on existing collectives such as VSLAs within the context of FFBS as platforms for implementation and assessed these for maturity using the collective readiness tool. Working with and through VSLAs, they carried out off-field training of collectives on agricultural activities, gender dialogues, market visits and lessons and cooking demonstrations. The improvement in knowledge, skills, relationships, self-confidence and conviction empowered women farmers in the project communities to lead the participatory development process of Community Adaptation Action Plans (CAAPs - through both ALP and PATHWAYS). By playing a key role, they ensured that issues affecting women’s welfare such as access to improved health care, potable water, alternative income and productive resources were incorporated into the CAAPs and presented to District Assemblies for integration into Medium Term Development Plans (MTDPs). With this integration of women’s concerns into the MTDP, there is some guaranteed assurance that routine budgetary allocations would be made for their implementation in the mainstream local governance system.
- In order to increase participants’ access to inputs, CARE’s programming facilitates linkages between farmers, input dealers and buyers, as well as organizes input fairs to educate participants on agrochemicals and fertilizers using the channels of VSLAs and FFBS. The program identifies two members of each VSLA group, 85 percent of whom are women, to identify marketing outlets, negotiate prices for produce sale, and aggregate produce for bulk sale to buyers. At the district level, PATHWAYS holds a Yield, Post-Harvest, Cost, and Marketing (YiPoCoMa) training to further educate participants (Final MACP Report, 2017).
- CARE Ghana’s FFBS is utilized to demonstrate good agriculture practices and techniques, which integrates nutrition, gender, and marketing into its approach. The model identifies CBEAs, 80 percent of whom are women that serve each VSLA group and impart knowledge they’ve learned about farming practices. The model also provides training on “Good Agriculture Practices” (GAP) for participants to instruct them on agricultural techniques as well as soybean processing demonstrations that encourage them to prepare nutritious meals at home.
- Interventions to address gender issues such as community gender dialogues and the work of gender champions has reinforced the need for peaceful co-existence of spouses and hence improved household relationships. Training programs for district assembly staff, assembly members, traditional and women leaders provided the requisite skills needed to engage and lobby owners of productive resources (land, bullocks and farm inputs) to release these resources to support women’s agricultural activities. A total of 30 acres of degraded land and patches of home stead plots allocated to VSLA groups in some CARE programming communities were identified, mapped and reclaimed using the “modified” Zai pit technology. VSLAs and WAPs have also been instrumental in advocating for timely access to ploughing services, access to seed and fertilizer under the Government’s Flagship (Planting for Food and Jobs) etc. as reported under NGGA/AGREE .
- The findings also reinforce the interrelatedness of the strategies being used in CARE’s programming through agricultural collectives. For instance, through the VSLAs, producers are able to take out loans in order to engage in agricultural production. As a result of engaging in soybean or groundnut production they are able to make enough income to make savings in the VSLAs. VSLA savings are used to buy inputs to farm. The soybean or groundnut cultivation contribute to income and household nutrition diversity.

The findings for this thematic area of the SFtW framework in Ghana reveal the following evidence about women’s empowerment:

- As men and women work together and consult each other (during “Talking Books” listening sessions, VSLA and CDC meetings, FFBS sessions, input fairs, gender dialogues etc.) they recognize shared aspirations and their

bonds become stronger. There is more openness and transparency in confronting gender norms that undermine women's empowerment. There is strong evidence of changing attitudes about gender equality in family life. PATHWAYS' interventions changed women's perceptions about gender issues in their homes and communities. Although patriarchal attitudes about family life and the distinct roles of men and women in the household still persist, great strides have been accomplished in the CARE target districts;

- Women are experiencing greater ability to express themselves and have more control over resources, including their own labour and time. This creates space for more women to engage in productive activities to generate additional income (e.g. PATHWAYS, PROMISE, CSI & HESP). The Social Cost Benefit Analysis of the programme conducted externally in 2016 showed that PATHWAYS had a USD 31 return for every USD 1 invested. This was split between women's empowerment, improved food security, and higher incomes, with 25% of the impact coming from spill-over into the communities from PATHWAYS farmers.
- Improved access to finances, all participants in all locations cited VSLAs as the most impactful intervention. Many noted that access to credit was the best outcome in this programming field.
- Women's confidence and self-esteem has increased because women and their roles are valued in the family and community now than ever before (e.g. under NGGA, HESP & PATHWAYS).
- Women and children are experiencing better health and nutrition status because men are willing to support women in the production of soya, groundnuts, cowpea, vegetables in kitchen gardens; leaving the best cuts of fish and meat for their children, and helping their wives plan and prepare meals (e.g. PROMISE/LINKAGES & PATHWAYS).

In sum, it is worthwhile to note that, a common thread across each of the projects reviewed was the FFBS model. This capacity building model was responsive in building agency, transforming structures and changing relations that empowered women in Ghana. The PATHWAYS Program in particular, was outstanding in its ability to use the FFBS model. The integration of the model into the agricultural seasonal cycle in Ghana was a novel idea. This integration ensured that knowledge, skills and practices of women farmers were built upon when relevant and in a timely manner touching on those critical issues such as: expanded access to services, assets and inputs; increased productivity, profitability and nutrition; increased influence of women over household decisions, assets and incomes and the fostering of the enabling environment that is better able to foster gender equity, both within communities and in extension and market systems. The evidence collected so far points to the fact that, the CARE's programming in this domain is leading to: (a) changes in the opportunity structure, consisting of the dominant institutional climate and social structures within which women in CARE's operational districts in Ghana are working to advance their interests, and (b) changes in the capabilities of poor women and the groups (CDCs, VSLAs, WAPs etc.) they belong in to take purposeful actions i.e., to exercise agency. All evaluations (i.e. CARE's Women Empowerment Index) conducted for the projects reviewed, confirmed that the number of empowered women, more than doubled in Ghana.

1.1.2 Increasing Women's Access to and Control of Productive Resources

CARE Ghana's programming in this field is equally robust. While PATHWAYS, LINKAGES, CSI and HESP did implement significant initiatives to support the realization of this arm of the SftW framework, the Agro-Source Project represents one of the initiatives that addressed the problems women face in their quest to increase access to and control of productive resources. Building on earlier initiatives (e.g. PATHWAYS) and proven contextual problems women face in agriculture in Ghana, Agro-Source focused entirely on: 1) increasing availability and access to good quality agricultural inputs through private sector led agro dealership schemes; 2) increasing availability of and access to certified seed through a community seed production system in partnership with the private sector; 3) improving utilization of good quality agricultural inputs; and 4) creating an enabling environment for women in agri-input systems through improving gender responsiveness of both private and government sector partners. Existing VSLAs and FFBS groups served as the foundation for the Project; new community level agro-dealers and seed multipliers were identified from these groups; similarly, there was an explicit effort by the project to encourage input dealers to engage farmers through these groups. These collectives equally became vital points of outreach upon the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Details of the evidence of impact outcomes are presented in Appendix 1. The salient impacts with sustainability and replicability impact are presented as follows:

- a) Training of community agri-input dealers and linking them with major agri-input suppliers for reliable supply of competitively priced quality inputs and extension services to the last mile smallholder farmers was transformational for most women smallholders. The project also identified and trained women from the VSLA groups as agro-dealers who are now helping women farmers with quality input and extension information. (Agro-Source Project Report, July- December 2018, p.1);
- b) Facilitation of participation of community level agri-input dealers in Annual Pre-Harvest Agribusiness Exhibitions Events and National Farmers Days and Exhibition Events expanded options for the sustenance of community level agri-input entrepreneurship. These events are organized through consultations with agricultural collectives (VSLAs/FFBS) in a cluster of villages for a specific fair. Functional linkages are beginning to emerge between these community level agri-input dealers, the collectives and major agri-input distributors and seed companies such as Rainbow Company, ADAMA Company Ltd, Tikola Company/East West Seeds, Hydrofarm Company Agriseeds Co. Ltd, Ariku Seed Company, Heritage Seed, Chemico Co. Ltd, Jubaili Agrotech etc. These companies are major importers and suppliers of agricultural inputs including agrochemicals, vegetable seed, tools and equipment etc. The agri-input dealers' activities have ensured that smallholder farmers especially, women have access to quality agri-inputs within reasonable proximity to their homes, at affordable prices, and range of available product options from which to choose. Additionally, the project facilitated the organization of community level agricultural input fairs serving as very essential sources of information on available agricultural technologies; appropriate use of agrochemicals; awareness creation on government policies in agriculture and modalities by which to access them (e.g. Pfi); locations of agro-dealers for their input needs etc.
- c) Training of Seed Out-grower Cluster Leads and CBEAs on seed entrepreneurship as part of the process of graduating some of the seed out-growers into fully registered independent seed producers is by default sustaining seed input availability and protecting poor women smallholders from the exploitative activities of fake seed producers. This is sustaining and scaling the impact of the initiative to improve women's access to certified improved seeds. It is significant to note that these out-growers, cluster leads and CBEAs were drawn from existing VSLAs and FFBS (CARE Progress Report for Brooks Family, July-December, 2020, p. 1).
- d) Facilitating processes for the graduation of Seed Out-growers and getting them certified (with the GSID) are offering them the opportunity to purchase their own foundation seed directly as registered foundation seed producers; - aiding their ability to sell certified seeds directly to farmers and other buyers; join membership of Seed Producers Association of Ghana (SEEDPAG) and National Seed Trade Association of Ghana (NASTAG) and continuing to receive general seed information, business and technical capacity building and serve as a voice for advocacy issues for smallholder women farmers.
- e) The project in its quest for sustainable measures to improve women's access to ploughing services before the commencement of the cropping season, supported the formation of Ploughing Service Providers Associations and facilitated linkages between these groups on one hand, and women groups (VSLAs). This arrangement is helping VSLAs to collectively engage these service providers in setting ploughing costs per acre seasonally; assisting them in the process not only to access timely ploughing services, but also at competitive costs.
- f) Gender dialogues with chiefs, landlords and male gender champions have contributed significantly to facilitating women's access to productive lands. Men's engagement through gender dialogues; and participatory monitoring and evaluation using the participatory performance tracker is significantly redirecting the focus of men to issues of unequal access to productive resources such as land; and opening them up to supporting the idea of not merely allowing women to intercrop in their fields but also apportioning lands for them to support their own productive engagements (particularly in soya, cowpea and groundnuts).

- Projects such as LINKAGES, PATHWAYS and HESP have improved women’s access to threshing services directly through the provision of threshers (which are managed by the FFBS) and indirectly through linkages to ongoing Government projects/programs such as the Rural Enterprises Program (REP).
- The VSLA model (CARE’s flagship) has proven consistently to be a sustainable financing mechanism and a conduit to finding practical innovative ways of supporting livelihood diversification to cushion against shocks that tend to erode adaptive capacity. This is because, improved financial inclusion cannot only be seen as “good development” but one which makes sense in the changing climate, because it is critical to building resilience among the climate vulnerable people and communities CARE is working in Ghana. CARE’s Adaptation Learning Program (ALP) represents a good example of how the VSLA flagship was used to facilitate assets building, innovation, institutional building and entitlements; climate knowledge and information (e.g. through PSPs) as well as flexible and forward-looking decision-making processes in Ghana.

In sum, CARE Ghana’s contribution to this domain of the SFtW framework has been comprehensive in respect of access to inputs, land, information and technologies, and access to finance. The weight of the distribution of the impacts however, vary across projects, with some projects having heavier leanings in respect of some sub-components than others. When viewed from a system’s perspective, the projects/programs have complemented each other to create the synergy that makes CARE Ghana’s impact in this domain holistic and reinforcing.

1.1.3 Enabling Women’s Access to Inclusive Markets

- The Market Research Committees (MRCs) set up and strengthened throughout PATHWAYS’ programming districts represent innovative examples of women small-scale producers’ ability to participate in collectives to negotiate better market outcomes, and make decisions in market systems. Having good market information is important for smallholder women farmers to negotiate with traders from a position of greater strength and also enables them to make planting decisions in line with market demands. Zonal-level Market Research Committees (MRCs) were formed in the project districts to lead all marketing activities at the zonal level including produce aggregation activities, recording production and sales of produce in each cluster community. The district level MRCs are responsible for identifying marketing outlets for VSLAs, negotiating with identified buyer(s) for good prices and supporting aggregation of produce of members of the VSLAs for bulk sale to the recognized buyers.
- The District Agriculture Governance Index (DAGI) initiative under the NGGA/AGREE prompts discussions to prioritize marketing and processing in the planning and implementation of district agricultural activities at the district level. From the data, citizens indicated the low investment in marketing and processing contributes to the limited farmer access to markets, which is a major challenge to agricultural development at the district level. The DAGI assessment for 2017 and 2018, showed that the districts focused investments on the production link, (about 85% on average) of the agricultural value chain related activities and costs. The remaining disbursements (15%) were distributed between marketing and processing. One-quarter (¼) of the districts did not record any expenditure item on agricultural marketing for 2018. Hence, CSOs being supported under NGGA/AGREE and the District Agricultural Sector Governance Platforms (DASGOPS) are using the data to engage and advocate for a paradigm shift towards marketing and processing of agricultural produce. Government agencies recognize WAPs as the “Voice of Women”, as there is increased recognition and support for WAP activities across the project districts. This recognition comes with a promising outlook for a strengthened relationship between WAPs and the MMDAs, Department of Agriculture and other private CSOs. District officers (Chief executives, Coordinating Directors and Planners) across the project districts have allowed more women to participate in the assemblies’ review meetings and provide information, feedback in respect of improving women’s needs in agriculture. Similarly, WAPs (which are a network of women groups at both the district and regional levels) constitute about 750 women groups with a membership of about 30,000 individuals are also using these data to progressively demonstrate collective voice and increased ability to advocate for better services (NGGA Annual Report, 2019). Beyond this sphere, is further advocacy work of the WAPs in increasing

women's access to land, ploughing services and the taking up of political office (e.g. Unit Committee and Assembly members).

- There is ample evidence that the agricultural value chains identified for support under the projects/programs reviewed were selected on account of sound market systems and value chain analysis. Target crops such as soya, cowpea and groundnuts as well as the vegetables grown in the kitchen gardens were identified from research to be considered “women crops” and the value chain up-grading potentials in these crops are explicitly dominated by chain actors that are women. There was a conscious effort to support not only their production, but also their processing, value-adding and marketing activities. Relevance of target crops to the local market context was also key to success—specifically, market-driven selection of crops is key for linking farmers to markets. The LINKAGES, HESP and PATHWAYS initiatives impacted this sphere phenomenally.

In sum, while the interventions implemented by CARE in this sphere in Ghana are impacting positively women's access to markets, what is not readily evident is how “inclusive” this process has been. Inclusiveness that guarantees profitability has been elusive in some instances, particularly, for some collectives under HESP and PATHWAYS. It was reported widely that in many instances, markets sourced by the MRCs came up with offers that were less competitive relative to those obtainable in local markets. Similarly, CARE Ghana's programming in this sphere has not been very responsive to interventions that reduce transaction costs from farmgate to market (i.e. transport systems and storage facilities). Strong market linkages are only possible when each preceding link of the value chain from land preparation to input supply to storage and processing is also strong. For example, strong linkages to input and output markets are important contributors to the adoption of improved inputs and production practices among farmers. Providing farmers with access to the right inputs affects levels and quality of production, and in turn can drive the design of post-harvest programming, especially as input providers increasingly become channels for both input distribution and aggregation. Finding ways to reinforce the interconnecting links and levers along the selected value chains will be important in facilitating CARE Ghana's impact in this sphere of the SFTW framework.

1.1.4 Improving Nutrition

- The Good Growth project (GGP) was a rural, market-led programme which delivered a complementary food supplement to children aged 6-24 months. The overall goal was to assess the delivery effectiveness of a market-based approach consisting of entrepreneurial women participating in the CARE VSLA system. The End of Project Report (2014) concluded that the CARE VSLA system is a useful approach to enhance financial empowerment of women and increase livelihood opportunities. After eighteen months of implementation, it was equally confirmed that:
 - ✓ The VSLA is effective as a platform to reach women in rural communities;
 - ✓ The VSLA is effective as a channel for mobilizing rural women for nutrition interventions;
 - ✓ Entrepreneurial women who are part of the VSLA can be effective in introducing new products to a rural community;
 - ✓ The VSLA system allows for easy tracking and monitoring of a sale and distribution model because members can easily be identified and located within the communities; and
 - ✓ The socio-economic and socio- cultural dynamics of rural communities do not allow a credit system to be feasible in this setting. This means that this model will work best if the rural entrepreneur has a capital base.
- CARE implemented the Nutrition Outcomes for Women (NOW) Project and it focused on increasing the production of iron-rich foods, i.e. iron-rich vegetables and animal protein through improved agro-practices; increasing the consumption of vegetables produced among women of reproductive age, through nutrition education and community mobilization; and improving the processing and storage methods to reduce nutrient loss. VSLAs were the conduits through which this innovative project was implemented. A survey to assess the impact of the project in 2013 revealed that on average, women in the intervention communities weighed 2.4 kg

more than the control women, and had a significantly higher mean body mass index (BMI). With nearly 10% of the entire sample having a low BMI (<18.5), i.e., being undernourished, the increase in weight and BMI associated with the intervention may be beneficial. A greater percentage of women in the intervention communities had a home garden, grew dark green vegetables, and consumed food from more than four food groups (greater dietary diversity) during the 24 hours preceding the interview. The percentage of households that produced animal source was also greater in the intervention communities. Beside nutritional status, the intervention women generally had stronger self-efficacy, and exercised greater autonomy in household decision making. The anthropometric indices of the children 0-23 months belonging to the intervention women were generally higher than those of the children of the control women, though the differences failed to reach statistical significance because of lack of statistical power.

- CSI (II)'s collaboration with MoFA to establish kitchen gardens in order to have easy access to green leafy vegetables to supplement the nutritional value in the household, especially among the children, pregnant and nursing mothers and also promote food crop production for consumption to serve as a source of alternative livelihood for VSLAs (CSI II Semi Annual Narrative Report, February 2018, p. 14).
- To promote the consumption of nutrient-rich food and share knowledge on the importance of diversified diets and best nutrition practices among women's groups and the communities at large, CARE collaborated with the Women in Agriculture Development (WIAD) division of the Department of Agriculture to conduct nutrition sensitization across all the NGGA/AGREE project regions/districts
- Participants' ability to process soybean into household meals have contributed to food and nutrition security in households. Soybeans incorporated into household meals, but infants consume majority of it because soybean is the main ingredient for preparation of weanmix porridge meant for infants. Besides household consumption, Soybean cheese, "dawadawa" (local spice), "koosi", weanmix, some of the recipes being promoted by PROMISE, PATHWAYS, HESP and LINKAGES have become additional sources of income for women in the project communities. These women process soybean into cheese, dawadawa, koosi and winnemix for sale at the communities' levels and through these processes are influencing nutrition outcomes.
- As part of the efforts to improve nutritional practices among project participants and other community members, CBEAs capacities were enhanced on basic nutrition practices and use of nutrition counseling cards. The counselling cards were developed in collaboration with the Ghana Health Service centered on maternal nutrition and the three basic food groups (Energy giving, Body building and Protective foods) as means of ensuring balance diets. CBEAs and community health workers conduct regular counselling sessions (with VSLAs) with the use of the counselling cards. Beyond promoting the consumption of soybean and groundnuts, the counseling sessions have also influenced other good nutrition practices such as the establishment of home gardens for vegetable cultivation during both the rainy and dry seasons.
- Under USAID's West Africa Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Program (WA-WASH), VSLAs were set up and their capacities built to ensure that Men and Women increased their socio-economic capital with the aim to finance their WASH services and other livelihood activities. As part of wider efforts to help households move up the sanitation ladder, the project organized field trips to the sanitation markets for various groups like traditional leaders, natural leaders and VSLA executives. The visits offered the project team the opportunity to discuss and demonstrate the functions and benefits of different types of improved latrines. The VSLA executives were expected to return to their members to develop mechanisms to raise funds as groups to facilitate their members to construct improved latrines. WA-WASH also trained some VSLA members as Community Livestock Workers (CLWs) to support the implementation innovative small ruminants revolving ("pass on the gift") scheme to introduce improved breeds of livestock (sheep and goats) through the VSLAs. Pass on the gift was expected to boost livestock production and increase resiliency in project communities by introducing an alternative livelihood strategy. The scheme was managed by the VSLAs with support from the CLWs and the MoFA's Animal Breeding Station. The project fitted boreholes with hand pumps to support off-season gardening by VSLAs. In communities adjacent to the Black Volta River, the project donated motor pumps to VSLAs to draw water from the river into community gardens. Similarly, water systems were rehabilitated to enhance dry season gardening.

The evidence from the review clearly shows relatively good impact in 3 core areas of support in the nutrition domain of the SFTW framework such as; a) promoting positive nutrition practices; b) homestead food production and 3) improved sanitation and water access; however, the evidence base relative to 4) stronger service delivery of quality health, water and education services for improved nutrition – are not quite as robust (at least, in light of the projects reviewed in this exercise).

1.1.5 Promoting Social Protection

- Following COVID-19 Response Strategy development, CSI II donated PPEs to health facilities in the project operational areas and set up handwashing points in project locations as part of the COVID-19 response. Some of the VSLA groups under CSI II used part of their social fund to buy nose masks and set up handwashing points at VSLA meetings before the project COVID response started. Risk communication was integrated with their meetings. The project also delivered hygiene kits (hand washing buckets, paper towels, soap) to 54 VSLAs and cocoa cooperatives as well (see p.g. 14 of CSI II final report).
- The ALP program devoted extensive efforts and time to support climate information service delivery to improve the adaptive capacities of smallholders by driving “quick-win” adaptation actions for community groups such as VSLAs. The reasoned action for this drive was to enable smallholders overcome the challenge of poor access to financial credit to buy improved seeds tolerant to the prevailing climatic hazards; pay for traction and other critical farm inputs required to produce food within an increasingly reduced farming season caused by other factors including climate change; and to support communities’ livelihood diversification strategies to reduced disaster risks. Similarly, the major channels for communicating advisories generated during PSP sessions were identified through an impact assessment of climate information services for community-based adaptation in Ghana in 2017 to include VSLAs, FFBS and CBEAs.
- Women end users of advisories particularly, identified VSLAs and CBEAs as the major channels by which they accessed climate information. The report further reports of evidence of strengthened and diversified livelihoods due to improved access to vital inputs for the operationalization of advisories through VSLAs and the input exhibitions during the PSP workshops, improved agricultural practices and access to physical, financial, social and human assets (including weather and seasonal climate information) and shifts in gender dynamics that foster and promote women’s agency.

In sum, the evidence base of CARE Ghana’s programming in this sphere could require further deepening as the range of projects and programs in the field are not as expansive compared with other arms of the SFTW framework. There is insufficient evidence of agricultural collectives being used as channels or fields of interventions to engineer such services as food aid, school feeding and vouchers. Equally paramount however, is the fact that, the evidence of the ability to use collectives such as VSLAs and FFBS as conduits to engineer cash and safety net programs have been instrumental in enabling households to “graduate” from social protection schemes, as livelihoods have been transformed in Ghana under the projects reviewed. When viewed from the perspective of the general characteristics of a typical woman smallholder and her household for direct engagement under the FFBS model for example:

- an income of less than USD 2 per day per capita;
- food shortages for part of the year;
- little, no or marginal land for cultivation;
- current production goals that are mainly for consumption, with small amounts being sold commercially;
- little or no control and influence by women over income and farming decisions; and
- significant agricultural labour constraints (often women-headed households)

It would be safe to conclude from the evidence established through the endlines and evaluations of the projects and programs implemented so far that, CARE’s programming in Ghana has been successful in uplifting majority of poor and marginalized smallholders from this baseline. Most direct beneficiaries of CARE’s programming in this field would for instance, not qualify to participate in the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) initiative (i.e. Ghana’s flagship social protection program) or even the Ghana Productive Safety Net Program (GPSNP) - which

is targeting the productive poor under the Ghana Social Opportunities Program (GSOP).

1.1.6 Multiplying the Impact of Agriculture through Women Small-scale Producers

Since the inception of CARE's programming in Ghana, close attention has been paid to the sustainability of the results achieved at all levels of implementation. This has been done in close collaboration with local governments in alignment with national policies and with the involvement of direct beneficiaries and communities in the design of programme activities. The focus has been on:

- 1) Investing in a more gender-responsive policy environment and national strategic frameworks by:
 - supporting the implementation of gender strategies in the agricultural sector (e.g. Gender and Agriculture Development Strategy [GADS, II]);
 - CARE's programming in VSLAs has been in direct response to Gender gaps articulated in the GAD II i.e. women's right to access credit is limited due to lack of collateral security; and proximity of financial institutions and unfavourable financial market dynamics being the main barriers to accessing funding for agricultural activities, accounting for 70.2% of all the barriers for women.
 - CARE's programming in the FFBS and the CBES model has been in direct response to the four main barriers to women accessing agricultural extension services identified under GAD II: a) proximity to extension agents; b) personal perception of the players that women do not need such services at all; c) women's lack of knowledge of the existence of such services; and d) inability of women to find service officers.
 - strengthening national coordination and collaboration on agriculture and rural development (e.g through RASGOPs/DASGOPs, DAGI etc.).
 - Functionally, WAPs are largely made of VSLA and FFBS participants and their participation in RASGOP and DASGOP activities are bringing to the fore advocacy issues for which duty bearers are taking action to address myriads of problems facing women in agriculture e.g. advocacy for improved access to inputs under Pfj; engaging traditional leaders and opinion leaders to improve access to land and other productive resources for women; integration of women's concerns into MTDPs etc.
 - focusing on issues, with a special focus on rural women's needs; and
 - providing capacity building to agricultural stakeholders in the use of gender analysis, budgeting and other gender mainstreaming tools throughout the planning, budgeting and monitoring stages.
- 2) Capacity development for individual women and for those in producer organizations in areas such as:
 - crop production, nutritional habits, food storage, entrepreneurial skills and sustainable agriculture techniques, as well as management and leadership and existing legal frameworks and economic rights through the channel of VSLA meetings and FFBS;
 - access to finance, including the provision of women-friendly financial services (e.g. VSLAs); and market access (e.g. MRCs);
- 3) Community awareness raising about women's rights through an array of context-specific methodologies aiming at behavioural change, and working within households.

The results of these efforts, among others, have been to transform agriculture and market systems. The NGGA/AGREE initiatives provide ample evidence of the impact of CARE Ghana's programming in this sphere of the SFTW framework. Among others:

- The initiatives have contributed to strengthening responsive governance for improved agriculture development in Ghana. The project designed and implemented the District Agricultural Governance Index (DAGI), an Excel-

based tool, to measure the responsiveness of local governments' (District Assemblies) to agriculture development. The results triggered the districts to increase their financial budgets and expenditure to improve service delivery in agriculture.

- As a result, capacity gaps of WAPs/VSLAs are being filled through training in fundraising, entrepreneurship, and sustainable agriculture, and they are also equipped with new perspectives to manage their agricultural operations profitably and sustainably.
- They have also enhanced collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), private sector actors, and USAID-funded Ghana's Strengthening Accountability Mechanism (GSAM) towards boosting advocacy initiatives for improved agriculture development. CSOs presented nine agriculture-related issues to the Ministry of Finance and an analysis of the 2019 National Budget Statement presented by the Finance Minister to Parliament revealed that, five of those issues were incorporated in the national budget line on agriculture. The project facilitated the formation of regional CSO networks, which are expected to enhance inclusiveness, efficiency, and collective voice for district-level CSOs.
 - For example, departments of agriculture in the 28 NGGA/AGREE project operational districts jointly planned and implemented the Planting for Food and Jobs program with CSOs, women groups (WAPs/VSLAs) and other private sector actors in 2019 – this arrangement ensured that WAPs/VSLAs got their fair share of inputs under the government's flagship and also accessed vital information which was disseminated to other members of their network of over 30,000 members.
- Similarly, NGGA/AGREE facilitated an inter-working group across the Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) of the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions towards delivering key project activities in a structured and coordinated manner. This effort has improved information sharing, collaboration, and joint program delivery. The working group has jointly developed guidelines to guide operations of the agricultural sub-committees and is currently leading the DAGI data verification process in the districts.

2.0 Brief Analysis in Response to Questions

2.1 What has CARE Ghana learned about agricultural collectives, and where is the evidence base the most robust?

Working through existing collectives, and the presence of a large network of VSLAs as a programming platform have been major facilitators of CARE Ghana's programming success in addressing the core components of the SFtW framework. The evidence base for this reality is robust in respect of: Women's Empowerment; Increasing women's access to and control of productive resources; and Enabling women's access to inclusive markets.

2.2 Where are areas of the SFtW framework that are not well documented in CARE Ghana's evidence base regarding agricultural collectives?

- The evidence from this review suggests that sub-component of: 1) stronger service delivery of quality health, water and education services for improved nutrition – under the "improving nutrition" component of the SFtW framework in Ghana is not well documented, although the GGP, NOW, WA-WASH and LINKAGES initiatives attempted to setup some foundations for this process. The lingering weakness is not only in respect of scale but time and place experience of this programming field relative to other domains of the SFtW framework in Ghana.
- Similarly, there is no documentation of CARE Ghana's initiatives in the fields of; school feeding and vouchers under the "promoting social protection" domain of the SFtW framework.

2.3 What studies and evidence still needs to be collected and conducted in order for CARE Ghana to fully understand how well agricultural collectives contribute to SFtW change areas?

- Evidence of accurate documentation of women’s secure access to land under the gender dialogues that have been set in motion through agricultural collectives is at best anecdotal. Similarly, conscious tracking of how long women are enjoying this security of tenure, access or even ownership has never been established.
- While the CBEA model has been novel and innovative in helping address many areas of interest to the SFtW framework, incentivising CBEAs has never been conclusively resolved to guarantee the sustainability of their efforts. A documentation of how CBEAs get absorbed in the formal or informal sectors as paid employees would be a good proxy to gauge their relevance beyond the exit of projects that set them up.

2.4 Are there any flaws and limitations in CARE Ghana’s current studies and research into agricultural collectives? If so, how should future research studies be improved?

CARE Ghana’s programming in the sphere of “enabling women’s access to inclusive markets” has not been very responsive to interventions that reduce transaction costs from farmgate to market (i.e. transport systems and storage facilities). Strong market linkages are only possible when each preceding link of the value chain from land preparation to input supply to storage and processing is also strong. This can be done primarily through conducting in-depth feasibility assessments prior to project design to ensure that the project is built comprehensively.

3.0 Conclusion, Key Learnings and Recommendations

Key success factors and strengths of CARE’s programming in respect of collectives

- a) Engaging with the government and traditional leaders is helping to advance goals of women’s empowerment in Ghana. VSLAs, FFBS and WAPs have over time adopted creative and participatory means to change existing power dynamics, structures, and social norms that are the root causes of gender-based inequality as a means of achieving many ends e.g, improved access to productive resources, exercising collective voice through advocacy for equitable shares of government-supported initiatives etc. Government’s engagement particularly at the RASGOP/DASGOP levels where women are represented by their VSLA executive who are members of WAPs is helping to improve responsive governance and facilitating women’s access to land, benefits of on-going government programs such as the Planting for Food and Jobs (Pfi) initiative and traditional leaders are also helping to change social norms as a result of their involvement at these levels. Since the coming into force of the Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy (FASDEP I&II), the policy thrust has been to work with and through legally recognized farmer groups or collectives; it was precisely for this reason that the Farmer Based Organization Fund (FBO Fund) was established. Thus, women’s collective voice through such legally recognized platforms such as VSLAs, WAPs etc. place them in strategic positions to leverage various kinds of state funded support in the field of agriculture.
- b) Having a master calendar in the FFBS helps set project expectations, supports staff in overcoming their technical biases and increases community ownership of the process and outcomes. Similarly, the standardization of the FFBS tools has been helpful in simplifying things so that ‘everyone’ can use it, including CBEAs who have between 8 to 12 years of education, and improve CARE’s ability to monitor effectiveness and quality.
- c) Demonstration plots and discussions on social topics engage the entire community, while dialogue sessions on gender and nutrition contribute to positive changes in relationships at the household level.
- d) Involving spouses early in the process has been a key success factor of the FFBS approach.
- e) The commitment of community leaders is crucial to the promotion of sustainable behaviour change.

Key Learnings (Challenges and measures to overcome them)

- 1) A major challenge for all GTAs is how to take them to scale, whether it is upscaling within a region or country or replication in a new country setting. There are two specific issues: first, because GTAs do not represent the business-as-usual approach to development, it is necessary to convince management and staff, in lead agencies as well as development partners and communities, to allocate time and resources to these initiatives; and second, to ensure a sufficient pool of expertise on GTAs is available. CARE Ghana needs to critically reflect on these realities and to fashion out the best way to drive the process of up-scaling experiences in using agricultural collectives for gender transformational food systems in Ghana.

- 2) Securing ownership titles for plots allocated to women in collectives such as VSLAs, FFBS and WAPs remains a key challenge. While most of the reports reviewed have highlighted varied instances of lands being allotted to serve the needs of women, it is not clear under what kinds of titles or lease arrangements these offers were made. Guaranteeing women's security of access or ownership of these lands would very much be helped by some legally binding title deed or lease arrangements (documented customary land arrangements would be most appropriate with the involvement of chiefs, local government authorities and traditional custodians of lands - "Tindamba"). CARE Ghana has some experience from the SLATE and LAW projects to guide this process.

- 3) Motivating and incentivizing CBEAs and Local Cocoa Facilitators (LCFs) could be a major hurdle to sustainability, as they spend much of their time working for their communities on a voluntary basis and for the groups (VSLAs, WAPs, FFBS) they belong. Typically, in the context of CARE's programming in Ghana, most CBEAs and LCFs belong in a VSLA, LCF or WAP. Linking them to the District Departments of Agriculture to be absorbed in routine activities has been an age-long measure, however, due to the under-resourced nature of these departments, they are mostly not well incentivised. Due to their recognition as village or community-level service providers, they have increasingly asserted their position as entry points for many government and NGO-run projects seeking to work with farmers organized under the framework of VSLAs, FFBS or WAPs. A significant number of them have been consciously targeted and trained as agri-input dealers or members of MRCs as a way to diversify their income sources and motivate them to continue to be of service. Concerns linger on prospects for those who could not be part of this opportunity.

Recommendations

- Continue investing in market access interventions aimed at improving the efficacy of agricultural collectives. Implement a holistic approach to addressing all the issues from farm to buyer. Provide targeted technical or financial assistance to tackle challenges with markets infrastructure to remove the bottlenecks to system change
- Continue to pursue a flexible approach to using agricultural collectives to promote and create gender-transformative food systems as defined by SFtW using the FFBS model.
- Continue to Integrate literacy content into skills trainings. Illiteracy was cited as a challenge for implementation of on-farm expense management trainings, particularly for women collectives. Livelihood capacity skills training should be combined with literacy education to fully realize potential outcomes from livelihoods skills trainings.

In respect of the potentials for up-scaling and replication of CARE Ghana's model in using agricultural collectives to promote and create gender-transformative food systems as defined by SFtW, the following are recommended:

Potential for upscaling

- Working with government departments to mainstream and incentivise CBEAs and LCFs much earlier in project/program cycles rather than at the end.

- Collaborating across sectors for integrated and efficient service delivery on important matters, such as the intersection between water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition, as well as sexual rights and reproductive rights.

Potential for replication

- Linking to social movements such as the Network of Women's Rights (NETWRIGHT) in Ghana and Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) will be crucial for addressing GBV and women's land rights.
- Interest in uptake of FFBS model by government departments as a viable extension model is the key to replication.
- Investment by private sector partners into the FFBS model is critical for reaching scale and influencing their practices around the engagement of women.
- Working through existing groups, and presence of a large network of VSLAs as a programming platform
- Presence of a comprehensive process-oriented toolkit on FFBS/VSLA that is adaptable
- Ability to digitize the FFBS model into low-tech options (e.g. the Talking Book and the use of local languages)

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Appendix 1: List of Documents Reviewed

Project Name	List of Project Documents Reviewed
Northern Ghana Governance Activity (NGGA)	1. Annual Report, Northern Ghana Governance Activity (FY19: October 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019)
Agricultural Governance, Resilience and Economic Empowerment Activity (AGREE)	2. Annual Report, Agriculture Governance, Resilience and Economic Empowerment (AGREE) Activity (FY20: October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020)
AGRO-SOURCE	3. Agro-Source Project Report (July – December 2018) 4. Agro-Source Project Report (January – June 2019) 5. Agro-Source Project Report, “CARE Progress Report for the Brooks Family Foundation” (July – December 2019) 6. Agro-Source Project Report, “CARE Progress Report for the Brooks Family Foundation” (July – December 2020)
Cocoa Sustainability Initiative (CSI)	7. Final Evaluation Report, 8. “General Mills Foundation /CARE Cocoa Sustainability Initiative Performance Evaluation” (January, 2020) 9. CARE General Mills Progress Report (September, 2017 to February, 2018) 10. CARE General Mills Progress Report (March - August, 2018) 11. CARE General Mills Progress Report (September 2018 - February, 2019) 12. CARE General Mills Progress Report (March - August, 2019) 13. CARE General Mills Progress Report (March - August 2020) 14. CARE General Mills Progress Report (September 2019 -February 2020) 15. Final Report, Endline Survey of Cocoa Sustainability Initiative (CSI) II (December, 2020)
Household Economic Security for Poor Women (HESP)	16. Project Monitoring Report (May 2016 – April 2017) 17. Mid-Year Monitoring Report (May, 2016) 18. Mid-Year Monitoring Report (May, 2017) 19. End of Grant Report (May 2017 – April 2018) 20. Final Evaluation Report (May, 2018)

<p>Pathways to Secure Livelihoods Program (PATHWAYS)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Pathways Project Baseline Report (February, 2013) 22. Pathways Annual Report (January – December, 2014) 23. Pathways Mid-term Review Findings Report (July, 2014) 24. Pathways Mid-Term Review Report (July, 2014) 25. Pathways Annual Report (January – December, 2015) 26. Final Report of CARE’s Pathways to Secure Livelihoods Program, “Early Stage Assessment” (October, 2015) 27. Social Cost Benefit Analysis of CARE International’s Pathways Program (November, 2016) 28. Annual Report and Cost Extension (December, 2016) 29. Pathways SCBA Fieldwork Summary Report (August 2016) 30. Pathways Annual Report (December, 2017) 31. Success Story of Market Research Committees at Garu-Tempene District (December, 2017) 32. Pathways Project Final Project Report (November 2011 – December 2018)
<p>PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 33. Annual Interim Report (January 2015 – November 2016) 34. Final Report (June, 2017) 35. Pathways Endline Analysis Report (July, 2017)
<p>Linking Initiatives, Stakeholders and Knowledge to Achieve Gender-Sensitive Livelihood Security LINKAGES (Ghana PROMISE)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 36. PROMISE Final Evaluation Report (April, 2016) 37. LINKAGES Project Final Report: Ghana PROMISE (2012-2016) 38. Soybean and Cowpea Value Chain Analysis Report (East Mamprusi and Garu-Tempene), 2013.
<p>Total</p>	<p>39 Reports</p>