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Scaling Innovations for Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Care Work for Women in Smallholder Livestock Feed Provisioning in Kenya and Ethiopia

Impact Story 2

KEY IMPACTS

This project's primary objective was to reduce women's and girls' unpaid care responsibilities and strengthen women's economic empowerment and early childhood development. By addressing childcare as a binding structural constraint, the project aimed to reposition childcare as economic infrastructure rather than a social service. The project achieved measurable reductions in unpaid care work, improved women's economic outcomes, strengthened workplace productivity, and advanced system-level change.

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Project Overview

The three-year [*Scaling Innovations for Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Care Work for Women in Smallholder Livestock Feed Provisioning in Kenya and Ethiopia*](#) project, which started in 2024, aims to give evidence of innovations to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work among 2,000 women engaged in smallholder livestock production by combining social and technical innovations.

Working with women livestock producers and their households in Kenya and Ethiopia, the project promotes gender-transformative approaches, improved forage production, donkey services, and childcare solutions to reduce women's workload, challenge restrictive gender norms, increase women's access to productive resources and create opportunities for economic and social empowerment.

Project Activities

The project implemented a bundle of social and technical innovations designed to reduce women's time poverty and improve livelihoods. Social innovations included the Transformative Household Methodology (THM) and the Start, Awareness, Support and Action (SASA) approach, which facilitated household and community dialogues on gender norms, work sharing, decision-making, access to resources, and women's participation in economic activities.

Technical innovations included scaling gender-responsive forage production, promoting donkey services to reduce drudgery in livestock feed transportation, and expanding access to childcare services. Delivery through mixed methods research with data collected at baseline progress tracked annually.

Implementation was supported through demonstration sites, peer farmer trainers, gender and GTA champions, childcare centres and committees, community dialogues, government partnerships, and jointly with The Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW), We-Action Ethiopia, International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)- principal investigators, and in collaboration with KSCPA and local government departments.

The project also engaged national and local policymakers on childcare and women's empowerment and supported a master's research study exploring links between women's time use and dietary outcomes.

Project Achievements

The project generated evidence of reduced time poverty, improved livelihoods and shifts in gender norms. An annual survey conducted in Kenya in October-November 2025 found that 78% of women achieved a work balance of less than 10.5 hours per day, contributing to improvements in confidence, food and nutrition security, participation in decision-making, leadership, leisure, and economic activities. Men were also reported to be more supportive of women's access to land and productive resources, increasing opportunities for forage production and income generation.

The project increased women's access to labour-saving technologies and economic opportunities. 48% of women reported accessing donkey services, while 61% used donkeys to transport forage. In total, 29 women (23 in Kenya and six in Ethiopia) acquired donkeys and more than 1,500 women participated in savings and loan schemes to invest in farming, small livestock, leisure and social capacity while some paying fees for their children.

Individual stories illustrate these changes. One participant gained access to land previously controlled by her husband and began cultivating improved forage, earning approximately KES 30,000 (US\$231) from her first harvest and later generating additional income from vegetables production. Reflecting on these changes, she explained,

"I am glad to have joined Ripple Effect Kenya because my self-esteem and confidence have been elevated and am now recognised in the community. I am the go-to farmer in the village, other women come to learn from me, my husband is equally proud of me."

She reported earning approximately KES 100,000 (US\$769.23) annually from forage production and no longer having to spend hours collecting fodder from distant farms. Another participant who acquired a donkey through the rehoming programme reported that tasks such as carrying heavy loads, fetching water and transporting livestock feed were no longer carried primarily by women. The donkey also generated additional income through hired services, earning approximately KES 400 per day, with the participant reporting that both the reduced labour burden and additional income had significantly improved the family's livelihood.

The project additionally influenced childcare policy and practice. In Bungoma, engaging with the Government Ministry of Education and social services contributed to the adoption of admission for children under three years into childcare centres aligned with early childhood development services. In Ethiopia, engagement with the Ministry of Gender and Social Development and Education contributed to the adoption of six childcare centres into local early education systems and allowed children under three years to enrol in the centres.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

The project found that some innovations require more time and support to become fully established. Childcare services, particularly in Kenya, remain in their early stages and face challenges relating to affordability and sustainable financing. In Ethiopia, no fees were being charged for childcare services, raising concerns about long-term sustainability. These challenges prompted the project to explore cost-sharing approaches and engage women on contributing to operational costs.

The project also learned that sustained policy engagement is essential for addressing barriers such as age limits for childcare enrolment and ensuring long-term institutional support.

Experience across both countries reinforced the value of combining social and technical innovations, as the bundled approach proved more effective in transforming gender norms and supporting women's empowerment than individual interventions implemented separately.

Care Sector Contributions & Next Steps

The project's main contribution is demonstrating that combining gender-transformative approaches with practical labour-saving innovations can reduce and redistribute unpaid care work while improving women's economic empowerment and access to opportunities. Evidence from Kenya and Ethiopia shows that addressing social norms

alongside women's time poverty can generate broader and more sustainable change than single interventions delivered in isolation.

Next steps focus on strengthening sustainability through continued engagement with government agencies, community structures, and private-sector partners, while scaling approaches that reduce unpaid care work and improve women's livelihoods.

About the Africa Cares Together Community of Practice

The [Africa Cares Together Community of Practice \(ACT CoP\)](#) is a vibrant, inclusive network of diverse actors committed to amplifying care work across Africa. It is coordinated by ActionAid International (AAI) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and the Hewlett Foundation. The ACT CoP network is made up of members from the 19 projects of the [Scaling Care Innovations in Africa \(SCIA\)](#) initiative, a partnership between IDRC and GAC.

Acknowledgements

This Impact Story was compiled by the 'Scaling Innovations for Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Care Work for Women in Smallholder Livestock Feed Provisioning in Kenya and Ethiopia' project team and the ACT CoP. Project partners include Ripple Effect Kenya, Ripple Effect Ethiopia, International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), The Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW) Kenya, and We-Action Ethiopia.

