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1. Introduction

Ethiopia was selected as a new programme country by ISF Board in December 2020, following an analysis on where ISF would have the most added value and most favorable operating conditions. Ethiopia is Finland's long-term bilateral partner country and an important partner for the EU.

The Somali region was selected as ISF's target area. It is inhabited by mostly ethnic Somalis who share the same language, culture, and traditions as Somalis elsewhere. The region shares a long land border with Somaliland, Puntland, and southern parts of Somalia. It can be easily accessed from both Addis Ababa and Hargeisa where ISF has its Ethiopia and Somaliland head offices. Both the country and region were selected based on ISF's strategic priority to prevent female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and because of significant possibilities for cooperation and synergies with other ISF programme countries.

This ISF Ethiopia Country Programme builds upon ISF strategy and theory of change, and will guide the selection of implementing partners, annual planning for ISF Ethiopia, and project planning for ISF and its partners.

2. Context analysis

Political, development, and civil society environment

Ethiopia has a system of ethnic federalism in which regions have considerable autonomy within the framework of federal policies and strategies owned and controlled by the central Government. Regional administrations are further decentralized to zone, *woreda* (district) and *kebele* (neighborhood administrations) levels. Somali Regional State, which is made up of 11 zones, 93 districts and 6 city administrations, is one of the regional states in Ethiopia identified as 'emerging', with generally lower level of administrative capacity and human development outcomes such as education, health and other social components.¹

While the Constitution allows for a high degree of decentralization to regional states and districts, the federal government exerts strong leadership over policies and programs, and regional development plans are shaped by national development agendas. These national policies and programs also guide the interventions of all development and humanitarian organizations operating in Ethiopia.

ISF's programme goal on strengthening livelihood and climate resilience is in line with the current ten-year (July 2020 – June 2030) perspective plan and its pillars on productivity and competitiveness, green growth and climate change, and private sector development and engagement. ISF programme promotes some of the nine priority sectors identified, such as agriculture, manufacturing, innovation and technology and energy. ISF's programme approach is also in line with the Ethiopian Women, Development and Change Strategy, which aims to increase women's economic empowerment.

ISF's programme goal on strengthening women's and girls' bodily integrity is also well supported by the country's gender discriminatory legal provisions in the Family Law and Penal Codes, aiming at tackling gender-based violence, including child marriage and harmful traditional practices such as FGM. Furthermore, the National Strategy and Action Plan on

¹ World Bank (2020). Ethiopia Regional Poverty Report – Promoting Equitable Growth for All Regions. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ World Bank, 2020.

Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children in Ethiopia aims to institutionalize prevention mechanisms and ensure social change while offering multi-sectoral protection for victims. The National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, which stipulates the key strategies, approaches, and evidence-based interventions to be employed in order to meet the national target of eliminating child marriage and FGM/C by 2025, provides a key entry point for ISF intervention in Ethiopia. The National Roadmap identifies five pillar strategies: empowering adolescent girls and their families; community engagement; enhancing systems, accountability, and services across sectors; creating and strengthening an enabling environment; and increasing data and evidence generation and use.

Recurring conflicts between Afar and Somali Issa tribes over land dispute in three *kebeles* around border areas have led to deaths and displacements. The three contested *kebeles* are predominantly inhabited by ethnic Somali Issa while being located within Afar. The Issa inhabitants desire to be part of the Somali region and have the backing of Somali regional authorities, while the Afar regional government considers the area to be an integral part of Afar. Militias from the two regions continue to clash over their disputed boundaries.

Civil society organizations (CSO) in Ethiopia are governed by the Organization of Civil Societies Proclamation (CSO Proclamation) that began operations in 2019, lifting previous restrictions on funding for CSOs and allowing the re-entry of international organizations that had their license revoked in the past. The new CSO law also allowed more scope for activities except for voter education, political lobbying and activities sanctioned against by the country's criminal law.

In Somali region civil society plays a key role in promoting sustainable development in contexts that are not necessarily always conducive. Development organizations operating in the region face various socio-political and security challenges. The key in operating smoothly in the region is to engage with clan elders and religious leaders who have high credibility within the community.

Sector-specific platforms are established at regional level, with coordination meetings scheduled typically once a month. These platforms help the government to monitor activities and to guide programme interventions to avoid overlapping activities. The coordination platforms are also used for resource mapping and fund mobilization, especially during humanitarian emergencies. Development partners indicate that limited government capacity and lack of commitment remain challenges for effective coordination.

CSOs whose programmes focus on FGM prevention, provide support to FGM survivors (addressing fistula and other FGM related complications and economic empowerment), train health extension workers who then cascade the training to the community, and build the capacity of FGM practitioners and creating alternative source of income for them. CSOs' work on the gender-based violence (GBV) include engaging communities in awareness raising and dialogue to bring about mindset change on gender biases and GBV, raising the awareness of local elders and empowering women and girls by providing them with economic opportunities in order to place them in a better position in the fight against HP and GBV/FGM. International non-governmental organizations having activities on FGM in Somali region include Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, Organization for Welfare and Development in Action, and Mother and Child Development Organization. As donor agencies, UNICEF and UNFPA provide support to the regional government in addressing FGM.

CSOs that promote women's livelihood resilience mainly focus their engagement on creating income generation opportunities for women by providing the necessary skills trainings, provision of start-up capital, providing business development trainings, monitoring business

performance, creating market linkages, and facilitating linkage with the private sector for employment opportunities. International non-governmental organizations having activities on livelihood resilience and food security in Somali region include among others Action Contre la Faim (ACF), Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA), Save the Children (UK and US), Oxfam, Islamic Relief, German Agro Action (GAA), Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), Hope for the Horn (HFH), International Rescue Committee (IRC) and United Society for Sustainable Development.

Women and girls' safety environment

Ethiopia has ratified a host of international and regional commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment, including the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Africa Renaissance Agenda 2063, committing to a specific goal on full gender equality in all spheres of life. At the national level, the country's laws and policies on gender equality are considered progressive, with the Constitution as well as the National Policy on Women providing guarantees on gender equality and the protection of women's rights in marriage, divorce, inheritance, and household responsibilities, and gender units embedded within the structure of many of the government ministries.

Ethiopia has also enacted various laws, policies and initiatives to address harmful practices, including giving coverage to GBV in the Revised Family Code (RFC) of 2000, criminalization of FGM in the Criminal Code (2005), the establishment of a National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM/C (2012), the National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Practices Against Women and Children in Ethiopia (2013), the Government's commitment to eliminate FGM/C by 2025 and increased budget allocation of concerned sectors (2014), national management protocols and training materials by Ministry of Health (MoH) for the clinical management of FGM/C complications (2016), and MoH's circular that forbids the medicalization of the FGM/C by banning the practice in health facilities and integrating prevention efforts into the activities of health extension workers (2017).

Despite progressive laws and policies, 80% of Ethiopia's female population experience discrimination and various types of GBV, including early marriage, FGM/C, domestic and sexual violence.² According to the 2016 national Demographic Health Survey (DHS), two in three women in Ethiopia age 15-49 have undergone FGM/C, with cutting and removal of flesh being the most common type (73%) and infibulation accounting for 7% of cases. Communities that practice FGM/C generally know that the Government deems the practice illegal, so they often carry out the practice secretly, but with the full knowledge and approval of the girls' parents and community members, including religious and clan leaders. FGM/C is most prevalent in Somali region (98.5%), where 52% of women and 34% of men support the continuation of FGM and 57% of women and 42% of men believe that some form of FGM/C is a religious requirement.³

As is the case with FGM/C, the practice of child marriage remains pervasive in Ethiopia.⁴ It is declining overall, while there are variations across and within regions. In Ethiopia, women tend to marry considerably earlier than men and the DHS (2016) shows that child marriage before the legal age of 18 accounts for 58% of marriages in the country, with 40% of young

² UN Women Ethiopia. 2019. *Annual Report on Key Achievements*.

³ Central Statistical Agency & The DHS Program, ICF: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia & Rockville, Maryland, USA: July 2017. *Ethiopia – Demographic and Health Survey 2016*

⁴ UN Women Ethiopia. June 2020. *Assessment of the General Socio-Economic Status of Women and Girls in Afar and Somali Regions: Barriers Hindering the Adoption of Family Law*.

women aged 20-24 years being married before the age of 18 and 12% before the age of 15. In Somali region, the median age for marriage is 18 years.⁵

Ethiopia has experienced country's worst drought in 40 years and an increasing number of people has fled from their homes in Somali region (see previous chapter). Displaced women and girls are at heightened risk of sexual and physical violence and coercion, and with more than 1,115 schools (UNFPA) in the region either fully or partially closed, girls are increasingly being forced into child labour and early marriage as their parents search for ways to make ends meet. In the regions of Ethiopia worst affected by the drought child marriage has on average more than doubled in the space of one year according to local government figures. Within the same time frame, cases of FGM/C increased by 27 per cent.

When boreholes run dry, it is usually women and children who trek for miles in search of water for the household, putting them at greater risk of gender-based violence. In the Somali region some 930,000 people need emergency and reproductive health support and more than 565,000 people have reduced access to protection services, including women, children and survivors of GBV.

The National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM/C is set up at the federal level to coordinate all efforts towards achieving the national goals of eliminating child marriage and FGM/C around the five pillar strategies of the National Roadmap, which are (i) empowering adolescent girls and their families (ii) community engagement, including faith and traditional leaders (iii) enhancing systems, accountability, and services across sectors (iv) creating and strengthening an enabling environment and (v) increasing data and evidence generation, and use.⁶

With the exception of Somali and Afar regions, all other regions have established regional level child marriage and FGM/C coordination forums. The major point of resistance on the part of the Somali regional government had to do with the name FGM/C. 'Cutting' (also referred to as Type 1 or Sunni) was seen as something that families have a right to practice in keeping with Islamic traditions, while there was consensus on banning 'mutilation' (also referred to as Type 3 or Infibulation/Pharaonic). To allow the establishment of the forum, the regional government insisted 'cutting' to be excluded from the name and claimed acceptance of the religious stand that Sunni cutting is allowed. In July 2021, the decision was finally made to drop the 'C' from the name and establish a regional ECM (early and child marriage) and FGM forum in Jigjiga.

The Revised Family Code (RFC) of 2000, which aims to tackle GBV, including child marriage and harmful practices such as FGM/C was expected to serve as a model law for regional states. Somali along with Afar are the only two regions that have yet to adopt a family law that would address GBV and meet the Constitutional standards including setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for boys and girls. Somali and Afar are, to date, applying the Ethiopian Civil Code of 1960, which sets the minimum age of marriage for girls at 15 and 18 for boys. However, Somali region is currently in the process of drafting a family law and a decision has been reached to put the minimum marriage age at 18. While the Family Law will also ban FGM, it will not, as it currently stands, address issues of FGC and polygamy.

Moreover, the Constitution and the Somali regional state law provide regulations for the official recognition of Sharia courts and Islamic law as an official source of law. In the Somali region, a system of legal pluralism exists where the informal justice system works alongside

⁵ Central Statistical Agency & The DHS Program, ICF: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia & Rockville, Maryland, USA: July 2017. *Ethiopia – Demographic and Health Survey 2016*

⁶ Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. August 2019. *National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C 2020-2024*.

religious institutions, allowing customary and religious laws to be applied on personal and family matters based on the consent of parties. One of the main causes for the limited law enforcement is indeed the communities' preference to solve cases of FGM through informal mechanisms, such as family mediations or mediations done by community leaders.

Despite the challenges, organizations working to advance women's empowerment and ending FGM in Somali region have made some achievements, including getting religious and clan leaders and others in the community talk openly about GBV, FGM and other harmful practices; reduced FGM prevalence in districts where there has been intensive engagement by stakeholders and increasing number of younger generation of men having a mindset change about FGM and no longer putting it as a pre-condition for marriageability.

Also, a national level child protection case management framework is in place and the Somali region has a referral mechanism in place, including a hotline for GBV survivors, involving Bureau of Women and Children Affairs, the Police, social workers, the Sharia Court, Justice Department, Office of the Attorney General and Bureau of Health. A one-stop service center in Jigjiga is also established with financial support from UNICEF to provide victims of GBV with immediate, complete and high-quality service, including provision of medical and psychosocial care, free legal services and temporary shelter. UNFPA is responsible for doing the promotion for the GBV survivors services.

Entrepreneurial environment in Somali region

In the Ethiopian regional development scene, Somali region is labelled as emerging region whose performance in the administrative, economic and social sectors is significantly lower than the rest of the country. For example, the road network in the region is poor.

The availability of business training is limited, although some progress has been achieved particularly in the field of TVET. Oxfam developed with the Federal TVET training modules for vocational and technical trainings that have been taken up by all 672 TVETs across the country. In Ethiopia, every region and city have SME development agency, with branch offices at zone and district levels. The system is set up to support job creation in high priority sectors such as manufacturing, construction, urban agriculture, trade and service that can be scaled up to medium or large industries.

Ethiopia has invested heavily in agriculture sector and has the largest agricultural extension system in Africa. System weaknesses include inflexibility of the service, low number of extension agents, poorly resourced farmer training centres, and weak research-extension linkages⁷. Ethiopia has national and regional agricultural research centres, including two in Somali that specialize in agro-pastoral and pastoral research. In addition, there are farmer training centres (FTCs) and Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) colleges.

Private sector is weak, which restricts access to reliable and affordable supply of production inputs outside the informal and unregulated sector. Most of the trade in the Somali region is illicit contraband market and it supports the livelihood of many citizens. Togochale town that borders Somaliland is one of Ethiopia's key route to the sea outlet as well as transporting contraband goods. Since illicit market is not under taxation, consumer goods in the Somali region are cheaper than in the rest of the country. Also Somali region rarely experience shortage of basic consumer products such as cooking oil and rice. Contrabandists import

⁷ Berhane, Guush, Ragasa, Catherine, Abate, Gashaw T., Assefa, Thomas Woldu (2018). The state of agricultural extension services in Ethiopia and their contribution to agricultural productivity.

restricted and prohibited goods into the region such as vehicles, guns, medicines and narcotics.

Private banks have branches in Jigjiga and in major district centres. Microfinance institutions, such as Somali MFI, provide financial services to communities that are outside of services of commercial banks. Somali MFI has 40 branches throughout the region and about 3,200 microfinance banking agents dispersed throughout every *kebele* of Somali region. MFI clients are mostly women (85 %) who access group loans without asset collateral. In addition to the standard financial services, Somali MFI also facilitates Hello Cash mobile payments and local remittances and supports NGO and government fund management. MFI provides solar power to remote areas of the region not connected to the national grid.

According to a study by Muhumad in 2020⁸ Somali women are born entrepreneurs, risk-takers and resilient in the face of myriads of challenges. Women start their business with money from their personal savings or loans from family members. There is positive societal attitude towards women's entrepreneurship, which encourages women to start businesses. However, cultural norms dictate in what line of businesswomen are allowed and/or are able to engage in, which limits their options to ventures that are not as lucrative as male-dominated business sectors.

Women entrepreneurs mainly work in the informal and formal service sector and run business operations from home, e.g. cafés, restaurants, beauty salons, clothing and cosmetics stores, houseware stores, and small grocery stores. In the informal service sector, most women work as street vendors, selling tea, fruits and vegetables as well as contraband goods such as clothing and other small personal and household items.

In the agricultural sector, men dominate the large livestock market (cattle and camel) while women breed and sell goats and dairy. Women conduct 85 % of the tasks at the household level in the dairy value chain, suggesting that investments in the value chain could potentially have a significant impact on women's economic empowerment⁹. Although not yet significantly large in numbers, women working in cooperatives have succeeded in breaking into the traditionally male dominated camel and cattle trading businesses. Women face significant challenges in accessing agricultural services and inputs, and as a result, they are less productive than their male counterparts.

Mobile phone usage by agricultural traders in Ethiopia to coordinate logistics and trade has become ubiquitous. Farmers and pastoralists are also increasingly using mobile phones to find buyers and pasture.

Climate risks and impacts

According to a climate risk profile conducted by USAID in 2020¹⁰, since 1960s, Ethiopia has experienced increasingly intense storms and flash floods, frequent and severe droughts, and unpredictable rainfall patterns. If current trends continue unmitigated, climate change may decrease national GDP by 8-10% by 2050.

An estimated 12.9 million people in Ethiopia are experiencing high levels of food insecurity, with two million of the most food-insecure Ethiopians living in Somali region and an

⁸ Muhumad, A. (2020). Challenges and motivations of women entrepreneurs in Somali region of Ethiopia.

⁹ FAO (2019). Strategic analysis and intervention plan for cow milk and dairy products in the Agro- Commodities Procurement Zone of the pilot Integrated Agro-Industrial Park in Central- Eastern Oromia, Ethiopia. Rome, FAO.

¹⁰ USAID 2020. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/BEO_BHA_FY20_Ethiopia_RFA-IEE_081120.pdf

estimated 67% of the region's population live below the poverty line¹¹. In Somali region, 85% of the population depends on climate sensitive livelihoods, particularly pastoralism and rain-fed crop production.

In 2022, Ethiopia is experiencing one of the most severe La Niña-induced droughts in the last forty years following four consecutive failed rainy seasons since late 2020, affecting an estimated 3.5 million people in Somali region (55% of the population) and leading to an increase in the number of internally displaced people. According to the Somali Regional Government's Drought Response Plan over 3.1 million people are facing food shortages and the region is a host to about 2.4 million displaced people, including 246,000 refugees from neighbouring Somalia. The effects of the drought on the affected communities are complex with the loss of livelihoods, shortage of food and negative impacts on health. According to a recent assessment by the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)¹², 85% of displaced people in Somali region reported the main reason for their displacement as "loss of livelihood due to drought"

Droughts are combined with extremely heavy rainstorms. In May 2021, Somali region was hit by flash floods after some parts of the region received as much rain in a day as they normally would in a month. The flash floods washed away livestock and crops, devastating the entire livelihoods of communities. The Shebelle river kept overflowing for over a month, displacing around 15,000 families and killing over 3,000 cattle, goats and sheep in Shebelle zone alone ¹³.

According to gender study conducted by Oxfam in 2017 in Somali region¹⁴ loss of livelihood and increased debt affected both men and women, but there were differences in how the drought impacted the different sexes. Men migrated with the remaining cattle in search of water and pasture while women and children migrated to internally displaced persons (IDP) camps for humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, while lack of food affected all groups of households, women tended to be de-prioritized in food consumption. Gender norms in general reduce women's resilience capacity, e.g. women have poor access to finance and assets and women are often underserved by extension services¹⁵.

Ethiopia has the necessary policies and strategies in place to respond to climate change. The Climate-Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) strategy, launched in 2011, streamlines climate through all relevant development sectors to achieve carbon-neutral growth and reduce environmental degradation. Against a rapidly growing population, agricultural expansion has caused significant damage to the country's natural resources, e.g. land degradation, deforestation and increased pressure on water resources, consequently increasing the vulnerability of many Ethiopians to climate hazards.

¹¹ World Bank (2020). Public expenditure and financial accountability performance (PEFA) assessment of the Somali regional state government.

¹² ACTED, Feb 2021. Drought Needs Assessment, Somali Region, Ethiopia, Post Short Rains 2021.

¹³ WFP, June 2021. <https://www.wfp.org/stories/climate-change-wreaks-havoc-livelihoods-ethiopia-somali-region>

¹⁴ Oxfam (2017). Petros, A., Terefe, B., Dico-Young, T. Gender analysis for drought response in Ethiopia – Somali region.

¹⁵ Mersha, A. A. and Van Laerhoven, F. (2016). A gender approach to understanding the differentiated impact of barriers to adaptation: responses to climate change in rural Ethiopia.

3. Problem analysis and ISF implementation approach

Root causes to FGM/C and early marriage

To prevent GBV, particularly FGM and early marriage in the Somali region of Ethiopia, the context analysis conducted in 2022 identified the following issues as critical root causes to be addressed:

- Despite steps taken by the Government, parents still face strong social pressure to continue practicing FGM/C, which is seen as a valuable practice to control female sexuality, to safeguard girls' chastity, marriageability, and social status; and to thereby guarantee the honour of her family.
- A girl's chastity before marriage is what ultimately defines her and her family's honour, and FGM/C is seen as a means to ensure that a girl is marriageable and kept safe for her future husband. There is also misperception that the clitoris will continue to grow unless FGM/C is performed.
- While Somali mothers and grandmothers are instrumentalized by the community to make decisions related to the practice of FGM/C, fathers and male community members also exert pressure for FGM/C, as they wish to maintain tradition, ensure marriageability of their daughters and avoid condemnation, harassment and ostracism
- Community's low level of awareness, particularly on females' rights over their bodily integrity, together with deep-rooted cultural and religious misperceptions and gender biases that limit women's and girls' meaningful engagement in decision making, even if the decision is one that has a direct impact on their lives.
- Communities' preference to solve cases of FGM and GBV through informal mechanisms, such as family mediations or mediations done by community leaders.
- Law enforcers follow the same social and gender norms as the community and hold strong beliefs around FGM/C. Hence, they refer GBV cases back to the community to be resolved through traditional mediation mechanisms.
- The Somali Regional Islamic Affairs Council believes the Sunni type of FGM/C is part of the practices of Islam that Muslims should follow, and that 'cutting' (Sunni or FGC) doesn't bring harm to the girl as 'mutilation' (FGM) does.
- Lack of political will to enforce existing laws and push for the region to adapt a family law that would address not only FGM but also FGC and all other harmful practices
- Weak GBV survivors service provision
- Patriarchal gender power relations and women's exclusion from authority imply that the different forms of discrimination against women and girls (including harmful practices and violence) are neither identified nor prioritised. Also, religious interpretations, laws and policies continue to favour men and subject women.

In terms of preventing early marriage in Somali region, the following issues have been identified as root causes to be addressed:

- Religious and community leaders resist regional family law, pointing to the divergence from cultural and religious norms, specifically on the prohibition of polygamous marriages, equal inheritance rights of adopted children, legal age of marriage, period of widowhood, and paternity by judicial decision. The Somali Regional Islamic Affairs Council condemns child and early marriage if the marriage is forced on the young girl. However, the Council is of the opinion that most early marriages taking place in the region are consensual and are therefore not considered harmful.

- Unequal and patriarchal gender norms and stereotypes: As women are still mainly assumed domestic roles, families do not prioritise girls' education, which dilutes her employment and economic opportunities, which in turn upholds the urge to marry off daughters to safeguard their economic standing. The Somali adage "women don't sit under a tree" means women are not fit to make decisions, as it is under a tree that people (men) sit to discuss over matters and make decisions. Most traditional families and communities don't see the value of educating females, since they consider it a waste of resources to educate a female who will then go on to belong to her husband and his family.

ISF implementation approach to prevent FGM/C, early marriage and other forms of GBV

Clan and religious leaders are the main actors/institutions with moral authority to end violence and harmful practices against women and girls. Given the influence they have over the community, any effort aimed at addressing harmful practices will not bear fruit unless these critical actors are engaged. The Regional Islamic Affairs Supreme Council and the Sharia Court are key religious institutions with strong moral sway over the community. Similarly, clan leaders have strong influence over community decisions. The regional Bureau of Women and Children Affairs, Bureau of Health, Police and Justice Department also have roles to play in the effort to end violence and harmful practices against women and girls.

To gain credibility in the eyes of the community and to achieve results, integration within the community development and economic resilience is often the best approach to mitigate violence and harmful practices against women and girls.

To address the social pressure to continue FGM, and the idea of FGM as a valuable cultural practice to control premarital sexuality and safeguard girls' chastity and marriageability, ISF aims to bring together and mobilise role models such as parents who have or are willing rejected FGM/C, as well as young men who no longer consider FGM/C as a pre-condition for marriageability. This helps people to understand that rejecting FGM/C is an option, and that girls can become respected community members and marry without undergoing FGM/C. Also, FGM/C survivors are encouraged to share their personal experiences to break the silence around the practice.

To strengthen women's agency over their own bodies and lives, it is important to train women and men about women's rights, and challenge rigid gender roles and responsibilities. ISF enhances women's participation in peer support networks (such as self-help-groups) and links them to relevant actors and institutions. Women are trained to identify and claim for their rights, including laws and policies that protect their integrity and safety, and victim-sensitive services for those exposed to violence and harmful practices.

To address early marriage, ISF mobilises female role models to show how educated and economically viable women benefit families and communities. Also, peer role models are mobilised, and discussions facilitated to demonstrate how education, equal economic rights, and spousal cooperation in both income generation and domestic duties improves family resilience and wellbeing. Also, political and traditional leaders as well as village councils are encouraged to address early marriage as a harmful practice and a violation against the rights of girls and women.

To prevent partner violence against women, ISF invites men and women in discussions to challenge rigid gender norms and male dominance, and to introduce nonviolent ways to

handle domestic disputes. Sensitisation on the various forms and negative effects of partner violence is needed to decrease social acceptance of violence as a way of disciplining the wife.

Lastly, to address impunity which is a major factor upholding harmful practices and violence against women and girls, women need knowledge on their legal and human rights, as well as on formal referral mechanisms and support services. To guarantee them respectful treatment and anonymity, and impartial and professional investigation, clan leaders, community committees, and traditional courts must be trained to reject and/or review customary laws and “local arrangements”. Also, health, police, and judicial officials need guidelines and sensitisation on victim-sensitive procedures and women’s rights.

Livelihood shocks and stressors, and root causes to women entrepreneurs’ vulnerability

The ISF programme strengthens women’s resilience capacities so that women can adapt to shocks¹⁶ and stressors¹⁷ that have significant and regular negative effects on livelihoods.

Environmental and security shocks, such as constant droughts and floods and ethnic conflicts, force people leave their homes and communities. Extreme weather conditions are the biggest reason for internal displacement in Somali region. Internal displacement breaks down social networks and safety nets and cause loss of property.

Environmental and climate shocks make entrepreneurship extremely difficult due to constant price volatility, loss of customers, floods and storms destroy property etc.

The price volatility of food and non-food items causes under-nourishment and hampers access to productive inputs.

Uncertainty of employment coupled with displacement causes constant volatility of family purchasing power and fear of long-term investment and impedes engagement in long-term development processes.

All this cause extreme material poverty, food insecurity, dependence on humanitarian aid, bankruptcy, unsustainability of business, and low motivation to make long-term plans. Girls and women are particularly vulnerable to these shocks and stressors: economic hardship increases school dropouts and girls are given to marriage for dowry and family livelihood. Tensions at home increase domestic violence against women and in temporary settlements and IDP camps cases of rape, abuse and sexual harassment increase.

In addition, women lack significant capacities (human, social, material and political) that make them and their livelihoods particularly vulnerable and unable to prepare and respond to shocks and stressors:

Women are caregivers in families with a triple workload as entrepreneurs, mothers and wives. Deep rooted gender biases and cultural stereotypes that restrict women’s movement, make it difficult for women to engage in businesses that would require them to travel far from home.

Most women entrepreneurs are illiterate or have very limited formal education. They lack confidence and know-how to engage in innovative businesses, apply for loans, and expand

¹⁶ Shocks = external short-term factors that have substantial negative effects on people’s current state of well-being, level of assets, livelihoods, or their ability to withstand future shocks. Shocks can be so called covariate shocks (e.g. climate hazards, economic or socio/political crisis, natural disasters) or more selective shocks that only affect some livelihood groups, households or individuals in a community (e.g. price volatility, job loss, illness, family or community problems).

¹⁷ Stressors = long-term pressures (e.g. degradation of natural resources, urbanization, political instability, unsafety) that undermine the stability of systems that affect women’s livelihood.

their business, so they stay in less profitable petty trading sectors. The fact that women entrepreneurs are less educated limits their access to formal trainings that would help improve their businesses.

Women's poor access to finance, assets, services and decision-making hampers the growth of their businesses and makes them vulnerable to stressors such as climate change. Women can open bank accounts; however, women don't have asset ownership rights and therefore lack the collateral required to access loans. Even in contexts where women can access microfinance loans without collateral, they have limited access to advice and training that would support their business development.

Women entrepreneurs are usually unorganised and run their business in isolation, which limit their opportunities for growth. Women have few business contacts, little knowledge of how to deal with government bureaucracy and poor bargaining power.

In Ethiopia, bureaucracy is heavy and corruption is common. Women entrepreneurs are required to pay unreasonable amounts in tax, as the amount is not based on what their individual businesses have earned over the tax period but rather on their business category.

The government-led Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions offer both long and short-term skills trainings, but the TVET institutions lack innovation as they tend to be rigid in their educational approach and lack the flexibility to tailor their training modules based on specific contexts and gender needs.

Somali region is labelled as emerging region where infrastructure is weak and availability as well as quality of advice services is poor. Agriculture extension system weaknesses include inflexibility of the service, low number of extension agents, poorly resourced farmer training centres, and weak research-extension linkages. Also, technology and industry sectors are underdeveloped, which reduces access to quality productive inputs.

Women entrepreneurs who seek to transition from the informal to formal sector face an uphill battle trying to secure an affordable business space, particularly in Jigjiga where rental costs are very high.

ISF implementation approach to promote women's sustainable livelihoods

Women entrepreneurs are often more vulnerable to economic, political and climate shocks and stressors than men due to prevailing cultural beliefs and practices, as well as institutional norms that formalise these. Beliefs and past experiences also affect women's self-confidence to handle shocks and their willingness to reform livelihoods proactively.

In Somali region, underdeveloped entrepreneurial environment and private sector, together with climate and environmental risks negatively affect all development processes. Cultural norms and practices further exacerbate development processes with women entrepreneurs. Therefore, work for strengthening women entrepreneurs and their organisations needs to consider development processes holistically:

- promoting women's participation in collective business models that support access to inputs, finance, training and innovation services and new markets
- strengthening women's capacity to lead and manage their own business collectives to increase their capacity to establish and administer relationships with private sector, training and research providers, and licensing and regulatory agencies

- promoting multi-actor cooperation between international and local experts, local authorities and communities to improve livelihood resilience
- investing in innovative technology, infrastructure and equipment to improve production security and efficiency, product quality, marketing, and to enable to launch new resilient livelihood options
- engaging men to project activities to enhance family resilience and respect for women's productive role, and to underlay more flexible gender roles

When an intervention is planned to develop agriculture or another livelihood that depends on natural resources, it must map climate and environmental risks and draw up a comprehensive plan to overcome them. These interventions have community and landscape level activities, however, considering the inclusion and empowerment of women.

The main type of actors and institutions to achieve programme goals and their role in relation to the identified problems are, as described below:

District authorities and departments and regulatory agencies are important because they influence the whole resilience context in terms of their policies and regulation frameworks. Local government departments are critical for any multi-stakeholder's forum to succeed.

Advisory institutions have an important role of preparing and building the capacities of women on resilience and mitigation. On the other hand, research, development and innovation (RDI) institutions serve as catalysts for change and innovative adaptation strategies.

Private sector actors in value chains, e.g. small-scale industries, local agrovets and stockists, are critical when it comes to 'last-mile' distribution of different resilience products and services to the grassroot women entrepreneurs and farmers.

Finance institutions and mechanisms that are accessible to women, for example cooperatives and women's self-help groups provide women with the needed credit to be used in accessing quality inputs, services and technology.

The village level leadership and administration have a role in creating platforms where women can get information and participate. They also play a role in disaster and risk mitigation, as they are the focal points between all other stakeholders and the women.

It is important to engage men in the process of empowering women economically. Without the support of men, women will have unprecedented challenges. In food chains, it is important to support the viability of whole value chains and climate resilience of production systems, hence, the cooperation amongst men and women.

In all the development processes is important to consider and map cooperation possibilities and synergies with other project activities and big national programmes implemented by international non-governmental organisations and local civil society.