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REALIZING RESILIENCE

Effects of integrated programming on household's sources of resilience and food security in the midst of drought

In the lowlands of Ethiopia, pastoralist and agro-pastoralist households are struggling to cope with the increasing frequency and intensity of drought, resulting in deteriorating livelihoods, rising food insecurity and increased dependence on humanitarian assistance. While many investments have been made in response to these challenges, most have produced shorter term benefits that erode either after the program ends or when the region experiences a major drought.

The Mercy Corps-led, USAID-funded 'Resilience in Pastoral Areas — North' (RIPA-North, henceforth 'RIPA') program was designed with the assumption that households experiencing recurrent humanitarian need can improve their well-being even amidst shocks through systems-strengthening interventions, particularly market systems development (MSD) and government-led service strengthening. Specifically, RIPA's design assumed that household well-being will be optimized if market actors and government service providers facilitate households' ability to access and utilize multiple resilience-enhancing services, or resilience capacities, thus allowing them to manage diverse risk factors. A focus on geographic layering and integration of services is therefore a key pillar of RIPA's implementation strategy.

This evidence brief summarizes the outcomes from RIPA’s third Recurrent Monitoring Survey (RMS), conducted in May 2023, 18 months into implementation of RIPA’s development interventions.¹ The RMS is a panel survey conducted annually at the end of each dry season, surveying 1,870 households across 22 treatment woredas, or district-level administrative units, and 21 comparison woredas.² Quantitative analysis was conducted to explore how exposure to the RIPA program is linked to differences in households’ access and use of resilience capacities and their food security in the face of a severe drought in the region. To understand the effects of layering and integration, the study analyzed key outcomes in areas where RIPA supported multiple interventions compared to areas where only one or no program activities took place. The results demonstrate the contribution of RIPA’s systems-strengthening approach to key outcomes and resilience in the lowlands, but do not establish a robust counterfactual to definitively evaluate project impact.

Overall, the RMS results indicate that households that had the highest exposure to multiple RIPA interventions experienced improved food security, and that RIPA had a large effect on improving nearly all essential resilience-enhancing services at the time of data collection when compared with non-RIPA areas and overtime. Notably, these gains were made during a period of extended drought in Ethiopia’s lowlands.

As such, the findings contribute to the growing body of evidence on what programs and approaches effectively contribute to improved resilience among pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in this region.

RIPA integrated interventions included:

- a) Strengthening livestock market systems while fostering opportunity to engage in other on and off-farm income sources to diversify risk (i.e. farming, youth employment);
- b) Improving access to complementary services including access to information, financial services, and an improved natural resource base, and
- c) Promoting community engagement in knowledge and behavior change interventions for nutrition.

To achieve this, RIPA partnered with and supported the private sector to diversify their business models in a manner that extended economic and social benefits to last mile communities, while also engaging government counterparts to better provide public services.

› How did RIPA affect access and use of key resilience-enhancing services promoted by the program?

RIPA’s systems-strengthening interventions contributed to sizeable increases in access and use of multiple resilience-enhancing services, or sources of resilience, in comparison to non-RIPA areas and over time. The RMS demonstrated significant positive effects on nearly all sources of resilience just 18 months into implementation and following a long, historic drought. Compared to non-RIPA areas, households in RIPA areas had higher levels of access to nearly all services targeted by the program: climate, market and extension information, rangeland and DRM management services, formal and semi-formal financial services, livestock and farm inputs; and nutrition and hygiene services.

Households in RIPA areas also demonstrated increased utilization of the majority of these sources of resilience relative to non-RIPA areas. This indicates that improved access largely translated into use of resilience-enhancing services in the face of the drought and other shocks experienced. Important exceptions were limited to no apparent or limited impacts of RIPA on measures of women’s empowerment and social capital.

1 While the RIPA program formally started in 2020, the initial years of the program were affected by COVID19 economic lockdowns, which were largely prohibitive for the start-up of development interventions. The program began its originally planned development interventions in January 2022 and the third round RMS was conducted in May 2023.
2 Treatment woredas are referred to as “RIPA areas” and comparison woredas as “non-RIPA areas” throughout this report.

Table 1: Evidence supporting RIPA impact on “access and utilization” of sources of resilience, including resilience-enhancing services

Resilience-enhancing service , or resilience capacity	Evidence supporting RIPA impact on 'access'	Evidence of HH 'utilization' /practice
1. Climate information	+++	+++
2. Rangeland and DRM management services	+++	+++
3. Formal and semi-formal financial services	+	+
4. Livestock and Farm Inputs	Livestock + Farm +++	Not studied
5. Access to information services	+++	+
6. Market access (Visited Market in last 30 days)	No effect	No effect
7. Livestock management practices	Not applicable (N/A)	Fattening + Vet Drugs Feed/Fodder++
8. Nutrition and hygiene services	+++	+
9. Community Institutions (access) and Social Capital (utilization)	++	No effect
10. Women’s empowerment	Not applicable (N/A)	No effect

KEY: += p < .1 ++ = p < .05 +++ = p < .01

Decentralized and diverse sources of information coupled with knowledge of resilient management practices contributed to anticipatory action during drought, and reduced shock effects. RMS results demonstrated that households with access to climate and early warning information were more likely to engage in positive anticipatory action, such as destocking or haymaking. In RIPA areas, 78% of households that accessed climate and early warning information used it to take anticipatory action, compared with 59% of households in non-RIPA areas. In addition, households that used climate and early warning information to take anticipatory action reported experiencing fewer shocks (2.3 shocks on average) than households who didn’t take action (3.1 shocks on average).

RIPA’s systems-strengthening interventions may have contributed to a spillover effect on non-RIPA communities. Non-RIPA households also demonstrated increased access and use of key resilience capacities between 2021 and 2023, albeit at a much lower rates than RIPA households. This was particularly true for capacities where RIPA enabled service delivery through the private sector and government-led services. Qualitative analyses tracked independent investments by 24 new businesses in RIPA-supported sectors, which replicated or built upon RIPA-supported businesses. In line with predicted systems



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intervention effects, these findings point to a potential spill-over effect in service provision from RIPA to non-RIPA areas.

Support from RIPA did not appear to contribute to significant differences in several indicators of women’s empowerment and social capital on a population level. These dimensions of resilience appear to require more time and a more comprehensive approach to achieve sustained population-level impact in the lowlands.

› Did RIPA impact food security and how did intervention layering affect this outcome?

Table 2: Evidence supporting RIPA’s impact on measures of food security

Food Security Measures of Well-Being	RIPA v. non-RIPA	High/Medium Intensity v. Low and no-intensity
Reduced Coping Strategies Index	+	++
Household Hunger Scale	No effect	++
Household Dietary Diversity	++	+

KEY: + = p < .1 ++ = p < .05 +++ = p < .01

The RMS demonstrated mixed effects of RIPA’s systems-strengthening approach on HH food security outcomes when compared with all non-RIPA areas. Overall, all RIPA areas combined across high, medium and low intensity areas of implementation had a positive effect on Household Dietary Diversity (HDDS), a marginal positive effect on household coping strategies, and no apparent impact on Household Hunger Scale (HHS) as compared with non-RIPA areas. The findings suggest that RIPA’s systems-strengthening approach only partially translated into improved well-being after 18 months of implementation and following drought.

RIPA contributed to consistent positive effects on multiple dimensions of food security when higher intensity areas were compared with lower intensity areas of intervention. The RMS further examined RIPA’s assumption that geographic layering and intentional integration of services is key to impacting households’ well-being in the face of severe shocks. The RMS found larger and more consistent differences in food security in RIPA ‘high intensity’ areas (where four or more interventions were implemented) and ‘medium intensity’ (two to three interventions) areas, where households were more likely to access multiple resilience-enhancing services than low-intensity or non-RIPA areas. The results



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suggests that resilience-enhancing services are more likely to translate to improved well-being outcomes when households have access to and use of a diverse set of resilience capacities, which were realized through more intensive layering and integrating of interventions. These results underscore the effectiveness of RIPA’s layered systems-strengthening only 18 months into implementation and following a prolonged, severe drought.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the RMS findings illustrate how systems interventions, which facilitate service delivery through market actors and government service providers, can have a sizeable impact on household resilience and food security effects during crisis if intensively layered and integrated. RIPA areas that received a high dosage of interventions — facilitating access to multiple, diverse resilience-enhancing services — demonstrated a sizeable effect on nearly all critical sources of resilience and multiple dimensions of food security just 18 months into implementation and following a prolonged drought. Based on these findings, we provide the following recommendations:



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- › USAID should double-down on its strategy of concentrating systems strengthening interventions in highly fragile zones of influence, while increasing multi-year development programming in areas of recurrent and protracted crises.
- › Pastoralism and livestock systems merit increased donor investments — including a focus on last mile market access and private sector led service provision — given their demonstrated adaptive capacity during prolonged droughts.
- › Donors and implementing partners should coordinate and increase attention to market systems development and governance systems strengthening that both support and diversify livestock-based economies in lowland contexts, focusing on diverse income choices and services access.
- › Decentralized and diverse climate, market and extension information sources, including through digital technology, private sector partners and government service providers require more funding and increased focus by implementing partners given their proven effects on anticipatory action and resilience.
- › Interventions to address restrictive gender norms require greater time and scale, as well as effective mechanisms that can support cascading positive impacts seen among direct participants to the wider community.

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Resilience in Pastoral Areas – North (RIPA-North) is a five-year, \$45 million USAID-funded program operating in lowland areas of Somali, Oromia and Afar regions of Ethiopia (2020 – 2025). RIPA-North aims to improve the resilience capacities of households, markets, and governance institutions, collectively contributing to enhanced food security and inclusive economic growth.