Introduction

Smallholder farmers in East Africa rely heavily on erratic and unpredictable rainfall for their livelihoods. Ineffective management of scarce or unreliable water resources further threatens household food security. In an attempt to address these challenges, CARE, through the Global Water Initiative-East Africa¹ (GWI-EA) has established learning and practice alliances (LPAs) in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda. LPAs are platforms that bring together a diverse set of stakeholders to define and address common challenges, exchange knowledge, and generate innovative, locally relevant solutions. In the context of GWI-EA, LPAs are used to link farmers, especially women, with local governments, research institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to promote action research. GWI-EA intends to use LPAs as an evidence base for Water Smart Agriculture (WaSA), a term used to encompass the various and essential components of water for food production, which is intended to strengthen the link between water and food production at the policy and practice levels.

In the summer of 2014, Biruh Zegeye, Nathan Kennedy, and Jillian Kenny of Emory University’s Master’s of Development Practice program conducted research on behalf of CARE on the LPAs in Ethiopia and Uganda. The aim of the study was to evaluate the efficacy of the LPA model in bringing diverse stakeholders together to influence change across multiple levels of society and government. In the two study districts, Otuke in Uganda and Dera Woreda in Ethiopia, the LPAs were set up in February 2014 and September 2013 respectively. Given that LPA implementation occurred less than a year before this research was conducted, the findings and recommendations need to be treated with caution as a summary of experiences with LPAs in the GWI program. However, this is a first step in understanding the effects of LPA implementation for water resource management and the potential benefits of utilizing this framework in other program areas.

¹The Global Water Initiative East Africa is funded by the Howard G. Buffet Foundation and works with smallholders and local and national stakeholders in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda to develop Water-Smart Agricultural (WaSA) practices.
**Methods**

Through the use of qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews, in Uganda’s Otuke District data was collected from 18 Champion Farmers, 21 LPA members, and 2 GWI-EA staff and in Ethiopia’s Dera Woreda district data was collected from 10 Champion Farmers, 17 LPA members, and two GWI-EA staff. Champion Farmers are individuals selected by their communities to adopt the new farming techniques and serve as models for other farmers to emulate.

The MSC (most significant change) tool was used with Champion Farmers and LPA members to look at impact through a narrative of experiences, including differences between male and female farmers’ experiences and changes in social capital. AAR (after action review) and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analyses were conducted during FGDs with LPA members and GWI-EA staff to look at enabling factors and gender. The AAR was used to understand the process of creating the LPAs, while the SWOT analysis provided an opportunity to reflect on past experiences and project future threats and opportunities.

**Findings**

**PROCESS**

**Expected vs. Actual Experiences**

**Uganda**: There were few differences cited between what was anticipated for the LPA and what has actually happened. This could be due to the fluid learning process of an LPA and the fact that this is the first time a learning platform such as the LPA has occurred in this district; the concept may have been difficult to envision prior to implementation. Some LPA members mentioned their hesitation going into implementation, as they expected a typical NGO intervention, but now recognize the “value-added” of the approach. The major area of difference in expectations included timing and spread of LPA implementation. This is due to both unforeseen difficulties with the remoteness of the Ugandan district and unclear communication and/or misunderstanding of the LPA purpose and activities.

**Ethiopia**: LPA members explained that, for a number of reasons, the LPA process has met or exceeded their expectations. As in Uganda, there was uncertainty about what to expect because of the fluidity and novelty of the approach, but they felt that the program has adhered to the plan presented at the launch meeting. They also had hesitations due to negative experiences with other NGOs, however they now recognize the value of the participatory multi-stakeholder approach. The LPA creation process went very smoothly, however LPA members cited scheduling and coordination as areas of concern. GWI-EA staff explained that government official attendance was high, but actual participation in action research was lower than expected. The government officials say that research meetings are at inconvenient times for their agriculture offices.

**IMPACT**

**Accomplishments to date**

In both Uganda and Ethiopia, Champion Farmers have been trained in a variety of agricultural skills and techniques for crop production and water resource management. Additional accomplishments include:

**Uganda**: The knowledge and the skills acquired from the LPA have been the greatest change for the Champion Farmers. Local village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) have also noted impacts from the LPA implementation due to the spread of knowledge throughout the region after each meeting. Group members have been excited to have a Champion Farmer in their group and see them as an advocate of their interests and needs with the local government. Champion Farmers have attracted neighboring farmers to come see their work, which in turn has created a demand to learn the new techniques. However, few have
begun adopting the methods due to limited access to seeds and inputs, lack of labor and technical skills, and a desire to wait and learn from the first harvest.

**Ethiopia:** Champion Farmers have implemented many of their new techniques and several have already harvested produce with increased yields. Their success is being used to attract farmers in the areas to adopt the techniques that they are utilizing. Another successful application of Champion Farmer training is in water pump maintenance. This local maintenance support has created employment opportunities for youth and decreased travel time due to breaks.

“It has increased how farmers are viewed in the public sphere. People nowadays view farmers as people who can contribute to economic development.”

— Kelle Anyess, Champion Farmer

**Social Capital**

Overall, Champion Farmers in both countries believe that the LPA has improved their relationship with local government, as evidenced by more frequent visits from district and subcounty officials. They also believe their engagement in the public sphere has increased. The LPA has given them a platform to voice their needs and they now feel that they have representation in the districts through the district officials participating in the LPAs. There is also unanimous appreciation among LPA members and Champion Farmers for the diversity of membership of participants, which results in the exchange of indigenous and technical knowledge among farmers, researchers, and politicians.

**COMPATIBILITY WITH PROGRAM FRAMEWORKS**

The GWI-EA staff and LPA members in both countries have been pleased the LPA framework, particularly its participatory nature. The LPA model is a demand-driven approach, unlike conventional programs which tend to be supply-driven with pre-determined solutions.

However, introducing this new kind of model has resulted in some complications. One is the difficulty of creating demand, commitment, and ownership from LPA members, particularly district offices. This commitment may come with time as research results are solidified and the model creates a feedback loop based on results from the previous research cycle. An additional challenge to this framework has been defining what roles GWI-EA staff and the LPA members should play in program facilitation. Initially GWI-EA staff have had to take a more directive role, however this is expected to change to a more facilitative role with growing levels of commitment from LPA members.

**ENABLING FACTORS FOR THE LPA**

**Institutional Factors:**

**Uganda:** The local government has acknowledged the importance of water for production and recently allocated money to install a drip irrigation system on a farm in Olilim subcounty. This is a new kind of interaction and support for this district.

**Ethiopia:** The program goals of the LPA align with current national agricultural goals of providing support to smallholders in order to increase Ethiopia’s gross domestic product. Due to these similarities, government officials have been excited to participate. Unfortunately, these officials have a number of concurrent programs that have hindered their ability to fully participate in the research process.

**Individual Factors:**

At the time of research, interns were the main point of contact between the Champion Farmers and the LPA in Uganda. They have been instrumental to implementation. It is unclear what will happen to the lines of communication once these individuals have completed their contracts.

Champion farmers themselves have been very enthusiastic about the new methods on their farms. They are receptive to repeated visits from a variety of outsiders and are glad to mobilize their farmer and VSLA groups for training.

Both countries repeatedly raised the issue of varying commitment levels of LPA members due to factors such as work commitments, distance, and the voluntary nature of their membership. It was suggested that they advertise the meetings as open to anyone in the region in an attempt to attract individuals with more direct interest in the LPA.

**Financial and Non-Financial Resources:**

Without GWI-EA funding, there would be no LPA. There has been reference to possible financial input from stakeholders, but without this, GWI-EA cannot transfer the leadership of the LPAs to the districts. Funding beyond the duration of the GWI project is vital to the sustainability of the LPA at this time.
A non-financial enabler in Ethiopia is the district’s plentiful water. Farmers here readily accepted new technology due to familiarity with irrigation pumps and other technology. An enabler in Uganda is the close proximity of the three research institutions. Non-financial barriers include lack of high-yielding seeds and affordable materials at local markets and limited vehicle access.

Social Norms and Culture
Many Champion Farmers said that outside visitors and farmers typically “believe by seeing” and were waiting to observe the results before trying the methods on their own plots. This indicates the importance of having strong results from the first action research cycle in order to promote the uptake of methods.

“The LPA has strengthened the relationship between farmers and the local government...and the LPA has increased women’s engagement, in that it makes sure both women and men have the knowledge.”

- John Odongo, Champion Farmer

GENDER
Differences between Men’s & Women’s Experiences
GWI-EA staff believe there are differences between men’s and women’s experiences of the LPA due to the large household responsibilities of females that affect their ability to engage in LPA activities. However farmers themselves, both male and female, feel that there are not gender differences within the LPA experience, agreeing that all are capable farmers and all are receiving the same knowledge. In both districts, LPA members noticed female Champion Farmers becoming more openly opinionated and vocal at meetings, which they credit to the LPA. Within the LPAs there are far fewer female than male members, which is largely due to the lower number of women working in the government.

Addressing Issues of Gender Equity
Women comprise 50% of the Champion Farmers in both districts. Interviewees agree that the LPAs do not typically take direct action to address equity in gender relationships. They did however say that LPAs indirectly address these issues. One such way is when female Champion Farmers receive profits from their harvests, they will be able to use this money to cover household expenses. Current action research in Uganda and Ethiopia does not currently consider gender, but there is discussion to incorporate it.

Social norms and mindsets change slowly, so some LPA members argued that the current status of gender equity is acceptable until people are settled into the LPA. Most LPA members expressed a desire for LPAs to do more in this area. Champion Farmers, both male and female, believe the LPA could help with gender-specific challenges by providing training in resource use, financial literacy, and “how to live more harmoniously within the household.”

Conclusion
GWI-EA has already achieved a degree of success through the LPA framework. The relationship between local government and Champion Farmers has been strengthened noticeably and new relationships have been established among LPA members who previously did not interact. From the evaluation team’s perspective, these are noteworthy accomplishments and strong indicators of sustainability. Clearly, various challenges can arise from multi-stakeholder-driven program approaches, but many of the issues discussed in this report are context-specific and broader points can be taken from the LPAs analyzed here to serve as learning opportunities for future LPAs. Additionally, CARE will be able to use learning from the LPAs to date to further inform and promote WaSA at the local, national, and regional levels. In conclusion, the evaluation team believes that the LPA framework is a promising approach for bringing together stakeholders from different sectors and levels of society to increase awareness, investment, and collaboration for a wide range of development issues.