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QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST PHASE OF A MIXED METHODS STUDY ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE VIM PROJECT IN KAYA, BURKINA FASO

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ViMPlus is part of USAID's Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced II (RISE) program, which supports vulnerable communities in Burkina Faso and Niger to effectively prepare for and manage recurrent crises and pursue sustainable pathways out of poverty.

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ACRONYMS

ATAD	Alliance Technique d'Assistance au Développement
CES/DRS	Soil and Water Conservation / Soil Defense and Restoration
CHA	Community Health Agents
DFSA	Development Food Security Activity
FANTA	Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project
FFP	Food for Peace
FFS	Farmer Field Schools
FRI	Farm Radio International
GAPs	Good Agricultural Practices
INERA	Institute of Environment and Agricultural Research
LIPs	Local Implementing Partners
MAAH	Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulics
MLAs	Mother Leaders Animators
RCPB	Réseau des Caisses Populaires du Burkina Faso
SILC	Savings and Internal Lending Committees
SNV	Netherlands Development Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDCs	Village Development Councils
ViM	Victory Against Malnutrition
ViMPlus	Victory Against Malnutrition Plus
VVVs	Village Vaccinators

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Victory Against Malnutrition (ViM), a Development Food Security Activity (DFSA) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Bureau for Food for Peace (FFP), was implemented by ACDI/VOCA along with Save the Children in four communes of Sanmatenga Province. In Kaya commune, the Activity closed in 2018, giving an opportunity to assess the sustainability of project ViM's activities, outcomes and impacts after project exit. Two years after the conclusion of ViM in Kaya, we launched this mixed-methods study to assess what elements of the Activity were sustained or not, and why. This report summarizes the results of the qualitative phase of this study. The qualitative investigation will be followed by a quantitative survey to assess project sustainability, expected in early 2021.

The ViM project ViM, implemented between 2011 and 2018, was guided by the following three strategic objectives (SOs): (SO1) increase productivity and food availability through improved agricultural practices and technologies and enhancing value chains of key agricultural productions; (SO2) increase household income by improving value chains, stimulating links between producers and buyers, exploring alternative income opportunities, and facilitating access to credit; and (SO3) reduce chronic malnutrition among children under five years of age and pregnant and lactating women. ViM also addressed crosscutting issues on gender and the environment.

This study on sustainability in Kaya builds on previous studies of sustainability of 12 development projects in four countries (Rogers and Coates 2015), which established a conceptual framework comprised of critical elements of sustainability. To be sustained, activities and behaviors must incorporate all three elements: motivation (to provide service, to make use of them, to practice behaviors); capacity (skills to implement and manage activities); and resources (provision for the continued availability of funds, inputs, and training). If one of these elements is lacking, sustainability is jeopardized. Rogers and Coates (2015) found that a fourth element is often essential as well: the creation of linkages between community groups started or strengthened by the project and organizations that have permanent presence in the community or interact with it and have an interest in continuing to support them. Finally, a key element of sustainability identified in these studies was that project activity exit should be gradual, so that individuals and community groups increasingly take responsibility for implementing their activities independently before the project has exited. This conceptual framework proved relevant to the sustainability of the ViM project in Kaya. Importantly, this study also examined the influence of external factors to the sustainability of impacts and activities as the commune has faced several shocks and stresses since the conclusion of the project in 2018, including heightened insecurity and terrorist activity, influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the COVID-19 pandemic which appear to have limited travel and group activities.

populations in the project area post-ViM Kaya faced the dual challenges of a high level of terrorist activity in the country, resulting in an influx of internally displaced persons into the commune, and the pandemic of Covid-19 which resulted in limitations on travel and group activities.

In the first phase of this sequential mixed methods studies we collected qualitative data through focus group discussions and individual semi-structured interviews with ViM program activity implementors, local implementing partners and collaborators, community organizations, service providers, and beneficiaries in four areas of Kaya commune. Although we were able to triangulate key findings, the

results are specific to this context and are not statistically representative. However, findings provide preliminary indications of which sustainability and exit strategies were effective.

SUSTAINABILITY PLANS AND EXIT STRATEGIES

The ViM project incorporated several elements into their project design to promote sustainability.

- Identify and work with existing groups in the community
- Collaborate with local institutions who will continue to be present and provide support to the groups formed or strengthened under ViM
- Establish linkages between community groups and local government, local NGOs (Local Implementing Partners, or LIPs), and markets
- Facilitate official recognition for groups and individuals through contracts and integration into persistent systems and organizations
- Prepare community groups for program exit; gradually transfer responsibility from ViM to the groups

SUSTAINABILITY OF SOI ACTIVITIES

Producer associations formed or strengthened by ViM reported that they continued to meet, though many respondents said meetings were less frequent than before, and some activities were dropped. For example, lead farmer trainers stopped implementing farmer field schools because they felt they had already trained farmers in the good agricultural practices (GAPs) they had been taught, so these were no longer needed. ViM intended to implement gradual handover of responsibility to Producer associations during the last two years of the project. The Producer associations involved in lowland agriculture (rice, vegetables) did continue to grow the crops and implement the techniques they had learned and to market their crops throughout the years since project ViM's exit. However, some activities have lessened due to constraints on gathering in groups and limited resources.

The presence of local institutions, particularly local implementing partner, ATAD (Alliance Technique d'Assistance au Développement), was mentioned as a source of support, and participants from one producer association focus group reported receiving training and materials from a new project that entered the area. However, most Producer associations and producer leaders reported challenges to sustained activities such as lack of resources and an absence of continued support. One issue raised was that during the project ViM arranged for subsidies to key inputs used in trainings and activities, but those subsidies has ended with the conclusion the project and no alternative source was identified.

Although an important ViM goal was to help Producer associations receive official recognition, several Producer associations mentioned that they had not completed the process of receiving legal recognition and official status by the time of ViM exit, and that this was a problem for them. Farmers did report that they continued to have access to credit through internal savings and loan groups (SILCs) and rural banks. However, the market information system established by ViM, SIMAGRI, apparently was not used by producers; we were unable to establish whether the system still functions.

Farmers reported continuing to use agricultural techniques that improved their efficiency or productivity if these techniques did not require purchased inputs, such as composting and erosion control. Those that required purchased resources were reportedly not continued. Respondents specifically mentioned not continuing construction of stone bunds which required purchasing stones and renting or obtaining a truck, which individual farmers were unable to do; this activity also required working in groups, and group work was limited due to COVID-19 restrictions and fear from heightened security risks.

Input fairs were organized to link producers with input suppliers; those fairs were not intended to continue once linkages were established. Reports on sustainability of this activity were mixed, with some farmers saying they were better aware of how to access inputs, but most participants did not feel that lasting relationships were established.

Many respondents reported that their participation in ViM activities was motivated by the pleasure in learning new things and by the respect of the community for their knowledge, but it is not clear that this motivation, without the benefits of improved production and marketing, was sufficient to maintain their involvement after the project ended.

Village Vaccinators (VVs) were trained by the ViM project to provide various veterinary services. The project ViM initially provided them with supplies and materials (e.g., syringes and vaccine, seeds for improved fodder), and they were trained to charge for their services as a way of ensuring funds to purchase new materials as well as a source of income. The VVs reported that they were continuing to provide services; some said it was challenging to find clients and mentioned farmers' inability to pay, and one participant had greatly expanded their client base. This was the only service provider model that incorporated a system for continued resources and motivation (income). That said, did not feel they had been integrated into a persistent network to receive support or continued capacity building.

SUSTAINABILITY OF SO2 ACTIVITIES

The main intervention discussed for SO2 was the organization of savings and internal lending committees (SILCs) and the provision of business and money management training for women aimed at helping them to start their own small businesses. According to our respondents, group meetings have dwindled, as have contributions of funds to village banks. However, further investigation is needed to learn if participants in fact did start businesses and whether these are continuing and thriving. Members largely agreed that they learned valuable financial skills through their participation. Women participants from SILCS were also involved in agricultural training and sometimes in Producer associations. The promotion of improved agricultural techniques, diversified production, and agricultural marketing were considered valuable to improved livelihoods in these rural, agricultural communities.

SUSTAINABILITY OF SO3 ACTIVITIES

The ViM project established village care groups each headed by a mother leader (MLA). During the project, MLAs met to receive training in nutrition, sanitation, and health care, and were responsible to train members of their village care groups. MLAs and village care group member received incentives in the form of agricultural training, goats and chickens, outfits (such as a shirt or *pagne*) to wear during

work, as well as food rations. Withdrawal of these benefits was noted as a disincentive to continue conducting group meetings. Women cited respect from the community and an appreciation of the importance of their work as motivating factors, but reported their activities declined once other incentives and free materials were lacking.

Nonetheless, respondents reported that they continue to apply the practices they learned in their own households, and that they are willing to provide advice and training to people who come to them and ask. Most said they no longer conduct group meetings, though they continue to promote good feeding practices, vaccination, and sanitation in their communities. MLA meetings required travel, which is now constrained by COVID-19 limitations as well as by fear of terrorist attacks. In one community, the village care groups were continuing to operate with the support (information and materials) of a new non-governmental organization working there.

A common theme among respondents was that linkages to the existing health care system have not persisted, though they were effective while the project ViM was in operation. The absence of institutionalized, official recognition of these committees by the health system was cited as a reason that they lacked access to new information and were unable to receive supplies for some their previous activities such as making soap and constructing improved cookstoves, so these activities have waned.

Project ViM also worked with community health agents (CHAs) and advocated for them to be integrated into official health systems. In 2016 the Ministry of Health officially recognized their role and began paying them a monthly salary of 20,000CFA (\$36) per month. But while CHA respondents contended that they have continued their responsibilities, they no longer receive remuneration. Further investigation on this issue is needed to better understand where CHAs currently stand within official health systems.

Committees were also trained to assist in the construction of latrines. Members of these committees reported that they were still available and willing to assist anyone who asked for help, as long as that person had the materials for latrine construction. Further investigation is needed to identify whether any latrines have been constructed since project exit.

CROSS CUTTING ACTIVITIES

ViM implemented mass communication activities related to cross-cutting issues of gender and the environment. Activities included the production of radio programming and theater skits intended to raise awareness of themes relating to health and sanitation, agriculture and the environment, and to women's empowerment and autonomy. With support from Farm Radio International (FRI), the project provided training and equipment to the local radio station so that these programs could continue, but apparently these plays and programs were not continued once project ViM ended.

Project ViM centered women across their activities, promoting gender autonomy and equality and working with all community members on gender relations. Women were explicitly involved in agricultural training and in Producer associations; internal savings and loan institutions were established explicitly for women; the project provided literacy training to women. Many of the focus groups and interviews included explicit mention of the increased participation of women in community activities and meetings and in agricultural work and in marketing and noted women taking leadership roles in

community organizations. One local government representative (male) noted women's increased presence and involvement in local markets. Women respondents cited increased confidence and willingness to speak up in community groups as a result of literacy training that increased their sense of autonomy and empowerment. Some women who received literacy training were able to further their formal education.

INFLUENCE OF SHOCKS AND STRESSES

The major shocks to the communities were the ongoing threat of terrorist attacks, which resulted in a flow into Kaya of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing more dangerous areas of the country, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused mandatory limits on travel and meetings in groups. Both the COVID-19 restrictions and the fear related to threat of terrorist attacks were cited as reasons why group activities had diminished, including MLA monthly meetings, village care group meetings, SILC meetings, and some producer association activities. The influx of IDPs was cited as a source of pressure on land and water availability as well as school and health services, though specific effects on ViM activities were not mentioned. The pervasive sense of insecurity, made more acute by the flow of IDPs, was mentioned by many. Respondents also mentioned the long-term stress of climate change and prolonged drought.

Adapting to these shocks and stresses is challenging. Limits on gathering and mobility meant that meetings or activities that require travel outside the community, like MLA activities, diminished or stopped, while behaviors in the home or activities within the community were more likely to be sustained. Any impact on access to markets remains to be investigated. Drought was another persistent challenge for producers. Respondents cited water scarcity as a reason for not continuing with tree planting activities, while the water conserving use of zai pits and demilunes was sustained and expanded.

LESSONS LEARNED

Activities were sustained when they incorporated the combination of motivation, capacity, resources, and linkages and diminished when any one of these was absent. Although service providers did report being motivated during project ViM by the personal satisfaction of learning new things, making contributions to their communities, and obtaining respect for their work, the lack of concrete material motivation resulted in reduced activity. Depending on the goodwill of volunteers is not a realistic expectation when people have competing responsibilities and priorities. When linkages were not effectively sustained, the continuation of activities was jeopardized, for example, when village care groups were unable to obtain supplies or continued training to support their work.

Some questions remain open to further investigation, including the degree to which agricultural and small business activities have resulted in sustained, improved livelihoods (including food security and nutritional outcomes), and how the policy of working with already existing community organizations affected the inclusion of all community members. This qualitative study provided suggestive indications of the factors leading to sustained project activity interventions; these will be assessed quantitatively in our follow-up study.

INTRODUCTION

Development projects are commonly assessed for impact but not for the persistence of benefits after external project investments end. Moreover, recent studies of development food security activities (DFSAs) observed that impact at the time of project exit does not necessarily predict longer term benefit, implying that impact evaluations do not always provide a complete picture of long-range project effects (Coates et al., 2016, 2016; Rogers et al., 2016, 2017; Rogers & Coates, 2015). Understanding what activities, outcomes, and impacts persist after donor resources are no longer provided is critical to ensuring durable, resilient, effective development. In addition, climatic and human-generated shocks and stresses are increasingly affecting global food security (FAO et al., 2018; Food Security Information Network (FSIN), 2018). For sustained impacts, development initiatives must take into account how results and expected sustained activities, service delivery, service participation, and behavior changes will respond to and overcome emergent risks.

Resilience in the face of shocks and stresses, whether social, economic, political, or climatological, is also key to achieving development outcomes and sustaining them post-project (Ansah et al., 2019; Béné et al., 2015). Strengthening resilience capacities is essential to enabling households to absorb, mitigate and adapt to changes. Escalations of conflict, climate shocks, and the resulting internally displaced persons (IDPs) crises they engender are increasingly challenging global food security, and the Center-North Region of Burkina Faso is currently confronted by each of these shocks and stresses (FAO et al., 2018; Food Security Information Network (FSIN), 2018). Development initiatives must therefore contend with the presence or anticipation of such shocks and stresses in program design, implementation, and adaptation. Understanding how to bolster resilience capacities among individuals, communities, and institutions has therefore become paramount to successful development projects (Fan et al., 2014; UNDP, 2012; Vaughan, 2018a). Further, guidance on designing food security interventions whose effects can persist in the presence of such shocks is critical, especially in contexts where the potential for periodic shocks is high. There may be specific components of an intervention that can be designed and implemented in anticipation of presumptive shocks and stresses to increase the likelihood of resilience to changing circumstances.

USAID's Bureau of Food for Peace (FFP) program (now incorporated into the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, BHA) has incorporated many of the recommendations that arose from Tufts University research into its 2016-2025 strategy, now requiring detailed sustainability plans for all DFSAs and weighing their quality heavily in the proposal scoring process. FFP has also highlighted sustained results and resilience as key thematic areas of its learning agenda (Food for Peace, 2019). Although the sustainability and exit strategies studies which have already been developed have shed light on factors facilitating sustainable results, further guidance is needed to operationalize the findings throughout the project cycle, including in project monitoring and evaluation, and to develop reliable, measurable predictors of sustainability that can be used to modify project components during the life of the activity to enhance the likelihood of sustainability and the capacity of beneficiary households and communities to respond constructively to shocks after a project ends.

This qualitative research is part of an ongoing mixed methods study contributing to this needed guidance by exploring the sustainability of impacts and activities of a DfSA project known as Victory Against Malnutrition (ViM) implemented from 2011-2018 by ACDI/VOCA. ViM's overarching aim was to reduce food insecurity among vulnerable rural populations in four communes of the Sanmatenga province, located in the Centre-Nord Region of Burkina Faso. This study is focused specifically on one commune,

Kaya. While a new initiative, ViMPlus, launched following the end of ViM and generally broadened its geographical target in the Centre-Nord Region, Kaya was not included in the scope of the new Activity. Although not perfectly comparable to other communes, Kaya was thus identified as a unique opportunity to evaluate the sustainability of the ViM project's implementation and exit strategies and the continued activities and results attained since the end of the ViM project. In an area where the new Activity, ViMPlus, will not continue. Building on Tufts research with Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project (FANTA), on Lessons on Sustainability and Exit Strategies of previous DFSA projects, this study evaluates the sustainability activities and impacts and the effectiveness of the exit strategy of the ViM project implemented by ACDI/VOCA in Kaya Commune.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Victory against Malnutrition (ViM) Project was a USAID/FFP funded Title II Multi Year Assistance Program (MYAP) implemented in four communes of Burkina Faso between August 2011 and September 2018. The project was managed by ACDI/VOCA in partnership with Save the Children (SC), the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), and three Local Implementing Partners (LIPs). Several government and private actors were also key collaborators throughout the project's lifetime.

Project ViM's overarching objective was to reduce food insecurity among vulnerable rural populations in four communes of the Sanmatenga province, located in the Centre-Nord Region of Burkina Faso. ViM had three strategic objectives: (SO1) increase productivity and food availability through improved agricultural practices and technologies and enhancing value chains of key agricultural productions; (SO2) increase household income by improving value chains, stimulating links between producers and buyers, exploring alternative income opportunities, and facilitating access to credit; and (SO3) reduce chronic malnutrition among children under five years of age and pregnant and lactating women. The project also addressed crosscutting issues on gender and the environment.

ViM targeted four communes: Barsalogho, Kaya, Namissiguima, and Pissila. It was originally a five-year project, but received a two-year extension, thus concluding in September of 2018. In Kaya, ViM targeted all 71 of the commune's villages, reaching an estimated 57,136 beneficiaries.

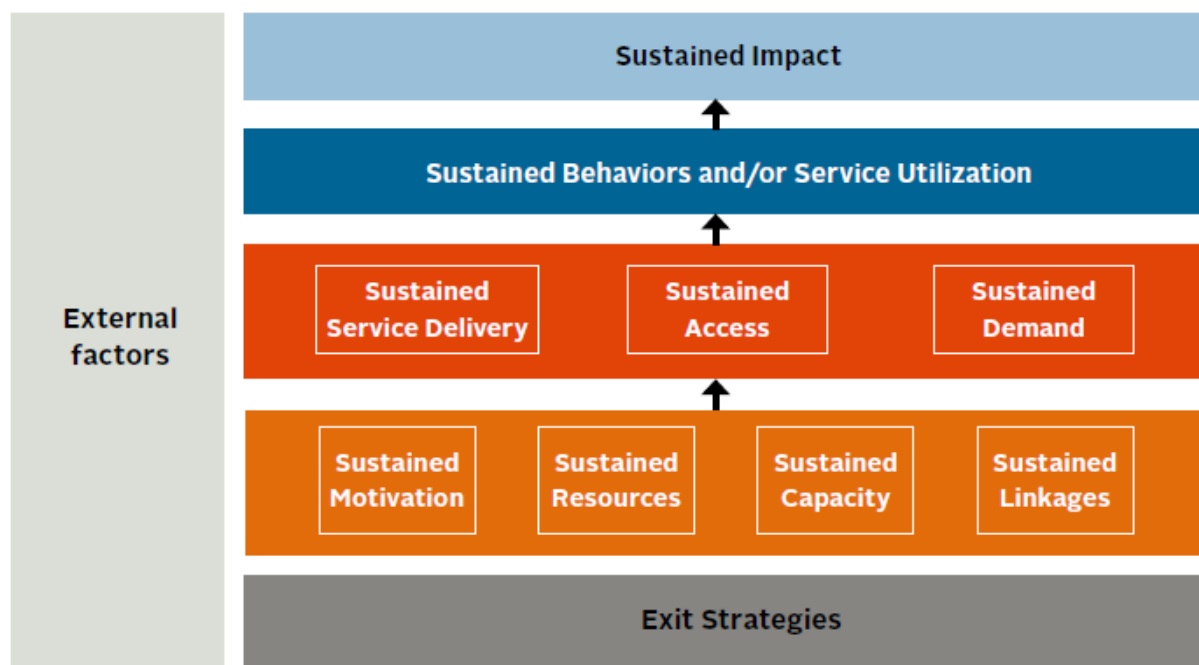
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study follows recent research investigating what factors are associated with sustained impact of development initiatives in food security. In 2009, USAID launched FANTA (<https://www.fantaproject.org/>), an initiative supporting research and evaluations of nutrition and food security interventions, aiming to "strengthen global-level guidance and standards". As part of this initiative, our team from Tufts University conducted a multi-country study of sustainability and exit strategies of 12 Food For Peace (FFP)-supported development food assistance projects (Rogers & Coates, 2015). This study identified a set of critical factors required for ensuring the sustainability of service provision, beneficiary demand, and enduring benefits after donor funding ends.

As illustrated in Figure 1, sustainable impacts of development initiatives depend on the continued use of services and sustained behaviors established by the initiative. These are supported by ensuring that service delivery mechanisms are upheld, that beneficiaries maintain access to these services, and that demand for these services remains. To strengthen the likelihood that these criteria are met requires a sustained source of resources, sustained capacity to provide services and to continue behaviors, and

sustained motivation on the part of beneficiaries and service providers, and in most cases, established and continued linkages to relevant organizations.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



Note 1 Adapted from Coates and Kegode. 2012. "Kenya Exit Strategies Study Round 2 Report." Unpublished, submitted to FANTA April 8.

The conceptual framework developed by Coates and Rogers (2015) provided a starting point to evaluate sustained impacts of the ViM project in Kaya. While this framework emphasizes how external factors can influence sustained impact, the shocks and stresses related to security concerns are becoming increasingly relevant to everyday lives in Kaya, along with several other areas of Burkina Faso (ACLED, 2020). This trend unfortunately reflects the situation in a growing number of developing countries; conflict is considered a key factor contributing to surges in food insecurity globally (FAO et al., 2018; Food Security Information Network (FSIN), 2018). The need to understand how development initiatives not only generate sustained results but contribute to building resilience of beneficiaries and partners in the face of shocks and stresses among them has therefore become critical.

In addition to examining the factors identified in this conceptual framework, this study also assesses shocks and stresses to identify what specific ones are felt by project stakeholders. (Zseleczy and Yosef (2014) define shocks as "external short-term deviations from long-term trends that have substantial negative effects on people's current state of well-being, level of assets, livelihoods, or safety, or their ability to withstand future shocks" (Zseleczy & Yosef, 2014). These may include terrorist attacks or natural disasters, such as drought, disease outbreaks, or market changes. On the other hand, stresses are "long-term trends or pressures that undermine the stability of a system and increase vulnerability within it" (Zseleczy & Yosef, 2014). Stresses may include climate variability, chronic poverty or food insecurity, or long-term oppression of certain groups. Once shocks and stresses are identified, we explore how they have affected the sustainability of ViM's impacts and activities from the ViM project.

Finally, we will examine how different ViM activities strengthened beneficiaries' resilience capacities, or, their "potential for proactive measures to be taken in order to deal with shocks or stresses" (Vaughan, 2018b).

MIXED METHODS STUDY OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

This mixed methods study is guided by the following three objectives and research questions:

- Conduct formative research to examine the persistence of behavior change and, where appropriate, service provision and use since the conclusion of the ViM project in Kaya.
 - Approximately two years after the conclusion of ViM project in Kaya, what activities, services, service participation, and behavior changes have been sustained?
 - What factors have contributed to the persistence of the sustained activities, service participation, and behavior changes?
 - What factors have challenged the persistence of the sustained activities, service participation, and behavior changes?
- Explore the impact that shocks and stresses have had on sustained impact and how the ViM project contributed to strengthening resilience capabilities among beneficiaries.
 - How have shocks and stresses affected the sustainability of activities including services, service participation, and behavior changes?
 - How have these shocks and stresses affected sustained impact?
 - How have shocks and stresses influenced the key factors in the conceptual framework (sustained capacity, resources, motivation, and linkages)?
 - What resilience capacities are necessary to adapt to, mitigate, or absorb these shocks and stresses?
 - How did ViM project activities contribute to strengthening these resilience capacities?
- Draw insights from findings to generate recommendations for the current ViMPlus project design, implementation, and adaptation.
 - What insights and lessons about the sustainability of activities, services, service participation, and behavior change in Kaya can be applied to ViMPlus design, implementation, and adaptation?
 - How can knowledge about factors predictive of sustainability be operationalized into monitoring and evaluation tools that will signal whether these factors are being successfully integrated into project operations, in order to inform ongoing learning and adaptation of activities within the ViMPlus implementation period?

- What elements of the experience of sustainability in ViM project areas through shocks and stresses can be used to develop a set of principles to inform the design, implementation, and adaptation of other activities (e.g. as part of ViMPlus) that enhance resilience?

QUALITATIVE STUDY OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

The qualitative phase of this study provided formative findings to better understand the context of the ViM project in Kaya, better understand the exit strategy, exit processes, and sustainability plans, and begin to understand the sustainability of project results and activities. Findings also serve to inform the development of quantitative instruments for the next phase of the study.

METHODS

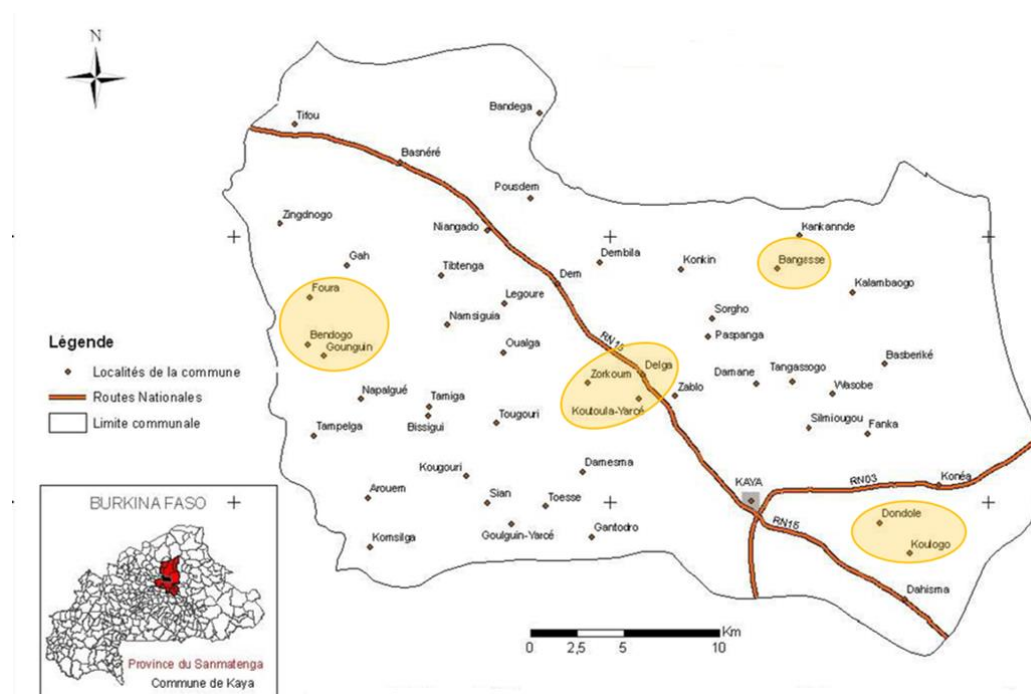
PARTICIPANT POPULATION

We conducted 20 focus groups with beneficiaries and service providers trained under the ViM project in Kaya between 2012 and 2018 (Table 1). We also conducted 20 interviews with program implementors and local implementing partners (LIPs) (Table 2). We used purposive sampling to recruit individuals with specific knowledge, expertise, and/or experience related to each category.

FOCUS GROUPS

We collected focus group data from four separate areas of Kaya to explore how different contexts may affect the sustainability of activities and impacts from the ViM project (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Map of Kaya Commune, Burkina Faso with target study areas circled in yellow



Note : Original map source: BNDT, DGRE, Mairie de Kaya, 2010

We conducted focus groups with service providers and beneficiaries. Service provider groups included Mother Leader Animators (MLAs), CHA's (Community Health Agents), Producer Leaders, and Village Vaccinators (VVs). Due to accessibility and travel challenges, we conducted an additional two individual interviews with service providers (VVs) who were not able to participate in a focus group. Beneficiary focus groups included members of Producer associations, Savings and Internal Lending Committees (SILC), and village care groups. For beneficiary focus groups, we purposefully invited members from different groups to observe different perspectives and interactions. Table 1 provides an overview of the make-up of all 20 focus groups.

Table 1. Focus group demographics

FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS					
ROLE	SECTOR	GENDER			TOTAL
		Female	Male	Mixed gender	
MLA	Health	3	0	0	3
CHA	Health	0	0	1	1
PA members	Agriculture	1	1	1	3
Producer leaders	Agriculture	2	2	0	4
SILC members	Micro-finance	3	0	0	3
Village care groups members	Health	2	1	1	4
VVs	Agriculture	0	2	0	2
Total		11	6	3	20

INTERVIEWS

Twenty interviews were conducted with project implementers, including individuals from the awardee organization (ACDI/VOCA) and LIPs (Table 2). In addition, we held two one-on-one interviews with VVs as they were unable to travel to participate in their designated focus groups.

Table 2. Interview demographics

INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHICS				
ROLE	SECTOR	GENDER		TOTAL
		Female	Male	
ACDI/VOCA	Agriculture, Gender	1	2	3
ATAD (Alliance Technique d'assistance au Développement)	Agriculture	0	2	2
RCPB (Réseau des Caisses Populaires du Burkina Faso)	Micro-finance	0	1	1

INERA (Institut de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles)	Agriculture	0	2	2
MAAH (Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulics)	Agriculture	0	3	3
Ministry of Education	Gender	0	1	1
Ministry of Health	Gender	1	0	1
FRI (Farm Radio International)	Health, Gender	0	2	2
Save the Children	Communications	0	1	1
SNV (Netherlands Development Organization)	Health	1	2	3
VVVs	Agriculture	0	1	1
Total		3	19	22

INSTRUMENTATION

The LIP interview and FG protocols were developed based on ViM documents, a framework of sustainability created by Rogers & Coates (2015), instruments used in previous studies, and literature relating to resilience in development projects. Interview protocols included questions that were both general and specific to ViM's three strategic objectives.

FG protocols followed participatory impact assessment methods, which integrated rating and ranking activities into open-ended discussion (Ager et al., 2010; Catley et al., 2008). Protocols targeted participant's work or the type of activity they engaged in with the ViM project.

Each protocol included a consent script, facilitator instructions, questions, and probes. Protocols were originally developed in English, translated to French, then translated to Mooré using a voice recorder, as Mooré is not commonly written. They were reviewed for clarity by a panel including expertise in community development, Burkina Faso, nutrition, agricultural development, and health. Their comments and revisions were incorporated to improve clarity and appropriateness of the content.

ENUMERATOR TRAINING

Prior to collecting data, enumerators participated in a five-day workshop and training where they:

1. Reviewed study objectives and key background information for this study
2. Participated in practical training and review of principles of research ethics
3. Reviewed the conceptual framework and methodologies
4. Participated in practical training on coordinating and implement focus group discussions and individual interviews
5. Reviewed all study instruments and protocols

6. Participated in practical training with each study instrument including mock focus groups and mock interviews
7. Conducted multiple pre-tests with relevant stakeholders in the field and participated in debriefing sessions to help improve the instruments

DATA COLLECTION

Interviews were conducted with program implementors and LIPs through Zoom or in person, depending on the risk associated with COVID-19. All interviews were recorded. Following data collection, recordings were translated from Mooré to French, transcribed, and prepared for analysis.

FGs were conducted in Mooré with ViM beneficiaries and service providers trained under ViM. As noted, the FG facilitator used participatory impact assessment methods to engage participants in active discussion. In addition to the facilitator, a note-taker was present to take observational notes, and all FGs were audio recorded with participant consent.

DATA ANALYSIS

Recordings from interviews and FGs were translated from Mooré to French and transcribed by agents from a transcription service. Agents were trained to do transcriptions using the Kuckartz et al (2008) “simple transcription system” (Dresing et al., 2015). Once transcriptions were complete, data were cleaned, with any Personally Identifiable Information (PII) removed and coded and transcriptions were prepared for analysis.

Cleaned transcriptions were imported into a shared NVivo project for analysis. Each dataset was classified based on the participants’ gender, data collection method (either FGD or interview), sector of work (agriculture, health, commerce, gender, etc.) and role (e.g. LIP role in ViM project).

To improve trustworthiness and rigor of findings, each transcription was analyzed by two researchers independently using context-driven coding based on the conceptual framework. Codes were established *a priori* based on the conceptual framework. During this process, codes were quantified to later provide opportunities to compare themes that emerged across gender, data collection type, and role (Creswell, 2014). In addition, new codes were added when a new theme or pattern emerged. Once all transcriptions were analyzed and coded by two independent researchers, we compared analyses and re-structured and merged our codes. We then repeated the analysis using the new set of codes. Following the second analysis, we compared findings to examine similarities and differences between the different classifications and sub-groups.

LIMITATIONS

As is the case in a qualitative study, findings reflect the experiences of participants within a specific context. While this study can provide important insights about sustainability and resilience in the context of ViMPlus intervention areas, our primary focus is on Kaya during this phase of the research, because Kaya is the one commune that was included in the ViM project but not continued into the ViMPlus project, providing an opportunity to observe what was sustained after the project’s ViM’s exit. Since this is a qualitative study with purposively selected respondents, results are not strictly

generalizable to the population of Centre-Nord as a whole, but the circumstances are broadly comparable, and the insights gained are likely relevant.

Accessibility challenges also limited our study to some degree. We intended to collect data from communities in different parts of the commune, but there were some areas and specific individuals we were unable to reach. For example, we could not find a sufficient number of VVVs to hold the anticipated three VVV focus group discussions. We were able to conduct two VVV focus groups and two individual interviews VVVs who could not make it to either focus group.

RESULTS

The data from the qualitative phase of this mixed methods study led to several important observations on the sustainability of activities and impacts, which will be further examined by the upcoming quantitative study of key indicators. First, we summarize the activities from each strategic objective (SO) and provide evidence of their apparent sustainability from the points of view of different participants, including program implementers, LIPs, service providers, and beneficiaries. We then employ the conceptual framework to examine how important the previously identified key factors associated with sustainability-capacities, resources, motivation, and linkages- were, and how they affected sustained results and activities. Next, we present an assessment of the shocks and stresses participants have faced since the conclusion of the project. We share participants' reflections on how these have affected the persistence of the ViM project's results and activities. Finally, we provide an overview of the exit processes and sustainability strategies, as articulated by participants.

VIM PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND SUSTAINABILITY

We asked project implementers, LIPs, service providers, and beneficiaries what practices and activities were expected to continue past the conclusion of the project and, if they were expected to continue, how well they have been sustained approximately two years after the project ended.

SO1: INCREASE AND DIVERSIFY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

To increase and diversify agricultural production (SO1), the ViM project worked with producer associations and established the service provider roles of producer leaders and VVVs. In addressing SO1, they also provided technical training to project beneficiaries working in other sectors, including MLAs, village care groups members, and SILC members. In Kaya, ATAD (Alliance Technique d'Assistance au Développement) served as the LIP, and technical support was provided from SNV (Netherlands Development Organization) and INERA (*Institut de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles*, a public research agency of the Burkinabe government and one of four specialized institutes of the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique* - CNRST) at different points of the project.

Technical trainings for Producer associations were designed and implemented by a combination of LIPs, international organizations, and the Burkinabe government, including ATAD, SNV, and INERA, to build producer capacities. These trainings were administered through practical activities including farmer field schools (FFS), demonstration plots, and farm exchange visits. In Producer associations, training topics focused on specific crops or livestock husbandry. More generally, beneficiaries gained technical trainings on sustainable agricultural and natural resource management (NRM) practices. Technical trainings

focused on sustainable agricultural practices, like sowing and harvesting techniques, conservation practices, and NRM techniques, such as soil and water conservation techniques, production and planting of tree seedlings with high nutritional value, and trainings on construction of improved animal shelters. Beneficiaries learned how to produce and use certain inputs, such as fertilizer and compost, and where to purchase others, such as insecticides, as well as how to apply them safely.

Across focus groups, participants valued the technical training they received through ViM. Technical practices like sowing and harvesting that did not involve obtaining new resources were considered to improve the efficacy of their work and were frequently mentioned as still being implemented. Producer group members, village care groups members, MLAs, and SILC members all discussed using demi-lunes and zai pits to prevent erosion to this day. Members of Producer associations noted their sustained use of composting techniques and making their own fertilizer, as explained by the following participant:

During the project we were taught how to make fertilizer and apply it. Indeed, it was beneficial to us. Today we continue to do the work: every seventh day we start making a new hole with fertilizer on the 14th day we turn and water the previous ones...this has helped us consistently produce fertilizer and we bring it to the field with us.

The less sustainable practices necessitated resources, materials, or funds that were not always accessible. In a FG conducted in Bendengo, male producer group members explained how they had learned to construct stone bunds and saw the value in them, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

In this region, there are no more trees. But when we made the stone bunds, we saw a difference between where we built them and those places that did not build them, because with the stone bunds our trees are growing.

Despite seeing value in building stone bunds, after project ViM concluded, they have been limited by not having access to enough stones. Part of this issue was not having access to a truck to obtain the stones. This issue also came up with sustained use of inputs. Whereas ViM had organized input fairs and coordinated subsidies to inputs, ViM's departure ended these activities and benefits, ultimately resulting in decreased usage. Moreover, recent restrictions on gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic made it hard for the group to meet and work together and combine funds to accomplish these large projects.

Producer associations

A central approach to address SOI was working with agricultural Producer associations. The project worked with groups representing a range of crops and products including sorghum, cowpea, rice, commercial crops (tomatoes, onions, etc.), small ruminants, and poultry. At the onset of the project, PMOs and LIPs identified and evaluated existing Producer associations to select those that were dynamic and well-organized. Selected groups then engaged in participatory evaluations to determine their perceived needs. From there, ViM supported Producer associations through a range of trainings and activities described above responding to those needs and providing technical training.

In addition to technical trainings, ViM emphasized developing organizational capacity. LIP respondents described how ViM worked with Producer associations to update their systems, providing trainings in creating action plans and helping them improve internal organization and structure to meet criteria for legal recognition. LIPs referenced several efforts to help Producer associations become more official. For

example, one PMO interviewee said that LIPs signed contracts with the Producer associations to ensure continued support. Yet there was disagreement in the producer leaders focus group, as portrayed in the following excerpt:

It would have been good if the ViM project designated other structures or people who could continue to support us after the project ended. In addition, we have seen that other structures have official documents certifying their existence and work... If the ViM project had helped us become an official cooperative and union...that would help us to work better and receive recognition. We know that these structures exist here. But (project ViM) left, and we have no documents attesting to our existence.

Producer leaders

Training activities related to SOI and producer group support were expected to continue through the leadership of producer leaders, also referred to as endogenous producer trainers. During the project, producer leaders received technical training and best practices for conducting trainings with farmers. Training practices included running FFSs, establishing and maintaining demonstration plots, coordinating exchange visits with other farmers, and conducting home visits to provide farmers with advice. They also worked with, and often were a part of, Producer associations that also received support from the ViM project.

From the viewpoint of most LIP and PMO respondents, producer leaders should be sustaining these activities as a way to continue to work through new challenges that arise for farmers, with support from the local implementing partners, such as ATAD. Although ATAD continues to provide counsel to several of the service provider and beneficiary participants, their perspectives of these activities differed. For them, the FFSs and demonstration plots were implemented by producer leaders during the ViM project to provide specific technical training. Now that the training is done, they believe there is no longer a need to continue implementing these activities. When probed whether the approach could still be used to train farmers on emergent producer challenges, one ATAD participant argued that yes, in theory this should work, but worried that without project or LIP support, it was unclear that the necessary leadership skills were there.

That said, several producer leaders reported that they continue to work with farmers and act as go-betweens with technicians to bring information to farmers. Members of Producer associations and producer leaders from Koulougo and the surrounding area said that they continue to work as before, although they seem to have gained new support from new external projects. Participants from this FG could not recall who was providing the new trainings in which beneficiaries were participating.

Village vaccinators (VVs)

ViM established the role of VVs in project areas. VVs received training to administer poultry vaccinations and techniques to preserve livestock forage to provide these services and technical trainings to their communities. The project equipped them with materials necessary to carry out this work, including syringes, needles, and coolers to transport vaccines. They also received livestock feed seed and molds to conserve feed. These trainings and materials were supplied to help them establish their own businesses as vaccinators and livestock experts. During the project, VVs thus began their work of administering vaccines and training farmers how to conserve livestock feed. From the start, VVs charged for these services to cover their costs of inputs and travel and to generate some income. This model was meant to help sustain activities once the project concluded.

There were mixed responses pertaining to VVV's sustained work. One VVV described how his clientele has grown from providing vaccinations in six villages during the ViM project to nineteen. Others said that they have continued working but raised several challenges that impede them from growing their businesses. Although their work included a remuneration process, once the project ViM ended, they were on their own to identify business opportunities and had no systematic support. Beyond input providers, VVVs could not identify any linkages that continue to provide support today. Rather, they received training and expected to work for themselves with their new capacities in their communities. Participants felt they lacked institutional support that would help them better access resources and generate clientele. Some even felt a sense of abandonment post-project.

VVVs further noted challenges related to the materials needed for their work. As noted, project ViM equipped them with syringes, needles, and coolers to transport vaccines. A number of participants described how these materials have since “become defective”. They also lacked some necessary resources, namely a refrigerator to preserve vaccines that they purchased.

SO2: INCREASE HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

SO2 focused on increasing household incomes by training producers in improved production practices, as described in SO1, and by improving market linkages and access to business development services. While qualitative data could not collect information on gross margin for crops or value of purchased from smallholders, we explored how savings groups and village banks were continuing.

Savings groups and village banks

To improve access to financial resources and credit and strengthen financial management skills among beneficiaries and particularly among women, ViM partnered with local financial institution network, called the Réseau des Caisses Populaires du Burkina Faso (RCPB) to set up Savings and Internal Lending Committees (SILC) and village banks (*caisses villageoises*). Each group had between 15-30 members that met weekly with one designated group leader from within the group.

One objective of village banks was to support women starting or running micro or small enterprises who needed to borrow a larger amount of funds for their business activities. Throughout ViM the project, LIPs worked with groups to strengthen members' economic skills and opportunities by providing mentorship, advice, and ideas for business activities. These groups had a credit rate of 200,000 or 100,000 FCFA to begin with, and members could take 75,000 to 100,000 FCFA to begin with. After that, if some women wanted to borrow a greater amount, they could advance to the second level, called ACA, wherein they could borrow up to 1,000,000 FCFA. Many women enrolled and participated in this program and established businesses such as vegetable cultivation, retail sales, etc. Finally, in addition to gaining competencies in money-management, these groups benefited from cross-sectoral activities. In each FG with SILC members, participants described how in addition to the SILC-specific activities, they received a range of trainings, from health and sanitation practices, to building improved cookstoves, to agricultural and forestry trainings, as described here:

... We didn't have a perfect command of crops. But they came to show us how to dig holes, to plant so that the fruits would be more abundant than before.

Like other stakeholder types who participated in trainings, they also received inputs such as improved seeds and tree seedlings. In addition, beneficiaries received food rations distributed during the project.

Several participants noted that while loans are continuing, the group members do not work together anymore as they did during the ViM project; rather, everyone works by themselves. It is unclear exactly why groups have reduced their meetings, but constraints on mobility is one potential factor, as we will further describe in our section on the influence of shocks and stresses. Also, some of the activities have not continued, such as tree planting. However, digging zai pits is something that they learned during the project ViM, and they are continuing with that. In another focus group, participants explained that while they continued working as a group on agricultural production after the conclusion of the ViM Project, they stopped making financial contributions. It was unclear whether this was a contribution to the savings group fund or contributions to some collective agricultural production fund, but it is likely the former.

SO3: REDUCED CHRONIC MALNUTRITION AMONG CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS OF AGE AND PREGNANT AND LACTATING MOTHERS (PLW)

ViM implemented several activities aimed at alleviating food insecurity and specifically to reduce chronic malnutrition among children under five and pregnant and lactating mothers (PLW). These activities sought to improve mother and child nutrition (MHCN) practices, the quality of health services, and hygiene and sanitation practices. During the project, they established village care groups and fostered leadership through the service provider role of Mother Leader Animators (MLAs). To bolster initiatives to construct and maintain public and household latrines and hand-washing stations, they also created latrine committees. Each of these groups was expected to maintain several activities after the project ended.

Village care groups and MLAs

In ViM's the first year of the ViM project, ViM staff launched initiatives to identify MLAs and helped to establish neighborhood groups, later known as village care groups to help implement activities related to SO3. Village care groups received training in topics related to healthcare, WASH, and nutrition. From each village care groups, one individual was appointed as an MLA. During ViM the project, MLAs from each committee came together and received specialized training in these topics. Then each MLA went back and trained their committee on the topic.

A central activity of village care groups committees was thus to attend meetings and trainings that their designated MLA provided for them and to producer associations learnings on to others in their community. During the Activity project, committees held routine meetings and received education in WASH, childhood nutrition and healthcare, and issues surrounding women's health, such as prenatal care. As part of these trainings, participants learned various skills, including how to make soap and improved cookstoves. In some instances, they supported activities surrounding building latrines and hand-washing stations which were managed and led by project ViM-supported WASH committees. In addition, members of village care groups committees benefited from cross-sectoral trainings in agriculture managed by local implementing partner, ATAD. Project ViM also engaged care group members in workshops on women's rights and family relations, as expressed by the follow care group member:

We still practice what we learned about family relationships. For example, there must be agreement and understanding between the man and his wife. Men were told that they must not attack their own wives because the home is meant for understanding.

Finally, committee members also supported MLAs in distributing rations during the project for pregnant and lactating women and for children between 6 and 24 months of age. Both MLAs and committee members also received rations for their households.

Generally, village care groups participants felt that the practices learned during ViM are ingrained in their everyday lives. Participants from both MLA and village care group FGs contended that this also extended to community members who they trained or provided advice to. Compared to stakeholders who depend on mobility to use the skills they gained during ViM, much of the WASH and nutrition competency revolved around the home and thus continued without as much interruption from external factors. Both MLAs and VHCN members also reported that they still help other people learn how to make soaps and improved cookstoves, and generally provide advice to interested community members.

Some groups appear to be more active in their communities than others. Participants from village care groups in Dondollé described how they continue to conduct routine home visits with pregnant women and after they have given birth. This group also continues to provide trainings on vaccinating children. In Zhorkoum, committee members continue to provide information on child health and nutrition and administer vaccinations. In Koulougo, participants from a mixed-gender focus group discussed their sustained capacity to help households construct improved latrines but noted that they only do this work when the household has the resources to purchase needed materials. Quantitative data will help determine how often this occurs.

The data could not confirm how regularly committees continued to meet, although some respondents identified challenges that pointed to decreased group meetings. In each area, mobility was restricted due to heightened fear of terrorist attacks or the COVID-19 pandemic. In Koulougo, participants also noted that the mandates put in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19 put restrictions on the group size of gatherings, which also impacted their work.

As noted, MLAs were selected from within the village care groups. ViM provided them with training in health, nutrition, prenatal care, and sanitation that they then brought back to their committees. In addition to facilitating routine meetings with their designated village care groups committee, they met monthly with other MLAs in their commune and received ongoing training from the LIPs and other partners. During project ViM, they also conducted community trainings with their groups, home visits, and were linked with the local health clinics and community health agents (CHAs). Although the participants did not bring up specific relationships with CHAs, annual reports describe how MLAs were trained in screening, referral, and home visit follow-ups to assist CHAs responsibilities of covering 100% of their designated villages (*Fiscal Year 2013 Annual Results Report: ACDI/VOCA – BURKINA FASO, 2013*).

Like the village care groups committee members, MLA participants appraised the skills, competencies, and knowledge cultivated through ViM. But outside of continuing to use practices related to health, nutrition, and WASH, their implementation of activities appears to have diminished in some areas. MLA participants in Gounghin and Koulougo explained that when someone comes and asks to learn from them, they happily train the person from their home. However, they no longer conduct community trainings or attend regular MLA meetings. In Delga, MLAs asserted that they have continued to conduct sensitizations with women and to advise them on how to prevent, track, and manage child malnutrition, using the hand measurements and training books they received through ViM to take child measurements and recommending where necessary to visit the health clinic and feed them a nutrient-dense porridge.

Community health agents (CHAs)

In annual, quarterly, and evaluation reports, community health agents were interchangeably called CHAs or ASBCs, and later CBHA's. Here we refer to them as CHAs. During project ViM, CHAs received consistent training in growth monitoring and promotion (GMP) and community case management of diarrheal disease. They also worked with local health clinics and the staff therein. In addition, they engaged with MLAs, who helped them accomplish their objectives of conducting community screenings, referrals, and home visit follow-ups.

During the activity, ViM began providing a salary to CHAs while simultaneously engaging in a national-level debate to integrate CHAs into government health systems. In January 2016, the Ministry of Health officially recognized CHAs and began paying the salary of 20,000CFA (\$36) per month (FY 2017, P19). Although further data is needed from the quantitative study, CHA FG participants asserted that since the project ViM ended, they are no longer receiving payment. At the same time, they mentioned receiving continued support through emergent organizations, so it is unclear what has changed since the project ended. This is an important finding to follow up with.

CROSS-CUTTING ACTIVITIES

Mass communication messaging

The ViM project coordinated mass communication messaging to raise awareness on a range of topics reflecting each strategic objective and the cross-cutting topics. Not only were these initiatives carried out through sensitizations carried out by the LIPs and trained service providers, but also through theater performances and radio programming.

Starting in the early years of the activity, ViM trained theater actors on targeted knowledge ranging from agricultural and WASH practices to gender relations. Theater troupes developed and presented plays based on the materials to sensitize communities in ViM project areas. Several interviewed LIPs referenced these performances, but all assumed that they were expected to end, and indeed did, once project ViM ended. None of the beneficiaries or service providers brought up these plays.

ViM partnered with Farm Radio International (FRI) and local radio station Radio Manegda to implement radio programming that responded to community needs and interests. In an interview with a representative from FRI, we learned that the organization provided support by training radio station teams and LIPs to use their interactive and digital innovation services to design and produce radio programs and to solicit feedback from listeners. FRI provided training on radio production and radio equipment.

To develop content for radio programs, FRI conducted formative research to learn about community listening habits and to identify important themes. Project ViM also invited cross-sector experts to contribute to development of content, including gender consultants, agricultural extension agents, and representatives from the ministry of agriculture. FRI and LIPs also coordinated radio listening groups to solicit feedback from the community on programming. Radio programming content covered agriculture, health, and cross-cutting topics. Gender was a prominent topic, with programs focused on the role of rural women in household food security, women's participation in governance, women's access to land, and engaging men in childcare responsibilities.

FRI also supplied radio equipment which they helped to install and trained LIPs how to use. They also covered costs of production during the activity. This equipment was left at the radio stations after the project ViM. But while beneficiaries were trained to use this equipment, it is unclear the degree to which they have continued to produce radio programming, especially related to gender integration and women's empowerment.

The FRI respondent contended that their organization continues to provide on-going consulting in radio production to participants from the ViM project, but further exploration is needed to determine who is benefiting from this. All other LIP respondents that mentioned the radio program activities believed that they had not continued. Additionally, none of the focus group participants referenced these activities. Follow up with other stakeholders is needed to understand if radio programs and listening groups have continued since project ViM ended.

Literacy education

To enhance women's capacities to participate in ViM activities, the project coordinated functional literacy trainings. One LIP respondent explained:

ViM activities worked not only to enable women's participation but their empowerment. It is the same for the literacy activities, which aimed to reinforce their levels as often (functional literacy) was necessary to be able to take on the responsibilities of their roles with ViM.

Another LIP representative further discussed how literacy education was often embedded in other training activities, such as trainings to make soaps or improved stoves. They also emphasized how increasing women's literacy levels lent to enhanced autonomy.

The Dondollé FG comprised of VHCN members lauded the literacy initiatives, also recognizing how it expanded their capacity to conduct activities and improved communication skills. Revealing post-project impacts, participants also highlighted how the training enabled one community member to pursue her education in university, another to become a primary school teacher. While the impact of literacy education appears to continue, there was no evidence that the training itself has continued in any systematic way.

Impact on women's empowerment and gender integration

Strong evidence for ViM's impact on gender relationships and women's empowerment post-project was difficult to secure during this qualitative phase. Most activities specifically related to this objective, such as sensitizations through radio programming and theatre performances, were assumed to have not continued by LIP respondents.

LIP respondents that worked specifically on this objective asserted that there were major advances in women's empowerment thanks to ViM. One participant described how women were more often in leadership roles in mixed groups. As previously noted, literacy training was also seen as an essential contribution to improving women's autonomy and capacity to conduct activities.

The work to strengthen women's decision-making power had varied results. One LIP respondent told the story of a wife who received technical training to construct zai pit erosion protections in their field. At first, her husband would not let her construct zai pits in their field. But after multiple discussions:

Ultimately, she asked to have a few square meters to test the techniques in the field, and her husband granted it. When she did, it surprised the husband so much that when the next season came, it was the husband who said that they should use zai in the whole field.

Although this example shows positive results, the LIP respondent still felt that women's lack of autonomy and decision-making power was a detriment to overall impact. They continued:

God only knows how many women have technical capacities, but they do not have the decision-making power in household operations. It is the man who decides how to conduct agricultural work. So, the woman knows, but she cannot decide. These external factors play a huge role in sustainability because if (a woman) comes to learn but is not allowed to apply, will she continue to go?

Others shared their observations of the impact of gender integration efforts. Although still discouraged that women do not enjoy the same rights as men, one partner from the Ministry of Agriculture described how since the ViM project if you go to the beneficiary agricultural plots, lowland fields, and markets, you see more women there than ever before, sometimes even exceeding the number of men. Another respondent observed a shift in self-esteem and how women carried themselves. Unfortunately, many LIP respondents still felt that women lacked decision-making power. Several partners pointed out that women's lack of rights remains a central challenge to sustaining activities and impacts.

In focus groups, MLAs consistently reported that their work earned them respect from community members, often citing it as a key motivation as illustrated by excerpts from two different MLA FGs:

That is what helps us to continue, it is the respect that people have for us.

It is the positive appreciation from people that encourages us to continue our activities.

Endline indicators collected as part of quantitative data to evaluate the impact of these activities assessed changes in women's decision-making, shifts in women's opinions on whether it is justifiable for a man to hit his wife, and indications of respect gained through their roles as service providers (e.g. MLA's work). These indicators will be revisited during the quantitative phase of the study.

Environmental sustainability

ViM beneficiaries and service providers were trained to build cookstoves to reduce the amount of firewood needed for cooking and offered trees to plant, using "utilitarian" species to prevent erosion, regenerate soil structure, and provide an alternate source of key nutrients for household consumption. As participants discussed these activities, it was clear how ViM integrated cross-cutting issues, such as environmental sustainability, to address other strategic objectives. That said, a major challenge related to tree-planting cited was the lack of water. SILC members from Dondolé discussed receiving moringa trees during project ViM but noted that they had not grown well over the years due to inadequate water and competition from noxious weeds.

HOW DID KEY FACTORS- CAPACITIES, MOTIVATION, RESOURCES, AND LINKAGES- CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABILITY?

During the project, participants felt they were consistently building capacities, reported multiple motivations, ready access to resources, and supportive linkages. In sustained activities and behaviors, these four factors remained present albeit weakened two years after the project ended. Where activities did not continue, one or more of these factors did not exist.

CAPACITIES

A clear focus of the ViM project was to strengthen capacities. The majority of program partners considered capacity-building to be the chief approach to sustainability, and over half of respondents referenced it as key to the exit strategy. Service providers and beneficiaries alike were provided training and practical opportunities to develop skills that they would be able to continue on their own once the project concluded.

In FGs, all stakeholder types lauded the capacities they developed through their engagement with ViM. MLAs and village care groups members felt that the knowledge they gained through ViM was invaluable for themselves, their households, and to help develop their communities. Producer associations likewise valued the training they received, which helped them develop both technical and organizational skills. SILC group members also received training to manage their groups and to work with the financial institutions and village banks. All stakeholders were provided with cross-cutting trainings aimed at gender and the environment.

FG participants felt they gained essential knowledge that they have retained and continue to apply. When asked what makes them think that capacities are sustained, one village care groups member observed:

If you walk into most women's yards, it is clean. Some did not know how to make porridge to give a child to eat, but with the training on porridge preparation during the project, they continue to prepare this porridge for their kids. Even regarding vaccinations, today we continue to do vaccinations and weighing children. If you see a pregnant woman today, she is following the normal weighing procedures, and when they give birth, they have their children vaccinated.

In a FG with members of Producer associations, one participant described how project ViM helped them learn improved agricultural practices and they were thereafter motivated to learn more and to teach others.

Although participants appreciated the capacities gained through their engagement with ViM, most described how the end of the project left them without a link for continued development. For the most part, MLAs and village care groups members felt they lacked continued linkages to the clinics or CHAs they worked with during ViM, and thus had no source of new information. Importantly, the participants from groups citing continued opportunities for trainings also had new organizations implement projects in their areas. Otherwise, health sector service providers and beneficiaries cited the lack of new information as a primary challenge to continue their work. One MLA from Gounghin explained:

What is preventing the sustainability of our work? We no longer gain new knowledge, as we are no longer receiving training.

Most VVVs and producer group members said they lacked a channel for obtaining new relevant information that could help their work, with only one exception. Many participants expressed a feeling of abandonment, as expressed by one VVV:

The biggest change since the project left is there are no more trainings and follow-ups. We are left to ourselves to continue to carry out our tasks. So it is very difficult, but we continue according to what we had learned. We strive to continue to always be available when people need our services, but the work goes slowly as if it was going to end.

RESOURCES

Participants were asked where they gained access to materials and resources during and after ViM the project. In several cases, participants said that during the activity, materials and resources were given to them “by the project”. At different points of the activity, service providers received materials and toolkits to support their activities. VVV’s were provided vaccination equipment and materials to grow and conserve livestock feed. CHA’s were provided tools to take anthropometric measurements. MLA’s received supplies such as picture books and flip charts to help them conduct group health/nutrition sessions with their neighborhood groups. In lieu of financial remuneration, MLAs were also offered agricultural and livestock training and given goats or chickens to support their livelihoods. All service providers also referenced receiving some kind of clothing or outfit that helped to distinguish them in their role.

Practically all service providers and beneficiaries received agricultural supplies, like improved seeds or tree seedlings. Producer associations received other agricultural tools including shovels and wheelbarrows and were provided materials for certain activities. For Producer associations engaged in ViM’s lowlands improvement project, the project provided the equipment to construct irrigated perimeters and install water catchment devices. SILC members also received toolkits to accompany the training they received during the project.

When asked where they accessed resources since Project ViM ended, the majority of participants said they didn’t have a new source. This is well-reflected in an excerpt from a women’s focus group of producer leaders from Koutoula-Yarcé. After listing the materials needed for their work, the facilitator asked:

Facilitator: During the project, did you have access to these resources? If you needed to replenish a resource, how would you do so?

Participant 1: It was the project.

Participant 2: Yes, it was the project who came to Kaya and called us so that they could deliver the materials.

Facilitator: And since the end of the project, how do you access these materials?

Participant 3: Since the end of the project, we have not had any new materials to work, we don’t have the means to buy new materials for work.

This theme implicates an issue of simply handing out materials and resources during a project, which becomes an expectation. Across stakeholder types, participants felt they had limited sustained access to needed materials. Without what was seen as needed materials, service providers felt blocked from conducting trainings. This especially created a challenge to recruiting and training new community

members or group members. For example, in a focus group with SILC beneficiaries, one participant described how they do not have new working manuals to give to new members. MLAs described similar challenges, describing how they received picture books to support their work

Part of the perception of non-accessibility is that resources provided were seen as non-local or even as “white people” materials. This theme came out from agricultural activities to nutrition activities alike. For example, MLAs explained that women who received food rations comprising a specific imported flour were skeptical about using a local substitute.

While some of the materials provided were likely brought in from outside the community, the ViM project did make efforts to promote local resources and to link service providers and beneficiaries to sources of materials. The input fairs implemented during the project aimed not only at introducing producers to different inputs, but also to connect producers with input providers. Upon further probing, it seemed that the problem wasn’t necessarily that the materials aren’t available, but that participants often lacked the financial resources to purchase materials on their own. This is an important nuance to explore further, as there are many possible contributing factors to this challenge. While it may be true that many beneficiaries and service providers don’t have the financial resources to purchase materials, it may also be true that the resource of interest isn’t considered a worthwhile expense at the household level – that the benefit isn’t recognized.

For service providers, limited resources restricted implementation of certain activities. MLAs explained that without some form of remuneration or sustained linkages, they could not purchase materials to conduct certain trainings like making soap or improved cookstoves. VVVs on the other hand were, in theory, remunerated for their work and could thus purchase basic materials such as vaccines. However, they lacked certain resources necessary in this context, namely a refrigerator in which to store vaccines that they must purchase as inputs. Having the resources to store vaccines is essential in this context because one vial of vaccine is good for about 200 chickens, but most clients have small flocks. Unless the VVV sets up multiple vaccinations during the time period right after they purchase the vaccine, they cannot make up for the costs of inputs.

As was the case with capacities, some village care groups participants did not share the challenge of access to resources post-project ViM as a result of their continued work through the support of a new organization/intervention. For example, members from a village care groups committee in Zorkhoum comprised of CHAs reported that after ViM left, a new project arrived, picking up on with the provision of training and materials, thus enabling them to continue to implement activities.

MOTIVATION

Recognition of the value of activities and practices learned under the ViM project was one of the most-cited sources of motivation that cut across beneficiary and service provider types. Participants saw the benefits of activities for themselves and for community development more broadly and were motivated to share these benefits. This was particularly true for certain health, nutrition, and WASH activities and for agricultural production. MLAs and village care group members felt inspired and responsible to continue working to decrease child malnutrition and to educate their communities of the importance of vaccinations. Producer leaders and members of Producer associations felt that they had increased their production capacity due to their training and support from ViM.

Another principal motivating factor across participant type was knowledge and skills acquisition offered through ViM's activities. This motivation was especially strong during project ViM, when they were regularly receiving trainings and participating in activities. After the project, stakeholders maintained motivation to continue to learn in their respective fields, but inadequate linkages restricted the degree to which most participants felt they had a source for new information. In the cases where new organizations had launched activities in their communities, participants portrayed their motivation to continue developing capacity. For example, in Zorkhoum, participants representing the areas' village care groups have maintained their activities, benefitting from further training and support from a new organization. Unfortunately, most participants did not feel they had linkages to former or new sources of information or training.

When discussing their motivations, a producer group member from Bendengo exclaimed that even if they had to pay for the cost of travel themselves, they would gladly travel to receive further training. This reflects how the motivation to strengthen capacity coincided with another frequently cited motivation: enjoyment or interest in the work itself. Service providers and beneficiaries from agricultural and health sectors emphasized how they were motivated by “an awakening of consciousness and knowledge”, to learn about things other than their normal work, and “for love” or “enjoyment” of the work. Several participants described how they felt proud doing this work and were motivated by the respect it helped to garner from their community. These motivations were sustained even two years after the project, although they did not necessarily translate into action.

MLAs were motivated by community development and enjoyment/interest for the work, but their decreased activity level underscores how this is not motivation enough. Aside from VVVs, all service providers were expected to continue activities without remuneration, as volunteer work. While some respondents felt that the volunteer approach was good for sustainability, most LIP participants saw it as a flawed approach, as articulated by the following respondent:

To tell the truth, the biggest challenge was the volunteer expectations. People are no longer ready to sacrifice their time, their energies, and their resources for the community without, in return, benefiting from them either the beneficiaries, or in their own households, or from the development agent partners. This is one of the shortcomings that played a role in sustainability. While we were there, all were engaged, but after our departure some say ‘the supervisors are no longer here, why should I bother?’.

LINKAGES

LIP respondents, service providers, and beneficiaries all felt that the ViM project did not effectively established vertical linkages to help activities continue. While MLAs and village care groups members worked with health agents from local clinics during the project, nearly all participants reported that these linkages had not continued and lamented the lack of stronger, or perhaps formal, connections. As previously noted, this affected their access to new information, training, and resources.

There were some contradictions when discussing linkages. LIPs discussed several activities implemented to establish vertical linkages between producers, Producer associations, VVVs, producer leaders and input providers and other support services. LIPs described the importance of input fairs, where producers were introduced to input providers to enhance their access to key resources once the

project concluded. From the perspectives of producers, producer leaders, and VVVs, these input fairs do not seem to have built lasting relationships or linkages.

A few LIPs recognized the lack of attention to bolstering linkages to support service providers' sustained activities. One LIP reflected on this as a challenge for MLAs:

The mother leaders there, there has not been an institutionalization allowing them to be integrated into the health system. Since then, mother leaders have not been recognized by health facilities as a resource that can support them to promote activities in health, nutrition, hygiene, and sanitation.

Another theme that emerged in the vein of linkages was participants' feeling that the project had abandoned them, some naming broken promises. Producer group members from Delga said that ViM promised them a storage facility to store livestock feed that never came to fruition. MLAs from Koulougou said they never received promised animals and pots and dishes to make soaps. Producer leaders in Koutoula-Yarcé explained:

They promised to help us with fertilizer and with breeding cattle and how to work with them so that we can use the manure in our fields. But they could not do all of this before leaving, they just told us about it. Even the barrels and wheelbarrows that were promised, we did not get them. I know that if all these promises were kept today, we would have seen the benefits.

This feeling of abandonment and broken promises underscores participants' feeling that they lacked a strong network and supportive linkages.

Although vertical linkages were not seen as well-established, project ViM appeared to have more successfully bolstered horizontal, or peer-to-peer linkages. Multiple participants pointed to increased social cohesion as a positive impact from the ViM project that carried over as a key motivator to sustain activities. In a focus group of MLAs from around Koulougo, one participant described how the ViM project helped to diminish the fear of talking to new people.

Before, if we saw strangers we would quickly go home. If a meeting was called, even some men would not go out. Now we are sitting and discussing together. Nowadays, when a meeting is called, the village chief himself will come.

This point was further emphasized by participants in two different focus groups:

This work made us closer to older people. Before young women like myself would say, 'I want to get closer to the mother [older, respected women in the village], but I am afraid of them'. Now we share the same fields and work in the same groups together. We laugh together.

The project united us women. Coming together to work is itself a motivation for us. First, it is a motivation. Second, we are able to share our experiences together and we feel united together no matter what the circumstance. Third, it creates peace among us.

ViM's specified target to empower women through different project activities led participants to feel "united as women". As one MLA participant explained, "(ViM) created an understanding between us women, and life has become easier for us".

HOW HAVE SHOCKS AND STRESSES AFFECTED THE SUSTAINABILITY OF ACTIVITIES INCLUDING SERVICE PROVISION, SERVICE PARTICIPATION, AND BEHAVIOR CHANGES?

Since the 2018 conclusion of ViM in Kaya, the commune has been confronted by a number of shocks and stresses that could affect the sustainability of ViM implemented activities and impact. As part of this study's resilience assessment, we asked participants what shocks and stresses they feel have affected their lives and their capacity to continue activities since the project ended in 2018. The predominant shocks revolved around the ongoing insecurity from terrorist activity in the area and the region generally. A prevailing strain is the surge of displaced persons, refugees coming in from other areas of Burkina Faso or the region generally to flee violence. Several participants described how the influx of IDPs has constrained resources in their areas. Participants lamented shortages of resources including food, water, limited spaces for their children in local schools, and limited cultivatable land. FG participants further described how the terrorism and influx of IDPs created a state of unrest and uncertainty, consistently wary of the potential need to pick up and leave as other IDPs had come to them, as illustrated by the following producer group member:

We are seated, but we do not know if we will need to depart. This is a constraint blocking the continuity of our activities because if you are not in your locality, there are no more activities.

These discussions also revealed how the insecurity and influx of IDPs has generated fear that further constrains their work and well-being. Participants described barriers to mobility which affects service providers' and beneficiaries' abilities to conduct or participate in certain activities. A notable change in activities across participant categories was the reduction in regular meetings. One LIP interviewee explained:

I think that the major challenge surrounds the question of security that has emerged with time and derailed almost all of the field activities...People cannot move around freely for activities that they want to implement, and the populations are being displaced, so it is truly a major problem.

This notion was echoed by many participants in focus groups, especially in the effect on gathering in groups. In a FG of producer group members from Faughin, one participant elaborated:

The fact that we cannot meet together in groups disrupts all of our activities. Whether it is building stone bunds or making compost: these activities are group activities. Now with the insecurity, we cannot work in groups, so for example, if we need to move stones for the stone bunds, one person alone cannot pay for a truck...Now that we cannot gather together it is just you by yourself working for hours without getting anything done.

The rising COVID-19 pandemic was another noted shock to mobility and holding group meetings.

Whereas shocks refer to external short-term deviations that negatively affect a populations' well-being, stresses are the long-term trends that jeopardize stability (Zseleczky & Yosef, 2014). Climate change was the most cited stress affecting participants, especially as it affects agricultural production. In particular, participants referenced the persistent drought in their area. A few participants also expressed how the shocks and stresses of insecurity and climate change led to the stress of food insecurity.

EXIT PROCESSES

ViM's Sustainability Plan and Exit Strategy, as described in the ViM Final Evaluation Report (*Final Evaluation of Victory Against Malnutrition (ViM) Project, Burkina Faso, 2018*, p. 27), focused on generating sustained technical and managerial capacities and was implemented in the following three phases:

- Phase down: incremental decrease of programmatic support and provision of resources
- Phase over: transfer support duties to local and/or permanent institutions
- Phase out: conclude program interventions

To better understand exit processes, we asked LIP respondents to elaborate on the specific approaches used as part of the exit and sustainability strategies. The following themes emerged when discussing the exit strategy:

- Started the exit strategy at the beginning of the project
- Participants took control of activities prior to the end of the project
- Used participatory approaches
- Received project extension

STARTING THE EXIT STRATEGY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT

About half of the 20 LIPs interviewed said that planning for the exit strategy began from the start of the project. One LIP extrapolated on this approach for the VHCN groups:

From the moment they were organized into VHCN groups, they received training in health and nutrition. As soon as the VHCNs were operational and had the necessary documents, we have oriented them towards a positive exit. Even in 2014, beneficiaries knew that in 2017 or 2018 the ViM project would end and that what is most important is to keep working to ensure the sustainability of the work we have done. And thus, we saw that even at the level of each household, individual beneficiaries took ownership of the process and started working without us. We only played a supervisory and technical support role until the project ended.

Although all LIPs felt that starting the exit strategy from the beginning was important for sustainability, five interviewees felt that exit strategy activities started too late. Two respondents contended that it was not until the last year of the project that the exit strategy was elaborated and implemented. This was considered a crucial limitation of the exit strategy for these five respondents.

PARTICIPANTS TOOK CONTROL OF ACTIVITIES PRIOR TO THE END OF THE PROJECT

This previous excerpt further exemplifies the strategy of producer association control and implementation of activities to the service providers and beneficiaries prior to concluding the project. In the first few years of the project, participants received education and practical trainings in their respective activities, facilitated by LIPs. In the last two years the project implementors stepped back, allowing the service providers to conduct the activities, providing support where needed. Additionally, local associations which were in charge of executing project activities on the ground during ViM project implementation, including the Producer associations were in charge of developing plans to continue implementing these activities and programs after ViM project's closure. Participants were also facilitated in continuing project activities by government technical services.

RECEIVED PROJECT EXTENSION

Originally, the ViM project was meant to conclude in 2016, but they received a two-year extension to continue through 2018. On one hand, this enabled project implementers to continue working with beneficiaries to enhance their capacity to take over once project ViM ended. However, the process of waiting to see if they received the extension was clouded in uncertainty for the ViM personnel, resulting in considerable staff turnover.

ESTABLISHED A DIVERSE TEAM OF PARTNERS TO PROVIDE SUPPORT

Each LIP respondent discussed the integrated team of partners that contributed to the ViM project. ViM was managed by the awardee, ACDI/VOCA, in partnership with Save the Children (SC) and the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) and three Local Implementing Partners (LIPs, or *Partenaires locaux d'exécution du projet/PLEP*). The LIPs ensured that ViM activities were bolstered with the necessary state, technical, managerial and on-the-ground expertise. This team supported the range of activities in the field and was comprised of actors from the state, local cooperatives, private companies, research institutes, and local and international NGOs. State actors included ministry level representatives and regional directorates.

Local partnerships were established to ensure that activities maintained the necessary level of support to continue after the conclusion of the project. While the project awardee, ACDI/VOCA, and partners Save the Children and SNV would no longer be working in the area, these other local actors were expected to continue their support. LIP respondents and FGs with service providers and beneficiaries provided evidence that ATAD remained active in the project areas, providing on-going support. Five service provider FGs and two beneficiary FGs discussed how they remained in touch with ATAD agents. The ATAD partners that we interviewed also discussed their continued presence in the field working with ViM beneficiaries. FRI also asserted that they continued to work with those that had received their radio training, but this seemed to be a general principle of the organization rather than a specific activity being conducted in Kaya.

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH AND PARTICIPATORY EVALUATIONS

Just as ViM generated a diverse team LIPs, the program also included a number of participatory evaluations, both to determine program rollout and execution for regular monitoring and evaluation, and also to evaluate program impacts at program exit. For example, between September and October

of 2018, project ViM conducted several participatory evaluation workshops with community actors such as municipal offices and local government officials. One example of this was the program's evaluation workshops related to land tenure access, which were implemented to ensure that land tenure issues were accounted for in program rollout. When deficiencies were identified, they were addressed with implementing partners, especially to ensure that local governments continued to provide land tenure access and other programs instituted during ViM project's implementation. Yearly participatory evaluations were also conducted with Producer associations, which were made up of ViM project beneficiaries participating in agricultural programs and activities. ViM program partners found that working through Producer associations and conducting yearly evaluations enabled ViM to prepare for the exit strategy starting early in the process.

In contrast to successful implementation of many participatory evaluations, other evaluations did not occur, specifically for activities that were implemented shortly before project ViM's closure; for example, threshing machines and other machinery related to lowlands improvement projects arrived shortly before project closure, and therefore, ViM planned for input providers to conduct trainings on machinery use with project beneficiaries, since project ViM staff would no longer be in the field. Due to the late implementation of this component, it was not possible to evaluate this activity. In terms of research, some research initiatives related to agricultural production were conducted by INERA and other partners, on subjects including local production systems and improved seed varieties. This research has had both direct and indirect effects on informing project implementation and post-project sustainability.

APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABILITY

Throughout interviews, LIPs identified approaches used to improve the sustainability of project impacts and activities. These included:

- Contracts and documentation
- Cross-cutting activities
- Markets and commercialization
- Working with previously established groups
- Participatory and community-level organizing
- Engaging government ministries

CONTRACTS AND DOCUMENTATION

One of these methods consisted of using documentation and contracts to ensure continued provision of services by ViM partners to project beneficiaries. For example, ViM signed contracts with Ministry of Women, National Solidarity, and Family/Ministry for Promotion of Women and Gender (MFSNF/MPFG) of the Burkinabe government to continue conducting trainings, plays, and radio campaigns to sensitize the public related to women's rights and gender equality. Project ViM also signed contracts with the three LIPs to continue providing technical and material assistance as well as consulting, trainings, and

supervision. The LIPs in turn signed contracts with Producer associations and individual service providers to preserve linkages between various project stakeholders, including local civil society organizations, individual beneficiaries, and the private sector. To continue supporting farmers with quality extension education, ViM ensured that contracts signed between ViM and the LIPs and between the LIPs and the Producer associations included provisions for creating demonstration plots for continuation of agricultural extension activities (including Farmer Field School / FFS trainings). Contracts were also signed between ViM and the DRAAH-CN regional office of the Ministry of Agriculture, stipulating that the government would continue providing technical and material services to project beneficiaries after the project conclusion. Contracts were also signed with village latrine construction foremen to continue following up on latrine service delivery after project closure. It was unclear from the data the specific content of these contracts.

CROSS-CUTTING ACTIVITIES

Cross-cutting activities were also envisaged by the ViM project team to ensure continued service delivery. Many participants noted how the focus on gender was key for sustainability. Women's empowerment was woven throughout Project ViM's activities. Project ViM worked to strengthen women's autonomy by improving their access to information and resources through trainings and sensitizations and bolstering women's participation in different committees. They also established leadership positions, such as MLAs, for women to cultivate health, nutrition and WASH skills and provide valued services tailored support to their peer communities. At the same time, ViM launched initiatives to engage all community members in discussions about women's rights through radio programming and theater performances. MLAs were expected to continue providing these sensitization services after project closure, supported by the Burkina Faso Ministry of Women, National Solidarity, and Family/Ministry for Promotion of Women and Gender (MFSNF/MPFG) of the Burkinabe government.

Another cross-cutting area focused on integrated natural resources management (NRM) approaches, as environmental questions touched on multiple project interventions including animal husbandry, agriculture, and livelihoods. Environmental activities included farm-level soil and water conservation, production of organic compost, planting of trees that can be used as a food source to improve household nutrition (moringa), and making and using improved cookstoves that reduce wood charcoal usage and improve indoor air pollution. Soil and water conservation activities as well as compost production are being continued by the LIPs, working directly with Producer associations and individual farmers at the household level. ATAD mentioned the formation of CES/DRS groups focused on soil and water conservation and soil protection and restoration (*conservation des eaux et des sols / défense et restauration des sols*, CES/DRS). ATAD supports these groups by providing extension advice, trainings, and basic materials and tools for soil and water conservation activities. The MLAs are in charge of following up on the improved cookstoves program to make sure that stoves are working and being used properly.

MARKETS AND COMMERCIALIZATION

Project ViM's exit strategy included a focus on market facilitation to enable semi-subsistence farmers to commercialize at least a portion of their produce more effectively in local and regional markets. Among these initiatives was the development of a market information system called SIMAGRI, but it is unclear to what extent this resource was taken up and used successfully by farmers to assist them in accessing

markets. The lowlands and irrigated perimeter improvement programs were also related to market access, as these activities facilitated the development of rice and vegetable market gardening that would not have been possible without high quality lowland and irrigated plots. ViM project stakeholders reported that these activities have continued to be implemented by Producer associations throughout the two years since project closure. Other market facilitation activities included input fairs to introduce input providers to farmers and Producer associations, but these fairs have not continued after ViM's project closure. Interviews with LIPs revealed that the input fairs were not intended to continue after project closure, because they have already accomplished their purpose of helping providers and farmers to make contact with one another and network. SILC groups were also trained to assist farmers with obtaining the financial resources necessary to commercialize their produce, and these activities have continued. Additionally, access to credit and insurance through Ecobank Burkina SA, a ViM project partner, area also likely continuing, according to interviews with LIPs.

WORKING WITH PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED GROUPS

The ViM project made an effort to work with organizations and service providers that already existed at the community level both before and during project implementation, including village vaccinators, Producer associations, and SILCs. Since many of these organizations were already in existence at project baseline, they were deemed to be satisfactory structures through which to ensure continuation of project activities after the ViM project team exited the region. Many of these groups were facilitated by the ViM project to improve their service delivery, access needed materials, recruit new members, find new partners in the NGO, private, and governmental sectors, and conduct group activities and meetings more frequently. In cases where such groups did not exist, ViM facilitated community-level organizing to create new groups, as discussed in further detail below.

PARTICIPATORY AND COMMUNITY-LEVEL ORGANIZING

A key part of the ViM project's exit strategy involved enabling civil society organizations to organize and continue project activities in beneficiary communities beyond the conclusion of the project. These included Village Development Councils (VDC), Producer associations, village care groups, SILCs, lead farmer trainers, village poultry vaccinators (VVs), mother leader animators (MLAs), and other village leaders. Interviews with stakeholders showed that these actors and committees were still somewhat active two years after the conclusion of project ViM, with varying levels of activity. For example, focus group discussions on SILC groups revealed that although lending and savings are continuing in some areas, members have stopped making financial contributions in other communities. Additionally, some group members reported that the group continued with SILC activities but that group meetings were occurring less frequently. However, most focus group members agreed that they had learned valuable financial management principles from the SILC activities.

Interviews with VVs revealed differing degrees of activity. For the most part, vaccinators continued providing vaccination services in communities they had provided services to during project ViM. However, several VVs mentioned issues with lack of access to necessary materials and lack of capacity to pay for services among farmers as hindrances to full provision of services as envisaged by the ViM project. Focus groups and interviews with producer association members revealed that at least some of these groups are still functioning and meeting regularly, although not all activities are being continued in all groups. For example, some Producer associations stated that the FFS programs were no longer needed because farmers had already learned and mastered the GAPs taught in the FFS modules during

ViM program implementation. Others mentioned that demonstration plots were not being kept up anymore because of lack of available land. However, Producer associations continue to meet in some areas and to maintain linkages with input providers, LIPs, and government organizations such as INERA. Producer associations participate particularly in CES/DRS activities, internal lending, compost production, and reproduction and use of improved seeds, among other activities.

ENGAGING GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES

Several government ministries were engaged to continue interfacing with project stakeholders, including LIPs, community organizations, and individual beneficiaries. These engagements were solidified through signing of contracts between ViM and various Burkinabe government ministries as described above. Interviews with project ViM stakeholders, including representatives of government ministries, revealed that these linkages were chiefly envisaged as technical in nature, where government ministries provide technical support to civil society organizations made up of ViM project beneficiaries to enable them to continue applying the principles and techniques they learned during ViM implementation. For example, the DRAAH-CN, the Regional Directorate of Agriculture and Water Management of the Centre-Nord region, continued to visit farmers and follow up with them on implementation of GAPS that they had learned during the ViM project, including conservation agriculture activities as described above. The MFSNF/MPFG was also available as a resource to MLAs who were responsible for continuing to educate and sensitize the public regarding women's rights and gender issues. Additionally, the INERA agricultural research institute has continued providing technical services to beneficiary farmers through knowledge transfer mechanisms.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative research underscored the importance of ensuring that all four key factors – capacities, motivation, linkages, and resources- are sustained post-project. In addition, the influence that external factors such as terrorism, influx of IDPs, and climate change had on sustained activities underpins the need for purposeful resilience-building initiatives targeting context-specific shocks and stresses. Results from this study will inform the development of quantitative instruments for the next phase of the study. Preliminary analysis of qualitative study data has led to the development of the following recommendations for increasing the post-project sustainability of ViM as well as related future projects.

INTEGRATE SERVICE PROVIDERS INTO PERMANENT SYSTEMS [LINKAGES]

Service providers and beneficiaries were not well-integrated into permanent systems, such as government institutions or local private companies, that could provide them needed support post-project. Although MLAs worked with local health clinics and CHAs during the project, no formal linkages were established to ensure that the relationship continued after the project ended. This left MLAs, a well-trained crew of health change agents, without support and resources needed to continue their duties, resulting in a dramatic decrease in activities. In general, service providers/beneficiaries trained under ViM (or ViMPlus) could be an asset to strengthen the capacities of more permanent/formal systems if better integrated during the project. However, it should not be assumed this will happen without purposeful interventions during the project.

Producer leaders and Producer associations also felt that they lacked needed formal connections or official recognition. Compared to other sectors, ATAD appears to be the most active LIP still working with ViM beneficiaries in Kaya. However, producer leaders and groups still felt they lacked sustained connections to the linkages and resources they were introduced to during ViM.

RE-THINK THE VOLUNTEER APPROACH [MOTIVATION]

Aside from VVVs, all service providers were expected to continue activities without remuneration, as volunteer work. In lieu of financial remuneration as a motivation for MLAs, during the project MLAs were provided agricultural and livestock training and given goats or chickens to support their livelihoods. While this served as a motivation during project ViM, the conclusion of the activity also terminated these offerings. Further, this approach ignores the challenge of women's time, access to resources, and mobility. Adding activities, such as rearing livestock, may be an excellent venture for women, but it means they must spend time on that activity, rather than the intended MLA activities. That time spent also detracts from their available time to participate in monthly meetings with other MLAs (as was intended). FG participants contended that they wanted to spend time on the MLA activities, wishing they could be paid as if it were a job so that they could focus on it, purchase the necessary materials for trainings, and afford to travel to conduct activities.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR WORKING WITH EXISTING GROUPS

ViM's approach to working with agricultural producer associations was to identify already existent groups in the project area and then select those they determined most dynamic. LIP respondents asserted that by working with previously established groups, there was already buy-in from group members.

Although there are clear benefits to working with dynamic, pre-established groups, it is yet unclear whether this approach perpetuate processes of social exclusion, especially of the most vulnerable members of the population unless the activity works to increase membership and emphasizes the social role of the producer association during the project. Further information is needed to understand the evaluation process for selecting groups and to determine who therefore benefited from these activities.

CHALLENGES TO THE GROUP APPROACH

ViM channeled the majority of activities through groups. producer associations, village care groups, and SILC members alike received training, support, and materials by engaging in their respective groups. There were advantages to working as a group as well, from building social cohesion to teaming up to complete a large project or combining funds to enable the purchase of inputs.

This approach was effective in many ways. Unfortunately, rising insecurity and restrictions on travel and gathering resulting from COVID-19 have curtailed many group activities. Recognizing that these barriers are not uncommon in ViMPlus areas catalyzes the need to generate alternate approaches. This may consist of supplementing group-level activities with interventions that can be successfully implemented at the individual level, as results show that activities practiced at home are more likely sustained.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT EXTENSION

As noted, ViM received a two-year extension. While it is yet unclear how this impacted the overall sustainability of the project, this finding unearths a few big picture questions. On one hand, implementing partners say that it enabled them to strengthen the exit strategy. On the other, what does this say about the sustainability of the original project design? Are there strategies that could have enabled the project to achieve sustained impacts in the original timeframe? These questions posed, it is acknowledged and consider the parameters placed on the project design, as specified by the awarding agency, both at initial project proposal and when applying for an extension. What impact do the processes mandated by awarding agencies have on how resources, be they human, financial, or other, are allocated or reallocated at different times?

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APPENDIX A: VIM PROJECT PARTNERS

The implementing organization and two main international partners were as follows:

1. ACDI/VOCA (implementer)
2. Save the Children (SC) (partner)
3. Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) (partner)

There were also three Local Implementing Partners (LIPs, or *Partenaires locaux d'exécution du projet/PLEP*). The LIPs ensured that ViM activities were bolstered with the necessary state, technical, managerial and on-the-ground expertise, and were comprised of the following three organizations:

1. Alliance for Development Assistance (*Alliance technique d'assistance au développement, ATAD*).
2. Action for the Promotion of Local Initiatives (*Action pour la promotion des initiatives locales, APIL*)
3. Zood Nooma Development Association (*Association Zood Nooma pour le développement, AZND* – *zood nooma* means “it is good friendship” in the Mooré language).

Other program partners included the following associations and organizations:

1. Burkina Faso Association of Wholesalers and Agro-Dealers (*Association de grossistes et détaillants d'intrants agricoles du Burkina Faso, AGRODIA*)
2. Burkina Faso Coalition for Women's Rights (*Coalition Burkinabé pour les Droits de la Femme, CBDF*).
3. Caritas Burkina (*Organisation catholique pour le développement économique et la solidarité, OCADES*)
4. Burkina Faso Credit Unions Network (*Réseau des caisses populaires du Burkina Faso, RCPB*)
5. International Rural Radios Burkina Faso (*Radios rurales internationales Burkina Faso, FRI*)
6. UASID Resilience and Economic Growth in the Sahel – Enhanced Resilience (*REGIS-ER*)
7. ARCADE Agency (*Agence ARCADE*)
8. Local Village Development Councils (*Conseils villageois de développement, CVD*)

This team supported the range of activities in the field and was comprised of actors from the state, local cooperatives, private companies, research institutes, and local and international NGOs. State actors included ministry level representatives and regional directorates, including the following:

1. Burkina Faso Ministry of Animal and Fisheries Resources (*Ministère des ressources animales et halieutiques*, MRAH)
2. Burkina Faso Ministry of Health (*Ministère de la santé*, MoH)
3. Burkina Faso Ministry of Women, National Solidarity, and Family (*Ministère de la femme, de la solidarité nationale et de la famille*, MFSNF / also known as the *Ministère de la promotion de la femme et du genre*, MPFG)
4. Regional Directorate of Environment, Green Economy, and Climate Change (*Direction régionale de l'environnement, de l'économie verte et du changement climatique*, DREEVCC)
5. Regional Directorate of Agriculture and Water Management of Centre-Nord (*Direction régionale de l'agriculture et des aménagements hydrauliques du Centre Nord*, DRAAH–CN).
6. Burkina Faso Institute of the Environment and of Agricultural Research (*Institut de l'environnement et de recherches agricoles du Burkina Faso*, INERA)