



CHAMPIONING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGES IN GENDER NORMS THROUGH THE AIRWAVES AND COMMUNITY FAITH LEADERS: A CASE STUDY OF THE CENTRAL NORTH REGION OF BURKINA FASO

Victory Against Malnutrition Plus (ViMPlus) Project



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ACRONYM LIST

ACIP	Annual Community Investment Plan
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CLG	Community Listeners Groups
DRFSNAFAH	Direction Régionale de la Famille, de la Solidarité Nationale, de la Femme et de l'Action Humanitaire
FRI	Farm Radio International
GSI	Gender and Social Inclusion
FCFA	West African CFA Franc (Franc Communauté Financière Africaine)
LIP	Local implementing partners
RIM/VIM	Radio-based Interactive Media Campaign for ViMPlus
SBC	Social Behavior Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Council
ViMPlus	Victory Against Malnutrition Plus
VLG	Virtual Listeners Groups
ZOI	Zone of influence

BACKGROUND

Gender inequalities in role distribution and power dynamics, deeply rooted in discriminatory social and cultural norms, can impede a broad spectrum of development outcomes if left unaddressed. This case study delves into the strategies employed by the Victory Against Malnutrition Plus (ViMPlus) Project in Burkina Faso to proactively address and transform inequitable social and gender norms that could limit the activity from achieving its objectives. This case study presents findings from two workshops and a qualitative study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of two major approaches used by the project to promote positive gender norms and behaviors.

The ViMPlus project was originally a five-year initiative funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). The project received a two-year extension in 2023/24 and is currently implementing year one of this extension period which is focused on capturing learning and ensuring sustainability of project successes. The primary goal of the project is to sustainably enhance the food and nutritional security of vulnerable populations residing in households within resilient community systems in the Centre Nord region of Burkina Faso. During the start-up phase of the project, and as a critical step towards achieving its goals, the project conducted a comprehensive gender analysis and other formative gender-focused studies¹ to identify gender inequalities and discriminatory harmful social and cultural norms that could pose significant challenges to achieving the strategic objectives² of the Activity. Key gender norms identified in these formative studies include:

- **Gender Norm 1: Men are household heads and decision-makers.** As the primary decision-maker men typically wield power over how income is used and how assets (land, tools, human resources, etc.) are deployed, even though women work across the various production and processing stages of a wide range of crops and livestock. Men's influence also extends to decisions related to sexual and reproductive health.
- **Gender norm 2: Women and girls are primarily responsible for household chores and childcare.** Women and girls in the Centre Nord region of Burkina Faso bear a disproportionately heavier burden of reproductive work, encompassing domestic and childcare responsibilities.
- **Gender Norm 3: Women should not leave the house without their husband's permission.** The social and gender inequalities in the division of household chores (Gender Norm 2), coupled with this restriction on women's mobility, hinders women's ability to engage profitably in income-generating activities or travel to health care centers.
- **Gender Norm 4: Women should not participate or hold leadership roles in community groups.** This norm is rooted in the perception that women lack the capacity to lead and are unable to make sound decisions.
- **Gender Norm 5: Women should not speak out in public meetings where men are present.** This norm results from the subordinate role and lower social status assigned to women in these communities. Both women and men believe that women should be submissive to their husbands and that women should show respect to men which includes not speaking out in a gathering where men are present. This norm is further compounded by social restrictions on women's mobility (Gender Norm 3) and women's responsibility for domestic and childcare chores (Gender Norm 2) so that

¹ MPEL. (2021). Baseline Study of the ViMPlus Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSA) in Burkina Faso: Final Report (Vol. I). Washington, DC: The Implementer-led Evaluation & Learning Associate Award. Available at: <https://www.fsnnetwork.org/resource/performance-evaluation-victory-against-malnutrition-plus-vimplus-resilience-food-security>; ACDI/VOCA (2020). Victory Against Malnutrition (ViMPlus) Gender Analysis Report. Available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00X33Q.pdf; ACDI/VOCA (2012). Victory Against Malnutrition (ViM) Gender Analysis Report.

² 1. Enhanced inclusive governance of institutions and organizations supporting vulnerable households in their pathway to food security and resilience. 2. Improved health, nutrition and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) of vulnerable households, especially pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and children in the first 1,000 days. 3. Economic well-being of vulnerable households increased and sustained. A crosscutting objective of the project is Social Inclusion--Enhance social, economic, and political agency and empowerment of women, men, and female youth.

women are excluded from training opportunities and from community decision-making platforms/groups (e.g., producer groups, Water Users' Association or Village Development Councils), resulting in their voices going unheard, and their needs overlooked.

Recognizing that these gender norms are embedded in communities in Centre Nord and influence behavior at all levels – individual, family, community and institutional – the ViMPlus project sought to effect social change at a systematic level (going beyond individual/personal and household level to changing social rules within a whole group or community) and to ensure that these changes are sustainable and spread throughout the targeted communities. The insights and recommendations from these formative studies informed the Activity's Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI) and Social Behavior Change (SBC) strategies. These strategies included interventions targeted at transforming harmful social norms that contributed to or were root causes of gender inequalities, limited the empowerment of women and overall, and had the potential to directly impact the project's ability to achieve its outcomes of improved resilience, food, and nutrition security for vulnerable households in the Center North region of Burkina Faso. Table 1 summarizes desired gender behaviors and the corresponding gender norm(s) that had to be addressed to achieve the desired behavior.

Table 1: Gender Norms Limiting Desired Behavior

OVERALL OUTCOME SOUGHT	DESIRED GENDER BEHAVIOR (DB)	GENDER NORMS LIMITING THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR ³
Engagement of women in community development processes, including active participation in community decision-making bodies to enhance inclusivity and representation	Community leaders actively seek input from women, providing them an opportunity to share their knowledge and skills during community days (DB 1)	Gender Norm 4: Women should not participate or hold leadership roles in community groups
	Women confidently participate and speak in public community development meetings and gatherings (DB 2)	Gender Norm 5: Women should not speak out in public meetings where men are present
Adoption of inclusive practices and behaviors within extremely poor households	Couples actively engage in discussions regarding family well-being (collaborative/joint decision-making) (DB 3)	Gender Norm 1: Men are household heads and decision-makers
	Greater equity in the division of labor and roles between women/girls and men/boys within the household (DB 4)	Gender Norm 2: Women and girls are primarily responsible for household chores and childcare

WHAT DID VIMPLUS DO TO TRANSFORM THESE NORMS?

The project employed a range of communication tools, platforms, and approaches to transform these harmful gender norms and achieve the desired behavior changes. This case study examines the impact of two major approaches⁴ used by the project to transform the negative/harmful gender norms that have hindered the practice/adoption of the behaviors prioritized by the project as critical for achieving the project's overall

³ While ViMPlus did not directly address social restriction on women's mobility, but efforts made to transform norms 1 and 2 dealt with women's rights/status as well heavy workload of women which are other factors that contribute to their limited mobility.

⁴ Others include the Husbands Schools.

outcomes. These approaches are: 1) the utilization of radio messages and 2) family/intra-household dialogues facilitated in collaboration with religious leaders.

This case study is structured as follows: a description of how ViMPlus designed and implemented the approaches; the methods used to assess the impact of the two approaches; the impact of the approaches on targeted gender norms and in promoting the desired gender behaviors; how these approaches complemented each other in transforming the targeted behaviors; and a conclusion with recommendations.

HOW DID VIMPLUS IMPLEMENT THESE NORM TRANSFORMATION APPROACHES?

Media Messages through Radio

Gender Technical Support to Radio Partners. ViMPlus collaborated with Farm Radio International (FRI) and local radio partners in the zone of influence (ZOI) to design and disseminate mass radio communications addressing prioritized gender behaviors. Specifically, through its technical leads, ViMPlus provided technical support to FRI and local partners in crafting content (radio messages) for various themes under its four components—Livelihoods (Agriculture and Livestock); Health, Nutrition and WASH; Governance; and Gender and Youth. Table 2 summarizes high level message/actions developed to tackle the harmful gender norms that hindered the practice of the desired behavior.

The technical support to radio partners also included the development and dissemination of a Guide to Gender-responsive Radio Broadcasting⁵ and capacity building on gender-sensitive communication strategies. FRI played a crucial role in establishing various platforms for interaction between listeners and radio stations, including ULIZA⁶ and ULIZA Answer digital platforms, enabling exchanges via cell phone. In addition to these platforms, other radio communication platforms such as theaters and round table discussions animated by trained radio technicians were employed as part of the project's comprehensive communication strategy.

⁵ [Gender Responsiveness in Radio Broadcasts_Final.docx](#)

⁶ ULIZA means « ASK » in Swahili

Table 2: Desired Gender Behavior, Impeding Gender Norm, and Targeted Message

DESIRED GENDER BEHAVIOR	GENDER NORM THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED TO ACHIEVE DESIRED BEHAVIOR	MESSAGE TARGETING THE HARMFUL GENDER NORM
Community leaders actively seek input from women, providing them an opportunity to share their knowledge and skills during community days	Gender Norm 4: Women should not participate or hold leadership roles in community groups	Supporting the practice of gender equity contributes to community well-being
Women confidently participate and speak in public community development meetings and gatherings	Gender Norm 5: Women should not speak out in public meetings where men are present	Community organizations are stronger and more dynamic when women and young people are included in decision-making bodies
Couples actively engage in discussions regarding family well-being (collaborative/joint decision-making)	Gender Norm 1: Men are household heads and decision-makers	When couples discuss together how to divide daily tasks it leads to a more peaceful and healthy family dynamic
Greater equity in the division of labor and roles between women/girls and men/boys within the household	Gender Norm 2: Women and girls are primarily responsible for household chores and childcare	The family works as a team when husbands and boys share in field and domestic work with the wife

In addition to these gender-focused messages, the project deliberately took steps to address negative gender stereotypes (and promote positive gender norms) in the delivery of messages/activities under other Activity components. One notable strategy involved featuring female characters as lead farmers in farmer field schools under the Livelihoods component of the project, thereby challenging the stereotype traditionally associating farming with men. This intentional approach aimed to reshape perceptions and contribute to fostering positive gender dynamics within communities.

To enhance local ownership, ViMPlus’ strategy involved the engagement of key stakeholders and influential individuals within the communities to participate in and facilitate these radio programs, contributing to system change and transformation. These participants included traditional and religious leaders, mother leaders, members of the Village Development Council (VDC), and resource persons from relevant government departments. Furthermore, ViMPlus, in collaboration with local implementing partners (LIPs), supported community radios in forming fifty-one (51) listener groups in the project’s ZOI. The involvement of LIPs from the targeted ZOI ensured the representation of vulnerable social groups, particularly women, in these groups. These community radios covered 80 percent of the Centre Nord region of Burkina Faso, encompassing the eight communes in the project’s ZOI.

The Family Dialogue Approach through Religious Leaders

Religion plays a paramount role in shaping the social identity of the people in the North Central region of Burkina Faso, where eight out of ten households are affiliated with a religious group. The deep respect for religious leaders and the profound dedication to faith in these communities often result in religion being cited as a justification for existing social and gender inequalities. Recognizing the role of religion in this cultural

context, the project identified religious leaders as valuable champions with the ability to positively influence gender norms and promote the desired gender behaviors.

Consultations and advocacy with national faith leaders. Implementation of the family dialogue approach through religious leaders, which began as a pilot, commenced with consultations and advocacy efforts involving the umbrella organizations of the three dominant religious denominations in the Centre Nord region and their leaders. These organizations included the Fédération des Eglises et Missions Evangelique (Evangelical Christian), the Fédération des Associations Islamiques du Burkina (Muslim), and the Diocese of Kaya (Catholic). These consultations served a dual purpose for validating the tools for the approach and for identifying additional stakeholders to support its implementation. After securing buy-in from these umbrella organizations and national faith leaders, ViMPlus proceeded to enlist the support of community-level religious leaders.



The Imam of Kangare animating the family approach

Securing support from other key stakeholders. In addition to the religious leaders, the project established direct collaboration with agents of the government ministry responsible for the protection of women and family - the Direction Régionale de la Famille, de la Solidarité Nationale de la Femme et de l'Action Humanitaire (DRFSNAFAH) along with its regional field agents. Additionally, ViMPlus also collaborated with several LIPs to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the impact.

Capacity building for community level religious leaders. To support the implementation of the approach, ViMPlus' Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI) Lead, along with LIPs, conducted training for one hundred and fifty-five (155) religious leaders on the tools developed for the family dialogue approach. The training encompassed both information sharing and capacity-building sessions, aiming to equip religious leaders to use verses and messages from their sacred texts, namely the Bible⁷ and the Koran, to substantiate their opposition to certain harmful gender norms, relations, or social practices while concurrently promoting positive masculinity and equitable household norms. This approach was designed to harness the influence of religious leaders in challenging and transforming negative social and gender norms within the community, encouraging greater gender equity and collaborative decision-making within households.

⁷ Some examples of Bible verses used in the training include Genesis 1:26-28, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Galatians 3:28; and Ephesians 5:21-33

The family dialogues facilitated by religious leaders centered on intra-household communication, inclusive decision-making in agricultural production, collaborative management of household assets/resources and income (Gender Norm 1), and the equitable division of labor within the household (Gender Norm 2). For the initial pilot phase of the approach the 155 trained religious leaders facilitated a total of 1,464 dialogues in 310 families across 21 villages. The approach was later scaled-up with 219 religious leaders facilitating 4,380 dialogues with 629 families⁸.

The Complementarity of the Two Platforms

To expand the reach of its norms-change activities, the ViMPlus project was intentional in harnessing the synergies between the two platforms. Specifically, the project leveraged the radio/media platform to expand the reach and influence of the family approach with religious leaders beyond the families that they directly coached. The religious leaders from each of the three dominant faith groups were featured on roundtable discussions broadcasted on community radios (Radio Manegda in Pissila and Radio Nerwaya in Rollo) alongside representatives (women and men) of the families that participated in the family dialogues. The topics discussed by religious leaders on the radios went beyond intra-household gender norms that were the focus of the family dialogue to include other topics like women's participation in leadership roles in producer organizations. By leveraging radio programs as a supplementary platform, these religious leaders reached a broader audience and further amplified the impact of their coaching efforts, contributing significantly to positive changes in targeted behaviors across communities.

HOW DID WE CAPTURE THIS LEARNING?

For adaptive management purposes and to inform scaling decisions, ViMPlus undertook several steps to reflect on the effectiveness of these norm change approaches in promoting positive gender norms and relations in participating households and communities.

Radio Messages

ViMPlus organized two reflection workshops⁹ in 2022 on the media campaigns, which were facilitated by the ViMPlus Gender and Social Inclusion Lead with support from the SBC Specialist. During the workshop, participants¹⁰ reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of the main communication tools and channels used to tackle the norms, shared implementation challenges and opportunities for improvement, changes observed in participating households/communities, and strategies to sustain the transformation/changes observed. In addition to these workshops, an evaluation study of the Radio-based Interactive Media Campaign for ViMPlus (RIM/VIM 1 and 2¹¹) implemented by FRI for the ViMPlus project was also conducted. This study included an analysis of the radio programs to understand the reach and impact in ViMPlus' ZOI, and the findings of this evaluation study were shared during the workshop. The workshop also provided an opportunity for the project to obtain a renewed commitment and support from stakeholders.

⁸ The implementation of the scale-up phase of the approach has been affected by insecurity in the target zones which displaced many of participating households.

⁹ Evaluation Workshop Report on Media Campaigns on Gender Indicators in Reference to ViMPlus CSC Strategy : [Rapport de l'atelier d'évaluation des médias sur le genre 1 sept 2022 \(1\).docx](#)

¹⁰ ViMPlus thematic area supervisors, LIPs, local radio representatives, the RIM-VIM Gender Focal Point, and radio technicians

¹¹ Results of the Evaluation of Project 274-RIM/VIM2 (September 2022). [FRI Milestone 6 - Rapport Final RIM VIM 2.pdf](#)

The Family Approach via Religious Leaders

Following the pilot phase of the family approach with religious leaders, the project conducted an evaluation workshop with the stakeholders of the approach, including the religious leaders, the DRFSNAFAH¹², and the LIPs. Data from the evaluation workshops revealed a strong appreciation by these stakeholders. Specifically, the following feedback was provided by workshop participants on the approach and the tools used:

- **Themes addressed:** Stakeholders unanimously recognized the relevance of these themes, describing them as "topical" in their communities. They were convinced that these themes contributed to improving the living conditions of the households that have benefited from coaching.
- **Use of religious leaders:** The use of religious leaders as the channel for conveying messages aimed at the targeted behaviors was well appreciated by the various stakeholders in the workshops, considering that the communities are strongly rooted in religion.
- **Use of holy books:** The use of holy scriptures to support the themes addressed in the sermons and in the households made it easier for participants to receive the messages. The books enabled the project to challenge certain stereotypes that many of the faithful believed to be religious prescriptions.
- **Tools used:** To deliver the messages, ViMPlus equipped religious leaders with tools that were adapted to the literacy levels in the context and allowed for easy understanding of the messages. For example, the image flipbooks were reported to have played an important role during the coaching sessions in the households.
- **Follow-up booklet:** Participating families were also provided with a follow-up booklet, which enabled them to record any changes observed in targeted behavior in real time.
- **Complementarity between the family dialogues facilitated by religious leaders and media/radio programs.** Religious leaders appreciated the synergy between the two platforms employed by the ViMPlus project to promote positive gender and social norms and behaviors. Religious leaders not only actively participated in radio programs but also recognized the positive influence of radio programming on families, making it easier for them to engage in coaching dialogues, as per the testimonials from two religious leaders below.

"Yes, I've already called in to Tougouri's Basnéré radio station on the gender aspects of family well-being. For example, I personally said during an intervention that it's very important to involve the boys and girls of a family in decision-making, regardless of gender, to change attitudes towards women in general in households."

-Catechist Kourita from Sagouem commune of Tougouri

"During our visits, we noticed that some families are already aware of the themes covered in our family dialogues and an appreciation of what they

¹² Regional Director of the Ministry of Women, National Solidarity, Family and Humanitarian Action

heard from the radio. This helped to facilitate the coaching process and increased the adoption of the good practices promoted by the project.

-Catechist SEBGO Kourita from the village of Sagouem

A qualitative study¹³ was also conducted after the pilot phase to explore the impact of the family approach on targeted gender behaviors in participating households. This study was a collaboration between ViMPlus' Gender team, the MEL team, and the LIPs. Focus group discussions were held with participating households in 16 villages across three communes (Pissila, Tougouri, Yalga). The study was limited to these three communes due to the precarious security situation in the area. In total, 36 religious leaders participated, including 10 Imams, 14 Pastors, and 12 Catechists. Focus groups were also conducted with 72 heads of families, comprising 20 Muslims, 28 Catholics, and 24 Protestants. The qualitative survey revealed a high level of adoption of the approach by the various religious denominations and families.

The section below presents the combined impact of radio programs and the family approach with religious leaders on the targeted/desired gender behavior drawing from the various studies conducted on these approaches and evidence from the evaluation workshops with stakeholders,

GENDER TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPACT OF APPROACHES

Desired Gender Behavior I: Community Leaders Actively Seek Input from Women, Providing Them an Opportunity to Share Their Knowledge and Skills at Community Days I 4 (Gender Norm 4)

The evaluation study of the FRI radio activity under ViMPlus revealed that the radio sensitization sessions conducted by ViMPlus, which targeted VDC members and other community leaders, led to an increased representation of women in community development platforms. Essentially, through these radio sessions, community leaders were more aware of the importance of considering the schedules of diverse community members when scheduling community meetings and of ensuring that meetings are accessible and inclusive. This understanding led to community leaders considering the schedules of women and young people, and selecting times when they are most likely to participate actively in meetings. Specifically, meeting times were adjusted to accommodate the availability and preferences of women and young people, typically scheduled between 10:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. This time change led to an increased participation of women and young people in community meetings and village assemblies, granting them access to spaces for exchange and capacity building.

Women's increased representation extended to decision-making bodies of community structures. Men allowed their wives to participate or join community-based organizations reflecting a changing dynamic that fosters gender-inclusive decision-making. For example, the community development planning sessions during which the Annual Community Investment Plan (ACIP) are developed held in 84 villages saw a significant

¹³ Rapport d'Etude sur l'Impact de la Phase Pilote de l'Approche Famille par l'Argumentaire Religieux (Septembre 2022) [Rapport enquête qualitative Argumentaire religieux 1.docx](#)

¹⁴ Community days are days dedicated to a collective and community activity or work of common interest or awareness-raising on themes of common interest.

increase in attendance, with a notable improvement in the participation of women. In 2021, women were virtually absent from the village assemblies (only 10 women). In 2022, this number increased to 349 women, indicating a positive trend in active participation. In 2023, there was a further growth, with 1,209 women participating in village assemblies.

Overall, the ViMPlus project has promoted a positive shift towards more equitable involvement in community development initiatives, ensuring that diverse perspectives are heard, and providing opportunities for women to enhance their skills and contribute to community development efforts.

Desired Gender Behavior 2: Women Confidently Participate and Speak in Public Community Development Meetings and Gatherings (Gender Norm 5)

The impact of the ViMPlus project on women's participation in community meetings goes beyond numerical increase; there has also been a notable improvement in the quality of their involvement. The radio messages targeting this behavior were complemented by trainings on inclusive governance targeting men and women, as well as female leadership trainings targeting women in the communities. The cumulative impact of these messages and trainings has been an increase in the active engagement of women in community meetings and consultation frameworks. They not only attend but also speak out, express their opinions, and provide valuable feedback and input during community accountability days. Women now actively participate in annual assessments of VDCs, providing their input on community development plans during community accountability days and participating in the selection of priority activities for community development, which reflects their growing role in community decision-making and development matters. For example, during one of the community accountability days, the Secretary of the Komsilgac Albert Ouedraogo VDC office, a female, reported out on the VDC office's activities (property management, financial management, management of ongoing projects) to the whole community. This increased ability of women to express themselves at community meetings indicates a positive shift in their confidence and agency. This change is significant for ensuring diverse voices are heard in decision-making processes, leading to more comprehensive and inclusive community development.

The increase in the quality of women's participation in community meetings and decision-making platforms has also been "fueled" by their involvement in mobilizing financial resources for community activities. For example, in the commune of Pissila, there was a total sum of 12,871,350 FCFA (equivalent to \$21,169.98) mobilized by the VDCs. This financial mobilization is crucial for supporting community activities and initiatives. Women played a significant role in this financial mobilization, accounting for 49 percent of the total amount¹⁵. This substantial contribution by women in raising funds for community projects has earned them respect from community leaders and men within their communities resulting in an increased engagement of women community decision-making discussions and their needs being taken into consideration in community development planning.

The representation and participation of women in the listener's groups also witnessed a significant increase, which is a sentinel sign of women's participation in community meetings/gatherings. More and more women were able to call in and speak on the interactive radio programs. The results of the final RIM/VIM evaluation revealed 10,895 interactions during the second radio campaign, with 46 percent of interaction from men, 54 percent from women, and 51 percent from young people. This participation exceeded the target that was set for female participation in the program (40 percent). The high participation of women in media programs

¹⁵ Men accounted for 38.95%, and young people contributed 11.94% to the mobilized funds (Source: Rapport Annuel Gouvernance 2023- [ViMPlus FY23 AR Narrative Report.docx](#))

was facilitated by the project by encouraging community radio stations to adapt broadcasting times to take account of women's daily activity schedules.

The gender messages delivered via local radio programs were noted to have broadened women's knowledge (awareness) and strengthened their ability to express themselves confidently in public settings (skills). The qualitative study of the family approach via religious leaders indicates that women and young people are now more capable of defending their viewpoints, showcasing a higher level of self-assurance, for example during community accountability days (Gender Norm 5).

This increase in awareness and self-confidence demonstrated by women has garnered respect and pride from their husbands at the household level. At the community level, this respect has influenced men's behavior so that they now involve women and young people in decision-making leading to a positive shift in women's social status within their communities. A survey on the level of change in listeners' knowledge following the broadcast of messages on the 3-2-1¹⁶ service, revealed a positive change in perception around the status of women in their communities, with over 83 percent of respondents (4,816) confirming that the information they received enabled them to know, for example, that women have the right to establish civil status certificates for their children.

Overall, through media/radio messages targeting negative gender norms that hindered women's participation in community gatherings and decision-making platforms, the project has contributed to increases in the number of and the quality of women's participation by promoting positive gender relations within the communities, positively influencing the dynamics of community engagement, with women and young people becoming more assertive in contributing to discussions and decision-making processes, and fostering more inclusive and meaningful engagement in community affairs.

Desired Gender Behavior 3: Couples Actively Engage in Discussions Regarding Family Well-Being (Collaborative/Joint Decision-Making) (Gender Norm 1)

The family dialogue sessions facilitated by religious leaders have led to positive changes and a better understanding of the importance of collaborative decision-making within families and the communities at large.

Specifically, qualitative data from participating households revealed that the family dialogue sessions facilitated by religious leaders have increased women's involvement in intra-household decision-making related to agricultural production and crop and resource allocation. Unlike in the past when decisions on how much land to allocate to crops were solely made by men/husbands, participating families observed that they now discuss and agree as a family on the utilization of land. Watch Sawadogo Awa of Kangaré tell her story [here](#). And Ali Soré share how his Imam sensitization led to his daughter chopping wood and his son helping with the dishes [here](#). These families also note that the family dialogues have empowered them to collectively decide on the choice of fertilizers and inputs to use on their farms and what to do with their crop and livestock products—what to consume versus what to sell. These are decisions that have been traditionally made by one person, the husband.

Stakeholders and households involved in this approach reported several benefits of concerted decision-making, including increase in cohesion among family members (stronger bonds and unity within the

¹⁶ The 1.2.3 service is a digital voice platform developed by VIAMO, an FRI partner structure for direct beneficiary interactions in voice and for voting beeps. The aim is to use an ordinary telephone at affordable cost to interact in voice radio broadcasts.

household); increased solidarity between husbands and wives; and improvements in the way families manage their property and resources, as evidenced by the testimonies below.

"There has been an impact because before, we weren't in the habit of sitting down together and discussing family life. But now we do. We sit down together and make decisions, thanks to the training we received".

-Sawadogo Bruno Passibiri, Catholic family Tougouri center

"For agricultural production, my wife sometimes comes up with ideas and we analyze and decide together. For example, if we're going to use inputs or not, where, or how much, depending on our means. The same applies to the choice of crops. For the use of crops, for example, we decide together whether to sell beans instead of sorghum for any expense."

-Catholic family from Rimkilga

The media sensitization activities via the radio programs have also played a significant role in fostering positive changes in intra-household gender dynamics related to decision-making. According to the results of the annual survey conducted by the project in 2022, a substantial majority of the participants or respondents (98.4 percent) acknowledged the positive impact of these radio programs on the participation of women and youth in intra-household decision-making. These results suggest that the media campaigns via local radio stations have been successful in influencing perceptions and behaviors within households, contributing to increased inclusion and participation of women and youth in decision-making processes.

"The radio themes centered on family dialogue, nutrition (preparation of enriched porridge), hygiene and sanitation, have had a major impact on women's lives." She notes further that "We (women) are increasingly consulted by our husbands in household decision-making, we have good hygiene in our households; we no longer spend money to buy misola flour to supplement the diet of our children who over six months old, because thanks to the program we can produce enriched flour."

-Madame YAMBA Claire, head of the Lourfa Women's Listeners Group-GEC

Desired Gender Behavior 4: Greater Equity in the Division of Labor and Roles Between Women/Girls and Men/Boys with the Household (Gender Norm 2)

The qualitative assessment of the family dialogue approach revealed positive changes in the division of household tasks resulting from participation in the family dialogues facilitated by religious leaders.

Participating families reported that their involvement in the family approach facilitated a reevaluation of the division of household tasks, giving greater importance to women and girls. This shift aimed to support young girls in attending school more easily, and to afford women greater freedom to engage in income generating activities. At the individual level, there are observable changes in perceptions around the gendered division of labor within the communities. Men are increasingly assisting their wives with certain household chores, signaling a departure from prejudices that limited women's development, as evidenced by testimonials from households participating in the family dialogues with religious leaders found below.

"Unlike before, I now often go out in search of wood; this very morning I pulled up several stems of *Corchorus Tridens* (Boulvanka) in a field to give to my wives to use as cooking fuel."

-KAFANDO Ousmane, Muslim family, Tougouri town

"These days, I take part in the harvesting of beans. That wasn't the case before because that task was reserved for the women. I also look for wood for cooking and draw water for the family quite often."

-Catholic family from Sagouem Tougouri

"Last time I listened to a program on the division of labor in the household. During the program, I learned that women are equal to men. And that it is only right that we do not leave all household chores to women. Since listening to Théâtre Plus, my wife and I have been at peace. I also take concrete action to relieve or help my wife in the family. These days, I no longer accept that my wife does all the chores as she used to. We've divided up the tasks so that we complement each other."

-Pascal Sawadogo

Overall, the project's family approach via religious leaders has led to some transformative impact in the households and communities. The shift toward inclusive decision-making, collaborative and supportive partnership between spouses, harmonious resource management within households, and greater equity in the intra-household division of roles reflects positive changes in gender dynamics and family relations. These

changes facilitated by the project have also led to a reduction in the prevalence of gender-based violence (intimate partner violence) which previously were related to conflict over scarce resources or consequences for neglecting traditional gender roles.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of these behavior change interventions was not without challenges. Conditions of insecurity in ViMPlus' zone of implementation have had notable impacts on the implementation of these behavior change approaches. Insecurity led to the displacement of families participating in dialogue sessions with religious leaders and the restricted mobility of religious leaders themselves. Some religious leaders relocated to other communes due to conflicts or insecurity, and others, such as priests, were transferred to dioceses outside the project's implementation zones.

The security situation also affected media communication strategies, particularly in high-insecurity zones. Sabotage of telephone networks and displacement of participants during interactions occurred, necessitating adaptations by local radio partners. Virtual Listeners Groups (VLGs) were introduced as substitutes for Community Listeners' Groups (CLGs) in communes where insecurity prevented the movement or convening of listeners. For instance, local radio partners like Manegda and Nerwaya transitioned from CLGs, where a group of 15-20 listeners would gather to listen to radio broadcasts, discuss addressed themes, and relay messages to the community, to VLGs. In VLGs, individuals or families would listen to radio programs, participate in group discussions on the broadcasted topic, mainly through voice messages on WhatsApp. Many of these listening groups have continued to function even when villages were dislocated because of armed conflict. The groups continued to share information throughout the displaced community putting members in an important role of information resource persons.



Gender-mixed Listeners Group of Lebda

Notwithstanding these challenges, the evidence presented in this case study underscores the effectiveness of both the media messages and the family approach facilitated via religious leaders in promoting positive gender and social norms, contributing to ViMPlus' outcomes and objectives.

Despite operating at different scales, the case study illustrates a notable complementarity between the two platforms employed by the ViMPlus project to promote positive gender and social norms and behaviors. Specifically, the synergy between religious leaders and radio programs is evident in the ability of religious leaders to extend their influence beyond the families they directly coached. The testimonials from the religious leaders who participated in the radio programs underscore the collaborative and reinforcing nature of the two communication platforms. The strategic combination/integration of the family approach via religious leaders, initially piloted in 310 families with facilitated dialogues, and the media approach targeting a broader audience through radio messages and programs has proven to be synergistic in promoting positive gender norms and behaviors within ViMPlus communities. By combining these different communication channels, the project also maximized its reach and influence in promoting gender equality and social inclusion.

The intentional engagement of local stakeholders and key influential persons from the communities has been crucial to the success of these behavior change interventions in achieving the targeted gender behaviors. The project's deliberate approach to involving local partners, such as religious leaders, government departments, and local implementing partners, in various stages of the design and implementation of these interventions has played a significant role. This involvement took several forms including advocacy with national faith leaders to get their buy-in, reviewing and validating tools, designing, and developing content for behavior change communications, increasing gender awareness among local stakeholders, and building the capacity of local radio technicians for gender-responsive media programming. This foundational engagement has been an important driver of continuity and sustainability of the observed positive changes in gender norms and relations within these communities.