

1/21/2022

Women's Innovation for Sustainable Enterprises (WISE)

Annual Report (2021)



Prepared By:
SAADATU ABDUL-RAHAMAN
(WISE Project Coordinator)

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR	2
ACTIVITIES CARRIED-OUT IN THE YEAR	4
Output 1111: Women in village savings groups trained on GE, CP, life skills, financial literacy, basic business skills, their economic rights, and informal savings (VSLAs+)	4
Activity 1111.1: Map existing savings groups and identify and mobilize communities for new groups	5
Activity 1111.3: Train community-based volunteers (CBVs) as facilitators on VSLA+	9
Activity 1111.4: Provide supplies to new and existing savings groups on a need basis (box, passbook, stamps)	10
Activity 1111.5 support community-based organizations to establish childcare services that meet safeguarding standards	10
Output 1121: Male partners/family members trained on gender equality and women’s economic empowerment	14
Activity 1121.1: Identify existing and/or mobilize new ‘male champion’ groups within communities	14
Activity 1121.3: Provide training to ‘male champion’ group leaders.	14
Activity 1121.4 Provide technical support and follow-up to groups to implement the cascading of training to male champions groups	17
Output 1122: Community and religious leaders oriented on promoting and organizing support for women’s economic participation	19
Activity 1122.1: Identify and mobilize community and religious leaders including, "Queen Mother"/"Magazias", as key change agents	19
1122.3: Facilitate orientation and refresher sessions with community and religious leaders, including "Queen Mother" groups	19
Activity 1122.4: Support community and religious leaders, including "Queen Mother" groups to deliver messages of support of women economic empowerment participation	22
Activity 1122.5 Facilitate meetings between community and religious leaders and SG/SG leaders to encourage leadership of local business women	22
CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDED ADJUSTMENTS	24
LESSONS LEARNT	24
CONCLUSION	25
APPENDIX: LIST OF WISE PROJECT COMMUNITIES	26

AGI	Association of Ghanaian Industries
BAC	Business Advisory Centre
CBV	Community-Based Volunteer
CP	Child Protection
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GE	Gender Equality
LDA	Local District Assembly
MoFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association
VSLA⁺	Village Savings and Loans Association Plus
WEE	Women Economic Empowerment
WISE	Women Innovation for Sustainable Enterprises

INTRODUCTION

With support from Global Affairs Canada (GAC), PLAN International Ghana in partnership with URBANET, is working in Northern Ghana to ultimately increase realization of rights to economic empowerment, wellbeing and inclusive economic growth for women, through the women’s innovation for sustainable enterprises (WISE) project. The Project aims to improve women’s agency to exercise and influence decisions regarding their participation in economic growth as well as Increase productivity, profitability, and innovation of their businesses.

The WISE project is a 4-year project targeting 5,056 women between the ages of 19-55 in 60 rural and peri-urban communities of Tolon and Kumbungu districts. WISE uses savings groups as entry platforms to mobilise beneficiaries. The project has 5 key areas of intervention, collectively called the women’s business hubs (figure 1) to be implemented in collaboration with the Local District Assemblies (LDAs), Business Advisory Centres (BACs), Ministry of Agric (MoFA), Environmental Protection Agency,

Association of Ghanaian Industries (AGI), Oikocredit and Bonzali rural bank (table 1).



Figure 1: WISE Project Interventions

Credit: PLAN International Canada

This report provides a narrative on the status of project activities highlighting progress by immediate outcomes from January – December 2021 (Year 2).

In this period, community entry processes were conducted in 72 communities to introduce the project to target beneficiaries and local leaders, after which 60 communities were enrolled after assessment and validation with LDAs in both districts. A total of 191 groups consisting of 5,343 females with 267 males (5%) were successfully enrolled.

Community sensitisations were organized in 60 communities in Q1 to create awareness on the project scope and the stakeholders involved. Despite this period being a busy time for communities, 6,111 community members participated in these sensitisations with impressive representation from local leaders.

Sixty (60) community-based volunteers (CBVs) were recruited from both districts to work with field staff to provide support to the women’s groups and serve as liaisons between the women, BACs and the Solar HerHubs.

Also, within the year, 540 male champions and 180 community leaders (traditional leaders, religious leaders and magazias) were mobilised and oriented to support women’s economic empowerment and promote gender equality and positive and non-violent masculinities.

Safe spaces concept was piloted in 8 communities this year to assess its feasibility in the North. Results from this will determine the upscale of the concept other communities.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR

Work Breakdown Structure	Activities	Achievements	Variance from Annual Plan (Year 2)
1111: Women in village savings groups trained on GE, CP, life skills, financial literacy, basic business skills, their economic rights and informal savings (VSLAs+)	<i>1111.1: Map existing savings groups and identify and mobilize communities for new groups</i>	191 savings groups mobilized from 60 communities. This represents 5,343 women	Overachieved Target of 5,056 women
	<i>1111.3: Train community-based volunteers (CBVs) as facilitators on VSLA+</i>	60 CBVs identified and trained on VSLA+ CBVs train women weekly during VSLA meetings They have supported in community mobilization for sensitization and selection of local leaders.	Achieved
	<i>1111.4: Provide supplies to new and existing savings groups on a</i>	Needs assessment of all 191 savings groups was conducted to	Achieved

	<i>needs basis (box, passbook, stamps)</i>	gather data on which supplies are needed All savings groups have received supplies	
	<i>1111.5: Support community-based organizations to establish childcare services that meet safeguarding standards</i>	Safe space concept piloted in 8 communities. All safe spaces have been furnished for use	Achieved
	<i>1111.6: Roll out VSLA+ and deliver foundational training</i>	CBVs conducting weekly trainings with savings groups. 162 groups have completed VSLA+ trainings	Underachieved 29 groups yet to complete trainings
1121: Male partners/family members trained on gender equality and women's economic empowerment	<i>1121.1: Identify existing and/or mobilize new 'male champion' groups within communities</i>	540 male champions identified and mobilized in 60 communities	Achieved
	<i>1121.3: Provide training to 'male champion' group leaders.</i>	119 male champion leaders trained on gender transformative change modules	Achieved
	<i>1121.4 Provide technical support and follow-up to group leaders to implement the cascading of training to "male champion groups"</i>	119 male champion leaders monitored during this period. Leaders have begun cascading trainings to the 7-member groups	In progress
1122: Community and religious leaders oriented on promoting and organizing support for women's economic participation	<i>1122.1: Identify and mobilize community and religious leaders including, "Queen Mother"/"Magazias", as key change agents</i>	180 community leaders identified across 60 communities	Achieved
	<i>1122.3: Facilitate orientation and refresher sessions with</i>	180 Traditional leaders receive sensitization on Gender equality	Achieved

	<i>community and religious leaders, including "Queen Mother" groups</i>		
	<i>1122.4 Support community and religious leaders, including "Queen Mother" groups to deliver messages of support of women economic empowerment participation</i>	Community leaders delivered messages in support of women economic empowerment during sensitization sessions	Achieved
	1122.5: Facilitate meetings between community and religious leaders and SG/SG leaders to encourage leadership of local business women	4 dialogue meetings held in 4 communities during this period	Underachieved 56 dialogue meetings yet to be held

ACTIVITIES CARRIED-OUT IN THE YEAR

Intermediate Outcome 1100: Improved women’s agency to exercise decisions regarding their participation in economic growth

Immediate Outcome 1110: Enhanced personal, social, and financial assets for women

Output 1111: Women in village savings groups trained on GE, CP, life skills, financial literacy, basic business skills, their economic rights, and informal savings (VSLAs+)

Overall, 60 communities equally distributed between Tolon and Kumbungu districts, were initially assessed, 48 communities were validated, and enrolled onto the project. An additional 12 communities were enrolled after meeting project requirements. Women groups were majorly enrolled with a few mixed groups of about 5% male membership. During this reporting period, 92 and 99 groups were respectively enrolled from Tolon and Kumbungu districts.

Activity 1111.1: Map existing savings groups and identify and mobilize communities for new groups

5,343 females with age ranges of 19-35: 2277 and 36-55: 3066, representing 191 village savings and loans association (VSLA) groups were successfully enrolled in Q1. A total of 267 males (5%) were members of some of these VSLA groups.

Sixty communities with existing VSLA groups were pre-selected together with Kumbungu and Tolon district assemblies (DAs) for assessment and possible enrollment onto the WISE project. A community mapping team of URBANET, PLAN and DAs conducted a reconnaissance of the communities to map their locations, existing VSLA groups and assess their suitability for the project.

There was a community entry led by the DAs to officially introduce the project team and the WISE project to chiefs, other moral duty bearers and savings groups. URBANET/PLAN briefed all stakeholders about the project to include duration, the 5 key intervention areas, feminist approach, and male engagement strategy. The team received a verbal consent from all the chiefs during the community entry process to officially work in these communities.

Community Validation: Sixty (60) proposed communities were initially assessed based on the project requirements and 12 of these communities were later replaced. In the end, 72 communities were assessed and 60 of them were validated in Q1 (appendix 1).

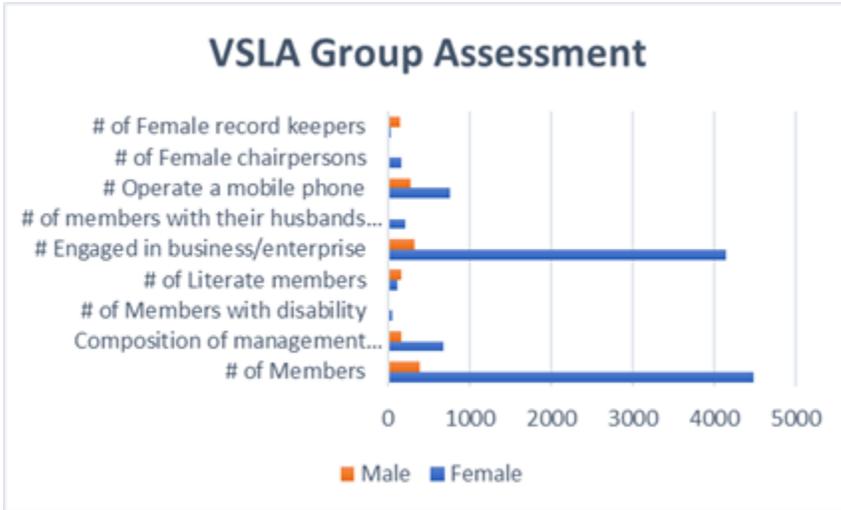
There was stakeholder engagement involving critical stakeholders of the target district assemblies (District Coordinating Directors, Business Advisory Centers, Community Development/Social Welfare Department, Planning Officers, and District Department of Agriculture) to discuss changes to the project communities after the team had conducted a reconnaissance visit and needs assessment. See table 3 for the reasons for the replacement:

Table 1: Communities Replaced During Validation Process

District	Proposed communities	Reasons for replacement	Replaced with
Kumbungu	Bontanga	It is an elite community (bungalow housing) and inhabitants are not suited for the project	Wuba <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has land for agricultural purposes and access to water for vegetable production
	Bognayili	CCFC funded projects existent in community including VSLA concept still ongoing. There is therefore no need to duplicate efforts here. CCFC also runs	Worivi

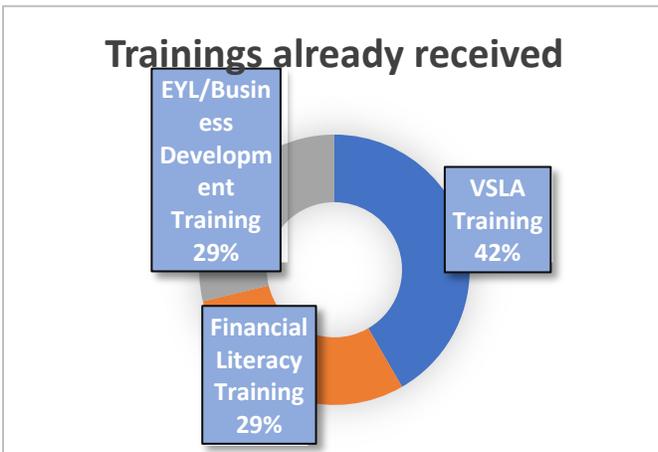
District	Proposed communities	Reasons for replacement	Replaced with
		programmes and this might affect the WISE project soon if the project stays in the community	
	Cheyohi No. 1	See Bognayili	Jepkahi Kuku <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has access to water for dry season activities
	Cheshegu	See Bognayili	Begu
Tolon	Adumbiliyili	Community is quite a distance. This would have an impact on operational cost. The safety of officers is also taken into consideration.	Golinga
	Kasuyili	CCFC funded projects existent in community including VSLA concept still ongoing. There is therefore no need to duplicate efforts here. CCFC also runs programmes and this might affect the WISE project soon if the project stays in the community	Kunguri
	Wantugu	See Kasuyili	Nyujagyili
	Grumani	See Kasuyili	Kpachiyili
	Tibognayili	See Adumbiliyili	Kuglogu
	Cheshegu	See Kasuyili	Kurugu vohoyili
	Zantani	This is an overseas community. The safety	Gurugu

District	Proposed communities	Reasons for replacement	Replaced with
		of officers is of utmost priority	



VSLA Needs Assessment: In total, 201 VSLA groups were mapped and assessed in the 60 communities across both districts. All mapped groups had no ties with an existing local organization in the community. Out of this, 191 were functional. The VSLA groups and their members are the operational entry points for WISE interventions. So as not to disrupt community structures, WISE priority is to

work with existing VSLA groups and mobilize new ones where necessary. Using the community mapping and needs assessment tool (appendix 1), the team assessed the groups ranging from membership, functionality, literacy level, management committee composition, and availability of VSLA kits and components. Though the groups had received VSLA training, 71% of them did not receive any training on financial literacy or business development (figure 2). Groups that were not functional gave lack of finance or business as the main reason for not continuing with their VSLA meetings and hoped that training on business skills and financial literacy would be beneficial in revamping their defunct groups.



Each group had a VSLA kit but with some of the components needing replacement. Less than 2% of the groups needed a new VSLA box. Components that needed replacement as mostly mentioned by groups were the passbooks, stamp and stamp pad.

In most cases there was one male being part of the management committee (81% female, 19% male) and his role was solely to support the women in keeping records. This was since there was no woman in the group literate/confident enough to take on that role. Majority of women (3,734 [83%]) could not

Figure 2: Trainings already received by existing groups

use a mobile phone without support even though they owned one. In view of this, we recommend that

Esoko provides a more women friendly innovative technology service so these women can have easier access.



Community Sensitization: In Q1 a total of 6111 (4840 women and 1271 men) community members and traditional leaders participated in the sessions across the 60 communities sensitized.

Within this period, 10 community sensitizations were organized to officially create awareness on the project scope and the stakeholders involved. Despite this period being a busy time for communities, 1,283

(females: 1,066, males: 217) savings groups, youth and men participated in these sensitizations with impressive representation from local leaders, youth, and men.

The project concept was of interest to both men and women and in some communities, men were somewhat disappointed that women were the primary beneficiaries. But this did not deter them from pledging their support to the project. Local leaders once again gave consent and approved for project activities to begin.

During the sensitisation, some local leaders raised the concern of lack of available land for even men to farm and lack of trees in their communities so as to benefit from the bee keeping intervention. There were also concerns raised by both men and women on the timely supply of start-up packages extension services by projects for farming activities. This they shared dwindles their interest in food security projects which promises start-up packages and ongoing extension services.

Overall, communities are enthusiastic about the WISE project and are curious as to how women would be able start bee keeping and the feasibility and sustainability of mushroom cultivation and grasscutter rearing in the northern region.

Economic Activities of Women: Of the 5,343 women mobilized, 4155 were engaged in individual/cooperative enterprises or businesses.

Project officer sensitizing a community on the WISE Project concept

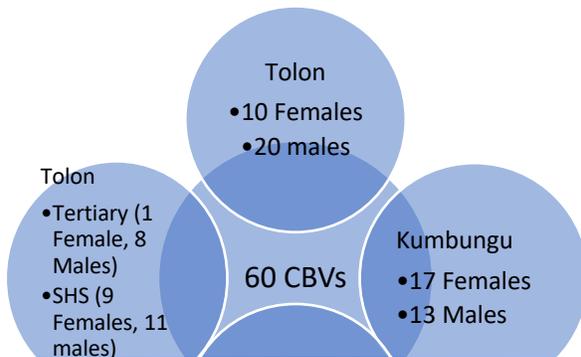
Women are engaged in a cycle of activities that changes with the season. Main economic activity in the rainy season is farming and during the harvesting period, women are engaged in shea nut picking as well, which they parboil and dry awaiting the peak of shea processing activities. After harvest (dry season), some women are engaged in shea butter processing while others sell their aggregated nuts to other women or aggregators. Sales from the shea butter and aggregation are used to buy rice or other grains for storage.

When shea nuts are no longer available, women begin processing the rice which they stored for sale or sell the other grains. Rice processing goes on into the farming season, and the cycle begins. Along-side these major economic activities (farming, shea processing and rice processing) some women are engaged

in petty trading, tailoring, weaving and food business in their various communities. All these are sources from which women get funds for their weekly VSLA contributions.

Activity 1111.3: Train community-based volunteers (CBVs) as facilitators on VSLA+

Selection of community-based volunteers (CBVs): Sixty CBVs were recruited from all 60 project communities to complement the efforts of field staff during community level trainings, monitoring and providing support to groups, mobilizing communities for project activities, and serve as liaisons between the women, BACs and the Solar HerHubs.



Sixteen (16) CBVs were initially selected in January 2021, to serve in all operational communities using a cluster system. However, for reasons of proximity, harnessing the potentials of individual community human resource capital, and for sustainability, CVBs were selected from each of the communities based on a set of criteria bringing the total to 60.



By the end of Q1, 18 females and 26 males were recruited to augment staff capacity in cascading the implementation of the WISE project.

The main priority in the selection process was to select women community-based volunteers but however this was a challenge because it was very difficult getting women in some of the community who met the selection criteria of a minimum of senior high school certificate (see figure above for details of CBVs).

Train Community-Based Volunteers (CBVs) on VSLA+: All CBVs received training on VSLA+ methodology during a two-week intensive trainer of trainers in Q2. CBVs were trained on core VSLA principles and gender modules. These modules totaled 32 and all participants were made to understand that each group in their respective communities were to be trained on one module per week. Trainings were to last till last

Project Officer assessing a community member in Wayamba, Tolon District for a CBV role

week of December, 2021. CBVs were also to receive a monthly allowance which included credit and transport.

Activity 1111.4: Provide supplies to new and existing savings groups on a need basis (box, passbook, stamps)

Across the 60 communities, all 5,343 women received passbooks, 186 groups received calculators, pens, rulers, stamps, ink, notebook and ink pad, and 22 groups received new VSLA kits. The women groups were much appreciative of these logistics. They were urged to follow all the new VSLA protocols and principles in using the new passbooks. Effective 1st July, 2021, these women would start using these passbooks per the way they are trained. The challenge initially was how they would transfer the records from their old passbooks into the new ones we are distributing, also those with different share prices, how would that be reconciled so that they can all be on the same level with the new passbooks. In trying to resolve these issues, we agreed on transferring total shares bought in the old passbooks to the new ones, where the share prices differ, say GHS 1.00 and GHS 2.00, the totals of those contributing GHS 1.00 should be divided by two (2) and the amount ascertained will be transferred to the new passbook as “starting number of shares”.

Activity 1111.5 support community-based organizations to establish childcare services that meet safeguarding standards

Out of 60 communities, 58 communities expressed interest in the childcare services concept and went ahead to identify safe spaces for its implementation in Y2Q3. During this period, 8 communities were selected to pilot the concept and assess its potential to upscale to the rest of the 58 communities. One of the reasons for this strategy was to make the implementation cost-effective as there is the tendency for the safe spaces to be furnished and communities would abandon them because of superstitious beliefs such as witchcraft.

The communities selected for the pilot include; Gbandu, Dulzugu, Digu and Bogupalgu in the Kumbungu districts and Yoggu, Woribogu, Tibogu and Zali in the Tolon district. Two care givers were identified in each of the communities and the principal care-giver received training on early childhood development and skills in running a safe space with the potential to upgrade to a day-care. This training was facilitated by experts from Plan International Ghana and Department of Community Development and Social Welfare. The piloting safe spaces would be furnished in with child-friendly items in Y3Q1



Safe space identified in Bogupalgu

Activity 1111.6: Roll out VSLA+ and deliver foundational training

In Y1Q2, SGs began receiving training on the 32 modules of VSLA+, facilitated by CBVs. At present, 162 of groups have completed the GRS modules while 29 are on the verge of completing the modules. The trainings were delayed by the harvesting season as CBVs found it difficult to mobilize women groups. By January 2022, all groups would have completed their VSLA trainings.

Interactions with the women groups indicate that modules they enjoyed most are Aisha's story, Man box Woman box, Hours in a day, Being assertive, women economic empowerment, healthy relationship and persons and things. For instance, from Aisha's story (Module 12) women shared that, ignorance increases a woman's vulnerability, hence, education, accessing appropriate SRHR services and elimination of child marriage, are prerequisite to a livelier future of the girl-child. For them, majority of rural women in patriarchal communities are an exact reflection of Aisha's life. Women find training an eye-opener, as before women overlooked hours they spend each day undertaking routine task of unpaid care work detrimental to their economic advancement.



Women are very vocal about their insights from these modules especially and are always quick to share the gender transformative change going on in their lives as a result of these trainings. Sana in Galinkpegu, had this to say *“Initially, men where not supportive of their wives attending meetings or engaging in economic activities away from their communities but due to sensitization efforts of NGOs like URBANET and Plan Ghana, we are now allowed to do business within and outside our communities and trade at Nyankpala Market. On market days, my husband helps prepare dinner when he is certain I will return home late.”*

Women have also reported that their agency have been enhanced resulting from their learnings and take-homes from the training sessions. This score is measured by their own acknowledgement of how assertive they have become through integration of the gender modules in their family lives to enhance effective communication and improve the healthy relationships they hold with their spouses.

Men who are part of the savings groups are also beginning to have some positive responses towards some of the burden's women are going through in the communities. The assistant Imam of Tibung stated, *“it is not wrong to assist my wife in doing some of the house chores, for instance when she is doing other domestic chores I can also help in taking care of my kids. I can prepare food for them, I even bath them as well”*. This evidence of positive masculinity is just a few of the gender transformative change the trainings have sparked. In a community like Dimabi in Tolon district, a man was spotted caring for a child whilst his wife was at a training. Some of the Imams have also started calling on their communities to be supportive of their partners.

CBV Monitoring: 58 CBVs were monitored within this period with Plan International Ghana M&E, Regional Coordinator and Gender Specialist to assess their facilitation skills and content knowledge of the gender responsive modules.



Two (2) female CBVs from Jakpahi kuku and Yipielnaayili voluntarily exited the project.

CBVs were assessed against a checklist of 12 issues ranging from attendance, subject matter, probing skills to team work. Progressively, majority of CBVs have had their confidence amplified with few especially the females(Nagbilgu, Gbanjong, Kpaachiyili and Kpilo) still timid. CBVs who are able to translate their confidence into good facilitation skills make trainings fun and exciting for women. Zulfawu Yakubu, a female CBV who

was nervous and could not facilitate training during roll-out in Q3 is currently an assertive facilitator with good linkages of modules and is a joy to watch during her trainings. Zulfawu is just one of such female CBVs who have been empowered as a result of being a CBV.



Zulfawu conducting a training in Galinkpegu, Tolon district

Another worthy mention is 19-year-old Alhassan Hubeida of Wuba community who was so timid and could not train her groups because of the presence of men in these groups. At present Hubeida is at module 24 with all of her 3 groups and shared that, *“before any training, I read that module and take*

down notes of how I will carry out any activities in that module. I go early to the training venue and set the place for the training. Now I don't even look in the manual anymore. I only go with my notes and the pictures I will need for that module. All of the women and men in my groups see me as someone very knowledgeable and are able to share very personal information during trainings."

Despite all these good stories about CBVs, during monitoring visits it was realised that some communities need extra attention from the field officer, because CBVs are not able to deliver content focus trainings to SGs despite their enthusiasm in the project activities. Aside poor time dedication to revision of modules ahead of training, some CBVs cannot read the text contain in the manual and translate it in the local dialect. Thus, Communities requiring extra attention include Nagbilgu, Kuglogu, and Lingbung, Gurugu, Kpaachiyili, Sabegu. These CBVs still do not have command of the content and need coaching.

Immediate Outcome 1120: Improved family and community recognition of women's contribution to the household and local economy

Output 1121: Male partners/family members trained on gender equality and women's economic empowerment

Activity 1121.1: Identify existing and/or mobilize new 'male champion' groups within communities
During this period, 540 male champions were identified across all communities.

The male champions are husbands of women in the VSLA groups and are to serve as influencers in their families and communities by promoting positive masculinities. From the VSLA needs assessment, 202 women were with their husbands in the same group.

Nine (9) male champions were identified and selected based on certain qualities (see text box) from each of the project communities. All groups were asked to identify men from their groups who exuded these qualities, including men (their husbands) in their communities who were not part of the groups. These men were followed up with and through interactions, 9 were selected from each community.

Qualities of a Male Champion

- Husband of a VSLA group member
- Commands community respect
- A Natural leader with strong interpersonal skills
- Past association with GE or feminist agenda
- Committed and passionate about GE and WEE
- Ability to mobilize fellow men and community leaders to support WEE and GE
- Ability to build cohesion in the group and strategize to mobilise for social change

The male champion concept is to ultimately stimulate peer groups of influential male leaders who will support Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) and Gender Equality (GE). These leaders would subsequently receive trainings in the ensuing quarters.

Activity 1121.3: Provide training to 'male champion' group leaders.

119 male champion group leaders were trained in Tolon and Kumbungu districts in Q3 on gender transformative change modules.

Engaging men is one of the core gender transformative strategies under the WISE project which seeks to positively impact on women economic empowerment as well as increase the realization and agency of women and girls. In the Ghanaian context, men are seen as the most powerful persons influencing the lives of both women and children, and often their support to women economic empowerment, engaging their partners in decisions that affects their lives, care for children and support in doing household chores and unpaid care work is limited.



Project Coordinator explaining the triple burden of women to male champion leaders

Based on this, a three-day trainer of trainers' session was organized to train selected male champions from the target communities in both districts. Two male champions each from the 60 communities were selected from the 9 each that were identified in Q1 and trained on 11 modules of gender transformative change, to serve as master trainers to the remaining 7 male champions in each of the communities. And when all of them receive the training, they will then peer-engage other men in their respective communities on the need for women economic empowerment, support for unpaid care work and building healthy family relationships.



Through modules such as Aisha’s story (module 2), Hours in a day (module 3), man box woman box (module 4) and Who makes decisions (module 7), participants were able to relate and reflect deeply on common situations women face in their various communities. And how these situations limit women’s economic participation. They were also able to reflect that men are only engaged in activities that are more productive leaving the

reproductive, care giving and unpaid workload to women.

Worthy of note is that about 85% of the male champion leaders admitted they were all currently “in the box” and that in order for them and their partners to “come out of the box”, they have to share responsibilities such as household chores, care giving and take decisions together. A male champion from Dalun, Mba Musah stated that his household was “out of the box” long ago, *“in my household both men and women do house chores. My last child who is currently attending UDS was sent for his field practical program where access to food vendors is difficult but because he is already used to cooking in the house, his life in the community is very easy because he cooks his own food.”*



Male Champion leaders receive training materials to facilitate their roll-out

Activity 1121.4 Provide technical support and follow-up to groups to implement the cascading of training to male champions groups

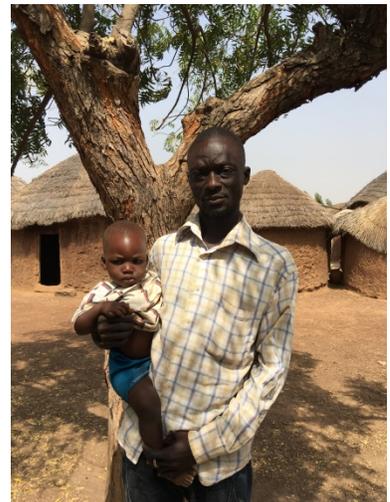
The male champion leaders who received ToT training in Q3 of the year began cascading the training to the other 7-member male champion groups in the communities. Prior to the start of the trainings, the male facilitators agreed with the other 7-member male champion groups about the frequency of the training, convenient venue and time, and the corresponding period to deliver all modules. However, the agreed times had some hitches due to the fact that it fell under a period where most of the other male champions group members are busy harvesting their farm produce. Some of the male champion facilitators have trained their groups to module 4 while others are almost done with the trainings. The facilitator group at “Jakpahi-Kukuo” demonstrated mastery of the content as they used practical examples and the picture to facilitate the understanding of the other members.



Male Champion Facilitating a training in Kpilo, Kumbungu district

On a general note, the trainings have had significant impact on the lives of the male champions as they have begun to support their wives in care responsibilities and other domestic chores such as fetching firewood and water. This significant change can be seen in a one of the male champions shown in the picture at Gbandu who has taken care responsibility of their younger child to allow space for his wife to engage in other activities. He shared *“I often take care of my children, sometimes I bath them just to allow space for my wife to prepare food and also go out for the VSLA activities. I used not to do this until I received the trainings”*.

A male champion, Bomahnaa, expressed his thoughts about the male champion training he received so far *“from my participation in the training, I understood that ignorance is the lead reason for men and women being in the box. It’s tiring to fulfil society’s expectation of gender roles ascribed to us, as men. It is by putting our learnings in to practice and propagating this through our attitudes (sharing care responsibilities and supporting partners) that we can get out of the box”*.



On a monitoring visit to Gawagu community (situated within the Nyankpala zone, Tolon district), a Male champion group leader, Ibrahim Loya, affirmed the enormous decline of sexual and gender-based violence issues witnessed in his community. This he ascribed to the trainings women saving groups and male champions are receiving. *“The training has change behaviours of spouses. Hitherto, we would hear night cries of women being beaten by their husbands saying “kill me and be free”. But lately it’s rare; we associate this change to the training of the WISE project”.*

Output 1122: Community and religious leaders oriented on promoting and organizing support for women’s economic participation

Activity 1122.1: Identify and mobilize community and religious leaders including, "Queen Mother"/"Magazias", as key change agents

This concept seeks to harness and channel the authorities of these local leaders by leveraging on their

various platforms to promote GE and positive and non-violent masculinities. These local leaders are ‘gate keepers’ of most acceptable social norms and recognized by their communities as having some authority over them. The WISE project would equip these leaders to also use their position and platform (community durbars, sermons, weddings, naming ceremonies and other social events) to profess their support for WEE and encourage especially men to support women’s participation in economic ventures.

Local leaders were identified and mobilized in consultation with groups, CBVs and community contact persons. It was realized that, some of the chiefs were not resident in their communities (Yoggu, Tibung, Wayanba and Worivi) and others were rather “too old and not active” as shared by community members. In view of this, sub-chiefs and linguists who fit the qualities (see text box) were selected. The magazias of some communities were yet to be selected to replace their deceased magazias or those who were too old. This slowed the mobilization process.

- | |
|---|
| <p>Selection Criteria for Community Leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revered local leaders who hold positions of influence• Past experience with WEE related projects and passionate to promote feminist agenda• Accepts that gender inequality violates human rights and the need for change• Futuristic, progressive and demonstrates leadership by influencing change• Ability to clearly communicate her/his support for GE and WEE• Openly condemns gender inequality |
|---|

There was a peculiar case of chieftaincy dispute in Dimabi community in the Tolon district. This community is actually a cluster of 3 communities, and this has made it challenging to select local leaders from this community. Each community is seeking to have its own set of local leaders. URBANET will address this next quarter during the community sensitization before major project activities commence.

1122.3: Facilitate orientation and refresher sessions with community and religious leaders, including "Queen Mother" groups

Under this period of reporting, community leaders including magazias and religious leaders in all 60 communities were oriented on gender equality and women economic empowerment. Chiefs and their representatives, religious leaders and community magazias across all 60 communities were taken through all modules of the sensitization manual for traditional leaders. This project continuously leverages their

influence and platforms to provide women conducive support systems from household to community levels in realizing their economic rights and well-being.



Traditional Leaders orientation in Zugu Community, Kumbungu district

During the session, the traditional leaders appreciated the fact that women are generally going through a lot when it comes to unpaid care work limiting their ability to capitalize on most economic opportunities as they have limited time. The leaders across all communities pledged support for the project and opined that the session was a wakeup call to them to engage community members to support their partners both in terms of the household chores and economic empowerment activities.

The chief of Warivi stated *“growing up as a child, I fetched water, fetched firewood, went to the grinding mill, performed other domestic chores for my parents and doing such things never prevented me from being a “man”, I am the chief of my community today”*. Another statement was made by the ‘Wulana’ of Jakpahi-kukuo, *“It’s about time we changed some of our pro-longed negative believes of men not helping women do the so-called women task, let’s work to support our women for a healthier family relationship.”*

Overall, the traditional leaders were receptive to the gender sensitization they received. Magazia of



Chief of Worivi, Kumbungu district

Nyankpala; *“I will urge all women to be patient and respect their partners for them to be supportive. Most men don’t support us (the women) because we don’t appreciate the little supports they give us. I will encourage them to always say ‘thank you’ to show their appreciation in order to get more support from them.”*

There were some expressions from traditional leaders which went to explain why men were reluctant to provide support to their partners. Chief Rep. from Gupanarigu community stated, “some women don’t deserve help because immediately you help a woman today, tomorrow it would become the man’s responsibility to do such chores even when the woman is less busy”. Chief of Gurumancheguyili was also of the opinion that; *“our main problem is the tradition with which we grew up with (‘Kavini’). This is gradually killing most men in our communities. I will encourage the men in the community to eschew the tradition of ‘kavini’ and be supportive of their partners.”*

Much more alarming was *“a man taking his child around is good, but due to superstitions in our communities, people often get jealous and can kill your child spiritually”*, Chief of Kuglogu, Sibdoo Yahaya.



Magazia of Nyankpala, Tolon district



Stigmatization (name calling) and polygamous nature of homes (he has to do it for all his wives) was also another reason hindering partner support at the community level.

In all the communities the Imams have started sharing the knowledge they have had during the training at the community level. The Imam of Dimabi, Abdul Rahman Yussif revealed that, when he shared the message on his Friday sermon, the congregation was not that receptive to him; there was murmuring among them and some of them leaving the mosque. But as he continued delivering the message every Friday and on any gathering at the community, people now come to him to justify some of the things he preaches about. He is sure with his explanations most of them would start

practicing his words. He recalled *“on that faithful Friday, when I tried admonishing my fellowship on the need to support their partners (wives) on bathing their children, washing and even cooking when there is the need, the men started leaving one after the other.”*

“At wedding ceremonies, I callout male partners to be supportive of women economic participating by sharing household chores. Personally, I am seeing changes now: male partners fetching water with cans for their wives, setting fire for dinner/supper preparation because their wives pending their wives return from farms. This is anchored on our belief system in Islam” Abdul Salam Hudu, Galinkpegu Community Imam.

Activity 1122.4: Support community and religious leaders, including "Queen Mother" groups to deliver messages of support of women economic empowerment participation

Community leaders, during the orientation on WEE were encouraged to deliver some key messages of support that would be used during their engagements with their communities. Some of these messages included;

- “Sweeping, fetching of water and child care are shared responsibility and not for women only.”
Chief of Yoggu
- Imam of Kuglogu, Yussif Alhassan; “God created man and woman and command them to support each other and consult each other in decision making.”
- Chief of Waribogu; “ before our women can be economically empowered, we need to offload the work burden on them; by supporting them financially, helping with household chores and child care responsibilities.”
- Chief of Gurmancheyili; “our main problem is the tradition with which we grow up with (‘Kavini’). This is gradually killing most men in our communities. I will encourage the men in the community to eschew the tradition of ‘kavini’ and be supportive of their partners.”
- Magazia of Yipelgu; “we should pay more attention to our children’s future. Our female children should be allowed to go to school or learn a trade to better their tomorrow.”

Activity 1122.5 Facilitate meetings between community and religious leaders and SG/SG leaders to encourage leadership of local business women

Four (4) dialogue meetings were facilitated between community leaders, male champions and SG leaders to discuss the problems or challenges faced by women at the household and community levels and how these challenges affect their economic participation. These dialogue meetings would continue for the rest of the communities in Y3Q1.

Women who were present at this meeting mentioned lack of money to buy shares, work load at the household level and lack of support from their men with household chores such as washing of bowls and clothings, sweeping the compound, fetching water, fetching firewood, bathing of children, taking children to school, cooking and taking care of children as the major challenges that they face which affects their economic advancement.

Madam Kubura, an executive to Maltiti VSLA group narrated, *“due to the household chores, I don’t get enough time to go for my VSLA meetings”* another member of the group said, *“if I had support from family members on my household chores, my business will have move faster than it is now.”* In some communities, men agreed to the fact that women face challenges of unpaid care work; but it is now in the past because they have begun to help them in this regard. All this is as a result of the implementation of the WISE project and similar ones. The women could testify to what the men were saying but however the men openly stated that their major challenge was *“the women refusal to perform their marital rights”* and this does not encourage them to support them with house chores.

During one of the engagements, a man admitted to being supportive of his wife but lamented about how



some women communicate when they seek for support. He bemoaned that, *“some of the women don’t know how to talk and ask for the needed support and they hardly appreciate our little efforts.”* The Magazia of the community excitedly mentioned that hitherto it was not easy for the women to open up on some of these things; partner support. She had this to say *“now we are comfortable talking about partner support with our husbands because of the male champions you have deployed. Now that the men too are getting the message, it will go a long way to help.”*

In all these engagements, men accepted they are willing to help but are afraid their wives will not keep it a secret. They mentioned that, most women would sit with their friends and talk about what her husband does for her. And for these men that’s a sign of disrespect and a sign that, the woman controls the husband. Some women surprisingly tend to defend men not helping with unpaid care work. This reveals that some of these women don’t find anything wrong with their husbands not supporting them with unpaid care work, and rather find it disturbing or a dent on their womanhood if their husbands should do any of the “woman work”.



Community dialogue session in Gbandu

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDED ADJUSTMENTS

CHALLENGES	RECOMMENDATIONS
Finding semi-literate male champions who could devote their time to the male champion training in some communities	Looking to see how possible it would be to engage male CBVs in that community to support the male champion trainings
Identifying female CBVs who meet the minimum educational requirement, reside in the community and with access to transport.	A 50-50 male-female ratio was used for the recruitment. Females who supported their groups as record keepers and could speak some level of English, were considered regardless of the minimum requirement. And in clustering communities for CBVs, female CBVs were given lesser number of communities relative to their male counterparts.
Female CBVs dropping out of the CBV program	Male CBVs have been identified to understudy officers so they can take over trainings
Some groups still finding it difficult to adhere to the VSLA loan principles	Existing local VSLA principles that does not deviate totally from the methodology should be partially allowed
Harvesting disrupted day time trainings	Trainings conducted in the night
Field officers unable to monitor trainings effectively because of the workload and the full roll-out of the trainings	Staggering trainings among communities would give the field officers the opportunity to concentrate on a few communities at time to wean them off a training before moving to the next cluster of communities
CBVs not motivated enough by the allowance and find it a little too small for their effort	Plan International Ghana to look at CBV remuneration again.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Beneficiaries should be registered with unique numbers and photographed to reduce multiple counting

- Engaging men and women in a dialogue meeting unravels challenges both men and women overlook when it comes to partner support.
- Men are more likely to support their partners if their partners perform their marital rites
- Communities usually perform funeral rites most part of the week especially after harvest, except Wednesdays and Saturday. This seriously reduces participation in community level activities which fall outside of Wednesday and Saturday within this stipulated duration.
- Access to thresher and timely distribution of start-up packages would be a great motivator to women interested in soybean production if the project is to succeed in this area of intervention.

CONCLUSION

Generally, the interactions that ensued during the preliminary engagements at all the various levels (meeting with community chiefs/elders, district authorities and relevant departments, women groups etc) to kick start project activity implementation was largely fascinating and uplifting to note. Indeed, the expectation of the project team for collaboration of the various key actors (district assemblies and their decentralized departments, chiefs and elders) as a key requirement for the success of the project was largely met. In particular, it is interesting to note that, the district assemblies (Tolon and Kumbungu districts) were highly interested in the project and made commitments to providing the enabling environment and support for the success of the project.

The key preliminary activities planned for implementation which serves as foundation activities and as springboard basically to launch into project activity implementation: selection and validation of target communities; assessment and subsequent enrollment of VSLAs, selection of CVBs/selection of male champions/community leaders have largely been successfully carried out. This was largely due to the interest shown by community contact persons who played critical roles in mobilizing community members for project activities.

A number of key challenges including women belonging to multiple VSLA groups and getting female CVBs preferably who meet the criteria for selection were identified. Again, there were questions as to why the project was centered on women. A number of key lessons and learning including taking into consideration communal events such as funeral rites, market days among others have been noted.

A number of strategies are being put in place to address those challenges and take advantage of the lessons learnt to ensure success of the project going forward.

APPENDIX: LIST OF WISE PROJECT COMMUNITIES

TOLON DISTRICT OPERATIONAL COMMUNITIES		
S/NO.	AREA COUNCIL	COMMUNITIES
1	Nyanpkala	Nyanpkala
		Kukuonaayili
		Galinpkagu
		Tingoli
		Gawugu
		Golinga
2	Tolon	Sabegu
		Woribogu
		Nangbegu
		Kamonaayili
		Yipelgu
		Dimabi
		Kunguri
		Zali
		Nyujagyili
		Gurumancheyili
4	Tali	Kpachiyili
		Tibogu
		Kuglogu
		Koblimahigu
		Kurugu Vohoyili
		Nagbiligu
5	Yoggu	Kpaligu
		Wayamba
		Gbanjong
		Yoggu
6	Lingbunga	Gurugu
		Lingbunga
		Tampia
		Vawagri

KUMBUNGU DISTRICT OPERATIONAL COMMUNITIES		
S/NO.	AREA COUNCIL	COMMUNITIES
1	Kumbungu	Zuggu
		Dulzugu
		Bogupaligu
		Kumbungu
		Satani
		Yipielnaayili
2	Zangbalung	Zangbalung
		Wuba
		Zangbalung Kukuo
3	Dalun	Dalung Kukuo
		Dalung Bihinaayili
		Dalun
4	Gupanarigu	Chanzege
		Gumo
		Gupanarigu
		Begu
		Nwodua
		Vili
5	Voggu	Tring
		Worivi
		Digu
		Voggu
		Voggu Kushibo
		Tibung
		Jegbo
6	Gbullung	Gbullung
		Jepkahi
		Tonjing
		Jekpahi Kukuo
		Gbandu