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Resilient pathways through women’s access to resources and services

SYNOPSIS

The Burkinabe Families Achieving Sustainable Outcomes (FASO) Program created more income-generating opportunities for women. Since diversification of livelihoods is the path towards resilience for many poor households, women’s increased access to income is essential for transformative change. By investing in human capital, with a special focus on women, FASO

contributes to a key dimension of resilience capacity. Market gardening—a gender-sensitive package of resilience-focused absorptive and adaptive capacity interventions –contributes to climate-change adaptation, household food security, and nutritional impacts. In addition, it increases women’s productivity and control of income, as well as their access to irrigation agriculture and cash.



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Resilience and gender. Gender influences the skills, strategies, and mechanisms individuals use to cope with and adapt to disturbances. It is more difficult for women to adapt to shocks and stresses because of their limited access to and control over productive and financial resources. Thus, women often struggle to diversify or utilize improved varieties of crops and small livestock that are better able to withstand drought or pests. Additionally, women—who typically own small plots of marginal land—often lack access to the technologies that fit their needs, facilitate adaptive capacity, and reduce workload. Through FASO-supported land reclamation activities, female heads of household have gained a source of security and reduced the vulnerability of their households.

FASO learned that women's time burden inhibited them from adopting agricultural and natural-resource management technologies. Recognizing this time constraint, FASO intentionally disseminated less labor-intensive agricultural and natural-resource management technologies to women and ensured that production and marketing decisions took into account their workloads and access to tools, land, and financial services. In order to ensure adoption of new practices, FASO strengthened women's access to – and control of—land and water.

Opportunities for women's livelihood strategies and adaptive capacity are linked to women's assets and levels of access to income and common property resources.

Women reported working mostly with groups that operate within the community, and relying more on bonding social capital (usually informal connections to family, kin, and friends, but also community members in general). Women engage in mutual risk-sharing networks at the village level. They depend on everyday forms of collaboration in activities such as collecting water and fetching fuel wood. In some cases, women help each other with farm work in exchange for labor, cash, or produce.

The FASO Program supported the formation of 777 savings and internal lending communities (SILC) groups. SILCs are helping women in the project areas develop basic skills in financial management. SILCs

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN-FOCUSED RESULTS IN FASO

- **52% of female participants** in FASO programs increased access to productive economic resources.
- **61% of targeted beneficiaries** reported increased revenue from agricultural activities.
- **3,147 women** accessed improved post-harvest storage techniques and technologies.
- **10,789 women farmers** were supported with USAID Title II food assistance to improve the productivity of more than 5,800 ha of degraded land.
- **637 ha of lowland** have been improved and allocated to 3,692 rice producers, 1,146 of which are women.
- **Women participating in market gardening** earned an average income of \$116 per beneficiary over a four-month dry season production cycle.
- **Women participating in warrantage** and rice parboiling activities earned an average income of \$161 and \$134, respectively, over a four-month period coinciding with the “lean season.”
- **771 savings** and internal lending communities (SILCs), primarily made up of women members, mobilized \$488,890 and generated \$113,000 in interest. They contributed more than \$42,500 to a social fund to support each other during shocks and stresses.

Source: FASO Monitoring and Evaluation Indicator Tracking Table data for FY2015.

have contributed to the development of financial capital by helping women save money and drive revenue-generating activities, mainly in the dry season. The social fund has also contributed to women's solidarity groups by supporting the poorest members of the community. Women SILC members reported



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using such funds to pay for school fees, educational supplies, the school canteen, or farm labor.

In addition to SILC, women participate in warrantage schemes. Instead of selling their cereals or produce at harvest time, women can receive loans while leaving part of their production in a locked warehouse with keys held by their group and the financial institution. This credit gives smallholders the means to buy essential inputs for the next planting and to hold on to product until the lean season, when food stocks start to run low and prices climb. At that point, farmers can redeem their product from the warehouse, sell their crop, repay their loan, and generate a profit. By using part of the credit to finance other income-generating activities, many farmers were able to repay their loans even before selling their crop.

Gender-based access to resources and ability to withstand shocks. Women own or manage most of small ruminant assets. Sheep and goats play an important resilience function, as they are important household assets with saving and insurance roles. They also play a crucial risk-mitigation role in the face of drought, crop failures, and reinvestment in production following a shock or stress.

Sheep and goats' ability to survive in harsh environments make them an important part of rural safety-net systems in Tougori, Manni, and Gayeri health districts. Sales of animals or their products supplement household income, and larger animals transport people and goods. Most significantly, animals store value generated by farming, and, to a lesser extent, by other forms of production and market exchange. For livestock

owners, animals constitute an asset base that can be liquidated when difficulties arise. In addition, animals provide animal products and represent an asset in the making (in terms of off-spring). Thus, raising livestock is an important livelihood strategy for women. Small ruminants and chickens are the most common animals among the most vulnerable households, including all-women and women-headed households.

As a result of FASO interventions, women can engage more in livestock rearing—an important part of the local economy. In the FASO Program intervention area, women generated income from gardening or sale of poultry, which they reinvested in breeding small ruminants. For example, a woman who participated in the FASO Program reported that her aggregate successes in poultry and bean farming have enabled her to buy two goats, which in turn have produced more kids. She has also raised 276 chickens, of which she has sold more than 70.¹

Livestock plays a critical role in recover and build farmer households, serving as savings and income sources, and providing manure for soil-improvement activities. Access to livestock or poultry has been transformational for women, who can now contribute cash or products to the household. Women repeatedly mentioned that this ability to contribute improved their status and increased their decision-making power within the household and community.

RESILIENCE: SCALING UP EFFORTS

Because of their contribution to health and nutrition goals, marketing gardens play an important role in child nutrition and expanding economic opportunities—especially for women—in the FASO Program.

Households seldom consume their animals (with the exception of chickens). Instead, most tend to reserve high-value animals for sale when scarce cash is needed or when “buying-up” for larger animals. Access to larger animals—cattle, donkeys, mules, and horses—may be key for more resilient livelihood strategies within the FASO Program area. Community members observed that the absence of livestock was a strong indicator of food insecurity or vulnerability. During a field visit conducted in July 2016, speakers in focus group discussions and key interviews frequently mentioned that households without any animals, especially those without poultry, were considered the poorest of the poor.

By establishing dry-season gardening for women to grow vegetables—including onions, tomatoes, okra, and peppers—for household consumption and income generation, FASO leveraged the productivity of developed lowland areas. Fresh

FASO IMPROVED NUTRITION THROUGH AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

- **Targeted the vulnerable** and improved equity through participation and access to resources.
- **Improved** the natural resource base
- **Empowered women**
- **Facilitated diversification** and increased production of nutrient-dense crops (e.g., orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, sesame, and legumes) and small-scale livestock (e.g., goats and poultry)
- **Improved processing**, storage, and preservation to retain nutritional value and food safety; reduce seasonality and post-harvest losses; and make healthy, convenient-to-prepare foods
- **Expanded market access** for vulnerable groups, particularly for marketing nutritious foods (e.g., garden vegetables, tomatoes, and peppers)

¹ FASO Program FY15 Annual Results Report Success Story, “Asseta and the Golden Egg.”



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vegetables are now available in local markets, where they contribute to improved incomes and nutrition. In most cases, women share the harvest among themselves. In some of the FASO areas in Gayeri health district, irrigated market gardens have allowed community members to access fresh vegetables for the first time during the dry season.

Women also received training in techniques for parboiling rice, as well as equipment to help with the scaling up of this income-generating activity. Rough rice harvested from the field with the husk and bran layer still attached is sometimes called paddy rice. Women can add value to paddy rice through parboiling. In parboiling, rough rice is steamed under intense pressure that pushes nutrients from the bran layer into the kernel, making it sturdier and less likely to break during milling. The final product can be sold as milled rice,

and the by-products—the husk and bran—can be sold as animal feed.

While some livelihood activities provided a steady income throughout most of the year, others provided income in lump sums. Women appreciated both types of income for different reasons. They found it easier to plan for the steadier sources of income, such as petty trade. These income sources reassured women that they could pay for regular expenses such as school fees and food each month, even though they did not currently possess that income. However, these livelihood activities usually produced only a small income and did not provide enough to meet unexpected expenses such as medical treatment or equipment repairs. Therefore, women needed a balance of steady but relatively small income sources, and lump-sum income sources (e.g., income from animal sales). Rice

harvests seemed to provide both steady incomes and lump-sum income. The stored rice could be sold as needed, in amounts just large enough for the households' needs.

Learning to-date: Two key drivers of resilience are: (1) diversification of income sources, and (2) access to resources and services. FASO facilitated the appropriate linkages needed to help female-headed vulnerable households manage risks. Through marketing gardens, poultry rearing, and livestock and small ruminant-fattening activities, women have been able to accumulate resources by focusing on one activity to achieve high returns.

However, in order to reduce the long-term risks for female-headed households, the FASO Program needs more time to facilitate development with major forms of service to support their activities (e.g., veterinary services for livestock and output markets for cash crops such as onions). In supporting women's income diversification strategies, it is important to identify the major risks and stresses facing households in their various activities, and provide the necessary linkages to ensure they can sustain their specialization over the long term.





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