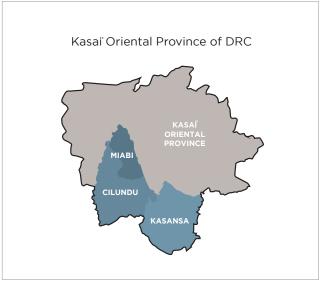# Learning from the Budikadidi Project in the DRC:

INTEGRATION FOR BEHAVIOR CHANGE-APPROACHES AND CHALLENGES

CONTEXT

From 2017–2023, a Catholic Relief Services (CRS)-led consortium has implemented a USAID-funded Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSA) in three health zones of the Kasaï Oriental Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Budikadidi (meaning "self-sufficiency" in Tshiluba) project works to sustainably improve household nutrition, food security and economic well-being. Project interventions were designed to be mutually reinforcing across these three sectors. Collectively targeting over 400,000 community members across 481 villages, Budikadidi was not designed to reach individual participants or households with all interventions. Instead, key behavior change messages were integrated across all project purposes with the aim of extending comprehensive benefits to the wider community. The 2019 internal midterm review revealed that many interventions remained siloed. It was also observed that Budikadidi potentially could have capitalized further on the roles of local leaders to promote behavior change beyond their technical responsibilities. As a result of the review, Budikadidi prioritized multisectoral integration of behavioral change messages to maximize beneficiary reach throughout the remainder of the project cycle.

Kasaï Oriental Province of DRC

Budikadidi takes place in the Kasaï Oriental Province of the DRC, targeting communities in the Cilundu, Kasansa, and Miabi health zones.

Eight-year-old Gentille helps her mother chop freshly-picked spinach from their permagarden in the Monzo village. Previously, the family rarely ate fresh produce, as they could not afford it at the market. Photo by Jennifer Lazuta/CRS

OBJECTIVE

This study was designed to document Budikadidi's approach to improved integration and to assess progress to-date with the aim of providing insight on leveraging layered, synergistic opportunities within complex multisectoral projects to support social and behavior change (SBC). The study responded to the following learning questions:

- What processes within the management structure improved integration? What challenges remain?
- How were efforts aligned across governance, agriculture, livelihoods, nutrition, health, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sectors to support adoption of project priority behaviors?
- How does the reach of multisectoral messaging to individuals compare to that of households?

METHODOLOGY

First, key informant interviews (KII) with Budikadidi staff were conducted to map out the project's key SBC messages (including who delivered them and who received them), integration approaches, successes and challenges. In July 2022, a series of two sex-specific focus group discussions (FGD), one youth FGD, and two sex-specific household interviews were conducted in each of the three project-targeted health zones for a total of nine FGDs and six household interviews. FGDs and KIIs consisted of a mix of program participants and community volunteers for a more holistic view of transmission and understanding of messages.

KEY RESULTS

Approaches

Staffing and Management Structure

To achieve integration of SBC messages across various Budikadidi interventions, the Budikadidi team first prioritized an integrated management structure. As a consortium of five organizations providing technical expertise in different sectors, Budikadidi leaders faced the early and common challenge of establishing a whole-of-project perspective across the consortium. Senior managers established various internal structures to create an environment in which staff could identify synergistic opportunities for reinforcing common messages across project activities. As a start, annual Theory of Change (ToC) workshops specifically highlighted the value of integrated programming, from which the concept of "One Budikadidi" emerged, and staff began forming an identity linked to the project rather than working as individual consortium members. This foundational asset enabled the development of an SBC approach that relied on integrated staffing, tools and models for message delivery within and across purposes.

Budikadidi formally introduced all health zone staff—from supervisors to field staff—to each activity, the messages promoted during its delivery, and its intended link to SBC. This holistic briefing was then cascaded down to community volunteers who promote the adoption of key behaviors within the interventions they lead as well as others in which they participate. For example, Community

Assistants (ASCO) provide multisectoral activity coordination support to field staff and thus deliver a wide range of SBC messaging to individuals and groups in their communities. Community Volunteers responsible for delivering core agriculture and nutrition interventions—Lead Farmers and Lead Mothers/Care Group Promoters, respectively—collaborate to promote permagardening for year-round access to fruits and vegetables, resulting in improved outcomes in both sectors.

Throughout the life of the project, Budikadidi senior managers have consistently championed the multisectoral project goal during various staff engagements, including trainings, weekly health zone coordination meetings and quarterly consortium-wide planning and reflection meetings. These structured engagements are also leveraged to design intentional sequencing and layering of various sector teams' detailed implementation plans. Consequently, project staff at all levels are not only cognizant of and able to effectively communicate the holistic set of Budikadidi priority behaviors across sectors, but they are also acutely aware of the intentional plan for frequent message reinforcement by various staff and volunteers. This approach to staff-wide engagement in SBC message delivery has continued to surface new opportunities for strengthened integration. For example, staff acknowledged that while WASH

Brigades are responsible for cascading WASH-specific messages to communities, they also play a key function in project strategies to engage youth leadership and improve governance. Thus, greater focus was placed on leveraging WASH Brigades to model adoption of a wider set of priority SBC messages. To achieve this, governance, gender, WASH and youth staff collaborated to deliver integrated coaching sessions to field staff so they could deliver multisectoral support to WASH Brigades.

Programming

The Budikadidi design also supported specific opportunities for integrated messaging and wider reach. Programming tools ranging from manuals and guides to visual materials and demonstrations presented to communities were carefully produced from a multisectoral perspective to provide field staff and volunteers with key information from sectors outside their expertise. For example, specific behaviors (such as making household decisions jointly or adopting the use of agricultural technologies) formed the content of literacy and numeracy manuals. Individuals honed these skills while manipulating content that reinforced messages they may have heard during other interventions. Cooking demonstrations were practical tools used by Lead Mothers to promote the consumption of nutrient-rich foods accessible through establishing permagardens. Governance tools created to strengthen the organizational capacity of various local group structures—e.g., Water Management Committees, SILC groups and Producer Organizations (PO)—were tailored to their sectoral aims (water delivery, economic strengthening and agricultural production, respectively). As such, training tools concurrently promoted their institutional and technical capacities, both of which are critical to their leadership in promoting community-wide behavior change.

To widen the audience of SBC messages and support household-level behavior change, Budikadidi modified the Care Group Promoter approach to focus not only on promoting improved behaviors with mothers, but to also include other family members, particularly fathers. This new strategy increased the number of joint home visits and decreased mother-specific community meetings to improve familiarity with promoted behaviors and male engagement overall. The Budikadidi team also leveraged technically agnostic communication channels—radio emissions, listening clubs and community meetings—to deliver and reinforce multisectoral messaging, reaching a wider audience than community members targeted for specific technical interventions.

Challenges

While the Budikadidi team employed numerous approaches to support integrated SBC programming, several challenges weakened the overall strategy. During the RFSA refinement period, the Budikadidi team hired a consultant who trained key technical staff in assessing and designing for behavior change and then supported them to define priority behaviors and conduct formative research to understand why targeted communities were not adopting these behaviors. Despite this investment, the process did not yield a robust SBC strategy for the project lifetime with clearly defined priority behaviors. First, the team struggled to identify and address non-knowledge barriers such as beliefs and attitudes, social norms and access to resources. Additionally, staff interviews revealed that in the absence of a clear list of priority behaviors, the sheer number of behaviors targeted was often overwhelming, limiting their ability to integrate and thoroughly communicate all messages. This is particularly true amongst field staff where Budikadidi places a strong emphasis on multisectoral delivery. Presumably, the staff challenge to absorb too many messages is equally felt by communities.

Moreover, staff stated that while great effort was made to integrate SBC messages across purposes, the development of these messages was typically designed in technical siloes, perhaps representing a missed opportunity to craft messages that could have been more easily championed by the wider multisectoral team. This occasionally led to programming decisions that did not reflect the current environment. For example, communities were encouraged to adopt permagardening to gain year-round access to fruits and vegetables, but water sources are not always available or accessible, undercutting the feasibility of the behavior. Additionally, the project's SBC strategy was not highly intentional in terms of long-term sequencing, resulting in static messaging across the project lifetime. Messaging was not adapted to context changes or to address successes and challenges with the current approaches.

Throughout implementation, SBC was often reduced to communications and mass media approaches, reflecting a lack of foundational SBC understanding throughout the consortium. While the project MEAL system did incorporate indicators to measure behavior adoption annually, there was limited to no intermediary effort to monitor progress of behavior adoption over time nor was there an effort to dive deeply into understanding persistent obstacles. Consequently, SBC messages were not adapted based on lessons learned or as the context evolved. While the MEAL system

Thérèse Mujinga, a Lead Mother in the Monzo Village, conducts a home visit with a local mother during which she reinforces social and behavior change messaging first introduced during group meetings with mothers and then helps to understand the specific barriers each faces to adopt these changes. Photo by ©Michael Castofas for CRS

was not sufficiently robust to support adaptive management of the SBC strategy, informal and on-going reflection on SBC approaches were also lacking after a dedicated SBC staff position was not prioritized in the project budget in later years. SBC as a collective responsibility did drive cross-sectoral discussions for integration; however, it also created a technical gap for strengthening SBC approaches.

Effectiveness

Budikadidi's integrated staffing structure and tools were highly effective at engaging community volunteers in promoting improved behaviors through multisectoral programming and message delivery. FGD participants identified polyvalents (project staff promoting the project's foundational purpose) and ASCOs as individuals who delivered multisectoral activities and messages while also noting that sectoral field agents also delivered SBC messages outside of their sector-specific activities (often during household visits or direct contact with community members). Prior to Budikadidi, the frequency and quality of community meetings varied across the zone, and in many cases, they did not take place. When and if they did, they were impacted by conflict/tension amongst community

members, rendering meetings ineffective. Governance programming shifted Community Animation Cells (CAC) from health-focused groups to multisectoral bodies that facilitate regular community meetings in collaboration with village chiefs and other community leaders. As noted by male FGD participants, this structure became an instrumental space for Budikadidi participants and the rest of the community to be regularly exposed to and encouraged to adopt behaviors from across the Budikadidi ToC.

At a high-level, the three purposes structuring Budikadidi's results framework and ToC are each multisectoral. The Foundational Purpose (FP) addresses youth, gender, literacy and governance; Purpose 1 (P1) combines health, nutrition, water and sanitation; and Purpose 2 (P2) works across agriculture, livelihoods and income-generating activities. Results found that integration was stronger within purposes than across purposes, largely driven by the ease of executing integrated programming within, as opposed to across, teams.

Foundational Purpose (FP): Youth, Gender, Literacy and Governance

Behaviors under the FP tend to be multisectoral in nature, and as a result, were more successfully integrated across all the purposes. Male FGD participants, particularly those who were members of organized community structures, discussed how strengthening organizational capacities of local groups, especially those that are multisectoral in nature, generally helped create an enabling environment for multisectoral integration by providing clear avenues to promote SBC messages. For example, most youth participants said that although they were not CAC members, they were occasionally invited to participate in CAC meetings which exposed them to, and promoted their adoption of, the full spectrum of Budikadidi multisectoral behaviors. Budikadidi project staff further confirmed that in some villages, all community group structures can participate in select CAC meetings. Additionally, youth club meetings were recalled as effective spaces for multisectoral discussion, particularly since youth were engaged in supporting village development including implementing community action plans and facilitating exchanges with other leaders. Male FGD participants further mentioned how improved literacy skills through the creation of literacy centers contributed to increased involvement of women in community leadership roles.

Regarding integration of FP messages amongst other purpose interventions, some FGD participants stated that strengthened organizational capacity of SILC groups and POs (key P2 structures) linked community development and income-generation as means to mitigate shock, a key FP message. Lead Mothers (P1 leaders) also play a significant role in promoting key FP behaviors, particularly around increased social cohesion, guiding mothers on how they can build positive relationships not only with their husbands and children but with their neighbors as well.

FGDs revealed that key messages prioritized under the FP are most understood by FP volunteers, including CAC leaders and youth club members. Both profiles are largely male due to norms around community leadership roles (whereas P1 volunteer roles were largely filled by women), thus FP behavior adoption may have been limited due to messaging limited by gender norms.

P1 – Health, Nutrition, Water and Sanitation

Findings indicate that P1 priority behaviors were promoted through many FP community volunteers; were mostly effectively integrated across sectors and purposes; were promoted in community-wide fora; and appear to be the most valued and adopted by community members. Female participants confirmed that while Lead Mothers promote numerous nutrition-related behaviors (including exclusive breastfeeding, providing children with nutritious meals from all four food groups, and natural family planning), they also deliver WASH messaging (including latrine management, potable water consumption, and handwashing during critical moments for improved health outcomes), confirming that multisectoral SBC messaging does occur within P1 programming.

> " These [gender] messages are integrated in all activities. Even when they participate in agricultural activities, they talk about the importance of sharing tasks."
>
> —FEMALE FGD PARTICIPANT

Compared to the other purposes, it appears that the P1 team was more effective in integrating their messages due to an increased level of understanding of the desired behavior change and the strategies through which they would promote those behaviors. Project staff stated that due to the high number of behaviors promoted in P1 compared to the other purposes, the strategy was to disseminate behaviors in as many spaces as possible using various methods. FGD participants stated that literacy and The Faithful House (TFH) manuals both promoted similar themes communicated by Lead Mothers. While these activities predominately targeted female community members, youth and male FGD participants identified community meetings as highly impactful spaces for the dissemination of P1 messaging. Additional, youth FGD participants described radio emissions and listening clubs as particularly effective channels for receiving P1 messages. Male FGD participants shared that while women are the target audience of Lead Mothers' activities and messages, Lead Mother home visits have been successful channels to extend nutrition- and WASH-focused SBC promotion directly to husbands. When asked which messages were most appreciated and adopted, both youth and male FGD participants mentioned P1 messages, indicating that this strategy appears to be successful.

P2 – Agriculture, Livelihoods and Income Generation

Within P2 messaging, FGD participants highlighted that beyond enabling savings, SILC groups also function as a mechanism to concretely promote income-generating activity development. Agricultural field agents encouraged farmers to join SILC and PO groups for more diverse income pathways. Female FGD participants stated that Lead Farmers promoted the adoption of agricultural practices while communicating the importance of time-saving for women and girls; for example, they encouraged households to establish permagardens to reduce women's travel to and from markets and early morning farming on distant farms to allow for more time during the rest of the day to engage in other household tasks. As such, they promoted mutually beneficial agricultural and gender behavior changes amongst both men and women, exceeding the specific aims of P2 objectives to also support FP outcomes.

CACs and ASCOs were the primary parties responsible for transmitting P2 priority behaviors—including adoption of improved agricultural practices, joint decision-making and developing income-generating activities—during CAC meetings, community meetings and household visits. Youth FGD participants noted that CAC Agriculture Focal Points would attend youth club meetings to communicate key agriculture and livelihood SBC messages. Focus groups noted the complementary role of Lead Mothers in promoting permagardening for improved nutrition outcomes and using household compost to improve soil fertility and increase production. As previously mentioned, an impactful model used by Lead Mothers was cooking demonstrations using crops harvested from permagardens to produce nutritious meals for community members to sample. Female FGD participants also cited key FP interventions—literacy and TFH programming—as creating spaces in which their leadership of income-generating activities (such as livestock management) was encouraged to strengthen household income and nutrition. Both interventions also promoted household task sharing as an intermediary aim to increase household production and income.

Missed Opportunities

Despite these successes, challenges did arise in the integration of SBC messages within and across purposes, particularly for activities in the WASH sector. While field staff worked directly with WASH community structures, particularly Water Management Committees (WMCs – joint FP and P1 structures), to strengthen their organizational capacities and serve as a community focal point

capable of widely promoting the adoption of key WASH behaviors, their role in SBC promotion integration was less successful than other local groups. In part, they lacked the authority to promote or model SBC as FGD participants stated that communities did not trust these leaders due to water fee management abuse. Focus groups revealed that these WASH leaders struggled to promote behaviors within their own sector and never promoted other project messages, resulting in siloed WASH programming.

Moreover, greater collaboration between key community actors could have bolstered greater integration and wider dissemination of multisectoral SBC messages. In some cases, it was noted that behavior change messages were primarily delivered to CAC members and Village Chiefs who struggled to collaborate themselves, let alone effectively collaborate to cascade the messages throughout their communities. Additionally, increased collaboration between Lead Mothers/WASH Brigades and PO/SILC groups would help reinforce messaging on how participation in these groups can lead to SBC for both positive health and livelihood outcomes.

While project staff confirmed that Lead Farmers were tasked with promoting dietary diversity when delivering permagarden support, these messages are not consistently or effectively delivered without the involvement of Lead Mothers, indicating a missed opportunity to promote nutritional behaviors to a wider audience (i.e., farmers who are mostly male). Moreover, integration of health and nutrition behavior messaging within SILC groups and POs is essentially nonexistent, with FGD participants suggesting that multisectoral messages were absent during these groups' meetings. This revelation represents a missed opportunity to leverage these consistent small group spaces for overt linkages between income generation and improved nutrition.

Lastly, although the project design integrated labor and time-saving technologies to reduce women's time burden, another Budikadidi learning study revealed that these technologies were most appreciated for their positive impact on increasing production, with women and men's time calendars remaining inequitable. The lack of change in both men and women's time burdens reveals that technical delivery failed to effectively integrate SBC messaging well enough to contribute to gender norm transformation.

Solange Balengela feeds her 12-month-old daughter, Marie, fortified porridge following a cooking demonstration by Lead Mothers in the Monzo village. Previously, Solange's children suffered from malnutrition, but after learning to make this porridge, she now regularly prepares it at home and her children are in better health.
Photo by Jennifer Lazuta/CRS

Reach and Spillover

While Budikadidi's approaches to integrated SBC programming effectively widened the audience for multisectoral messaging beyond the limited targeting of individual interventions, overall reach remained limited due to several factors. First, Literacy Agents, TFH Facilitators and Lead Mothers employ multisectoral tools and models, but predominately reach women. Meanwhile, other interventions that engaged significant numbers of men—POs, SILC groups, Lead Farmers and WASH interventions—were less successful at integrating cross-purpose messaging. Thus the holistic set of Budikadidi priority behaviors were reinforced less often amongst men than with women. This reality risks exacerbating the unequal time burden faced by women and reducing the effectiveness of the SBC strategy. As men retain most decision-making power and control of resources, household adoption of multiple behaviors is less likely if not championed by men. Male community volunteer FGD participants (who served as Literacy Agents and TFH Facilitators) confirmed that multisectoral messages integrated into these interventions convening large numbers of women were often only heard directly by men during community meetings or informal interactions with community leaders. While this study reveals the importance of community meetings to reach both men and women and widen the scope of multisectoral SBC messaging beyond intervention audiences, this wider space remains restrictive as many vulnerable groups (e.g., the elderly or people with disabilities) struggle to access these meetings.

Study participants revealed, however, that a positive spillover of Budikadidi SBC messaging has occurred at both household and community levels, widening the project's audience to indirect participants. Each household interviewee reported having at least one household member who also participated in Budikadidi activities with whom they shared key messages, typically during evening family discussions. This not only provided the space for SBC messages to reach marginalized individuals at the household level, but also allowed for the exchange of key messages between household members for a holistic set of messages. Several unmarried youth FGD participants residing with their parents and siblings confirmed that they were made aware of priority behaviors promoted by Budikadidi from household members or their neighbors. Budikadidi participants who were not directly targeted for permagardening support reported adopting this practice after witnessing its positive impact on their neighbors' food access, revealing a positive community spillover effect. One participant engaged only in SILC and PO activities detailed how practicing behaviors she learned from her sister, a youth club participant, around early pregnancy and forced marriages has helped

her avoid harmful situations. Another participant revealed the multi-generational dimension of integrated message cascades, stating that his children are responsible for his awareness of key WASH and forced marriage/early pregnancy messages, which have encouraged him to take a more active role in his children's lives and well-being. Moreover, each interviewee reported that at least one behavior adoption was driven by a message communicated to them from their household members. Two participants stated that the messages they appreciated the most were communicated to them by a household member instead of directly by a Budikadidi leader, revealing the power of household-level dissemination.

Many interviewees specifically noted the transmission of Budikadidi SBC messages from their spouses. One male participant shared that he learned about positive birth outcomes from his wife, a Lead Mother, and witnessing the impact of her work helped him overcome his reluctance to participate in Budikadidi. A Lead Mother shared that her husband, a TFH Facilitator, discussed joint decision-making, preventing physical violence, and how to communicate with children with her, reinforcing themes she was exposed to during literacy classes. Another participant explained that his wife introduced the importance of permagardening for improved nutrition, a practice they have since adopted together.

When probed further to understand if couples are challenged to exchange SBC promotion with one another, two of the interviewees noted that participating as TFH facilitators taught them how to engage in positive dialogue and joint decision-making. They noted that practicing these skills as a couple and having more regular discussions has softened spousal reluctance to project participation and ultimately contributed to more consistent SBC reinforcement. A female participant also credited Lead Mothers for their support in joint decision-making. She previously experienced conflict with her husband, but her Lead Mother's household visits helped her develop a closer relationship with her husband, accumulating in the adoption of key behaviors. A Real Father volunteer responsible for encouraging young men's support to their families leveraged the training he received to make changes in his own household. Now, he and his wife are more at ease to address household conflicts productively, resulting in increased dialogue and the adoption of project-promoted behaviors.

DISCUSSION

The strategic "One Budikadidi" approach effectively garnered championship of integration amongst senior management. The aim to cascade this collective ownership to the field level (both to staff and community leaders) has succeeded to various degrees. Overall, the Budikadidi experience highlights several practical approaches for integrating messages across a multisectoral project, promoting behavior adoption and increasing household reach: i) the creation of spaces where project staff, together with community leaders, volunteers and members, can gather and discuss different messages (e.g., community meetings and youth club meetings); ii) multisectoral content reinforcement (e.g., literacy instruction or radio emissions) and iii) implementation of cross-purpose activities where mutually reinforcing messages are promoted, such as the permagardening intervention which serves to promote production, nutritious consumption and time savings.

Even though integration is appreciated and, in some instances, concretely planned by the Budikadidi team, a diffusion of responsibility inherent in multisectoral programming has prevented further action and presented challenges. This underscores that integrated programming is critical not only to reach a wider population with key SBC messages, but also to collectively create the enabling environment necessary for various objectives to be met. To ensure intentional integration of SBC messages in a multisectoral project such as Budikadidi, the following recommendations should be considered:

- **Staffing and management considerations:** During project start-up, staffing strategies should focus on the intentional recruitment of staff with SBC expertise (unique to a communications background) who have the capacity to effectively coordinate the suite of multisectoral behaviors and engage field staff and community leaders in transferring knowledge, delivering behavioral nudges and assessing behavior adoption. A dedicated SBC team would help shift the focus from simply communicating SBC messages during numerous interventions to the intentional integration of messages across purposes to support sustainable behavior adoption.

- **Holistic SBC design structure:** As part of the RFSA refinement period, teams should conduct well-executed formative research (possibly, but not exclusively, barrier analyses), including intentional mapping across sectors to create a strong foundation for a robust SBC campaign design. This includes engaging with participants and community leaders to support the validation of priority behaviors, the creation of and validation of messages and the selection of audiences (as well as modes) for dissemination. The design process should focus on developing frameworks for each priority behavior that carefully leverage entry points created across the different purposes and their various interventions.

- **Adaptive programming:** To ensure continuous relevance throughout the life of the project, SBC programming strategies will likely require adaptation to progressively focus on the most difficult behaviors, integrate new information, and specifically target late adopters. Careful SBC strategy sequencing will also reduce the pressure on staff, community volunteers and the communities themselves to digest all messages simultaneously, likely supporting greater and more sustained behavior adoption overall. Additionally, a commitment to collaboration within and between purposes will help identify opportunities for integration across sectors as conditions change.

- **Targeting considerations:** Formative research identifying the nature of the most vulnerable populations and barriers to their behavioral change should be used to design SBC strategies that specifically target vulnerable community members. For example, a strong SBC strategy may include plans to prioritize community volunteer home visits to households with people with disabilities so they can hear SBC messaging directly in addition to household transmission. To promote message reach within the household, teams can leverage programming promoting joint decision-making to specifically encourage SBC message-sharing between spouses.

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