



# FSP Qualitative Survey Report

# **INCLUSIVENESS IN**

# **COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING**

OCTOBER 2021

## 1. Introduction

The South Kivu Food Security Project (FSP-“Enyanya”) is a 7-year USAID BHA funded development project operating in the South Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The project works towards an overall goal of increasing the food security through three purposes:

- 1) Purpose 1 (P1): Household incomes increased
- 2) Purpose 2 (P2): Improved nutritional status of target communities
- 3) Purpose 3 (P3): The socio-economic environment is stable and inclusive

The project is in its sixth year of implementation.

### 1.1. Objectives of the study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to seek to understand 1) the existence or absence of a consensual perception of positive change in the inclusiveness of community decision-making for women and youth in the FSP intervention zone, and 2) how male, female, youth and adults in the FSP intervention zone perceive the normative role of women and youth in community decision-making. This study will also serve as a reference to inform the personalized indicators:

- Consensual perception of positive change in the inclusiveness of community decision-making for women and youth
- Male, female, youth and adults' perception of women's and youth's role in community decision-making

### 1.2. Target zones for the study

The study covered three health zones in South Kivu province namely Katana, Kalehe and Muti-Murhesa. Twelve focus Group Discussions were held in the aforementioned areas. Focus group samples were stratified by health zone (Kalehe, Kabare, Miti-Murhesa), age (15-29, 30+) and sex (male, female), yielding an overall four FGDs per health zone and six FGDs per demographic group (sex or age).

Health Zone	Village	Sex	Age
Kalehe	Lemera	male	15-29
	Kalehe	male	30+
	Muhongoza	female	15-29
	Bushushu	female	30+
Katana	Mwanda	male	15-29
	Kadjucu	male	30+
	Luhihi	female	15-29
	Kabushwa	female	30+
Muti-Murhesa	Cituzo	male	15-29
	Cifuma	male	30+
	Kahungu	female	15-29
	Buhandahanda	male	30+

## **1.3. Methodology**

### **1.3.1 Sampling strategy**

The data underlying this indicator was collected from all 24 presidents of local development committees (LDCs) in the FSP intervention zone through key informant interviews (KIIs) and from 12 focus group discussions with project participants based on variability sampling with a targeted concept saturation rate of 80%.

### **1.3.2 Data Recording**

Each FGD was conducted by one facilitator and one note-taker. The note-taker documented spoken responses, behaviors and attitudes as noticed during the interviews. Each facilitator and notetaker filled out a notes sheet to summarize their take-aways, questions and impressions from the interview.

### **1.3.3 Data management**

Data was aggregated by MEL Quality Monitoring Assistants in the field and shared with the Bukavu office according to FSP-MEL filing standards. Interview notes were stored as document sets in the qualitative analysis software MaxQDA and enriched with variable labels (type of interview, type of note, health zone, health area, village) for improved qualitative data management.

### **1.3.4 Quality Assurance**

Data validity and reliability was ensured through a range of quality procedures including (1) training of enumerators in qualitative data collection methods, facilitation and notetaking, (2) documentation of relationships and biases that may influence the interpretation of the data, (3) complete documentation according to FSP-MEL qualitative note-taking standards, and (4) triangulation between [a] methods, [b] interviewees, [c] locations and [d] inter-facilitator reliability.

### **1.3.5 Data analysis**

All qualitative data was analyzed in MaxQDA using the content-structuring qualitative content analysis method according to Mayring (2002)<sup>1</sup>. Data was coded in a two round, exploratory and confirmatory qualitative coding approach, based on an a-priori coding system of Research questions and normative role type (active/passive). Coding categories were developed using the interview listening notes and triangulated with a rapid exploratory coding of raw interview notes before the establishment of the final coding system. In a second step, the coding system was applied to all raw interview files before retrieving and summarizing the segments responding to research questions.

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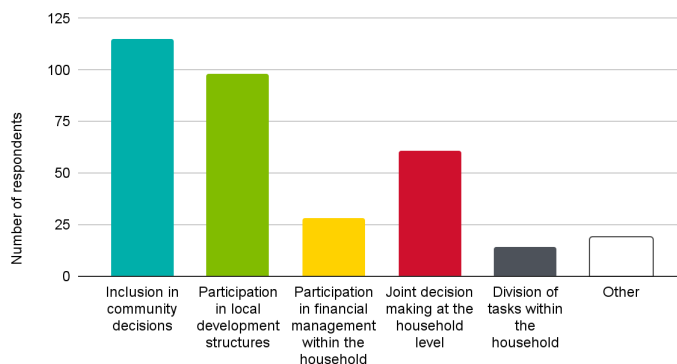
<sup>1</sup> Mayring, Ph. (2000). Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken (7th edition, first edition 1983). Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag.

## 2. Results of the study

The analysis of inclusiveness in local development structures shows a growing trend towards the inclusion and participation of women and youth in the community governance structures. Indeed, there is a general consensus of improved participation and positive change in the community, linked to this growing inclusion, reflected in a strong sense of representation. Women and youth are increasingly taking on positions of responsibility in the structures, which also allows them to have more visibility and gain experience, and to participate in decision-making processes. There is also an increase in confidence on the part of women and youth, but some obstacles remain to their equal consideration in decision-making. While women and youth are showing up more often in management structures, their decision-making power within these structures is still limited when compared with men. As one participant explained, change is underway, not yet complete. However, the analysis shows an optimistic perspective and consensus on the importance of integrating women and youth into decision-making, and increased awareness among men, women, and youth, which could manifest itself in the presidency of women and youth in the next elections.

### 2.1. Consensual perception of positive change in the inclusiveness of community decision-making for women and youth

**Type of change identified by respondents**



The study results reveal a consensus, both at the focus group participants and key informant interview levels, regarding positive change dynamics within their communities towards more inclusiveness of women and youth. Indeed, 97% of respondents mention this dynamic of change. This general trend can be seen among women, men, and youth, and is illustrated by various examples. Among the examples cited, 64% of women, men and youth in focus groups and key informant interviews mentioned participation in LDCs and inclusion in community decisions. A young man in

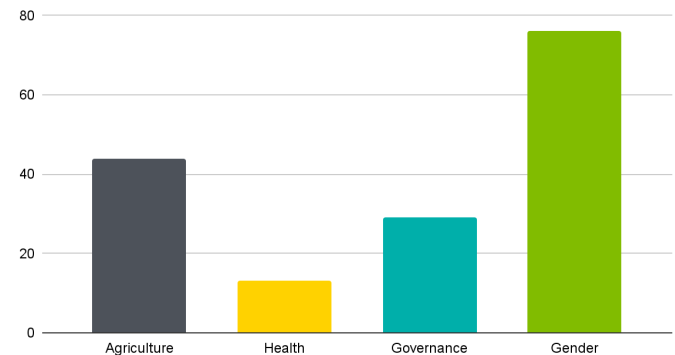
Kalehe said that the **“Involvement of the youth in community decision making enables a cohesion between groups that the project accompanies and that activates global social cohesion”** (FGD, Lemera, Kalehe).

Overall, participants report a balanced change in male and female behavior, which is encouraging and reflects a global change dynamic. The participants also mentioned several times a societal awakening. This awakening can be seen at several levels, according to participants' responses. A woman in Katana mentioned that she **“used to think women were not able to lead activities in which men were involved. Thanks to FSP, women (in her community) started a VSLA, in which men joined, even though it is led by women : men accept them in being the leader”** (FGD, Kabushwa, Katana). Other participants also mention a change at the household level, and in the way of taking household decisions. A young woman in Miti said : **“We were simply giving birth to children. Our husbands were deciding for everything, but now they are taking our opinions into account, for example about income management, schooling for our girls.”** (FGD, Kahungu, Miti). This societal awakening is seen on the side of women and men. Indeed, men also mention a transformative change in their behavior, as a man from Kalehe reported :

“before I wasn’t asking my wife for decisions, but now all the decisions are made jointly” (KII, Tchibandja, Kalehe). Finally, we observe a global shift towards inclusiveness, from both women and men. This is described by a CLD leader in Miti, who emphasizes the fact that both “**women now take the lead**”, and “**men were discriminating against women, [...] but now understand their role, consider them.**” (KII, Saint Pie, Miti).

Participants consensually attribute all or part of these changes to FSP’s intervention. Gender activities were most cited, but all components were mentioned as having an impact on increasing inclusion. When participants were asked to identify one or more activities that are causing this change, they mentioned various activities, which show the project's impact as a whole, the synergies between approaches, and the integration of the gender component in each activity. Notably, participants mention specific structures supported by the program, led by women and youth (VSLA, OPs, etc.), their participation in certain activities that encourage their inclusion in decision-making (road rehabilitation, permagarden etc.), or of specific key trainings (governance, GBV) as being critical factors of this global shift towards inclusion. Some participants also mentioned the awareness-raising and campaigns carried out by FSP, which shows the cross-cutting impact of SBCC activities.

**FSP activities leading inclusivity according to participants**



This dynamic of growing inclusivity is particularly visible towards women. Indeed, participants tend to mention more measures or examples illustrating the growing inclusion of women, and 59% of the changes of which participants are most proud relate to the inclusion of women. Programmatic data also shows this trend : the number of LDCs, POs and CSOs supported by the project whose leadership committee includes at least one woman and one youth exceeded the target and has reached 100%. In addition, 138 women and marginalized groups are now consulting with traditional leaders on local issues, which represents 117% of the initial target. On the other hand, youth tend to perceive that changes affect them more often, since according to the youth surveyed, 35% of the changes they identify concern them compared to 26% of changes identified by adults. This shows that program participants understand and take ownership of the impact and opportunities of the activities organized.

Changes they are most proud of	Adults (over 30)	Youth (15-29)
Are regarding women	59%	50%
Are regarding youth	26%	35%
Other	15%	15%

Therefore, the overall trend is towards an improvement in the inclusion of women and youth, which manifests itself both through increased participation in LDCs and increased inclusion in decision-making within these structures. However, there is still work to be done, since even if this more inclusive decision-making is mentioned, respondents focus mainly on participation of women and youth and creating a space for free and unrestricted expression that can represent a step towards inclusion in decision-making.

### 2.1.1. What do local development committees do to ensure that women and youth are heard and their perspectives considered in local decision-making processes?

The committees nurture an inclusive platform for joint decision-making in critical areas. Overall, participants mentioned a positive change in the inclusiveness of women and youth in these structures.

First of all, the respondents mentioned efforts to include women and youth in meetings, encouraging and promoting their participation. Overall, the participants and the KIIs evoke an active role of women and youth, and the creation of spaces for free expression, the proper consideration of their opinions and their systematic consultation. **“Meetings cannot be held without them”** according to some respondents, and most mention solutions and actions taken to resolve barriers. Among the members of the LDCs, all mention actions taken to promote the participation and listening of women and youth. To emphasize why they want women and youth’s participation, respondents alluded to the evident capacities that the youth possess such as their seriousness, engagement and energy. On the other hand, the transparency and financial skills of women were applauded. Community members and committee representatives emphasize on the improvement in access to opportunities for both women and youth, and their active participation. There is general optimism on the future if this current trajectory is maintained. To further put this inclusion to perspective a respondent said : **change is underway, not yet total.**

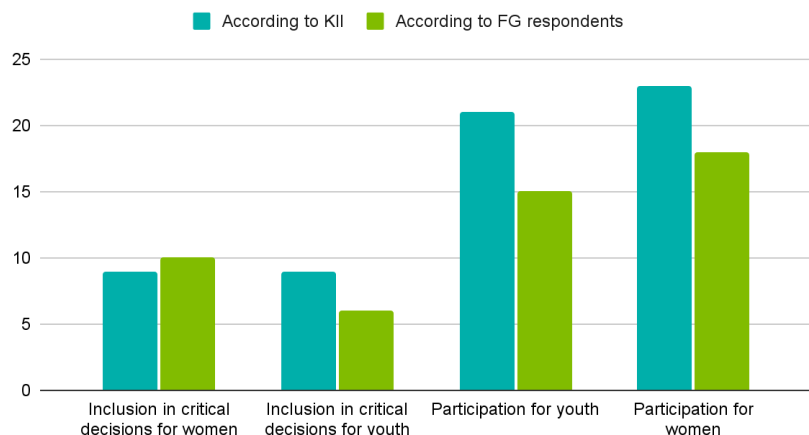
In terms of inclusion at key positions, progress has also been made. Indeed, after the elections of LDCs, structures supported by the project whose leadership committee includes at least one woman and one youth went from 85% to 100%. Within the LDCs, women and youth often hold key positions in the committees, such as vice president, treasurer, or as the head of specific committees, which gives them more weight in decisions. They can have strategic roles in advocacy and awareness-raising activities to engage more women and youth in a virtuous dynamic of inclusion. In some key positions, such as vice-president or treasurer, women sometimes have the opportunity and responsibility to represent committees or act as spokespersons. This might represent an opportunity for them to gain skills and confidence, both self confidence and from the community members, in order to gain credibility in the next elections.

However, deeper efforts are needed to achieve inclusion and equal consideration in decision-making.

Most respondents cite active participation of women and youth but

still limited decision-making. Indeed, it seems that the concerns of women and youth are heard and addressed during meetings but that they are not yet integrated into decision-making processes concerning the issues they raise. According to the participants and especially the youth, there is also sometimes a problem of the flow of information on activities related to LDCs that do not allow them to make their voices heard. Finally, while the trend is towards increasing inclusion, there is a glass ceiling, which does not yet allow for a woman in the role of president, while they often reach the vice-presidency. On the other hand, the

**Actions taken to increase inclusivity in CLDs**



respondents mention several youths at the head of LDCs, which shows the evolution and changes in behavior, so this change dynamic is encouraging.

### **2.1.2. What obstacles still inhibit some women and youth to actively participate in decision-making in local development committees?**

Barriers to the inclusiveness of women and youth can be read at several levels in the responses. Compared to last year, the lines have shifted and the order of the obstacles cited by participants have slightly changed. The two main changes are that low self esteem is not anymore the most mentioned obstacles by women, though it is still mentioned by some women and adult men talking about women and youth. This shows how this is related to cultural norms, but also that women are progressively gaining self-confidence. The second one is about illiteracy, that is also less mentioned by women and youth as an obstacle, but mostly by adult men concerning what would represent an obstacle to women's participation.

More than the inherent lack of self confidence of women, we can mention the obstacles related to customs and the considerations of women and youth in Congolese society, especially in a rural context. Indeed, obstacles related to customs or lack of consideration of women and youth's opinions are the most mentioned by the participants in the focus groups. Members representing the LDCs mention the lack of confidence, illiteracy, or lack of capacity of women or youth, and 22% of feedback regarding women and youth's leadership were criticisms, most of them coming from adult men. Indeed, negative perceptions of youth still persist among older adults, which may hamper their inclusion - some older adults reported that youth are "unwilling to volunteer," that they are "unstable," "impatient," or "arrogant," and cited these as reasons for the lack of youth leadership, which was already emphasized in Y4. These negative (unconscious) stereotypes are however not recognized by older adults as barriers to youth participation - LDC members tend to believe that youth no longer face obstacles to their inclusion, citing positive examples of youth 'success stories' in their communities.

Women and youth themselves identified obstacles to their participation and inclusion. Women have sometimes identified low self-esteem as a factor hindering their active participation, which may also be associated with their integration of those customs and cultural norms that depict women as inferior to men in all aspects. Youth emphasized that they were not well informed and that crucial information slipped them, thus making it challenging to participate in LDC meetings effectively. Some respondents also highlighted time or money constraints, which force them not to participate in meetings, mostly women. This was already mentioned in Y4, linked with the compromising position women are often put into with regards to decision making. Indeed, some of them are still not allowed to participate in meetings without the consent of their husbands, and their husbands' opinions influence some of the contributions women have thus, objectivity is lost.

### **2.1.3. How far do male and female, adult and youth feel represented by their local development committee?**

The majority of respondents felt represented by their LDC and believed that the committees were representative of the community at large. This feeling can be explained by the advocacy activities carried out at the committee level to make the voices of their members heard and increasing efforts towards participation. In addition, community representatives justify their legitimacy and representativeness based on elections, and several mention their duty of accountability to the community.

Among respondents, some mentioned that the increasing inclusion of women and youth, in turn, allows them to engage their peers, to achieve more representativity and encourage participation by raising interest from

women and youth. Their presence also builds the confidence of others, hence the importance of having women and youth in critical positions. For some committee leaders, they also serve as a model.

In practice, there is a consensus on the efforts made by the committees to integrate and prioritize the opinions and problems of the members of their communities during the various meetings and in the planification. In addition, the LDCs are also involved in conflict resolution, thus representing the community's interests, increasingly including women and youth, which was mentioned several times as a factor of better cohesion.

#### **2.1.4 What obstacles to the meaningful participation of women and youth in community decision-making have been addressed over the past year?**

Compared to the previous survey, illiteracy is less cited as an obstacle to participation by women and youth, which shows the impact of FSP's efforts. Indeed, the project carries out activities to allow women to enroll in literacy and numeracy classes. In addition, the project purposefully targeted marginal groups, which also included women. As a result, some women now feel more confident in meetings as they are now literate, and lack of self-confidence is also less cited by women as an obstacle. Indeed, lack of self confidence is less cited by women than by adult men, which shows that women are progressively gaining confidence, but that deeper efforts need to be made on perceptions.

According to the members of the LDCs, most of the obstacles related to the committee or structural discrimination are addressed, sometimes including obstacles related to customs. For focus group members, progress is being made to make their voices heard, especially women. They repeatedly mention improving their participation and reducing barriers to their participation in elections to critical positions. However, customs and traditions still represent one of the main obstacles cited by participants.

Part of the generational conflict that may exist was addressed as youth are now mentioned as potential equal partners. Even though there is still a significant perception of youth as being dispersed and with a certain unwillingness to participate, some of them are mentioned as role models and their seriousness, and their intellectual capacities are highlighted, which shows progress in terms of inclusion.

#### **2.1.5. What obstacles have not been addressed?**

Some barriers persist and continue to be cited as barriers to including women and youth in community decision-making. There is a consensus on the persistence of certain levels of discrimination, both against women and youth. The unstable nature associated with youth and prejudices about women, related to their submission or inability to make informed decisions, hinders their election to key positions such as president.

Most of the representatives of the LDCs mention the lack of self-confidence as an obstacle to the inclusion of women and youth in key positions, which is paradoxically less so by those concerned. This can be seen as a reluctance of LDC leaders to their inclusion while denying existing barriers. Indeed, among KII respondents, several representatives explained that there are no longer any barriers to the inclusion of women and youth. This could then represent another level of the obstacle, being the lack of willingness of adult men to recognize and address the structural barriers limiting the inclusion of women and youth. However, both participants and representatives of the LDCs acknowledged a global change in women and youth's perception and recognized significant progress on custom-related discrimination. Therefore, it can be concluded that a behavior change is underway but not yet total.



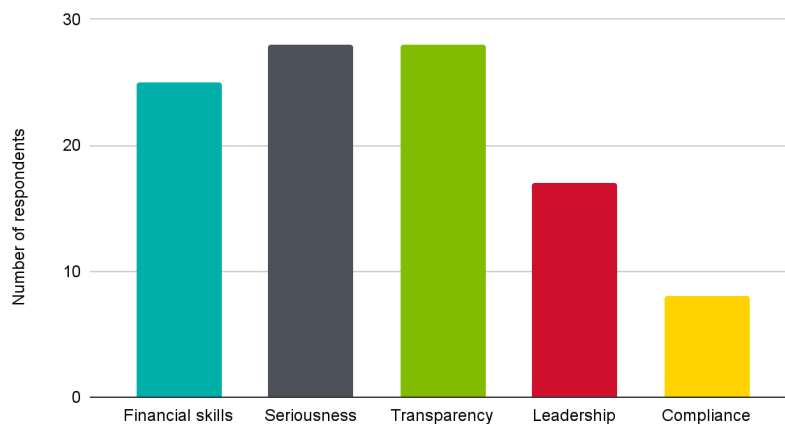
## 2.2. Male, female, youth and adults' perception of women's and youth's role in community decision-making

### 2.2.1. What role should women play in community decision-making according to men, women, adults and youth? Why?

There is a consensus that women should have access to the same opportunities as men, and should play more important leadership roles, including the presidency. While most women currently observe the position of vice-president, respondents mention their enthusiasm to have women in the role of president. Several respondents mentioned that they trust women more, emphasizing their integrity and sense of responsibility. Not only do women mention their desire to become presidents, but men also put it forward, and recognize the importance of having women in positions of responsibility. A respondent representing LDCs highlighted the ability of women to better understand and address women's concerns, hence the importance of having

women in positions of responsibility to contribute to change. **“She can lead a team just like a man can do. Men understood that women are as intelligent as they are, and can occupy any position”** (FII, Saint Pie, Miti)

#### Women's skills according to participants



All groups continue to argue that women are best placed to serve as treasurers. People perceive women as incorruptible, which makes them perfectly suited to this role. This role is considered the most appropriate because women demonstrate a high level of transparency, which is highly desirable when managing funds. While

this allows women to participate in leadership committees, it is still linked with perceptions and doesn't yet mean they are included in decision-making.

Overall, there is a consensus among respondents to elevate women to higher leadership positions, as they are up for the challenge. Women are considered to possess the key skills required to occupy leading leadership positions despite some reluctance regarding their ability to make independent decisions.

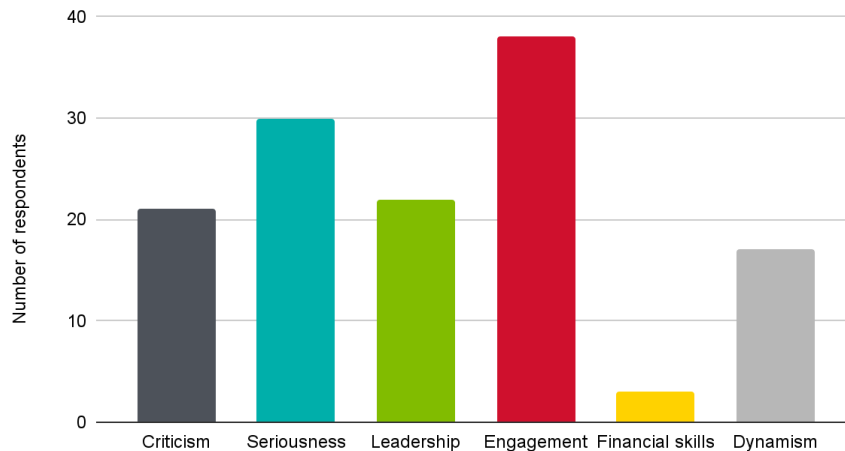
Finally, the analysis of intersectionality reveals here that young women are particularly enthusiastic about women's accession to positions of responsibility. One young woman respondent explained: **“If the woman were president of the LDC, she could lead differently than men”**. This shows that young women are sensitized and willing to contribute to this dynamic of change and increasing inclusion, and may distance themselves from the constraints imposed by custom and societal shackles.

### 2.2.2. What role should youth play in community decision-making according to men, women, adults and youth? Why?

Respondents generally highlight the skills of youth in terms of writing, seriousness and commitment, which represents a real added value in positions of responsibility. While the majority of them are currently in

support positions such as secretary, several respondents mention youth in key positions who have recently arrived in office.

### Youth's skills according to respondents



Youth are also identified as particularly suitable for positions related to safety management or community mobilization. Youth have the potential to play an active role in influencing other youth to make certain decisions made by the LDC. Thanks to their energy, they are able to easily mobilize other youth for specific activities.

However, there are still persistent stereotypes about youth, particularly related to their instability, which encourages some adults to say that they still need to learn before entering executive roles. Among young respondents, the majority say they are motivated and ready to take on the challenges of these positions, which seems encouraging. Youth see themselves as good leaders, especially because of their education, but also their ability to drive change. A respondent said **“Youth play a big role because they have the concerns to improve governance and are dynamic”**. Other roles considered best suited to youth are those of advisor and mobilizer.

## Conclusions

The overall trend observed and highlighted through this research is that of a positive change, a global dynamic of integration and increasing inclusion of women and youth in local development structures. The link with program activities is strongly emphasized by respondents, which shows the impact of FSP in transformative behavior change towards greater inclusion of women and youth. While custom and stereotypes still represent a barrier to greater inclusion, resulting in the glass ceiling for presidential positions, the program's efforts are having a considerable impact on the dynamics of change, and on the lives of women and youth in general. Efforts should be pursued in awareness raising and training for participants and within structures, as these are the activities cited by participants as having a significant impact. At the same time, the other activities of the program contribute to creating synergies and recognition of the importance and potential impact of the integration of women and youth.

## Key recommendations

### For FSP

**-Reinforce messages about positive masculinity linked with nonviolence, the promotion of women's rights, and the promotion of women's leadership in the public sphere and in the household. The**

observed shift toward greater inclusiveness can be strengthened if men understand the value of women and youth's leadership and do not feel threatened. There could be backlash with the idea of promoting women, and FSP should continue to help participants recognize and address perceptions of gender and gender roles, and how they are culturally constructed. Key message should keep including that anyone, regardless of gender, can be a competent leader.

**- Continue literacy activities, leadership training, and the Gender Transformative Training (GTT) approach focusing on shared decision making in households, in parallel with the inclusion of women in VSLAs Group.** These activities allow women to gain confidence and to be involved in the allocation of income, and participants are increasingly integrating VSLAs, which will stay in place after FSP ends. The impact is important and allows women and youth to feel concerned and to want to get involved in the activities. It also shows community members the place that women can have in society, and builds their confidence in women, allowing them to be elected to positions of responsibility.

**- Strengthen SBCC activities by diversifying approaches,** continuing to promote messages not only on the radio but using various communication channels. Broaden the spectrum through photos, for example, to allow participants to visualize men embracing positive masculinity or women in leadership positions. By normalizing the idea that women and youth can hold leadership positions, it strengthens their chances of being elected by the community.

**- Address the perception of women and youth** by continuing to disseminate messages on youth development, highlighting the successes of youth and women and emphasizing their role and potential. For example, highlighting their successes in the community through listening clubs, radio programs, etc., or encouraging meetings between structures that include women or youth leaders and others who are still reluctant. FSP can also rely on gender champions to reach and influence their peers and older adults. By equipping natural leaders with more skills and information, they can become change agents in the communities.

**- Address the lack of information:** Decentralize information, not only relying on leaders but publishing it in other local structures involved in planning activities, to allow everyone to participate. Encourage better dissemination of information by CLDs in their action plan for women and youth. Diversify the communication channels, asking each person to disseminate information about the organization of activities to reach a larger number.

**- Continue to engage chiefdoms and CLD leaders** on incorporating a better division of tasks into the bylaws so that female vice presidents have access to information and gain capacity, leadership and confidence to strengthen their chances of being elected, as president, in the next elections.

**- Continue GBV training** to raise community members' awareness of certain behaviors and reinforce messages about positive masculinity through different groups such as VSLAs, POs, Channels of Hopes, Peer Positives Couples

## **General recommendations towards inclusion in decision making**

**- Work in depth on perceptions, rooted in customs.** Training and awareness-raising activities address deeply rooted behaviors that are difficult to transform. Perceptions and stereotypes persist and are a major limitation to full inclusion in decision making. These perceptions also dictate the roles that are assigned to women and youth, which will remain secondary if not addressed in depth.

**- Reinforce messages about positive masculinity.** Indeed, strengthening inclusiveness in decision making can be done by engaging men in expressing their masculinity with healthy behaviors towards

women and girls. By working on key, well-defined messages, men can be made to understand that they are not threatened but can be strengthened by the increasing inclusion of women and youth, and the sharing of power and decision making.

**- Link activities together to maximize their impact.** Indeed, different activities will create synergies that can maximize the overall impact on inclusiveness. For example, activities that empower women through literacy help them gain self-confidence, or involving women in income-generating activities help them to be valued by other community members. By creating synergies between activities, their impact on women, youth, and the perception of community members is multiplied.

**- Involve leaders at all times by monitoring the messages:** To ensure the appropriation and sustainability of the approach, involving leaders is essential, as they in turn can mobilize the community members most attached to the tradition. However, it is important to follow the messages that they transmit, so as not to distort them.

**- Reinforce messages at key times, depending on the structures' electoral calendar.** Reinforcing key messages or working with members on inclusivity issues before elections can increase the chances of women and youth being elected.

**- Work on intersectionality, and on trust between youth and between women.** Indeed, we can observe a form of mistrust linked to the integration of customs by women and youth, which can undermine their confidence in themselves and in their peers. Working on this trust, particularly in the case of young women, can help strengthen the impact of the intervention.