

GENRE+ Phase II Project learning brief

Strengthening climate resilience, social cohesion & gender equality in Ségou, Mali

The UK FCDO GENRE+ Phase II project aims to support the equitable management of natural resources for climate resilience, social cohesion and peace in the Ségou Region. In March 2024, just over one year after the start of the second phase of the project, research was initiated to understand changes in community behaviour around natural resource management (NRM) and the factors underlying them as a result of efforts to promote more active participation by women. The GENRE+ Phase II project operates in 48 villages, of which 24 villages were randomly selected for this research and learning process.¹ This learning brief aims to summarise the key findings from the research and recommendations for project adaptations in its final year.

Summary of Findings

Over the past 15 months of the GENRE + Phase II project's implementation (January 2023- March 2024), **24 villages have seen improvements in their adaptation capacity to climate change**, including initiatives to reduce logging, soil erosion and deforestation for firewood and to restore forests and increase crop yields. However, lack of availability of land and competition over resources remains a challenge. Community-based natural resource management (NRM) systems are broadly viewed by community members as 'inclusive' and 'consensus-based', suggesting critical conditions for equitable and peaceful management of natural resources are in place. However, in practice, only 15% of respondents believe that the needs of women and minority are integrated, with men reporting greater inclusivity in these systems than women (45% to 15%).

There are, nevertheless, **strong indications of perceived shifts in attitudes and behaviours on participation of women in NRM**, especially among community leaders and decision makers and heads of households. In the past six months alone, eleven women have been appointed to positions of responsibility in NRM decision-making spaces. such as village councils; COFO (Land Commission); on pump, water or forest protection committees and the farmers' organisation. In many cases, this is the first time women have been represented.

The **majority of respondents believe that the participation of women in decision-making processes has led to more effective solutions to conflicts over natural resources**. This is evidenced by women's increased collective action. This includes women working together to adapt their forest use and raise awareness of the affects of climate change through participation in forest protection brigades; engaging with institutions such as COFO to negotiate collective rental of land, and engaging with decision makers to advocate for change in access to land for market gardening and agro-pastoral development.

However, **women's contribution to climate adaptation and NRM decision-making remains within their traditional roles as natural resources users**: as collective users of communal resources such as forests for firewood collection and market gardens (not land owners). And

¹ The research study sample was made up of 143 people including (50%) women, through 24 focus groups including 12 women focus groups. The sample for this study was drawn from the beneficiary communities of the GENRE++ project, the results and causality can therefore only be generalized to these communities/villages.

while the nomination of more women in leadership positions is significant, their roles tend to be as the lone ‘women’s representative’ among a committee or council of men.

Despite positive changes observed over the last six months, **12% of respondents say they have encountered challenges in integrating women into NRM decision-making processes.** This is attributed to resistance among certain individual leaders to appoint women to positions of responsibility, as well as traditions, social norms and customs that do not portray women as suitable leaders. Respondents also cited a lack of education for women, tensions or conflicts between the sexes and a lack of self-confidence among women due to the weight of customs and the importance of land insecurity as barriers to women's participation.

Key findings:

Changes in community adaptation to climate change:

Thirty-three per cent of respondents (32% W/33% M) reported behaviour changes in relation to community adaptation to the effects of climate change. Initiatives implemented by the community include:

Community adaptation initiatives to address the effects of climate change	% respondents reporting these initiatives	% women/male responses
Planting and maintaining trees to restore the forest and fill the gap left by deforestation	29%	25% W/ 33% M
Reducing abusive logging	28%	31% W/25% M
Using improved seeds and organic fertilisers to improve yields and avoid exposure to chemicals	27%	26% W/25% M
Establishment of stone barriers to reduce soil erosion	9%	6% W/12% M
Use of clay or biogas stoves as alternatives to firewood were also mentioned mainly by women than men	7%	12% W / 2 % M

Forty-five per cent of respondents (49% W/ 41% M) thought that the GENRE+ Phase II project had made a ‘major contribution’ to community-based climate adaptation and resilience, though this was mainly in the communes that benefited from the first phase of the project. Thirty-five per cent (36% W/ 33% M) believed the project has made an ‘average contribution’, while 20% thought that it had made a ‘minor contribution’, mentioned by more men than women (15% W/ 26% M).

Project Example: Reduction in Abusive Logging

The reduction in abusive logging results from a combination of actions carried out by the community and the forest brigades, with the support of the Genre+ Phase II project. The project supported certain communes in drawing up local agreements on the management of natural resources through close collaboration between community members, local authorities, and relevant stakeholders. As part of these conventions, communities agreed to specific commitments and put in place rules aimed at regulating the exploitation of forest resources. These rules, developed in a participatory manner, were designed to be respected by all members of the community. The essential role of the forest brigades is to ensure compliance with these established rules and to intervene in the event of abuse or violations.

Shifts in attitudes and behaviours on women's participation in NRM:

One third (34%) of respondents (33% W/ 35% M) reported changes in behaviour in the last six months in relation to women's participation in NRM and conflict resolution. This includes greater consideration of issues such as: women's access to land (affirmed by 68% respondents: 79% W/ 57% M), women's participation in decision-making processes (27% in total: 21% W/ 32% M) and recognition of women's rights (6% in total, mentioned by 11% of men only).

The majority of respondents feel that changes in behaviour have been observed mainly among community leaders and decision makers (44%: 49% W/ 39% M), followed by heads of households 27%: 26% W/ 28% M). Nineteen per cent (19%) of respondents (15% W/ 23% M) reported that greater awareness among women of their rights and duties in the management of natural resources has been a motivating factor in their becoming more involved claiming their place in decision-making processes.

In relation to formal recognition of women's rights, for example, in recent times we have observed greater respect of quotas during appointments to decision-making bodies, more support for the participation of women and recognition of their right to speak at meetings attended by men. To ensure respect for these rights, one of the main mechanisms available is the Coordination of Women's Associations and NGOs (CAFO), which is represented by women leaders committed to protecting women's rights and promoting women's well-being, children and family.²

Men in the Toukoro focus group: *"Before, we used to seek the advice of our wives discreetly at home in order to deal with a problem. Nowadays, women play this role directly in the COFO or as female representatives on the village council in order to resolve conflicts".*

More women in leadership positions:

In the past six months, there have been eleven new appointments of women to positions of responsibility. This includes three as women's representatives on the village council, one as a representative on COFO, six as representatives on pump, water or forest protection committees and one as 3rd vice-president of the farmers' organisation.

These appointments represent a clear change in the representation of women in leadership positions. According to CARE's Rapid Gender Analysis on Power & Participation (RGAP, 2023), women do not have direct access to the village council, regardless of the quota rules. Through women's advocacy and with the commitments made by the leaders during the project activities, the designation of female leaders to represent women within the village council is something which has not been achieved in these localities before. Women are also taking up leadership roles in other new spaces. While women are often members of water committees, this is the first time they have participated as members of the forest protection brigades and farmers organisations in the localities concerned. Farmers' organisations have traditionally been made

² The Engaged Men project (a CARE initiative under the Gender Equality Women's Empowerment Program) has also been contributing by providing support and accompaniment to women in these spaces.

up of men, as women are not landowners, which has acted as a barrier to women playing a role in this regard.

Increased representation of women in NRM decision making roles is also shifting NRM outcomes. For example, in the village of Kanouala, commune of Kemeni, Ramatou Dao, a woman leader was appointed to represent women in the forest protection brigade which initially was made up of five hunters (all men). This appointment marked a significant turning point in the decision-making dynamic within the brigade, with her taking part in patrols and resource controls alongside the men, demonstrating the ability of women to occupy positions traditionally held by men. A concrete example of its influence is the revision of the calendar for the exploitation of forest products to consider the specific needs of women. Furthermore, the influence of Ramatou Dao is manifested in the increased respect for the rules, particularly by women, who are the main users of forest resources in the village.

Men's focus group participant, Farissouma I : *"The actions of the GENRE+ Phase II project have contributed a great deal to changes in behaviour and mentality, because through the training we receive from the project, and the feedback we give to others, we can see that many people have understood and are in the process of changing. The women themselves have realised that they have the right to defend their interests, even within traditional structures such as chieftaincies. This is why they have expressed their desire to have female representation in the forthcoming elections for "Haut du formulaire" councillors.*

Seventy-three (73%) of respondents (69% W/ 73% M) felt that the Genre + Phase II project had made a 'significant contribution' to achieving the appointment of women to positions of responsibility. This change was attributed mainly to awareness raising and advocacy among decision makers on the participation of women in NRM decision-making processes, and training to build women's knowledge and skills to take the initiative to ask local leaders to include women on the relevant committees.

According to the project participants, some successes achieved by Genre + Phase II project that contributed to these changes include:

- a) Building women's literacy through the Women Lead in Emergencies (WLIE) approach:**
In certain localities, illiteracy was a major obstacle to the active participation of women in the management of their VSLA and in decision-making within their community. Literacy initiatives have enabled women to acquire essential skills and boost their self-confidence.

Atoumata Traore, VSLA's president Beyan: 'With the support of the project, 30 women benefited from literacy courses for 45 days in February 2024. These courses enabled the women to take charge of the administrative and financial management of their VSLA, but also strengthened their confidence in themselves. The group's administrative secretaries now carry out their duties effectively, and the women no longer need to depend on a man to keep the accounts. Additionally, when we are invited to meetings or events, we can now write our own information, something that was previously unthinkable for most of us.'

- b) Rehabilitation and development of market gardening and agro-pastoral areas:** With the project's capacity building activities and advocacy carried out by WLIE activities, all project intervention villages where women did not have collective spaces (such as market gardening areas) were encouraged to find solutions to provide appropriate spaces for

women. This will promote the economic empowerment of women by allowing them to access productive resources and contribute to family income and decision-making.

- c) **Forums focusing on women's participation:** Genre+ Phase II has organised forums aimed at increasing women's participation in decision-making processes. These forums offered women a platform to express their opinions, needs and aspirations, thereby helping to increase their participation and leadership in community life.

Participation of women leading to more effective solutions for inclusive natural resource management

The majority of respondents (66%: 85% W/ 53% M) believe that the participation of women in decision-making processes has led to more effective solutions to conflicts over natural resources.³ In addition to women taking up more leadership positions in NRM decision-making spaces, 35% of women reported having held meetings with local decision-makers to improve their participation in NRM in the past six months, and 49% of respondents reported women having carried out advocacy actions that have improved women's access to land.

As a result, **women are actively contributing to climate change adaptation. However, this remains mainly in the areas where they traditionally play a role as natural resources users (rather than land owners):** in firewood collection and market gardening. For example, they participate in forest protection brigades, in planting trees in collaboration with men, and in making stoves and using biogas to reduce the pressure on forest resources. In the villages of Kampolosso 2, Kanouala and Fambougou, for example, women are members of the forest protection brigades, in which they carry out awareness-raising activities on the effects of climate change and help to make compost.

Women's focus group participant, Kampolosso 2: *"Every year, just after the rainy season, we used to cut down a lot of trees and store them as firewood for cooking. Now we've realised that we need to change our behaviour, so we leave one year out of two without cutting any wood, and if we don't respect this rule, we risk being punished".*

Through the work of the project, women have also been active in lobbying for increased access to land for market gardening to strengthen their livelihoods and reduce the pressure on agro-pastoral land. In the villages of Tingoni, Marobougou and Ouendebougou, for example, through their lobbying efforts, women have succeeded in acquiring communal land dedicated to market garden production, an opportunity that was previously unavailable in these villages.

Women are also involved in other ways that support climate resilience and social cohesion. During an individual interview with a woman in Sakoibougou, she reported: *"We have a cereal bank in our village, it's an initiative to help us get through the lean period. So both men and women have a right to grain stored in case they need it before the scheduled time for sharing. The cereals are given on condition that for every 100kg you repay, you add 10kg as interest. This initiative has helped to strengthen social cohesion between the communities and to promote inclusion, because the women are involved in the management of this cereal bank.*

³ While there was a positive correlation found in the research on community perceptions on the link between women's participation and effective resolution of NRM conflicts, **the research did not focus on how this (and the issue of women's access to land) links to the frequency of conflict as an outcome.** This is an issue that should be further explored in the latter stages of the project.

And yet, while women are increasingly participating and working to collectively to influence decisions, NRM decision-making remains male-dominated

The majority of respondents believe that decisions are made on a consensus-based approach: 67% all the time (74% W/ 61% M), 20% 'often' (26% W/ 13% M) and 13% 'sometimes' (only men 27%). Ninety-five per cent (95%) of respondents also reported that they perceive current approaches to NRM as 'inclusive': 65% of whom say 'all the time', 30% say 'often' and 5% say 'never'. However, **inclusive participation is not necessarily resulting in women's increased influence over NRM, as only 15% respondents (split evenly between men and women) reported that natural resource management integrates the needs of women and minority groups.** In addition, there is variance between men and women's perception of the inclusivity of NRM practices, with 45% of men reporting inclusive approaches are taken 'all the time', compared to 15% of women.

In practice, a consensus-based approach in this context is based on consultation (e.g. through NRM management committees and interested parties), with final decisions on NRM/conflict mediation being made by the Village Council. The make-up of the Council and Committees remains heavily male dominated. Women can inform decisions, via consultation with the women's representative (if they exist), or by lobbying their male counterparts.

Women's focus group participant, Diassebouyou: *"When the women want to take any action, they delegate the women's president and other women to bring this to the attention of the village chief. Or when important decisions are taken, the men call on a women's representative, who in turn informs the other women of the activity or decision that has been taken. We then support the decision taken by our men and these women representatives, whatever the decision. Often we even delegate a man to speak on behalf of women at certain men's meetings. Generally, our grievances are upheld through this process, but if we don't get up as a group and talk to the men about it, it's less likely to be successful".*

Despite positive changes observed over the last six months, 12% of respondents (mainly women at 19% and men at 6%) say they have encountered challenges in integrating women into NRM decision-making processes. This is attributed to resistance among certain individual leaders to appoint women to positions of responsibility, as well as traditions, social norms and customs that do not portray women as suitable leaders. Respondents also cited a lack of education for women, tensions or conflicts between the sexes and a lack of self-confidence among women due to the weight of customs and the importance of land insecurity as barriers to women's participation.

Lack of land availability and entrenched customary laws restrict women's access to land, though small shifts in customary practice are evident

In Mali, the law promotes equal inheritance rights, but customary practice persists in excluding women from land inheritance. As a result, in practice women cannot inherit land and can only access land on a communal and temporary basis, with a woman's access to land dependent on her marital status. The majority of respondents (86%: 88% W/ 85% M) also reported that there are no initiatives in their community to improve women's sustainable access to land.

Male individual interviewee, N'djella: *"Every man gives a portion of land to his wife to cultivate, but not to appropriate. Over the last six months, all the young women who have been married recently have been given land by their husbands, but if they divorce, the land is taken away from them".*

Men's focus group participant, Cinzana: *"Women generally have access to land in the form of a loan, but inheriting it is always a tricky business in our village, given the weight of tradition, because traditionally women don't inherit land here. Nevertheless, some women have been able to buy land that they still farm."*

Twenty-seven per cent of respondents (23% W/ 31% M) reported that women's access to land had not improved or worsened. Of these, 64% of participants (100% W/ 44% M) felt that lack of availability of land is the principle reason (i.e. there is not enough land for everyone), while 36% (mentioned only by 56% of men) felt that revocation of access rights is a key cause.⁴

Women's focus group participant, Diassébougou: *"Women have grown tired of asking for land to farm because they don't get it. There isn't enough land for men, let alone a portion for women. Some men can't feed their families from what they produce because they don't have enough land. Even if women manage to get land here, they give it to their husbands out of compassion. There has been no improvement in the land situation for women in the last six months".*

Nevertheless, 73% of respondents (77% W/ 69% M) thought that women's access to land had improved. Examples of this include women successfully lobbying community leaders to gain access to market gardens and agro-pastoral areas, women collectively renting land through contracts negotiated with landlords (with the help of COFO), or husbands delegating part of their collective fields to women.

Forty-four per cent (44%) of respondents felt that this was due to 'changes in customary practices' (i.e. while customary/formal laws have not changed; in practice, husbands, community leaders and private landlords are more open to giving women collective access to land). This change is believed to have been facilitated by awareness-raising campaigns (44%) and women's collective farming operations (13%), with a small percentage of access being gained through direct purchase (2%).

Project Example: Collaboration between COFO (Land Commission) and Women's Groups

The COFO is present in several of the project villages, with village chiefs typically acting as the president of the COFO. The COFO's role is to resolve land disputes peacefully, which helps to create an environment conducive for equitable access to land for women. According to the data from this research, 20% of women report that collective use has made it easier for them to access land. Through advocacy initiatives led by the women's VSLA groups, land was obtained in Tingoni, Marobougou and Ouendébougou and three new market gardening areas were developed by the project this year. During the consultation frameworks organized by the project, village chiefs also committed to give land to women for collective use in the villages of Beyan and Koni.

⁴ Revocation of land relates to the withdrawal of access to private land that has been given by donation, loan, rental, sharecropping or lease. If women obtain land for collective exploitation, such as for market gardening areas, this land is generally transferred in their name so there is rarely a revocation of access rights in these cases.

Project Adaptations in Final Year

Based on lessons learned from the first fifteen months of project implementation, including information gathered during this research, the project team plans to integrate the following recommendations for project adaptation and implementation in year 3 (FY3):

- 1. Increase focus on awareness, training and skills development of men for gender equality.** For FY3, the project plans to organize quarterly exchange and awareness sessions per village, targeting Producer Organizations (POs), Village Savings and Loan Groups (VSLAs) and community leaders. These sessions will address equitable and inequitable gender attitudes, female leadership, and women's rights to further build an enabling environment for women's participation and leadership in NRM.
- 2. Invest more in addressing barriers to women's participation, and opportunities for women's direct engagement in NRM through the project's WLiE activities:** Women demonstrated strong engagement in implementing WLiE activities in FY2. For FY3, the project plans to support WLiE groups by facilitating them to update their WLiE action plans, develop progress markers (to better envision and evidence impact) and provide them with more financial support to carry out their activities.
- 3. Increase support to commune authorities to revise their Communal Development Plans (PDSECs) to integrate Community Adaptation and WLiE Action Plan priorities:** Despite the efforts made during FY2, including the development of Community Adaptation Action Plans (PACA) and the organization of dialogue frameworks between elected officials and communities to integrate PACA actions into the PDSEC, only one commune out of 12 has succeeded in integrating the actions of the PACA. For the year FY3, it is planned to use available resources to support communes in revising their PDSEC to facilitate the integration of PACA actions. It is essential to provide significant support to municipalities in updating or revising their PDSEC so that PACA and WLiE priorities can be better integrated. This will ensure greater, more sustainable impact in the delivery of inclusive NRM from a community-based perspective.
- 4. Expand geographical inclusivity (and conflict sensitivity) in the development and validation of local conventions for consensual management of natural resources:** The development and validation of local conventions for consensual management of natural resources requires the involvement of all villages in the commune during these processes, even villages not being the project intervention areas. In FY3, the project will ensure that all villages in a commune, including those not directly affected by project interventions, are involved in the consultation and validation processes of local agreements consensual management of natural resources. While these villages will not have benefitted from wider project activities to date (including the focus on enabling women's participation), efforts will be made to ensure women and marginalised groups are actively included, wherever possible.
- 5. Ensure effective response to Do No Harm and protection needs:** During the bi-monthly meetings with key stakeholders organized by the project in FY2, it was difficult to obtain information in terms of safeguarding in a confidential manner. For FY3, the project plans to establish accountability and feedback mechanisms within the 48 intervention villages in order to facilitate the collection of confidential safeguarding information.