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Rwanda:

Gender equality helping farmers cope with increased food insecurity

“We share the same meals equally, as we all work together to provide for the family, each one of us has equal rights.”

Eric Uwarezweneza

The Indashyikirwa project was implemented in selected communities in seven districts of Rwanda from 2014-2018. It aimed to reduce the gender-based violence (GBV) experienced by women who were members of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). The project’s couples’ curriculum resulted in a 55% reduction in the odds of women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence from their partner when compared with women who only joined VSLAs.

In October 2022, CARE interviewed 6 participants from Indashyikirwa in the districts of Rubavu, Musanze and Burera to see whether these impacts had been sustained four years after the project ended. As these families’ main source of income is farming, interviews asked specific questions about what people are experiencing in the current food crisis. **While they are facing food shortages, the increased gender equality within families is helping these couples deal with the crisis more proactively and equally.**

Food security

Farmers faced challenges as a result of COVID-19 and continue to experience negative impacts as a result of the current food crisis. Because of the increase in food prices due to conflict in Ukraine, the impacts of climate change and the fertilizer shortage, families are struggling around the globe. In this region of Rwanda, CARE’s partner the [Rwandan Men’s Resource Center \(RWAMREC\)](#) reports **food scarcity in homes has been particularly caused by lack of rains and high prices.**

“At home, we eat lunch and dinner, but I can’t say we get satisfied.”

Clementine
Nyirantegerijimana

These challenges are **pushing families to reduce food consumption**. Some families estimate eating 30% less than they were before, and they are eating smaller meals or eating only once or twice per day. Often, everyone waits to eat until the children get back from school. In some cases, families are reducing the amount they eat of certain crops, such as Irish potatoes, even though they grow them because seeds and fertilizers are costly.

“My children now say, mum nowadays you really care for us, we now eat healthy meals. ... I have added more weight as a result, during the training I was very thin, I weighted 50 kgs and now I weight 71 kgs.

Olive Mukakaregeya

Couples reported positive shifts to more diversified and healthier diets following the Indashyikirwa training. But the consequences of the pandemic in addition to price hikes has affected this, with price increases forcing some families to stop the consistent use of proteins such as meat and fish **and eat proteins just one or twice a month**. Foods such as maize and sorghum have been limited recently as the harvest was not good; due to drought greens are also scarce. Despite this, women report trying to eat well.

Equitable relationships

Previous investments in gender equality as part of Indashyikirwa have made a difference to people’s experience now.

Among couples which did not receive training, interviewees report intimate partner violence still happens; often this is rooted in harmful social norms and gender roles, such as men being the head of the household and the person making all the decisions. Women who did join the training reported benefits including legalized marriages, acquisition of property rights, better communication with their spouse and improved power dynamics within their relationship.

In particular, **recognition of women’s role as being more than just in the home meant women were allowed out to work and consequently can contribute to the household’s overall income**.

Managing resources together

Training for both women and men together on how to manage household finances has made a difference to women’s ability to cope with the challenges they face.

“From cooperation with my husband, there is better management of our resources, and we are no longer in the lowest category of poverty ranking. We were able to increase our property. We bought 3 gardens which we use to grow our crops.”

Clementine Nyirantegerijimana

Previously men would decide what to do with the harvest and any income from it. One woman reported her husband would sometimes hide money he made from taking on additional work, but this is no longer happening. Instead, they are planning better how they will manage their resources. Couples report they are **making household decisions together, with women having an equal say**. This is helping them to find solutions together and make the most of what they have.

Rwanda scores **0.402** on gender equality nationally (1 equals perfect gender equality).

Rwanda’s food security score is **40.3** in 2021, (100 is the highest possible food security).

Husbands and wives are **working together to contribute to food costs**—something which women were not able to do before. Women earning income have been able to save—these savings have been useful in tiding over lean periods or enabling families to invest in their food production. Some have even been able to grow enough that they can still divide their crop, eating part at home and selling the rest.

RWAMREC reports families which have been unable to invest in their home food production are faring worse, working long hours and engaging in casual labor to be able to afford food.

“It would have been worse... If I was to be seated at home without earning any money considering the situation now, I don’t think my husband would have managed alone.”

Alphonsine Kampire

Project successes

Among couples that attended the Indashyikirwa training, sustained changes identified in the follow up interviews include:

- Reduced conflict within couples.
- Decision-making in the household shifted to include women as equals, including for financial and resource management.
- Women’s role no longer seen as confined to the home, with wives free to engage in work outside the home to earn income.
- Women started joining leadership positions and recognizing their power.
- Couples have increased savings with savings groups.
- Women acquired property rights.
- Girls are viewed by fathers as persons entitled of respect and of educational opportunity in the household.
- Men improved their relationship with their children.

Conclusion

Farmers in the project area are battling the global food crisis. The continued increase in the prices of fuel and fertilizer is threatening the global food supply at the same time as they are struggling with the impacts of climate change

These farmers are facing food scarcity – but they are coping. Investing in gender equality has helped them be more resilient in the face of these global challenges. Thanks to strategies addressing the root causes of gender inequality and gender-based violence, women farmers are bringing home more income and have an equal say in how they will use this to feed their families.

Authors: This brief was written by Miriam Selva and Jenny Conrad in November 2022.

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