Gender Integration as success factor in VSLA and Nutrition Programming

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Outlines

✓ What is a Nutrition based VSLA?
✓ Using VSLA as a platform
✓ Nutrition based VSLA steps
✓ Intervention package
✓ Midterm results (2016)
✓ Final evaluation (2018)
✓ Key learning
✓ Testimonies
What is a Nutrition based VSLA

• VSLAs established based on self-selection. Once VSLA membership is set, nutrition messages are introduced to the VSLA groups starting in the intensive or development phase.

• Distinct VSLAs for Women (pregnant, lactating women), for Men, mixed (both men and women), and community leaders.

• The diversity of groups allowed the approach to reach influencing groups and the wider community more deliberately.

**Benin’s VSLA+Nutrition experience forms basis for Growing the Future manual which integrates nutrition, WASH messages**
Using VSLA as a platform

- Trainers: VSLA community facilitator and catalysts
- VSLAs meet every week
- Local NGO facilitators meet with VSLA catalysts once a month for training/coaching
- MIS data collection quarterly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time required in each meeting</th>
<th>Description of activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-30 minutes</td>
<td>Nutrition, health, food security, WASH participatory learning session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Commitments and next steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 mins – 1 hour</td>
<td>Regular savings and loan meeting</td>
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Nutrition based VSLA steps

Preparatory phase
Facilitators explain the goal of VSLAs and also the importance of discussing nutrition and WASH messages

- During the election of the management committee – group chooses catalysts, community volunteers, who will help facilitate lessons on nutrition/WASH
- These catalysts are trained in Maternal, Infant, and Young Child Nutrition and WASH practices

Intensive phase
Facilitators start to share nutrition and WASH messages with VSLA group members (15-20 minutes at the beginning of each meeting).

Development phase
Facilitators start to hand over and supervise catalysts to deliver nutrition/WASH messages to the groups
**Intervention package (Nutrition @ center)**

- **Improved nutrition-related behaviors**
- **Improved use of maternal and child health and nutrition services**
- **Household adoption of appropriate water and sanitation practices**
- **Availability and equitable access to quality food**

**Women 15-49 yrs & infants under 2 yrs**

**Gender, Empowerment and Governance**

**Formative Research Findings:**

- Social norms surrounding foods
  - Pregnant women discouraged to certain foods (peanuts, soy, eggs)
  - Taboo foods for infants: Plantains, soy, cassava, and groundnuts
  - Reduce consumption during pregnancy for fear of delivering a large baby
- Important role for older women in feeding practices
Intervention package (Protein for People)

- Improved Nutrition-related Behaviors
  - Improved use of Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition Services
  - Household adoption of appropriate water and sanitation practices
- Availability and equitable access to quality food

- Outcome:
  1. Increased Animal Source Foods in diets of women and children in targeted areas
  2. Improve gender equity
  3. Improved learning and advocacy

Fish, Poultry, rabbit, snail
Intervention package

• Messages include feeding practices, intra-household food production and distribution, WASH, gender roles, negative social norms

• Introduction of Social Analysis and Action approach
Midterm results (2016)

• 206 VSLAs established in two communes using an integrated VSLA+nutrition approach with N@C project with 80.5% of women

• 92% of VSLA members reported sharing key messages
• 70% increase in reported handwashing prior to feeding children
• Mothers in VSLA groups:
  • Improved exclusive breastfeeding rates from 40% to 76%,
  • Increased giving colostrum to their newborns from 75% to 85%
  • Increased feeding children dark, leafy green vegetables from 24% to 44%
Despite insignificant drop in stunting, counterfactual data indicate stunting prevalence across the region. Therefore drop of 0.9% is therefore significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Baseline (%) in 2014</th>
<th>Endline (%) in 2018 N@C</th>
<th>Endline (%) in 2018 N@C+P4P</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stunting (HAZ&lt;-2)</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>32.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exclusive breastfeeding</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>75.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum dietary diversity</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of household gardens</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwashing before feeding</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwashing after toilet use</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>89.1</td>
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Key learning (1)

✓ VSLAs are an effective platform for nutrition behavior change
✓ Sustainability of VSLA groups creates same opportunity for nutrition
✓ Engaging and educating influencers in VSLAs leverages their roles as cultural gatekeepers to change negative social norms around nutrition
✓ VSLAs present opportunities for targeting pregnant and lactating women who would normally not participate
Key learning (2)

✓ Having different types of VSLA help to take into account gender
✓ Additional incomes increase household investments in nutritious foods
✓ Women’s economic empowerment increases her negotiation power
✓ Growing the Future manual helps facilitators balance time between VSLA business and nutrition education and prioritize messages
Testimonies (1)

“Before, so we didn’t know how to take care of our children. We thought that was women’s business. Now that we know, we can help our wives to make sure that our children eat right at every age. But it’s up to us to tell our families and all of our neighbors about what we know.”

-Innocent Mentonou
Men’s group member

“Since I’ve joined a VSLA, I have become independent. I make my decisions with my own money. And now that I’m getting information about child nutrition, I am also able to help my daughter feed her baby. I’m getting the right advice about health, too, so I can pass it on.”

- Emiline Soumenou
Influential group member
Testimonies (2)

"Through the sensitization of community members, particularly pregnant and lactating women, by the facilitators of the project, the well-being of children under 2 years old and women is guaranteed”.

Mrs. KOGUE Mahoussé, and her 5-month-old daughter
Testimonies (3)

• April the 26, project facilitator told us about the importance of community and home garden during an IEC session.

• June 27, 2019, we planted the vegetables. To work on the garden, we organized ourselves in groups of four per day to water. One month later, we began by selling vegetables among us as members of VSLA and we sold in the neighboring villages (Bagon and Makpegon). Since then, the community has discovered that we produce fresh organic vegetables. People come from the district of Lainta Cogbe and Gounli to buy vegetable for different local ceremonies almost every weekend.

• Fifonsi VSLA
Testimonies (4)

My name is Dansou Sylvie. My husband's name is Dansou Epiphane.

Our home has been affected by an activity called Social Analysis and Action. Before, my husband did not do any domestic activity. But when we talked about the Ideal Woman and Ideal Man tool, my husband understood what a woman expects from an ideal husband and I too. Since then, my husband helps me with cooking. What touched me the most is that he sweeps the house. His attitude has led many men to reconsider their position in relation to domestic work because he is respected in the village.

Also, since that moment, my husband and I talk more about our household and it has really strengthened cohesion.
Thank You