



Community mobilisation of a group of women during a working session organised by the SALI-BASE Project (Strengthening Access to Livelihoods and Basic Services) in the Diffa region, Niger, © Elisabeth Adewale/CARE, 2018

Women Lead in Emergencies Evaluation and Project Evidence, Niger

Project Period: April 2019 – December 2020
CARE's impact area: Gender Equality



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Executive summary

Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE) is a global CARE initiative implemented in five countries (Niger, Uganda, Philippines, Colombia, and Mali). In Niger the initiative is implemented in the departments of Maine (Diffa Region) and Dungass (Zinder Region) with the respective support of Norway and the Sall Family Foundation.

This evaluation is part of the overall learning from the WLiE initiative and focuses primarily on the Diffa pilot site, where the programme has been active longest. The Zinder pilot will only be examined through documentation review. This evaluation is intended to be both a formative and summative evaluation and aims to produce solid evidence on the impacts of the initiative and to share knowledge with implementing actors and project stakeholders. The evaluation methodology used innovative qualitative approaches (the most significant change technique and Ladder of participation) combined with traditional methods of data collection and qualitative and quantitative analysis (semi-structured group and individual interviews, and a quantitative survey).

Overall, the evaluation results found that women have made significant changes in their leadership and meaningful participation. This has resulted in increased self-confidence, ability to participate and speak up in public meetings, ability to take on leadership roles, and ability to express and demand their rights from those in power, thereby playing an influential role in improving services and living conditions in their communities and beyond.

A comparative analysis between the women of the groups supported by the project and those who were not, shows that women in WLiE-supported groups have significantly higher levels of responsible participation than their counterparts without the direct project support:

- **Women have acquired leadership skills that allow them to speak out in decision-making bodies and public forums to express and defend their individual concerns and the concerns of their communities:**
 - 96 percent of women participate in formal meetings (of NGOs or community meetings), 58 percent of them on a regular basis. In comparison, 79 percent of non-member women participate in formal meetings with 34 percent attending on a regular basis.
 - 77 percent of women members of the WLiE supported groups versus 48.5 percent of non-members speak up to express their opinions and concerns in these meetings. Additionally, 71 percent of members versus 34 percent of non-members report feeling listened to because their leaders take their opinions seriously (this is according to 97 percent of members and 76.7 percent of non-members).
 - Women affirm their commitment to sharing and defending their opinions and acting on their own. In fact, 64.5 percent of members and 45.4 percent of non-members disagree with the statement that their husbands must speak for them if they want to change anything in their community.
- **68 percent of female members and 46 percent of female non-members reported being able to hold leadership positions in their community.**
 - Even though 63.6 percent of women members and 61.6 percent of women non-members want to hold leadership positions, only 31 percent of women members and 9 percent of women non-members hold any kind of leadership position.
- **The women work collectively and have developed a partnership with other structures to achieve a common goal.**

- Women are aware of their collective power – 61 percent of members and 57 percent of non-members recognize that they can only make a difference if they work together. Similarly, 69.3 percent of women say they are very likely to work with others for the benefit of their community.
- They have established working relationships with village chiefs, Imans, the Mainé City Council, and NGOs (Karkara, CARE, Coopi, APBE) to achieve their goals of improving their living conditions and the conditions of their communities.
- **Women collectively take action to implement a community initiative to address a need identified by their group.**
 - Women Members of the groups supported by WLiE have initiated and conducted more than 10 advocacy actions to improve their living conditions and access to resources and services.
 - Women implement collective activities to meet the identified needs and/or action plans of their groups.
- **In response to women's expressed needs or requests, women collectively influence and/or hold accountable community and humanitarian decision-makers (including CARE Niger) for making changes to the humanitarian response, service delivery, or any other aspect of their work.**
 - Women actively exercise their roles as citizens – 83 percent of women members and 61.7 percent of non-member women say that, as citizens, they should question the actions of their leaders even though they know it is risky to do so (according to 39.2 percent of women members).
 - Women have obtained new levels of influence because they have initiated changes and/or adaptations in the plans of the mayor's office and humanitarian actors to respond to women's requests (holding special budget sessions of the council, setting up infrastructure and services, etc.).
 - The above results of women's advocacy are proof of their positive influence on decision makers.
- **Community members see improvements in services, humanitarian response, or other areas of interest because of actions taken by women's groups.**
 - 85.8 percent of women members and 63.9 percent of non-members are confident that their access to services will improve.

Perception of change by women and stakeholders

Results of an analysis of the significance of changes for women and men showed that Improving Access to Basic Social Services was most significant to women and men, receiving the highest score (58), well ahead of improving the Status and Position of Women (40), and Leadership and Participation (30), demonstrating that addressing practical needs is both a foundation and a means of expressing strategic interests.

This analysis highlighted the social and familial costs of women's participation and leadership as an unintended negative effect of the project.

On the other hand, several positive unexpected effects emerged, notably the effect of women's leadership on other sectors – such as WASH, child protection, and access to land for production – not covered by the project, and the driving role of women's advocacy on the effectiveness of coordination between actors, etc.

The result of an analysis of the level of participation of women, conducted by the women members of the WLiE groups, indicated that among the six groups that did the exercise, three report that they reached the level 8 of Citizen Control (the highest level of the ladder), while the other three reached Level 4 of the ladder, Consultation. The women justify these assessments respectively by their ability to initiate and successfully implement activities including advocacy for the first group and by the great disparity in terms of self-confidence and participation among them for the second group.

Main recommendations

The following are the main recommendations to improve the results for women participants, power holders, and for scaling up the initiative:

Women's leadership and participation

- Review the minimum package of capacity building activities and make use of this package for all groups. Strengthen awareness and support counseling for men and adolescents on the importance of women's leadership and participation and their active contributions.
- Encourage cooperation between women – both between trainers/mentors and other women, and intergenerationally (i.e., between women leaders and adolescent girls) – to promote opportunities to share and broaden life experiences between women, young women, and girls.
- Strengthen reflection and analysis to identify and challenge unequal social practices with powerful tools such as AAS, religious preaching, etc.

Project approach and model

- Review the project's approach, emphasizing the understanding and ownership of the project's approach by women and the project team from the outset, strengthening the co-creation phase with practical tools for women's empowerment, and defining appropriate monitoring and evaluation and accountability mechanisms
- Adapt the model to add specific support to the tracks identified for the transformation of roles and power relations between men and women, e.g., how to further support men's initiatives in sharing domestic tasks with women?

Collective approach and impact

- Advocate for regular participation of the project's and women's representatives in the Maine City Council budget sessions.
- Reflect with the mayor's office and the technical services on the management of the balance and equity of the allocation of the mayor's resources to consider positive discrimination towards villages receiving little or no support from partners.
- Hold regular participatory sharing and learning workshops on collective action and women's voices in the presence of women and power holders through joint planning and review meetings.
- Build upon the synergy of the different partners' interventions to create a framework for coordinating ongoing initiatives that support women's leadership.

Project team

- It is necessary to recruit a project team of men and women, and technical staff to overcome the paradox between the inexperience of the trainees and the complexity of the project, to facilitate exchanges and reflections between groups of the same sex, and to ensure the quality and support of the field agents.
- Strengthen the operational capacity of the team through training on the project's approach and practical tools and ensure that the tools developed are available in French.

Introduction

The logic of project implementation

The Promoting Women's and Girls' Leadership and Participation in Emergencies project is a new global initiative of CARE International, first piloted in 2016 in Tonga, later in 2018 in Uganda and Niger, and in 2019 in the Philippines, Mali, and Colombia. The project is based on the global observation that women living in humanitarian contexts frequently have limited participation in decision-making within humanitarian responses and their communities. This is even though women are frequently some of the most affected by disasters, conflicts, and pandemics. Efforts to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Women and Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) are still far from being successful, especially at the local level. The WLIE initiative, in line with CARE International's approach to gender in emergencies, aims to address the imbalance within humanitarian responses that results in decision-makers ignoring or failing to prioritize issues that affect women. To do this, the project aims to make changes at three closely related levels:

- Develop a set of practical tools and methods to help humanitarian actors and donors change the way they work and seek the inclusion of women.
- Change the conditions that keep women out of decision-making spaces and limit their ability to influence the humanitarian response.
- Make sure that women have the right to participate responsibly and exercise this right in the decisions that affect their lives.

The approach used by the project to achieve these changes revolves around the three elements of CARE's Gender Equality Framework, which are described below:

- **Agency:** through supporting women and their ability to conduct their own analysis, make their own decisions, and take actions that are relevant to them. This also includes strengthening women's access to information, knowledge, and skills.
- **Relationships:** through supporting women to access decision-making spaces, working with women to engage power holders and demand rights and actions for their families and communities. It also considers the work with women for the engagement of men and boys for the responsible participation in public spaces or to negotiate with powerholders.
- **Structures:** work with women to define institutions and spaces of power to ensure that women have access to them to claim rights, so that these institutions seek and accept women's voices. This ensures that women are not only supported to act but also to address the barriers to inclusiveness. Thus, women will not be held solely responsible for their own exclusion.

In Niger, the initiative is being implemented in the regions of Diffa (2019) and Zinder (2020) with funding from Norway (80,000 Euro) and the Sall Family Foundation (45,387 Euro). The objective is to promote the leadership and participation of women and girls in decision-making bodies in crisis management (Lake Chad Basin crisis in Mainé Soroa (Diffa) and food insecurity in the Dungass Department in the Zinder Region). In addition to the women-specific outcomes (action plan), the project expects the following outcomes:

Intermediate results:

- Women have acquired leadership skills that allow them to speak out in decision-making bodies and public forums to express and defend their individual concerns and those of their communities.
- Women feel more empowered to take on leadership positions in their communities (empowerment of women in decision-making positions).
- Women work collectively and have developed a partnership with other structures to achieve a common goal.
- Women collectively take action to implement a community initiative to address a need identified by their group.
- Women collectively influence and/or hold community and/or humanitarian decision-makers (including CARE Niger) accountable for making changes to the humanitarian response, service delivery, or any other aspect of their work in response to women's-expressed needs or requests.
- Community members see improvements in services, humanitarian response, or other interests because of actions taken by women's groups.

To achieve these results, the project adopted an innovative five-step implementation approach (Analysis, Reflection, Co-creation, Action, and Learning) that gives a central role to women participants and emphasizes the quality of their participation in decision-making and leadership regarding the humanitarian response, their lives, and the lives of their community at large. Surrounding the women, who are the main actors in the implementation of the project, are the powerholders (men, traditional chiefs, community leaders), who have a direct influence on the participation and leadership of women at the community level and within the mayor's office, the deconcentrated technical services, and other partners (national and international NGOs, United Nations agencies) who play an important role in the provision of social services and support to women's initiatives.

The project directly supports 742 women and girl members of 21 groups (572 women of 19 groups and 30 girls in the municipality of Maine; 86 women of two groups and 64 girls in Bangaza in the municipality of Dungass). The activities implemented by the project and these groups are:

Start of the project: the establishment of the team (the Project Manager, the Gender Technical Assistant, and two young professionals), composed completely of women, the project launch, and the training workshop on the project approach. Group selection was carried out on 32 MMD (Mata Masu Dubara) groups.

- Set up by other CARE projects, which made it possible to select 19 of the most successful to move forward in the project.
- Conducting discussions with stakeholders on the level of participation and leadership of women and the achievement of RGA-P¹ (Rapid Gender Analysis and Power) that highlighted the existence of a multitude of decision-making bodies related to assistance at the community level in which women were represented but participated very little in the decision-making process.
- Capacity building for women, communities and powerholders. Orientation, awareness-raising, and reflection sessions on women's rights, their voices and leadership, and certain fundamental humanitarian standards with the support of men to promote the participation of

¹ Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation conducted in Diffa in September 2019 and in Dungass (May 2020)

women. However, the training on Social Analysis and Action did not take place due to the restrictive measures of the COVID-19 pandemic and the problem of availability of trainers at the country level.

- Facilitating the co-creation of women's activities and action plans, a rather difficult step that required several iterations of refinement, training, and reflection with the women and with the Women on the Move (WOM) and CARE International (CI) teams.
- Support for the implementation of women's action plans through the execution of a package of activities common to all the groups, in particular training and awareness raising on leadership, law, and the key messages of COVID-19. Also, the granting of a subsidy of 750,000 CFA francs per group to finance their action plan, and the establishment of contacts between the groups and the authorities and technical services of the State, which the women have seized upon for their advocacy work.
- Women have led sustained and successful advocacy efforts (see details in the "Advocacy and Improving Access to Social Services and Humanitarian Assistance" section).
- Exchanges, reflection, continuous support and advice on leadership and the voice of women between the project team and the women, and between the project teams, CARE International, CARE Great Britain, and the Women on the Move (WOM) CARE West Africa.
- Other activities initiated by the women consisted of setting up spaces for 30 adolescent girls who were trained on Gender Based Violence, menstruation management, and counseling on schooling/attendance, RH, sewing); an awareness campaign for religious leaders on the rights of spouses, and the participation of women in emergency activities.
- The capitalization workshop at the end of the project included participation by all the groups, and included women's awareness-raising activities about the COVID-19 pandemic.

The context of the project

The Diffa Region is facing a humanitarian crisis characterized by insecurity and massive displacement of people fleeing the armed conflict in northern Nigeria, which has spread to the Lake Chad Basin countries including Niger since 2014. This crisis has led to unprecedented attacks on civilian populations, including gender-based violence against women and girls, and violence against men and boys. The deterioration of the security situation with the continuation of attacks is keeping the displaced population in the commune of Maine, which is the focus of the efforts of humanitarian actors. Additionally, the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-economic impact of restrictive measures against its spread adds to the complexity of the humanitarian situation and impacts the effectiveness of interventions implemented by humanitarian actors.

In addition, several analyses, evaluations, and reviews of CARE's response to the Lake Chad Basin crisis have highlighted the low or non-participation of women in decisions about their lives and humanitarian responses. Indeed, despite the opportunity that humanitarian emergencies offer, the response has not deliberately addressed gender role inequalities and power relations, or the social norms that support them. Apart from their traditionally gendered activities, women do not hold decision-making positions in mixed committees – they either play a secondary role, or roles related to their traditional activities/tasks. Regarding women's leadership and participation in public life, current projects and initiatives often focus on supporting political participation. Since the end of the MMD program (2008), which created and supported nearly 500 groups and supported women's political participation in the Diffa Region and the Maine Department in particular, there have been no

large-scale initiatives that support women's responsible participation and leadership at the community level. The WLiE initiative is designed and implemented to address these shortcomings. The socio-cultural context of WLiE's intervention area (Maine) is characterized by a predominantly Kanuri indigenous population, which is generally more conservative and less open to change, and the more mixed (Hausa, Kanuri, and Fulani) displaced population, which is more open to change. In the towns of Malan Blamari and Ambram Ali, the population is mostly local with few displaced persons, having not experienced major disruptions related to displacement, and is more conservative in their social and cultural norms and practices. In addition, there is a weak presence of humanitarian workers unlike the IDP host sites (Tam, Sabon Gari, Jambourou, etc.). As a result, access to goods and services from humanitarian actors (WASH, health services, and other assistance) as well as opportunities for women's engagement in community activities and decision-making (activity management committees) are limited, and the population in these communities is less open to change than those living in IDP sites.

The rationale for the evaluation

This evaluation is part of the overall learnings of the WLiE program and the achievement of IDEAL's objectives and aims to generate solid evidence on the impacts of the Women Lead in Emergencies initiative, and to share knowledge with women and girls who are participating in the Women Lead in Emergencies pilot project activities being implemented in Niger in the regions of Diffa (April 2019-December 2020) and Zinder (January to December 2020). It is therefore a question of assessing the level of achievement of the intermediate and higher-level objectives and results assigned to the project, and the objectives defined by the target group (i.e., the women members of the groups) through the answers to the following key questions:

1. What results have materialized from the Women Lead in Emergencies program? Are they consistent with the project's theory of change?
2. How are these outcomes perceived and evaluated by the women in the groups and other project stakeholders?
3. How did the Women Lead in Emergencies project contribute to the achievement of these results?
4. How would you evaluate the contribution of women and partners to the success of advocacy outcomes?
5. How does successful advocacy translate into a better life for people of different genders, ages?
6. What were the challenges in achieving the results?
7. What elements of the project were important to see the results?
8. To what extent has there been an improvement in services at the community level and how is this expressed?
9. How did the groups engage with the Women Lead in Emergencies methodology and to what extent was the methodology fully implemented in the different groups? What adaptations were made and what components did members find useful?
10. What evidence of the influence of women's voices and collective action in emergencies, including the response to COVID-19?
11. What unexpected actions or outcomes occurred and how did these contribute to hindering the project objectives?
12. What are the pros and cons of integrating the WLiE approach into other CARE Niger

projects and programs?

The answers to questions 1-8 and 10 allow for the analysis of the summative part of the evaluation, namely the achievement of project results, particularly in terms of effectiveness and relevance. Questions 9, 11, and 12 are learning questions related to the project approach and its potential for replication.

The methodological framework

The methodology used to address both the formative and summative dimensions of evaluation is an approach that combines a predominantly qualitative analysis with a quantitative one. The methodology revolves around CARE's conceptual frameworks for gender equality, the project's theory of change, and analytical tools (e.g., Most Significant Change, Sherry Arnstein's Community Participation Scale and Framework, and CARE Advocacy Analysis (AIIR)). This approach allowed women project participants and powerholders with direct or indirect influence on the achievement of the WLiE project's objectives to take a central role throughout the evaluation process. The qualitative analysis was supported by quantitative data that not only provided information on trends but also allowed for a comparative assessment of the achievement of objectives and the contribution of the project in the absence of a clearly established baseline at the beginning of the project.

Details on the methodology used and the different steps and tools can be found in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

The results

Results achieved by the Women Lead in Emergencies Project

Almost all the project's outcomes showed positive changes, even those at higher levels. However, the assessment of the level achieved would have been more significant if there had been a baseline or target established at the outset. In the absence of this, the evaluation used a comparison between women beneficiaries (members of WLiE groups) and other women who were non-members of this group. Table 1 below shows the level of achievement of these results. In all analyses, women members of WLiE groups demonstrated a higher potential for responsible participation and influence than non-members.

Table 1: The level reached by project result

	Results	Level reached	
		Women members of WLiE	Non-WLiE women members
Intermediate results:	1.1 Women have acquired leadership/expression and advocacy in meetings		
	1.1.1 Women participate in decision-making bodies and public forums.	96% of which 58% on a regular basis	79% of which 34% on a regular basis
	1.1.2 Women express and defend their concerns and those of their community	77%	48.5%
	1.1.3 Feeling heard in formal meetings	71%	34%
	1.2. Women feel empowered to take on leadership roles in their communities	68%	46%
	The women work collectively and have developed a partnership with other structures to achieve a common goal	61%	57%
Higher level results	2.1 Women collectively take action to implement a community initiative to address a need identified by their group	10 advocacy initiatives undertaken	1 advocacy initiative undertaken
	2.2 Women collectively influence community and/or humanitarian decision makers to address their needs and concerns		
	2.2.1 Women agree that as citizens they should question the actions of their leaders	83.1%	61.7%
	2.2.2 Women say their leaders take their opinions seriously	97.2%	76.7%
	Community members see improvements in services, humanitarian response, or otherwise because of actions taken by women's groups.	85.8%	63.9%

The remaining sections below present the analysis according to the evaluation's learning questions and CARE's approach to gender equality.

Agency

- Women understood their rights and their role in the community.
- They have developed self-esteem and leadership skills.
- They speak and are heard in public meetings.

Relation

- Women participating in decision making.
- Women claim their rights from decision-makers.

Structure

- Weak accountability and local governance – it is a risk for women to question the actions of their leaders.

Leadership and participation in decision making

According to the women, before the Lake Chad Basin Crisis² and the arrival of the project, they rarely frequented public spaces and gatherings, either because their husbands did not authorize them to do so, because they were busy with domestic activities, or because they were afraid and ashamed of showing themselves and expressing themselves publicly (due to social prejudices according to which their place and role were limited to the home while men occupied public spaces and made decisions concerning community life almost by themselves). Victims of the "tied goat syndrome", women did not dare and could not venture into these spaces, nor did they want to speak out to make their point of view, their needs, and their concerns heard.

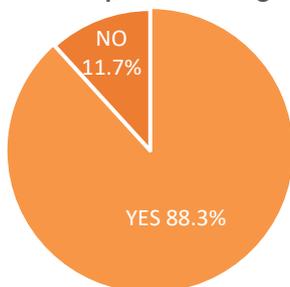
Knowledge of rights and responsible participation of women in public forums

Since the implementation of the WLiE project, women in the sites supported by the project have come to understand their duties and the importance of their role in the community. Indeed, 81.8 percent of the members of the WLiE groups interviewed said that the WLiE project had changed their understanding of their rights. They have acquired a certain self-confidence that has helped them overcome fear, shame, and social prejudices. Above all, they have understood their role and the importance of expressing and asserting their points of view, their needs, their concerns, and of being listened to.

They participate significantly in community meetings – 96 percent of women members declare that they participate in formal meetings and 58 percent on a regular basis, compared to 79 percent of non-members with even less regularity at 34 percent. In these meetings, women members of WLiE groups are more likely to speak up (77 percent) and easily express their opinions, problems, and those of their community than non-members (48.5 percent). Similarly, 71 percent of women members seem to be

listened to more during these meetings than non-members (34 percent), which is a motivating factor that reinforces their ease in expressing themselves in public, see Graph 1.

Graph 1: Are you comfortable speaking and sharing your views and concerns in public meetings?



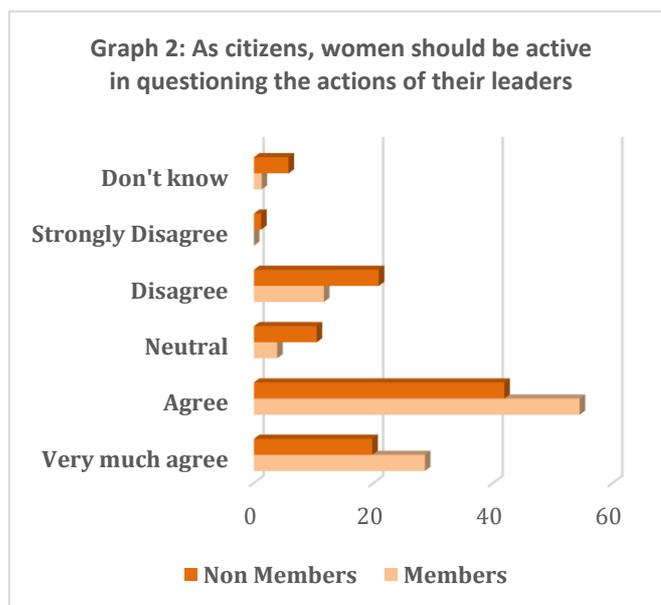
Some women have developed confidence to speak out in meetings even beyond their communities. For example, some women participated in virtual meetings with CARE West Africa and CARE International, and in the capitalization workshop where they proudly shared their experiences with the project and their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

² <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/disaster/ot-2014-000068-nga>

Women have also improved their ability to participate meaningfully and influence decisions that affect their lives and those of their communities.

They participate in the decisions within their groups with 79.2 percent of the group interviewed affirming that all the women of their groups make decisions, and the same degree of credit is given to their opinions without difference to their male counterparts (with 100 percent in Ambouram Ali and 66.6 percent in Maine). Moreover, they easily assert their rights to decision-makers with whom they can influence and win their case – 71.8 percent of women agree that as citizens they should question the actions of their leaders (83.1 percent of WLiE-supported group members strongly agree or agree, compared to 61.7 percent of non-members who strongly agree or agree). Although, 39.2 percent of them (non-members) still think that this constitutes a risk for them (see Graph 2). Although this risk is real, it is not reserved for women only as it is linked to the context, notably to weaknesses in accountability and local governance.

Women are also more committed to empowerment and are less dependent on their husbands financially but also in their freedom of movement and self-assertion. For example, 54.6 percent of the women surveyed (64.5 percent of members and 45.4 percent of non-members) disagreed with the statement that their husbands must speak for them if they want to change anything in their community.



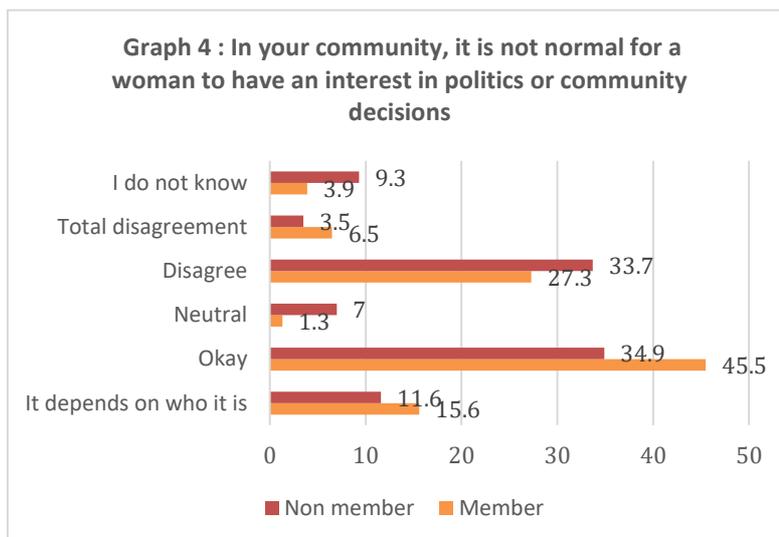
Women's willingness to take on leadership positions—List Chart #

Agency: The gain in confidence and leadership has given some women the desire to become more involved in community and political decision making. Indeed, 68 percent of women members and 46 percent of women non-members feel able to hold leadership positions in their community.



In addition, 63.6 percent, and 61.6 percent of them respectively want to occupy leadership positions. The candidacy of some women members of WLiE groups in the local elections of November 2021 supports these findings. Of the women surveyed, 31 percent of members and 9 percent of non-members are in some form of a leadership position, usually within women's groups exclusively, mostly by plebiscite or appointment.

Structure: A significant portion of women (69 percent) say that it is common to very common to see women in leadership positions (see Graph 3). However, the weight of social norms continues to weigh heavily on their perception of public exercise, since 66 percent of members and 46.5 percent of non-members agree with the statement that in their community it is not normal for a woman to have an interest in politics or community decisions (see Graph 4). The high percentage of WLiE members that agree with this statement is most likely a reflection of the challenges they experience daily, anything that would make them want to put more emphasis on collective action.



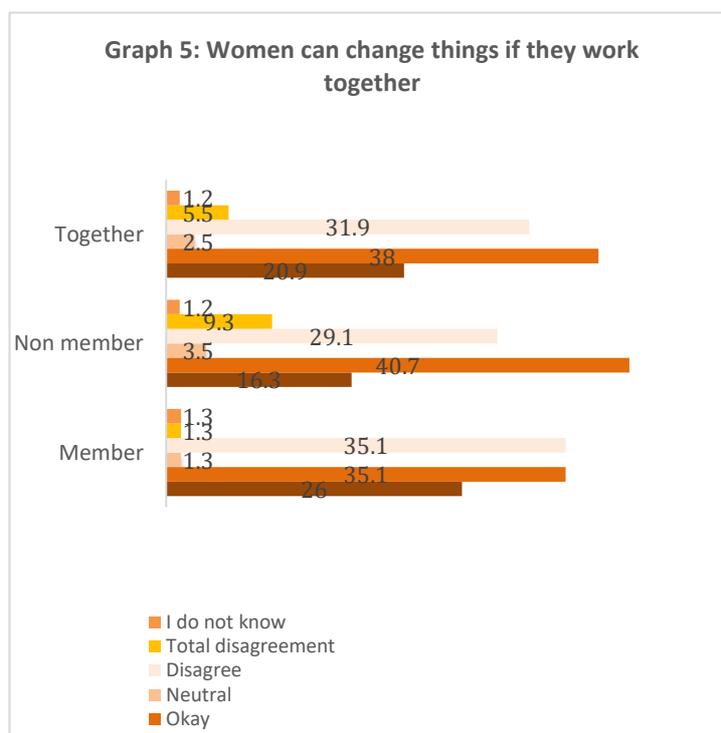
List Chart Number in the above chart

Collective Voice and Action and Women's Influence in Emergency Situations, including the Response to COVID 19

Women's collective action in the humanitarian response, including COVID-19

Relationship: Before the arrival of the project, women were already organized in MMD groups with the support of partners, including CARE, through the Kariya, Salibase, and Prames-B projects. At the beginning of the project, the WLiE project selected 19 well established MMD groups. These groups, which were legally operational and recognized, conducted savings and credit activities and some small collective activities (such as warrantage³, fattening, public health, and GBV awareness). The group networks were limited to each other, the village chiefs, and the Maine town hall.

The WLiE project capitalized on the gains that had been made by the MMD approach and implemented this innovative approach for women's empowerment and meaningful participation of women by emphasizing women's central role and their learnings.



³ Warrantage is a form of warehouse inventory credit system (receipt system) found in Niger.

A series of trainings, sensitizations, and counseling were conducted; collective action inviting women to unite their strength and claim their rights was reinforced. These trainings made women aware of the collective strength – 61 percent of women members and 57 percent of non-members believe that they can only make a difference if they work together (see Graph 5 above). Beyond the normal regular activities of saving and supporting individual IGAs, women have developed a social network of solidarity and mutual emotional support. In addition, with the support of the project, the women opened their own bank account to receive and manage the subsidy granted by the project to self-finance the activities based on their action plans.

Regarding the role of the groups in the humanitarian response, the advocacy efforts of women to improve targeting (inclusion of people who meet the criteria) is notable. Efforts focused on topics like the prevention of GBV risks, mutual psycho-social support, support to GBV survivors (for example, women from one site accompanied a victim of violence to Maine for treatment), and awareness raising against COVID-19 at a time when social distancing and confinement measures limited these encounters. More details on the adaptation of the groups to the context of COVID can be found in the section "challenges".

Women's collective action: engagement of men and boys

Relationship

- *Men support and encourage women's participation and leadership.*
- *Husbands take over some of the women's domestic tasks.*
- *Women have expanded their network of solidarity and partnership within and beyond their communities.*

Relationship: Through recognition of the importance of men's support in promoting their leadership and responsible participation, women developed strategies to influence men. 63 percent of the groups (12 out of 19) conducted activities to engage men and boys. The women requested that the project support them in the engagement of men and boys through the provision of awareness raising sessions in the community; also, by working with local religious

leaders to ensure that their preaching spoke to the participation of women, the duty of men as husbands and heads of households, the need for equality and balance in the distribution of domestic tasks between men and women, etc. This had an immediate effect on the men who agreed to take part in the project, and its activities. As a result, the men then agreed to:

i) Encourage women to participate in community meetings. Several testimonies and anecdotes were shared, including one about men who took care of the children while their wives attended the meetings, others who reminded their wives the time of the meetings (so that they would be on time). These have resulted in positive changes, as town criers now insist on the presence of women (see story from Bangaza).

ii) Alleviate women's domestic chores (water, wood, laundry, cleaning around the houses, access to the mill, etc.). "Even the kanuri have agreed to help their wives" exclaimed a woman in Tam, while a man also expressed his satisfaction, "since I started helping my wife with the housework, even the quality of the meals has improved, and we eat better."

This is a significant change from the pre-project period when men would get indignant and say, "what are you doing here? Who invited you?" to the women who ventured into public gatherings.

Although there is no numerical indication, it is evident that not all men are happy with this advance in women's responsible participation and leadership role, as men have expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that women are often absent from their homes without informing or asking permission and believe that this is a significant negative change of the WLiE Project (see section on community

perception of changes). On the other hand, it should be noted that apart from the testimonies of the women of Jambourou (Maine) on their positive influence on the behavior of the boys of Fada, the women made little or no mention of having involved the boys.

Collective action and influence of power holders

Structure

- *Better status and position of women in society (traditional chiefs, religious leaders, town halls).*
- *Women and the project influenced partner plans and the Maine City Council budget session.*
- *Defiance of unequal social norms and practices.*

With the support of the men and recognizing the limited capacity of the project to fund their action plans, the women quickly realized the need to develop relationships with those in power to achieve their goals. In fact, 69.3 percent of the women surveyed recognized the likelihood of partnering with other actors for the benefit of their communities (see Graph 6).

The women members of the groups thus coordinated among themselves to designate representatives to submit and defend their

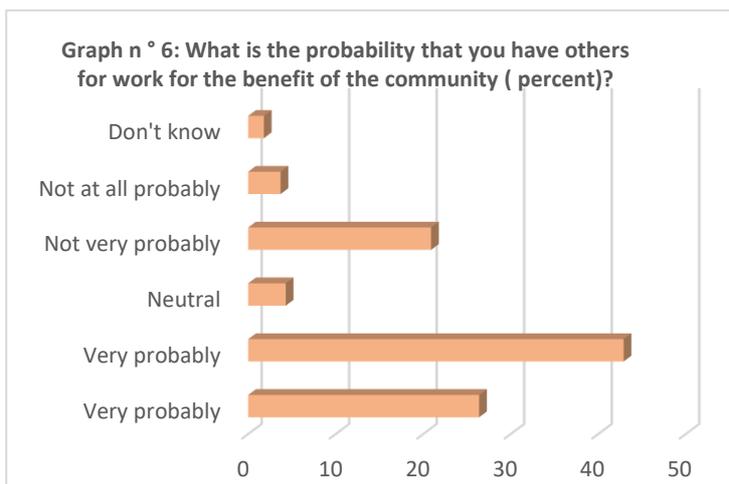
concerns and those of their communities to important powerholders – e.g., the mayor's office (improving access to social services), village chiefs (access to land for displaced persons and groups), and humanitarian NGOs (for access to assistance).

The efforts made by women have further reinforced the importance of their role in the eyes of men, who now do not hesitate to ask for the support of women to find solutions to problems they were unable to solve:

"The men went to the decision-makers seven times without success; we went only once and three days later we had the drilling," recalls a woman member of the group at TAM.

Through their advocacy and commitment, women have succeeded in influencing the plans of powerholders at various levels. As a result, they have seen changes in:

- The revision of the assistance plans of humanitarian actors (correction of the targeting of beneficiaries, realization of infrastructures, etc.)
- The allocation of resources from the mayor's office and the project. For example, a special budget session was convened to reallocate resources to meet the drilling requests of the women of Kamou Tada (see box on right).



The women of Kamou Tada, 35 km from Maine, are not beneficiaries of the WLiE project. Still, they applied lessons learned from the women of Ambram Ali, made a plea, and obtained a borehole.

The administrative, communal, and customary authorities and humanitarian actors now recognize the contribution and leadership of women thanks to their successful advocacy, which means that women are listened to more and have managed to impose themselves as stakeholders in decision-making.

This has raised the consideration of the role and status of women in the eyes of men in the communities.

"This world belongs to women; they are more listened to by the decision makers than we are. Women have reached such a level that they have taken the lead because we men follow them" said Iman de Guidan Kadji.

In addition, women are driving changes in unequal social norms and practices through men's awareness and acceptance of the importance of women's leadership and responsible participation in community life, the assumption of some domestic tasks by men, and the initiation of some women into activities once reserved for men (e.g., brick-building), upon men's suggestion.

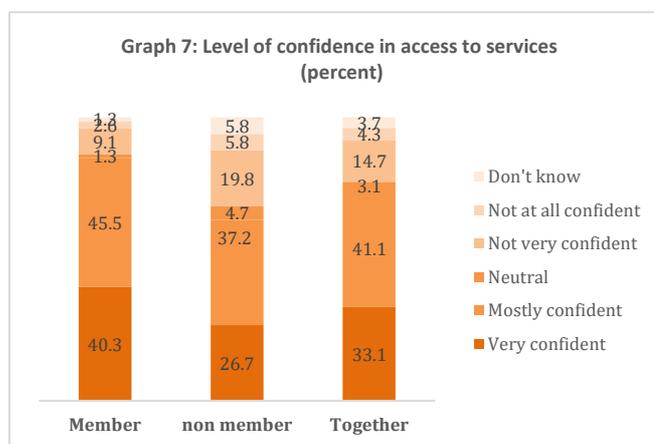
Advocacy and improving access to social services and humanitarian assistance

"That day we spent the whole night talking and laughing with my husband, happy as the first day of our marriage! "

As mentioned above, members of the groups have coordinated with each other and conducted more than a dozen successful advocacies with powerholders in the following areas.

- **Water, hygiene and sanitation:** the women of Guidan Kadji, Tam, Jambourou, Ambram Ali and Malan Blamari have all made efforts to improve access to water. They have all been successful with the realization of boreholes and mini-AEP (drinking water supply); except for Malam Blamari who are still waiting for support for the solar electrification of their mini-AEP to ensure the supply of water in case of power cuts. The women of Jambourou also pleaded for and obtained a public dump for the management of household waste.

- **Access to land:** the women of Tam, Guidan Kadji, and Malan Blamari have requested and obtained plots of land from the village chiefs, which they use individually (Tam) or collectively (Guidan Kadji and Malan Blamari). In Malan Blamari, the women operate a collective field whose production is exploited in the form of warrantage, while in Guidan Kadji, the women operate a market garden with the support of humanitarian partners.

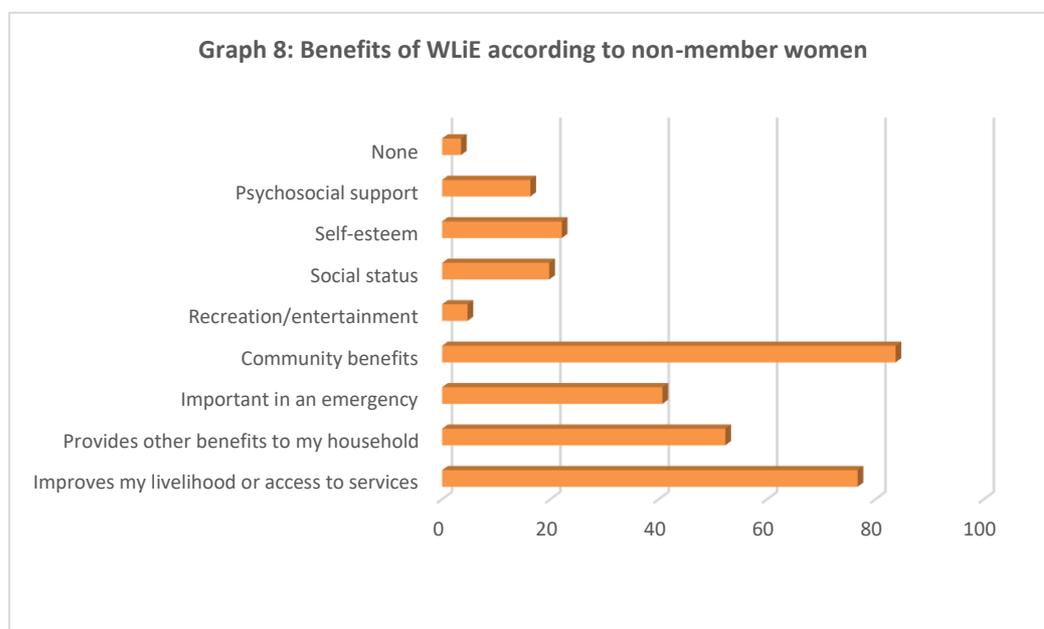


- **Education:** the women of Tam advocated with the NGO Karkara for literacy classes.
- **Health:** the women of Tam negotiated a means of transport for their sick *talibé* children (in the absence of their master) to the health center of Mainé where they were cared for, free of charge, by the social service of the center.
- **Protection:** following an upsurge in cases of violence, particularly sexual violence against girls, the women of Tam, Guidan Kadji, and Jambourou made a plea to the gendarmerie to deploy a night patrol to prevent violence. They also requested and obtained from the WLIE project the organization of sensitization sessions against GBV. In addition, the women sought and

obtained from COOPI (an international NGO) the creation of a secure child-friendly space for the children outside the classroom. Other advocacy actions concerning the obtaining of civil status documents have also been successfully carried out for the benefit of displaced populations.

- **Relief of their domestic tasks:** the women of Tam and Guidan Kadji requested a mill with the town hall, and thanks to the coordination between the town hall and an international NGO, they obtained the setting up of a multifunctional platform in Guidan Kadji, a site not far from TAM. This further improved their living conditions as it provided reduction in time spent on their domestic tasks.
- **Access to assistance:** The women of Tam and Guidan Kadji advocated for the inclusion of the most vulnerable people missed in the initial targeting. Currently, the same kind of advocacy is underway with CARE and WFP to consider the Sabon Gari neighborhood whose population, made up of IDPs had been excluded from the cash beneficiaries list.

The success of these rounds of advocacy was overwhelming as almost all the women's requests were met except for one request from the women of Malan Blamari and the case of the collective field in Tam. This has resulted in significant improvement in



access to basic social services in the communities. 85.8 percent of female members and 63.9 percent of female non-members reported being very confident to confident about their access to services (see Graph 7). In addition, non-member women reported improved livelihoods and access to services as one of the main benefits of the project (see Graph 8). The impact of women's advocacy on improving the lives of people of different gender and age groups is immeasurable.

“Ga Touwo ga rouwa! what was our happiness when only three days after we had gone to plead for water at the town hall of Mainé, we found the drilling team working on the site, while we were returning from a distribution with our cash transfer money in hand!” Exclaimed a woman member of Tam's Farin tchikin kowa group.

In addition to the project's intervention in communities, improved access to basic social services has benefited other communities not supported by WLIE thanks to a ripple effect. The village of Kamou Tada has benefit from a well and a mini-AEP thanks to the advocacy of their women who have followed the example of the women of Ambram Ali. See the AIIR tool in Appendix 3.6 for more details on advocacy).

Thus, the men and women of these communities have better access to i) drinking water and hygiene thanks to the availability of water and the dumping ground (Maine Château); ii) food resources and vegetables for household food/dietary diversification; iii) education through women's literacy and synergy between sectors – access to water has improved school attendance of students as well as their access to school meals (see most significant change for details); iv) reduced the risk of violence for girls and young women and improved children's rights to leisure and development; v) reduction of women's domestic chores; freeing up time for them to take care of themselves and to invest in

"I have been married for over 30 years, but the joy that WLiE has brought to my home is such that I feel like I am experiencing happiness like on our wedding honeymoon!" Testifies a displaced woman member of the Farin Tchikin Kowa group in TAM.

other productive activities; vi) raising awareness among men and those in power about the status and real position of women in society; vi) positive results, greater cohesion and understanding within the home

In addition, the women's advocacy efforts have also served as a springboard for strengthening coordination between the town hall, the STs, humanitarian actors, and the synergy of actions

for greater impact. It also raised awareness at the mayor's office on the importance of considering women's needs in their planning processes, which may have been the basis for inviting the project participants to the budget session by the communal council.

Overall, beyond the contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the groups' action plans, the women's advocacy demonstrated the significant efficiency of the WLiE project. With few resources (human and financial) the project made it possible to achieve an impact well beyond its intervention sites.

Consistency of results with the project's theory of change

Almost all the results obtained are consistent with the theory of change and aligned with the three dimensions of CARE's approach to gender equality. Additionally, the project efforts that produced these results are also consistent with the project's theory of change, as noted below.

1. The project organized an institutional diagnosis to assess the organizational health of the group and identify the collective activities that are carried out, including actions to strengthen the voice of women.
2. Organization of a gender analysis to obtain information on women's capacities, needs, and aspirations. WLiE has ensured that women are in control of their own empowerment journey. The project's role was to listen to and help women identify and express their own aspirations for participation in public life and decision-making, thus supporting the strategies identified by the women.
3. Strengthening women's collective action – women carry out savings and credit activities to strengthen their collective, rather than individual, capacity to increase the project's transformative potential. WLiE connected women with powerholders for advocacy efforts. This was part of the possibilities for action in the co-creation stage and at the same time served as a solution to the shortfall.

As a result, women are empowered, they are more committed to economic empowerment, and there are no taboo activities for women. They are increasingly expressing the desire to become more involved in community decision-making and governance at the urban center level of the WLiE zone. They have understood that being autonomous has a cost, they have also understood that in contexts where men don't have many opportunities, they must commit themselves more. Furthermore, the NGOs working in the same sites also encourage women's advocacy initiatives to address the specific

needs of women and the community. With the humanitarian crisis⁴, these partners have set up a multitude of decision-making structures at the community level (WASH Committee, VGB Committee, Complaint Committee, Selection Committee, etc.) within the same site; partners advocating for women's participation in each committee has fostered a presence of women in local management committees.

In short, thanks to the intervention of WLiE, women have more consideration and men place greater value on their contribution to community life. Men have come to understand that it is necessary to go through women to have the solution to certain problems.

The perception and appreciation of the results by the women of the groups and other project stakeholders

Women members, non-members, and men analyzed the changes brought about by the project through the Most Significant Change method and Sherry Manstein's Participation Ladder, the results of which are summarized below.

Analysis of the most significant changes

A participatory analysis of the meaning of the changes was conducted with women (members and non-members) and men at four sites. The objective was to ensure the participation and central role of women and men in this evaluation, by considering the perspective of the changes made in the achievement of the project's objectives and of women, as well as the potential positive or negative unexpected effects of the project.

According to the women, a significant change is defined as any important positive change in the individual and collective life of women, and in the position and role of women in the community. Examples cited by women in relation to WLiE were knowledge of rights, freedom of movement outside the home, freedom to participate and speak in public gatherings and meetings, ability to advocate to decision-makers on issues of collective interest, and change in the position and role of women in the community). Men were less articulate in their responses, and gave as examples the grouping of women, cohesion, and knowledge of rights.

The analysis was based on stories of change collected from women and men during the implementation of the project. The analyzed stories fall primarily into three areas of change: (1) access to social services, (2) women's leadership and participation, and (3) women's status and position in the community (see appendices 3.2 and 4 for the analysis method and stories). Table 2 below summarizes the results of this analysis.

Table 2: Summary of the analysis of the most significant changes

Area of change	Changes	Significance score			Total
		Highly significant	Significant	Not Significant	
Access to services	Access to drinking water, hygiene, education, protection, religion	58	13	0	71

⁴ Lake Chad Basin Crisis

Status and position of women	Women are more considered, more listened to, domestic tasks lightened	40	11	0	51
Leadership and participation	Knowledge of rights, mass participation and being at the forefront of meetings, public speaking	30	30	04	56

Access to basic social services was the area found to have the highest change in scores on the very significant scale (58), followed by Status and Position of Women (40), and Leadership and Participation (30). However, when the scores are averaged, Access to Basic Social Services maintains first place, while Status and Position of Women drops to third place, in favor of Leadership and Participation.

Significance analysis in relation to the above score shows that access to social services is beneficial to the entire community, hence the unanimity by all groups leading to the high score obtained. In terms of leadership and participation, there is a wide disparity in terms of self-confidence and public speaking between women members and non-members. Even among women members, not all have reached the same level of confidence, especially since several groups noted the case of women who have recently returned to the groups. On the other hand, men reported a negative score, probably due to the social and familial costs of women's participation – e.g., perceived disrespect of husbands and/or repeated absences of women from their homes. (See Moustapha's testimony on TAM for reference).

Women's assessment of their level of participation (Sherry Arnstein Ladder, Figure. 1)

"If there is a level of participation above citizen control, we have already reached it," says the president of the Hadin Kay group of Tam

Women members of the groups supported by the project conducted a participatory self-assessment of their level of participation in the groups using Sherry Arnstein's Participation Ladder. Thus, three groups out of seven were classified at the top level of participation, which is the Level 8, Citizen Control. They are the groups Farin Tchikin of Kowa, Hadin Kay of Tam, and Haske Noor of Jambourou. The reasons given by the women are that they have reached a level where they are the ones who initiate and implement their activities successfully, and they also do the advocacy.

Three other groups were awarded Level 4 of the Ladder, Consultation: Hadin Kay of Sabon Gari, Guidan Kadji; Kilakil of Ambram Ali; and Kilakil 3 of Malan Blamari. They justify this level by the fact that there is a great disparity in terms of self-confidence and participation among the members, some of whom cannot even express themselves during the group

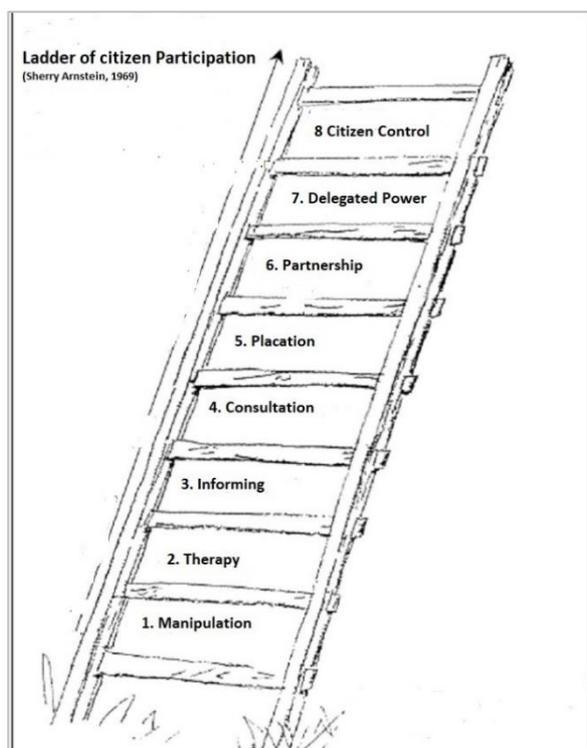
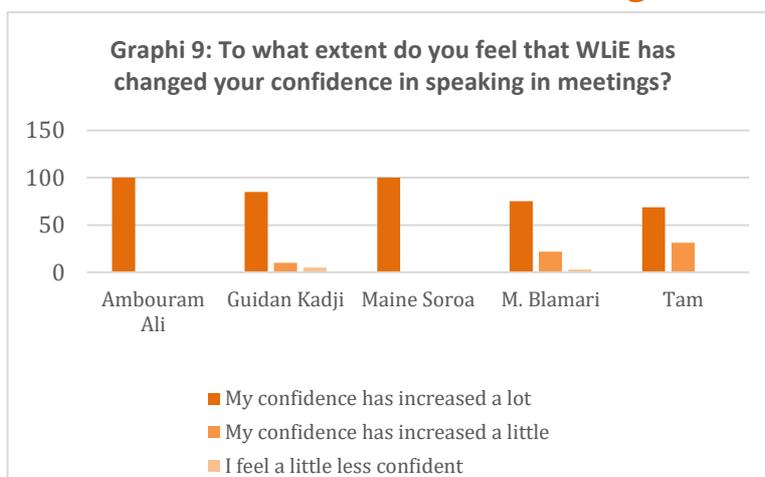


Figure 1 Sherry A. Participation Ladder.

meetings. However, they have all done advocacy to influence decision-makers in the direction of their needs and concerns.

The contribution of the project to the materialization of changes

According to discussions with men and women (members and non-members) and powerholders, the WLiE project has played an important role in these changes through interventions such as training, sensitization, religious preaching, reflection, and advisory support that the project has conducted at the various sites for the benefit of women members and non-members, and men. The women members found WLiE's approach interesting and different from other projects. Indeed, thanks to this project, they have understood their rights and the importance of their leadership, and they have strengthened their capacity to express themselves in public and to claim their rights. The survey confirmed these claims with 100 percent of women members saying that the project has improved their understanding of their rights and 97.4 percent saying that the project has increased their confidence to speak up in meetings (with 100 percent in Ambouram Ali, Maine Soroa, and Tam – see Graph 9).



According to discussions with men and women, training and sensitization activities, counseling, subsidies, and advocacy contributed the most to the achievement of project objectives.

Other actors have contributed to these changes through the synergy created between their interventions and those of WLiE. Among the actors mentioned are CARE (Resilac, Jimiri a Ambram Ali, Malam Blamari, Tam, Guidan Kadji projects), Plan International (protection of young girls, GBV in Tam and Guidan Kadji), Coopi (Guidan Kadji), the ACTED-Concern consortium, WHH (multi-functional platform for women in Guidan Kadji), IRC (Space for women and girls in Tam), Karakara (Guidan Kadji), among others.

Despite the changes observed in women's responsible participation and leadership, the success of their collective efforts, and men's perception of the role and position of women, much remains to be done. First, some women have still not acquired a sufficient level of self-confidence to express themselves easily in their group, let alone in public. Further, more than a third (35.1 percent) of the women members surveyed continue to believe that they do not necessarily need to work together to make change, compared to 61.1 percent who believe the opposite (see Graph 5). The influence of traditional perceptions of the role and place of women continues to weigh heavily. For example, in Malam Blamari, a group of women participating in the discussions whispered to each other about their indignation at the fact that women are listened to by decision makers to a greater extent than men. As for the men, they noted everywhere the negative aspects of women's participation and leadership, the fact that some women abandon their homes in favor of group and community meetings, and that women no longer give the respect they owe to their husbands.

Challenges encountered in achieving results

- **Project set-up and approach:** the effective start of the project was a challenge, first in

identifying and recruiting women trainees and then in understanding the project approach. Indeed, despite the initial training at the start of the project, the innovative and pilot nature of the approach, unavailability of practical tools, language barriers (the tools available were in English, others had not yet been developed), and the non-experience of the trainees, did not permit an easy appropriating of the project approach by the team. As a result, certain stages of the project approach, such as co-creation, took longer than expected. At the team level, two staff members left (the Gender Assistant and an intern) which limited the team's operational capacity. In addition, the team should have had at least one male member to facilitate outreach and interaction with men and adolescents.

- ***The intended breadth of activities versus actual project funding:*** this remained a challenge, with resources being insufficient to meet all activity needs. After reflections and exchanges with the women and the WOM coordinator, the solution was to put the groups in contact with existing powerholders who could support them to supplement the limited resources of the project. In effect, while it remained a challenge, it also led to an opportunity for advocacy activities.
- ***The constant challenge of reflection and creativity:*** the pilot nature of the project meant that the project team had no references or previous experience to draw on. Language barriers limited sharing with Uganda.
- ***The COVID-19 pandemic:*** because of the pandemic, project activities had to be suspended for a given period. Then, when activities resumed in the field, compliance with the distancing measures affected group activities, particularly training and sensitization. The project team had to opt to work with a core group of members who cascaded the results. The core group was then trained and equipped with materials to sensitize women on the pandemic and the protective measures to be respected for the conduct of their activities door to door, and during ceremonies (weddings and baptisms). The women therefore adapted their functioning to the situation – they organized so as not to congregate at the time of payment (some came to give the money and left, others sent their children, etc.).
- ***Security situation:*** security measures limited the amount of time spent interacting with women in the field. The situation is more difficult in sites such as Malam Blamari, which maintains a reputation, rightly or wrongly, as a refuge for insurgents. For example, there is a continual turnover of teachers who refuse to stay there. In cases like these, the interaction time is much more limited since it is necessary to leave the site at 1:00 PM instead of 3:00 PM as it is at other sites. Similarly, during the winter period, the team was unable to engage with men who were in the field until 2:00 PM, and thus had limited interaction. This has impacted the effectiveness of the project even though this site has the most groups, and the need for interaction is more important given that the population is more conservative, comprising indigenous Nigeriens versus those who are displaced or refugees. It is important to note that this security challenge will become even more acute at all sites, with the increase in attacks targeting Maine and its surrounding areas.

Limited presence of humanitarian actors in some sites: this reduces the chances of success of women's advocacy efforts. This is the case in Malan Blamari, where their advocacy for the installation of solar energy at their Mini AEP remains unfulfilled due to the absence of

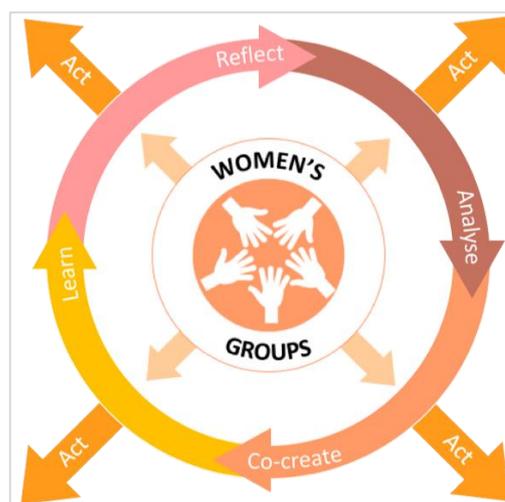
humanitarian actors. This site, which has no displaced population, has very few stakeholders from whom the mayor's office or the commune's technical services can seek support. This is a demotivating factor for women.

Women's understanding and implementation of the WLiE approach

The WLiE project is a departure from the usual emergency projects that tend to focus on material assistance to cover the immediate needs of the affected populations. The WLiE project is innovative both in its objectives and in its implementation approach; in addition, its pilot nature gives it a research-action dimension that allows flexibility and iteration in its execution.

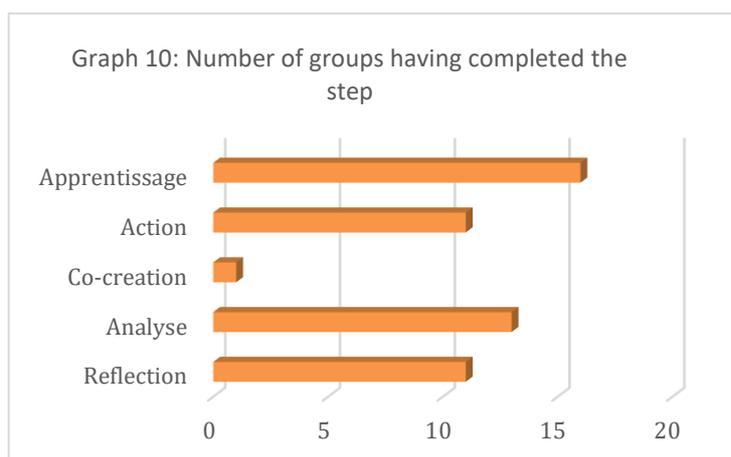
As a result, it was difficult for the women to understand and take ownership of the five steps of the project approach. They referred to two stages in the execution of the project that they understood in their own way; these were:

- **Analysis and reflection stages:** women did not distinguish between the two phases; they referred to them as the same diagnostic phase during which they were questioned to identify their problems and needs instead of two different stages – serving first to (1) analyze the social norms and practices governing the power dynamics between men and women to identify the problems and barriers related to women's responsible participation; followed by (2) participatory reflection on local solutions to resolve these problems.
- **Step Action:** the women proudly report all the activities they have carried out and benefit from with the project: trainings, sensitizations, coaching, the grants they manage autonomously, and the advocacy activities they have undertaken to influence the power holders to address their concerns. Women recognized the importance of improving their agency (self-confidence, knowledge of their rights and role, and confidence to raise their voice in decision-making forums), their relationships (the collective strength of women from one or more groups to influence decisions), and the recognition and valuing of their status by men and the community (structure). They recognize the critical importance of these elements in the materialization of these actions, most of which were successful.
- **The co-creation stage:** this stage was the most difficult to understand for the women who were not aware that the objective of this stage was to empower them to take the reins of the project. Which is accomplished by setting their own objective according to their needs and leadership aspirations, and self-identifying the actions and the implementation strategy needed to reach this objective, hence the idea of action plans. It took preliminary activities of reflection and iterative exchanges, and capacity building of the women on leadership and their right to identify activities to strengthen their participation and leadership. However, the women are not aware of the empowerment aspect of this process, but rather of the identification of activities as a result of the diagnostic phase of their needs. For example, the women did not talk about the action plans they had developed and implemented to achieve these goals.
- **Learning:** this was not distinguished as a step in the project approach but rather as an important



condition for achieving their goals. Indeed, the trainings, sensitizations, preachings, multiple exchange sessions, and coaching by the project team were unanimously recognized as having been among the key activities that contributed to the achievements of the women and to the changes in their individual and collective lives. The multiplier effect of these trainings was recognized by both women members and non-members of the groups supported by the project, as they always benefited from the restitutions of the trainings by the nuclei that received the initial trainings. The learning workshop was highlighted as a final stage of learning where women were proud to demonstrate their leadership by sharing their experiences.

In summary, no group consciously implemented all five stages of the project approach in a linear fashion (see Graph 10). The stages of reflection, action, and learning came up most often in the discussions; with reflection and learning spread across the life of the project. However, the women found the project's approach interesting, in that it adapted to their pace, level of understanding, and leadership.



A better understanding and execution of the co-creation phase would have given more meaning to women's responsible participation and leadership because it would allow women to feel ownership of their decisions and actions. The actions to be taken would be more meaningful if they were part of a goal that women would be willing to follow, and thus evaluate and establish greater accountability within the groups and the community for achieving these goals.

The unexpected results of the project

Despite deliberate efforts to capture the negative unintended effects of the project, only one is reported – the social and familial setback of women's participation and leadership. This was echoed by men in Tam and A Malan Blamari, who felt that improving women's participation and leadership was at the expense of the family and the respect that a woman owes her husband. Men complained that women abandoned their homes and the care of their children to participate in group meetings and activities, they also blamed some women for not asking permission from their husbands to go to meetings (see the story of Mustapha in Tam).

Moreover, in Malan Blamari, some non-member women do not seem to approve of women's leadership, as reported in the Guidan Kadji water story where it is reported that women are listened to more than men by decision makers. They are likely among the 9.3 percent of non-member women surveyed who say that women's participation has negative effects.

However, there were several positive unintended effects including:

- Access to basic social services. The success of women's advocacy has brought significant improvement in access to social services for populations that would not have been possible without women's involvement.

- The effect of women's leadership on other projects/dimensions/sectors not covered by WLiE. Women are interested in any issue affecting their community and feel like defenders of the rights of the most vulnerable. For example, supporting access to health care for talibés, accompanying GBV victims to health care to avoid stigmatization, raising awareness about COVID-19, and legal and citizenship issues (civil status).
- The multiple pleas of women in several areas have been a springboard for strengthening coordination between actors. Indeed, following each plea, the mayor's office and the technical services of Maine worked together to identify the appropriate partner.
- Women's advocacy and the participation of the WLiE project in the budget session of the Mainé communal council is an initiative that should be pursued to the end, to influence mayors to plan budgets that are sensitive to gender and women's concerns.

Relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the project

Considering the above analysis of results, the WLiE project is an example of efficiency and effectiveness for having achieved significant results with so few resources – a total budget of USD 142.555 for the two regions, and a team of eight people, including six interns.

The results achieved can be explained by the relevance of the project, as participation and leadership are a crucial need of women members of MMD groups. Indeed, prior to the start of the project, women members of the groups had already reached a level of organizational capacity and collective action and aspired to achieve more participation in decision making and influence. They had already started to develop isolated and uncoordinated initiatives (for example, the cases of claiming the respect of the quota of women to the elective posts notably by the women of the groups of Maine). The project, despite the complexity of its approach, has therefore propped open an already opening door. In addition to this, the dynamics of the groups and the effect of announcement and competition between the groups acted as a catalyst – particularly concerning collective actions with each group wanting to go beyond the level that the other reached. On this subject, the president of the Farin Tchikin Kowa Group in Tam said that, "we regularly ask the project team about the achievements of other groups so that we do not get left behind! "

However, this collective action dynamic is supported by external conditions, such as the presence of humanitarian actors who are willing to support women's efforts in sites with displaced populations (Tam, Guidan Kadji, and Jambourou). By contrast, in sites where the majority of the population is resident (Ambram Ali and Malan Bloumari), there are fewer opportunities for support from humanitarian actors other than the mayor's office and the departmental technical services.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Ultimately, this evaluation shows that the WLiE project is an example of an efficient and effective program. Despite the complexity and innovative nature of its approach, and despite limited capacity and resources (human and financial), the project has achieved significant results both for the lives of women and their communities and for the learning needs of the project. Indeed, although the women have not internalized the conceptual logic and the five steps of the project implementation approach, they have achieved such self-confidence and leadership that some groups feel they have reached the ultimate level of citizen control, which would be justified if we consider the sum of the results achieved by the groups, whether they were expected or not. However, it is also realistic to note that groups are never homogeneous, so there are internal disparities in agency but also disparities between groups in voice and collective action.

There is therefore room for improvement both in terms of the women and the team set-up and approach to the project; as well as in terms of learning the lesson from this pilot experience by those in power (local government) and the humanitarian world in general. It is with this in mind, and with a view to scaling up the initiative, that the following recommendations are made.

Recommendations

In relation to women's leadership and participation

- Add more sensitization and support actions to advise men on the importance of leadership and women's participation and what role they can play in this sense.
- Engage boys and young men more in outreach to make them champions in the promotion of women's leadership and prepare them for their future contribution.
- Strengthen progressive thinking and analysis on social practices that hinder women's responsible participation and leadership. The application of Social Analysis and Action (SAA)⁵ and (religious preaching are very effective tools to address ignorance, preconceived ideas, and resistance to change by both men and women themselves.
- Encourage intergenerational cooperation between older women and girls to promote opportunities to broaden life experiences and promote personal development among women, young women and girls.
- Enable women with strong leadership skills to take on roles as trainers and mentors for their peers so that they can serve as positive role models and examples of leadership.
- Reflect on the relevance and feasibility of partnering with other local organizations to support the groups in key components (e.g., Ngada Mutual for accounting and financial services, other CARE projects or other NGOs to monitor the savings and credit activities of the groups) so that the project team can focus on supporting women in aspects of responsible participation and leadership.

Considering the above results and findings, the following recommendations were made to CARE and other project actors and stakeholders.

In relation to the project approach and model

⁵ SAA is CARE's signature approach to gender norm transformation, a facilitated process through which individuals explore and challenge the social norms, beliefs, and practices that shape their lives and health.

- Organize information and orientation sessions for women and men on the project's approach, objectives, expected results, and implementation steps, with an emphasis on the co-creation phase and the empowerment of women in the definition and execution of their action plan.
- Review the project's approach by formally considering the role of powerholders as partners in women's collective action.
- Organize participatory self-evaluations of the Action phase (implementation of women's action plans) to learn lessons before developing new plans.
- Adapt the model by adding women's capacity building as a systematic cross-cutting activity prior to and/or throughout implementation before the start of each project phase.
- Establish a system for monitoring and evaluating project performance at the women's and project levels, drawing on the Progress Markers tool for tracking progress of change from the basic to the more complex levels of transformation (e.g., helping groups analyze their success, the impact of their actions, and identify challenges and opportunities).
- Adapt the model to add specific support to the tracks identified for the transformation of roles and power relations between men and women (e.g., how can they further support men's initiative in sharing domestic tasks with women?).

In relation to the collective action and influencing

- Advocate for regular participation of the project and women's representatives in the Maine City Council budget sessions.
- Reflect with the mayor's office and the technical services on the management of the balance and equity in the allocation of the mayor's resources to consider positive discrimination towards villages receiving little or no support from partners.
- Make participatory sharing and learning workshops on collective action and women's voice regular in the presence of women and powerholders through joint planning and review meetings.
- Build on the synergy of the different partners' interventions to create a framework for coordinating ongoing initiatives supporting Women's Leadership.
- Systematize the participation of the project and women leaders in Maine's communal council budget sessions to influence mayors to plan budgets that are gender sensitive and address women's concerns.

In relation to the project team

- A team should be recruited with gender and M&E technical assistants and experienced field supervisors (2/3 women and 1/3 men), employed on a full-time basis, to overcome the paradox between the inexperience of the trainees and the complexity of the project, and to facilitate exchanges and reflections between same-sex groups.
- Strengthen the operational capacity of the team through training on the project's approach and practical tools, ensuring that the tools developed are available in French.

Annexes

- **Annex 1** Terms of reference
- **Annex 2** Methodology
- **Annex 3** Tools
 - 3.1 Guide d'entretien staff projet
 - 3.2 MSC Field Guide
 - 3.3 FGD WLiE Members Guide
 - 3.4 Guide to Interviewing Power Holders
 - 3.5 Ladder of participation
 - 3.6 AIIR tool
- **Annex 4** Stories
 - Zeinabou's story on participation in decision-making bodies
 - Story of Lami Mahamadou CIPS
 - Story about early marriage in Tam (collected during the collection)
 - Story on the leadership and participation of women in Banzaga
 - Story of access to drinking water in Guidan Kaji
 - Story of Elh Moustapha Tam (collected during the collection: negative impact of WLiE)
 - Fanna Kalou story (collected during the collection: negative impact of WLiE)