

Women's Empowerment:

Strategic Impact Inquiry Research Summary

The Context: For women, the context of Niger is filled with both constraints and opportunities. One of the poorest countries in the world, there remains significant gaps between men and women in health, education and literacy. Still, the government, civil society and other organizations have committed to promoting women's rights.

The Project: CARE Niger investigated the impact of its signature village savings and loans (VSL) method, Mata Masu Dubara (*Women on the Move*), through a gender lens. Beginning in 1991, MMD linked women's savings and credit associations to its reforestation projects and its success led MMD to spread across the country.

As it developed, MMD became more participatory, responsive to local contexts and systematic in incorporating gender conceptual frameworks. Starting in 2001, MMD focused on economic and social empowerment and projects became rooted in action research of local realities. MMD linked its gender approach to other projects that emphasized equity and engaged partners to integrate CARE's strategies into their structures. MMD projects also offered trainings on strategic themes to promote women's empowerment and networked groups with one another as well as with civil society organizations in order to increase women's social capital.

For the SII, CARE Niger explored MMD's impact on women's empowerment across regions and also across program interventions.

CARE Niger's Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII): For the SII, CARE Niger examined its work through a meta-evaluation centered on four key questions:

- What are VSL's impacts on women's empowerment?
- In what different ways does CARE Niger use VSLs? How do their impacts differ (lessons

The [Strategic Impact Inquiry](#) (SII) seeks to evaluate CARE's impact on women's empowerment. For more CARE Niger's full SII report, please contact: pqlibrarian@care.org.

learned; good practices in project design, implementation strategies in the future)?

- What impact does VSL have on other approaches and CARE strategies?
- What is CARE's contribution to poverty reduction in Niger, particularly women's poverty?

The Methods: CARE Niger's SII took the form of a multi-analyst meta-evaluation:

RESEARCH DESIGN

- **Formative Workshop:** Reading groups to initially review documentation and reports for selected projects
- **Research Team:** Program staff (senior management team, monitoring and evaluation specialists, gender specialist and other staff); two consultants

DATA COLLECTION

- **Meta-Evaluation:** Review evaluations of seven projects and programs

DATA ANALYSIS

- **Analysis:** Do project impacts show a relationship between project activities and women's empowerment as indicated by CARE's global research framework and/or identified by Nigerien women?
- **Workshop:** Share and discuss findings

Rationale

- Evaluate women's empowerment progress.
- Improve quality of future evaluations.
- Understand the historical evolution of CARE's programming in Niger.

Limitations

- Availability of documentation impacted the ability to explain project context, strategies, priority objectives, changes, challenges and important accomplishments.

NIGER

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Women's Own Views on Empowerment:

AGENCY

Reduced workload
Asset accumulation
Increased capacity to mobilize resources
Capacity to mobilize organizationally

STRUCTURE

Access to training and information

RELATIONS

Power sharing at community level
Negotiation skills

Impact on Empowerment

Implications:

CARE-Niger's new principles and strategies influenced MMD to go beyond savings and credit to become flexible, participatory and inclusive of men, which strengthened MMD in the long-term.

- MMD activities can be modified to local contexts without losing benefits and are important entry points for program strategies, like natural resource management.
- Networking MMD groups increased social capital by strengthening relationships between groups and with other micro-finance institutions.
- MMD principles, based on transparency, regular meetings and contributions, and well defined management structures ensures group/network quality.
- VSL should be oriented in terms of flexibility, enabling larger/wider/more inclusive participation, and adaptation to specific environments.

MMDs reduce poverty directly by improving women's income and increasing their access to both financial resources and social capital.

- Program flexibility and innovation permit participation by the most vulnerable women.
- MMD savings funds reinforce women's capacities/social cohesion through meetings/social security nets.
- Raised consciousness, relationships with partners and strengthened communications encouraged observable behavior changes like civil society engagement.

Internally, CARE must align with its longer term, broader, programmatic strategies and vision

- CARE must address structural aspects of women's empowerment, through innovative strategies and a more explicit role for targeted changes in project log-frames.
- Embed programmatic learning in new project design – exploit evaluations systematically.
- Develop standardized, quantifiable indicators for women's empowerment.
- Train staff to adapt core ideas/processes in gender to particular contexts.
- Improve logical coherence between interventions in a particular project with what we wish to achieve at a larger, strategic programmatic level.
- Ensure stronger links between monitoring and evaluation indicators and processes with the visions and aspirations of women themselves.
- Do not focus evaluations exclusively on project log frame, particularly if it does not reflect on gender. In each project, explore gendered relations, structures and agency.

CARE-Niger must act strategically with donors to remain aligned to its mission

- Look for synergies with other donor/government/private activities that will facilitate structural changes that promote women's empowerment.
- Invest in staff/partner gender analysis capacity-building: training, workshops and exchanges.
- Strategize how to increase CARE's 'room to maneuver' given the tension between donors and CARE's strategic orientations to remain true to vision, plans and donor goals.

Agency	Structures	Relations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset accumulation and increased capacity to mobilize resources • No reduced workload • Livelihood security, assets, savings, and greater control over lives • Awareness, knowledge and skills in economic, social and political arenas • Group membership • Greater participation in civil society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of a visible movement of MMD women, gaining public voice/access • Greater access to training, information, financial services • Cultural norms and discourse shifting (e.g., marabous preaching on women's rights in Islam) • Seldom change in structure beyond the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to negotiate effectively within household, community • Influence and participation in family affairs, and joint action • Presence in community structure, but no automatic influence • Alliances with partners to plan for community-wide actions • Social cohesion among women, but little effect on hierarchies among them