



Gender Equality Approaches in the SCALING Project

December 2021

Gender Inequality and Maternal and Child Health

Gender inequality limits' women's ability to access the information, rights, power, and opportunities they need to have control over and properly care for their own health and that of their children both during pregnancy and after birth.

Barriers include:

Women's lack of health knowledge

Barriers to accessing healthcare (language, transportation, permission from husbands/family members, confidence)

Traditional beliefs that harm women, such as food taboos

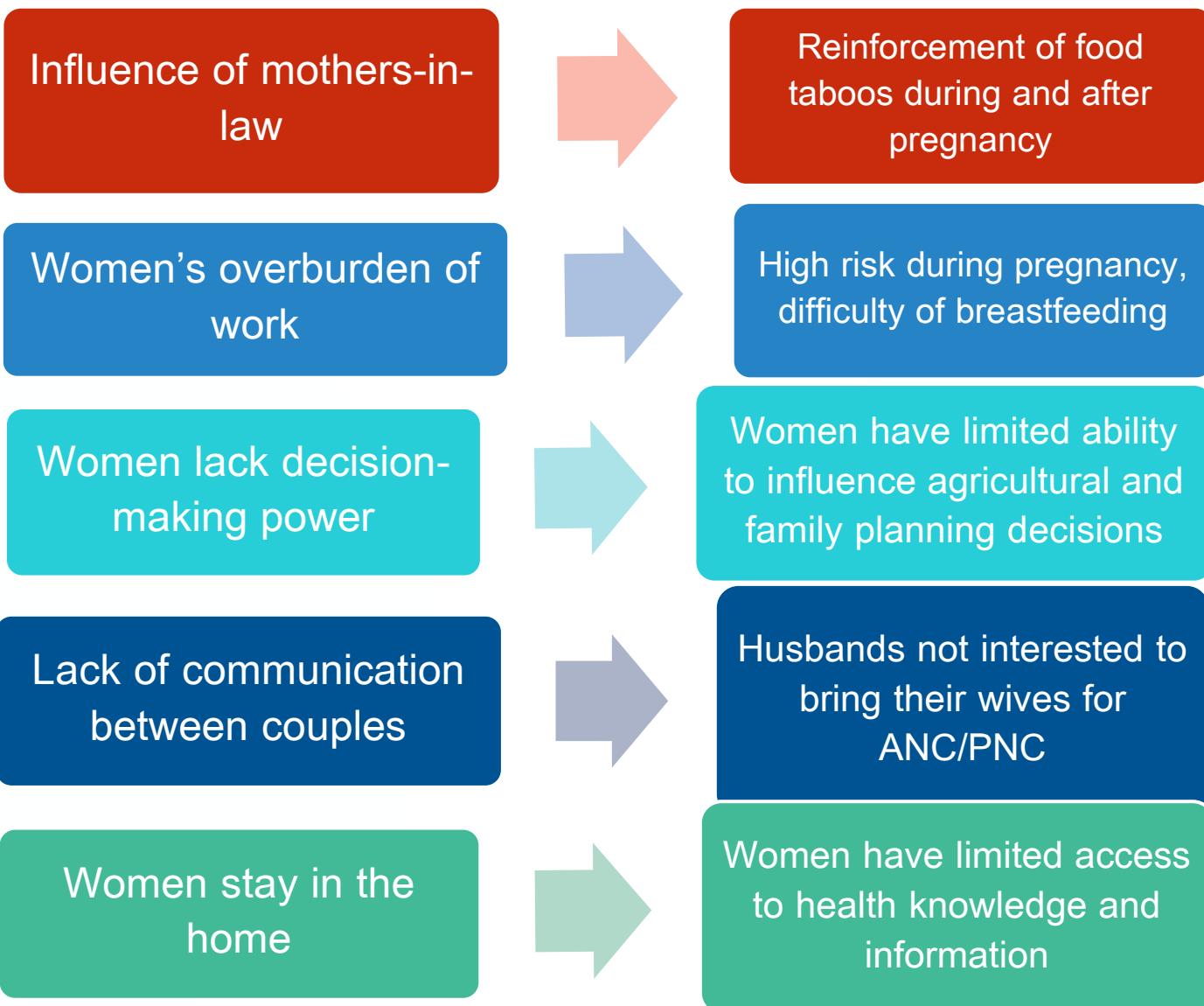
Lack of proper self-care during pregnancy

Inadequate knowledge of infant and child nutrition

Lack of husband understanding and support of maternal health and nutrition

Gender Inequality and Maternal and Child Health

Examples



Gender in SCALING



1. Gender Equality Trainings (WWR, GER)



2. Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA)



Elder Social Norms Workshop (Pilot)

Cross-Cutting:
Gender Integration

3. Women's Leadership



Gender Equality Trainings

Original Project Design (two separate trainings)

Women's Workload Reduction (WWR) – increase equal sharing of work in the household

Gender Negotiation – improve relationships and equal decision-making between husbands and wives

Revised design (one single training)

Gender Equality in a Relationship (GER)

Combined lessons from WWR and Gender Negotiation



Comparison: WWR versus GER

Women's Workload Reduction (WWR)

3-hour workshop for women, followed by two monitoring visits with couples

20 women per village (but in reality, usually about 30 women)

3 Steps:

- Identifying burdensome work for women
- Mapping women's daily time use
- Creating a plan for reducing workloads

Rolled out in four provinces

Fully: Huaphanh, Luang Prabang

Partially: Phongsaly, Luang Namtha

Gender Equality in a Relationship (GER)

Half-day training for couples

10 couples (husbands and wives) per village

5 Lessons

Sex and social norms (gender roles)

Changing social norms

Women's workload reduction

Healthy relationships

Shared household decision-making

Rolled out in three provinces

Fully: Luang Prabang, Luang Namtha

Partially: Phongsaly

Lessons Learnt: WWR and GER

Widespread success reducing women's workloads, harder to change household power dynamics (ex: women's participation in household decision-making)

Need for men's involvement in gender activities



When men were not involved in planning in the WWR approach, there were sometimes family disagreements because men had not joined the activities and did not understand why they had to change

To engage men, it is **helpful to have male facilitators**

Importance of gender equality activities

Heavy workload and lack of husband's support were barriers that prevented many women in target villages from joining other SCALING activities, including VSLA

Benefits of WWR / GER

Scale: WWR, GER, or both were rolled out in **419 villages** in all 14 target districts (99% of SCALING target villages), reaching **13,197 women** (WWR), and **5,004 couples** (WWR and GER)

Decreasing workloads for women

Men in most villages help more with household work, childcare and field work, especially while their wives are pregnant

In some conservative villages, men do not want to help with household, but do help with field work and heavy work

Women have more time to rest, take care of themselves, and take care of their children

Women have more time to do economic work like weaving to earn additional income



Benefits of WWR / GER (cont.)

Economic impacts

Self-reported improvement in family economy

Increased support from husbands on all kinds of work

Increase in family peace and happiness

Improved communication and understanding

Increase in respecting each other and helping each other in the family

Increased family unity, agreement, and equality in the family

Moderate increase in women's involvement in household decision-making

Many women said their husbands listened to them and consulted them more than in the past



Participant Quotes: WWR / GER

“Before the project, I didn’t help my wife very much because I didn’t understand about sharing work with women. I thought that most work was women’s work, like washing clothes, steaming rice, sweeping, and many other tasks. After the project started, we had training about gender and lightening women’s workloads. If we lighten women’s workloads, women will have more time to earn money, it will reduce their work, and we will have better communication and planning in the family.”

Mr. Maikham, 31, Huaphanh

“After the project started, there have been many improvements. Now men consult with their wives about work, and men also understand how to help with women’s work. We have time to earn money, which has improved our family economy, and it’s decreased women’s work. Now when there are meetings, I dare to voice my opinions.”

Ms. Lamfai, 30, Huaphanh

Next steps: WWR / GER

Adding formal monitoring visits to GER to:

Further support couples in the change process

Gather more information on how and to what extent change is happening

Monitoring system should gather information on links between gender change and health/nutrition (or other sectoral focus)

Increasing reach of GER approach

Current reach (10 couples per village) was too small to create community-wide change in larger villages

Need for increasing number of participants or methods for passing lessons learnt between participants and other community members

Need for increasing proportion of male trainers

Difficulty of involving men in gender activities (men think gender is not relevant to them and see trainers are mostly women [as they are from LWU])

Explore possibility of working with both Lao Women's Union and Lao Youth Union for future gender activities

WWR / GER Pictures



Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA)

Village-level women's group for saving and borrowing

Purpose:

- 1) Provide women with access to financial resources as a safety net (for food or medical costs), or to invest in livelihoods activities
- 2) Strengthen women's confidence, capacities, leadership, and role in the public sphere

Method:

Money comes from members themselves (project provides only equipment and technical support)

Managed entirely by women (SCALING model)

Year-long savings cycles, then share out of savings and interest



Lessons Learnt: VSLA

Most benefit for rural communities, more difficult in peri-urban communities

More successful in villages where **women have basic competencies** (literacy, numeracy, Lao language)

Lack of **men's support** (husbands or village authorities) can be a major barrier to VSLA success

Women's ownership of their group and money helps ensure loans are paid back

Difficult in villages where women migrate

Valuable in villages where women engage in small business activities (ex: weaving)

Rules need to be flexible to meet the needs of different groups in different situations

Village-to-village learning exchanges can be very helpful in motivating groups that are not active

Savings and loaning alone is not enough to engage peri-urban women—**need for more learning and business opportunities**



Economic Results of VSLA

In all, 203 VSLAs were formed across all 14 target districts (approximately 50% of all SCALING target villages), with a total of 5,764 members

Total:

Amount saved: more than **4,158,660,000 LAK (~382,000 USD)**

Amount loans: more than **2,358,000,000 LAK (~216,590 USD)**; 56.7% of money saved

Amount of interest earned: more than **220,099,000 LAK (~20,220 USD)**

Average:

Savings per group: **20,793,000 LAK (~1,910 USD)**

Savings per member: **721,000 LAK (~66 USD)**

Loans per group: **11,790,000 LAK (~1,080 USD)**

Comparison of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 (based on 29 villages in LPB and HUA with two full savings cycles):

Average increase in savings (from first to second cycle): 5,329,000 LAK per village
(increase of 50.3%)

Average increase in borrowing (from first to second year): 2,168,000 per village
(increase of 28.5%)

Social Results of VSLA

Financial resources

Money from **annual shareout** (without group cannot save a large amount at once; ມີເງິນເປັນກ້ອນ)

Safety net to ensure family has food and can meet basic needs in emergencies (ex: COVID)

Convenient borrowing, that can be accessed quickly when needed

Family benefits

Decreased financial stress creates **increased peace in family**

Increased communication between husbands and wives on financial matters

Men earn extra income for saving in VSLA

Women's capacity

Improvements in women's leadership and financial management skills

Increased public role in community increases women's role in village decision-making, access to public spaces, access to information, and unity among village women (increases women's space for collective action)

Increased women's confidence and daring allows greater voice in family and community

Men increasingly see and appreciate women's capacities and value



Participant Quotes: VSLA

“When we let women manage the money, we have seen that they can do this much better than men. If men keep the money, they will use it for useless things, going out and spending it carelessly. Now the wives keep the money, and they are also members of the Village Savings and Loan Association. When necessary, we can discuss with our wives to make shared decisions about borrowing money for managing or spending within our family. We are very proud that women know how to manage money, and in the future, we will continue to support our wives to be part of the VSLA.”

Men’s focus group, Phongsaly

“In this village, we used to have a Village Savings and Loans Association, but that group has now been dissolved by the mutual agreement of all members because: 1) We did not have money to save; 2) We did not have time to save. In this village [where we saved at night], everyone said the evening was the time for cooking and housework, and if they came to save money, they would not be able to cook; 3) There was no interest, because no one was borrowing money; 4) No one wanted to be committee members; and 5) Most men in this village are addicted to drugs, so we were worried about the safety of the money.”

Former VSLA Committee member, Huakhua Village, Phongsaly

Next steps: VSLA

Maintain existing VSLA groups with support from LWU

- Strengthen capacity of committee members for sustainability

- Continued monitoring of groups (both in-person and by phone) integrated into LWU plans

Formalize village-to-village **learning exchanges as part of VSLA approach**

Expand use of **VSLA as a learning platform**

- Training on business skills (ex: food processing)

- Building knowledge on health, nutrition, and other topics

Pilot **links to formal banking for peri-urban groups**

Increase flexibility in the “Rules that Cannot be Changed”

- Allow changes based on requests by and agreement of group members at the end of an annual cycle

- Ex: minimum member age, length of savings cycle, frequency of savings, number of members, etc.

VSLA Pictures



Women's Leadership

Trainings for women on leadership skills
were held with representatives from target
villages

Two-day trainings at district level (one initial
training and one review training)

Two representatives per village (in villages with
VSLA, these are committee members)

Purpose:

Women understand what a leader is,
and the roles, characteristics, and
skills of a leader

Women train themselves to gain the
characteristics and skills of a leader

**Women use their new leadership
skills and confidence in their
villages** to guide their VSLA groups
and increase their public roles



Results: Women's Leadership

In total, **784 women** joined leadership trainings across the four target provinces.

Results

Many positive cases of **women increasing their confidence, daring, negotiation, and understanding of leadership** after joining the training (but not all women; some did not change leadership behaviors after training)

Some women held meetings with village authorities to **share lessons learnt** from the training, or **created action plans** to be carried out by the women in their villages

Many VSLA committee members who attended leadership training were **better able to guide VSLA activities**, create plans, and speak up on behalf of their group after the training.



Lessons Learnt: Women's Leadership

Learning and Next Steps

In Luang Prabang, **women developed action plans** to implement community-level actions after returning to their villages

This can be integrated into the Women's Leadership training as a way to apply lessons learned and **pass their leadership skills on to others**

In Luang Namtha and Luang Prabang, Women's Leadership review sessions were also used as a **platform for VSLA learning exchanges** with great success

This can be used both to motivate VSLA groups that are not active, and to inspire villages without VSLA groups to start their own groups



Elder Social Norms Workshop (Pilot)

Activities about gender and social norms at the village level, focused on older men and women

Purpose: to help facilitate change by encouraging the older generation (who may resist change or encourage their children to follow old traditions like food taboos) to be more open to changes in social norms

Process

- 1) Reflect on social norms for men versus women
- 2) Discussion about social change participants have seen in their lifetimes
- 3) Create an action plan for change



Lessons Learnt: Elder Social Norms

Positive results from reflections

Participants were **able to identify gendered social attitudes and expectations**, and make comparisons about how expectations were heavier for women

Participants were **able to identify and discuss positive social changes** they had seen in their communities

Nonetheless, on the whole it **remains difficult to change the ideas of the elderly population**

Action plans were often not very ambitious

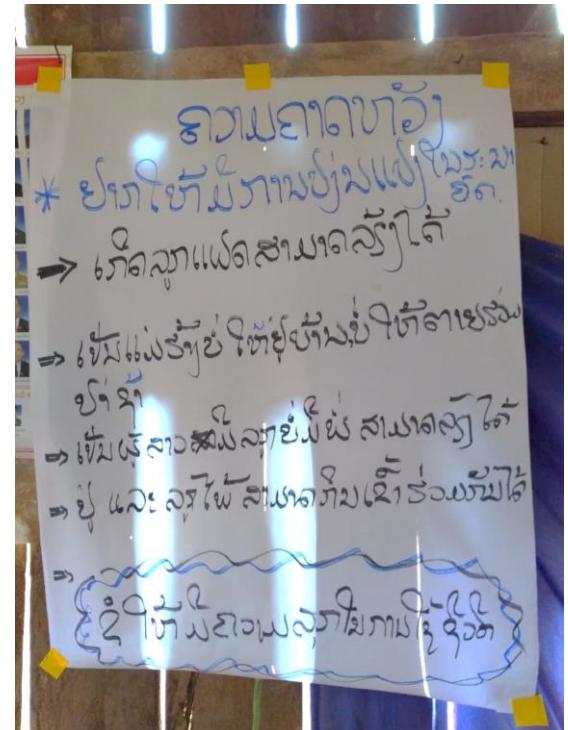
It was not clear how much effort the participants would put into implementing their plans, if any

Training was adapted to **include youth as well as elderly**, in order to facilitate discussion (by introducing some more progressive ideas)

Recommended next steps

Continue pilots with follow-up to monitor change

Implement in villages where resistance from the older generation has already been identified as a problem



Gender Integration across Sectors

Integration of messages on gender equality across all sectors under SCALING

Purpose:

Provide **gender equality messages for communities as often as possible** to promote change

Increase understanding of **how gender equality impacts other sectors** like health, nutrition, and WASH

Examples of SCALING Gender Integration

Men's involvement in SBCC activities

Gender Module of LSS peer education curriculum

Gender officer in Phongsaly joining other teams for field activities to provide gender equality messages to participating community members

Key Gender Messages

A list of key gender equality messages was developed to be integrated into all field work by project teams and government (across all sectors)

Four categories:

Husbands share household labor

Ex: It is especially important for men to support household work—especially heavy work—while their wives are pregnant and after giving birth (it is not true that working hard will help women give birth easily; it is dangerous to the mother and child's health)

Men are involved in maternal health and nutrition

Ex: Men should support their wives during pregnancy and after birth by going with them to ANC/PNC visits

Husbands and wives share decision-making in the household

Ex: When husbands and wives decide together, they have more information and can make better decisions

Women are seen as leaders in their communities

Ex: Some women may be shy to speak up, which means it's important to ask them their opinions and give them space to speak out, as well as to take their ideas seriously

Lessons Learnt: Gender Integration

Successes: During the gender change assessment, there were various **changes that were not attributed to any one particular gender activity**, but rather to the whole package of SCALING activities

Women's **increased participation** in the community (ex: at village meetings)

Women's **increased daring** (daring to think, to speak out, to make decision, and to try new things)

Women becoming **more knowledgeable** and clever

Women **claiming their rights** (to participation in public forums, to expressing their opinions and having their voices heard, and to contributing to community decisions and problem solving)

Next steps

Continue integrating key gender equality messages into programming (within SCALING and in consortium members' future project work)

Integration of gender equality messaging into government's village-level field work (especially LWU and members of provincial and district nutrition committees)

Thank You



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