

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Analysis for the Soil Values program

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The views and interpretations expressed herein are solely those of Cindy Chungong Consulting and do not necessarily reflect those of the project partners or stakeholders.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGRA	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COFO	Commissions Foncières Locales – Local Land Commissions (Mali and Niger)
COFOV	Commissions Foncières Villageoises – Village Land Commissions (Burkina Faso)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FGD	Focus Group Discussion(s)
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
HHS	Household Survey
ICRAF	World Agroforestry
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFDC	International Fertilizer Development Center
IITA	International Institute for Tropical Agriculture
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
ISFM	Integrated Soil Fertility Management
ISRIC	International Soil Reference and Information Centre
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
KII	Key Informant Interview(s)
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NISS	Nigeria Institute of Soil Science
PASADEM	Programme d'Appui à la Sécurité Alimentaire et au Développement dans les Régions de Maradi, Tahoua et Zinder – Support Program for Food Security and Development in the Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder Regions
PRSA	Programme de Résilience du Système Alimentaire – Food System Resilience Program
PWD	Person with Disabilities
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SNV	Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers – Netherlands Development Organisation
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association
WFP	World Food Program
WUR	Wageningen University and Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Soil Values program is a 10-year initiative launched in 2024 and funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. It is implemented in watersheds in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Northern Nigeria by a consortium led by IFDC with SNV and WUR, supported by AGRA, ICRAF, IITA, ISRIC, and IWMI. It aims to enable small-scale food producers to sustainably manage soil fertility for ecologically sustainable food production and climate resilience.

This report presents findings of a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) analysis conducted in target watersheds in all four countries to understand gender dynamics, social norms, power structures, resource access, and risks. This study aimed to identify potential barriers and opportunities for the effective and equitable implementation of the Soil Values program, to ensure that it benefits all segments of the population, particularly women, youth and vulnerable groups.

The methodology used a gender analysis framework, guided by key research questions focused on legal and policy contexts, social norms and beliefs, gender roles, responsibilities and time use, access to and control over assets and resources, power and decision-making patterns, and personal safety and security.

Data collection involved a combination of tools, including desk reviews of relevant literature, key informant interviews with stakeholders, focus group discussions with community members, and a household survey conducted within the target watersheds.



The key findings across the four countries reveal that, while women play a critical role in agriculture and livestock activities and subsequently in soil fertility management, there are significant disparities and inequalities across all domains of analysis. Common themes across all countries in the research findings include:

01  **Legal Frameworks vs. Practice:** Despite legal and policy commitments to gender equality and social inclusion in all countries, implementation is hindered by customary laws and patriarchal norms restricting women's land rights, inheritance, and participation in public and community life. State and local institutions lack capacity and funding to enforce GESI laws and policies, such as quotas.

02  **Social Norms:** Gender norms limit women's ownership and control of productive resources and participation in decision-making, including on soil management issues. While there are signs of transformation, with women's increasing participation in economic life, traditional standards continue to dominate. In Northern Nigeria, in particular, the cultural practice of seclusion of married women (kulle) severely restricts their participation in activities outside the household.

03  **Gendered Divisions of Labour:** Women contribute significantly to agriculture, livestock and soil management but face inequalities in decision-making and resource access and their contributions to soil fertility are undervalued despite their importance to household agricultural systems. Women carry disproportionate burdens of unpaid domestic work, constraining their time and mobility for participation in soil fertility initiatives.

04  **Access to and Control over Resources:** Access remains unequal, shaped by gender, socio-economic status, displacement, and geography. Women face systemic barriers to land, agricultural inputs, finance, and training opportunities, which severely limit their capacity to sustain livelihoods and build economic resilience. However, successive development interventions, whether by local civil society, state actors, or international organisations, have made significant inroads in increasing access to resources for underserved groups.

05  **Patterns of Power and Decision-Making:** Patriarchal norms significantly constrain women's decision-making power in both public and private spheres. Women have limited representation in formal and informal decision-making structures. However, there are certain types of initiatives, such as local development projects and cooperatives, where they are highly active and make their voices heard.

06  **Safety and Security:** Gender-based violence is prevalent and underreported. Insecurity, climate and environmental disasters, and conflict amplify risks for women, limiting their mobility and participation.

Across all findings, the analysis shows that gender-related inequalities are influenced by additional factors such as age, widowhood, forced displacement, disability, and socio-economic position, which can either heighten vulnerability or create opportunities for transformation. An intersectional understanding of these intersectional factors is therefore essential for accurately interpreting the results and designing responsive, context-appropriate interventions.

Based on the research results, key recommendations for **government actors** include strengthening enforcement of GESI-related laws and quotas; reinforcing decentralised technical services; supporting local production and transformation of agricultural and livestock products; facilitating inclusive market access for women, youth and vulnerable groups; improving institutional coordination among implementing agencies; and investing in gender-responsive extension services.

Private sector actors – such as agricultural input suppliers, food processors, and distributors – should adopt inclusive value chain models that actively engage women, youth, and vulnerable groups as contributors and decision-makers. Financial institutions should expand access to tailored products such as microcredit, crop insurance, and working capital funds that reflect the realities and needs of rural women and youth

For the **Soil Values consortium** general recommendations include to: develop a comprehensive GESI strategy to guide all stages of program design and implementation; incorporate conflict sensitivity into all project components – recognising both the competing and mutually beneficial interests of diverse groups in target areas; establish community feedback mechanisms to address grievances and mitigate potential backlash against GESI-targeted groups; collaborate with government services in all phases of the program cycle; engage traditional and religious leaders to shift social norms; and conduct dedicated research on semi-nomadic pastoralists to better understand their perspectives and roles in soil management.



Specific recommendations, in line with the five Soil Values intervention areas include:



Ensure that the design and targeting of support packages are informed by research data, local knowledge and expertise and that they reach remote and insecure areas, including use of doorstep delivery models; improve soil fertility knowledge and practices of producers through local cooperatives, female extension agents, accessible communication channels, and training aligned with women's existing roles and entrepreneurship and specific knowledge gaps identified by the research; support initiatives to transform attitudes and behaviours that limit effective participation of GESI target groups in soil fertility management, including developing targeted communications strategies and implementing sensitisation efforts at community and household level; expand access to resources for enhanced soil fertility management, including land, equipment and tools, water, finance, markets and advisory services for women, youth and vulnerable groups, ensuring that support is adapted to the specific needs and constraints identified in the research.



Support inclusive governance and decision-making by landscape and watershed management agencies, and improve access to these platforms for women, youth and vulnerable groups; engage regional technical services throughout the program implementation cycle for improved coordination and coherence at watershed/landscape level; strengthen advocacy and organisational sustainability of cooperatives and local associations to engage more effectively with natural resource management bodies.



Advocate with financial institutions to develop inclusive financial products and to reduce specific barriers that limit access to credit and financial services for women, youth, and other GESI target groups; strengthen the capacity of producer associations to enhance their outreach, revenue streams, and market integration and to better integrate women, youth and vulnerable groups within their membership and leadership; support scale-up of localised soil fertility solutions, food transformation, and by-product utilisation (particularly composting) for women and integrate their domestic enterprises with private sector actors.



Convene platforms for coordination between stakeholders across the agricultural inputs value chain to improve access, affordability, and efficiency, especially for women, youth, and other GESI priority groups; support targeted capacity-building for policy makers and technical staff on GESI and facilitate policy discussions on how to strengthen the application of existing gender and inclusion policies in agricultural and livestock sectors.



Ensure community dissemination, cross-sector learning platforms, partnerships with local research institutions, digital repositories, and periodic updates of the GESI analysis for strategic learning.



INTRODUCTION

Soil Values program

The Soil Values program is a 10-year initiative launched in 2024 and funded by the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS), within the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). It targets watersheds in Burkina Faso, Mali, Northern Nigeria, and Niger and is implemented by a consortium led by International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC), with Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), and Wageningen University & Research (WUR) as core partners. This consortium is complemented by five convening and knowledge institutions – Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), World Agroforestry (ICRAF), International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), International Soil Reference and Information Centre (ISRIC), and International Water Management Institute (IWMI).

The expected **impact** of Soil Values is to improve the soil fertility and productive capacity of 2 million hectares of farmland in the Sahel (400,000 ha each in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger and 800,000 ha in Nigeria) and the resilience and wellbeing of 1.5 million small-scale food producers, particularly women, (300,000 each in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger and 600,000 in Nigeria).

The program will implement **five intervention areas**:

Bundling integrated packages that combine technical and socio-economic support for improved soil fertility management.



Integrating interventions at the landscape and watershed levels to optimise water management, promote nature-based solutions, and encourage community-led planning.



Brokering financial instruments to support long-term soil fertility investments and explore payment mechanisms for small-scale food producers, including farmers and livestock holders.



Convening policy dialogues at the regional, national, and sub-national levels to advocate for a conducive policy environment.



Scoping and learning to integrate lessons learned by Soil Values and other programs and build the capacity of key stakeholders.



Rather than creating new initiatives, Soil Values will operate through a series of flexible “partnerships,” introducing its intervention areas into ongoing or future projects to enhance, catalyse and scale partners’ soil fertility investments.

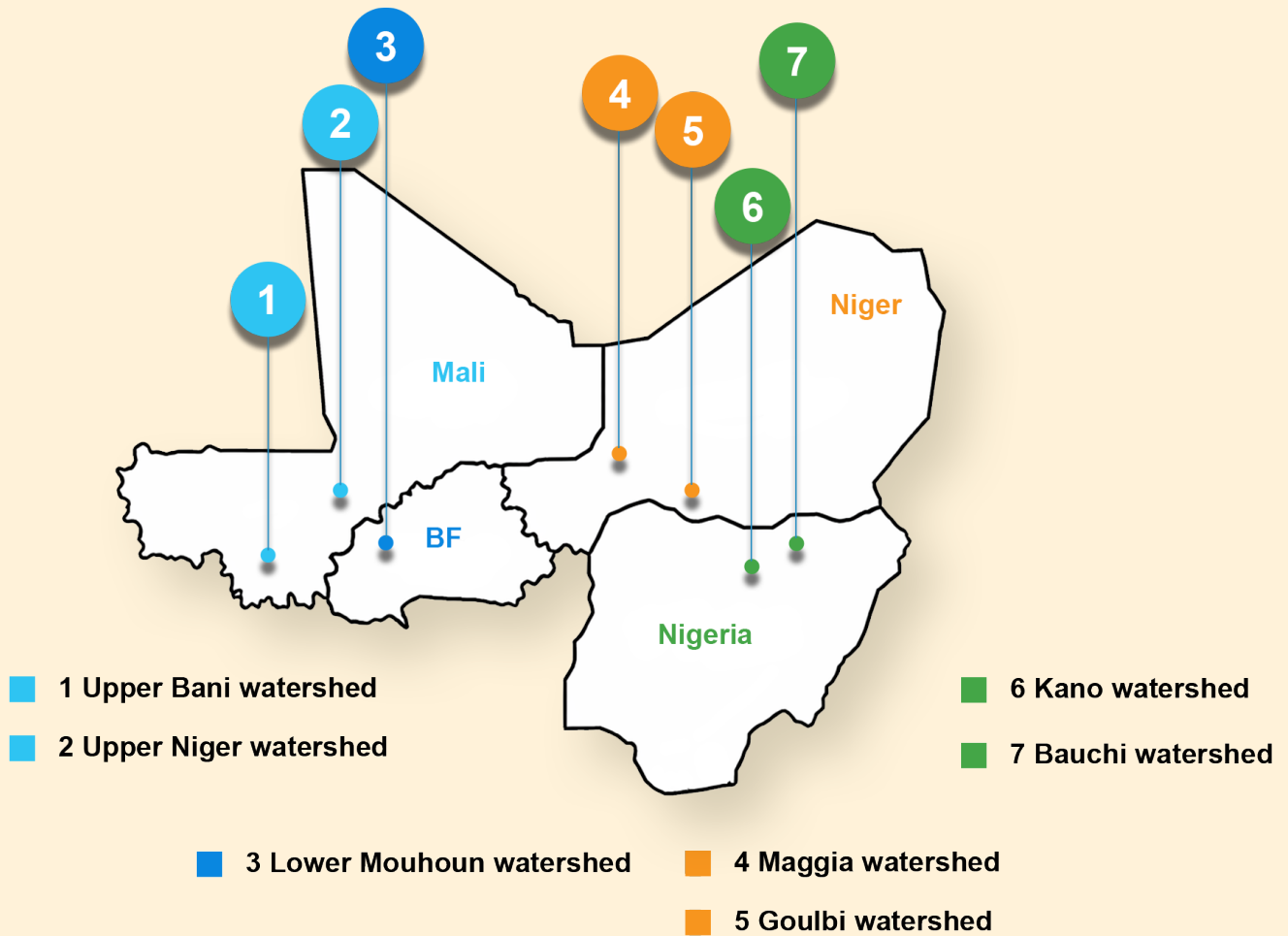
Objectives of GESI analysis

The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion research is intended to enhance the GESI-responsiveness of the Soil Values program and, where possible, promote GESI transformational change through program activities. Specifically, the research will lead to:

- Greater understanding of GESI factors impacting and impacted by the Soil Values program, by addressing knowledge gaps on GESI and soil health.
- More effective, inclusive and equitable activity design and implementation, by providing an evidence base to develop a strategy for integrating specific GESI considerations into program activities.
- Enhanced sustainability of program results, by addressing the root causes of gender inequality and social exclusion that negatively impact effective and durable soil fertility management.



CONTEXT



Mali

The *Upper Niger* watershed in Ségou Region supports intensive irrigated and rain-fed agriculture, fishing, and pastoralism, with the Niger River system enabling large-scale rice, cereals, and vegetable production. Seasonal wetlands provide critical grazing and fishing resources, and livestock rearing by both settled farmers and pastoralists remains central to local livelihoods.

The *Upper Bani* watershed in Sikasso Region is Mali's most fertile agricultural zone, characterised by high rainfall, productive soils, and diversified farming systems. Seasonal floods from the Bani River nourish extensive cultivation of cereals, cotton, fruits, and vegetables. Livestock production is integrated into farming systems, with cross-border trade in animals and agricultural goods playing an important economic role.

Both watersheds face significant stress from rapid population growth, competition over natural resources, and climatic changes affecting rainfall and soil quality. Growing competition over water and land resources between land users undermines agricultural productivity and ecosystem stability. Furthermore, insecurity has intensified across central and southern Mali, disrupting mobility, market access, and rural livelihoods, and constraining development initiatives.

Burkina Faso

The *Lower Mouhoun* watershed in the Boucle du Mouhoun Region supports mixed farming systems, combining rain-fed and irrigated crop production with fishing, forestry, and livestock rearing. Fertile plains allow cultivation of cereals and cotton, while polyvalent livelihood systems integrate agriculture, livestock, and forest resources.

The region faces mounting environmental stress from deforestation, soil degradation, and irregular rainfall patterns, with additional pressures from artisanal and industrial mining. Security threats from armed groups have caused displacement, disrupted economic activities and reduced access to land and services.

Niger

The *Goulbi* watershed of Maradi Region underpins intensive agriculture along seasonal floodplains, supporting cultivation of cereals, legumes, and vegetables through rain-fed and small-scale irrigation systems. Cross-border dynamics, with significant refugee inflows from northern Nigeria, strongly influence local communities.

The *Maggia* watershed in Tahoua Region is characterised by highly variable water availability, with brief but intense seasonal flows shaping farming along riverbanks and lowlands. Livestock rearing, particularly cattle, goats, sheep, and camels, remains a key source of income and resilience.

Both watersheds face acute environmental stressors, including land degradation, climate variability, and water scarcity. Farmer-herder conflicts are exacerbated by population pressure and shrinking natural resources. Insecurity linked to extremist groups, banditry, and cross-border criminality disrupts mobility, markets, and agricultural production, while mass forced displacement places further strain on already fragile local systems.

Nigeria

The *Kano* watershed in Kano State comprises interconnected rivers and reservoirs supporting rain-fed and irrigated agriculture, with crops such as cereals and groundnuts complemented by livestock rearing. Seasonal grazing routes and herding practices remain essential components of rural livelihoods. Restoration initiatives such as the Yartiti site reflect efforts to rehabilitate degraded land and improve water management.

The *Bauchi* watershed in Bauchi State, anchored by the Jama'are River system, sustains both crop production and pastoral livelihoods through rain-fed and irrigated agriculture. The watershed also contributes to the wider Hadejia-Nguru wetlands, which are ecologically and economically significant.

Both states face environmental pressures, including irregular rainfall, land degradation, and competition over natural resources. Security risks from banditry, kidnapping, and farmer-herder conflict affect mobility and access to farmland. While Kano remains comparatively stable, rising insecurity in neighbouring states has spillover effects.



METHODOLOGY

Gender analysis framework

The GESI analysis utilised USAID's Integrating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment framework (USAID, 2023), which examines six key domains: (1) Laws, Policies, Regulations, and Institutional Practices; (2) Social Norms and Beliefs; (3) Gender Roles, Responsibilities, and Time Use; (4) Access to and Control over Assets and Resources; (5) Patterns of Power and Decision-making; and (6) Personal Safety and Security.

Additionally, the analysis drew on SNV's GESI empowerment framework (see Annex III), alongside the project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (pro-WEAI), which provides a nuanced measure of women's agency within agricultural contexts.

Key research questions

In line with the GESI analytical framework and the objectives of the Soil Values program, the research sought to respond to a detailed set of questions, including but not limited to the following:



For each domain, the research also examined how diverse factors – such as age, marital status, socio-economic situation, education level, migrant or displacement status, disability, and ethnic belonging – influence the challenges and opportunities experienced by individuals.

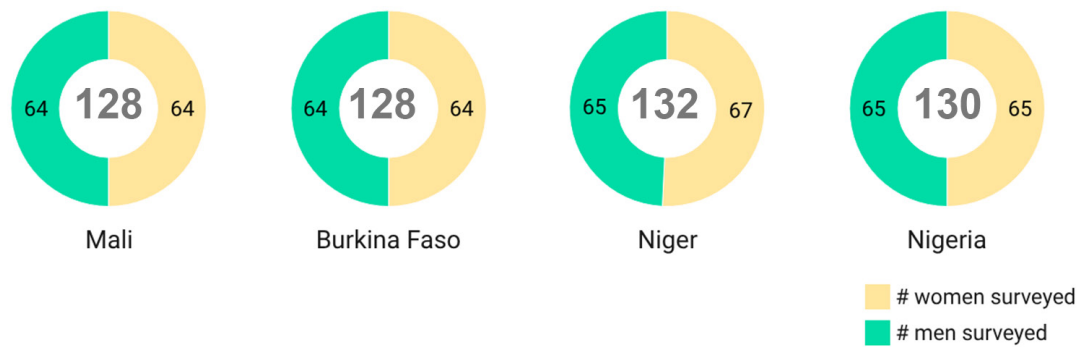
Data collection tools and sampling

Primary data collection across the four countries was conducted between end of February and mid-March 2025 in the target watersheds and in regional and national capitals.

Household Survey

The Household Survey (HHS) utilised random sampling, targeting both men and women (the primary female and the primary male adult decision maker who is engaged in rural and agricultural or pastoral livelihoods), with only a single respondent targeted per household.

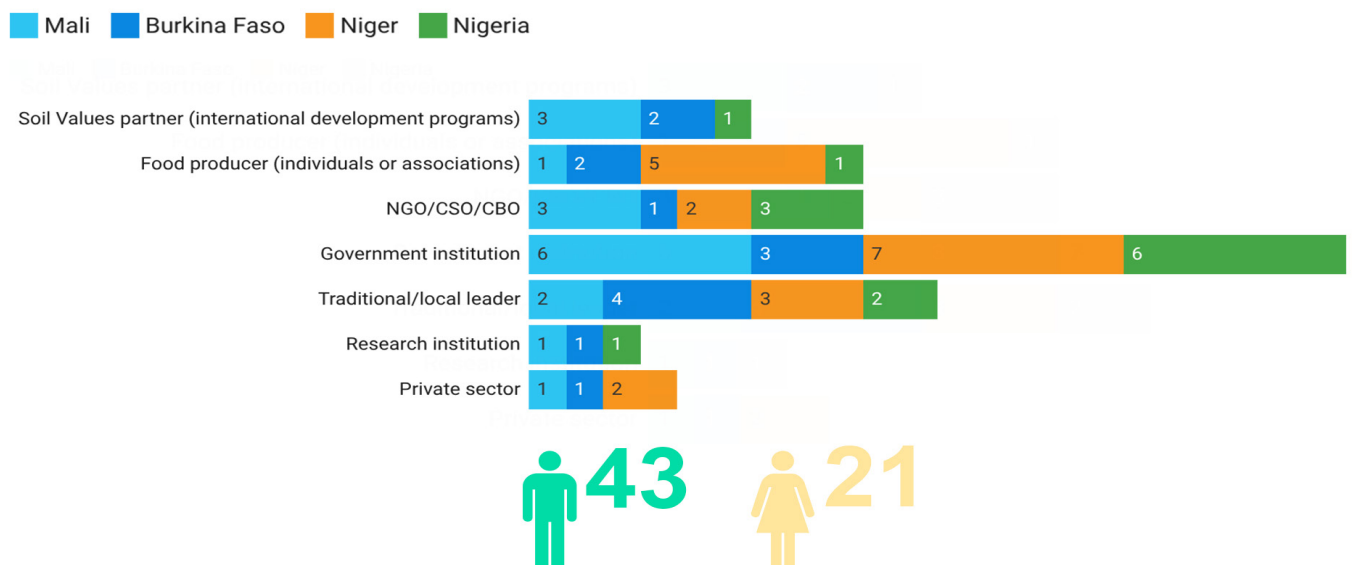
Household survey sample size, by country and sex



Key Informant Interviews

The Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted using purposive sampling, with participants selected based on their expected familiarity with the research domains of analysis and with questions tailored to their specific area of experience.

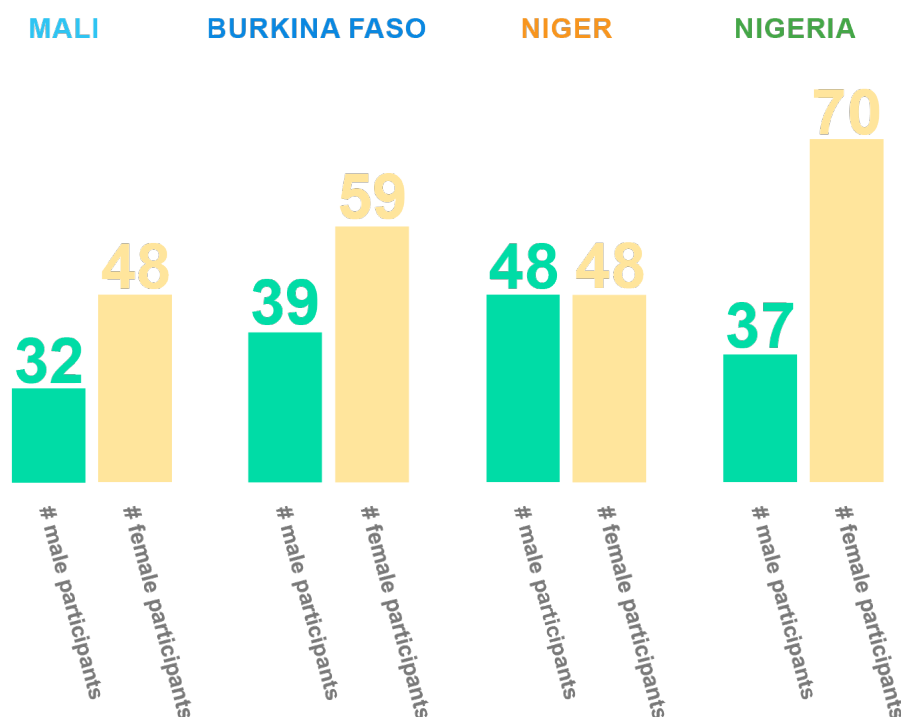
KII respondents, by country, category and sex



Focus Group Discussions

In each country, the research team conducted women-only, men-only and mixed Focus Group Discussions (FGD). FGDs were organised by age, gender, and livelihoods (e.g. farmers, herders, traders). Specific sessions were organised with more vulnerable persons, including IDPs, PWDs, widows, divorcees and older women.

FGD participants, by country and sex



Target watersheds

The target sites for data collection in each country and state/region were agreed by the research team with the Soil Values consortium, based on watershed mapping, consultation with national partners, and logistical and budget considerations. The data collection sites were largely rural; however, key informant interviews were also conducted in regional and national capitals.

The details of the research sites in each country and watershed can be found in Annex IV.

Ethical considerations

The research teams in each country received training on research ethics and applied a set of ethical safeguards to minimise risks to participants and ensure respectful, safe, and consistent data collection. All research respondents were informed of the study's purpose, and informed consent was obtained orally or in writing, with participation strictly voluntary. Interviews were conducted in conditions ensuring privacy, with gender-matched interviewers, and strict confidentiality procedures, including anonymisation of data. Sampling sought diverse representation, especially of vulnerable groups, with careful consideration of interview timing and location. Enumerators were selected to reflect local demographics, languages, and diversity characteristics.

Research limitations and challenges

The design and execution of the research were constrained by budget, time, and logistical challenges, which limited the number of sites and reduced the sample size. Sampling size for the HHS was thus calculated based on a confidence level of 85% and a margin of error of 9%, rather than the preferred 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. The smaller sample size also presented a risk of not being representative of the diversity and proportions of the population of the sites, and in particular failing to capture small subgroups, such as displaced persons, (semi-) nomadic herders, and divorced women. To address these limitations, quantitative findings were systematically cross-checked against qualitative data from key informant interviews and focus group discussions, and specific FGDs were organised targeting more vulnerable groups.

Across all countries, the data collection period coincided with Ramadan, the Islamic holy month, which influenced participant availability and may also have influenced willingness to participate in the survey. To mitigate this, the research teams worked closely with a diverse group of community members to identify and engage relevant stakeholders.

Insecurity also affected access to some areas, resulting in reduced travel options and restricted engagement with some planned stakeholder groups. In Burkina Faso, additional constraints arose due to administrative restrictions; the research team was unable to access the North Region and therefore collected all data in the Boucle du Mouhoun Region alone. The national political and security context also prevented the collection of sensitive demographic data on ethnicity and religion.

Finally, the study focused on individuals aged 18 and above, as ethical and safeguarding measures were not in place for the inclusion of minors, even if they were the primary adult decision-makers in their households. Thus, the study does not capture the perspectives of the significant proportion of women and men who are involved in agricultural activities and soil fertility management before the age of 18.





FINDINGS

These findings are derived from the synthesis of primary qualitative and quantitative data collected across the four intervention countries, supplemented by secondary literature. Statistics provided are drawn from the HHS, unless otherwise indicated. The analysis and conclusions below refer strictly to the research respondents and sites and should not be interpreted as drawing broader conclusions about GESI dynamics across the whole of the four countries under study.

A detailed description of the demographic profile of the HHS in each country is provided in Annex I.

Laws, policies and regulations, and institutional practices

Legal and policy frameworks

Constitutional and legal protections

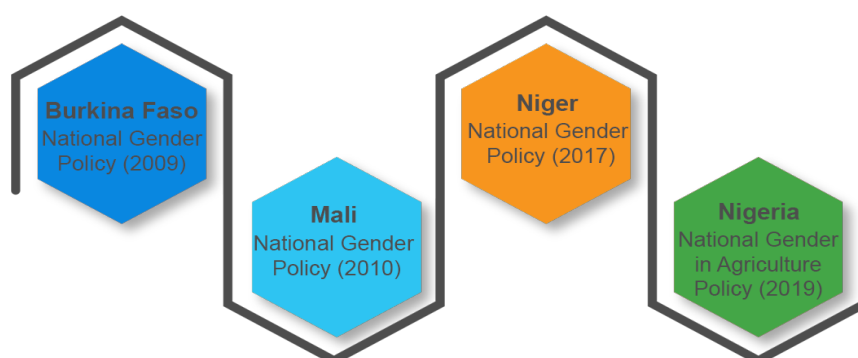
Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria's Constitutions enshrine gender equality, and all four countries are party to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, closer analysis shows that gender discrimination is embedded in certain legal provisions concerning GESI. For example, the Mali Family Code sets the legal minimum age for marriage at 16 years for women and 18 years for men and allows for girls under the age of 16 to marry, with parental consent.

Political participation quotas

Mali and Burkina Faso require 30% women candidates on electoral lists, while Niger mandates 25% women in elected roles and 30% in appointed positions. Nigeria does not have a national gender quota law.

GESI policies, strategies and mechanisms

All four countries have gender policies at national level to address gender disparities in areas like land access, economic empowerment, and protection from violence, as well as policies protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, such as IDPs and PWDs.



Mali's National Gender Policy (2010) includes ambitions to improve rural women's productivity in agriculture, herding, and fishing. Burkina Faso's National Gender Policy (2009) targets more equitable access for women to inputs, infrastructure, equipment, credit and technology to support their livelihoods activities, with particular emphasis on enhancing access to land and property rights. Niger's National Gender Policy (2017) addresses gender disparities in education, health, politics, and the economy. In Nigeria, the National Gender in Agriculture Policy (2019) and the National Women's Economic Empowerment Policy (2023) focus on increasing women's access to productive resources, particularly in agriculture. Further policies exist at state level, such as Kano State's Social Protection Policy (2020) and Bauchi State's Social Protection Policy (2019), aiming to reduce poverty among vulnerable groups.

Land usage and inheritance

In *Burkina Faso*, the 2009 Rural Land Law promotes gender equality in land access and provides legal recognition of land rights for both men and women.

It further acknowledges the rights of pastoralists to access grazing lands and calls for the establishment of pastoral corridors to facilitate the movement of livestock.

The Burkinabe Civil Code (1989) establishes children and the surviving spouse of the deceased as legitimate heirs, including girls and women.

Niger's Rural Code of 1993 acknowledges equal land rights for men and women in access, use and inheritance but lacks specific measures or any quotas for women, youth or other vulnerable groups. It protects pastoralist rights, allowing free movement of livestock and defines pastoral corridors and grazing areas to prevent conflicts between farmers and herders.

Niger does not have a formal unified Family Code. Instead, family law matters, including inheritance, marriage, and divorce, are governed by a combination of statutory laws and customary law.

In Mali, land use is governed by the 2006 Agricultural Orientation Law (LOA) and the Agricultural Land Law of 2017. The LOA provides for 15% of redeveloped land to be allocated to women, youth, and vulnerable people and 30-40% of agricultural intrants (fertiliser, seeds) to be allocated to women and youth.

The Pastoral Charter was established in 2001 to formalise the rights and responsibilities of pastoralist communities, addressing issues related to land access, grazing areas, and mobility.

According to the Malian Civil Code and the Family Code, inheritance rights are based on the principle of equality among heirs, with both male and female children being entitled to inherit from their parents. However, the Family Code allows individuals to choose customary or religious regimes to govern family matters, even if these do not recognise equality.

In *Nigeria*, the Land Use Act of 1978 governs land ownership but does not specifically mention gender or make provisions for particular groups. A draft National Agricultural Soil Management Policy is being developed by the Nigeria Institute of Soil Science (NISS), the first national policy specifically concerning soil fertility in Nigeria. The policy includes provisions for women and youth empowerment in soil fertility management, but it is yet to be approved by the federal government or by states.

The National Livestock Transformation Plan (2019-2028) is a policy aimed at transforming the livestock sector, improving the livelihoods of pastoralists, and addressing the root causes of land conflicts.

Nigeria lacks a unified family code, and the Nigerian Constitution allows customary and religious laws to be applied. As such, both Bauchi and Kano States apply Islamic law (Sharia) for their Muslim residents, alongside secular courts. Sharia governs personal and family law, including marriage, divorce, inheritance, and business transactions, and, to an extent, criminal law.

Customary and traditional practices

There is a substantial gap between policies promoting rights and resources for underserved groups and actual practices in all four countries. Particularly in rural areas, awareness of statutory laws and policies governing GESI and land use rights remains low, even within agencies tasked with their execution. Government authorities have limited operational capacity, funding and presence at the village level in rural areas to implement and monitor policies.

“The law is there, and then there is culture and religion, which is the lens through which the law is interpreted.”
– CSO KII, Nigeria

Customary and religious laws significantly shape the rights of different social groups, particularly women, in rural areas. Legal pluralism in all four countries means that these laws are considered valid alongside statutory law, though they are typically more restrictive as concerns women and vulnerable group's rights in marriage, family affairs, land usage and inheritance. The societal structures across all the research regions are both patriarchal and patrilineal, with land typically viewed as a family patrimony, passed down through male heirs. Thus, while women may have nominal inheritance rights, effective control is often entrusted to male relatives.

Institutions involved in GESI and soil fertility management

Development initiatives by state, civil society, and international actors have contributed to shifting harmful gender norms, improving farmers' technical knowledge, boosting agricultural productivity, expanding access to land, inputs, and financial resources, strengthening cooperatives, and promoting environmental conservation.

Sustainability and scaling up remain a significant issue for these initiatives, with limited funding, short program durations, corrupt diversion of resources, ineffective targeting, and poor coordination among actors among the obstacles.

STATUTORY BODIES

Government and parastatal agencies are responsible for policy development and policy sensitisation, implementation and monitoring, technical advisory and accompaniment of target groups, advocacy, capacity-building and promotion of new practices, and facilitation of access to resources and information. Examples include:

- Ministries overseeing Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Environment and Natural Resources
- Ministries overseeing Women's and Youth Affairs and Social Development
- Natural Resource Management Agencies, such as watershed and landscape management institutions

Local Government Driving Gender Inclusion: Livestock and Agricultural Innovation in Maradi Region, Niger

In the rural commune of Jirataoua, Maradi region, women face significant economic challenges due to limited access to resources and income-generating opportunities. Many households are engaged in both farming and livestock rearing. Recognising this, the Communal Livestock Service (SEC), with the support of key partners such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (FIDA), the Community Actions Project (PAC), and the Food Security and Development Support Project in the Maradi Region (PASADEM), launched an initiative aimed at empowering women through sustainable livestock farming and agricultural innovation.

With the collaboration of local municipalities, this initiative targeted women's groups and vulnerable women across the commune. The primary objective was to promote self-sufficiency through small ruminant fattening—specifically sheep and goats. SEC provided animal and agricultural kits to selected women, along with comprehensive training and ongoing support to ensure successful livestock management. The innovative aspect of this program lay in its sustainability model: after 10 months of animal husbandry, the offspring of these animals were redistributed to other women who had not yet benefited from the program. This cyclical approach ensured the long-term expansion of economic opportunities for women across the community.

The SEC also focused on enhancing the value of agricultural by-products to further bolster women's economic resilience. In collaboration with the Family Agriculture Development Program (ProDaf), women were trained to produce densified multi-nutritional blocks—a cost-effective and nutritious feed supplement for livestock. These blocks, made from locally available crop residues such as millet stalks, sorghum stalks, bean leaves, groundnut leaves, and various plant materials, provided an affordable and accessible solution for livestock nutrition. Additionally, women were trained to produce poultry feed on a small scale, which they sold locally at reasonable prices, providing them with working capital to reinvest in other income-generating activities.



TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE BODIES

Local Land Commissions (COFO/COFOV) exist in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger to mediate disputes and manage land allocation. These bodies typically include state representatives, village leaders, and community groups, but their effectiveness is often constrained by limited resources and the strong influence of customary systems. Village chiefs and traditional authorities continue to wield significant authority over land allocation and inheritance norms, shaping access to agricultural and pastoral resources. While their roles can reinforce restrictive practices, many also actively collaborate with civil society and development actors to promote women's empowerment and improved resource access.

In Northern Nigeria, Emirs and their appointed district leaders (Hakimi) hold substantial cultural and religious influence, overseeing land allocation, dispute resolution, and community mobilisation under Islamic law. Their authority—exercised exclusively by men—significantly influences local governance and social norms in rural areas.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Agencies such as the World Bank, UN Women, the World Food Program (WFP), and various INGOs fund or implement development and humanitarian projects across the target zones. They work in partnership with national and local actors to address gender inequality and social exclusion in natural resources use. Several regionally coordinated or nationally implemented multisectoral programs operating in the research sites integrate agricultural development, climate resilience, and social inclusion.

PRSA's Agricultural Food Systems Security Initiative in the Boucle du Mouhoun Region, Burkina Faso

The Food System Resilience Program (PRSA) is actively working to enhance food systems security across seven regions in Burkina Faso, including Boucle du Mouhoun, where it is launching its operational phase. The program focuses on seven key agricultural sectors: rice, maize, cowpeas, tomatoes and onions, orange-flesh sweet potatoes (OFSP), mango, and moringa orchards. In addition to promoting these crops, PRSA provides essential hydro-agricultural and meteorological information to farmers to improve production practices and ensure sustainability.

A key feature of PRSA's approach is the integration of gender considerations into all of its interventions. The program places a strong emphasis on empowering women and youth within the agricultural sector. As part of its capacity-building efforts, PRSA conducts training for women on good production and processing practices, which are critical for improving productivity and marketability.

To further support economic empowerment, PRSA provides financial assistance for micro projects targeting women, youth, and men, and establishes exclusive market gardens for women. The program also helps women secure funding from the Women's Income-Generating Activities Support Fund (FAARF) and facilitates access to tailored credit solutions through microfinance institutions. Additionally, PRSA collaborates with the government to promote agricultural insurance for women, ensuring their financial security in case of crop failure or other unforeseen challenges.

In line with its commitment to youth empowerment, PRSA provides vocational and diploma-based training opportunities to young people, equipping them with the skills necessary for sustainable agricultural practices. The program's ambitious objectives include the development of 17 lowland rice production sites, fully equipped for both production and processing. A core aspect of PRSA's strategy is its commitment to inclusivity, with the aim to involve at least 40% women and 50% youth in its interventions and allocate at least 30% of redeveloped lands to women and youth. Through these efforts, PRSA seeks to contribute significantly to both food security and socio-economic empowerment in the Boucle du Mouhoun Region.

LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY

NGOs, CSOs and CBOs support disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, advocating for inclusive development and human rights. Producer and livelihoods associations, such as farmers' and herders' associations, and women and youth cooperatives serve as platforms for rural stakeholders to engage in collective action and advocacy.

Research institutions contribute to evidence-based policy-making and innovation in agriculture and environmental management.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Key actors in the private sector include agricultural input producers and distributors, agribusinesses involved in processing agricultural and livestock products, and professional bodies such as chambers of agriculture, which provide support to farmers and influence agricultural policies. These actors play a role in shaping market dynamics, facilitating technology adoption, and providing access to finance, equipment, and value chains.

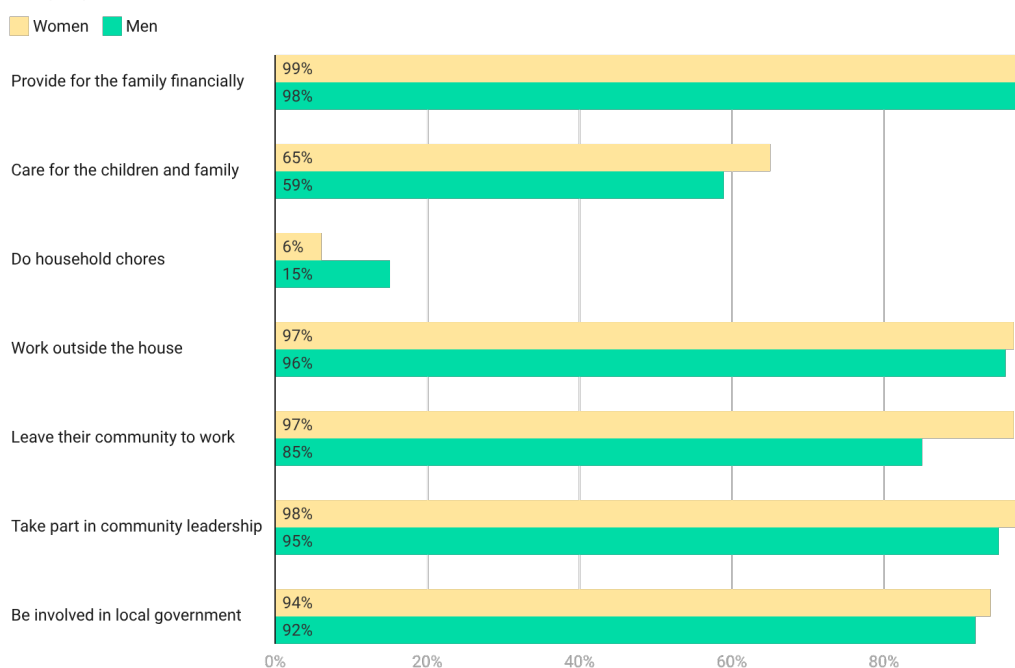


Social norms and beliefs

Social expectations for men

Across all four countries, according to the research, the “ideal man” is viewed as the primary breadwinner, and someone who protects, provides, and exercises authority in his household and community. He is not expected to bear domestic burdens such as cooking and cleaning.

Figure 1: % of men and women who agree that it is appropriate for men to engage in listed activities, across all countries



Social expectations for women

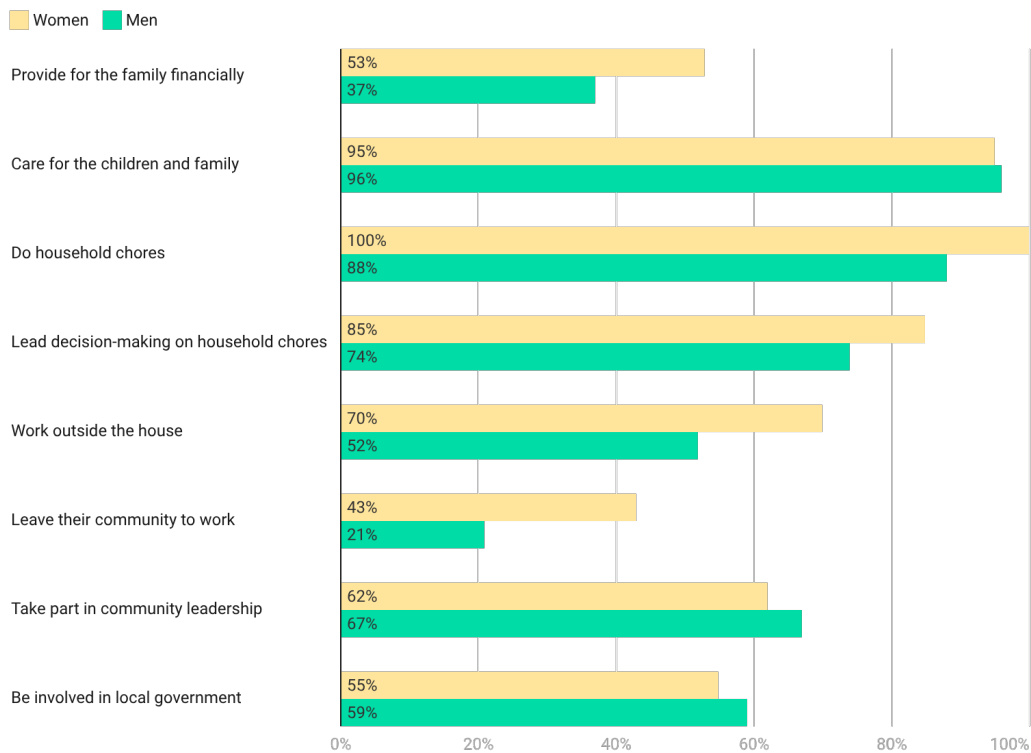
The “ideal woman” is obedient, caring, and primarily tasked with maintaining the household. Her identity is commonly constructed around domesticity, respect for her husband, childcare, housework, and in some cases, contributing to agricultural or income-generating activities – but always as secondary to the man’s activities.

In Bauchi and Kano States in Nigeria, the cultural-religious practices of kulle and ba shiga reflect highly restrictive norms for women, particularly for activities outside the household.



Participants’ illustration of “ideal man”, working in a field, and “ideal woman”, looking after children, in FGD in Toecin, Burkina Faso

Figure 2: % of men and women who agree that it is appropriate for women to engage in listed activities, across all countries



Kulle and Ba Shiga: Cultural and Religious Influences on Gender Roles in Northern Nigeria

Ba shiga is a Hausa phrase that translates to “no entry”. In Northern Nigeria, especially in cultural and religious contexts, *ba shiga* can refer to spaces where entry is prohibited for certain individuals, such as areas designated for women only or private family quarters where men outside the household are not allowed. It is often associated with *kulle*.

Kulle (meaning “lock” in Hausa) is a cultural practice in Northern Nigeria, particularly among Hausa-Fulani and some other Muslim communities, which refers to the seclusion of women from public life. It is deeply rooted in Islamic traditions, although its strictness varies by family, social class, and region. Women who are placed in *kulle* are expected to remain indoors and limit their interactions with men who are not close family members (*mahram*). They typically only go out for essential reasons, such as medical care, childbirth, or religious activities. It is mostly practiced by married women, especially those in wealthy or influential households. It is seen as a way of preserving a woman’s dignity, privacy, and respectability.

Role of social norms and beliefs in natural resource management and production systems

As men are regarded as household heads and economic providers, there is near-universal agreement – by both men and women – that men should lead in crop cultivation, livestock management (especially large livestock), and the purchase and sale of agricultural inputs and outputs. Women are actively involved in agriculture and livestock management but traditionally they are afforded limited decision-making power and autonomy, positioning them in secondary roles in productive activities.

“There is this belief at village-level that says women should be content with everything small. Small garden, small business, small livestock, everything is small when it comes to women. And it’s thought that women should be content with small activities and men with large activities.”
-Regional authority KII, Mali

Figure 3: Responses for all sexes on appropriate behaviour for a man, by country

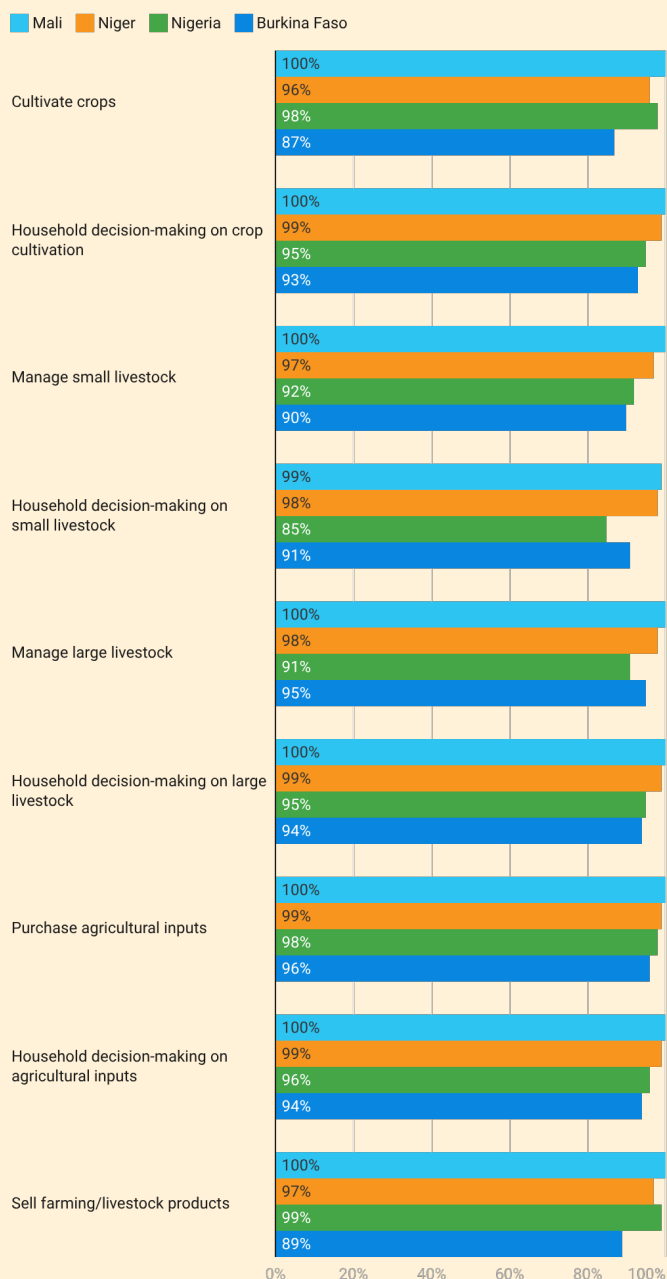
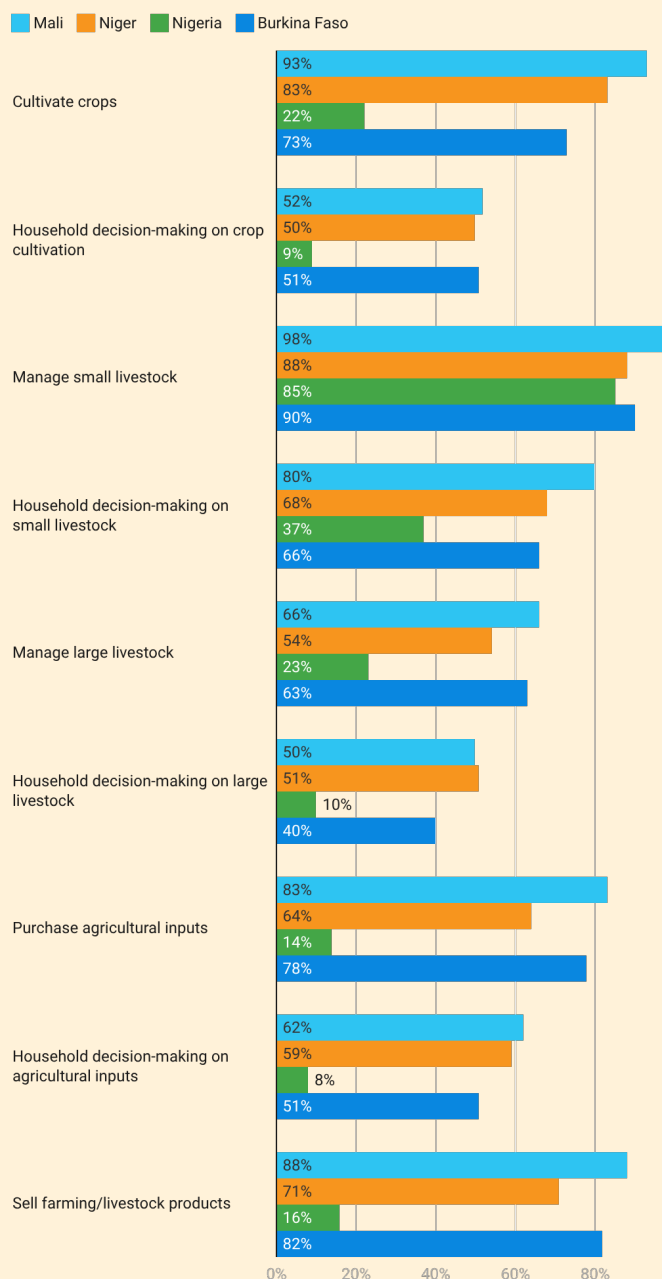


Figure 4: Responses for all sexes on appropriate behaviour for a woman, by country



The only activity showing broadly high levels of acceptance for women’s involvement across all countries is the *management of small livestock*. Otherwise, the data show key differences, by country, in acceptance of women’s participation in various activities, highlighting the importance of understanding specificities of culture and context in each intervention zone.

It is important to note that, across all four countries, there is a consistent gap between the perceived appropriateness of women’s involvement in agricultural tasks and the perceived appropriateness of their participation in related *decision-making*. This disparity highlights the persistence of gendered power dynamics, where women’s labour may be accepted, but their authority over this labour remains limited.

These data further reveal some degree of internalisation of restrictive gender norms among women themselves, with women sometimes being less likely than men to believe they, themselves, should be involved in decision-making. This is further explored in the Chapter “Patterns of power and decision-making.”

SHIFTING SOCIAL NORMS AND BELIEFS ON PRODUCTIVE ROLES

Across all four countries, traditional expectations remain influential, yet qualitative data reveal that women are increasingly expected to contribute financially to household well-being. This change is driven by empowerment initiatives, urbanisation, and rising economic pressures, as traditional livelihood strategies no longer meet household needs. Indeed, where the economic benefits of women’s participation are tangible, both men and women appear more likely to accept a greater role for women in productive activities, although changes in perceptions on decision-making still lag behind. These dynamics are examined further in the Chapter “Gender roles, responsibilities, and time use”.

Normative changes can generate tension, particularly among men who hold restrictive views on women’s roles. There is concern from many quarters where conservative religious beliefs continue to hold significant sway that these changes reflect a “westernisation” of local communities. Many interviewees acknowledge the complexities of balancing religious and cultural norms with evolving gender norms. They note that overassertive gender messaging from external actors could provoke resistance. Nonetheless, perceptions of risks of backlash specifically against women’s participation in soil fertility decision-making among community members are generally low.

“Social norms used to affect women’s participation, but now not anymore. It’s the women who raise livestock, work in the fields like us, search for gold, engage in market gardening, and take care of other household activities. With our system of polygamy, if you don’t liberalise things, you’ll end up suffering yourself. There are families where if we remove the women’s income from the household, there would be nothing left!” -Traditional leader, Burkina Faso



90%

of respondents in the HHS do not believe there is any risk of negative reaction in their community if women participate in programs around soil fertility management

Influence of intersectional factors on social norms and beliefs

High rates of early marriage in the four countries mean that **age and marital status** are closely linked, with young women quickly assuming societal expectations around marriage and motherhood. These factors intersect with responsibility, as older, married women are expected to contribute more financially to their households than younger, single women, who are typically under their parents' financial responsibility until they get married. Conversely, young men face great pressure to earn income to be considered suitable for marriage. Yet qualitative data shows that younger people, especially women, are increasingly challenging restrictive norms, suggesting a gradual shift towards greater gender equality.

The research highlights that **PWDs** experience pronounced social exclusion, due to pervasive stereotypes that they have limited capability to contribute to agricultural and livestock activities. For women, discrimination is even more acute, as they are often deemed unsuitable for marriage, leaving them more exposed to economic exploitation and sexual abuse.



Gender roles, responsibilities, and time use

In line with the above-described social norms and beliefs on gender, women consistently bear the heaviest burden in terms of domestic responsibilities, particularly childcare, cooking and cleaning.

Roles and responsibilities in productive labour

Across the four countries, agriculture remains a foundational livelihood strategy, with over 95% of households surveyed actively engaged in crop cultivation. Among these households, 100% of men in all four countries and 100% of women in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger and 83% of women in Nigeria report being personally responsible for cultivating crops.

84%

of women across all countries report being “always”, “very often” or “often” involved in preparing meals

14%

of men across all countries report being “always”, “very often” or “often” involved in preparing meals

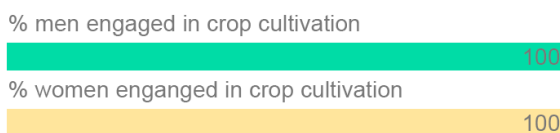
85%

of women across all countries report being “always”, “very often” or “often” involved in cleaning the house

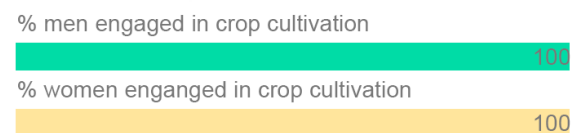
19%

of men across all countries report being “always”, “very often” or “often” involved in cleaning the house

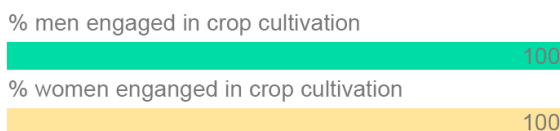
Mali



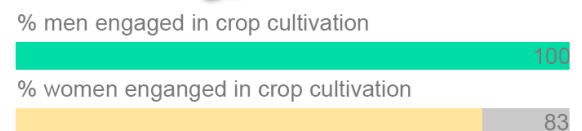
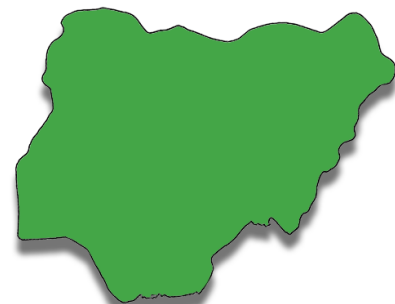
Niger



Burkina Faso



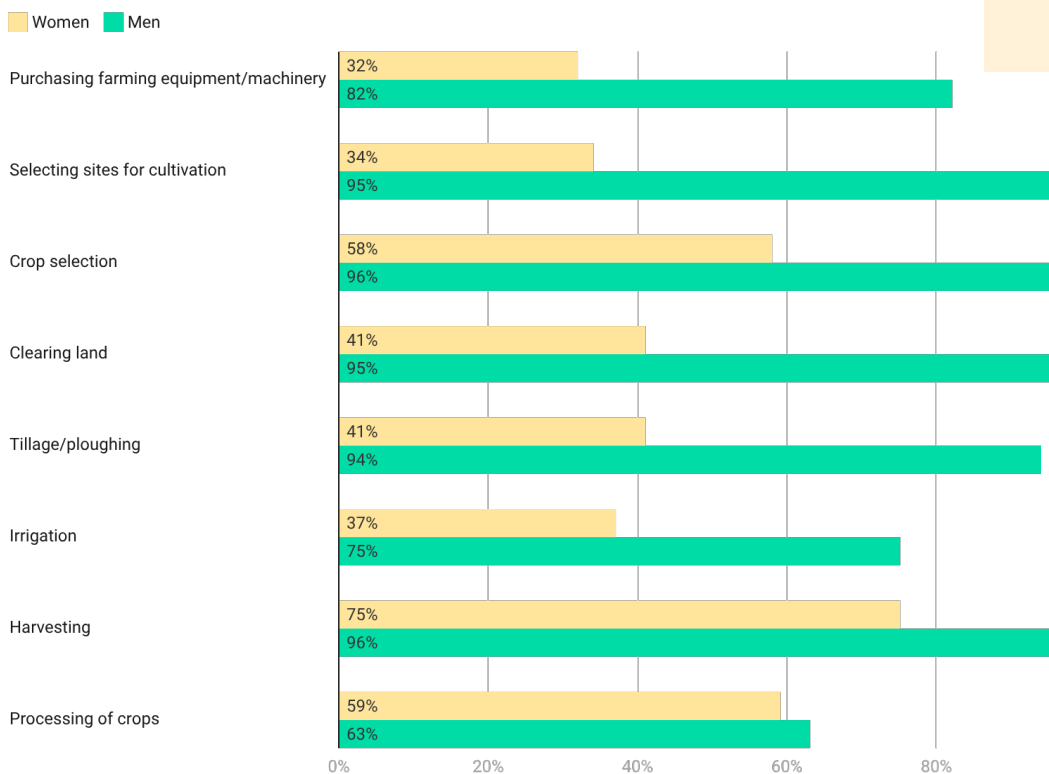
Nigeria



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

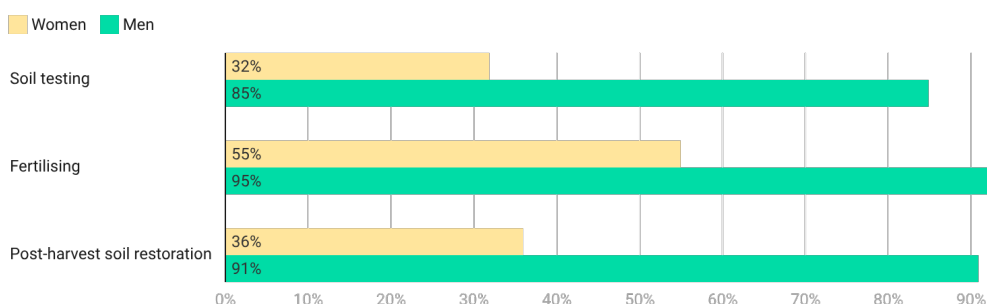
Though there are nuances by country in agricultural production roles, in general men are mostly responsible for physically demanding tasks, such as land clearing and ploughing, dominate activities involving decision-making, such as selecting cultivation sites, and lead tasks requiring financial and technical inputs, such as machinery use and large-scale cultivation. Women’s participation is more substantial in small farms (such as market gardens or home gardens) and post-harvest processing, where they manage their operations relatively independently. These differentiated roles are evident in the crops cultivated, with men tending to be more involved in staple grains, such as millet and sorghum, and larger-scale production, while women are more commonly responsible for vegetables and other crops for smaller-scale or subsistence farming.

Figure 5: % of men and women in all countries who report being “always”, “very often”, or “often” involved in agricultural tasks



When it comes to soil fertility management, specifically, men predominantly manage the technical and resource-intensive aspects, such as compost transportation (which may require animal traction or carts) and purchase and application of chemical fertilisers. Meanwhile, women participate in complementary and vital – but often less visible – roles, particularly in household-level practices such as collecting organic waste and manure and managing small composting pits. Women notably take leadership roles in managing the fertility of their own farms and market gardens. However, they often lack the resources to invest in inputs to improve soil fertility, such as chemical fertilisers.

Figure 6: % of men and women in all countries who report being “always”, “very often”, or “often” involved in soil fertility management tasks





86%

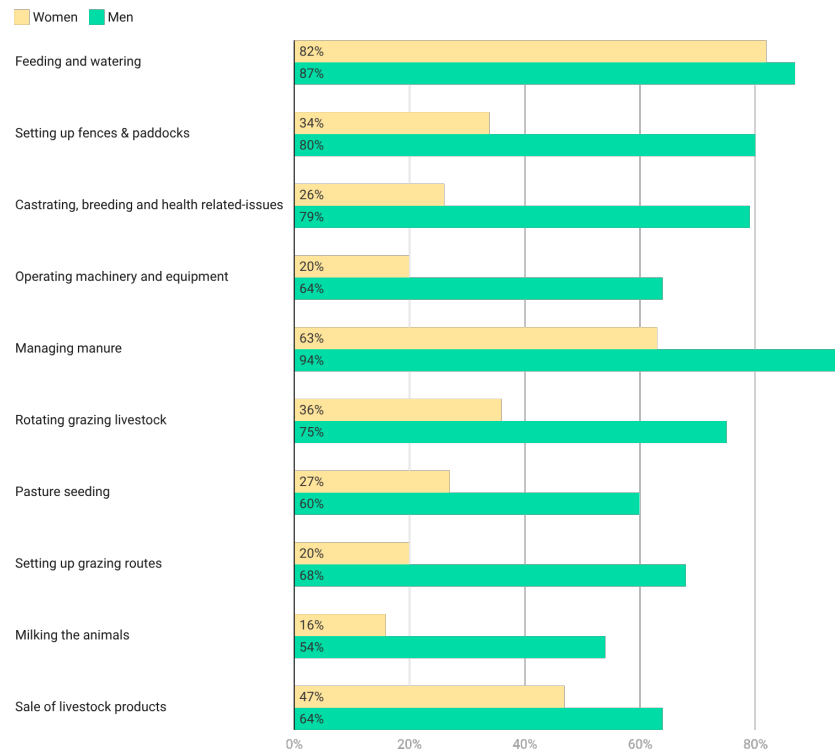
of households across all four countries report that they rear some form of livestock

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

In general, livestock rearing is practiced as a sedentary activity, complementing crop agriculture, rather than as a primary livelihood.

Gendered divisions of labour in livestock management are consistently observed, though the degree and nature of women’s involvement vary by country. As with agriculture, men dominate in technical and labour and resource-intensive tasks, such as setting up paddocks, rotating grazing livestock, and animal health management, while women typically participate in more routine and care-oriented responsibilities such as feeding, watering, and managing small ruminants or poultry. Women also contribute to manure management – an area of relatively balanced participation– and to trade activities.

Figure 7: % of men and women in all countries who report being often, very often, or always involved in livestock management tasks



Participation in community activities

Across all countries, participation in social and ceremonial community activities is widely reported among both men and women. Activities such as weddings, baptisms, funerals, and religious celebrations serve as common touch points for social engagement, with relatively minor gendered differences in overall participation. Even within the constraints of *kulle* in Northern Nigeria, which limits women's mobility outside the household, women may still engage in cultural and social activities within their communities.

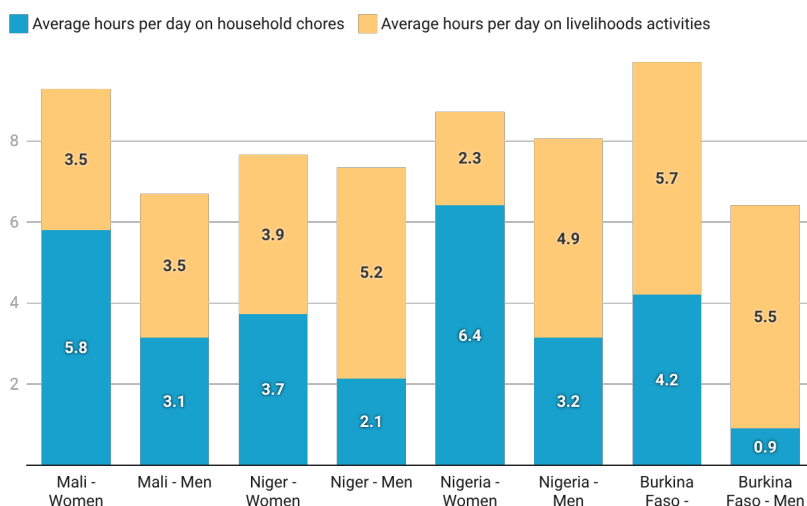
"Whether in the fields or at home, women work, and this is not fair. Women cook, sweep the courtyard, fetch water, and take care of the children. After working in the fields all day like the men, they must still prepare meals before bed, while men return from the fields, bathe, and rest. It is the woman who suffers more." – Female farmer in Sibi, Burkina Faso



Time use and work/life balance

Women bear a triple burden – combining productive and reproductive labour and community responsibilities – resulting in significant time poverty, albeit with important contextual variations in how this imbalance is experienced and perceived.

Figure 8: Daily average hours spent by men and by women on household chores and on livelihoods activities, by country



Mobility and access to public spaces

Gendered norms shape women's mobility and, by extension, access to activities and opportunities related to soil fertility management. Where men face mobility restraints, these are more likely to be due to financial, logistical or infrastructural challenges (such as lack of money or unsafe transport routes). Women are much more likely to report sociocultural factors, such as needing consent of a family member to travel.

58%

of women need consent of a family member to travel

6%

of men need consent of a family member to travel

Northern Nigeria exhibits the most pronounced gender disparities in mobility among the four countries, largely due to the practice of *kulle*, which confines married women to the home. In Burkina Faso, women enjoy relatively high freedom of movement compared to their counterparts in other countries, with 77% of women reporting no mobility restrictions whatsoever.

Figure 9: % of men and women, who report always being able to go to the market alone, by country

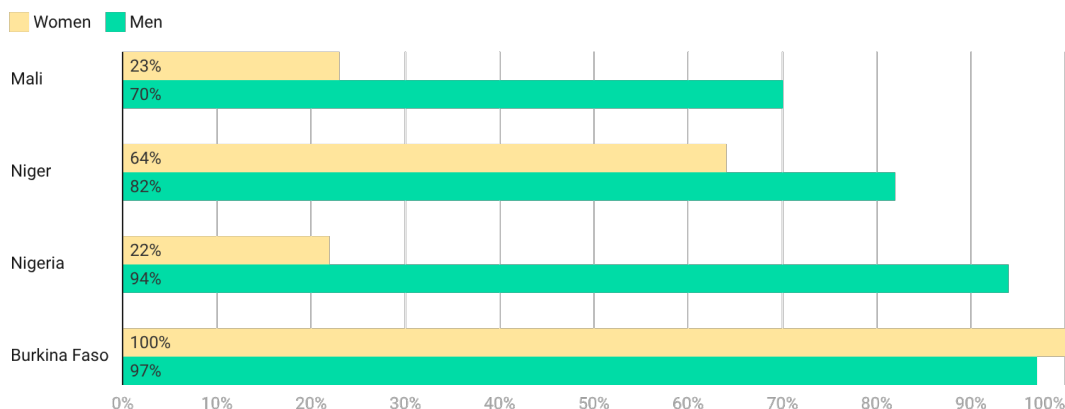
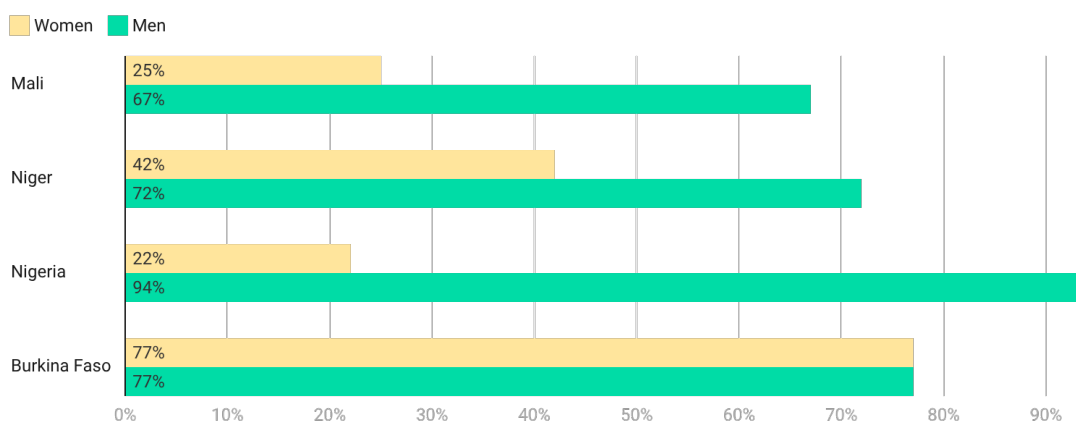


Figure 10: % of men and women who report always being able to go to community meetings (water committee, land committee, security meetings etc.) alone, by country



Evolution of gendered responsibilities in rural production systems

Women are increasingly participating in previously male-dominated agricultural domains, and men are slowly engaging in areas historically associated with women, particularly in food processing. These shifts reflect both necessity – driven by declining soil fertility, economic insecurity, and land pressure – and opportunity, facilitated by access to training, equipment and technologies, and institutional support.

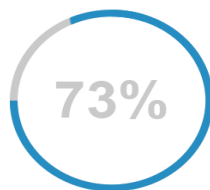
Cooperatives and livelihoods associations are facilitating more collaborative labour practices, as seen in fonio processing cooperatives in Ségou, Mali, where men now undertake tasks once reserved for women, such as washing and dust removal from husking. Technological advancements, such as motorised pumps and mechanised carts, have further reduced the physical burden on women, enabling them to increase their productivity and autonomy.

It is important to note that these evolutions are not without challenges. As noted in the Chapter “Social norms and beliefs”, more progressive beliefs and practices still face resistance on religious or cultural grounds. Furthermore, some women experience the expansion of their roles into new productive sectors as an additional burden rather than empowerment, feeling compelled to “share equal responsibilities with men” without corresponding shifts in household labour distribution. Time poverty and work burdens therefore remain a critical consideration when engaging women in new initiatives.

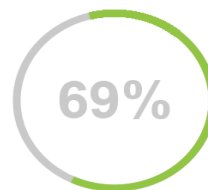
“When it comes to the commercial sector, men engage in trade in the same way as women. Here, everyone is allowed to do business; there is no rule saying that only men should do it. Similarly, in livestock farming, there is no discrimination to say that only men should raise large or small animals.”
– petty trader in FGD, Boromo, Burkina Faso

Intersectional factors and roles and responsibilities in soil use

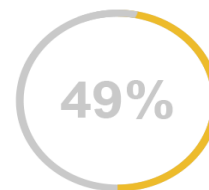
Age plays a significant role in shaping gendered responsibilities, with both men and women expected to conform to traditional gender roles from an early age. Younger women are more likely to be involved in domestic chores and care giving duties than older women. Qualitative data also indicate that younger women are typically the primary caregivers for persons with disabilities in their households.



of **young women** report being “very often” or “always” involved in childcare



of **middle-aged women** report being “very often” or “always” involved in childcare



of **older women** report being “very often” or “always” involved in childcare

Marital status further influences responsibilities, particularly for **female heads of households** (typically widowed, single, separated, or divorced women), especially when they have minor children. These women face significant burdens: they remain responsible for traditionally feminine productive and reproductive tasks, while the absence of adult male labour forces them to also take on roles traditionally associated with men. In these cases, women frequently perform physical agricultural labour themselves, although male relatives may provide occasional assistance.

Herder communities in all four countries tend to follow similar patriarchal systems as described throughout this chapter. Women’s roles are largely confined to domestic and reproductive tasks, while men are primarily responsible for mobile herding. Women may have some involvement in livestock management, such as milking and feeding, but decision-making, particularly regarding grazing and herd management, is typically reserved for men. Nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles can place additional strain on women, as they are expected to perform domestic chores while also dealing with the hardships of migration, including limited access to healthcare, education, and resources.



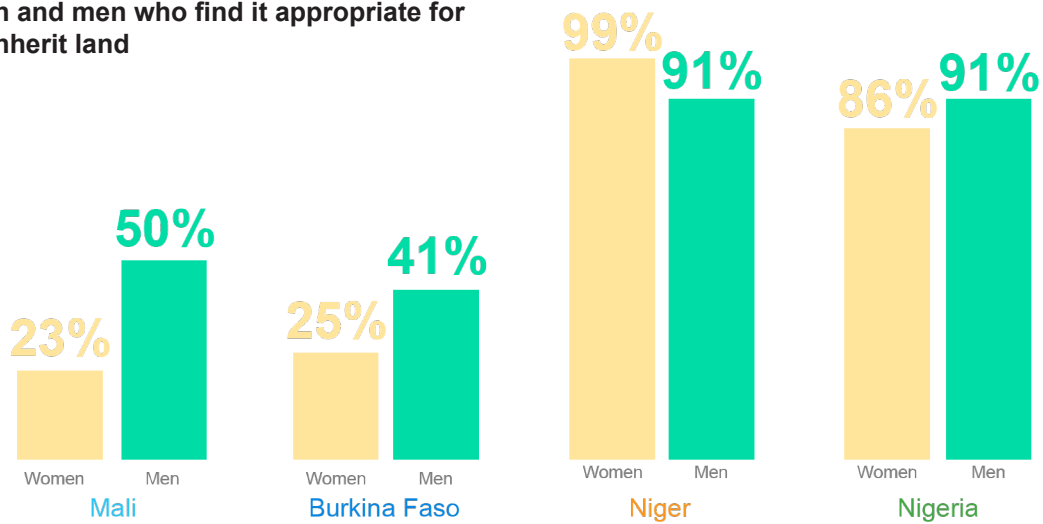
Agricultural and pastoral land

PATHWAYS AND CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN TO ACCESS LAND

Inheritance

While there is near-universal support for men's right to inherit land, attitudes towards women's inheritance are more divided. In Mali and Burkina Faso, acceptance remains low.

% of women and men who find it appropriate for women to inherit land



However, normative acceptance of inheritance does not necessarily translate into practical control of land for women. In all countries, women's rights to access and use inherited land are typically mediated through male relatives and control often remains largely in male hands, in accordance with patriarchal norms. This arrangement is precarious, as men can withdraw access to land in the event of family disputes or divorce. This tenure insecurity can discourage women from making long-term investments in soil fertility, as they are not certain to benefit from the gains.

Community allocation

Women seeking land outside of family concessions must often go through customary systems or local land management commissions, with final decisions resting with senior traditional leaders, who are almost universally male. Plots allocated to women are frequently less productive, more degraded, smaller, and more remote, while men are prioritised for allocation of larger, more fertile land. Legal documentation formalising access to land use is rare, meaning a prevalence of informal arrangements through which women's access can be revoked at any time.

Purchase/lease from private landowners

Women in the targeted sites face significant financial and literacy barriers to purchasing land. Historically, land leasing has been a simpler arrangement, with users providing a token payment (often a portion of their harvest) to the landowner. However, as arable land has become scarcer and more valuable, many landowners now demand more substantial payments for land use. Landowners can reclaim leased land once the agreed-upon period expires, particularly when it has proven to be highly productive. This creates uncertainty and discourages lessees from long-term investments in soil fertility.

Cooperatives

Cooperatives have emerged as a viable option for women to access land collectively, through joint acquisition, leasing and allocation. Additionally, as women's cooperatives are often represented in village land management committees, they can play an active role in decisions regarding the allocation of land to women.

State interventions and development projects

Numerous local and international development and empowerment initiatives support increased access to land for women, through advocacy, accompaniment, and provision of resources.

Various quota laws across the countries have been established to ensure that women, youth and vulnerable groups gain access to land (see the Chapter on "Laws, policies and regulations, and institutional practices"). However, these policies are rarely implemented consistently in many rural communities.

Agricultural inputs



Improved Seeds
62%-82% of households



Chemical Fertilisers
83%-92% of households



Organic Fertilisers
85%-98% of households



Chemical Pesticides
76%-92% of households

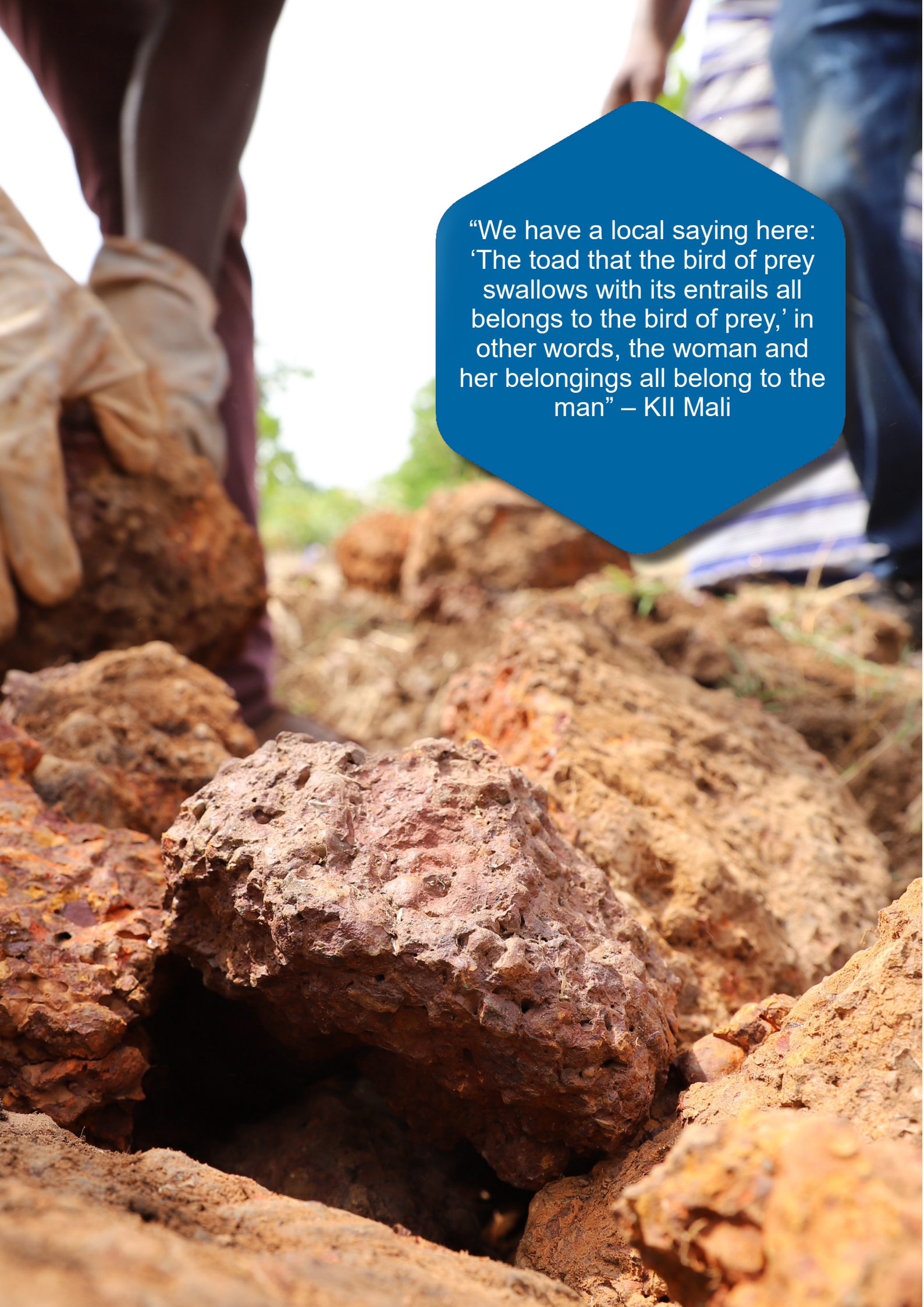


Natural Pest Control Strategies
51%-59% of households

The majority of farming households in all countries use a variety of agricultural inputs.

Women's access to inputs has been facilitated through gender-specific state, civil society, private sector and international interventions, such as quota policies, input distribution programs, and support to home gardening projects. However, men are still far more involved in purchase and use of agricultural inputs than women (c.f. Chapter "Gender roles, responsibilities, and time use").

Overall, women face multiple barriers to accessing improved seeds, fertilisers, and pest control solutions, stemming from financial constraints, limited control over land, and social norms that restrict their ability to make agricultural decisions independently. Rising input costs, poor infrastructure to transport inputs to local markets, insecurity, corruption in government distribution and subsidy programs, lack of local production facilities, and weak coordination between producers and distributors are additional challenges.



“We have a local saying here: ‘The toad that the bird of prey swallows with its entrails all belongs to the bird of prey,’ in other words, the woman and her belongings all belong to the man” – KII Mali

Equipment and tools

Modern tools and equipment reduce labour costs and facilitate more efficient natural resource management, contributing to more sustainable and profitable farming and livestock rearing practices. Hence numerous development actors have focused efforts on adoption of new agricultural technologies for farmers. However, agricultural equipment is primarily controlled by men, particularly newer and more expensive tools. For rural women farmers, many modern tools and equipment are not readily available in local markets and/or are too financially costly.

Even when women have access to such tools and equipment, for example through external development programs, entrenched gender roles prioritise men's ownership and use of such resources within the household, such that women do not necessarily control the material. Limited technical training opportunities and low levels of literacy further restrict women's ability to use and maintain more modern technologies.

Livestock

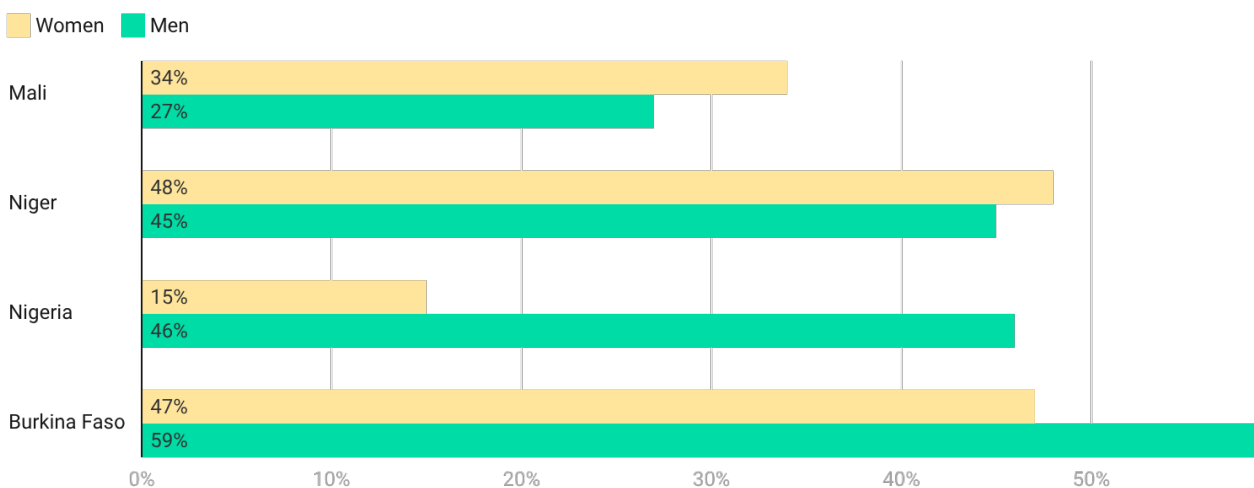
There is a clear gendered division in livestock ownership and management, with women predominantly responsible for small livestock, including poultry and ruminants like goats and sheep, while men typically control larger livestock, such as donkeys and cows (see the Chapter "Social norms and beliefs").

Small ruminants and poultry managed by women play a crucial role in their livelihoods, providing income, food security, and reproductive value, with lesser requirements for resources such as land and fodder, compared to larger animals. These animals offer economic autonomy through sale of livestock products and support household resilience in times of crop failure or drought. However, larger livestock, particularly cattle, are more socially and economically valuable. Cultural norms often deem it inappropriate for women to own or manage larger animals or to engage in the physically demanding activities required for their care. Moreover, the high financial cost of larger animals is a significant barrier for women, as is the lack of access to land for grazing, alongside inadequate resources for veterinary care. Additionally, cultural and security concerns prevent them from herding livestock along grazing routes. These multiple barriers restrict women's potential to expand into larger-scale livestock farming, thereby limiting their economic opportunities in this sector.

Education, training, and skills development

The household survey demographic data reveal significantly lower education and literacy levels among women compared to men, across all sites. This subsequently influences their access to training and skills development in soil management practices. Barriers also include limited awareness of opportunities, cultural norms against their participation in external activities, and domestic responsibilities. Despite these challenges, government agencies, development partners and local organisations are actively working to offer targeted training programs for women in rural areas, which are gradually bearing fruit in improving knowledge and practices on soil fertility.

Figure 11: % of men and women who have participated in skills-building/training on soil fertility management in the past 3 years, by country



Information and advice

Institutional structures exist to support dissemination of livelihoods knowledge among rural households through extension services, community-based facilitators, and development partner interventions. Information is also accessed through community radios, WhatsApp groups, village relays, and local chiefs. The role of women's associations and cooperatives is significant, serving as platforms for knowledge sharing and mobilisation among members.

Despite these efforts, access to agricultural information and advisory services remains uneven between men and women. One of the most pervasive constraints is the severe shortage of extension personnel, particularly in remote and rural areas. Furthermore, women are poorly represented in extension services; in conservative contexts where gender norms strongly discourage interaction between unrelated men and women, the lack of female staff is a significant barrier to reaching women farmers.



Logistical and infrastructural challenges further undermine the effectiveness and inclusivity of information delivery systems. Poor road conditions, long travel distances, and pervasive insecurity in certain regions severely limit the mobility of extension personnel, private sector actors and NGO staff, making it difficult to sustain regular engagement with remote communities. Moreover, while initiatives such as farmer field schools have been promoted to provide hands-on training, their scale and inclusivity remain limited. Such programs often only reach farmers who are mobile, have time to travel, and can visit demonstration plots – criteria that systematically exclude many rural women.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

Access to information and communication technologies can play a vital role in enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainable soil fertility management. Through mobile phones, radio, and digital platforms, farmers can access timely information on weather forecasts, market prices, pest and disease control, and best practices for soil and crop management, for example. These tools also facilitate knowledge-sharing and training opportunities, allowing farmers to adopt improved techniques.

Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria have experienced significant digital advances in the past decade, marked by growing access to mobile technology and digital services. However, digital progress is largely concentrated in urban centres. Rural areas continue to lag behind due to persistent infrastructure challenges, such as unreliable electricity supply and limited mobile network coverage. There are further disparities in access to technology among men and women, with men generally having better access to digital agricultural platforms and resources. Key barriers to women's access to agricultural technologies are the relatively high cost of modern technologies, including mobile phones and internet access, and lower literacy rates, which limit their ability to engage with written materials, instructional guides, and digital platforms. Social norms also restrict women's access to technology, with men traditionally expected to control and manage any valuable household resources.

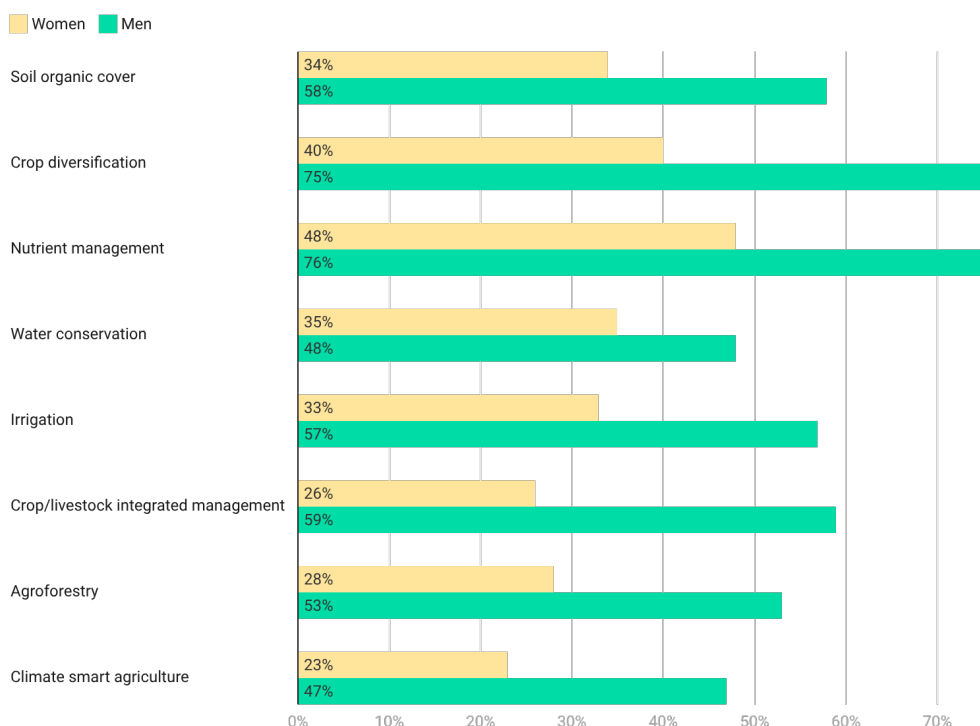
Therefore, women often rely on more traditional and cheaper forms of communication, such as radio, for communication needs and on informal channels, such as word-of-mouth exchanges or peer advice for information. While these play an important role, the technical quality of information and consistency of communication is often unreliable.

KNOWLEDGE OF SOIL FERTILITY MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

A consistent gender gap in knowledge of soil fertility techniques is evident in the data, with men reporting higher levels of knowledge and technical proficiency across nearly all domains. Northern Nigeria exhibits the most pronounced gender disparities in knowledge of soil fertility techniques: a significant proportion of women report having no knowledge of basic practices, such as crop diversification and nutrient management, which are critical to sustaining yields and maintaining soil health.

Across all countries, women's self-declared knowledge of crop–livestock integration is low. As a significant proportion of women are engaged in both crop cultivation and livestock rearing, this represents a potential missed opportunity. Climate-smart agriculture is another area where women's knowledge remains limited; this poses a serious constraint to resilience, in a context of intensifying climate variability and environmental degradation.

Figure 12: % of men and women who report “excellent” or “very good” knowledge of soil fertility-enhancing techniques, for all countries

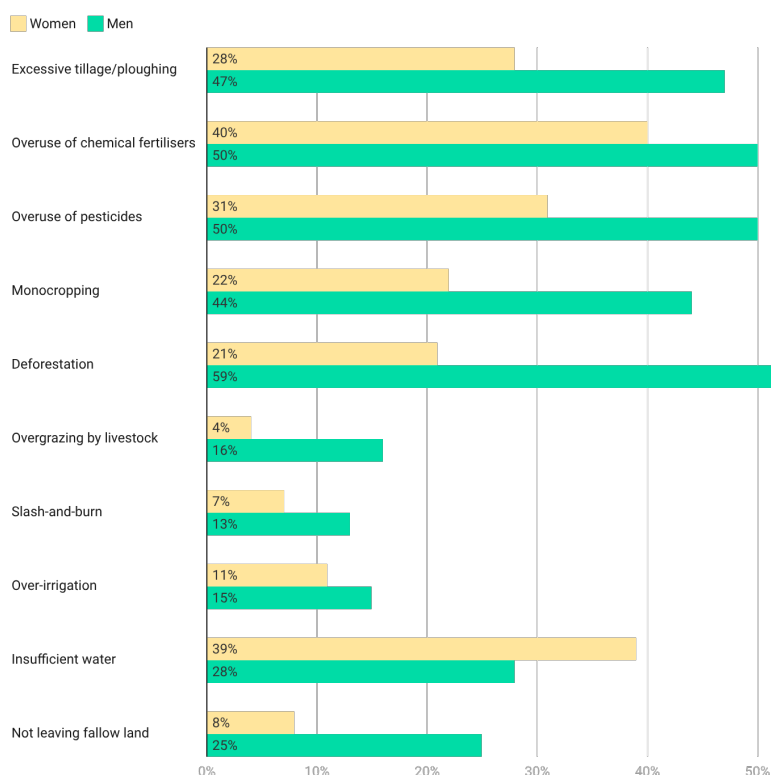


HOUSEHOLD USAGE OF SOIL FERTILITY TECHNIQUES

Crop rotation and intercropping are the most widely adopted practices for enhancing soil fertility among farming households across all four countries. Usage rates of more advanced or specialised techniques, such as zaï pits/half-moon structures, contour ridges, and climate forecasting are much lower across the board and are generally adopted as a result of specific capacity-building programs.

Women across the four countries are less likely than men to recognise the negative impacts of certain practices on soil fertility. In Nigeria, for example, 48% of women could not identify any harmful practices, compared to just 3% of men.

Figure 13: Practices cited by men and by women as harmful to soil fertility, for all countries





Crop Rotation

71% - 87% of households



Intercropping

67% - 90% of households



Zai pits or half-moon structures

34% - 55% of households



Contour Ridges

26% - 50% of households



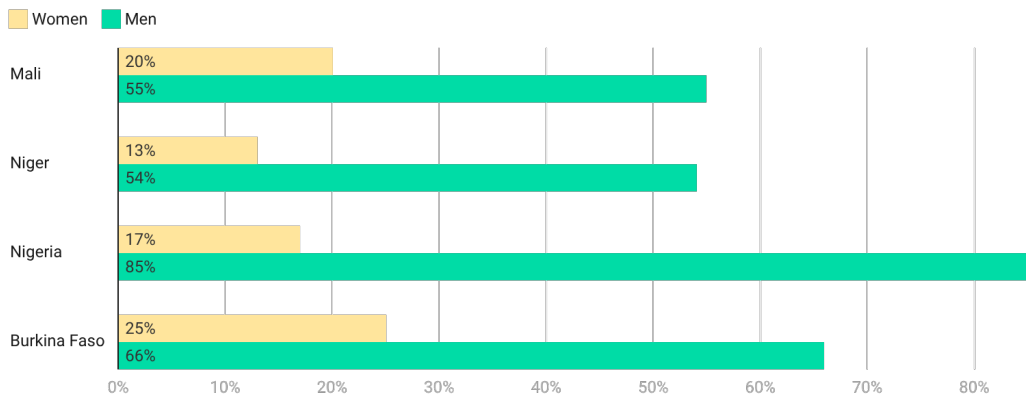
Climate Forecasting

33% - 42% of households



When it comes to authority over soil fertility practices, men are the primary decision-makers, reflecting their broader control over household productive activities.

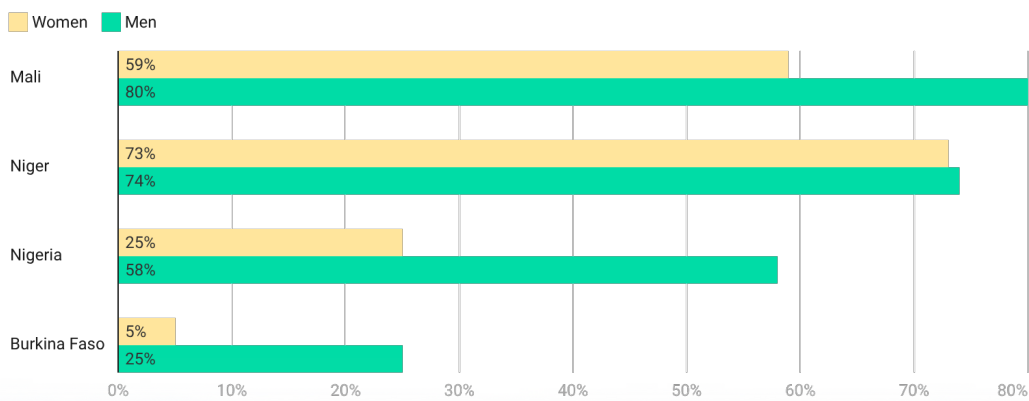
Figure 14: % of men and women who decide by themselves on the use of soil fertility-enhancing practices in their households, by country



Water

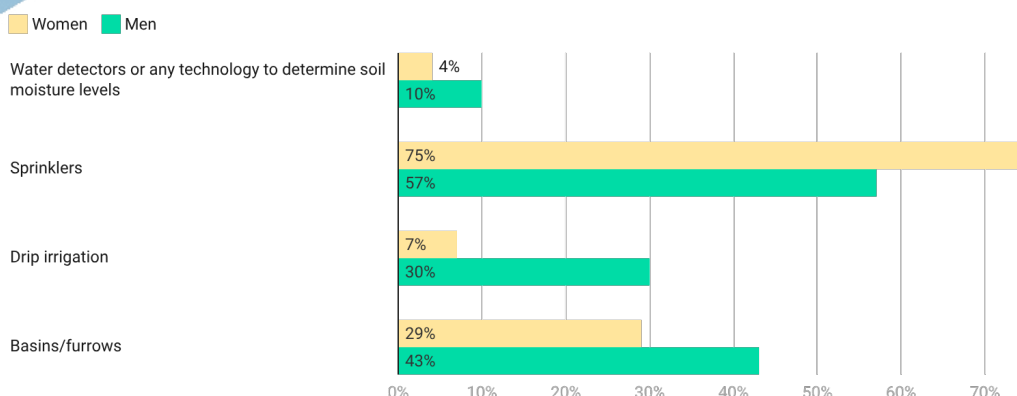
The increasing frequency and severity of droughts, alongside the accelerating desertification of the Sahel region, are exacerbating water scarcity for rural producers. The research findings show that the practice of irrigated agriculture varies significantly by country and by gender.

Figure 15: % of men and women who personally practice irrigated agriculture, by country



The data shows that the prevalence of use of particular tools varies significantly by country. For example, 91% of individuals in Mali who practice irrigated agriculture use sprinklers, compared to only 11% in Northern Nigeria; 37% of those in Burkina Faso use water detectors, compared to only 4%-6% in the other countries. Such differences reflect factors such as varying irrigation infrastructure, development initiatives, household financial resources, knowledge of technologies, and access to tools in local markets.

Figure 16: Use of irrigation tools by individuals practicing irrigated agriculture for all countries, by sex



Financial and economic resources

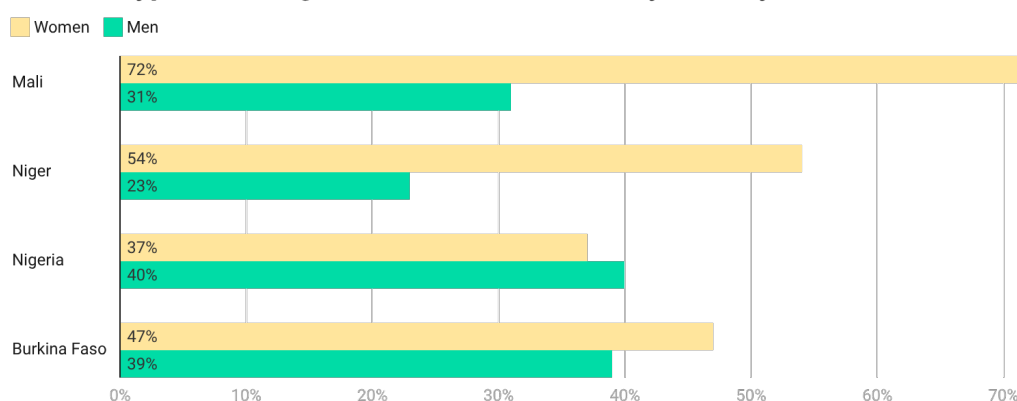
FINANCIAL SERVICES

In contrast to other assets and resources analysed in this chapter, women tend to have equal or greater access to financial services than men. This relative parity can be attributed to the multiplication of state, local, and international initiatives in recent decades aimed at enhancing women’s financial inclusion. The notable exceptions to parity are when it comes to access to having personal bank accounts (where men are much more likely to own accounts, except in Mali) and Northern Nigeria – where the influence of *kulle* remains pervasive and limits women’s participation in financial inclusion measures.

Credit and loans

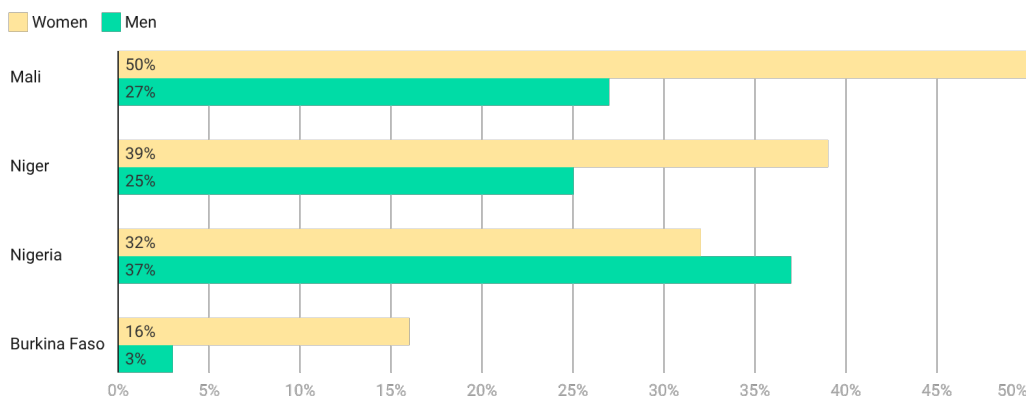
A variety of financial mechanisms, including microfinance institutions (MFI), Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA), and cooperatives, have emerged as important tools for facilitating women’s access to credit.

Figure 17: % of men and women who are members of a cooperative, VSLA or other type of savings and loan association, by country



Despite notable improvements, significant barriers to women’s financial inclusion within formal financial institutions persist. One major challenge is the limited presence of banks and MFI at the village level, which hinders rural women from accessing the support they need for their agricultural and livelihood activities. Another critical issue is the lack of trust of financial institutions in rural women’s repayment abilities, resulting in loan offers with high collateral requirements, steep interest rates, and short repayment periods, which do not match the needs and constraints of women farmers.

Figure 18: % of men and women who have received a loan or credit to support their livelihood activities in the past 3 years, by country



Women who have received a loan or credit in the previous 3 years to support their livelihood activities

3% vs 33%

Received from a bank

Received from a local association

Furthermore, the data show that women often lack knowledge about available financial opportunities, including government allocations and the mechanisms for accessing them. The complexity and length of credit application processes further deter women, as their time poverty and lower literacy levels make it difficult to engage with these systems.

Finally, while community-based groups, such as VSLA, offer a form of financial support, their limited scope and small-scale nature mean they cannot always provide the transformative financial resources necessary to meet the demands of women seeking to sustainably expand their businesses or investments in agriculture.

ACCESS TO MARKETS

Women play important roles in processing and trading agricultural and livestock products in the research sites. For example, in Maradi, Niger, it is reported that women have a near monopoly of the moringa trade. However, women face multiple barriers to participating in physical market activities and broader value chain systems. As analysed in the Chapter “Gender roles, responsibilities, and time use”, in all countries except Burkina Faso, women face mobility restrictions that limit their ability to independently engage in market trading. They further face heavy domestic responsibilities, restricting time available for activities outside the household. Additionally, the absence of modern processing units at the local level, of transportation and storage, and of coordination mechanisms between producers and processors restricts women’s ability to scale their food processing activities and reach larger markets.



AUTONOMY AND CONTROL OVER INCOME

Across all four countries, a common theme is the gendered division of financial decision-making, with men largely holding control over household expenditures. Across all countries, 47%-69% of men reporting deciding by themselves on household expenditures, such as food, clothing, healthcare, and social activities, compared to only 17%-36% of women. However, respondents in FGDs noted that, with increasing economic and livelihood pressures pushing women into income generating activities, there is increasing scope for women to choose how they spend the money they earn – though they are still typically expected to consult their husbands on these decisions.

Influence of intersectional factors on access to and control over assets and resources

When it comes to **age**, young women are expected to marry early and bear children, confining them to largely domestic roles and limiting their availability and freedom to access and manage resources independently, compared to young men. For their part, young men face some restrictions in access to resources compared to their elders. While they can inherit land and access family land for farming, until they get married and become heads of their own household, decision-making and control of this land remains in the hands of male elders in the family.

Widows face specific constraints to access resources, due to their diminished economic power and social status. Though they have religious and legal inheritance rights, in practice, land that belonged to their deceased husband is usually controlled by his male relatives after his passing. Furthermore, without income from a male head of household, costs associated with procuring productive inputs, assets, technologies, or attending capacity-building initiatives become prohibitive for many widows. On the other hand, as the *de facto* heads of household, they have more autonomy in decision-making on family expenditure.

Educational levels play a crucial role in access to modern agricultural resources. According to the data, people with lower levels of education are less likely to leverage agricultural training and advice and therefore have relatively poor knowledge in agricultural techniques compared to their peers.

IDPs face significant challenges in accessing land and other resources, as they are often considered outsiders to the community. Having fled their own homes, often with minimal belongings, many lack the financial resources to invest in agricultural resources, such as tools and technology. Furthermore, opportunities with formal financial institutions are contingent on having identification documents, which many IDPs who have fled emergencies do not have.

PWDs may be excluded from control of their land by family members and may be refused allocation of land by village chiefs (or awarded unproductive small plots), under the pretext that they cannot exploit the land effectively. Logistical barriers and a lack of adaptive tools and inaccessible infrastructure also contribute to the exclusion of PWDs from capacity-building initiatives, new technologies, and financial platforms. However, development actors are increasingly taking specific measures to promote the include of PWDs in their activities, with quota allocations and considerations of their specific accessibility needs.

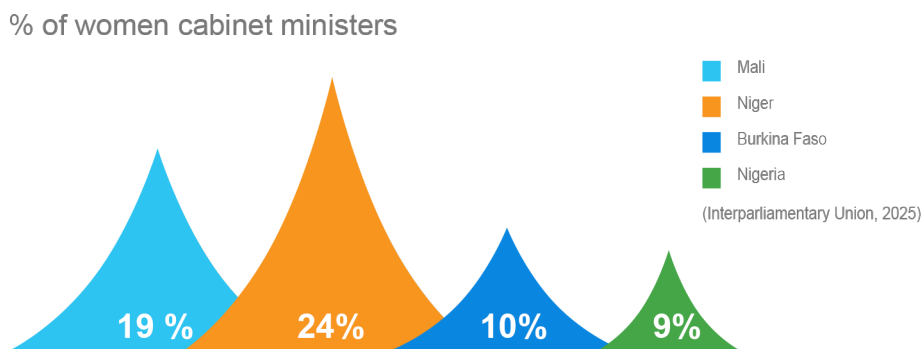
Nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists increasingly face difficulties in accessing land and natural resources such as water, wood, and forage for their livestock. They are increasingly pushed into protected areas and face restrictions on grazing land and water sources. The pressure from agricultural expansion and climate change exacerbates the vulnerability of nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists, who depend on access to communal resources for their survival.



Patterns of power and decision-making

Political participation

Women in all four countries have the legal right to vote and stand for election at all official government levels and various laws have been implemented to promote their representation in government. However, overall, the representation of women in political offices at all levels is very low.



Societal expectations and political party structures limit women's access to political networks, campaign funding, and other resources essential for success in the political arena. Even when women overcome structural and institutional barriers, they often continue to face stigma and discrimination from voters – both male and female – which hinders their ability to win elections and govern with authority. Finally, women who accede to positions of power are still typically allocated gendered portfolios and responsibilities, such as women's and family affairs, but are rarely considered for posts such as agriculture or natural resource management.

Household decision-making

Household decision-making is shaped by gender norms that assert male authority, particularly in relation to productive activities and initiatives outside the household. Women generally play a secondary or advisory role in decisions, if consulted at all. Their power to make decisions on their own is mainly limited to their domestic chores, their small farm or market garden activities, and specific tasks considered within the traditional female domain (such as small livestock management).

Across all the surveyed domains, only 11–15% of women report being able to decide to participate independently in the various external activities, compared to 86–88% of men. The data demonstrate that Burkina Faso has the most gender equitable practices regarding decision-making, though still skewing in favour of men. Northern Nigeria – where the practice of *kulle* shapes women's ability to participate in activities outside the household – consistently demonstrates the largest disparities in decision-making.

Figure 19: % of men and women who can decide by themselves to participate in training or capacity-building initiatives, by country

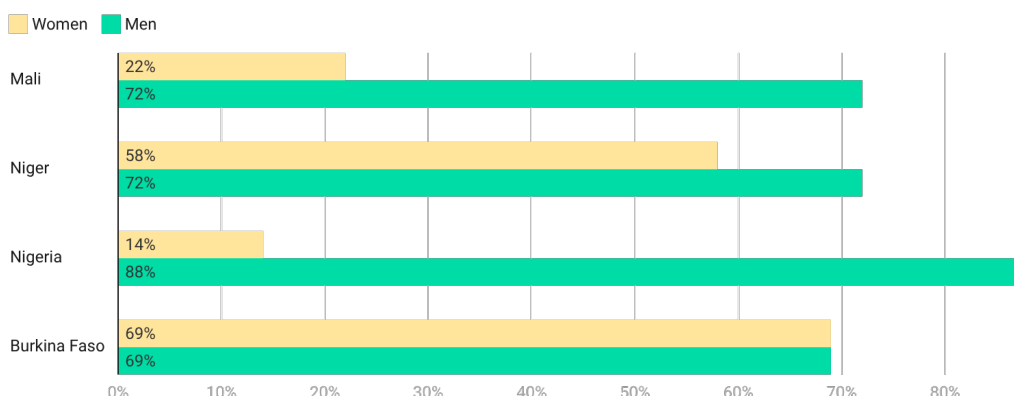


Figure 20: % of men and women who can decide by themselves to participate in extension services or other livelihoods counselling/advice services, by country

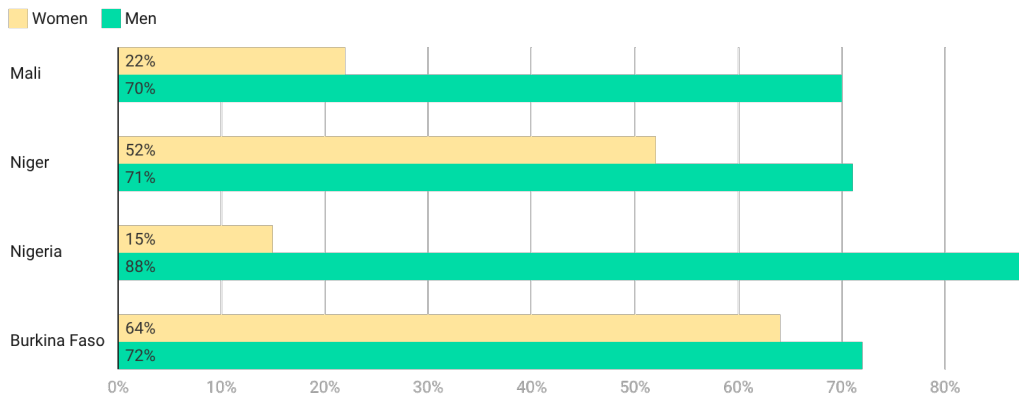


Figure 21: % of men and women who can decide by themselves to participate in financial inclusion measures (loans, credit, VSLA, insurance etc.), by country

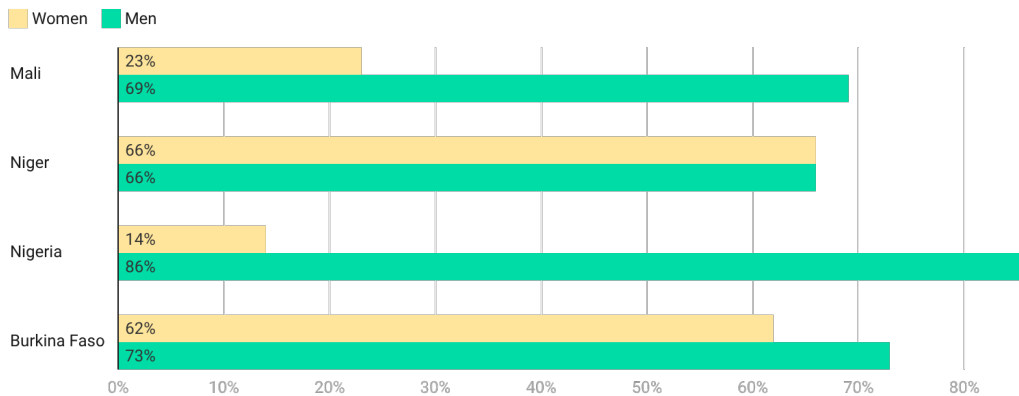
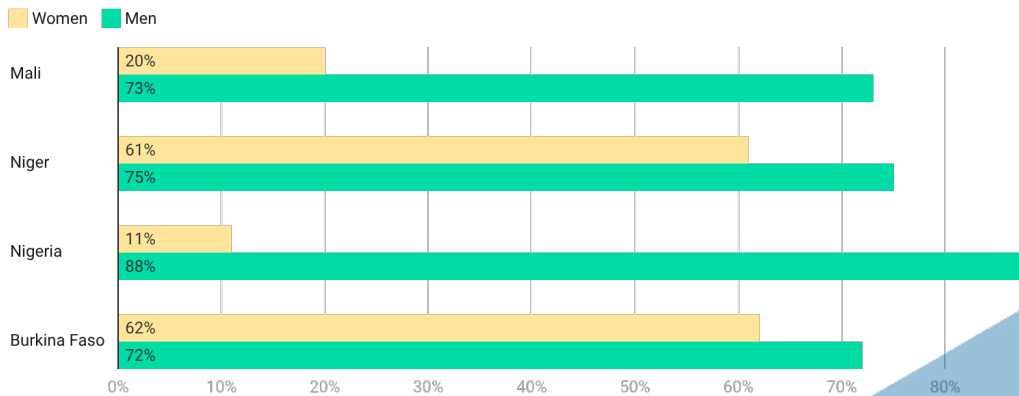


Figure 22: % of men and women who can decide by themselves to participate in community meetings (e.g. water committee, village council, business association etc.), by country





Participation in community decision-making structures

As outlined in the data on social norms, there is widespread agreement – across both genders – that men should play leading roles in community leadership and local governance. Support for women’s participation is far more limited, including among women, themselves.

Recent policy and institutional initiatives across the four countries have aimed to enhance women’s meaningful participation in community decision-making structures. However, various barriers still limit the effectiveness of these efforts: Women tend to face greater time burdens due to domestic and childcare responsibilities, as well as restrictions on their mobility, which impact their availability for public engagement (see the Chapter “Gender roles, responsibilities, and time use”). Limited access to transport options, particularly when meetings are held at the district or regional rather than village level, poses an additional barrier. Moreover, unequal access to information means that women are often less aware than men of the opportunities to participate in governance structures. As illustrated above, household-level dynamics also reinforce these barriers, with many women lacking the autonomy to independently decide whether they can engage in community decision-making spaces.

Figure 23: % of men and women who have participated in discussions/meetings of a local land management committee in the past year, by country

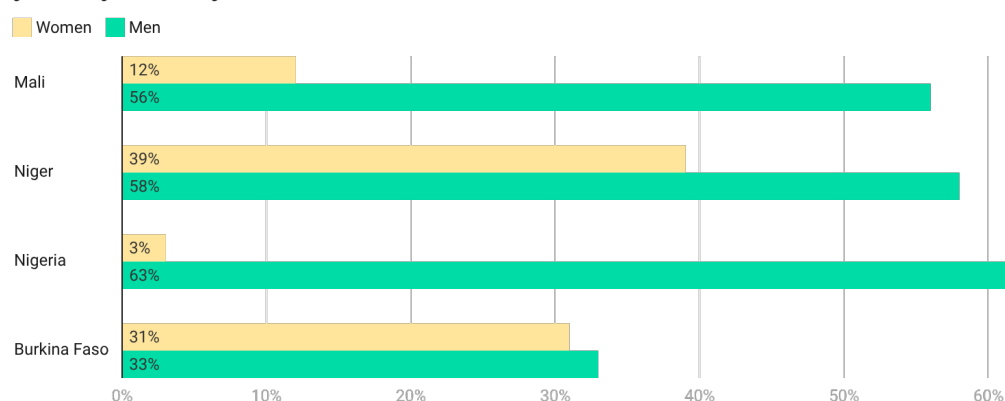


Figure 24: % of men and women who have participated in discussions/meetings of a local farmers' association in the past year, by country

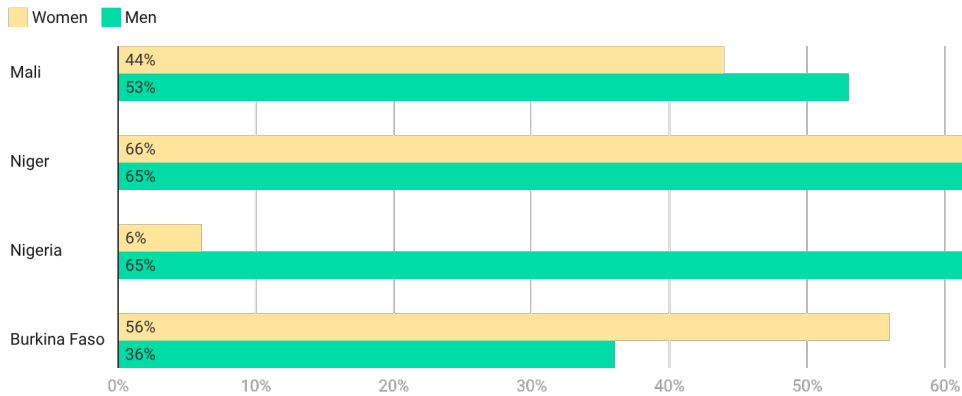


Figure 25: % of men and women who have participated in discussions/meetings of local development projects in the past year, by country

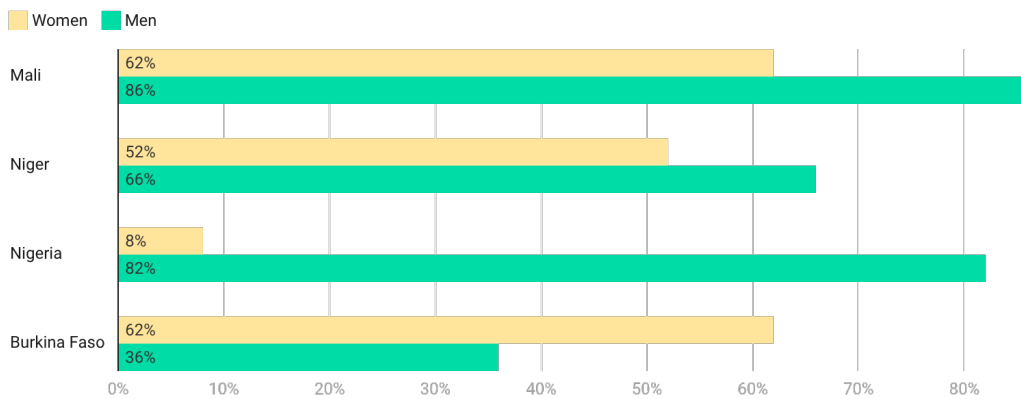
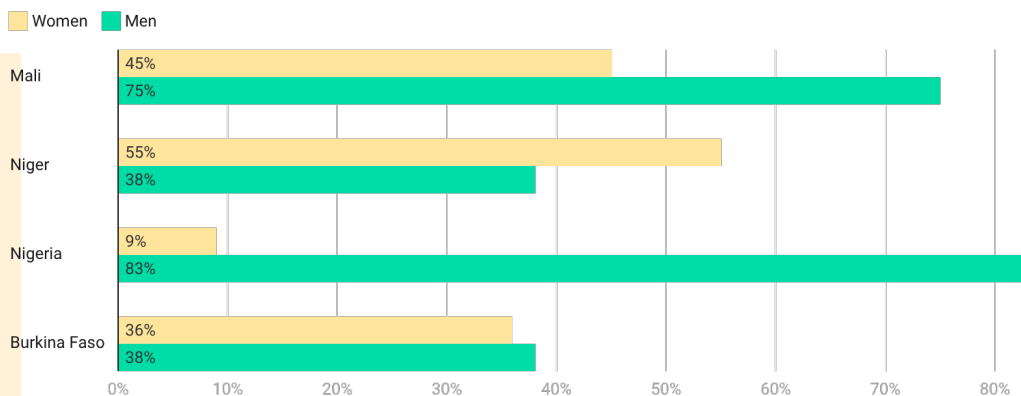


Figure 26: % of men and women who have participated in discussions/meetings of the village council in the past year, by country



In general, men are more actively involved in natural resource management committees (water, land) and traditional structures (such as village councils), while women are more likely to be engaged in meetings on local development projects. Increasingly, such projects specifically target participation, representation and inclusion of women.

90%

of women in Northern Nigeria report that they have not attended any meetings of local water management committees, land management committees, farmers' associations, herders' associations, or village councils in the previous year

Women in Burkina Faso are much more involved in all of these structures than women in other countries, at times even being more likely to participate than men. In contrast, women in Northern Nigeria report the most limitations.

While women participate in a range of decision-making platforms, their role is often passive. Where they attend meetings, they tend to speak less, usually only intervening when asked. In contrast, men are more likely to express themselves spontaneously and to feel that their opinions are considered in decision-making processes.

Figure 27: Nature of participation of men and of women in meetings of local land management committees, for all countries

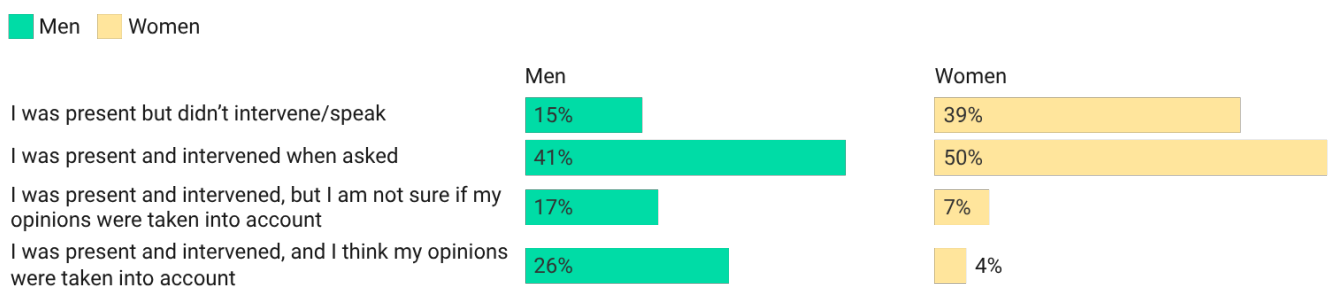
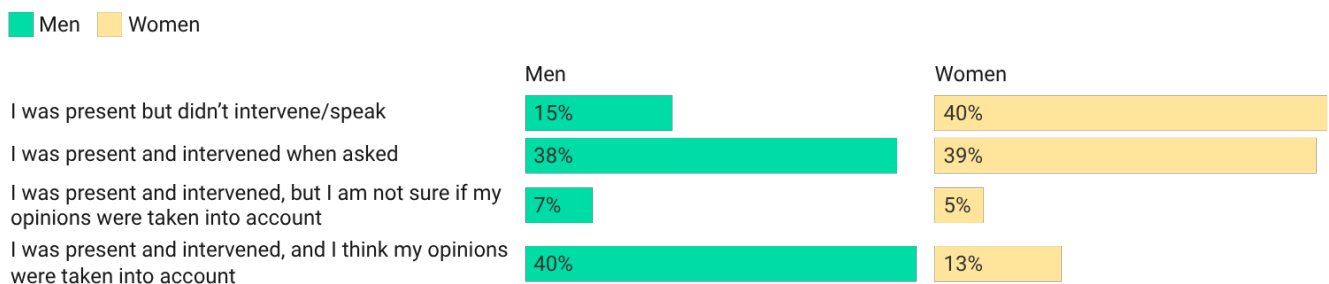


Figure 28: Nature of participation of men and of women in meetings of village councils



Evolution of patterns of power and decision-making

As analysed in the Chapter “Social norms and beliefs”, evolving *social norms* are gradually allowing space to challenge traditionally universal male authority in decision-making. With increased access to education and greater access to media and urban lifestyles, younger generations are exposed alternative models of decision-making. This shift is enabling women to take more initiative, assume public roles, and increase their visibility and influence.

Economic hardship and livelihood insecurity are also compelling households to adapt, creating avenues for women to take on more income-generating and, subsequently, decision-making roles. Women’s cooperatives, for example, have gained greater legitimacy in local decision-making structures, such as village land commissions, through their demonstrated financial success. As women contribute more significantly to household income through agriculture, herding, trade, and informal work, their bargaining power has grown.

Development interventions are also playing a crucial role in reshaping household decision-making patterns, by enhancing women’s self-confidence, leadership skills, and access to decision-making platforms, while also working to change perceptions among their male family members. Efforts are also underway to integrate women into traditional decision-making structures, such as village councils. Another key strategy has been the implementation of community participation quotas by government, civil society organisations, and international NGOs to promote the inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in decision-making processes.

However, as discussed earlier, the tacit renegotiation of roles and power is also being met with some resistance. Men who are accustomed to holding dominant decision-making power within the household often perceive women asserting their priorities as a challenge to their authority. Thus, while gender programming has been important in shifting decision-making practices and has been welcomed by many women, research participants were at pains to emphasise the importance of remaining sensitive to local cultures and traditions and of engaging men, including husbands and traditional, religious, and community leaders, as allies of change.

Influence of intersectional factors on decision-making and governance

Age remains a critical marker of inclusion and exclusion in decision-making, with youth – particularly young women – being constrained by generational hierarchies. Unmarried youth are still considered to be under the authority of their parents and are expected to conform to the head of household’s decisions. Youth participation in land governance structures such as the village land commissions is possible through cooperatives and associations, yet tradition privileges input and opinions of older men.

For women, **marital status** is perhaps the defining factor in their implication in decision-making. Women must generally seek their husband’s input in decisions and rarely make decisions alone. By contrast, widows and divorced women have some degree of autonomy as heads of household. However, they still often defer to male family members’ opinions or otherwise involve them in their decisions.

IDPs typically experience a loss of decision-making power in their host regions, as they are more likely to be excluded from local governance structures and often overlooked in outreach efforts.

PWDs face multilayered exclusion due to social prejudices that view them as less capable, as well as due to infrastructural barriers. People with motor or sensory impairments may struggle to physically access decision-making spaces and obtain relevant information in formats adapted to their accessibility needs.

Nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists are systematically excluded from land governance processes compared to farmers and sedentary herders. Their seasonal mobility and resource needs are frequently deprioritised in favour of agricultural interests, especially as they are often considered interlopers who are not indigenous to communities. Their physical absence during their seasonal nomadic migration means they often miss crucial opportunities to participate in decision-making meetings.

Personal safety and security

Perceptions of safety

Overall, respondents surveyed report relatively high feelings of personal safety. Respondents in Mali express the most concern about security, while respondents in Northern Nigeria express the least concern.

81%-94%

of men across all countries report “always” feeling safe when moving alone in their communities

66%-97%

of women across all countries report “always” feeling safe when moving alone in their communities

Women tend to feel less safe than men when moving alone, particularly when traveling outside their community. The gendered discrepancy is most pronounced in Mali and Niger, with women feeling much less safe than men in both cases. Conversely, in Burkina Faso, women instead report higher perceptions of personal safety than men. This is possibly explained by the gendered nature of violence in specific research sites, where men may be more frequently targeted for abduction, forced recruitment, or attacks by armed groups due to their perceived combatant potential.

Sexual and gender-based violence

SGBV is a pervasive issue across the four countries, deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, inadequate policy implementation, discrepancies between statutory laws and local customs, weak reporting mechanisms, and impunity for perpetrators. Limited access to justice and severe social stigma imposed on survivors contribute substantially to chronic underreporting, making it complex to determine accurate prevalence rates.

Sexual violence against men remains a highly taboo subject across all the countries, with limited data and inadequate reporting mechanisms contributing to the invisibility of these violations. However, it is known that men and boys are also subjected to such violence, particularly in conflict zones, where they may be exploited by militants and caught in sex-trafficking rings.

Mechanisms for responding to sexual and gender-based violence remain limited in both coverage and effectiveness, particularly in rural settings. Pervasive social stigma against survivors, under-resourced service infrastructure – including limited availability of sexual assault referral centres and counselling facilities – and the prevailing influence of customary justice systems are key barriers. In such systems, village chiefs frequently mediate SGBV cases using traditional norms, failing to provide justice or support for survivors.

Despite these challenges, important support mechanisms exist, particularly through the efforts of civil society. Local NGOs and women’s associations play a key role in providing psychosocial counselling, legal assistance, and safe spaces for survivors, often in partnership with international organisations. Community-based interventions, including awareness-raising campaigns and the training of local leaders and health workers, have also emerged as critical strategies to shift harmful norms and improve access to care.

Conflict, insecurity and criminality

Mali, Burkina Faso, Northern Nigeria and Niger are fighting to contain the threat of *violent insurgent groups and organised banditry* that have taken over increasing swathes of territory. Attacks against civilians by armed groups involve ambushes, raids, kidnappings and summary executions, as well as theft or destruction of crops and livestock.

This violence has displaced millions of people across the region, disrupting agricultural and pastoral activities and trade of goods necessary for these livelihoods. Thousands of hectares of arable farmland have been abandoned or are occupied by militants, while the displacement of hundreds of thousands of farmers and herders into host communities has increased strain on natural resources and accelerated local soil degradation.

Additionally, rapid demographic growth, increasing scarcity of water and other natural resources, a lack of formal systems for land demarcation and ownership, and breakdown of local conflict resolution mechanisms have contributed to increasing *conflict between land users, particularly between sedentary farmers and semi-nomadic herders*. Farmers are increasingly encroaching on allocated grazing lands and migration routes, causing herders to lose access to vital resources, while herders also trespass into farms, with their livestock destroying agricultural crops. This has contributed to increasing violent clashes between farmers and herders and cycles of reprisal attacks. These farmer-herder conflicts directly impact agricultural productivity and soil fertility, with crops and livestock being destroyed and formerly cooperative arrangements on nutrient exchange (manure, crop residue) breaking down.

The impacts of violence and criminality on women are often devastating, exacerbating their exposure to SGBV, kidnapping, poverty, hunger, forced displacement, and negative coping mechanisms, such as survival sex.

Climate and environmental risks

Climate change and environmental degradation are intensifying livelihood precarity for rural populations whose economic activities depend on natural resources and access to arable land. Farmers struggle with erosion, flooding, and declining soil fertility, yet lack access to climate-smart agricultural practices and risk-mitigation mechanisms, such as crop insurance. Similarly, sedentary and (semi-)nomadic herders face shrinking grazing lands, water scarcity, and increased livestock mortality due to prolonged droughts.

Women's agricultural and livestock livelihoods are increasingly undermined by the intersecting pressures of climate change and environmental degradation, which compound longstanding gender-based disparities in access to land and productive resources. Women are more likely than men to manage smaller and less fertile plots, and to have more limited access to essential agricultural inputs. With more limited access to modern irrigation tools, they are more vulnerable to rainfall variability and subsequent climate-induced crop failures.

Agricultural experts consulted during the research also consistently raised concerns regarding the unsustainable use of chemical inputs, with the widespread application of unregulated, poor quality, fertilisers and pesticides threatening long-term soil fertility and posing direct health risks to farmers. Moreover, the improper disposal of packaging – particularly plastics – has become a pressing environmental hazard, contaminating water sources and endangering both human and livestock health.



Impact of intersectional factors on safety and security

Individuals who lack social and economic protection have more limited ability to flee from danger, less access to services, and heightened exposure to violence and abuse, and are therefore more threatened by insecurity and risks.

Widowed women and female-headed households are frequently denied legal inheritance and left without access to land or productive resources unless through goodwill of the extended family, exposing them to exploitation.

Displaced populations, particularly women, face multiple layers of insecurity, often experiencing SGBV both in transit and within host camps and communities. They also face challenges in accessing health services, legal support, and livelihood opportunities due to unfamiliarity with their new environment, discriminatory attitudes towards perceived outsiders, and lack of identifying documentation.

Women with **disabilities** face compounded discrimination and exclusion. Social stigma frequently excludes them from formal protection and economic activities.

Age is another intersecting factor shaping experiences of insecurity. Young women face particularly acute risks due to their dependency within household structures, restricted access to education, and early marriage. Early marriage practices curtail their autonomy and increase the risk of domestic and sexual violence. Young men, on the other hand, face increased risks of abduction or forced recruitment into armed groups or being targeted by security forces on suspicion of belonging to such groups. Meanwhile, older adults, particularly men over 56, report heightened concerns around health and mobility, factors that increase their vulnerability to physical violence and economic exclusion.

Ethnicity and livelihood practices further shape patterns of insecurity in contexts of intercommunal conflict. Fulani herders across the Sahel are particularly stigmatised, often perceived to be associated with jihadist groups. This has led to increased targeting by security forces and community self-defence groups, exacerbating historical grievances and weakening trust between communities and the state. At the same time, semi-nomadic communities are targets of attacks, extortion, and cattle rustling from jihadist groups and criminal networks, as their transhumance routes often have limited presence of state security forces.





RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are tailored to the objectives and approach of the Soil Values program and are intended to support inclusive, context-responsive GESI interventions that address barriers and leverage existing opportunities, as identified in the research.

The detailed recommendations are available in Annex II.

Government actors

National institutions should strengthen the implementation of existing GESI laws and quotas through sustained sensitisation, monitoring, and gender-responsive budgeting. They should reinforce accountability mechanisms for schemes targeting underserved groups, including subsidies, input distribution, and land redevelopment, and allocate sufficient financial, technical, and logistical resources to regional and local technical services, particularly extension systems.

A conducive regulatory environment is needed to attract private-sector investment in domestic production and processing units, especially in sectors where women are economically active, to bolster local economies and reduce exposure to external shocks.

In *Nigeria*, federal approval and state-level domestication of the National Agricultural Soil Management Policy remain essential to guide coordinated soil health and productivity initiatives.

Decentralised ministries and agencies should prioritise awareness raising and local enforcement of GESI-related laws and policies, applying intersectional analysis to identify the most vulnerable categories of women and youth and ensure their effective inclusion in quota-based mechanisms. Strengthening the operational mandate and regular functioning of local land commissions is critical, alongside improving coordination and information-sharing among decentralised agencies, international actors, and private-sector partners across watersheds. They should also invest in recruiting, training, deploying, and retaining more female extension agents, and provide all extension staff with GESI training to enhance service delivery for women and underserved farmers.

Private sector actors

Agricultural input producers, food processors and distributors should integrate women, youth, and other vulnerable groups across agricultural value chains not only as producers and consumers but as key contributors of knowledge and innovation in climate-smart and financially viable practices.

Strengthened coordination between input suppliers, distributors, and financial intermediaries is essential to ensure timely, affordable, and equitable access to inputs in rural areas, supported by targeted mechanisms such as post-harvest repayment for farmers with limited capital.

Private sector actors should also collaborate with women's and youth cooperatives to establish local input production units and modern agro-processing facilities, helping to stimulate local economies and expand market opportunities.

Financial institutions, such as banks, MFIs and digital finance providers, should design and adapt financial products that reflect the realities of rural women, youth, and persons with disabilities, particularly constraints related to collateral, irregular income and limited financial literacy. Partnering with women's associations can improve outreach to underserved groups.

Financial institutions should also broaden inclusive microcredit, working capital, and agricultural insurance schemes that are accessible and affordable for low-capital women and youth farmers and responsive to their specific risks.

Soil Values program

Overall, the Soil Values program should adopt and operationalise a comprehensive GESI Strategy that guides all stages of program design, implementation, and MEL, and that integrates a conflict-sensitive approach that recognises both the competing and mutually beneficial interests of diverse groups in target areas and monitors and anticipates any potential backlash against target groups.

Implementation should be closely coordinated with local and regional government technical services, and traditional, religious, and community leaders should be actively engaged to strengthen women's inclusion in decision-making spaces. Program activities must be designed to avoid reinforcing intra-household or community inequalities, particularly for women facing intersecting vulnerabilities, such as widowhood, and should ensure appropriate spaces where women can participate in activities with minimum cultural and logistical constraints.

Finally, targeted research should be conducted on transhumant pastoralist populations, who are often excluded from standard data collection but who play an important role in landscape and natural resource management.



INTERVENTION AREA 1: BUNDLING INTEGRATED PACKAGES THAT COMBINE TECHNICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUPPORT TO FARMERS FOR IMPROVED SOIL FERTILITY MANAGEMENT

Overall, support packages to farmers and pastoralists should be designed using GESI research findings and local expertise to ensure relevance, avoid duplication, and reach remote and insecure areas where women, youth, and vulnerable groups face greater barriers.

To **improve knowledge and practices around Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM)**, capacity-building efforts should target cooperatives and producer groups representing underserved groups, using communication channels accessible to low-literacy populations, and aligning advisory services with women's existing roles and entrepreneurship in high-potential value chains (such as in market gardening and composting). Knowledge provision should target areas with demonstrated gender gaps (such as crop-livestock integration and climate-smart agriculture) and address harmful soil management practices through promotion of alternative techniques which are relatively accessible to women (such as natural pest control), giving preference to peer-to-peer learning approaches, wherever possible.

To **transform attitudes and behaviours that limit effective participation of GESI target groups in ISFM**, behaviour change efforts should include a clear advocacy and communication strategy targeting both men and women, developed with local CSOs and women's groups. Messaging should challenge restrictive norms, promote shared household decision-making on soil fertility, and engage men as allies through culturally appropriate dialogue platforms.

To **expand access to resources that improve ISFM**, the program should prioritise doorstep delivery models, wherever feasible, and offer targeted assistance to people facing greater productive responsibility burdens, such as widows and divorced women. Soil Values should support land access and more efficient use through advocacy with community leaders and land commissions, rehabilitation of degraded land, and provision of appropriate inputs. These include fertilisers, labour-saving equipment and tools adapted to gender roles (such as gas stoves) and disability needs (such as mobility aids), and irrigation access through home kits and communal systems.

The program should also seek to enhance skills and confidence of GESI target groups, particularly women, through literacy, training, mentorship, peer exchange platforms, and accessible learning tools, including childcare support where relevant. It should improve access to financial services, by strengthening women's savings groups, advocating with financial institutions to reduce access barriers, and offering grants for the most vulnerable individuals.

Finally, Soil Values should improve market access for underserved groups through partnerships with private sector actors committed to GESI principles, scaling innovations in promoting agricultural enterprise among GESI target groups (e.g. food processing by women farmers), and investing in initiatives that stimulate local production (e.g. composting) and facilitate access to new markets.



INTERVENTION AREA 2: INTEGRATING INTERVENTIONS AT THE LANDSCAPE AND WATERSHED LEVELS TO OPTIMISE WATER MANAGEMENT, PROMOTE NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS, AND ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY-LED PLANNING

Soil Values should accompany landscape and watershed level governance structures to apply and monitor quota systems that guarantee representation of women, youth, and other underserved groups. Dialogue and planning platforms supported by the program should accommodate women's mobility and time constraints. The program should build the advocacy, communication, and organisational capacities of women's, youth, and vulnerable groups' associations, such that they can engage effectively in decision-making in natural resource management bodies. Furthermore, cooperatives and local development associations – where women participate more actively – should be supported to channel their priorities into landscape and watershed planning processes. Finally, the involvement of regional technical services across all stages of intervention (design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) is essential to secure coordination, sectoral alignment, and sustainability.



INTERVENTION AREA 3: BROKERING FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS TO SUPPORT LONG-TERM SOIL FERTILITY INVESTMENTS AND EXPLORE PAYMENT MECHANISMS FOR SMALL-SCALE FOOD PRODUCERS, INCLUDING FARMERS AND LIVESTOCK HOLDERS

Priority actions to enhance GESI include sustained advocacy with financial institutions (including MFI) to ease structural barriers to credit for women, youth, and other underserved groups and develop tailored financial products for vulnerable groups, supported by financial guarantees and technical assistance from the consortium; strengthening the organisational capacities of farmer and pastoralist associations to enhance their outreach, revenue streams, and market integration, and accompanying them to increase inclusion of women and youth in their membership and leadership structures; and facilitating market linkages between producers and processors to address market demands and leverage existing entrepreneurship of GESI target groups, such as in compost production.



INTERVENTION AREA 4: CONVENING POLICY DIALOGUES AT THE REGIONAL, NATIONAL, AND SUB-NATIONAL LEVELS TO ADVOCATE FOR A CONDUCIVE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Soil Values should facilitate platforms that bring together stakeholders across agricultural inputs value chains to improve access, affordability, and delivery systems for women, youth, and other GESI-priority groups. The program should build the capacity of policymakers and technical staff on intersectional GESI analysis and its application in soil fertility and natural resource governance, and support policy discussions on reinforcing existing gender and inclusion commitments within agricultural and livestock sectors. In *Nigeria*, the program should actively engage with the Nigerian Institute of Soil Science to influence and strengthen GESI provisions in the forthcoming National Agricultural Soil Management Policy.



INTERVENTION AREA 5: SCOPING AND LEARNING TO INTEGRATE LESSONS LEARNED BY SOIL VALUES AND OTHER PROGRAMS AND BUILD THE CAPACITY OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The Soil Values program should strengthen learning systems by ensuring that all research findings are disseminated at community level to support transparency, accountability and inclusion. It should institutionalise cross-sector learning platforms with government services, UN agencies, women's associations, INGOs and local CSOs, and private sector actors. The GESI analysis should be updated regularly, or complemented by continuous monitoring tools, ideally implemented with specialised agricultural and social research institutions. Finally, the program should develop a partnership engagement strategy and conduct regular strategic stakeholder mapping to keep an updated overview of actors across watershed areas and align collaboration with the program work plan and GESI strategy.



ANNEXES

Annex I: Detailed Country Household Survey Demographic Profiles

Mali

In Mali, the survey was conducted in 2 watersheds, Haut Niger et Haut Bani, in the regions of Ségou and Sikasso respectively. Equal numbers of surveys were conducted in each region. 50% of the respondents in each region were women, and 50% were men.

In terms of **age**, 30% of the respondents are youth, aged 18 to 35 years old (very similar % in the case of women – 30% - and men – 31%), 51% are middle aged, 36 to 55 years old (59% in the case of women, 42% in the case of men), and 19% are older people, above 56 years (11% in the case of women, 27% in the case of men). There is a very similar age profile for the 2 watersheds: 30% youth, 50% middle aged, and 20% older people in Haut Bani and 31% youth, 52% middle aged, and 17% older people in Haut Niger.

In terms of **civil status**, 93% of women surveyed in Mali are married, 41% in a monogamous marriage and 52% in a polygamous marriage, 6% are widowed and 1% single. These % differ slightly in each watershed. In the case of Haut Bani, 97% of women are married, 22% in a monogamous marriage and 75% in a polygamous marriage, and 3% are widowed. In the case of Haut Niger, 88% of women are married, 60% in a monogamous marriage and 28% in a polygamous marriage, 9% are widowed and 3% single. Out of all the married women in a polygamous marriage, 70% are the first wife, 24% the second wife, 3% the third wife and 3% the fourth wife.

In terms of civil status, 93% of men surveyed in Mali are married, 60% in a monogamous marriage and 33% in a polygamous marriage, and 7% are single. These % slightly differ in each watershed. In the case of Haut Bani, 91% of men are married, 41% in a monogamous marriage and 50% in a polygamous marriage, and 9% are single. In the case of Haut Niger, 94% of men are married, 78% in a monogamous marriage and 16% in a polygamous marriage, and 6% are single. Out of all the married men in a polygamous marriage, 72% are married to 2 wives, 14% to 3 wives, and 14% to 4 wives.

Only 6% of women surveyed are **heads of household** (75% of them widowed, and 25% married in a monogamous marriage), in comparison with the 77% of men (100% of them married in either a monogamous or a polygamous marriage).

In terms of **household sizes**, most of men and women (85%) are living in big or very big households, with 42% of people surveyed sharing household with 6 to 10 members, and 43% of people with over 10 members. Only 15% of people surveyed are living in households of 5 members or less. Most of the respondents living in very big households with over 10 members are from Haut Bani (69%).

Also, most of men and women (84%) are living in households with many **children**: 42% of respondents are living with 3 to 5 children, and 42% with 6 or more children (up to 15 children). As with the household sizes, most of the respondents living with 6 or more children are from Haut Baani (68%). Only 2% of people interviewed did not live with children, and 14% with one or two children.

In terms of **education level**, 81% of women cannot read or write, 3% can read and write but did not finish a formal education cycle, 14% finished primary school and 2% finished secondary school. Within the sample of women who cannot read or write, there are no major differences regarding age, as the % of the different age groups are very similar to the % of these age groups for the total number of women. Men – 33% cannot read or write, 31% can read and write but did not finish a formal education cycle, 9% attended Islamic School and can read and write, 16% finished primary school, 6% finished secondary school, 3% vocational training and 2% attended University. There are no major differences between watersheds.

Household's **main livelihood activity** – 100% Subsistence farming/agriculture

Disabilities – 17% of people surveyed have some kind of disability (or several combined). 1% have difficulties seeing, 3% hearing, 12% walking, 2% remembering, 3% with self-care, and 2% communicating. There are no major differences between watersheds nor men and women.

Residency status – 96% of people surveyed are local residents (originally from/member of the local community), 2% are Internally Displaced People living in a host community, 1% Asylum seeker/refugee claimant (refused) and 1% Foreign resident (and NOT refugee).

Ethnic group – The most prevalent ethnic groups in the sample are the following: 35% of people surveyed are Bambara, 27% Senoufo and 16% Samogo/Samoko. There are other ethnic groups represented, but at much lower percentage, such as Peul (4%), Dogon (3%) or Somonos (3%).

95% of Bambara surveyed are from Haut Niger (Ségou), and 100% of Senoufo and 100% of Samogo/Samoko are from Haut Bani (Sikasso).

Religion – 99% of people surveyed are Muslim, and 1% Christian.

Niger

In Niger, the survey was conducted in two watersheds, Goulbi and Maggia, in the regions of Maradi and Tahoua respectively. 51% of the respondents are women, and 49% are men.

In terms of **age**, 13% of the respondents are youth, aged 18 to 35 years old (18% in the case of women, 8% in the case of men), 51% are middle aged, 36 to 55 years old (52% in the case of women, 49% in the case of men), and 36% are older people, aged above 56 years old (30% in the case of women, 43% in the case of men).

In terms of **civil status**, 45% of women surveyed in Niger are married, 27% in a monogamous marriage and 18% in a polygamous marriage, 46% are widowed, 4% are single and 4% divorced/separated. Out of all the married women in a polygamous marriage, 50% are the first wife, 42% the second wife, and 8% the fourth wife.

In terms of civil status, 97% of men surveyed in Niger are married, 49% in a monogamous marriage and 48% in a polygamous marriage, and 3% are single. Out of all the married men in a polygamous marriage, 80% are married to 2 wives, 10% to 3 wives, and 10% to 4 wives.

43% of women surveyed are **heads of household** (79% of them widowed, 3% married in a polygamous marriage, 3% married in a monogamous marriage, 10% divorced/separated and 3% single), in comparison with the 97% of men (99% of them married in either a monogamous or a polygamous marriage, and 1% single).

In terms of **household sizes**, most people surveyed (88%) are living in big or very big households, with 50% of people sharing household with 6 to 10 members, and 38% of people with over 10 members. Only 15% of people surveyed are living in households of 5 members or less.

Most men and women (66%) are living in households with many **children**: 53% of respondents are living with 3 to 5 children, and 31% with 6 or more children (up to 12 children). 4% of people interviewed did not live with children, and 12% with one or two children.

In terms of **education level**, 39% of women cannot read or write, 25% can read and write but did not finish a formal education cycle, 25% attended Islamic school and can read and write, 4% finished primary school, and 6% finished secondary school. There is an important difference regarding age, as 67% of women who finished primary school are youth. For men, 23% cannot read or write, 8% can read and write but did not finish a formal education cycle, 28% attended Islamic School and can read and write, 26% finished primary school, and 15% finished secondary school.

Household's **main livelihood activity** – 73% subsistence farming/agriculture, 18% small business / trade / income generating activity, 5% sedentary livestock herding, 2% cash crop farming, 1% nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralism and 1% wage employment. There are some differences between men and women responses. For instance, 61% of women responded that their household main livelihoods activity was subsistence farming in contrast with 86% of men; and 28% of women responded that their household main livelihoods activity was small business / trade / income generating activity in contrast with 8% of men.

Disabilities – 42% of people surveyed have some kind of disability (or several combined), 45% of women and 38% of men. 27% have difficulties seeing, 15% hearing, 28% walking, 17% remembering, 15% with self-care, and 13% communicating. For a few types of disabilities, there are differences between men and women. For instance, 9% of women have difficulties hearing, even if using hearing aids, compared to 22% of men; or 10% of women have difficulties remembering or concentrating compared to 25% of men. However, some others do not present differences. For instance, both 28% of women and 28% of men have difficulties walking or climbing the stairs.

Residency status – 92% of people surveyed are local residents (originally from/member of the local community), 2% are Internally Displaced People living in a host community, 1% are (semi-)nomadic pastoralist (temporarily in this location), 1% are asylum seeker/refugee claimant (pending) and 3% are foreign residents (and NOT refugees).

Ethnic group: The vast majority (87%) of respondents are Hausa, with a further 5% being Hausa/Fulani, 3% mixed Hausa and another group, 2% Fulani, 3% Mogobiri and 1% Sonrhai.

Religion – 98% of people surveyed are Muslim, and 2% Christian.

Nigeria

In Nigeria, the survey was conducted in two watersheds, Jama'are and Yartiti, in the states of Bauchi and Kano respectively. 50% of the respondents were women, and 50% were men.

In terms of **age**, 35% of the respondents are youth, aged 18 to 35 years old (51% in the case of women, 20% in the case of men), 39% are middle aged, aged 36 to 55 years old (31% in the case of women, 48% in the case of men), and 25% are older people, aged above 55 years old, (18% in the case of women, 32% in the case of men).

In terms of **civil status**, 75% of women surveyed in Nigeria are married, 38% in a monogamous marriage and 37% in a polygamous marriage, 22% are widowed, 2% are single and 2% divorced/separated. Out of all the married women in a polygamous marriage, 67% are the first wife, 25% the second wife, and 8% the third wife.

In terms of civil status, 97% of men surveyed in Nigeria are married, 52% in a monogamous marriage and 45% in a polygamous marriage, and 5% are single. Out of all the married men in a polygamous marriage, 76% are married to 2 wives, 21% to 3 wives, and 3% to 4 wives.

78% of women surveyed are **heads of household** (25% of them widowed, 33% married in a polygamous marriage, 37% married in a monogamous marriage, 2% divorced/separated and 2% single), in comparison with the 100% of men (97% of them married in either a monogamous or a polygamous marriage, and 3% single).

In terms of **household sizes**, most people surveyed (88%) are living in big or very big households, with 45% of people sharing household with 6 to 10 members, and 43% of people with over 10 members. Only 12% of people surveyed are living in households of 5 members or less.

Also, most of men and women (66%) are living in households with many **children**, 40% of respondents are living with 3 to 5 children, and 35% with 6 or more children (up to 27 children). 9% of people interviewed did not live with children, and 16% with one or two children.

In terms of **education level**, 78% of women cannot read or write, 3% can read and write but did not finish a formal education cycle, 11% attended Islamic school and can read and write, and 8% finished primary school. There is an important difference regarding age, as 100% of women who finished primary school are young. For men, 14% cannot read or write, 8% can read and write but did not finish a formal education cycle, 11% attended Islamic School and can read and write, 32% finished primary school, 26% finished secondary school, 8% vocational training and 2% attended University.

Household's **main livelihood activity** – 56% subsistence farming/agriculture, 7% small business / trade / income generating activity, 11% sedentary livestock herding, 23% cash crop farming, 2% nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralism and 1% wage employment. There are some differences between men and women responses. For instance, 68% of women responded that their household main livelihoods activity was subsistence farming in contrast with 45% of men; and 8% of women responded that their household main livelihoods activity was cash crop farming in contrast with 38% of men.

Disabilities – 37% of people surveyed have some kind of disability (or several combined), 48% of women and 26% of men. 16% have difficulties seeing, 10% hearing, 14% walking, 15% remembering, 12% with self-care, and 8% communicating. There are differences between men and women on all types of difficulties, and women seem to be more affected than men. For instance, 23% of women have difficulties seeing compared to 9% of men; or 17% of women have difficulties hearing compared to 3% of men. However, some others do not present differences. For instance, both 28% of women and 28% of men have difficulties walking or climbing stairs.

Residency status – 95% of people surveyed are local residents (originally from/member of the local community) and 5% are foreign residents (and NOT refugees).

Ethnic group – 38% of respondents are Hausa, 52% are Hausa-Fulani, 8% are Fulani, and 2% other.

Religion – 98% of people surveyed are Muslim, 2% are Christian.

Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, the survey was conducted in one watershed, Lower Mouhoun, in the region of Boucle du Mouhoun. 50% of the respondents are women, and 50% are men.

In terms of **age**, 18% of the respondents are youth, aged 18 to 35 years old (22% in the case of women, 14% in the case of men), 57% are middle aged, 36 to 55 years old (62% in the case of women, 52% in the case of men), and 25% are older people above 56 years (16% in the case of women, 34% in the case of men).

In terms of **civil status**, 75% of women surveyed in Burkina Faso are married, 27% in a monogamous marriage and 48% in a polygamous marriage, 19% are widowed, 3% are single and 3% divorced/separated. Out of all the married women in a polygamous marriage, 42% are the first wife, 48% the second wife, and 10% the third wife.

In terms of civil status, 94% of men surveyed in Burkina Faso are married, 52% in a monogamous marriage and 42% in a polygamous marriage, 5% are single and 2% are widowed. Out of all the married men in a polygamous marriage, 78% are married to 2 wives, 11% to 3 wives, 7% to 4 wives and 3% to more than 4 wives.

50% of women surveyed are **heads of household** (38% of them widowed, 28% married in a polygamous marriage, 22% married in a monogamous marriage, 6% divorced/separated and 6% single), in comparison with the 92% of men (96% of them married in either a monogamous or a polygamous marriage, 2% single and 2% widowed).

In terms of **household sizes**, most people surveyed (77%) are living in big or very big households, with 43% of people sharing household with 6 to 10 members, and 34% of people with over 10 members. Only 23% of people surveyed are living in households of 5 members or less.

Also, most men and women (66%) are living in households with many **children**: 49% of respondents are living with 3 to 5 children, and 17% with 6 or more children (up to 28 children). 7% of people interviewed did not live with children, and 28% with one or two children.

In terms of **education level**, 62% of women cannot read or write, 14% can read and write but did not finish a formal education cycle, 8% attended Islamic school and can read and write, 11% finished primary school, 2% finished secondary school, 2% completed vocational training and 2% attended university. There is an important difference regarding age, as 57% of women who finished primary school are youth. For men, 53% cannot read or write, 3% can read and write but did not finish a formal education cycle, 5% attended Islamic school and can read and write, 23% finished primary school, 12% finished secondary school, 2% vocational training and 2% attended university.

Household's **main livelihood activity** – 78% subsistence farming/agriculture, 12% small business / trade / income generating activity, 7% cash crop farming and 3% wage employment. There are no major differences between men and women.

Disabilities – 18% of people surveyed have some kind of disability (or several combined). 11% have difficulties seeing, 3% hearing, 11% walking, 3% remembering, 1% with self-care, and 2% communicating. There are no major differences between men and women.

Residency status – 88% of people surveyed are local residents (originally from/member of the local community), 1% are Internally Displaced People living in a host community, 1% are (semi-)nomadic pastoralist (temporarily in this location) and 11% are foreign residents (and NOT refugees).

Ethnic group – Data was not collected due to political and security sensitivity.

Religion – Data was not collected due to political and security sensitivity.

Annex II: Detailed Research Recommendations

The following recommendations are grounded in the research findings and aim to guide program implementers and other stakeholders involved in soil fertility management. They are based on both quantitative and qualitative data and reflect the diverse realities of women, men, youth, displaced persons, persons with disabilities, farmers, and herders, among others, across Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Northern Nigeria. The proposed actions are tailored to the objectives and approach of the Soil Values program and are intended to support inclusive, context-responsive interventions that address barriers and leverage existing opportunities, as identified in the research. While they aim to contribute to gender equality and social inclusion, they are not a comprehensive roadmap for GESI transformation in the target region, as certain systemic constraints – such as limited access to basic services, infrastructure, or broader drivers of social change like urbanisation and digital connectivity – fell outside the scope of this research but remain critical to achieving lasting impact. As such, these recommendations should be viewed as a contribution to a broader, multi-actor, multidimensional process of social and economic transformation.

Government actors

NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Reinforce the application of existing laws and quotas that support gender equality and social inclusion, through sensitisation and monitoring of designated implementing agencies, appropriate resource allocation, gender-sensitive budgeting and timely disbursement of funds.
- Ensure appropriate monitoring and accountability for schemes to improve access to resources for underserved groups, such as subsidies, input distribution, and land redevelopment initiatives.
- Allocate adequate financial, logistical, and technical resources to regional and local technical services, including extension agents, to enable them to provide sustained support to women, youth, and vulnerable farmers in implementing sustainable land and soil management practices.
- Facilitate a conducive policy environment and regulatory framework for private sector actors to invest in establishment of domestic production, such as fertiliser production units, and modern agricultural and livestock product processing units, particularly in sectors where women are well-established, to stimulate local economies, mitigate vulnerability to external shocks, and increase affordable access for farmers. Implement certification systems for processed products to ensure quality and market competitiveness. Facilitate access to certification services for GESI target groups through regional agencies. Invest in road and transport networks to facilitate access to markets for farmers and rural producers.
- In *Nigeria*, approve the National Agricultural Soil Management Policy (NASMP) at federal level to provide a coordinated framework for restoring soil health and improving agricultural productivity and prioritise the domestication in each State. In *Niger*, strengthen and institutionalise state-led post-harvest purchasing mechanisms for food security reserves to stabilise markets and provide predictable demand for smallholder producers. Ensure these mechanisms are accessible to women and marginalised groups through better planning, communication, and coordination, avoiding monopolisation by commercial-scale producers.

DECENTRALISED MINISTRIES AND AGENCIES

- Strengthen local-level awareness and implementation of laws and policies promoting rights of underserved groups.
- Apply intersectional analysis to identify which categories of women and youth are most vulnerable and design responsive strategies to ensure their inclusion in quota allocations.
- Strengthen the operational capacity and mandate of local land commissions to ensure they function effectively at local levels, including by ensuring the regular participation of state agencies.
- Establish regular channels for dialogue, coordination, and exchange of experiences among different local and regional agencies and international and private sector actors working in rural development, land management, and natural resource governance at watershed level.
- Develop and implement strategies for recruiting, training, deploying and retaining more female extension agents. Provide GESI training to existing agents to improve their capacity to serve women and underserved farmers.
- Expand integrated and survivor-centred responses to SGBV at the decentralised level.
- Host and convene platforms for coordination and information sharing between government, local, international and private sector actors working on natural resources management and development.
- In *Nigeria*, prioritise the domestication and implementation of the National Agricultural Soil Management Policy, particularly in Soil Values priority states, and pass the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act in Kano State to strengthen protections for vulnerable groups and advance gender justice.

Private sector actors

AGRICULTURAL INPUT PRODUCERS, FOOD PROCESSERS AND DISTRIBUTORS

- Integrate women, youth, and vulnerable groups across the entire agricultural value chain, not only as suppliers or consumers, but also as knowledge holders and change agents who can influence adoption of financially beneficial and climate-smart practices.

- Strengthen coordination among input suppliers, distributors, and financial intermediaries to ensure timely, affordable, and equitable access to agricultural inputs in rural areas. Adopt targeted practices to support women and youth with less initial capital, such as post-harvest repayment models.
- Support the establishment of local inputs production units and modern agro-processing units for by-products in collaboration with women's and youth cooperatives.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

- Develop and adapt financial products – including microcredits, working capital funds, and crop insurance – that are tailored to the realities of rural women, youth, and persons with disabilities. These products should account for constraints such as limited collateral, irregular income, and financial literacy gaps. Partner with women's associations to reach underserved groups effectively.
- Explore and expand inclusive agricultural insurance schemes, ensuring these are accessible to women and youth farmers with low capital, and responsive to their unique risks and challenges.

Soil Values program

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop and implement a comprehensive GESI Strategy to guide program design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Ensure appropriate spaces where women can participate in activities with minimum cultural and logistical constraints (such as single gender initiatives, women facilitators, venues in local communities rather than locations requiring travel, etc.)
- Set up an accessible and transparent mechanism for reporting and addressing grievances, including potential negative or unintended impacts of project activities. This is especially important in preventing, anticipating and responding to backlash against women, youth, and other GESI-targeted groups.
- Work in close coordination with local and regional government technical services to harmonise efforts, avoid duplication, and facilitate mutual learning.
- Incorporate conflict sensitivity into all project components (including training for staff), recognising both the competing and mutually beneficial interests of diverse groups in target areas. Pay particular attention to semi-nomadic pastoralists, whose specific vulnerabilities around land and natural resource access, as well as participation in decision-making, are often overlooked in favour of agricultural stakeholders.
- Actively engage traditional, religious, and community leaders to promote women's inclusion in decision-making spaces, demonstrating how inclusion supports cultural values, community cohesion and local development.
- Recognise potential for initiatives to deepen inequalities within households or communities. Interventions should be designed to avoid reinforcing exclusion of women who may have less scope to participate in such initiatives (e.g. women with disabilities, widows, junior wives).
- Regularly update GESI analyses and use participatory methods (e.g., Participatory Rural Appraisal or Community-Based Participatory Research). Involve communities in data interpretation and use.
- Recognising their transient but significant impact on landscape and natural resource management, prioritise specific research on transhumant pastoralist populations, who are often excluded from standard household-based methodologies.

INTERVENTION AREA 1: BUNDLING INTEGRATED PACKAGES THAT COMBINE TECHNICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUPPORT TO FARMERS FOR IMPROVED SOIL FERTILITY MANAGEMENT

General

- Ensure that the design and targeting of support packages are informed by this research data, local knowledge and expertise, through coordination with local government technical services, civil society and advocacy groups, producer associations, and research institutions. This will ensure that packages are adapted to the specific profiles and needs of farmers in the targeted sites, avoid duplicating existing resources or initiatives, and that they build on what already works at the local level.
- Ensure that support packages are designed to reach more remote and insecure regions, where women, youth, and underserved groups face increased risks and barriers to access to resources and information.

Improve knowledge and practices about techniques for enhancing soil fertility, minimising soil degradation, and enhancing agricultural productivity and profitability, with a focus on reaching GESI target groups

- Work with and support cooperatives, associations, and producer organisations to implement targeted capacity-building and accompaniment initiatives.
- Adapt information dissemination methods to better reach women and underserved groups, including using communication channels more accessible to people with low literacy (e.g. community radio), and integrating messaging into women's usual gathering places (e.g. social celebrations).

- Align advisory and capacity-building support with existing women's practice and entrepreneurship in high-potential value chains, particularly through promoting peer-to-peer learning, for example market gardens and composting.
- Prioritise increased knowledge provision services among women in sectors where the research demonstrates significant gender gaps, such as on climate-smart technologies and practices.
- Promote knowledge crop-livestock integration techniques, as most women are involved in both sectors to some degree.
- Support initiatives that directly address the most common harmful practices for soil health identified in the research, and which can easily integrate women's participation, for example promote natural pest control strategies to reduce reliance on aggressive chemical pesticides.

Support initiatives to *transform attitudes and behaviours* that limit effective participation of GESI target groups in soil fertility management

- Develop an advocacy and behaviour change communication strategy that defines clear change objectives in attitudes and behaviours related to soil fertility management and GESI, outlines key messaging on empowerment, and targets both men and women to reshape harmful gender norms.
- Collaborate with local civil society organisations and specialised women's empowerment groups to develop targeted messaging, campaigns, and advocacy programs focused on transforming gender stereotypes and changing attitudes towards other vulnerable groups.
- Support sensitisation programs for men that use appropriate community entry points and communication tools to emphasise the value of women's involvement in soil fertility management, focusing on the tangible benefits for households and communities.
- Facilitate culturally appropriate dialogues on household decision-making around soil fertility, focusing on the advantages of shared responsibilities.

Expand access to resources that improve GESI target groups' engagement in soil fertility management:

General

- Work with local NGOs, CSOs and community leaders to prioritise doorstep delivery models, where feasible, recognising that women and vulnerable groups have greater constraints to travel to access resources and services.
- Support access to civil identification documents for women and vulnerable persons, including displaced individuals, as a foundation for rights and resource access.
- Explore targeted support for widows and divorced women, who tend to be more active in productive activities due to necessity and are typically more financially constrained.
- Provide innovation grants to GESI target groups to experiment with agribusiness models that integrate ISFM.

Access to land and agricultural inputs

- Support and accompany cooperatives and associations in advocacy efforts with community leaders and land management councils for the allocation of accessible, secure and productive land to women and GESI target groups.
- Coordinate with land management bodies, including traditional leadership and village land commissions, to acquire, rehabilitate, and secure degraded land for use by GESI target groups.
- Provide appropriate agricultural inputs and training to smallholder farmers, prioritising GESI target groups and locally fabricated and sustainable products, such as bio fertilisers.

Access to equipment and tools

- Expand access to durable equipment that reduces labour intensity and improves efficiency and productivity of farming, herding and agricultural processing activity, ensuring that it is tailored to household and individual roles and responsibilities (e.g. for women engaged in home gardening ensure tools that are appropriate for use small-scale plots).
- Address time poverty among women by facilitating access to labour-saving technologies for domestic responsibilities, such as gas stoves, and engage men to commit to supporting their maintenance.
- Provide adapted agricultural and livestock management tools, and essential mobility aids to persons with disabilities to enhance their access to information and advisory services, markets, training and income-generating opportunities.

Access to information, advice, skills development

- Strengthen the leadership capacities and self-confidence of women and other GESI target groups by providing training, literacy initiatives, discussion groups, exchange platforms, and mentorship opportunities.
- Where possible, incorporate childcare support at training sessions and other activities that target women and may take up a substantial amount of their time.
- Ensure training tools, information resources and kits are accessible for participants with visual, hearing and other impairments.
- Facilitate discussion and exchange platforms for women land users in areas where associations are absent, to promote shared learning and mutual support.

Access to water

- Support off-season market and home gardening for women farmers through provision of home irrigation kits.
- Invest in communal irrigation systems, repair degraded infrastructure to improve water access (e.g. earthen dams, solar-powered boreholes, tube wells).

Access to financial services

- Provide financial management, budgeting and organisational development support to local women-led savings and loan platforms to build financial resilience and support capital accumulation among members.
- Engage in advocacy with local financial institutions to reduce access barriers to credit and loans.
- Offer unconditional grants or financial allocations for the most vulnerable women.

Access to markets

- Partner with private sector actors who have proven GESI commitments for access to agricultural inputs and to invest in activities related to value chain development. Support local private sector actors to scale successful innovations in promoting agricultural enterprise among GESI target groups (e.g. food processing by women farmers). Invest in initiatives that stimulate local production (e.g. composting) and facilitate access to new markets.
- Support women's cooperatives and trader associations with negotiations on pricing and transport to boost access to markets and profitability.

INTERVENTION AREA 2: INTEGRATING INTERVENTIONS AT THE LANDSCAPE AND WATERSHED LEVELS TO OPTIMISE WATER MANAGEMENT, PROMOTE NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS, AND ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY-LED PLANNING

- Provide targeted training and mentorship on advocacy and strategic communication for associations and cooperatives representing women, youth, and vulnerable groups to strengthen their ability to articulate and defend their needs within landscape and watershed management platforms. Provide broader organisational development support to improve their effectiveness and sustainability.
- Ensure that dialogue and decision-making platforms at the watershed and landscape level supported by Soil Values account for the specific mobility and time constraints of women and other underserved actors.
- Provide institutional accompaniment to natural resource management structures to implement and monitor quota systems that guarantee the representation of women, youth, and other vulnerable groups in decision-making positions.
- Support cooperatives and local development associations – where women participate more actively – to engage with landscape and watershed governance bodies to ensure that women's perspectives and priorities are captured and integrated into planning and management decisions.
- Involve relevant regional technical services in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of Soil Values interventions to ensure coordinated and informed action across sectors and levels.

INTERVENTION AREA 3: BROKERING FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS TO SUPPORT LONG-TERM SOIL FERTILITY INVESTMENTS AND EXPLORE PAYMENT MECHANISMS FOR SMALL-SCALE FOOD PRODUCERS, INCLUDING FARMERS AND LIVESTOCK HOLDERS

- Conduct sustained advocacy with national, regional, and local financial institutions to reduce structural barriers that limit access to credit and financial services for women, youth, and other GESI target groups.
- Support institutional capacity-building of farmer and pastoralist producer associations, including through digitalisation, where appropriate and feasible, of operations (e.g. digital sales platforms and accounting systems) to enhance their outreach, revenue streams, and market integration. Promote the inclusion of underrepresented groups, particularly women and youth, within association membership and leadership.
- Facilitate strategic linkages between primary producers and local processors to ensure that agricultural and livestock products are appropriately transformed in line with market demands and existing entrepreneurship of GESI target groups.
- Provide technical and financial support to women to scale up compost production and integrate their enterprises with private sector fertiliser distributors. Promote the establishment of decentralised fertiliser production units and agricultural by-product processing units at the community level, particularly with youth and women cooperatives.
- Provide financial guarantees and technical assistance to microfinance institutions and other financial intermediaries to enable them to ease eligibility criteria for agricultural loans for women, youth, and vulnerable groups and to develop and tailor financial products, such as microcredits, crop insurance, and working capital funds, that are responsive to their needs.

INTERVENTION AREA 4: CONVENING POLICY DIALOGUES AT THE REGIONAL, NATIONAL, AND SUB-NATIONAL LEVELS TO ADVOCATE FOR A CONDUCTIVE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

- Convene platforms for coordination between stakeholders across the agricultural inputs value chain to improve access, affordability, and efficiency, especially for women, youth, and other GESI priority groups. These dialogues should address issues of pricing, timing, quality control, and the role of cooperatives and local enterprises in delivery mechanisms.
- Support targeted capacity-building for policy makers and technical staff on GESI, with a focus on intersectional gender analysis and its application in the design, implementation, and monitoring of soil fertility and natural resource management policies.
- Facilitate policy discussions on strengthening the application of existing gender and inclusion policies in agricultural and livestock sectors.
- In *Nigeria*, engage directly with the Nigerian Institute of Soil Science on the development of the National Agricultural Soil Management Policy (NASMP). There is a critical window of opportunity to strengthen the gender and inclusion components of the policy, using results from this study.

INTERVENTION AREA 5: SCOPING AND LEARNING TO INTEGRATE LESSONS LEARNED BY SOIL VALUES AND OTHER PROGRAMS AND BUILD THE CAPACITY OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- Ensure research activities include mechanisms for community-level dissemination of findings to promote transparency, accountability, and inclusion. Participatory methods such as Participatory Rural Appraisals should be employed to share findings and validate interpretations with consulted communities. This addresses a key concern raised by research participants whereby the lack of feedback loops has led to community disengagement and perceptions of exclusion.
- Institutionalise or join platforms for cross-sectoral exchange with key stakeholders, including UN agencies, national women's associations, decentralised government technical directorates, international NGOs, and local CSOs active in soil fertility and GESI programming.
- Establish a user-friendly digital repository of all research outputs, policy briefs, and technical reports, accessible to consortium members, staff, and partners.
- Update the GESI analysis regularly or implement alternative regular monitoring tools to track shifts in GESI norms, attitudes, and practices. Collaborate with specialised agricultural and social research institutions to design and implement joint research, capacity building, and monitoring initiatives that integrate GESI considerations.
- Ensure private sector actors are involved in learning and exchange activities, as they frequently collect data relevant to soil fertility, market dynamics, and gender participation. Their engagement is essential for a comprehensive evidence base and effective scaling of innovations.
- Develop a partnership engagement strategy aligned with the Soil Values program work plan and the GESI strategy. Conduct regular strategic stakeholder mapping exercises to update understanding of government agencies, civil society actors, private sector actors, development organisations, and technical working groups operating within the watershed intervention areas of the Soil Values program.
- In *Mali*, engage with Dou Touloma project in Ségou and Sikasso to draw on lessons learned, particularly its work with ASPROFER and youth/women cooperatives. Its integrated approach to women's empowerment offers valuable lessons on legal, financial, and normative change.

Empowerment of women and (potentially) marginalised people we work with to realise their basic rights, secure decent work, successfully establish and grow their businesses or increase their agricultural productivity, income and resilience to shocks

ACCESS

power to/over
Equal access to resources, land, inputs, paid work, finance

1. Independent income
2. Access to finance
3. Access to markets (including business registration)
4. Access, control of and/or ownership of assets, land, water resources
5. Access and use of ICT
6. Access to knowledge through training, education, etc.
7. Access to (clean) energy, WASH services, water resources

AGENCY

power within
Decision making, choices, and self confidence

8. Self-confidence in relation to skills
9. Knowledge and skills to manage productive sphere
10. Work/life balance
11. Influence/decision making on household/independent income
12. Influence/decision making at household level e.g., investments, crop selection, access to finance
13. Influence/decision making at household level related to food, energy, WASH, water resource access and use

VOICE

power with
Meaningful and equal participation, networks, and relationships. Influence in communities and governance systems

14. Ability to organise with others e.g. group membership
15. Ability to influence at community and local governance structures
16. Leadership in the community
17. Freedom of movement in public spaces

Resilience or Wellbeing - the ability/adaptability to manage climate and other risks

24. Agency
25. Buffering
26. Connectivity
27. Diversity

Enabling Environment - systems transformation

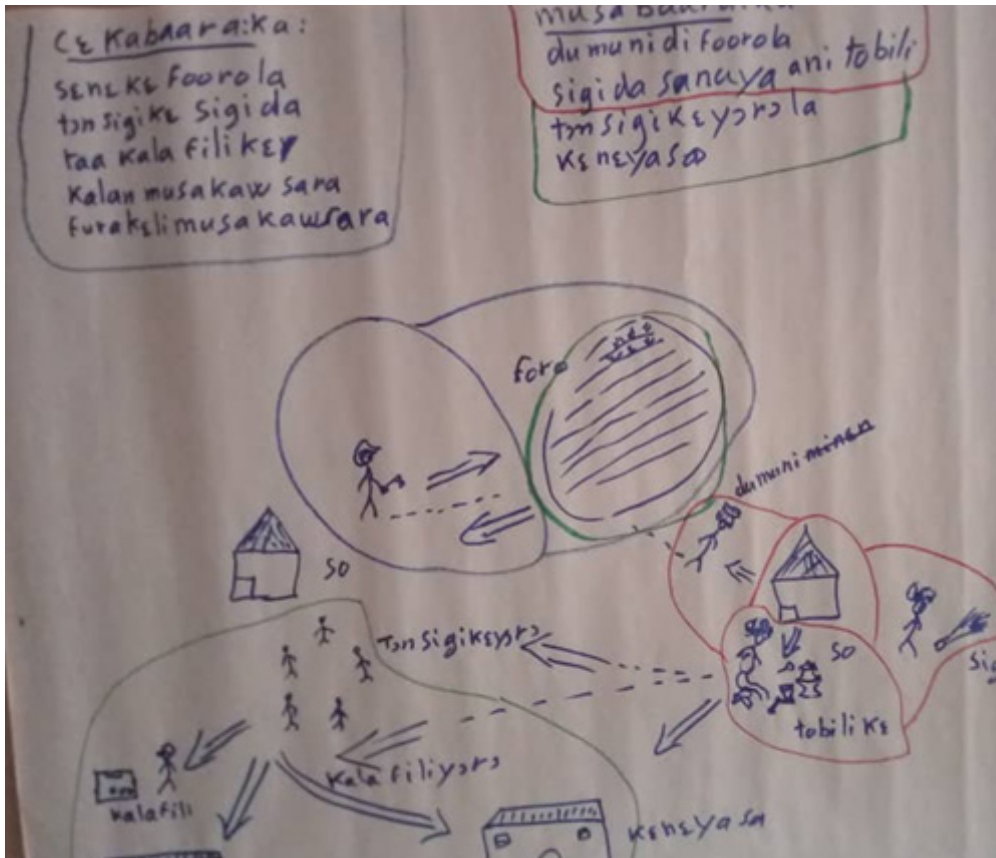
structures and institutions support gender equality and social inclusion (spaces, institutions, government and businesses)

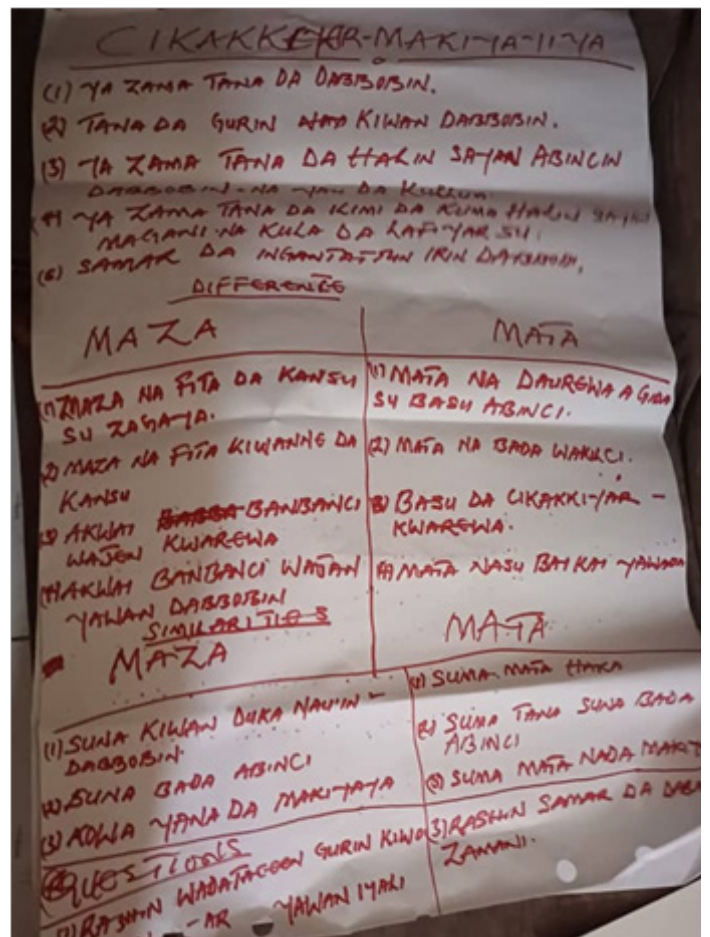
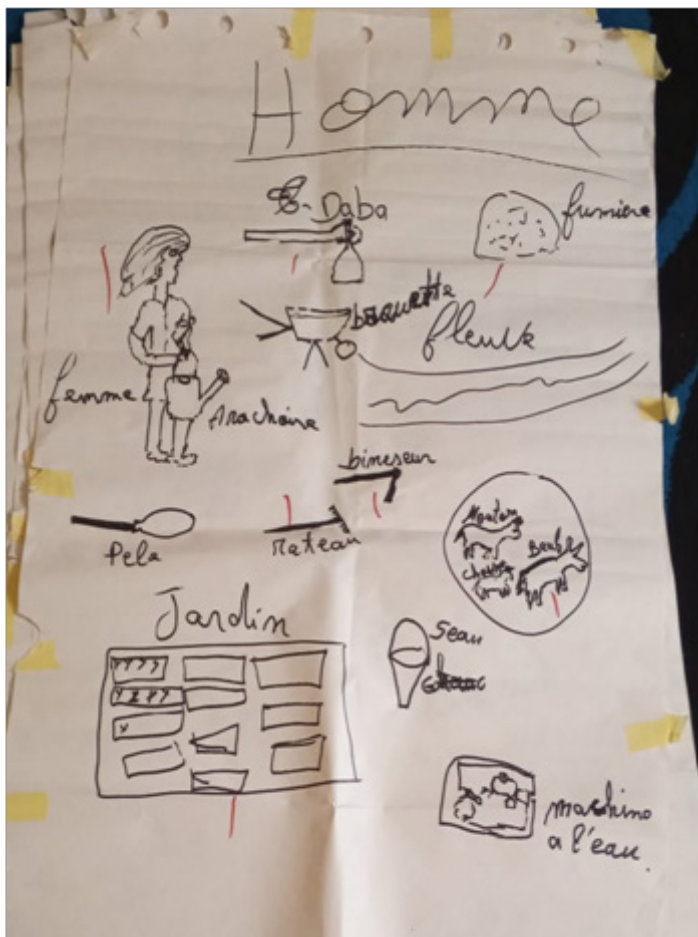
18. Status of women and marginalised people in the workplace
19. Women and marginalised people in the labour market
20. Women and marginalised people's legal and economic rights (including access to basic services)
21. Social norms, attitudes and behaviours
22. Social protection policies relating to agri-food systems, energy or water
23. Status of women and marginalised people in local government structures

Annex IV: Primary Data Collection Sites

Country	Watershed	State/ Region	Village/ward/city
Mali	Upper Niger	Ségou	M'Péba, Berthéla, Cinzana, Ségou city (regional capital)
	Upper Bani	Sikasso	Mandela, Kaboïla, Bogotieré, Sikasso city (regional capital)
		Bamako Capital District	Bamako
Burkina Faso	Lower Mouhoun	Boucle du Mouhoun	Boromo, Bana, Pompoi, Sibi, Pa (Boro and Yamané) and Poura (Dar es Salam and Toecin),
		Centre	Ouagadougou
Niger	Goulbi	Maradi	El Kolta, Hanou Gazané, Magadi, Teke, Danja, Jirataoua, Maradi city (regional capital)
	Maggia	Tahoua	Dogueraoua, El Adowa, Kotoria, Dagarka, Dolli, Dosey, Tahoua (regional capital)
Nigeria	Jama'are	Bauchi	Yola, Dako Dako
	Yartiti	Kano	Wards: Shanono (Shanono), Alajawa (Kandutse), Shakogi (Tsallatawa)
		Bauchi	Wards: Jama'are B (Yola), Jama'are C (Dako Dako), Dogon Jeji
		Kano	Kano city
		Jigawa	Dutse
		Federal Capital Territory	Abuja

Annex V: Sample FGD Exercises





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MAINSTREAMING SUSTAINABLE
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