# FIT Project Summary

World Neighbours Canada Society

November 2022

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| **Canadian Organization** | World Neighbours Canada Society |
| **Innovation Title** | Empowering Women in Burkina Faso |
| **Organization type** | Non-Profit (Registered Charity) |
| **Province** | British Columbia |
| **SMO Contact Details (public facing)** |  |
| **Innovation Theme** | Agriculture |
| **Innovation Type** | Approach |
| **SDG** | SDG 5-Gender Equality |
| **GEM** | GE 3-Gender Transformative |
| **Testing Duration (months)** | 15 months |
| **Total Amount funded** | $221,275 |
| **Local Partner Organization** | Association d’Appui à la Promotion du Développement Durable des Communautés (APDC) |
| **Local Partner Country** | Burkina Faso |
| **Region** |  |
| **Intended Participants** |  |
| **Point in Testing** | Field Preparation |
| **Description of Innovation/Testing**  World Neighbours Canada (WNC), and its local partner organization, Association d’Appui à la Promotion du Développement Durable des Communautés (APDC) tested this innovative solution over a 15 month period. The testing has taken a gender-transformative approach to facilitating an informal “family-based animal-fattening enterprise.” This innovative solution identified women as direct beneficiaries of varied professional training, and gender sensitization workshops that sought to build competencies relevant to the advancement of women’s economic empowerment in households, and in the livestock smallholder sector. It also provided men, as well as adolescent girls and boys with age and gender-specific sensitization workshops that allowed them to critically reflect on changes to the existing notions of gendered power relations and labour roles, and to recognize the potential benefits of women’s economic empowerment.  The notion of developing and testing a sustainable method for animal-fattening originated with women in Burkina Faso. They deemed animal-fattening a valuable intervention because it does not depend on regular rainfall and it generates regular income. This solution targets limiting factors to women’s full and equitable economic participation in households and the livestock sector, including the following obstacles: women are often constrained to arduous labour with little capacity for income-generation; they have meager chances to develop professional knowledge and skills; and they lack access to cooperative relationships (mutual respect, human dignity, and safety from gender-based violence) within households.  Women’s tacit exclusion from the processes of purchasing and selling animals has long been a barrier to their capacity to form informal animal-fattening businesses. Our innovative solution addresses the above obstacles by providing professional training workshops for women in various subject areas: animal-fattening, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, production scheduling and gender sensitization. Inclusion in such interactions can promote progress on women’s full economic participation in households and in the livestock smallholder sector. It can facilitate a transition to relationships of mutual accountability between all household members. | |
| **Testing Hypothesis**  If women increase their level of control in managing animal-fattening enterprises, while men and adolescent girls and boys develop an increased awareness of the benefits of women’s economic empowerment, then there will be an increase in women’s full and equitable economic participation in households and the livestock smallholder sector. Assumptions include that women will be able to acquire the professional knowledge and skills necessary to form and maintain an informal animal-fattening business despite limited literacy and formal education; men and adolescents will transition to more cooperative and mutually empowering relations in households; and animal-fattening will remain viable through the testing period. | |
| **Testing Framework**  The testing methodology used an experimental approach including two control groups and three innovation groups. There were three phases to our solution’s testing. The control group (CG) consisted of 30 women, and their household members. CG women got training only in animal-fattening techniques and skills as this represented the baseline practice in the local context. The total innovation group (IG) consisted of 110 women, and their household members. IG women received professional training in all of the topics outlined in the performance measurement framework (PMF). The other members of their households –men, and adolescent girls and boys –received gender sensitization workshops. During the final reporting period, all of the innovation and control groups were operative, although the third IG (30 women) had not had sufficient time to complete a full project cycle (beginning with purchase and ending with sale of the fattened animals).  Baseline and endline data were collected on women’s capacities and attitudes of household members. Thus, two measures were used for data comparison: (a) control group v. innovation group, and (b) baseline v. endline. The hypothesis was to be validated by demonstrating that women, men and adolescents perceive that a family-based animal-fattening enterprise is an asset to all members of the household; that an increased number of women feel they have the capacity to manage such an enterprise; and that there is increased support from family members. The local partner managed the testing; beneficiaries and local women’s groups were consulted throughout the project’s duration. | |
| **SMO Background (Testing/Region)**  This innovative solution targeted the eastern province of Gourma in Burkina Faso. The semi-arid climate with its frequent and worsening droughts destabilizes the single season of rain-fed subsistence agriculture that is the basis of most people’s livelihoods in the region. Decreasing agricultural production and food security have led to acute malnutrition exceeding critical thresholds in many areas. Since transportation, water, health, and energy infrastructure is minimal in rural Gourma, access to productive assets, such as livestock, is vital to ensuring food security, and sustainable income-generation.  Few women in rural Gourma are literate, and most women aged 16 and above have no formal education. Thus, their inclusion in income-generating activities is limited. Women continue to be acutely affected by precipitous decreases in food security, rising armed conflicts, and measures mitigating the spread of COVID-19. The strong patriarchal norms and attitudes in rural Gourma manifest in the form of women’s low levels of literacy and literate numeracy, lack of access to productive assets, meager chances to develop and exercise professional knowledge or skills in income-generating activities, and lack of cooperative relations in households. | |
| **How is this innovative?**  Fattening of sheep by women, at a basic level, was already practiced in the program area. However, in the context of rural Gourma, training women farmers (who are mostly illiterate) to manage technical, financial and managerial aspects of sheep-fattening enterprises was innovative. The difference may seem subtle, but the testing showed substantially different outcomes between women who were given “normal” support (funds to purchase sheep and basic veterinary care provided) and women who were trained to lead family-based sheep-fattening enterprises.  Given this context of little or no literacy and literate numeracy, it was initially difficult to assess the degree to which IG women developed some capacities or could be deemed competent to exercise some forms of professional knowledge/skills. World Neighbours Canada and its local partner APDC identified locally adapted methods to measure the capacity of participating women: although women are not able to read, comprehend, and write sound records of business transactions, or animal feeding/vaccination schedules, they were able to provide comprehensive oral accounts of these documents, through which they demonstrate the capacity to develop and begin to apply the relevant forms of professional knowledge/skills. APDC staff are aware that on-going support will need to be provided to the women, beyond the term of the project, to ensure that skills and competencies continue to be solidified.  Oral accounts of key professional skills such as financial record-keeping and scheduling proved valuable tools in allowing program leaders and women participants to understand a.) the key similarities and differences between oral and written accounts of business transactions and b.) how to structure oral accounts that identify and organize information relating to business transactions in accordance with the standard practices of written accounts, which are considered more authoritative.  The results show that the previous assumptions that women with little or no formal education, literacy, and literate numeracy cannot manage an informal animal-fattening business were incorrect. Women have demonstrated a newfound sense of self-belief and confidence in managing their animal-fattening businesses.  At the conclusion of the testing there was a significant improvement in local perceptions of the women who actively participate in the purchase and sale of animals among IG beneficiaries from across all age and gender-specific groups. | |
| **Potential Impact of Innovation (in general)**  In focus group discussions at various points during the project, women beneficiaries, and other household members, commented on the importance of this project. One woman’s testimony indicates the power of the approach: “This project really saves us women. Thanks to this project, our husbands have changed a lot. Respect has been established between us [husbands and wives], and we love each other more. Our children are happy because we support them well at school.”  Another woman stated: “APDC came to choose ten women from our village to practice animal-fattening. They helped provide funds for us to purchase sheep for fattening. We fattened the sheep and we ask you to continue to support us. Thanks to APDC, our husbands help us now. Our children also help us. Every fortnight, the ten women from Ganyéla who are part of the FIT project meet at Adjima’s house [the house of a woman who is recognized as the leader of the innovation group women in Ganyéla]. We ask each other questions to find out how each woman’s sheep is growing and what their health status is. We count on APDC, an organization that continues to support us, to get us out of our suffering. Thank you.”  The husband of one of the women beneficiaries added these comments: “I am the one who supports the women in the animal-fattening project initiated by APDC. [He and his wife act as community leaders among the innovation group households in their village. They invite innovation group women to their house for check-in and progress meetings once every two weeks]. I organized a meeting with all the husbands of the beneficiary women [the innovation group women in Ganyéla] to explain the importance of this project for our families. All of these men understood me well, and they are helping their wives with animal-fattening. We are really happy for all your support. We have given a lot of permission to our women to do the work of animal-fattening well. No woman does this work alone. The husbands and the children support them a lot. If activities are a bit difficult for the women, men do these for them. We are happy with the project. In case there is another opportunity for development support soon, we ask APDC and the partners [WNC and FIT] to think of us. We are fully prepared to work with them day and night.”  And his wife added these comments: “In the village of Ganyéla, there are ten innovation group women. We have meetings to exchange and share experiences every fortnight. During these meetings we work to share all the information that awakens the mentality of women on good animal-fattening practices. During these meetings, each woman takes the floor to say how she takes care of her sheep. This sharing allows each woman to improve the quality of the food given to her sheep. It is the same for veterinary care. Those who have sought treatment for their animals explain how they succeeded in healing their animal. This allows the other women to imitate good examples. Our husbands support us a lot. We understand each other well. If a woman needs to go away from the house for some time, her husband will take very good care of the sheep (clean the workshop and feed the animals well). The woman will come back to find that everything is fine, and will be very happy. Since we have good understanding with our husbands, there are no problems. We thank you [APDC, WNC, and FIT] very much for all of your multiple supports. You have contributed value to our lives.” | |
| **Potential Impact on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment**  Prior to innovation testing, very few women had ever directly observed, or participated in, an animal purchase or sale process.By the end of testing there was a significant improvement in local perceptions of the women who actively participate in the purchase or sale of animals among IG beneficiaries from across all age and gender-specific groups.  In this testing, women were the primary beneficiaries of funding for the purchase of sheep. They were able to develop and apply professional knowledge and skills relevant to forming and sustaining an informal animal-fattening business. By the end of testing, the perception of women’s labour roles as subordinate or supplementary to those of men and boys decreased substantially.  Men’s engagement in the innovation testing was encouraged through a novel approach to animal-fattening that is family-based and seeks to foster positive intra-marital and intra-household relations. Such positive relations have been harnessed by the IG women to promote knowledge-sharing about, and increased participation in, animal purchase and sale processes.  All women (110) from the Innovation Group participated in the animal purchase process at the local cattle markets. The Phase One and Two IG women (80) observed and participated in the animal sale process as well. All IG women (110) engaged with veterinary service providers to ensure timely vaccination for their animals for the first time. The IG women’s inclusion in the animal purchase and sale processes and in arranging vaccinations was contrary to local norms which tacitly exclude women from these activities.  In the final reporting period, women who participated in the purchase or sale of animals were characterized in entirely distinct terms as women who could "get along with their husbands,” and garnered praise and encouragement. The final evaluation data suggests that these women have built ways to meaningfully participate in animal purchase and sale processes that allow them to learn how to conduct these processes while fortifying relations of mutual respect and cooperation with the men in their households.  Prior to innovation testing, boys tended not to support their household members to complete animal-fattening related tasks such as feeding animals, fetching fodder, and ensuring clean enclosures and water. Rather, women and girls tended to be responsible for these tasks. As a result of the innovation testing, IG boys have increased their degree of contribution to the gendered labour linked to animal-fattening, “improv[ing] their attitudes towards girls by participating in household chores, such as washing dishes, cleaning the yard, and fetching water.”  In addition to the changes within households and improvements in relations between family members, there were improvements in relationships between women beneficiaries within innovation villages. Communication between IG women developed to a greater degree, with innovators sharing information, supporting women with no literacy and literate numeracy skills by assisting them with completion of written records, as well as providing general encouragement and opportunities to share concerns about the care of their animals. Such regular communication between women within a particular village was not a typical part of village life prior to this testing. | |
| **Testing challenges**  The existing conditions of poverty in the local context posed an obstacle for the women - having enough funds to maintain or increase the number of animals in one’s ownership was a barrier to undertaking a sheep-fattening enterprise. This is especially so for those beneficiaries who have not yet completed one round of animal-fattening and secured the profits from the sale of their first set of animals to provide income to continue the activity.  Compounding the existing economic precarities of poverty, the increased presence of armed terrorist groups in rural Gourma has hindered the prospect of development in much of the testing environment, such that “the only association that marks its presence [in rural Gourma] through activities with women and men” is now APDC – the local partner of World Neighbours Canada.  The risks of ongoing armed conflict and increasing presence of terrorist groups in rural Gourma have continued to inform the testing framework in the final reporting period. Mitigation measures included hosting all professional training and gender sensitization workshops in secure locations; hosting training workshops in Fada, the district capital which is more secure than rural Gourma; hiring local instructors rather than bringing in experts from Ouagadougou; disseminating prompt information regarding the movements of terrorist groups; and limiting large gatherings of beneficiaries to avoid drawing undue attention.  In the final reporting period, we were notified by APDC that two of their staff encountered terrorists in two separate incidents while travelling in the local region. The APDC staff did not incur any sort of physical harm as a result of these incidents. However, they each had vehicles – a jeep and a motorcycle - taken away from them by the terrorists. Following these cases, further precautions were taken in conducting all remaining testing activities, both project activities and final data collection. The timeline for all testing activities was extended, and the innovation end date was changed from July 30, 2022 to August 31, 2022. WNC, APDC, and the beneficiaries are all grateful for having been able to proceed slowly and carefully and able to complete all the remaining testing activities as planned. | |
| **Results and Impact**  The innovative solution’s progress includes increases across nearly all gender-sensitive indicators in the PMF. Innovation group women have developed an increased income-generation capacity, upgraded their professional knowledge and skills, structured animal-fattening activities as informal and “family-based” businesses, secured increased support from household members for tasks related to the care and purchase of animals, and begun to identify themselves as agents of development and as economic actors who merit greater decisional authority and respect within the household and the village. Though innovation group women worked in difficult conditions, with some of the necessary assumptions for the validation of our hypothesis coming under strain, as evidenced by the progress of innovation group beneficiaries, the family-based animal-fattening enterprise approach, did produce the hypothesized impact: it resulted in increases in women’s full and equitable economic participation in households, and in the livestock smallholder sector.  Our innovative solution’s novel approach consists in supporting IG women’s transition to a form of animal-fattening that allows them to structure their activities as family-based informal businesses. This family-based structure allows women to operate in a context in which their existing relations with the men and boys in their households can determine, or affect to a great degree, the extent of their economic participation. These relationships can affect the options available to women in making meaningful strides towards their economic empowerment. Notwithstanding their effects on women’s potential positions as economic agents, their relationships with the men and boys in their households hold an overarching social significance and constitute a moral and social good that women seek to preserve. As we examine our data, we insist upon fully acknowledging women’s desire and intent to honour the multitude of social positions they inhabit. We recognize that women’s desire to maintain positive intra-marital and intra-household relations, while working to expand the range of economic positions they may adopt through animal-fattening, does not imply their blind adherence to parochial cultural values, or internalized sexism. Rather, it shows that women appreciate the complex considerations that one must attend to while enacting any strategy for their economic empowerment under difficult conditions. | |
| **Key Lessons**   * **Testing process**   During the testing process, WNC and APDC took into account the feedback from the first innovation group for less visible staff oversight in purchasing animals. APDC staff provide facilitation and orientation on the animal purchase process to ensure transparency and accountability in the appropriate use of funds, while encouraging the meaningful inclusion of women in the animal purchase process. But the beneficiaries felt that the presence of APDC staff at the cattle market, and the practice of a large group of women attending the market at the same time was negatively impacting their ability to negotiate with sheep vendors.   * **Hypothesis**   The hypothesis was perhaps ambitious given the short duration of the testing period and major challenges such as illiteracy and insecurity. However, as stated above, enough evidence was gathered to indicate that the hypothesis was validated.   * **Gender Equality**   Engaging men and boys in the testing process to include their participation and their support in women’s animal raising and purchase/sale processes proved to be an even more important outcome than originally imagined.  As a result of the innovation testing, IG boys have increased their degree of contribution to the gendered labour linked to animal-fattening, "improv[ing] their attitudes towards girls by participating in household chores, such as washing dishes, cleaning the yard, and fetching water.” When adolescent boys increase the degree of support that they offer in household labour, which includes the labour associated with animal-fattening, it can be that girls experience improvements in their educational outcomes, and income-generating capacity.   * **Other**   WNC has learned about how to conduct Rapid and In-Depth Gender Scans, and how to use the data generated through these scans to inform all aspects of the design and testing framework in a given project; WNC has learned how to select a set of key gender issues that a project will seek to address, and how to create an effective monitoring and evaluation plan to assess progress on the achievement of priority gender equality outcomes; WNC now better understands what it means to justify the need to address a development problem using a specific solution on the basis of that solution being innovative; and, WNC has observed that the data gathered to determine the efficacy of an Environmental Management Plan can contribute to an improved understanding of the interactions between gender and health. | |

**Lessons Learned Questions and Answers:**

Q: What would you have changed in your project now that it is completed, if you had to redo it?

A: We would have considered the issue of illiteracy more explicitly and taken concrete steps to ensure that women with little or no literacy would fully benefit from all training.

A: Had we known about the work of My Oral Village and their approach to supporting illiterate women (with respect to reading, writing and numeracy skills) we would have attempted to integrate such an approach into our professional financial literacy sessions.

A: We would change our interview questions to acknowledge clearly that the target was not for women to be able to do things on their own, but to lead the family unit for some activities and to play an active role in other activities.

Q: What advice would you give to other SMOs working in the same/similar field?

A: Don’t overlook the potential impact of gender awareness sessions. We thought these sessions would be less valued by participants than more practical skills training, but in fact they may have had the biggest impact and were appreciated by both women and men.

A: Don’t assume that providing livestock and some inputs to women will have an impact on their family income or on gender equality. This is normal practice for SMOs (as it was for us), but we found that intensive training on livestock raising, enterprise management and gender equality were needed to ensure measurable impacts on family income and gender equality.