

# Improving Resilience through Village Savings and Loan Associations





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## Acronyms

BMS	Business Management Skills
BRACED	Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate and Environmental Disasters
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CBT	Community Based Trainers
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IGA	Income Generating Activities
KII	Key Informant Interview
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association



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## Executive Summary

Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International – Switzerland has been working in South Darfur to improve resilience at the household and community level through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). In VSLAs, community members form a self-managed group in which money is saved. Members can take out loans from the savings to invest in a project or to cover sudden cash needs. After the saving cycle is over, savings and interests from loans are distributed back to the contributing members. Since there is little evidence about the impact of VSLAs on household and community resilience, this study focused on these linkages in the Sudanese context. The four key lines of enquiry for this study are:

1. How do VSLAs help households and communities to improve their resilience to repeated shocks and crises?
2. What differences exist in how VSLAs improve resilience of males compared to females?
3. What best practices and lessons can be drawn from how VSLAs are currently functioning?
4. What gaps in evidence and data exist that would benefit from further studies?

Forcier Consulting conducted the research in October 2016 in four villages in Kass locality, South Darfur through eight key informant interviews, eight focus group discussions, and eight case stories.

### Livelihoods, Savings and Loans

Farming and livestock rearing have been and remain the main sources of income in the researched villages with a smaller proportion of the community being involved in trading or manual labour. None of the income sources were found to be stable year-round as a consequence of environmental hazards<sup>1</sup> and conflicts. Additionally, saving is uncommon since most community members prefer to invest their money in assets, such as crops and livestock. When community members face a shock or stress, or need money to invest, they can take out informal loans. However, the system of informal loans depends on the degree of trust in the ability of the loan taker to pay back the loan.

### Village Savings and Loan Associations

VSLA projects in Sudan are supported by Resilience in the Horn, Secure Economic Empowerment and Livelihood Diversification and Non-State Actors, funded by EU and Dutch Government. More than 300 VSLA groups were established in South Darfur through this project. The Resilience in the Horn project, which is funding this study, set an additional goal to utilise the VSLAs to increase resilience at the household and community level.

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental hazards are events which could potentially threaten the surrounding natural environment (e.g. droughts, etc.)



VSLA members agree amongst each other how much to put in the savings box and what the priorities for loans are. If a member wants to take out a loan, he or she will need to defend the plan in front of the VSLA committee. Most of the VSLAs have agreed among members that the first priority is to take out loans for business investments. VSLAs also have a social insurance box to cover social events, occasions, and emergencies such as funerals. While members pay approx. 10% interest rate over loans from the VSLA savings box, no interest is paid over loans from the social insurance box. Despite the efforts to inform the beneficiaries of this operational structure, some confusion existed in the initial stages relating to whether CARE would provide and be able to withdraw cash from the VSLAs, though these were eventually addressed. Additionally, particularly male community members exhibited early distrust towards the VSLAs until sufficient proof of their contributions to the community became apparent through the VLSA activities.

While most of the loans are currently taken by individual members, the idea to invest money as a group is increasing in popularity. Projects run by a group of VSLA members have the potential to increase profits for each member of that group and, as such, should be encouraged. Additionally, such loans may have important implications in building resilience beyond the individual/household levels as discussed below.

### **Resilience**

According to the 'Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters' programme (BRACED), resilience is the "ability to anticipate, avoid, plan for, cope with, recover from and adapt to (climate related) shocks and stresses"<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, resilience can be broken down into four components, namely adaptation, anticipation, absorption, and transformation.

At the household level, the main shocks that are being experienced in the researched villages are the death, illness or unemployment of an income-producing household member. At the community level, the main shocks are droughts, lack of pastures, fires, and conflicts.

Anticipation is defined as the ability of the individual or group in question to foresee, prepare for, and mitigate potential risks. This occurred mostly, although still in a limited manner, at the household level. Individual VSLA members were found to replace the materials of their houses with bricks in order to prevent their house from burning in a fire. In addition, farmers harvested their crops earlier in the year to prevent pastoralists from allowing their livestock to eat the harvest. On the community level, however, less improvement was witnessed. While training was conducted on early warning systems, there are no early warning systems in the villages. Finally, community meetings were held to avoid conflicts between farmers and pastoralists, but these meetings are unrelated to the VSLA and, in addition, were not always found to be effective. However, VSLAs did improve community cohesion which, as such, could decrease the likelihood that conflicts will emerge among community members. In other words, while households understand the concept of anticipation, most anticipatory measures require positive action at the community level, something which VSLAs are currently unable to achieve.

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<sup>2</sup> DFID (2014a). KPI4 Guidance. U.K.: Department for International Development.



Absorption is a component of resilience that is well tackled through the VSLA project, both at the household and community level. Most VSLA members have been able to save money and invest in assets that can be used during times of shocks and crises. In addition, being a member of the VSLA provides them with an opportunity to take out a loan if a shock occurs. At the community level, VSLAs have improved bonds among people. This is evidenced by the fact that community members provide assistance to each other in times of hardship. While such support existed before the VSLAs, it has increased significantly, especially among women. As such, the activities of the VSLAs have contributed to the strengthening of local informal support structures for shock absorption even beyond the VSLA itself.

Adaptation occurred primarily at the household level. Most VSLA members were able to diversify their income and as such, not be dependent on one source of income during a shock. Crucially, the VSLAs have made a huge contribution in enabling households to increase the diversity in their income in terms of trades, but by enabling female household members to earn incomes that help support the households. However, some VSLA members had invested their money in exactly the same thing they were doing before, which seemed to have less gains for them. Among those members, no or only a limited increase in income was found and their ability to deal effectively with the environment, in which shocks are common, remains limited. This is likely a result of limited follow-up visits and advice from the implementing NGO partner. As such, more efforts are needed from the implementing NGO are needed to monitor and provide advice in order to ensure the best possible outcomes from loans and investments.

### **Transformation**

A key element of transformation is women empowerment. VSLAs were found to have contributed strongly to women empowerment at the household level. Through being able to earn independent incomes, and gaining training and subsequent positions of responsibility, women have increased their decision power and have gained confidence in the sampled areas especially at the household level.

However, these had not at least yet led to changes in overall community decision-making structures, as females are still largely excluded from positions of high responsibility on this level. Men also experienced positive effects from joining the VSLA, although mostly regarding their income only. For men, however, it was found that a possible stigma from joining this “women’ project” could lead to a decrease in respect at the community level.

### **Conclusion**

Through the VSLA project, participating households have become more resilient at the household level. Firstly, the capacity of the households to absorb the most common shocks, such as droughts, conflicts and fires, has increased as they have become through business investments less reliant on a single source of income, both in income-producing individuals and trades. Beyond this, some



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meaningful steps were taken to reduce the likelihood of issues such as fires through investments in improved facilities at the household.

At the community level, however, no major changes occurred as a result of the VSLA project. Early warning systems, for example, had not been implemented through the VSLAs. This is not surprising as the VSLA model in its current state targets households rather than communities. Many community-level projects cannot be meaningfully engaged in by any individual household, even if benefits of cooperation would significantly contribute to the stability of each household. It is essentially a traditional collective action problem that limits the degree to which VSLAs can serve to address these issues without modifications. This is not to say that VSLAs do not contribute to community resilience, as each household that is able to withstand shocks while remaining productive will mean that this household is not in need of assistance and can in fact assist others.

In summary, the VSLAs can and do contribute to the household-level resilience, especially when combined with training and awareness raising. This has implications in improving the resilience of the community as a whole, as households are better able to provide informal support to each other. However, within its current form, it is unlikely that community-level shock anticipation and transformation activities can be addressed without some modifications or incentives due to the collective action problems associated with the costs and benefits.

Despite the fact that the project is focused on women empowerment, resilience was found to be increased for men and women. For example, when a woman gets her own source of income, this will also increase the resilience of her husband since there are now multiple sources of income in the family. Within households, women increased their decision power and were now looked upon with more respect. At the community level, only limited changes for women were observed. In general, joining the VSLA as a male is sometimes confronted with substantial reservations. Since the project originally started for women only, the project was often seen as a women's project and men who join therefore are at risk to be stigmatized. Moving forward, it is advisable to:

- Provide NGO partners with training on the different capacities of resilience and how to build resilience at the household and community levels
- Increase management of VSLAs from the implementing NGO partner to ensure investments are most valuable from a resilience perspective
- Provide female VSLA member with trainings on leadership and encourage them to take leadership positions within the VSLA, but also outside
- In those areas where VSLAs are well developed among women, organize special meetings for men to mitigate the stigma of joining a VSLA



## Introduction

As one of the largest international NGOs, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) supports developmental and humanitarian aid projects in 95 countries. Since 1978, CARE has worked in Sudan with a mission to “save lives by providing relief services to internally displaced people, assist conflict-affected populations to restore livelihoods, and promote peace and stability.” In Sudan, CARE is represented by CARE Switzerland and runs programs focused on water and sanitation, hygiene education, primary health care, nutrition and livelihoods support.

Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) are one of CARE's most successful approaches to fight poverty and promote women empowerment. While first established in Niger in 1991, the approach has now been implemented in 26 African countries, serving almost 4 million members. In a VSLA, between 15 to 25 community members form a self-managed group in which money is saved. Members can take out loans from the savings to invest in a business or to cover sudden cash needs. After the saving period is over, savings and interest from loans are distributed back to the contributing members. CARE does not provide any direct capital investment, but members receive extensive training on a variety of topics, including how to manage their savings.

In South Darfur, there are currently more than 300 VSLAs, 211 of which were established in Kass and Gereida localities (Kass: 125, Gereida: 83). All VSLAs in Gereida were established in 2016 while the majority of VSLAs in Kass were established in 2015. The majority of VSLA members are women.

Despite there being a large amount of research on the impact of VSLAs on women and households' abilities to improve the diversity of their livelihoods, generating additional income, and changes to community cohesion and decision making, less is known about the impact on household and community resilience. This study will therefore assess the linkages between VSLAs and resilience in the Sudanese context through the following four key lines of enquiry:

1. How do VSLAs help households and communities to improve their resilience to repeated shocks and crises?
2. What differences exist in how VSLAs improve resilience of males compared to females?
3. What best practices and lessons can be drawn from how VSLAs are currently functioning?
4. What gaps in evidence and data exist that would benefit from further studies?

Forcier Consulting conducted this study in October 2016 in four villages in Kass locality, South Darfur. In addition to a thorough desk review of project documentation and secondary sources, Forcier Consulting undertook 8 key informant interviews, 8 focus group discussions (approximately 10 participants each), and 8 case studies focusing on the main elements of resilience. This report provides an overview of the main findings.



## Theoretical Framework

Resilience has become an important term in the language of many disciplines. Despite the importance of the term, there exists no consensus over its definition. One of the more popular definitions describes resilience as the ability of systems (e.g. communities) to function in the face of disturbances<sup>3</sup>. To conceptualize this definition, one needs a number of properties within social systems that allow these systems to provide stability, predictable rules, security and other benefits to its members<sup>4</sup>.

The 3As+T framework as set out in the 'Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate and Environmental Disasters' programme (BRACED)<sup>5</sup> forms the theoretical conceptualization of resilience in this research. According to the BRACED model, resilience is the "ability to anticipate, avoid, plan for, cope with, recover from and adapt to (climate related) shocks and stresses"<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, resilience can be broken down into four components, namely adaptation, anticipation, absorption, and transformation.

When social systems are able to adjust to multiple and future changes in their environment, they are considered adaptive. This encompasses the ability to take steps to create a desired state in a changing environment or an environment that is about to change. Adaptive social systems are able to minimize the chance of a shock occurring and also mitigate its impact. Successful indicators of adaptive capacity include income stability, asset ownership, climate information, and the availability of basic services. Preparation and planning before a shock refers to the anticipative capacity of social systems. It requires a pro-active action to avoid the shock or mitigate its impact. Early warning systems and preparedness and planning mechanisms are indicators of the anticipative capacity. Finally, absorption refers to the ability of social systems to handle and absorb disasters and hazards. It requires communities and household to make use of available skills and resources to manage shocks. Indicators include savings and safety nets, as well as substitutable assets and income sources.

While the first three components refer to capacities of resilience, "'transformation' is a not a capacity but rather an approach to holistically and fundamentally build, reshape and enhance people's capacity to adapt to, anticipate and absorb shocks and stresses"<sup>7</sup>. Indicators mainly focus on women empowerment as this is a key element at the heart of the BRACED programme.

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<sup>3</sup> Holling, C.S. (1973) 'Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems'. Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics. 4, pp.1-23

<sup>4</sup> Bahadur, A., Peters, K. Wilkinson, E., Pichon, F., Gray, K. and Tanner, T. (2015) The 3As: Tracking resilience across BRACED. BRACED. [www.braced.org/resources/i/?id=cd95acf8-68dd-4f48-9b4124543f69f9f1](http://www.braced.org/resources/i/?id=cd95acf8-68dd-4f48-9b4124543f69f9f1)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> DFID (2014a). KPI4 Guidance. U.K.: Department for International Development.

<sup>7</sup> Bahadur, A., Peters, K. Wilkinson, E., Pichon, F., Gray, K. and Tanner, T. (2015) The 3As: Tracking resilience across BRACED. BRACED. [www.braced.org/resources/i/?id=cd95acf8-68dd-4f48-9b4124543f69f9f1](http://www.braced.org/resources/i/?id=cd95acf8-68dd-4f48-9b4124543f69f9f1)



## Methodology

For this research, a desk review and analysis of secondary sources, as well as qualitative data collection was conducted in one locality (Kass) in South Darfur. Four villages were included in the study, namely Singita, Limo, Jomeaza Lagaraw, and Bulbul. Qualitative data collecting occurred in October 2016 and included Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and case studies.

### Desk review and Analysis of Secondary Data

Before the start of the research, a thorough desk review was conducted to guide the tool development as well as analyse existing data. The desk review and secondary data analysis included amongst others the following sources:

- Project documents Resilience in the Horn
- The 3As: Tracking resilience across BRACED
- Access Africa: Village Savings and Loan Associations Field Officer Guide
- Village Savings and Loan Association Program on Women Empowerment Evidences from Sudan
- Resilience Assessment for the Graduation with Resilience to Achieve Sustainable Development (GRAD) Project

### Qualitative research: KIIs, FGDs, and Case Stories

Qualitative data was collected from a number of respondents in order to elicit narrative and in-depth information about the project activities. Participants were selected with assistance from CARE.

Tool	Participants
Focus Group Discussion	Female members of VSLAs (3), male members of VSLAs (2), mixed members of VSLAs (2), non-members of VSLAs (1): 8 FGDs in total
Key Informant Interview	Community leader (2), VSLA leader (2), CARE field staff (3), Local NGO Partner (1): 8 KIIs in total
Case Studies	8 case studies

KIIs were conducted as part of the primary data collection in order to gather nuanced and open-ended information from key individuals relevant to the project. The aims of the KIIs were to get an understanding of the overall impact of the VSLA in the village and relations between villages, a full picture of the project implementation, differences between villages in the areas, challenges encountered, and lessons learnt.

Focus group discussions were used to allow project beneficiaries to contribute nuanced and open-ended responses to complicated questions and concepts, eliciting more information on attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. FGD were designed using the participatory methods framework to



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ensure that participants were comfortable with sharing their thoughts freely and the data reliably reflects the realities on the ground. It was chosen to conduct FGDs with project beneficiaries both in gender-separated and mixed groups in order to analyse the potential differences in views and impacts between genders. Non-beneficiaries, were interviewed in order to better understand non-participation and evaluate the impact on resilience between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.

Case studies were conducted with individuals who in one way or another strongly reflect some aspect or impact of the project implementation, particularly in relation to the key lines of enquiry. Case stories aim to allow respondents to tell in their own words how participating in the project has impacted their life. Respondents qualified for case stories were mostly within other qualitative tools (for example, within the FGD participants).

### **Limitations**

The main limitations for this study were:

- Research was limited to four villages in Kass locality while the project has been implemented in two localities (Kass and Gereida). Results can therefore not automatically be generalized to the situation in Gereida locality.
- The researcher conducting the qualitative interviews and focus group discussion is male. This created a risk that women would not feel free to speak about certain issues that they perceive to be sensitive. In order to mitigate this risk, the researcher was trained in the participatory methods framework and how to create an open atmosphere in which women feel free to speak out about sensitive issues.



## Savings and Loans

In all of the researched villages, farming and livestock rearing were the main sources of income. It is estimated that more than 80% of adult community members are involved in farming, at least during some parts of the year. Most farmers cultivate crops such as groundnuts, sorghum, durra and millet during the rainy season, but those who have their own water source may also cultivate vegetables during the summer<sup>8</sup>. Trading and manual labour are the next main sources of income. A significant proportion of the community members involved in farming during the rainy season, will use the summer to do trading or manual labour. Traders go to Kass to buy large amounts of goods and try to sell them at local markets. Community members involved in manual labour, on the other hand, will often work at farms or cut trees for charcoal.

None of the main income sources are particularly stable. Farming usually provides food for 6 or 7 months a year<sup>9</sup>, which consequently leads to a food gap for those who are not involved in trading or manual labour during the remainder of the year. In addition, environmental hazards, in particular droughts, have the potential to negatively influence or completely destroy the harvest. Pastoralist also suffer from droughts as there may not be enough water or pastures available for their livestock. Trading has been significantly impacted by security issues. In the past, many full-time traders have returned to farming as a consequence of conflicts<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, during the rainy season some of the roads are closed and this limits the possibilities for traders. Manual labour, finally, is not a stable source of income as it mostly depends on needs of those outsourcing the labour and is mostly seasonal work.

The researched communities had repeatedly been confronted with a variety of shocks and crises (droughts, fires, conflict, etc.). Due to strong community cohesion, however, collective action for those who faced a shock was found to be common. A good example of this are the so-called “Nafeers”. Nafeers are groups within the community who, on the basis of reciprocity, help each other with farming and social events, but also after emergencies. If, for example, a family loses their house due to a fire, Nafeers were often found to help rebuild the house<sup>11</sup>.

For those who are in need of money after a shock or who want to invest money in a business, informal loans are available. The lender, however, will need to find a loan provider who trusts that the loan will be repaid. Consequently, “it is mostly relatives who lend each other money<sup>12</sup>”. At the very least, the lender will need assets that can be sold if the loan cannot be repaid otherwise<sup>13</sup>. In addition, there

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<sup>8</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries

<sup>9</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries

<sup>10</sup> KII with Community Leader

<sup>11</sup> KII with Community Leader

<sup>12</sup> FGD with Non-Beneficiaries

<sup>13</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries



are limited opportunities to get formal loans from banks or financial institutions, but this was not found to be the preferred form of lending among community members<sup>14</sup>.

### Case Story: Diversification of Income



Fatima and her husband owned a small piece of land which they used to grow groundnuts, sorghum and okra (5.5 feddan<sup>15</sup>). Since the land was too small to provide them with food for the whole year, the family would repeatedly experience a food shortage during July and November.

In 2015, the situation worsened when Fatima's husband became disabled and she became the only person to provide for her household. Unsure about her future, Fatima felt inspired with the idea of joining a VSLA.

Months after her husband became disabled, she joined a VSLA and took out a loan of 400 SDG (approx. 58 USD) to cover the educational costs for her children. The loan, which was paid back over a period of three months, however, did not change anything in her situation and Fatima and her family continued to struggle. It became clear to Fatima that she needed to invest money strategically in order to ensure an all-year income for her family.

In an attempt to increase and diversify her income, Fatima took out two more loans (700 and 500 SDG, approx. 101 and 72 USD). She invested the money in a tea business and a piece of land. Every day, she put aside a little bit of money to save. Currently, Fatima has 15 feddan of land and, with some of her savings, she bought two goats. She feels confident that she can withstand any shock since she has savings, farmland, goats, and a business to rely on.

*"I never thought I would be able to run my household without the help of my husband. It makes me feel proud that I did this all on my own. I will do everything in my power to ensure my children will receive the education they need to have a better life than I had."*

Despite a significant proportion of the community being involved in farming and trading, often households depend on one source of income since the farming and trading will take place during different seasons. Income diversification in the sense that households have more than one source of income at the same time was not found to be common. Consequently, households are vulnerable for factors that impact their main source of income. In addition, due to low incomes, saving is also not common, even though there exists consensus that saving provides multiple benefits. One community leader explains, "people don't usually save cash money in this community. Instead, they keep their

<sup>14</sup> FGD with Male Beneficiaries

<sup>15</sup> One feddan = 60 metre × 70 metre = 4200 square metres



money in assets, such as livestock or crops. However, behavior has changed over time and now community members are saving more money than before<sup>16</sup>. While assets are important for households in order to deal with shocks, vulnerability will further decrease if households have assets and savings. Some assets, for example livestock, may be lost during certain shocks or crises, for example droughts. Savings, on the other hand, could potentially make families more vulnerable during conflicts. Ideally, community members would have different sources of income, different types of assets, and savings to ensure the best possible safety net in times of hardship. However, this was not found to be common in the researched communities.

*Figure 1. Focus group discussion with female beneficiaries*



<sup>16</sup> KII with Community Leader



## Village Savings and Loan Associations

Consultations at the project locations were conducted by CARE prior to the start of the project. A number of findings from these consultations were taken into account when designing the project. Firstly, natural resources were not being managed properly and consequently under pressure. Secondly, community members lacked project management and investment skills. Finally, women spent most of their time on household chores, such as cleaning, cooking and child care. Women had limited decision power within households and communities, something which was magnified by their lack of education and the absence of their own source of income<sup>17</sup>.

Based on the consultations, the VSLA project was designed with a specific focus on women empowerment and capacity building within the community. The original design only allowed women to participate in the VSLAs. Later in the project, however, the project was opened for men as well. Currently, there are three types of VSLAs: groups that consist of women only, groups that consist of men only, groups that consist of and women and men. To ensure social participation, women are given most of the management positions within the VSLAs<sup>18</sup>.

Capacity building is a key element in the project design, with most of the trainings focusing on one of three main components of resilience (i.e. anticipation, absorption, and adaption). Trainings on early warning systems and natural resource management were conducted to ensure anticipation at a household and community level. Furthermore, trainings on Income Generating Activities (IGA), selection, planning and management of projects, and crosscutting themes (gender, health and education) were planned to increase adaptation among VSLA members. For the absorption component of resilience, no trainings were held, but activities were conducted. Activities included the rehabilitation of water points, livestock investment, and fuel alternatives.

All VSLA participants were trained in Business Development Skills (BDS). The aim of this training is to ensure VSLA members increase their knowledge of investment and project management and consequently will be able to diversify and increase their income. The implementing NGO at the project locations did not provide this training. Instead, a number of Community-Based Trainers received a training for trainers. The role of CBT is to train VSLA members and provide them with advice on investments<sup>19</sup>. A critical component of the training and advice from CBTs is risk mitigation and determining the success and risk factors of a specific project<sup>20</sup>.

Community meetings held in order to inform the potential beneficiaries about the VSLA project aimed to explain the VSLA model and the potential benefits for its members. Unfortunately, not all community members fully understood the VSLA model and initially there existed some suspicion towards the project among a part of the community. Firstly, some female beneficiaries were under

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<sup>17</sup> KII with CARE Staff

<sup>18</sup> KII with CARE Staff

<sup>19</sup> KII with CARE Staff

<sup>20</sup> KII with Implementing NGO Partner



the impression that CARE would provide direct cash investments to the VSLAs box<sup>21</sup>. In addition, a small group within the community, primarily men, assumed that CARE would be able to take money out of the VSLA savings box<sup>22</sup>. While there were enough community members who did have enough confidence in the project to join, it is important to clearly explain to potential beneficiaries what to expect from the project. This will prevent expectations that cannot be met and suspicion among community members.

*“Initially, we thought that CARE would provide us with cash for the savings box. After realizing that would not happen, we decided to continue with the project anyway”*

### **Female Beneficiaries**

VSLAs select their own members (between 15 to 25) and select a VSLA committee, which consists of six members (1 head of VSLA, 2 accountants, 1 administrator, and 2 committee members)<sup>23</sup>. To be able to participate in a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), one must be<sup>24</sup>:

- Over 18 years
- Motivated to participate
- Live in the same area as the other participants
- From the same socio-economic level as the other participants
- Not be from the same family as other participants

*Figure 2. Saving box VSLA*



<sup>21</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries

<sup>22</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries

<sup>23</sup> KII With VSLA Leader

<sup>20</sup> KII with CARE Staff



Members have to agree amongst each other how much they contribute to the VSLA box. If needed, the amount can be adjusted later in the saving period. On average, VSLA contribute between 2 and 15 SDG (0.3 – 2.2 USD) a week. The average savings at the end of the saving period ranges between 2,000 and 40,000 SDG (290 – 5,797 USD)<sup>25</sup>. Among the visited villages, Bulbul's VSLAs had the lowest and Singita the highest average savings. However, the numbers from Bulbul are from January till December 2015 and may not accurately reflect the current situation.

*Table 1. VSLA savings from December 2015 till October 2016*

Village	# of VSLAs	Total Savings	Average savings per VSLA
Singita	32	160,000	5,000
Jomeaza Lagaraw	21	95,831	4,563
Limo	14	55,499	3,964
Bulbul*	20	53,862	2,693

\* Numbers from January till December 2015

Priorities for loans are agreed among members. Most VSLAs agreed business investments are given the highest priority. The second priority is education and the third is health. After that, other needs can be covered. In a few VSLAs, however, it was decided that health needs are the second priority instead of education<sup>26</sup>. Interest rates are also determined among members, but most VSLAs decided on a 10% interest rate. Before a member can receive a loan, he or she needs to defend the investment in front of the VSLA committee and a CBT. The VSLA committee will discuss with the person applying what the success and risk factors of the project are and how to mitigate potential risks<sup>27</sup>.

Aside from the savings box, there is a social insurance box. This box, in which members put at least 1 SDG a week, is used to cover social events and emergencies, such as funerals. There is no interest over loans from the social insurance box. "Sometimes all the money in the saving box is used and sometimes there will be money in the saving box. That depends completely on the number of loans that have been taken and the specific VSLA group<sup>28</sup>".

*Table 2. Loans from the VSLA savings according to FGDs*

	Females	Males	Mixed
<b>Business/investment</b>	37.5%	66.7%	50.0%
<b>Unexpected event</b>	7.5%	33.3%	30.0%
<b>Environmental hazards<sup>29</sup></b>	42.5%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Health</b>	7.5%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Education</b>	5.0%	0.0%	20.0%

<sup>25</sup> KII with CARE Staff

<sup>26</sup> KII with CARE Staff

<sup>27</sup> KII with VSLA Leader

<sup>28</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries

<sup>29</sup> Environmental hazards are events which could potentially threaten the surrounding natural environment (e.g. droughts, etc.)



As can be seen in table 2, there are differences in the spending behaviours of men and women. It has to be taken into account, however, that a difference in geographical location may also account for some of the differences. In general, it appears as women being more inclined to take out loans for educational and health purposes, while men are more focused on loans for business investments.

Loans have to be repaid in 1 to 3 months. Most beneficiaries do not experience much difficulty paying back their loans in time<sup>30</sup>. Those who do experience difficulties can ask for a delay and mostly they will be given more time<sup>31</sup>. In order to mitigate the risks of loans for the lender and the other VSLA members, the maximum loan will depend on the income of the lender. “No more money is given to a single person than double the amount of his or her personal savings. If a member has 1,000 SDG in savings, the loan will be maximum 2,000 SDG<sup>32</sup>.” Furthermore, to ensure there is enough money in the savings box for emergencies, VSLAs aim to have always at least 40% of their savings available<sup>33</sup>.

Despite most of the loans being taken by individual VSLA members, the suggestion has been raised to take loans in groups. Bigger investments that are shared among a number of VSLA members could potentially increase the profit for each individual member. Indeed, some beneficiaries, especially males, complain that due to the small loans they are allowed to take, their income has not increased significantly<sup>34</sup>. Currently, a number of VSLAs have plans to invest their savings in one large project at the end of the savings period. One VSLA, for example, plans to invest their savings in the establishment of a large retail shop<sup>35</sup>.

Most beneficiaries agree that their income has increased after they joined the VSLA<sup>36</sup>. Female beneficiaries explain “most of us have been able to increase their income. Some now have a stable income and some have found a second income source, mostly through trading. Those who gained a second income through trading have almost all been able to save money as well<sup>37</sup>.” Male beneficiaries, on the other hand, report that “most of us have been able to increase our income. However, the savings in the VSLA are still low and since we have only been able to take small loans, we have not found the increase in income to be significant<sup>38</sup>.” Among the mixed group of beneficiaries, consensus existed that all members increased their incomes and savings<sup>39</sup>. Non-beneficiaries, finally, explain that VSLA members experience a multitude of benefits. They not only received training, but according

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<sup>30</sup> KII with Community Leader

<sup>31</sup> KII with VSLA Leader

<sup>32</sup> FGD with Male Beneficiaries

<sup>33</sup> KII with VSLA Leader

<sup>34</sup> FGD with Male Beneficiaries

<sup>35</sup> KII with CARE Staff

<sup>36</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries, FGD with Male Beneficiaries, FGD with Mixed Beneficiaries

<sup>37</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries

<sup>38</sup> FGD with Male Beneficiaries

<sup>39</sup> FGD with Mixed Beneficiaries



to the non-beneficiaries, the VSLA members have been able to increase their incomes, renovate their houses, and have changed their overall mentality regarding income and saving<sup>40</sup>.

### Case Story: Becoming a Trader



Mona, an intelligent young female, worked in manual labour at farms for multiple years. The work, however, is seasonal and is depending on the needs of landowners. Often there would be no work for her. Her instable income would lead her to experience food shortages and being unable to pay her children's school fees. Sometimes her situation would get so bad that her family provided her with support.

*"When my husband left me with two children to travel, I was all alone. There was just nobody to take care of me. I felt like I had no future and my children would also not have a future."*

Mona is relatively educated and understands the importance of knowledge. When she joined the VSLA in 2012, she did not take a loan immediately, but instead focused on educating herself. Participating in the BDS training made her realize that she wanted to become a trader. All other members in the VSLA group witnessed how motivated Mona was to make her dream come true and they nominated her to participate in a specialized course on trading in Kass.

With a small budget provided by CARE, Mona travelled to Kass and started the course. She learned how to make strategic trade decisions and how to mitigate risks. With her new gained knowledge, she decided she was ready to take the next step in her life. She was going to become a trader.

In 2013, Mona took a loan of 1,200 SDG (approx. 174 USD). She bought different goods that she knew would sell well at the local market. In addition, she kept asking for advice from the CBT and other VSLA member to ensure she would make the best investment decision. She was able to get a return of 4,000 SDG (approx. 578 USD) on her original investment. All this money, she again invested in trade. She now has a stable income of 1000 SDG (approx. 145 USD) a month. Mona is still investing most of her profit in her trading business, but she is aware that she needs to start saving and investing in assets soon to become more resilient to shocks.

*"I feel very satisfied about joining the VSLA. My family used to support me in difficult times, but now I am able to support my family."*

<sup>40</sup> FGD with Non-Beneficiaries



A significant proportion of the beneficiaries have used their loans to start a trading business, something which provides them with a second income source. However, due to the lack of available market information, they are unable to make fully informed trading decisions. No market information is shared between villages and, as such, traders often don't know the prices of certain goods in other villages. Without full information, the decision whether to buy or sell goods at which villages is less than optimal. It is expected that profits can be increased if villages share information amongst each other on a reciprocal basis<sup>41</sup>.

*“The loans are very useful. Sometimes you face an emergency, maybe a family members who needs medical treatment, and you can take out a loan to ensure that the family member receives help”*

**Male Beneficiaries**

*Figure 3. VSLA members joining a workshop on how to make vaporizers*



<sup>41</sup> KII with VSLA Leader



## Resilience

A number of shocks can occur at the household and community level in the researched villages. Within households, the death or illness of an income earning household member can significantly impact the household's income, especially if the person was the main income earner. In addition, unemployment of a previously income earning household member has the potential to significantly decrease that household's income.

At the community level, droughts, fires, and conflict are the main shocks and crises experienced. Droughts are a recurrent environmental hazard which impacts farmers and pastoralists, who constitute the majority in the researched communities. Depending on the seriousness of the drought, farmers' harvest can be negatively impacted or completely destroyed. In addition, droughts can leave pastoralists with too little water and pastures for their livestock. Consequently, this may cause sickness and death of livestock.

Fires are often caused by using unsafe stoves made from bricks. Since most of the houses in the communities are made from local materials they are easily inflammable. Although fires do not happen that frequently, the consequences are often very serious. Some families lose everything due to a fire and have to start all over with nothing.

Finally, conflict between farmers and pastoralists causes unsafe situations with negative consequences for all community members, regardless of their occupation. When a conflict occurs, there is also a high likelihood of assets being taken away from community members. The impact of a conflict, however, is most devastating for traders. Due to the unsafe situation during a conflict, traders often will have to stop their work and, as such, lose their source of income.

### Anticipation

A number of trainings have taken place with the aim to explain to participants how to prepare and plan for shocks and crises at the household and community level. For the household level, VSLA members receive a BDS training and a training on the use of mud stoves. Two trainings were given with a focus on the community level. One on early warning systems and another on natural resource management. Remarkably, none of the VSLA beneficiaries interviewed mentioned receiving or hearing about either one of these two trainings.

Some VSLA members were found to some steps to anticipate shocks or crises at the household level. For example, some members were found to change the materials of their house from local materials to bricks. This should prevent their house from burning down in a fire. However, to prevent fires from occurring in the first place, community members were found to take extra care while cooking in the summer time when the wind blows hard<sup>42</sup>. After cooking, they take extra care to ensure that

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<sup>42</sup> KII with VSLA Leader



the fire would be properly extinguished<sup>43</sup>. In addition, as mentioned before, a training was given on how to use mud stoves instead of brick stoves. Using these stoves decreases the risk of fire. Community were found to indeed change their cooking methods to decrease the chance of fires. However, as a community leader remarks, houses are sometimes built close to each other which increases the risk of more than one house catching fire. It is important to start building houses that have a save space between them<sup>44</sup>.

### Case Story: Leadership

*“All my life, I felt sad about not going to school. When I moved to Nyala, however, I realized that almost everybody had gone to school. It made me feel I did not fit in.”*



At age 36, Habiba decided it was time to take her life in her own hand. She signed up for a literacy class and quickly started to improve her reading and writing skills. After completing the literacy class, she signed up for elementary school. It was not much later, that she moved back to her old village.

At her old village, Habiba decided to join a VSLA in 2012. Since she had developed reading and writing skills, she was asked to become the VSLA administrator. Never in her life had Fatima been in a leadership position. At first, she was struggling and confidence issues made her believe she would not be able to fulfil the role. However, her motivation and passion for learning made her a very successful VSLA administrator, something that gained her respect and status with other community members.

Since it was education that helped her to become a VSLA administrator to begin with, Fatima decided to sign up for secondary education. A 2000 SDG (approx. 290 USD) loan helped her become a trader and earn a salary of around 2000 SDG a month. This money allows her to continue her education.

*“My dream is to go to university. I know I can make this dream come true. Thanks to the VSLA I know I can be a leader and respected in the community. I want to encourage other women to continue their education and get the most out of life.”*

<sup>43</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries

<sup>44</sup> KII with Community Leader



## Case Story: Preventing Shocks

With eight children, Saadia (43) and her husband were struggling to survive. Owning a small restaurant, they made about 500 SDG (approx. 72 USD) a month. Since they were not always able to pay the school fees for their children, Saadia worried a lot about their future. In 2014, she decided to join a VSLA, hoping this could change her and her family's life.

Saadia participated in a BDS training to gain knowledge on how to strategically invest money into her restaurant. After that, she took out a 2000 SDG (approx. 290 USD) loan. With the money, she established a traditional bakery and built an extension for her existing restaurant.



Her investments turned out to be clever as she was able to pay the loan with interest and raise her income to 2000 SDG a month. However, Saadia knew that certain shocks could leave her with nothing again. In 2015, she witnessed first-hand how fires in her village destroyed the lives of a number of families. In order to ensure her house would not burn down in one of the fires, Saadia changed the local materials it was made of into bricks.

Saadia also tried to establish some safety nets for her household. She built three new rooms for her house, one of which is used to store crops. In times of hardship, she can use the crops to sell or as food for her family. In addition, Saadia gave her brother 3000 SDG (approx. 435 USD) in order to start a trading business in another village. They are sharing the profits and in times of stress, they will help each other out.



*"Because I joined the VSLA, I am now able to send my children to school and I was able to pay for the weddings of four of my daughters. Joining made me realize I can change my life and therefore I decided to sign up for a literacy class."*

For droughts, however, households were not found to use seeds more resistant to longer period without rain<sup>45</sup>. The fact that households don't anticipate shocks and crises is also a result in the sense that anticipation often has to occur at the community level. One of the mechanism to ensure communities would anticipate shocks and crises were the two before mentioned trainings. However,

<sup>45</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries



despite a training on early warning systems, there are no early warning systems in the community. For droughts, for example, community members were still found to predict the level of rain using local methods, like the level of temperature, the grass and trees, and the wind<sup>46</sup>. One VSLA group, however, declared interest in investing their shared savings in a water pump and, as such, is taking steps to prepare and plan for droughts. The fact that the training on early warning systems did not translate into the implementation of such systems is not surprising as the VSLA model in its current state targets households rather than communities. Households are, as such, unable to tackle community level issues, even if the benefits are significant at the household level. It is essentially a traditional collective action problem that fundamentally limits the degree to which the VSLA can serve to address community level issues without adjustments to the program. For future training, it is advisable to design the training with the aim to develop early warning systems and actively monitor and support the implementation of such systems.

### Case Story: Building Resilience



Magbula owned a small food business and 2.25 acre of land. Farming, however, did not provide her with enough food for the whole year and her business was only partly able to fill the gap. Magbula was most of the time able to ensure one meal a day for herself and her children, but sometimes she found herself unable to pay for her children's medical bills.

In 2016, Magbula joined a VSLA. After multiple consultations with a CBT, she decided to quit her food business since it was not a viable cause to invest in. Instead, she became a trader of women's clothing.

With 500 SDG (approx. 72 USD) in savings and a 700 SDG (approx. 101 USD) loan, Magbula bought clothes and shoes. After paying back the loan, she had 900 SDG in savings. She wanted to keep her savings, but was advised to invest the money in more farmland. She bought 2.75 acre of land and is optimistic about the harvest this year. Profits from farming, she will invest in trading again.

*"Joining the VSLA made me realize that having more stable sources of income makes me better prepared for shocks. I will work hard to ensure I can always absorb a shock when it occurs."*

<sup>46</sup> KII with CARE Staff



### Case Story: Husband and Wives



Ismael is 41 and has two wives. He has been working as a blacksmith for years. He makes knives, agricultural tools and materials for in houses. During the rainy season, however, Ismael and his wives work on a farm. Despite his hard work, he has never been able to ensure a stable income for his family.

Ismael has taken out four loans in total, 200 SDG (approx. 29 USD) each. The money was invested in metal. But since the loans are quite small and he invested in the same thing he used to do before, Ismael did not notice any difference in his income or his ability to absorb shocks. Despite this, Ismael witnessed the success of the VSLA for other members and he encouraged both of his wives to join the VSLA.

They did. Both of Ismael's wives invested money in farming and, as such, they gained their own income. While Ismael used to help them, he now is able to focus completely on his blacksmith business and both his wives are able to do their farming on their own. At a household level, they all realize they have become better able to handle shocks. Ismael changed his view on his wives now he knows that they are able to run a business just as well as he is. He also realizes that he has become more resilient due to his wives ensuring a second income at the household level.

*"I am so happy my wives are able to help me with the expenses for our family. It is not only my task anymore but we are in this together. I want to take out a big loan in the future and buy a large amount of metal to sell."*

Conflicts are a recurrent event in South Darfur. In general, most conflicts emerge after one of the following situations occurs. Firstly, sometimes livestock is being stolen from pastoralists and if the thieves are being tracked down by the original owners of the livestock this is a potential cause of conflict. Secondly, sometimes pastoralists' livestock would eat the harvest of farmers. This often happens at times when there is a lack of pastures. If the farmers uncover this, a conflict may emerge. In the early stages of a conflict, most opportunities for a solution exist. This will often involve one party to pay compensation to the other party. Crucial in this regard is the peace committee, which consist of community leaders. This committee often meets, but these meetings were not always found to be effective<sup>47</sup>. When a conflict escalates and individuals have been killed, it becomes especially

<sup>47</sup> KII with Community Leader



difficult to reach a solution. According to Islamic Law, 100 camels should be provided in compensation for each victim, but this is often not achievable.

### Case Story: One Large Investment



Husseain worked as a trader for 17 years. However, when conflict broke out, he needed to stop his business and started to work as a farmer. For four years, he worked as a farmer, but when the conflict was settled, he decided to go back into trading.

In 2014, he joined the VSLA with 20 other members. Many of the members had had good results by taking out loans. Husseain noticed that the best results were gained by taking out larger loans.

Ismael took out one loan worth 2,000 SDG (approx. 290 USD) in 2015. He invested the money in a diverse set of products and was able to pay back the loan in time. With some of his earning, he built a new room. He used bricks instead of local materials in order to prevent it from burning in a fire. In addition, Husseain started farming again. As such, he now has an income throughout the year, but he will need to further improve his income to become fully a resilient for shocks.

*“Me and other VSLA members are thinking about taking out one big loan together. I hope we will invest the money in farming because the profits are very good when you have enough money to invest. We need to work together and only then we can really change our lives”*

For community members, conflicts are hard to anticipate. Farmers were found to harvest their land earlier than normal in order to prevent livestock from eating their harvest, but no other measures were taken at the household level. At the community level VSLAs have not made any impact on conflicts, something which is confirmed by a community leader saying “the VSLAs did not contribute to conflict resolution. Most of the members of the VSLA are women and they have no experience in solving conflicts<sup>48</sup>.” However, since relations between community members have become stronger and an increase in community cohesion was reported, it can be argued that conflicts have a lower likelihood of occurring as a consequence of the VSLAs.

<sup>48</sup> KII with Community Leader



In a limited way households were found to take anticipatory steps to plan and prepare for shocks and crises. Very limited evidence was found, however, that VSLAs enabled communities to better prepare for shocks and crises. The implementing NGO in one of the researched villages confirms that, “VSLAs are only for its members and no measures at being taken the community level<sup>49</sup>”. As such, minimal effects were observed at the community level. To create a significant impact the community level, additional activities are required.

### **Absorption**

All of the shocks and crises faced by people in the community have a severe impact. The consensus, however, is that VSLA members are better able to absorb shocks than not VSLA members. Female beneficiaries explain that “absorbing a shock is hard, even for VSLA members. However, mostly we will take out a loan for trading purposes after a shock occurs. This gives us the opportunity to make instant money<sup>50</sup>”. Aside from the loans for investment, being a VSLA member also provides individuals with the opportunity to take out a loan from the social emergency box. This gives household some ability to deal with a shock and focus on bringing new money into the household.

VSLA have contributed to increased community cohesion, especially among women. As such, VSLA members trust each other and care about each other’s situation. Consequently, VSLA member feel inclined to help each other in times of stress. “When there is a fire, for example, VSLAs members have contributed money and time to help the affected family. Sometimes a new house is built for families who lost their house in a fire. Materials are also being provided. While such efforts also occurred outside of the VSLA, it has become more frequent due to the VSLAs<sup>51</sup>.”

Savings and assets are a good measure of absorptive capacity in households. Among female beneficiaries, it is agreed that while most members were able to save money, some still have too much different needs to cover with their money that their savings did not increase. Male beneficiaries explain that their savings did increase, but not significantly. Among mixed beneficiaries there was agreement that all of them had been able to increase their savings. Non-beneficiaries, finally, find themselves unable to save money at all. When they do save money, this money is often immediately invested in a sudden cash needs. Stable savings do not really occur. On the other hand, it needs to be noted that most community members will invest savings in assets, such as crops and livestock, before saving actual money<sup>52</sup>.

Overall, VSLA members were found to have significant more capacity to absorb shocks compared to non-VSLA members. At the household level, VSLA members have increased their savings and assets, and have the opportunity to take out a loan for sudden cash needs. At the community level, VSLAs were found to have increased community cohesion and, as such collective action to help community members to absorb shocks was found to be common.

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<sup>49</sup> KII with Implementing NGO partner

<sup>50</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries

<sup>51</sup> KII with VSLA Leader

<sup>52</sup> KII with Community Leader



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## Adaption

Since most of the shocks in South Darfur are recurrent events and most of the main income sources are instable due to these shocks, an effective way to adapt to this situation is to diversify income. VSLAs have been particularly effective in enabling members to diversify their incomes. Non-beneficiaries explain that “VSLA members have mostly multiple sources of income. If one business does not provide an income for a while, they can rely on other sources of income<sup>53</sup>”. Most of the beneficiaries were found to be involved in farming and trading. It has to be noted, however, that some VSLA members invested their loans in the same thing they used before joining the VSLA. There were limited improvements found in their situation and in times of stress, these VSLA members experienced most problems. This may be a result of limited follow-up visits and advice from the implementing NGO partner. Multiple beneficiaries indeed expressed a desire for more advice on their investments. It is important to ensure that loans from the VSLA are used to create new sources of income or invest in an expansion of an existing project to create the best possible outcome from the loans.

A number of trainings were specifically designed to make VSLA members more adaptive to their environment. Those trainings include training on IGA, selection, planning and management of projects, and crosscutting themes, such as gender, health and education. The main aim of these trainings is to ensure that VSLA members will diversify their income, but a second aim includes to increase risk management skills among VSLA members. VSLA members were found to have knowledge on how to better adapt to their environment, but sometimes found themselves unable to do so<sup>54</sup>.

At the household level, however, no changes were found to adapt to the situation of recurrent droughts. In general, most of the community members were still using traditional methods of farming and, as such, remained very vulnerable for droughts<sup>55</sup>. In specific, no drought resistant seeds were found to be used by VSLA members. Since most of the VSLA members are farming at least during the rainy season, this is an area which could benefit strongly from more attention. One measure that could have an impact at the household and community level is to conduct trainings specifically focused on improved farming techniques during droughts. In addition, households should be encouraged to buy drought resistant seeds and their availability in the project communities should be ensured.

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<sup>53</sup> FGD with Non-Beneficiaries

<sup>54</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaires

<sup>55</sup> KII with VSLA Leader



## Transformation

Within BRACED, “transformation refers to the likelihood of human systems to fundamentally and sustainably improve the resilience of vulnerable citizens to the impacts of climate extremes and change<sup>56</sup>”. Since women empowerment is at the core of the BRACED programme, this is one of the best measures of the transformative capacity of social systems.

Originally, the project only allowed for women to participate in the VSLAs. After the project was running for some time, however, communities witnessed the positive effects VSLA members experienced. Men requested if they could join the VSLAs and it was decided that men should be able to participate. Currently, most VSLAs still consist of women only. However, there are some VSLAs that consist only of men and there are some mixed groups. In mixed groups, women are given most of the management positions in order to ensure that men don't dominate the decisions.

### Case Story: Small Loans



Seeing how much better some of his fellow community members were doing after joining a VSLA, Yahya (65) wanted to join. At this stage, he owned a small shop at the local market which is open one day a week and also had a shop located in his house. Since Yahya can read and write, he took it upon himself to do the book keeping for the VSLA

Problematic is the age of Yahya, which does not allow him to do manual labour or start a farming business by himself. As such, it was decided that Yahya would invest in his already existing businesses. He took out a loan of 700 SDG (approx. 101 USD) and spent it on products for his shops. Despite the fact that Yahya was able to pay back the loan, he was unable to save any money or raise his income. Yahya explains that to make a real profit, he would need to take out a larger loan, around 2000 SDG. However, one of the reasons Yahya was not able to raise his income or save money might be that joining the VSLA did not allow him to diversify his income. Instead, Yahya kept doing what he had always done, only with slightly more money to invest.

*“I want to take out a larger loan in the future and improve my business. I want the shop to become a lot better so that my son can take over from me.”*

<sup>56</sup> Bahadur, A., Peters, K. Wilkinson, E., Pichon, F., Gray, K. and Tanner, T. (2015) The 3As: Tracking resilience across BRACED. BRACED. [www.braced.org/resources/i/?id=cd95acf8-68dd-4f48-9b4124543f69f9f1](http://www.braced.org/resources/i/?id=cd95acf8-68dd-4f48-9b4124543f69f9f1)



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Female beneficiaries are satisfied with the fact that the VSLAs in which they participate consist mainly or only of women. Since men usually control every aspect of their lives, they feel that too many men in one VSLA would decrease their decision power within the group significantly. As such, it is important to continue this project with that in mind. Especially important is to ensure that women remain in most management positions.

*“We are happy that there are not too many men in the VSLA since they normally control every aspect of our lives. In the VSLA, we can make decisions”*

**- Female Beneficiaries**

Females feel that the VSLA contributed to their empowerment. Most participants did not have their own source of income before joining the VSLA and a sense of pride exists that they are able to contribute to their household’s income. Male beneficiaries confirm that women in VSLAs are better able to contribute to their household’s needs. In addition, women have shown that they are able to run businesses just as well as men and, as such, have gained in respect.

Among female VSLA members, strong relationships have developed. Before joining the VSLA, women were not well connected and arguments among females were common. VSLAs have contributed to more cohesion among women in the community, something that is appreciated greatly by female beneficiaries. While the women in VSLAs at first only cared about each other in relation to the VSLA, members now were found to help each other with matter completely unrelated to the VSLA<sup>57</sup>.

Due to the strong emphasis on training and capacity building in this project, women have also increased their knowledge about investments and business. This made women feel more confident about their skills and abilities to properly run a business. Men confirm once more that women indeed have become more knowledgeable and skilled. There remains, however, an issue with illiteracy in the VSLAs consisting of only women. One female beneficiary describes that, “sometimes the administration is not correct, that is because women don’t know how to write and read”. This outlines the importance of literacy classes, especially for women.

*“We observed the success of women in the VSLA and then we decided to ask if we could join”*

**Male Beneficiaries**

At the household level, female and male beneficiaries agree that women have gained in decision power. In addition, women were found to better express their own needs after joining the VSLA. At

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<sup>57</sup> FGD with Female Beneficiaries



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the community level, only minimal change was observed. In general, respect for women increased within communities, but no evidence was found that VSLAs contributed to women being in leadership positions. One community leader, for example, expressed that women should not be involved in conflict resolutions since “women have no experience with that”. In general, the perception still remains that, although women have improved their skills and knowledge, “men are better at running projects and businesses<sup>58</sup>”.

VSLAs have also lead to positive outcomes for men. Most notably, some members were found to be able to diversify and/or increase their income. In addition, men whose wives joined the project have increased in resilience due to the new income sources earned by their wives. Since in many cases, husbands and wives were working together in projects, relationships between men and women may also have improved. However, it is being reported that some men in the targeted communities view the VSLA as a women’s project. They consider it a shame for a man to join such a thing and stigmatize those men who do join<sup>59</sup>. As such, VSLA may be empowering for women to join, they may lead to less respect for men if they decide to join.

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<sup>58</sup> KII with VSLA Leader

<sup>59</sup> KII with CARE Staff



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## Concluding Comments

VSLAs have enabled some its members to diversify and/or increase their income and subsequently decrease their vulnerability for shocks. However, not all members were able to experience those positive effects and this was mostly caused by two factors. First, those who continued doing what they had always done, just now with some more money, were found unable to become more resilient. In addition, small loans were sometimes found inadequate to change VSLA members' lives.

The project, which aims to increase household and community resilience, was found primarily effective at the household level. Households took some anticipatory steps, became better able to absorb shocks, and adopted in some ways to the instable environment in which they live. However, at a community level, limited change was visible. It appears that the design of the project is not opt to create significant changes at the community level. However, if enough individual community members become resilient through the project, this would also have an impact on community resilience.

Women were the main beneficiaries of the project. It was found that community cohesion among women had increased significantly. Women in many cases found an independent source of income through the project and gained respect through their proven ability to run businesses, At the household level, women were found to have increased their decision power. Once again, however, limited change was found for women at the community level.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Village Savings and Loan Associations		
Key Finding	Bottlenecks	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of VSLA members were able to increase and/or diversify their income</li> <li>• VSLA members who invested their money in the same thing they did before joining the VSLA, experienced mostly no or very limited changes</li> <li>• Training and capacity building has enabled members to better run a business and mitigate risks</li> <li>• Cohesion was traditionally found in all communities, but was magnified due to the VSLA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Due to low literacy levels of some of the VSLA participants, administration is not always done correctly</li> <li>• No or little improvements were found among VSLA members who took out small loans</li> <li>• A lack of market information available limits the possibility to make strategic business decisions</li> <li>• Some community members were initially suspicious towards the VSLA project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only allow literate members of the VSLA to do the administration or provide better support for those who are illiterate</li> <li>• Support and encourage VSLA members to take out larger loans as a group and run projects together</li> <li>• Develop a system where communities exchange market information on a reciprocal basis</li> <li>• Review the method of informing community about the VSLA model to avoid misunderstandings</li> </ul>
Resilience		
Key Finding	Bottlenecks	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VSLA members took some anticipatory steps at a household level (i.e. mud stoves, brick houses, etc.), but not for all shocks (e.g. drought)</li> <li>• Due to increased community cohesion, the chance of a conflict occurring is lower</li> <li>• Savings, assets, and the opportunity to take out loans make VSLA members better able to absorb shocks compared to non-members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite trainings, no early warning systems were present in the communities</li> <li>• Although community meetings occur to prevent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists, these are not always effective</li> <li>• Most community members are still using traditional methods of agriculture</li> <li>• Understanding of the resilience model among implementing NGO partners is limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop additional activities outside the scope of current activities focused on community resilience</li> <li>• Provide training on modern agricultural techniques and encourage the use of drought resistant seeds</li> <li>• Provide NGO partners with more training on the elements of resilience and how to build resilience at the household and community levels</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A significant part of VSLA members were able to diversify their income and increased their adaptive capacity</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure more follow up from the implementing NGO to ensure optimal investment decisions</li> </ul>
<b>Transformation</b>		
<b>Key Finding</b>	<b>Bottlenecks</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women report increased confidence in their abilities to run a business and make investment decisions</li> <li>• Men have developed more confidence in the ability of women to run a business and thereby increased their respect for women</li> <li>• Women are better able to express their own needs and make decisions at the household level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men may face stigma from joining the VSLA as it is seen as a women project</li> <li>• Women report a fear that if too many men join the VSLA, they will start to make all the decisions</li> <li>• Women have increased their ability to make decisions at the household level, but are still not making any decisions at the community level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In those areas where VSLAs are well developed among women, organize special meetings for men to mitigate the stigma</li> <li>• Continue to keep VSLAs either “men only”, “women only” or “mostly women managed”</li> <li>• Provide women with trainings on leadership and encourage them to take leadership positions within the VSLA, but also outside</li> </ul>



## Annex 1: Key Informant Interview Tools

### IDI with CARE Staff

Questions	Indicators
<p><b>Introduction</b> Hello, my name is _____ and I am working with Forcier Consulting. I am here to learn more about the Village Savings and Loan Associations implemented by CARE in South Darfur. I want to assure you that all the opinions you give are completely confidential. You may refuse to answer any particular question. You may also end the interview at any point without any negative consequences. However, we would greatly appreciate your opinions on these topics, which will contribute to understanding the needs in your community better. This interview should not take more than 1.5 hour.</p>	
<p>Age:</p> <p>Gender:</p> <p>Organisation:</p> <p>Role:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General characteristics</li> </ul>
<p><b>VSLAs</b></p> <p>1. I would like to start talking about Village Saving Loan Associations (VSLAs) in South Darfur. Could you explain me in detail how the VSLA project was designed for South Darfur?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a. Was resilience taken into account in the project design? (<i>how</i>)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">b. Was women empowerment taken into account in the design? (<i>how</i>)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">c. How does the project design for South Darfur differ from how VSLAs are designed elsewhere in Sudan? (<i>why</i>)</p> <p>2. Who are the members of the VSLAs?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a. How are members chosen to participate in the VSLAs? (<i>selection criteria</i>)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">b. Are there any people who are not allowed to participate in the VSLAs? (<i>why</i>)</p> <p>3. What are the average savings a VSLA accumulates over time?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a. What are the most common reasons for VSLA members to use the VSLA savings?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project design</li> <li>- Beneficiaries</li> <li>- Savings</li> <li>- Programming in conjunction</li> </ul>



<p>b. Are these reasons in line with the intended reasons to use the VSLA? (<i>why not</i>)</p> <p>c. Have risk mitigation plans been done to inform the decisions of VSLA members? (<i>explain in detail</i>)</p> <p>4. What other programs, if any, are implemented in conjunction with the VSLA program?</p> <p>a. If any other programs: How are these programs incorporated with each other?</p> <p>b. What are the benefits, if any, of having these programs work in conjunction with each other?</p> <p>c. Are there any interventions that should be set up in conjunction with the VSLA program, but are currently not? (<i>which</i>)</p>	
<b>Resilience</b>	
<p>5. I would now like to speak about shocks and crisis in South Darfur and how community members deal with those. What are the main shocks and crises that people in South Darfur face? (<i>ask the following questions for each shock and crisis mentioned</i>)</p> <p><i>Anticipation</i></p> <p>a. How have VSLAs, if at all, contributed to households being able to take anticipatory steps for this shock or crisis? (<i>ask specific examples</i>)</p> <p>b. How have VSLAs, if at all, contributed to communities being able to take anticipatory steps for this shock or crisis? (<i>ask specific examples</i>)</p> <p><i>Absorption</i></p> <p>c. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed the impact of this shock or crisis on households in the community?</p> <p>d. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed the impact of this shock or crisis on the community as a whole?</p> <p><i>Adaption</i></p> <p>e. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed how households adjust after such a shock or crisis?</p> <p>f. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed how communities adjust after such a shock or crisis?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shocks and crises <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Anticipation</li> <li>o Adaption</li> <li>o Absorption</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Women Empowerment</b>	
<p>6. Now, I would like to speak about the outcomes of VSLAs. What do you think are the main positive outcomes from the VSLA project in South Darfur?</p> <p>a. What are the main positive outcomes for women?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project outcomes</li> <li>- Gender differences</li> </ul>



<p>b. How can these positive outcomes be intensified?  c. What are the main positive outcomes for men?  d. How can these positive outcomes be intensified?</p> <p>7. What do you think are the main negative outcomes from the VSLA project in South Darfur?  a. What are the main negative outcomes for women?  b. How can these negative outcomes be mitigated?  c. What are the main negative outcomes for men?  d. How can these negative outcomes be mitigated?</p>	
<b>Wrap-up</b>	
<p>8. If you could change one thing to improve the VSLA program, what would it be?</p> <p>9. Is there anything you would like to add?</p>	
<p><b>Thank you very much for your time and insights. I hope this will help to further improve the VSLA services in South Darfur.</b></p>	

### IDI with Community Leader

Questions	Indicators
<p><i>Introduction</i>  Hello, my name is _____ and I am working with Forcier Consulting. I am here to learn more about the Village Savings and Loan Associations in your community. I want to assure you that all the opinions you give are completely confidential. You may refuse to answer any particular question. You may also end the interview at any point without any negative consequences. However, we would greatly appreciate your opinions on these topics, which will contribute to understanding the needs in your community better. This interview should not take more than 1.5 hour.</p>	
<p>Age:  Gender:  Organisation:  Role:</p>	<p>- General characteristics</p>
<p><b>Income and Savings</b></p>	



<p>1. I would like to start talking about income and savings in this community. What are the main sources of income in this community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How do community members help each other, if at all, when others deal with threats to their main source of income? (<i>Not VSLA</i>)</li><li>b. Can community members take out informal loans if they face a threat to their main source of income? (<i>not VSLA</i>)</li><li>c. How do people in this community feel about saving money? (<i>why</i>)</li><li>d. What are the main obstacles that prevent community members from saving money?</li></ul> <p>2. Do you know if Village Saving Loan Associations (VSLAs) exist in this community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. If yes, can you describe how VSLAs work?</li><li>b. What are the most common reasons for VSLA members to use the VSLA savings?</li><li>c. How difficult is it for VSLA members to pay back the loans? (<i>why</i>)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Income</li><li>- Savings</li><li>- VSLAs</li></ul>
<b>Resilience</b>	
<p>3. I would now like to speak about shocks and crisis in this community and how community members deal with those. What are the main shocks and crises that people in this community face? (<i>ask the following questions for each shock and crisis</i>)</p> <p><i>Anticipation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Are there any mechanisms in the community to warn community members about this shock or crisis in advantage? (<i>What</i>)</li><li>b. What kind of measures are taken at the community level to anticipate for this shock or crisis?</li><li>c. How have VSLAs, if at all, contributed to communities being able to take anticipatory steps for this shock or crises? (<i>ask specific examples</i>)</li><li>d. What measures are needed to ensure communities are better prepared for such a shock or crisis?</li></ul> <p><i>Absorption</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>e. What was the impact of this shock or crisis on the community as a whole?</li><li>f. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed the impact of this shock or crisis on the community?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Shocks and crises<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Anticipation</li><li>o Adaption</li><li>o Absorption</li></ul></li></ul>



<p>g. What measures are needed to ensure this community will be better able to deal with the impact of this shock or crisis?</p> <p><i>Adaption</i></p> <p>h. What changes, if any, were made at the community level to adjust to the new situation after the shock or crisis?</p> <p>i. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed how this community adjusted to the new situation after the shock or crisis?</p> <p>j. What measures are needed to ensure this community will be better able to adjust to the new situation after the shock or crisis?</p>	
<p><b>Wrap-up</b></p>	
<p>4. If you could change one thing to improve the VSLA program, what would it be?</p> <p>5. Is there anything you would like to add?</p>	
<p><b>Thank you very much for your time and insights. I hope this will help to further improve the VSLA services in your community.</b></p>	

### IDI with VSLA Leader

Questions	Indicators
<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <p>Hello, my name is _____ and I am working with Forcier Consulting. I am here to learn more about the Village Savings and Loan Associations in your community. I want to assure you that all the opinions you give are completely confidential. You may refuse to answer any particular question. You may also end the interview at any point without any negative consequences. However, we would greatly appreciate your opinions on these topics, which will contribute to understanding the needs in your community better. This interview should not take more than 1.5 hour.</p>	
<p>Age:</p> <p>Gender:</p> <p>Organisation:</p> <p>Role:</p>	<p>- General characteristics</p>
<p><b>VSLA</b></p>	



<p>1. I would like to start talking about VSLAs in this community. Could you explain me in detail how VSLAs work?</p> <p>a. How are members chosen to participate in the program? (<i>selection criteria</i>)</p> <p>b. How are members of the VSLA being trained for the program?</p> <p>c. What are the positive sides of the training?</p> <p>d. What are the negative sides of the training?</p> <p>2. What are the average savings a VSLA accumulates over time?</p> <p>a. How is ensured that members make informed decisions about what to use the savings for?</p> <p>b. What are the most common reasons for people to use the VSLA savings?</p> <p>c. Are these reasons in line with the intended reasons to use the VSLA? (<i>why not</i>)</p> <p>d. Are there any shocks or crises for which VSLA members do not use the savings? (<i>which/why not</i>)</p> <p>e. Are there always sufficient funds for members to take out loans? (<i>why not</i>)</p> <p>f. How difficult is it for members to pay back the loans? (<i>why</i>)</p> <p>g. How can VSLA funds be used more effectively? (<i>why</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beneficiaries</li> <li>- VSLA training</li> <li>- Savings</li> </ul>
<b>Resilience</b>	
<p>3. I would now like to speak about shocks and crisis in this community and how community members deal with those. What are the main shocks and crises that people in this community face? (<i>ask the following questions for each shock and crisis</i>)</p> <p><i>Anticipation</i></p> <p>a. Are there any mechanisms in the community to warn community members about this shock or crisis in advance? (<i>What</i>)</p> <p>b. What kind of measures are taken at the household level to anticipate for such a shock or crisis?</p> <p>c. How have VSLAs, if at all, contributed to households being able to take anticipatory steps for this shock or crisis? (<i>ask specific examples</i>)</p> <p>d. What kind of measures are taken at the community level to anticipate for this shock or crisis?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shocks and crises             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Anticipation</li> <li>o Adaption</li> <li>o Absorption</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



<p>e. How have VSLAs, if at all, contributed to communities being able to take anticipatory steps for this shock or crisis? (<i>ask specific examples</i>)</p> <p>f. What measures are needed to ensure households are better prepared for such a shock or crisis?</p> <p>g. What measures are needed to ensure communities are better prepared for such a shock or crisis?</p> <p><i>Absorption</i></p> <p>h. What was the impact of this shock or crises on households in the community?</p> <p>i. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed the impact of this shock or crises on households in the community?</p> <p>j. What measures are needed to ensure households are better able to absorb the impact of this crisis or shock?</p> <p>k. What was the impact of this shock or crises on the community as a whole?</p> <p>l. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed the impact of this shock or crises on the community as a whole?</p> <p>m. What measures are needed to ensure communities are better able to absorb the impact of this crisis or shock?</p> <p><i>Adaption</i></p> <p>n. What changes, if any, were made within households to adjust to the new situation after the shock or crisis?</p> <p>o. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed how households adjust to the new situation after the shock or crisis?</p> <p>p. What measures are needed to ensure households will be better able to adjust to the new situation after the shock or crisis?</p> <p>q. What changes, if any, were made within the community to adjust to the new situation after the shock or crisis?</p> <p>r. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed how this community adjust to the new situation after the shock or crisis?</p> <p>s. What measures are needed to ensure this community will be better able to adjust to the new situation after the shock or crisis?</p>	
<p><b>Women Empowerment</b></p>	
<p>4. Now I would like to speak about the outcomes of VSLAs. What do you think are the main positive outcomes from the VSLA project in your community?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project outcomes</li> <li>- Gender differences</li> </ul>



<p>a. What are the main positive outcomes for women?  b. How can these positive outcomes be intensified?  c. What are the main positive outcomes for men?  d. How can these positive outcomes be intensified?</p> <p>5. What do you think are the main negative outcomes from the VSLA project in your community?  a. What are the main negative outcomes for women?  b. How can these negative outcomes be mitigated?  c. What are the main negative outcomes for men?  d. How can these negative outcomes be mitigated?</p>	
<p><b>Wrap-up</b></p>	
<p>6. If you could change one thing to improve the VSLA program, what would it be?</p> <p>7. Is there anything you would like to add?</p>	
<p><b>Thank you very much for your time and insights. I hope this will help to further improve the VSLA services in your community.</b></p>	

### IDI with Implementing NGO Staff

Questions	Indicators
<p><i>Introduction</i>  Hello, my name is _____ and I am working with Forcier Consulting. I am here to learn more about the Village Savings and Loan Associations in your locality. I want to assure you that all the opinions you give are completely confidential. You may refuse to answer any particular question. You may also end the interview at any point without any negative consequences. However, we would greatly appreciate your opinions on these topics, which will contribute to understanding the needs in your community better. This interview should not take more than 1 hour.</p>	
<p>Age:  Gender:  Organisation:  Role:</p>	<p>- General characteristics</p>



<b>VSLAs</b>	
<p>1. I would like to start talking about VSLAs in this locality. Could you explain me in detail how VSLAs work?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What are the average savings a VSLA accumulates over time?</li> <li>b. What are the most common reasons for VSLA members to use the VSLA savings?</li> <li>c. Are these reasons in line with the intended reasons to use the VSLA? (<i>why not</i>)</li> <li>d. Have risk mitigation plans been done to inform the decisions of VSLA members? (<i>explain in detail</i>)</li> </ol> <p>2. What other programs, if any, are implemented in conjunction with the VSLA program? If yes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How are these programs incorporated with each other?</li> <li>b. What are the benefits, if any, of having these programs work in conjunction with each other?</li> <li>c. Are there any interventions that should be set up in conjunction with the VSLA program, but are currently not? (<i>which</i>)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Savings</li> <li>- Programming in conjunction</li> </ul>
<b>Resilience</b>	
<p>3. I would now like to speak about shocks and crisis in South Darfur and how community members deal with those. What are the main shocks and crises that people in South Darfur face? (<i>ask the following questions for each shock and crisis mentioned</i>)</p> <p><i>Anticipation</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How have VSLAs, if at all, contributed to households being able to take anticipatory steps for this shock or crisis? (<i>ask specific examples</i>)</li> <li>b. How have VSLAs, if at all, contributed to communities being able to take anticipatory steps for this shock or crisis? (<i>ask specific examples</i>)</li> </ol> <p><i>Absorption</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed the impact of this shock or crisis on households in the community?</li> <li>d. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed the impact of this shock or crisis on the community as a whole?</li> </ol> <p><i>Adaption</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed how households adjust after this shock or crisis?</li> <li>f. How have VSLAs, if at all, changed how communities adjust after this shock or crisis?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shocks and crises               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Anticipation</li> <li>o Adaption</li> <li>o Absorption</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Women Empowerment</b>	



<p>4. Now I would like to speak about the outcomes of VSLAs. What do you think are the main positive outcomes from the VSLA project in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What are the main positive outcomes for women?</li><li>b. How can these positive outcomes be intensified?</li><li>c. What are the main positive outcomes for men?</li><li>d. How can these positive outcomes be intensified?</li></ul> <p>5. What do you think are the main negative outcomes from the VSLA project in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What are the main negative outcomes for women?</li><li>b. How can these negative outcomes be mitigated?</li><li>c. What are the main negative outcomes for men?</li><li>d. How can these negative outcomes be mitigated?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Project outcomes</li><li>- Gender differences</li></ul>
<b>Wrap-up</b>	
<p>6. If you could change one thing to improve the VSLA program, what would it be?</p> <p>7. Is there anything you would like to add?</p>	
<b>Thank you very much for your time and insights. I hope this will help to further improve the VSLA services in your locality.</b>	



## Annex 2: Focus Group Discussion Tools

### FGD with Female Members of the VSLAs

Questions	Indicators
<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <p>Hello, my name is _____ and I am working with Forcier Consulting. I am here to learn more about the Village Savings and Loan Associations in your community. I want to assure you that all the opinions you give are completely confidential. You may refuse to answer any particular question. You may also end the interview at any point without any negative consequences. However, we would greatly appreciate your opinions on these topics, which will contribute to understanding the needs in your community better. This interview should not take more than 2 hours.</p>	
<p>Number of participants:</p> <p>Ages:</p> <p>Genders:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General characteristics</li> </ul>
<p><b>Income, Savings and VSLAs</b></p>	
<p>1. I would like to start talking about income, savings and VSLAs in this community. What are the main sources of income in this community?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a. Are the main sources of income in this community stable all-year round?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">b. If not, what are the main threats in this community that could destabilize these sources of income?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">c. How do community members help each other, if at all, when others deal with threats to their main source of income? (<i>Not VSLA</i>)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">d. Can community members take out loans if they face a threat to their main source of income? (<i>not VSLA</i>)</p> <p>2. You are all members of a VSLA. Why did you decide to join the VSLA?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a. What are some of the reasons why other community members decided not to join the VSLA?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">b. Are there community members who want to join the VSLA, but are unable? (<i>who/why</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Income sources</li> <li>- VSLA</li> </ul>



3. VSLA members are primarily female. How do you feel about this?

- a. What are the positive sides of including mostly women in the VSLA project?
- b. What are the negative sides of including mostly women in the VSLA project?
- c. How has your participation in the VSLA impacted your position as a woman in the community?
- d. How has your participation in the VSLA impacted your position as a woman in your household?
- e. What other aspects of your life, if any, have changed after joining the VSLA?

4. How useful do you feel it was to join the VSLA?

- a. Has your household income increased/remained stable/decreased after joining the VSLA? (*note down number of respondents for each answer*)
  - a1. Why did your income increase?
  - a2. Why did your income decrease?
- b. Have your household savings increased/remained stable/decreased after joining the VSLA? (*note down number of respondents for each answer*)
  - b1. Why did your savings increase?
  - b2. Why did your savings decrease?

### Resilience

5. I want to speak about loans you may have taken from the VSLA. Have you ever taken a loan out from the VSLA?

- a. What reason did you have to take out a loan? (*note down the number of people who took a loan for the following reasons and specify the loan*)
  - a1: Business/investment?
  - a2: Unexpected event? (*funeral, etc.*)
  - a3: Environmental hazard? (*drought, floods, etc.*)
  - a4: Another reason?
- b. Are loans always available when an emergency occurs? (*why not*)
- c. How difficult was it to pay back the loans? (*why*)
- d. Can you describe why or why not it was useful for you to take out a loan? (*note down complete story what the loan was for and what happened after*)

- Loans
- Shocks and crises
  - o Anticipation
  - o Adaption
  - o Absorption



e. In the future, for what reasons would you take out a loan? (*note down the number of yes and no and probe why*)

i1: Business/investment?

i2: Unexpected event?

i3: Environmental hazard?

i4: Another reason? (*note down reason*)

6. I would like to speak about shocks and crises in this community. What were the main shocks and crises this community faced in the last year? (*ask the following questions for each shock and crises*)

*Anticipation*

a. Did the community foresee this shock or crisis before it happened? (*how*)

a1. If yes, did the community take any measures before the shock or crisis happened? (*what kind*)

a2. What measures are needed to ensure the community is better prepared for this shock or crisis?

a3. Did you in your household take any measures before the shock or crisis happened? (*what kind*)

a4. Did your participation in the VSLA allow you to better prepare for this shock or crisis? (*how*)

a5. What measures are needed to ensure your household can better prepare for this shock or crisis?

*Absorption*

b. How did this shock or crisis impact the community?

b1. Did the VSLA change anything in how this shock or crisis impact the community? (*how*)

b2. What measures are needed to mitigate the impact of the shock or crisis on the community?

c. How did this shock or crisis impact your household? (*how*)

c1. Did your participation in the VSLA change anything to the impact this shock or crisis had on your household? (*how*)

c2. What measures are needed to mitigate the impact of the shock or crisis on your household?

*Adaption*



<p>d. Have any changes taken place in the community after the shock or crisis to adjust to the new environment?</p> <p>d1. Did the VSLA change anything in how the community adjusted to the new environment after the shock or crisis? (how)</p> <p>e. Have any changes taken place in your household after the shock or crisis to adjust to the new environment?</p> <p>e1. Did the VSLA change anything in how your household adjusted to the new environment after the shock or crisis? (how)</p> <p>f. How can VSLAs play a role in making communities better able to deal with such shocks and crises?</p>	
<p><b>Wrap-up</b></p>	
<p>7. If you could change one thing to improve the VSLA program, what would it be?</p>	
<p>8. Is there anything you would like to add?</p>	
<p><b>Thank you very much for your time and insights. I hope this will help to further improve the VSLA services in your community.</b></p>	

### FGD with Male Members of the VSLAs

Questions	Indicators
<p><i>Introduction</i> Hello, my name is _____ and I am working with Forcier Consulting. I am here to learn more about the Village Savings and Loan Associations in your community. I want to assure you that all the opinions you give are completely confidential. You may refuse to answer any particular question. You may also end the interview at any point without any negative consequences. However, we would greatly appreciate your opinions on these topics, which will contribute to understanding the needs in your community better. This interview should not take more than 2 hours.</p>	
<p>Number of participants</p> <p>Ages</p> <p>Genders</p>	<p>- General characteristics</p>



### Income, Savings and VSLAs

1. I would like to start talking about income, savings and VSLAs in this community. What are the main sources of income in this community?

- a. Are the main sources of income in this community stable all-year round?
- b. If not, what are the main threats in this community that could destabilize these sources of income?
- c. How do community members help each other, if at all, when others deal with threats to their main source of income? (*Not VSLA*)
- d. Can community members take out loans if they face a threat to their main source of income? (*not VSLA*)

2. You are all members of a VSLA. Why did you decide to join the VSLA?

- a. What are some of the reasons why other community members decided not to join the VSLA?
- b. Are there community members who want to join the VSLA, but are unable? (*who/why*)

3. VSLA members are primarily female. How do you feel about this?

- a. What are the positive sides of including mostly women in the VSLA project?
- b. What are the negative sides of including mostly women in the VSLA project?
- c. Has the position of women in this community changed after they joined the VSLA?
- d. Has anything changed in the ability of women to make decision in the community after they joined the VSLA?

4. How useful do you feel it was to join the VSLA?

- a. Has your household income increased/remained stable/decreased after joining the VSLA? (*note down number of respondents for each answer*)
  - a1. Why did your income increase?
  - a2. Why did your income decrease?
- b. Have your household savings increased/remained stable/decreased after joining the VSLA? (*note down number of respondents for each answer*)
  - b1. Why did your savings increase?
  - b2. Why did your savings decrease?

- Income sources
- VSLA



Resilience	
<p>5. I want to speak about loans you may have taken from the VSLA. Have you ever taken a loan out from the VSLA?</p> <p>a. What reason did you have to take out a loan? <i>(note down the number of people who took a loan for the following reasons and specify the loan)</i></p> <p>a1: Business/investment?</p> <p>a2: Unexpected event? <i>(funeral, etc.)</i></p> <p>a3: Environmental hazard? <i>(drought, floods, etc.)</i></p> <p>a4: Another reason?</p> <p>b. Are loans always available when an emergency occurs? <i>(why not)</i></p> <p>c. How difficult was it to pay back the loans? <i>(why)</i></p> <p>d. Can you describe why or why not it was useful for you to take out a loan? <i>(note down complete story what the loan was for and what happened after)</i></p> <p>e. In the future, for what reasons would you take out a loan? <i>(note down the number of yes and no and probe why)</i></p> <p>i1: Business/investment?</p> <p>i2: Unexpected event?</p> <p>i3: Environmental hazard?</p> <p>i4: Another reason? <i>(note down reason)</i></p> <p>6. I would like to speak about shocks and crises in this community. What were the main shocks and crises this community faced in the last year? <i>(ask the following questions for each shock and crises)</i></p> <p><i>Anticipation</i></p> <p>a. Did the community foresee this shock or crisis before it happened? <i>(how)</i></p> <p>a1. If yes, did the community take any measures before the shock or crisis happened? <i>(what kind)</i></p> <p>a2. What measures are needed to ensure the community is better prepared for this shock or crisis?</p> <p>a3. Did you in your household take any measures before the shock or crisis happened? <i>(what kind)</i></p> <p>a4. Did your participation in the VSLA allow you to better prepare for this shock or crisis? <i>(how)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loans</li> <li>- Shocks and crises               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Anticipation</li> <li>o Adaption</li> <li>o Absorption</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



<p>a5. What measures are needed to ensure your household can better prepare for this shock or crisis?</p> <p><i>Absorption</i></p> <p>b. How did this shock or crisis impact the community?</p> <p>b1. Did the VSLA change anything in how this shock or crisis impact the community? (<i>how</i>)</p> <p>b2. What measures are needed to mitigate the impact of the shock or crisis on the community?</p> <p>c. How did this shock or crisis impact your household? (<i>how</i>)</p> <p>c1. Did your participation in the VSLA change anything to the impact this shock or crisis had on your household? (<i>how</i>)</p> <p>c2. What measures are needed to mitigate the impact of the shock or crisis on your household?</p> <p><i>Adaption</i></p> <p>d. Have any changes taken place in the community after the shock or crisis to adjust to the new environment?</p> <p>d1. Did the VSLA change anything in how the community adjusted to the new environment after the shock or crisis? (<i>how</i>)</p> <p>e. Have any changes taken place in your household after the shock or crisis to adjust to the new environment?</p> <p>e1. Did the VSLA change anything in how your household adjusted to the new environment after the shock or crisis? (<i>how</i>)</p> <p>f. How can VSLAs play a role in making communities better able to deal with such shocks and crises?</p>	
<b>Wrap-up</b>	
7. If you could change one thing to improve the VSLA program, what would it be?	
8. Is there anything you would like to add?	
<b>Thank you very much for your time and insights. I hope this will help to further improve the VSLA services in your community.</b>	



## FGD with Mixed Members of the VSLAs

Questions	Indicators
<p><i>Introduction</i> Hello, my name is _____ and I am working with Forcier Consulting. I am here to learn more about the Village Savings and Loan Associations in your community. I want to assure you that all the opinions you give are completely confidential. You may refuse to answer any particular question. You may also end the interview at any point without any negative consequences. However, we would greatly appreciate your opinions on these topics, which will contribute to understanding the needs in your community better. This interview should not take more than 2 hours.</p>	
<p>Number of participants:</p> <p>Ages:</p> <p>Genders:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General characteristics</li> </ul>
<p><b>Income, Savings and VSLAs</b></p>	
<p>1. I would like to start talking about income, savings and VSLAs in this community. What are the main sources of income in this community?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Are the main sources of income in this community stable all-year round?</li> <li>b. If not, what are the main threats in this community that could destabilize these sources of income?</li> <li>c. How do community members help each other, if at all, when others deal with threats to their main source of income? (<i>Not VSLA</i>)</li> <li>d. Can community members take out loans if they face a threat to their main source of income? (<i>not VSLA</i>)</li> </ol> <p>2. You are all members of a VSLA. Why did you decide to join the VSLA?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What are some of the reasons why other community members decided not to join the VSLA?</li> <li>b. Are there community members who want to join the VSLA, but are unable? (<i>who/why</i>)</li> </ol> <p>3. VSLA members are primarily female. How do you feel about this?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What are the positive sides of including mostly women in the VSLA project?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Income sources</li> <li>- VSLA</li> </ul>



<p>b. What are the negative sides of including mostly women in the VSLA project?</p> <p>c. Has the position of women in this community changed after they joined the VSLA?</p> <p>d. Has anything changed in the ability of women to make decision in the community after they joined the VSLA?</p> <p>4. How useful do you feel it was to join the VSLA?</p> <p>a. Has your household income increased/remained stable/decreased after joining the VSLA? <i>(note down number of respondents for each answer)</i></p> <p>a1. Why did your income increase?</p> <p>a2. Why did your income decrease?</p> <p>b. Have your household savings increased/remained stable/decreased after joining the VSLA? <i>(note down number of respondents for each answer)</i></p> <p>b1. Why did your savings increase?</p> <p>b2. Why did your savings decrease?</p>	
<b>Resilience</b>	
<p>5. I want to speak about loans you may have taken from the VSLA. Have you ever taken a loan out from the VSLA?</p> <p>a. What reason did you have to take out a loan? <i>(note down the number of people who took a loan for the following reasons and specify the loan)</i></p> <p>a1: Business/investment?</p> <p>a2: Unexpected event? <i>(funeral, etc.)</i></p> <p>a3: Environmental hazard? <i>(drought, floods, etc.)</i></p> <p>a4: Another reason?</p> <p>b. Are loans always available when an emergency occurs? <i>(why not)</i></p> <p>c. How difficult was it to pay back the loans? <i>(why)</i></p> <p>d. Can you describe why or why not it was useful for you to take out a loan? <i>(note down complete story what the loan was for and what happened after)</i></p> <p>e. In the future, for what reasons would you take out a loan? <i>(note down the number of yes and no and probe why)</i></p> <p>i1: Business/investment?</p> <p>i2: Unexpected event?</p> <p>i3: Environmental hazard?</p> <p>i4: Another reason? <i>(note down reason)</i></p> <p>6. I would like to speak about shocks and crises in this community. What were the main shocks and crises this</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Loans</li><li>- Shocks and crises<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Anticipation</li><li>o Adaption</li><li>o Absorption</li></ul></li></ul>



community faced in the last year? (*ask the following questions for each shock and crises*)

*Anticipation*

- a. Did the community foresee this shock or crisis before it happened? (*how*)
  - a1. If yes, did the community take any measures before the shock or crisis happened? (*what kind*)
  - a2. What measures are needed to ensure the community is better prepared for this shock or crisis?
  - a3. Did you in your household take any measures before the shock or crisis happened? (*what kind*)
  - a4. Did your participation in the VSLA allow you to better prepare for this shock or crisis? (*how*)
  - a5. What measures are needed to ensure your household can better prepare for this shock or crisis?

*Absorption*

- b. How did this shock or crisis impact the community?
  - b1. Did the VSLA change anything in how this shock or crisis impact the community? (*how*)
  - b2. What measures are needed to mitigate the impact of the shock or crisis on the community?
- c. How did this shock or crisis impact your household? (*how*)
  - c1. Did your participation in the VSLA change anything to the impact this shock or crisis had on your household? (*how*)
  - c2. What measures are needed to mitigate the impact of the shock or crisis on your household?

*Adaption*

- d. Have any changes taken place in the community after the shock or crisis to adjust to the new environment?
  - d1. Did the VSLA change anything in how the community adjusted to the new environment after the shock or crisis? (*how*)
- e. Have any changes taken place in your household after the shock or crisis to adjust to the new environment?



<p>e1. Did the VSLA change anything in how your household adjusted to the new environment after the shock or crisis? (how)</p> <p>f. How can VSLAs play a role in making communities better able to deal with such shocks and crises?</p>	
<b>Wrap-up</b>	
<p>7. If you could change one thing to improve the VSLA program, what would it be?</p> <p>8. Is there anything you would like to add?</p>	
<p><b>Thank you very much for your time and insights. I hope this will help to further improve the VSLA services in your community.</b></p>	

### FGD with Non-Members of the VSLAs

Questions	Indicators
<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <p>Hello, my name is _____ and I am working with Forcier Consulting. I am here to learn more about the Village Savings and Loan Associations in your community. I want to assure you that all the opinions you give are completely confidential. You may refuse to answer any particular question. You may also end the interview at any point without any negative consequences. However, we would greatly appreciate your opinions on these topics, which will contribute to understanding the needs in your community better. This interview should not take more than 2 hours.</p>	
<p>Number of participants:</p> <p>Ages:</p> <p>Genders:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General characteristics</li> </ul>
<b>Income and livelihood</b>	
<p>1. I would like to start talking about livelihood in this community. What are the main sources of income in this community?</p> <p>a. Are the main sources of income in this community stable all-year round?</p> <p>b. If not, what are the main threats in this community that could destabilize these sources of income?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Income sources</li> <li>- Attitudes towards saving money</li> </ul>



<p>c. How do community members help each other, if at all, when others deal with threats to their main source of income? (<i>Not VSLA</i>)</p> <p>d. Can community members take out loans if they face a threat to their main source of income? (<i>not VSLA</i>)</p> <p>2. How important do you think saving money is? (<i>why</i>)</p> <p>a. What are the main obstacles that prevent you from saving money?</p> <p>b. What are the main obstacles that prevent other community members from saving money?</p>	
<b>VSLA</b>	
<p>3. I would like to talk about Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs). Have you ever heard of this concept? (<i>if not, explain to the respondents what a VSLA is</i>)</p> <p>a. If yes, please explain what a VSLA is?</p> <p>b. Are you aware that there are VSLAs in your community?</p> <p>c. Did you have an opportunity to join the VSLA?</p> <p>c1. If yes, why did you decide not to join the VSLA?</p> <p>c2. If no, would you want to join the VSLA? (<i>why</i>)</p> <p>d. Do you know other people who are joining a VSLA?</p> <p>d1. Did joining the VSLA changed those people's lives? (<i>how</i>)</p> <p>4. (<i>Explain once more in short what a VSLA is</i>) Do you think it is useful for someone to join a VSLA?</p> <p>a. What could be the positive sides of joining a VSLA?</p> <p>b. What could be the negative sides of joining a VSLA?</p> <p>5. If you are in need for money, how would you get money in the following situation:</p> <p>a. Money to invest in a business?</p> <p>b. Money to cover a sudden event? (funeral, etc.)</p> <p>c. Money to deal with an environmental hazard?</p> <p>d. Money for other events? (write down other events)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- VSLA</li> <li>- Attitude towards VSLA</li> <li>- Loans</li> </ul>
<b>Resilience</b>	
<p>6. I would like to speak about shocks and crises in this community. What were the main shocks and crises this</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shocks and crises             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Anticipation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



community faced in the last year? (*ask the following questions for each shock and crises*)

*Anticipation*

- a. Did the community foresee this shock or crisis before it happened? (*how*)
  - a1. If yes, did the community take any measures before the shock or crisis happened? (*what kind*)
  - a2. What measures are needed to ensure the community can better prepare for this shock or crisis?
  - a3. Did you in your household take any measures before the shock or crisis happened? (*what kind*)
  - a4. What measures are needed to ensure your household can better prepare for this shock or crisis?

*Absorption*

- b. How did this shock or crisis impact the community?
  - B1. What measures are needed to ensure that this shock or crisis does not impact the community so much?
- c. How did this shock or crisis impact your household? (*how*)
  - c1. What measures are needed to ensure that this shock or crisis does not impact your household so much?

*Adaption*

- d. Have any changes taken place in the community after the shock or crisis to adjust to the new environment?
- e. Have any changes taken place in your household after the shock or crisis to adjust to the new environment?

- Adaption
- Absorption

**Wrap-up**

7. Is there anything you would like to add?

**Thank you very much for your time and insights. I hope this will help to further improve the VSLA services in your community.**



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### **Forcier Consulting**

Forcier Consulting is a development research firm that operates in challenging post-conflict environments. Established in 2011 in South Sudan, Forcier Consulting has invested in developing methodologies and approaches to research that are contextually appropriate and feasible, whilst adhering to international standards for social science research and utilizing the latest data collection technology available. Our core services include population and social science research, project evaluations, market assessments for livelihoods and vocational trainings, private sector and market research for feasibility studies, strategic planning and representation, and training and capacity building workshops.

For further information, please visit [www.forcierconsulting.com](http://www.forcierconsulting.com).