

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

PADANE Project

Abstract

This booklet reflects on how Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) was embedded and experienced within the PADANE project (2018–2026) in Burundi. By applying a four-pillar empowerment framework, Access, Agency, Voice, and Enabling Environment, the project aimed to improve income, nutrition, and resilience for farming households across eight agricultural value chains. The findings highlight significant shifts in household decision-making and resource access driven by participatory tools like the Integrated Farm Plan (PIP). At the same time, the booklet also highlights areas where further strengthening is needed. Structural barriers especially around land rights continue to limit how far these gains can go. Drawing on these experiences, the booklet highlights contextual lessons on what it takes to move from household-level change to more sustained, system-level impact in GESI programming.

Methodology

The findings and lessons learned presented in this booklet are based on a comprehensive GESI assessment of the PADANE project. complemented by qualitative staff and participants' reflections from implementation experience.

- **GESI assessment report:** Most of this booklet conclusions are from the GESI assessment conducted by an external consultant to ensure an objective evaluation of the project's impact.
- **Analytical Framework:** The analysis was guided by the GESI framework, focusing on four domains of Access (resources), Agency (decision-making), Voice (participation), and the Enabling Environment (systems and social norms).
- **Data Collection Tools:** Information was gathered using specific tools designed to evaluate household and community-level shifts, including reviews of participatory interventions such as the PIP and Family Tree.
- **Evidence-Based Synthesis:** Qualitative evidence was drawn directly from participant success stories to validate findings on power dynamics and social change.

Key achievements

1 Access

- Women gained **greater access to land** through participatory household planning tools (PIP, diamond dream, and family tree).
- **Savings and credit structures** (VSLAs, VICOBA, solidarity groups) expanded financial and social inclusion for women and youth.
- Women accessed **training and livelihood opportunities across** value chains, improving productivity and nutrition

2 Agency

- **Couples' training** shifted household dynamics, enabling women to influence decisions on production, income use, and nutrition.
- Women reported **increased confidence and skills** to make investment and nutrition-related decisions.
- Household-level interventions fostered **more equitable decision-making** between men and women.

3 Voice

- Women's **collective voice amplified** through cooperatives, savings groups, and advocacy networks.
- Increased **participation in community dialogues** and engagement with local authorities.
- Emerging **leadership roles** in informal community structures, though formal governance and market representation remain limited.



Lessons

Lesson 1: Transforming household norms is necessary but insufficient to sustain GESI outcomes

Context (Burundi / PADANE)

In Burundi, deeply embedded gender norms position men as heads of households and primary decision makers over land, income, and investments. PADANE intentionally targeted household-level power relations through participatory tools, focusing on making hidden power dynamics visible and creating space for dialogue and negotiation.

What was done

PADANE recognised men as key partners in change and engaged them to support more inclusive household dynamics and strengthen women's roles in development. Due cultural barriers that keep consider women less important in the development aspect, it was important to encourage and educate men to support women and change behaviour that was imposed to them due to the culture. PADANE applied participatory household planning tools (*PIP, family tree, diamond dream, and Journey of Transformation*) to:

- Surface gendered power dynamics
- Promote joint planning and transparent decision making
- Engage men and women together in reflecting on norms
- Help men to see the women as part of the economic development of the households

Why it worked

These tools worked because they made power visible and negotiable rather than implicit and fixed. The tools also made men (the power holders) part of the change process which facilitated acceptability on their part. By reframing the household as a shared economic and social unit, they created space for dialogue and negotiation.

Under what conditions

- Tools were applied consistently and facilitated by trained staff and local structures established by the project
- Men were deliberately engaged, not treated as obstacles
- Economic opportunities accompanied social dialogue

What changed

- Individual level: Women gained confidence and voice
- Household level: Decision making shifted toward joint planning
- System level: Minimal change

Remaining barriers

While household norms shifted, institutional and cultural norms did not. Access to land, credit, and formal leadership opportunities continues to be mediated by male dominated systems.

Lesson 2: Increased participation does not translate into scale due to perceived risk, resource, and investment gaps

Context (Burundi / PADANE)

Collective structures such as savings groups and cooperatives have become key entry points for women's economic participation in PADANE-supported value chains. While these platforms have significantly increased women's engagement in financial activities, this participation does not consistently translate into access to larger investment opportunities or formal leadership roles in collective spaces.

Evidence from the innovation fund highlights persistent gaps in the scale of access and benefit distribution. Although women represented 43% of applicants, they received only 22% of the total funding allocated under the women and youth window. Women were actively encouraged to apply and did so; however, they tended to apply for smaller grant amounts compared to men. The data points to possible underlying constraints related to risk perception, investment readiness, and access to resources.

At the same time, women are more present in collective structures, accounting for 54% of groups and cooperatives compared to 46% for men. However, areas with a higher concentration of women's groups did not correspond to higher levels of grant allocation. This indicates that increased participation alone is not sufficient to ensure equitable access to larger-scale financing.

What was done

PADANE strengthened collective and household level enablers by:

- Supporting women's participation in savings groups (VSLAs) and cooperatives
- Encouraging women to apply for innovation fund grants and supporting business development processes
- Promoting women's leadership roles within collective structures
- Engaging men to recognise women's economic contributions
- Linking women entrepreneurs to financial institutions and value chain actors
- Embedding gender considerations within cooperative structures and group governance

What worked

- Collective structures created safer entry points for women's economic participation and experimentation with smaller-scale investments.
- VSLAs functioned as spaces for confidence building, peer learning, and gradual exposure to financial decision-making.
- Women-led project choices strengthened ownership and business commitment.
- Male engagement contributed to shifts in household decision-making dynamics

Under what conditions

- Regular group interaction and trust
- Integrated learning alongside finance
- Community acceptance of women's collective action

What changed

- Individual: Increased confidence, skills, and economic engagement
- Household: Greater recognition of women's contributions
- System: Few banks have started investing in women's activities.

Remaining barriers

- Persistent fear of risk and lack of collateral
- Limited access to productive assets

Lesson 3: Engaging Local Land Governance Systems is Critical to Overcoming Gender Bias

Context (Burundi / PADANE)

In Burundi, land ownership remains highly unequal, with women significantly underrepresented. Land tenure is governed by a mix of statutory law and customary practice, with inheritance systems that largely exclude women.

What was done

PADANE primarily strengthened informal and semi formal access mechanisms, including:

- Advocacy networks and capacity building on advocacy and lobbying
- Organizing advocacy actions targeting local governance for joint land registration
- Sensitizing households on the importance of joint registration

Why it worked

These approaches worked because they bypassed exclusionary formal systems and built women's economic legitimacy incrementally.

Under what conditions

- Advocacy networks were predominantly women
- They were equipped with advocacy skills to influence local governments and households

What changed

- Household level: Increased joint land registration (242 women included)
- System level: Improved acceptance among local administrators
- Administrative level: Adjustments to land registration practices

Remaining barriers

- Lack of ministerial order to institutionalize reforms nationally
- Legal constraints on women's land inheritance



Lesson 4: Women's Leadership Remains Limited Despite Increased Participation

Context

The project established structures to sustain interventions, but women's leadership remains low across these structures and at national level

What was done

- Campaigns to encourage women's participation in leadership
- Promotion of internal rules supporting women's inclusion

What changed

- Increased participation in entry-level leadership roles

Remaining barriers

- Social norms discouraging women from competing for leadership roles
- Women's leadership rarely transitions into formal governance roles

Implication

Efforts to transform norms and support women's leadership must continue, with stronger emphasis on enabling women to access and sustain formal decision-making positions.

Conclusion

PADANE demonstrated that the GESI framework can generate meaningful shifts in access, agency, and voice, particularly at household and community levels. These achievements position SNV Burundi as a GESI-responsive actor with emerging transformative practices.

Sustaining and scaling these gains will require deliberate focus on structural reforms, stronger partnerships with public and private actors, and the systematic integration of GESI principles from the design phase of future programs.





Access

Access to Land and Resources

Renata & Barthelemy – Household Planning Unlocks New Horizons

Province: Rumonge Colline: Gatete
GESI Pillar Highlighted : Access



Renata and Barthelemy lived as many couples in Burundi, within a cultural context where men are recognised as heads of households and hold authority over family property and decision-making. This arrangement was not unusual, and for years it shaped their lives without question. Yet, it carried limitations, particularly for Renata, whose aspirations to undertake new initiatives were constrained by the traditional boundaries of gender roles and household power dynamics.

The turning point came when they were introduced to participatory household planning tools through earlier SNV projects, later reinforced by PADANE. Training sessions on the Integrated Farmer's Plan (PIP) and the family tree exercise challenged them to rethink their household as a shared entity. The metaphor of the tree, representing the family, encouraged transparency in income and expenses, joint planning of projects, and a reimagining of household activities as collective responsibilities rather than tasks divided by gender. For Renata and Barthelemy, this was a radical departure from the norm in their community, but it sparked a transformation in how they viewed their future.

Together, they decided to establish a joint cooperatives, aptly named Renata_Barthelemy. As both teachers and farmers, they combined their skills and resources to invest in amaranth farming, a crop with strong market potential. The results were immediate and profound. The cooperative grew **from selling only 5 kg of amaranth per week to selling 250 kg weekly,** establishing a steady and sustainable source of income. Their household income grew substantially, and the wealth generated from their enterprise contributed to the wellbeing of the entire family. Their success did not go unnoticed. Local authorities, impressed by their initiative and the scale of their operations, lent them an additional plot of land and provided an irrigation machine to support production during the dry season. This institutional recognition further expanded their access to resources and strengthened their resilience.

With their enterprise flourishing, Renata and Barthelemy began negotiating with banks for loans, confident in the revenues generated and the promising contracts they had secured with clients. What began as a household planning exercise had evolved into a thriving business, opening doors to financial inclusion and long-term sustainability. Renata, once limited by cultural norms, now stood as an equal partner in decisions about land, investment, and the future of their family.

This story illustrates the power of the GESI framework's Access pillar in practice. By introducing participatory tools that promote transparency and shared responsibility, PADANE enabled women like Renata to move beyond traditional constraints and gain equitable access to land, finance, and productive assets. Their journey demonstrates how access, when unlocked through inclusive approaches, becomes a catalyst for household prosperity, community recognition, and systemic change.

Kirama Colline – From Malnutrition to Economic Empowerment

Province: Makamba Colline: Kirama

GESI Pillar Highlighted : Access

Kirama Colline in Makamba Province was once known for its vulnerability, with alarming rates of child malnutrition. Families struggled to provide balanced meals, and the idea of eating meat or fruit daily was considered a luxury, even for wealthier households. Women, in particular, bore the burden of feeding their families with limited resources and little decision-making power.

Interventions

Through the PADANE project's Sustainable Nutrition for All (SN4A) approach, Kirama was introduced to nutrition education and solidarity groups operating as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). From the outset, PADANE intentionally prioritised women's participation, focusing on women of reproductive age as key beneficiaries and engaging **mamans lumière** (lead mothers) as community role models. These women played a crucial role in demonstrating good nutrition practices and mobilizing their peers.

The training emphasized dietary diversity - the "five fingers" food groups - and practical demonstrations showed families that nutritious meals could be prepared with resources already available in their households. PADANE also strengthened informal savings and credit mechanisms that are more accessible to women, enabling them to participate actively in community groups, build financial confidence, and make decisions that directly influence their families' health.

To overcome the economic barriers of accessing protein and fruits, women organized themselves into solidarity groups. Each member contributed small amounts - as little as **500 BIF weekly** - pooling funds to buy chickens, rabbits, or seeds, and rotating support among members. These groups also cultivated each other's fields, ensuring food security and strengthening community bonds.



Transformation

What began as a response to urgent nutrition needs quickly evolved into a platform for economic empowerment. Women who previously had no means to save or invest began purchasing family necessities and starting small businesses. Collective savings allowed them to access protein sources regularly, diversify diets, and improve child nutrition.

The impact was visible: malnutrition rates in Kirama dropped dramatically, and families reported healthier children and improved resilience during lean seasons. As one community member, Nahinkuye Godelieve, explained, "Today, we learnt to keep food aside for that season, and in case it is not enough, we are using solidarity groups to contribute."

Beyond nutrition, the solidarity groups became spaces for continuous learning. Meetings were not only about saving money but also about sharing knowledge on breastfeeding, maternal health, and hygiene.

Over time, men began joining after witnessing the success of women-led initiatives, further strengthening collective ownership.

Strategic Significance

Kirama's story demonstrates how financial inclusion and training opportunities can transform vulnerable communities. By combining nutrition education with savings structures, PADANE enabled women to move from survival to empowerment. The solidarity groups bridged the gap between knowledge and practice, ensuring that families could afford diverse diets and invest in their futures.
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This case highlights the GESI framework's Access pillar in action: women gained access to financial resources, training, and livelihood opportunities, which translated into healthier families, stronger community resilience, and new pathways for economic growth.





Agency



ESTELLE & JACQUES MUGANJI

A Household Transformed Through Dialogue and Shared Dreams

Province: Bubanza Commune: Rugazi
GESI Pillars Highlighted: Agency & Voice

Before the Transformation

When Estelle and Jacques Muganji married in 2018, their early years were marked by tension and imbalance. Estelle, naturally entrepreneurial and energetic, dreamed of starting a business she believed in. But Jacques - shaped by cultural norms and peer expectations around masculinity - believed that he alone should make decisions for the household. He imposed business ideas on his wife, dismissing her own aspirations.

The ventures he pushed her into did not succeed and even drew Estelle into legal complications. She felt silenced and unsupported. Jacques grew frustrated when his plans failed, reinforcing a cycle of misunderstanding and emotional distance. The household struggled under the strain of poor communication and unequal decision-making.

A Moment of Realization

Witnessing the consequences of these imposed choices, Jacques began to reflect. He saw Estelle struggling in activities she never chose and realized how deeply the household was affected. Slowly, he opened space for conversation - asking Estelle what she truly wanted, what work motivated her, and how he could support her ambitions rather than direct them.

This shift aligned with a pivotal opportunity: the couple was invited to PADANE's **Journey of Transformation** training, a household-centred intervention designed to strengthen equitable decision-making, family planning, respectful communication, and financial transparency.

The Turning Point

For Jacques, the training became a personal breakthrough. Hearing other men reflect on similar experiences helped him confront the patterns he had normalized. He recognised how his authority had limited both Estelle and the family's prosperity.

"Before I allowed Estelle to do something she was passionate about, I was the only one generating revenues in the family. I later realized that working solo was impeding the family's prosperity." - Jacques Muganji

This marked the beginning of a profound transformation.

A New Beginning for Estelle

With her husband's support, Estelle finally pursued the activity she had wanted from the start: **collecting and selling milk**. She began modestly but with purpose, investing **300,000 BIF of her own capital** to start a small milk collection activity. Her dedication and growing business skills enabled her to compete for the PADANE **Innovation Fund,** through which she was awarded a **2 million BIF grant** that significantly accelerated her progress.

Through this support, Estelle expanded her operations, increased her milk collection capacity, and opened a **milk shop and patisserie**. Her business grew rapidly, and today it is valued at approximately **20 million BIF**, a remarkable leap from her humble beginnings.



Her business quickly gained traction, becoming a stable and growing source of income for the family.



Life Today

Today, the Muganji household has transformed into a partnership built on trust, shared responsibilities, and mutual support. Estelle's business generates significant revenue, contributing directly to the family's wellbeing. Financial decisions are made together, openly and confidently. Communication - once strained - now guides their plans and strengthens their relationship.

Jacques has become an active supporter of the business, providing skills, investment, and encouragement. The couple now sees their future as a shared journey rather than a divided effort.
Their transformation illustrates the powerful impact of household-level GESI interventions. When women gain the space to speak and lead, and when men embrace dialogue and shared responsibility, families prosper - economically, socially, and emotionally.

A Story of Agency, Voice, and Shared Growth

Estelle and Jacques are now living proof of how the Journey of Transformation can shift entrenched norms, strengthen agency, and rebuild households on the foundations of respect and communication. Their experience reflects the heart of PADANE's GESI approach: empowered individuals shaping resilient families and thriving communities.


Voice

From Orphaned Farm Girl to National Amaranth Leader: An Informal Voice Transforming Women's Agribusiness

Province: Gitega
GESI Pillars Highlighted: Voice & Agency
Leadership Level: Informal Community Leadership

A Childhood Marked by Hardship

Rosette's journey begins in profound adversity. Orphaned at a young age, she grew up without the chance to go to school, relying only on her resilience to survive. As a teenager, she cultivated other people's land for minimal pay, using the little she earned to support herself and her siblings. Poverty shaped every aspect of her early life - yet it never extinguished her determination to rise above her circumstances.

A Turning Point Through PADANE

When Rosette was introduced to the PADANE project, she saw an opportunity that had never been available to her before. She participated in a series of trainings on business planning, value chain development, and entrepreneurship. For the first time, she learned how to analyse market potential, build a business model, and invest strategically.

It was during these trainings that Rosette identified **amaranth seed multiplication** as her niche. With the small funds she had saved from cultivating other people's fields, she rented her first plot and began producing seeds. She started with just **16 kg of quality amaranth seeds** - a valuable and costly asset at 25,000 BIF per kilogram.

Her first harvest exceeded expectations. Today, she produces around **300 kg of improved amaranth seeds per harvest cycle**, a remarkable leap from her humble beginning.

An Unmarried Woman Owning 11 Plots - A Quiet Revolution

Despite cultural norms that discourage unmarried women from owning property, Rosette used her income to purchase **11 plots of land in her own name**. In a context where female land ownership - especially for single women - is socially inconceivable, Rosette's achievements shocked her community and challenged long held beliefs about what a young woman can own, build, and lead.

Her expanding business created employment opportunities as well. She now works with **14 part-time workers**, ten who assist weekly and four who support her three times a week.

From Farmer to Mentor - and Now a National Connection Point

As Rosette's success grew, so did her visibility. Farmers, youth, and women from across Gitega began seeking her out for advice, mentorship, and quality seeds. What began as individual guidance evolved into full-fledged community support.



Rosette has now:

- **Mentored around 50 young women** in entrepreneurship and amaranth production
- **Supported dozens of youth** in preparing business plans for grant competitions
- Seen **many of her mentees secure grants** from development programs
- Become a regional reference point for amaranth cultivation

Her leadership remains **informal** - she is not seated on cooperative boards or official market governance structures - but her influence is undeniable. She is now known as **a trainer of trainers for amaranth**, respected by peers, agronomists, and extension workers alike.

The Birth of a Women's Cooperative

Recognizing the importance of collective action, Rosette **participated in the creation of a cooperative** of 25 women, many of whom she personally trained and empowered. Recently, the cooperative won a grant from a government programme - an achievement that validated Rosette's leadership and gave her group a stronger platform.

Her cooperative remains informal in governance spaces, but it is increasingly recognised for its entrepreneurial strength and technical expertise.

A Growing Voice Beyond Her Province

Rosette's story began attracting attention beyond Gitega. She was featured in **local magazine**, which amplified her story to a national audience and expanded her network across Burundi.
Through this visibility, she has been invited to share her experience in various dialogues and platforms, contributing valuable insights on women's entrepreneurship, seed multiplication, and youth engagement in agriculture.

Leading Change without a Title

Despite her remarkable achievements, Rosette's leadership has not yet translated into formal governance roles. Cultural norms, limited educational background, and institutional barriers continue to prevent her from entering formal committees and market representation spaces.
Yet within her community, she is already a pillar. Farmers and youth rely on her guidance. Women see her as living proof that empowerment is possible. And development actors see in her the promise of Burundi's next generation of agricultural leaders.

Rosette's journey shows that leadership does not always begin with a title. Sometimes it begins in the fields, in resilience, and in the quiet determination of a young woman who chose to rewrite her own destiny - and uplift others with her.



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

Access

Power to/over

Equal access to resources, land, inputs, paid work, finance

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

Agency

Power within

Decision making, choices, and self confidence

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

Voice

Power with

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

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

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

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

Enabling Environment - systems transformation

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

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



Written by Kerria Akimana and Nicelatte Niyongere
in Collaboration with SNV Global GESI Office

For more information contact
kakimana@snv.org / nniyongere@snv.org