SHIFTING NORMS THROUGH SOCIAL DIALOGUES

NIGERIA WAY LEARNING SERIES
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Cover photo: Women meeting in a small group to share ideas in advance of a social dialogue. These small group meetings are essential to enhance participants' ability to contribute to the social dialogue.
### ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOMWAN</td>
<td>The Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Nigeria</td>
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<td>GESI</td>
<td>Gender equality and social inclusion</td>
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<td>KII</td>
<td>Key Informant Interview</td>
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<td>LGA</td>
<td>Local Government Area</td>
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<td>LSP4G</td>
<td>Life Skills Program for Girls</td>
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<td>MEDA</td>
<td>Mennonite Economic Development Associates</td>
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<td>Nigeria WAY</td>
<td>Youth Entrepreneurship and Women's Empowerment in Northern Nigeria project</td>
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<td>SALAR</td>
<td>Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions</td>
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INTRODUCTION TO NIGERIA WAY

Youth Entrepreneurship and Women’s Empowerment in Northern Nigeria – Nigeria WAY – supports women and youth agro-processors in three value chains in Bauchi State: rice, soybean and groundnut. The project focuses particularly on women and youth-led businesses, with activities aimed at improving productivity, adopting environmentally sustainable business practices, and increasing access to markets, financial services, market information, business networks, and partnerships.

The Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) and the Association of Small AgroProducers in Nigeria (ASSAPIN), two member-based alliances operating in Bauchi State, mobilize clients for the project. The project operates in seven Local Government Areas (LGAs), specifically selected because of their importance in Bauchi’s economy, feeding two key markets in Bauchi State – Bauchi and Azare – which bring together buyers, sellers, and processors for soybean, groundnuts and rice, among other crops. Businesses in Bauchi are largely small and informal, and the market remains nascent, with government – not the private sector – as a primary driver.

In this socially conservative state, women and young people face many obstacles in achieving business success. Mobility is limited for many women, and gender norms restrict the roles available to them. At the same time, endemic poverty increases the need for their economic participation. With increased access to productive technologies and business services, greater financial inclusion and inclusive community dialogues, Nigeria WAY supports women and youth-led businesses to transform their contribution to their households and communities.

The Nigeria WAY Learning Series

The WAY Learning Series is an ongoing initiative to share lessons learned as the project is being implemented, with a particular focus on identifying and understanding factors that impact women’s business success and overall wellbeing in Bauchi State. Topics include women’s time use, girls’ self-perception after participating in skill-building opportunities, how cooperatives function as business platforms for women, and women’s perceptions of themselves as entrepreneurs.

The Learning Series is shared widely with the development community and with project stakeholders, including partners, clients, and government.
Acknowledgments

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Nigeria WAY is made possible with the generous support of Global Affairs Canada and is implemented by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA). Thanks to WAY’s many partners and MEDA’s generous private supporters.

MEDA thanks the Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Bauchi Chapter who have been instrumental in the implementation of the Social Dialogues. We deeply value their partnership and collaboration. In particular, MEDA thanks Amirah Aishatu Ibrahim Kilishi, President of the Bauchi FOMWAN Chapter, and Fatsuma Aminu Mohammed, FOMWAN Coordinator.
WHAT IS A SOCIAL DIALOGUE?

A social dialogue is a structured, facilitated series of discussions which bring together different groups of people in order to identify, discuss and solve social issues of concern. While flexible, the process includes specific stages designed to maximize buy-in and participation of key stakeholders, particularly those whose voices are often excluded from decision-making. Social dialogues include an intentional diversity of voices: representatives from different groups are brought together to ensure inclusion of a range of perspectives and interests.

Social dialogues are valuable tools for engagement and mobilization around problem-solving. Community dialogues – social dialogues held at the community level – can provide tools for solving issues identified by the community members themselves. In particular, dialogues can bring to light issues that individuals and families are experiencing, but which are not typically discussed in public. Through these structured discussions, individuals and families realize that problems they are grappling with individually are actually systemic issues which are caused or fueled by structural inequalities. Dialogues create the basis for a community to plan for the future and take collective action, ultimately aspiring to bring transformational change for individuals and communities.1

Dialogues are being successfully used by a range of organizations to bring system-level change on numerous issues. For example, the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs in Kenya has worked with civil society and non-governmental organizations, using community dialogues to accelerate eradication of female genital mutilation.2 The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) leverages dialogues to understand and resolve complex social problems, such as increasing the integration of marginalized groups.3

The Nigeria WAY team is partnering with the Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), using dialogues to raise, publicly discuss and shift norms within communities on the issue of early and forced girl child marriage. FOMWAN’s membership includes organizations across Nigeria and they have been active in Bauchi State since 1986, supporting the health, literacy and economic empowerment of Muslim women and girls. MEDA and FOMWAN’s collaboration builds on FOMWAN’s advocacy work, raising awareness on the health dangers of early marriage and the

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1 This paper uses ‘social dialogues’ as an umbrella term; on Nigeria WAY, social dialogues are being conducted at specifically at the community level. When discussing WAY’s work in this area, the term ‘community dialogue’ is used.

2 See for example https://www.wvi.org/kenya/accelerating-abandonment-female-genital-mutilation-and-child-marriage-project

importance of birth spacing. In communities where the WAY project is active, early and forced girl child marriage is increasingly being recognized as a social problem with repercussions for girls, whose health and well-being may be impacted in numerous ways by the practice, and for families supporting their daughters. Dialogues are providing a platform for girls, their families and communities to discuss early and forced marriage and its causes openly, rather than attempting to solve it in isolation.

PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL DIALOGUES

A social dialogue typically includes the following characteristics or elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intentional</th>
<th>Inclusive</th>
<th>Diverse</th>
<th>Systemic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mobilize people into collective action to understand and resolve a common social problem</td>
<td>Shifting discussions from hierarchical to horizontal, promoting voices and perspectives of those who are often excluded, including women and young people</td>
<td>Engages different perspectives within the community, leading to greater creativity, increased feelings of ownership and more effective collective action</td>
<td>Allows communities to move beyond symptoms and understand the causes of social issues that are deeply rooted, systemic and often hidden</td>
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Communities may initiate the dialogue process organically, in response to an incident or a crisis such as a natural disaster, or concerns over rising crime. Frequently, however, dialogues are a facilitated process, with a trusted mediator providing guidance on how to use the technique to identify and resolve issues. In some cases, community members learn social dialogue techniques and can take on the role of facilitator; in other cases, community members prefer to have an external facilitator who is perceived as more neutral. In either case, dialogues provide tools and open space for discussion at different levels – household, community and regional. Conflict and friction are reduced, and collective action expanded, as people leverage the tools for finding solutions. SALAR emphasizes the importance of inclusion: “If the dialogue is inclusive of all relevant perspectives – if none is actively excluded, tension will recede, resistance will lessen and conflict will de-escalate.”

4 The Child Rights Act has been promulgated federally in Nigeria but has not been ratified by the Bauchi State government. Therefore, early marriage is defined by FOMWAN as one that compromises the health of the girl, because of her insufficient maturity, and impacts on her family.

As noted above, a dialogue can be conducted within a community, region or even at a national or international level. Regardless of the scope, dialogues typically include the following phases:

**Preparation**

Vital in laying the groundwork for successful dialogue. At this stage, buy-in is secured from important gatekeepers, such as government officials and community leaders. Information about the process is shared and community members are mobilized for participation and support of the dialogue.

**Community Dialogue**

A series of discussions, often facilitated, with a cross section of community members who represent different perspectives and demographics. The group identifies issues within the community, analyzes root causes and generates next steps and solutions. To increase participation, particularly of those whose voices are often excluded, smaller group discussions are held in advance. Building negotiation and communication skills, these small group sessions can increase the ‘empowered participation’ of systemically excluded groups such as women and youth.

**Action Plan**

A successful dialogue results in concrete next steps and an action plan. Achieving this may require multiple dialogues. Ultimately, decisions should be generated by the community members (as opposed to the facilitator), and should offer realistic solutions to the problems under discussion. As the FOMWAN project coordinator noted, this is part of the power of social dialogues: “you that are facilitating are not the one coming up with the problems and solutions, it is those people concerned that will come up with their own particular issues.” (Fatima Aminu Mohammed, KII).

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Figure 1: Stages in a Community Dialogue

The Nigeria WAY project is using social dialogues in several communities in Bauchi State to promote greater gender equity, specifically related to women’s ability to engage in economic activities. The dialogues are being conducted by community facilitators, women supported and trained by WAY’s partner, the Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN). As noted above, FOMWAN is a trusted community organization which has been working with girls and women in Bauchi State for 35 years. In particular, they have been raising awareness on the health consequences many girls and women face as a result of early and forced marriage, a practice estimated to affect 44% of women in Nigeria. In Bauchi State, 64.4% of women were found to be married before the age of 18 and 27.4% before the age of 15. FOMWAN and WAY are leveraging social

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6 To support FOMWAN, MEDA has created a Community Dialogues Guide, providing a consistent methodology for facilitators to use in their work. This document can be found at [https://www.meda.org/WAYLearning](https://www.meda.org/WAYLearning)

dialogues to engage communities in discussions on the impacts and root causes of early and forced marriage.

**USING DIALOGUES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE ON NIGERIA WAY**

By introducing a more inclusive discussion and decision-making process, dialogues contribute to the process of social change. Chom Bagu, retired Country Director and an expert on social dialogues, described the impact: “Dialogues shine a light on issues that have been in the darkness. Actions that come from the dialogues are important, but even having the dialogue can create change. Shining the light creates change.” When previously excluded people are included in discussions and decision making, they can feel acknowledged, sometimes for the first time. Nigeria WAY uses dialogues to catalyze transformational change towards greater gender equity.

Through a series of community consultations, the Nigeria WAY team identified four key interrelated issues that impact on the lives of girls and women in Bauchi State: women’s economic engagement, girls and street hawking, girls leaving school and early and forced marriage.

![Figure 2: Multiple community issues contribute to increased rates of early marriage](image)

Gender and social norms in Bauchi State restrict women’s movement outside the home, which present challenges when they try to engage with the market as businesswomen. Social norms also dictate that men should provide financially for the family, and by implication, women should not engage in productive (i.e., remunerated) work, but instead should regard

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childrearing, food preparation and domestic work as their first priority. Women may decide they need to earn an income, particularly to look after her children. However, there is still pressure for them to confine their activities to the household, meaning that women need an intermediary who will sell their products. With limited access to schooling, especially at the post-primary level, girls from low-income families frequently engage in economic activities, acting as their mothers’ proxy in the market. Typically, they sell food, often made by their mothers, and other goods on the street. Anecdotally, the WAY team has been told that, at times, mothers set income targets, putting pressure on the girls to sell all their goods each day.

While they are selling their goods, girls must interact with men, some of whom begin cultivating relationships with the girls – relationships that are inherently unequal, and frequently become exploitative, a practice sometimes referred to as ‘grooming.’ Men may offer money or buy all the girl’s wares, with the implication that they have paid for her time and affection. Families become concerned and arrange a marriage, often with an older man who can pay a dowry. The girl may not be consulted on the choice of husband – or even the decision to marry.

Early and forced marriage has lasting impacts on the lives of girls, women and their families. As noted in an analysis of women’s economic empowerment and age of first marriage in Egypt, early marriage may limit a girl’s long-term economic empowerment by “disrupting her acquisition of pre-marital enabling resources,” including knowledge and skills from leaving school prematurely, lost earnings from not entering or from leaving the labour market to marry, and limited role models and social networks outside the family. In addition, early pregnancy can bring complications because of the girl’s age and developmental stage, sometimes resulting in long-term health problems. Girls may be abandoned by their husbands, or they may leave their husband’s family to return home. Because of the stigma of these health issues, girls are often hidden at home or sent to live with relatives, so the community does not see the results, contributing to widespread ignorance about the health consequences of early pregnancy. Anecdotally, the WAY team has heard reports of increasing rates of marriages breaking down because girls are physically and emotionally unprepared to become wives and mothers. If they are able to return to their parents’ home, they often do so with one or more young children, adding financial pressure to the family.

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9 Auren kelieh is the practice of women’s seclusion, limiting contact with non-relative men.
11 See https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/themes/health/ for more information.
MEDA’s Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Framework

MEDA’s theory of change for increased Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) prioritizes developing more equitable and inclusive market systems for sustainable economic growth. MEDA works with excluded groups, particularly women and girls, to improve their access to and use of the following:

- Decent work, equitable employment opportunities and skills development;
- Assets, natural resources, financial services and other needed supports to advance economically; and,
- Resources to adapt to climate change and build resilience to economic and environmental shocks.

*Figure 3: MEDA’s Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Framework*
MEDA considers how our programming can enable excluded groups, particularly women and girls, to enhance their personal agency and ability to claim their rights, by advocating for:

- Manageable workloads and sharing of care responsibilities;
- Ability to live free from violence and harassment with improved mobility, security, and mental and physical well-being; and,
- Improved agency and collective action, decision-making authority, and influence in different spheres.

Overall, MEDA takes a systems approach to promote these objectives. Our programming engages with diverse clients and partners to promote GESI and cultivate a just and equitable enabling environment. This structural change addresses gender biases/inequitable social norms, and includes engaging with men, boys and other key gatekeepers.

Social dialogues are an important tool in promoting increased gender equality and social inclusion, allowing MEDA and FOMWAN to work at multiple levels illustrated in this framework, summarized as follows:

*Small group discussions are important parts of the social dialogue process.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain of Change</th>
<th>Impact of Social Dialogues</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Access and Use</strong></td>
<td>• Increasing acceptance of women’s engagement in market activities and increased family contribution to domestic work to free women’s time for economic engagement (see Agency and Rights, below)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Girls gaining speaking and negotiation skills in the Life Skills Program for Girls, an essential precursor to participation in dialogues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Decent work and skills development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assets, natural resources, financial services and other needed supports to advance economically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agency and Rights</strong></td>
<td>• Men and women sharing domestic work at home, with men taking on some childcare responsibilities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Partners, community leaders and staff shared that men are now consulting women (and children) on household decisions</td>
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<td>• Communities mobilizing around actions to protect girls from violence and harassment in the market, including building or designating structures where they can sell goods and appointing individuals to accompany them to market to provide protection</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Manageable workloads and sharing of care responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improved agency and collective action, decision making authority and influence in different spheres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ability to live free from violence and harassment with improved mobility, security and mental and physical well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Just and equitable enabling environment</strong></td>
<td>• Public discussions of issues previously deemed private or 'women’s issues' now happening in many communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Women are being invited into decision-making processes by traditional and local leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Structural change that addresses gender biases / inequitable social norms, including engaging with men, boys and other key gatekeepers</td>
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SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH DIALOGUE

The Nigeria WAY team and FOMWAN are using social dialogues as one in a suite of tools to raise awareness of and shift social and gender norms that inhibit women's socio-economic engagement. For most women who are participating in WAY activities, the dialogues are the first time that issues impacting their lives have been discussed in a public forum.

The findings below reflect WAY team members’ observations, project reports, the WAY Mid-Term Review and data from in-depth interviews that were conducted with five staff members at FOMWAN, including the project coordinator who manages FOMWAN's work with MEDA, and two monitoring and evaluation staff. The following trends were observed in communities where dialogues are being implemented, specifically on girls, women and men.

Impact on Girls

With intentional preparation, specifically the Life Skills Program for Girls (LSP4G), project partners FOMWAN, Child is Gold and Fahimta Women and Youth Development Initiative are building the capacity of girls to communicate more confidently and ultimately to participate meaningfully in community dialogues. This increased confidence is illustrated in the story of 15-year-old Farida from the Warji Local Government Area who said, “Before now, I could never speak to my father. I was always scared.” Her parents, subsistence farmers who were struggling financially, had arranged her marriage, when Farida was selected to participate in the LSP4G. As part of the training, the girls visited a nearby clinic treating girls and women with fistula, a childbirth complication caused by prolonged and obstructed labour. The baby usually does not survive, and the mother may be left with chronic conditions including infections, infertility and nerve damage, affecting her ability to walk. Young mothers are particularly vulnerable to fistula, as they are giving birth before their bodies are fully developed. Farida invited her father to accompany them to the clinic and this catalysed discussions between them about her future. He agreed to postpone her marriage and enrolled her back in school. She said, “I can now talk openly with my father unlike before and this has improved our relationship.”

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12 The dialogues build on and are supported by other WAY interventions, including the Life Skills Program for Girls, Savings and Loan Groups and matching grants to increase women's access to productive technologies. In addition, WAY links women to markets through Women Sales Agents, aggregators who buy from women and sell to larger scale processors. These interventions are beyond the scope of this paper but are described in more detail in the Nigeria WAY Learning Series, at https://www.meda.org/WAYLearning

13 Nigeria WAY’s Life Skills Program for Girls is a three-week training program for adolescent girls, building their capacity in communication, negotiation, financial literacy and goal setting. The skill building and increased confidence has been an important step in preparing the girls to participate in the social dialogues.

14 Farida, LSP4G participant, interviewed by Nigeria WAY staff on 15 October 2020.
In the Life Skills Program For Girls, participants built their confidence and communication skills. This improved their ability to participate in social dialogues.

confidence and ability to communicate with her parents about difficult subjects have already brought positive change to her life, and these skills will provide a foundation for lifelong learning. For girls like Farida, improved interaction with family, particularly parents, has resulted in improved family relations.

The FOMWAN Coordinator described the LSP4G as “magic for the social dialogues,” leading to “profound changes, notably with the girl and her household.” The girls are able to speak up during the dialogues after the LSP4G program “because then they’re wiser with more self-confidence.” 15

With the implementation of the LSP4G, girls reported changes in the attitudes of fathers in their communities. One girl noted: “Our fathers have that mindset that once a girl is up to 15-16 years they will give you out in marriage, but now they have changed their mind and they want us to go to school and get to the right age before we can get married.” 16 Parents expressed support for girls to gain skills and to delay marriage. A mother participating in a focus group discussion stated: “We are going to support these girls that are trained in this life program by having a discussion time with them and discuss about saving money and involving them in business because it is important for them to be doing something. Also, about the issue of early and forceful marriage, that if there is any one among them that their parents want to force them, they should report that parents to us and we will know what to do about it, because we are going to protect

15 Fatima Aminu Mohammed, FOMWAN Coordinator, KII, 22 October 2020.
them and tell the village head about it if he is not aware about it and if need be we will go to radio station and let the world know that the Warji women are protesting about the abuse of girls and women’s rights by forcefully marrying their underage girls.”

The WAY team’s research found that girls who were either in school or who had completed some formal education were much more likely to receive financial and moral support from family members and community than those without formal education. In addition to increasing girls’ self-esteem, it is possible that the LSP4G, targeting girls with little or no formal education, is increasing the stature of these girls in the eyes of their family and community members.

**Impact on Women**

As noted above, the social dialogues are bringing significant changes for women, raising issues impacting their lives into public discussions for the first time. Many ‘women’s issues’ such as gender-based violence (often described by women in Bauchi as a lack of ‘family harmony’) are considered taboo and are not raised in public forums. As Chom Bagu stated, “light does not shine on activities that marginalize and hurt women, but social dialogues give women a voice.” Like the girls whose increased confidence helps them to contribute, women are engaging in public discussions about the issues that are of primary concern to them, many for the first time. The Nigeria WAY Mid-Term Review found that 86.8% of women and girls reported feeling comfortable speaking in public on social norms.

Anecdotally, husbands and local leaders are increasingly accepting and valuing women’s contributions to the family and community. FOMWAN’s Coordinator notes that “community leaders initially never wanted to sit with other women; they don’t believe there are women leaders.” Traditional leaders would “hold meetings without the inclusion of women’s voices, they take most decisions without considering what the women feel about those decisions, but now, whatever they do, they give room for the women to make input for most decisions, especially for those that concern women.” In turn, as more women are invited to community meetings, they are themselves seeking to be more inclusive, coming together with other women in advance to understand and represent others’ concerns more

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18 Girls without formal education were less likely to report having family (34%) and community (17%) support as compared to those either in school or with some level of formal education (97% and 61%). Onyango, Elizabeth. *Life Skills for Girls Program Report*. April 2020.
21 Fatima Aminu Mohammed, FOMWAN Coordinator, KII 22 October 2020.
22 Fatima Aminu Mohammed, FOMWAN Coordinator, KII 22 October 2020.
accurately.\textsuperscript{23} As women come together in groups – for community dialogues, but also in the Savings and Loan Groups and processing cooperatives – they are able to share and learn from each other’s experiences. Interviews with women indicate that the social benefits of working in a group are even more important than the economic benefits such groups bring.\textsuperscript{24}

In addition to these contributions to public meetings, social dialogues are increasing acceptance for women’s economic engagement. For example, one dialogue included a discussion on a nearby skills training centre where some women from the community had attended capacity building sessions and began earning money from micro-enterprises. Through the discussion, several men reported increased enthusiasm for their own wives gaining similar skills and opportunities so they can contribute to family income. Anecdotally, there are reports of men helping more with household tasks such as childcare, making it easier for women to go to market. Across three WAY communities, a project survey found that 70\% of wives and 61\% of husbands stated that men do household chores so that their wives can work.\textsuperscript{25}

In Bauchi’s ‘permission culture,’ women must ask their husbands before being able to conduct business. Their mobility is constrained, limiting their ability to visit input sellers, service providers and markets, thus restricting their ability to engage in economic activities. When they are able to run businesses, their role and economic contributions to the family are considered ‘voluntary’ – men are responsible for providing economically, and therefore women’s contributions may be welcome but are not considered a central source of family income. Despite some progress, social and gender norms in Bauchi continue to impinge on women’s lives and socioeconomic engagement.

**Impact on Men**

A common theme that emerged in the FOMWAN interviews was that the dialogues raised men’s knowledge of key issues facing girls and women. Specifically, men are becoming more aware of the intertwined challenges of limited women’s mobility, challenges they face in accessing markets for their goods, risks girls face while hawking and the consequences of early and forced marriage. In addition, dialogues are making these topics more acceptable as public discourse. One KII notes that in several LGAs, men and women discuss the social dialogues and the topics raised during social and community events, such as after Friday prayers in the mosque, at weddings and naming ceremonies.

\textsuperscript{23} This solidarity builds on and is reinforced by the Savings and Loan Groups supported by the WAY project. In addition to providing informal financing for members, participation in the groups builds trust and solidarity among group members.

\textsuperscript{24} Cooperative group KIs, 17 and 18 December 2020.

Through social dialogues and related activities, many fathers are realizing the value of their daughters as members of the family and community, not only someone’s future wife. Anecdotally, many fathers are now supporting their daughters to stay or return to school. In Jama’are, one father shared that he had regarded his daughter as “just a burden on him [and he would] rather get her married off so the husband will just take care of her.” However, after visiting Nigeria WAY’s Life Skills Program For Girls, his attitude shifted, and he decided to keep her in school to continue learning.26

FOMWAN staff note that many religious and community leaders are “awakened to their responsibilities,” specifically finding and enacting solutions to problems. In some cases, leaders are taking on a more inclusive leadership style, listening to and acting on the concerns raised by community members. Religious leaders are providing “guidance and counselling when things get muddled together” – specifically, clarifying which social norms are religious injunctions and which are cultural customs. In separating religion and culture, these gatekeepers are providing credibility for women to engage in business activities. Religious leaders are now teaching that everyone, regardless of age or sex, has rights within their society.27

In some communities, “traditional leaders have made pronouncements against early and forced girl child marriages.”28 Some community leaders have begun calling on parents to discuss marriage with their daughters, rather than forcing the decision upon her. One leader in the Warji LGA has begun advocating to parents on behalf of girls who do not wish to

26 Fatima Aminu Mohammed, FOMWAN Coordinator, KII 22 October 2020.
27 Fatima Aminu Mohammed, FOMWAN Coordinator, KII 22 October 2020.
28 Fatima Aminu Mohammed, FOMWAN Coordinator, KII 22 October 2020.
be married. He “has opened his doors to any girl who is being forcefully married off,” providing a safe space, then calling her parents to discuss whether marriage is appropriate at that time.  

**Next Steps / Analysis**

The social dialogues have catalysed the process of change at the community level, stimulating discussions on social norms relating to women’s mobility, the value of women and girls in the family and the increasing importance of women’s voices. Girls and women have reported significant changes in their interactions with men, including fathers, husbands and leaders in their communities. Gatekeepers, including community and religious leaders, note increased awareness of issues that are important to women and girls, and in some cases have even begun advocating on their behalf. In some communities, village heads and women leaders are going from house to house to sensitize people on early and forced marriage. The WAY team hopes to continue leveraging these shifts in perception and interaction.

In terms of concrete responses, communities have tended to focus on measures that emphasize protection of girls and women. Several communities have designated or constructed spaces that are deemed safer locations for girls to sell their goods. Kondu community has built a specific structure for this purpose where girls will have supervision from a community elder. The village of Ragom has designated a specific area where girls can hawk their wares safely. Groups of young men (called ‘vigilantes’ by FOMWAN staff) are informally patrolling marketplaces, construction sites and other areas that may be dangerous for girls, “forming groups to protect the girls from other hoodlums.”

These protective mechanisms are an important step. Though reactive – they border on restricting, even ‘policing’ the actions of girls and women – it is critical to recognize that girls are currently at risk. In the coming year, the WAY team and FOMWAN will actively focus on ways to capitalize on these early shifts in social norms, looking for ways to support sustainable systems change towards greater family and community support for women’s businesses and recognition of women’s contributions as valuable, rather than token or voluntary. The team will support communities in moving from acknowledging issues to tackling root causes.

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29 Fatima Aminu Mohammed, FOMWAN Coordinator, KII 22 October 2020.
30 Fatima Aminu Mohammed, FOMWAN Coordinator, KII 22 October 2020.
Sharing impacts of the Nigeria WAY project with representatives from Global Affairs Canada.