Success story: Community and local institutions collaboration for resilience

In Gamba, in the Zinder region of Niger, the community came together to create its village health center

Members of the Gamba village Mother-to-Mother¹ (MtM) group in the Zinder region of Niger, were wondering how to get a village health center, because the closest one was five kilometers away (far to walk with sick children). The village had been requesting a local health center for decades.

Some of their husbands were members of the village Husbands’ School², a peer education group for fathers. They were also discussing the need for their wives and children to visit health facilities and clearly identified the lack of a village health center as a major obstacle. In December 2016, the village created a community-based health and nutrition Quality Improvement (QI) Team³, supported by the USAID REGIS-ER project, implemented by NCBA CLUSA and URC.

The QI team first focused its efforts on promoting enriched porridge consumption by all children aged between six and nine months old. They organized regular group sessions on making the enriched flour and porridge, with the village Mother-to-Mother groups and they performed home visits to ensure the adoption of the practice. They also promoted home garden visits by the Local Development Committee, or Comité Local de Développement – CLD, because home gardens have huge potential to improve household food security and alleviate micronutrient deficiencies by increasing the availability of food throughout the year and reducing the budget spent on food - especially among the most vulnerable households.

The Gamba village QI team then asked the CLD to support them in initiating a lobbying effort to get the health center, targeting the office of the prefect of Magaria Department. The CLD successfully leveraged funds from three of the community’s savings and loan groups, and one community member offered the plot of land for the health center. Thanks to this commitment, the application for the health center was officially fulfilled and accepted by the authorities.

¹ Mother-to-Mother (MtM) groups are groups of pregnant and breastfeeding women who come together to learn about and discuss issues of maternal, infant and young child health, nutrition and hygiene.
² The husbands’ schools aim to engage men in actions for maternal, infant, and young child nutrition and health and foster behavior change at the community level.
³ Each QI team is made up of representatives from existing, diverse organizations/groups within the community. The team meets to collectively review health and nutrition data to identify areas for improvement, set indicators, develop an action plan to improve chosen behaviors, and work with their respective organizations/groups to implement the action plans. They regularly track their progress and make changes to the action plan.
The CLD collected nearly 1,400,000 CFA francs ($2,600) from the community to contribute to building and equipping the health center. The money collected within the community helped purchase building materials, a professional mason to finish the building and install a latrine, furniture and equipment, and a start-up stock of drugs.

With the facility completed, the mayor’s office recruited a health provider for the center. During the official opening, the Magaria Department health district rewarded this initiative by offering a maternal delivery bed and a desk for the health agent. The health center has been functional since February 21, 2018.

“Before, to visit the nearest health center, we had to spend 10,000 CFA francs ($20) – and we lost a lot of time. Now, it takes less than 1,250 CFA francs for a visit, as we have the center just next to us. We feel relieved, especially pregnant women who can get prenatal care and professional support to give birth,” said Gamba resident Kanta Ibrahim.

Chamsia Kanta was one of the first women to give birth in the health center. Her husband had previously had to wheel her in a cart to the nearest center – and now it was right next door! Also, after the birth of her child, vaccination services were easily accessible. Over 10 women have given birth in the health center since it opened.

“Before, we had to go several times to the administrative center over 10 kilometers away so our children could get their set of immunizations. It was long and exhausting. My son is less than one-month old today – look how healthy he looks,” said Chamsia.

This accomplishment also benefits neighboring villages, which were even further away from a health center. Achi Moutari comes from Maiboukrou, five kilometers away, to have her children vaccinated. “We are impressed by what Gamba achieved. It is a unique example in our area. Thanks to the health center and the efforts of Gamba, we cut the journey in half. Such a major change!”

The Gamba CLD continues to organize development initiatives with the trust of the community - it has now taken over the management of the other activities in the community, including an animal transfer activity supported by REGIS-ER – habbanaye. The CLD also created a fund of 150,000 CFA francs ($300) to contribute to drilling a brand-new borehole in their village.

Gamba’s success lies in the community collaboration with local institutions, building resilience and connecting to long term resources.