

SOUTH SUDAN

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR TRANSFORMING WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' NUTRITION

Introduction

South Sudan is deeply rooted in norms that prioritise men as decision-makers, often overlooking holistic health and nutrition approaches that would benefit women and girls. Women's perspectives remain underrepresented in many spheres of life, including access to nutrition. Prolonged conflict, low levels of education, lack of employment, and limited access to income-generating activities further compound women's exclusion from decision-making processes. This exclusion has contributed to challenges such as low uptake of health and nutrition services and poor access to nutrition-rich diets for women, adolescent girls, and children. Consequently, both women's and children's health is often compromised due to poor nutrition.

South Sudan's conflict, low economic status, and rampant displacement further impact health and nutrition outcomes for women, girls, and all children. These challenges affect women's awareness of health and nutrition issues, limit their ability to access services, misguide policy and programming, and heighten their vulnerability to ill health.

Two projects in South Sudan, the Fortifying Equality and Economic Diversification for Resilience ([FEED I 2015–2018](#), [FEED II 2020–2025](#)) and the [Greater Resilience through Enhanced Agriculture and Nutrition \(GREAN\) project \(2019–2024\)](#), have successfully integrated gender-transformative approaches into their nutrition and resilience initiatives. This good practice



document captures the key interventions, lessons learned, and recommendations from these projects, providing actionable insights for future programmes aimed at enhancing gender equality and nutrition outcomes.

The [Gender Transformative Framework for Nutrition](#) (GTFN) underscores the essential relationship between gender equality and nutrition outcomes. To identify promising practices for gender-nutrition transformation, World Vision projects were evaluated using the GTFN matrix, focusing on the [seven key domains](#) of gender-nutrition transformation: equitable food systems; gender- and adolescent-responsive health systems; equitable education; economic inclusion; safe and equitable water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); social protection; and resilience to environmental and political crises.



Fortifying Equality and Economic Diversification for Resilience (FEED I and II)

The FEED I and FEED II projects include activities that increase women's access to WASH services, Savings for Transformation groups, and agricultural training with kitchen gardens. Additionally, women participate in cooking demonstrations to develop skills and knowledge on preparing nutritious meals. Surplus vegetables from kitchen gardens are sold, enabling women to generate income that they can use to start small businesses. FEED II integrates social norms discussions into cooking demonstrations and maternal, infant, and young child feeding sessions to challenge harmful food taboos and to encourage men and boys to participate in unpaid care work and make joint household decisions about nutrition. Both FEED projects addressed six of the seven GTFN domains, increasing women's participation, decision-making, and access to resources in food, education, economic, and social protection systems, as well as increasing their resilience to crises.

Promising practices

- **Women's savings and credit groups:** FEED II established savings and credit groups for women, enabling them to start and expand small businesses, thus enhancing their financial independence and household nutrition security. As a result, the proportion of women who own and control livelihood assets increased by 30%.
- **Women as household food providers:** In South Sudan, women often eat last and least. Female youth have the lowest food consumption scores, with 48% experiencing poor consumption. However, due to the FEED projects, food consumption and dietary diversity have improved through nutrition education targeting women as household food providers. In FEED I, household dietary diversity increased by 40% over the course of the project. In FEED II, equitable feeding practices increased by 46% among women and 43.5% among men, including knowledge of improved nutrition practices for girls and pregnant and breastfeeding women.
- **Market linkages:** FEED II is facilitating linkages between women producers and local markets, addressing the reality that only one-tenth of households in South Sudan report women's involvement in decisions regarding the use of assets and resources. The project developed farmers' marketing associations to raise product prices through collective selling, increasing agricultural market access for participating farmers by more than 50%. Women's ability to source supplies for their businesses also rose by 11% overall and by 18% for female youth. These gains are attributable to FEED II training and reflect a growing willingness among female adults and youth to seek new market opportunities.
- **Women's leadership and participation in decision-making:** FEED II is fostering women's leadership by ensuring that at least two-thirds of leadership positions are held by women or female youth. The project also promotes female leaders in public forums and events, such as disaster risk management committees and Farmer Field Days and Business Schools. As a result, women's participation in project leadership and community organisations has increased by 34%, and their confidence to lead projects and local organisations has risen by 35.5%. Additionally, the proportion of men and male youth with positive experiences of women in leadership has also increased by 8% and 18%, respectively.

Lessons learned: Educating women on nutrition and providing them with access to credit, market opportunities, and agricultural tools are critical for their economic empowerment and can significantly improve household nutrition. Major strides have also been made in increasing joint decision-making and support from men in household chores, as well as boosting men's confidence in women's leadership.

Through these activities, the FEED projects have sustainably increased women's participation, decision-making, and access to resources. This strengthens their resilience to shocks and crises, supports their education, improves access to food, and enhances economic and social protection systems, ultimately leading to better household nutrition.



Greater Resilience through Enhanced Agriculture and Nutrition (GREAN)

The Greater Resilience through Enhanced Agriculture and Nutrition (GREAN) project improved nutrition outcomes by engaging both women and men in community-based health and nutrition education. The project also integrated gender-sensitive approaches into agriculture, market linkages, and local value chains to enhance food security and build resilience against climate change. In this way, GREAN addressed the GTFN domains of equitable education, food and livelihoods, WASH systems, and economic inclusion, while increasing women's resilience to crises.

Promising practices

- Inclusive nutrition and health education and agriculture training:** GREAN conducted health and nutrition education sessions that involved both women and men, emphasising the importance of shared responsibility in household nutrition and health. These sessions, led by community volunteers, included vegetable growing, cooking demonstrations, the promotion of locally available nutritious foods, and growth monitoring. They also integrated WASH activities with health and nutrition, promoting inclusive and sustainable access to clean water and sanitation. As a result, 61% of households adopted healthy handwashing habits, a 15% increase. Overall, 94% of women participants were taking action to improve their family's nutrition by the end of the project, up from 69%.
- Women's leadership and decision-making:** The project promoted women's leadership in various project structures, particularly those related to WASH systems. Women made up 50% of Water Management Committee members, and 60% of these committees were led by women. Women were also well represented in structures overseeing hand pumps, market stalls, and seed stores. At the household level, 59% of women reported increased participation in financial decision-making, particularly regarding livestock sales, a 24% increase.

- **Women's access to economic and agricultural resources:** GREAN provided training on climate-smart agricultural practices, including drought-resistant crops and water conservation, enabling equitable access to agricultural inputs for women farmers, including seeds, tools, and training. As a result, women's access to economic and agricultural resources increased, improving their resilience to crises and food security status.
 - o Female-headed households saw their median monthly income rise by 404%, from \$10.07 to \$50.77, and individually, women's earnings increased by 368%, from \$10.90 to \$51.40.
 - o These economic gains contributed to reduced food insecurity for women. Fewer female-headed households adopted negative coping strategies in response to food shortages, with the reduced Coping Strategies Index indicator dropping by 4.9 points, compared to a drop of 3.9 points for male-headed households.
 - o Households consuming locally available or home-grown nutritious foods rose by 14%, from 66% to 80%.
 - o By the end of the project, 92% of women had more freedom of movement to access WASH, health, and nutrition services, up from 82%. The evaluation further confirms that increased access to WASH services directly benefited women.
- **Male champions:** The project trained male community leaders as champions for gender equality and nutrition, promoting male involvement in maternal and child health practices. This led to a positive shift in perceptions of men's contributions to household chores and childcare, increasing by nearly 8%. Dietary diversity also improved, with 95% of households consuming at least four different food groups by the end of the project, up from 78%.

Lessons learned: While the GREAN project positively influenced gender norms and attitudes, ongoing advocacy is needed to address persistent harmful behaviours that affect women's engagement in economic activities. Engaging men as partners in health and nutrition initiatives remains essential for sustaining progress in women's leadership, decision-making, and nutrition outcomes for families. Additionally, improving women's economic empowerment through initiatives such as mother support groups and crop production is key for enhancing household food security and nutrition and must be sustained through continued investment.

The GREAN project was significant in improving women's agency, resources, and opportunity structures in South Sudan, especially through nutrition education, access to economic, food and WASH systems, and increasing women's resilience to political and economic crises.





Conclusion and recommendations

The FEED I, FEED II, and GREAN projects in South Sudan illustrate that integrating gender-transformative approaches into nutrition programmes can lead to significant improvements in gender equality and nutrition outcomes, as well as economic empowerment and access to food, health, WASH, and education services. The following recommendations, based on the promising practices from these projects, can be scaled up to further the transformation of gender and nutrition.

Key recommendations

1. **Expand economic empowerment initiatives for women:** Increase access to and reach of women's savings and loan groups, as well as access to digital financial services and market platforms to enhance women's economic independence. Expand economic interventions focused on value addition, vocational training, and small business grants for women.
2. **Promote gender equality through male engagement:** Develop sustained training programmes for male champions to engage men in supporting women's decision-making power and autonomy, especially at the household level.
3. **Increase women's leadership in systems that affect them the most:** Scale up proven interventions targeting women to increase their access to resources and leadership in agriculture, WASH, health, education, social protection, and economic systems, as well as training and services.
4. **Enhance women's access to resources and resilience:** Scale up climate-smart agricultural programmes to support resilience to environmental crises.
5. **Continue advocacy to positively address harmful gender norms:** Advocacy remains essential to positively shift gender attitudes, especially those limiting women's engagement in economic activities, leadership, and decision-making power.

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For additional information, please contact World Vision's Health and Nutrition Team at health@wvi.org

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