

# Towards Inclusion: Integrating Gender into Guinea's Risk Communication and Community Engagement Activities

## Context

In 2020, after Breakthrough ACTION staff in Guinea participated in a regional gender integration training in Abidjan, they conducted a two-day training on gender integration for the heads of gender and equity sections of ministries and local and international nongovernmental organization (NGO) representatives. Since then, Breakthrough ACTION Guinea has worked with gender focal points in One Health ministries to help them intentionally incorporate gender into risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) activities. Recommendations from a gender analysis workshop for the vaccine response in 2023 highlighted the need for building program implementers' capacity to integrate gender into their work. In 2024, to support Global Health Security (GHS) and One Health priorities, Breakthrough ACTION committed to strengthening the level of understanding and the degree to which gender is integrated RCCE activities in Guinea. This effort shows government and civil society actors how gender equality makes health programs more effective.

Breakthrough ACTION Guinea developed and piloted a new five-day training curriculum on gender integration in RCCE activities in Nzérékoré and Kindia. The trainings brought together 54 national, regional, and prefectural participants from various fields, including representatives from the Ministries of Health, Environment, Agriculture, and the Promotion of Women, Children and Vulnerable Persons; partner NGOs; health promotion and communication focal points; and civil society actors. This training represents a pioneering effort, poised to pave the way for future scalability and adoption across other Breakthrough ACTION countries of implementation. The training strengthened participants' understanding of gender integration in health projects and specifically in the context of zoonotic disease control. Objectives included understanding gender concepts in the context of health programs, explaining its importance integrating gender into health activities, questioning the impact of gender stereotypes/norms/roles on multiple levels, learning how to apply the principles of gender integration into all stages of their activities, and developing an action plan to ensure gender integration in RCCE activities.



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## Challenges

In health projects, stakeholders and project implementers have often misunderstood the concept of gender and its role in health projects, frequently associating the term “gender” solely with women. This lack of understanding, accentuated by social and cultural norms, has been a major obstacle to the effective learning and implementation of health interventions. Moreover, participants were unfamiliar with the notions of gender equality and gender integration in RCCE activities. Even at a global level, this field is relatively new and available guidance and technical information contain gaps. These issues highlight the need to clarify key concepts, raise gender awareness, challenge social and cultural norms that limit understanding, and apply gender equality principles in public health. Projects additionally face the challenge of the time and resources needed to design and disseminate a relatively new curriculum.

## Actions Taken

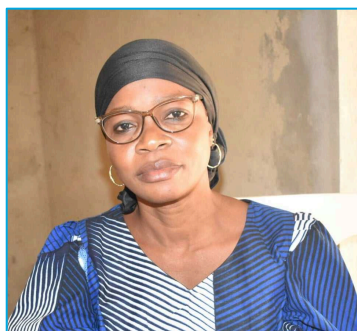
The training curriculum is rooted in best practices for adult education and participative learning. Breakthrough ACTION dynamically structured the training sessions, incorporating multiple formats including PowerPoint presentations, interactive discussions, case studies, group work, and practical exercises to ensure a thorough understanding of the subjects covered. During the training, participants engaged in collaborative group work to explore approaches to and methods of gender integration. They analyzed in-depth how to account for gender more fully in their projects, examine gender disparities, adapt programs to meet the specific needs of different those from different socio-demographic backgrounds, intentionally involve men and boys in RCCE activities, and aim for a sustainable transformation of social norms leading to a healthier, more gender-equitable society. These exercises enabled participants to develop a holistic and practical understanding of how to integrate gender at each stage of a health program’s lifecycle using the Social and Behavioral Change (SBC) Flow Chart, ((1) define, (2) imagine and test, and (3) implement).

The training also highlighted practical tools and methods that facilitate gender analysis and working gender integration into health projects at all stages of their development. Participants learned steps they can take throughout the lifecycle of an activity to ensure they employ more gender-sensitive approaches and inclusive planning and implementation. This pragmatic approach strengthens their ability to put theoretical concepts into practice in the field.

## Impact

This weeklong immersive experience led participants to reconsider their approach to RCCE activities in relation to gender and enabled participants to explore the complex nuances of gender integration, overcoming traditional stereotypes and common gender norms in their communities. In-depth discussions highlighted the positive effect gender-inclusive approaches have on the effectiveness of interventions. By developing several different action plans, each participant listed different steps they intend to take to better integrate gender into different aspects of their RCCE activities.

## Testimonials



*“Before coming to the training, frankly, I thought I knew almost everything about gender, but this training showed me that there is another positive way of looking at gender, because before, I thought gender was men and women.”*

— Mahawa Sylla, Head of the Information Technology and Database Department at the National Observatory for Social Protection and Gender-Based Violence

After the training, Mahawa Sylla realized she could use a more inclusive and positive approach in her activities. This will improve her communication in the field, notably by opening constructive discussions with men on gender issues that affect the health and well-being of the community. She also plans to share the knowledge acquired during the training with her colleagues and partners by providing an overview of the training and key take aways and learnings within her department. She plans to integrate tools and methods she learned into her day-to-day work, particularly in preparing documents and projects. Finally, she plans to strengthen collaboration with partners by ensuring they consider gender issues in all project phases.



*“This gender integration training in RCCE gave me a great opening in terms of a deeper understanding of integrating gender. There were certain terminologies and approaches that I hadn't quite mastered.”*

— Adoma Konate, Focal Point for Communication and Health Promotion at the Dabola Prefectural Health Directorate

Adoma Konate emphasized how the training deepened his understanding of gender-related terminologies, notably by distinguishing between social norms and gender norms and by exploring different approaches and ways to integrate gender in health projects. Konate also expressed his appreciation for the gender integration continuum: “The gender integration continuum [... is] an instrument that will enable us, who are at the operational level, to see [where] the gender integration level is.” Konate explained how he plans to apply the knowledge acquired during the training to his daily work, using the Gender Equality Check-in Tool to evaluate and improve health projects, and committing himself to promoting gender equality and equity within his department and at community level. Finally, he stresses that collaborating with other stakeholders will ensure continuous integration of the gender dimension in future projects, involving all relevant actors at all levels.



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*“This training has enabled participants to be equipped with the methods and means of integrating the gender dimension into our activities, so it’s a very good training we’ve had, it’s been very well equipped, and I think that with this training we’ll be able to do this integration in our different activities.”*

— Benjamin Évelyne Denise, Research Manager, National Department of Community Health and Traditional Medicine, Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene

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Benjamin Évelyne Denise underlined the beneficial impact of the training, thanks in particular to the interactive learning methods that enabled a good understanding of gender integration tools and approaches. She expressed her intention to share the knowledge acquired with her colleagues by becoming a focal point in transmitting the lessons learned from the training and using the tools presented to integrate the gender dimension into daily activities. Denise envisages close collaboration with other training participants and stakeholders to ensure effective gender integration in future projects, emphasizing the interconnectedness and contribution of each to the development of national or branch strategic plans. Finally, she mentions specific strategies and techniques learned during the training, such as the [Gender Integration Continuum](#) (distributed by USAID’s International Gender Working Group), Breakthrough ACTION’s [Social and Behavioral Change Flow Chart](#), and its [Gender Analysis Toolkit](#). She looks forward to implementing these in her projects to tackle the root causes of gender inequalities and integrate the gender dimension in a meaningful way.



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*“At the end of the five days of activities, of the capacity building we benefited from, I have enough information but also knowledge on the procedure by which I can integrate gender in the planning and implementation of all activities.”*

— Sekou Omar Magassouba, Head of the Risk Communication and Community Involvement Unit, National Health Security Agency

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Sekou Omar Magassouba underlines the positive impact of the training on his knowledge and skills, acquired through interactive activities and reviewing processes for integrating gender into planning and implementing activities. He says he will apply the concepts he learned by accounting for gender when organizing capacity building initiatives for key players, adapting training module content to include this dimension, and considering the specific needs of men, boys, women, and girls when designing awareness raising messages. He intends to share training materials on professional platforms, plan future activities incorporating training recommendations, and work with press groups and social influencers to disseminate gender integration messages.

These testimonials underline the participants' commitment to applying what they've learned in their respective projects. By integrating gender in a transversal way, these influential individuals can create more inclusive and effective health programs that respond to the specific needs of Guinean communities.

## Conclusion

Breakthrough ACTION Guinea addressed misunderstandings and misinterpretations surrounding the concept of gender with proactive steps, including developing and implementing this comprehensive training curriculum. The training broadened participants' vision of gender integration in health and RCCE projects and reflects a major step towards building more inclusive and effective health programs. Through interactive sessions, practical exercises, and exposure to tools and methodologies, participants not only gained a deeper understanding of gender integration but also fortified their commitment to applying these principles in their work. As Guinea continues to prioritize GHS and One Health initiatives, integrating gender considerations into RCCE activities testifies to the country's dedication to fostering inclusivity and addressing the diverse needs of its communities. Participants can use what they've learned to catalyze transformative change in the design, implementation, and evaluation of health projects in Guinea, paving a path towards a healthier, more equitable, and more resilient society.

*Credit for all photographs: Yacouba Sakho, Breakthrough ACTION Guinea*

This success story is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Breakthrough ACTION and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.