



Training overview

Why was this training developed?

The TOMAK program supports Timorese households to maximise benefits from the resources they already have to support and feed their families, while diversifying and expanding these resources further.¹ This involves promoting improved household farm management and production techniques, while simultaneously shifting household nutrition behaviours, practices and decision-making to ensure there is year-round access to nutritious food for the whole family.

One important part of this approach is to promote joint decision-making between couples over household resources, even if the ownership of these resources is unequal. Distribution of resources within households almost always follows prevailing socio-cultural norms. The resources that each partner brings to the marriage or household, as well as their age and gender are critical in determining decision-making power within the household. In Timor-Leste, dominant socio-cultural norms typically result in women bringing fewer resources to their households than men.

This can perpetuate a cycle of gender inequality, whereby women and girls from one generation to the next continue to have a perceived lower status than men, and thus can experience less access to and control over household resources. The exclusion of women from resource ownership can be a barrier to them raising their own opinions and ideas about how household resources are used.

Building awareness of gender dynamics in households, improving couple communication, and promoting joint decision-making can empower both men and women to contribute

¹ Resources can include: belongings, land, water, food, trees, animals, property, equipment, income, money, labour, etc.

positively to their household. International research has found that children whose mothers participated in all household decisions were 15% less likely to be stunted and 32% less likely to be wasted, than mothers who did not participate in making any decisions.² Other research found that women with high involvement in decision-making were less likely to have low body mass index (BMI) and more likely to take a sick child for treatment.³ Another study found that nutrition-sensitive interventions that specifically target women's empowerment such as increased control over household income, consistently showed a positive effect on child nutrition.⁴

As we empower women it is also important to engage men to become more involved in the health and welfare of their children, including taking on larger roles in caring for children and reducing the potential for domestic violence. Research has found that joint decision-making is associated with a lower probability of domestic violence compared to when husbands make decisions alone.⁵ Focusing on joint household decision-making allows couples to develop the respect and trust to share their aspirations for the future, enabling them to set goals for their family and better deal with any setbacks they may face along the way to achieving them.

This training curriculum aims to challenge and promote behavioural changes at the individual, couple and household level. These changes should lead to more gender equitable decision-making and a fairer allocation of household resources to benefit all family members, especially women and children. The training comprises a range of interactive participatory sessions that address household decision-making around food production, nutrition-related practices, division of labour and resource allocation.



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- 2 Rahman M, Sima U & Goni M. Impact of Maternal Household Decision-Making Autonomy on Child Nutritional Status in Bangladesh, 2015
 - 3 Singh K, Bloom S & Brodish P: Gender Equality as a Means to Improve Maternal and Child Health in Africa in *Health Care Women Int.* 2015 Jan; 36 (1): 57–69.
 - 4 Ruel MT, Alderman H. Nutrition-sensitive interventions and programmes: how can they help to accelerate progress in improving maternal and child nutrition in *Lancet* 382: 536–51 2013.
 - 5 Zegenhagan s, Ranganathan M & Buller MA Household decision-making and its association with intimate partner violence: Examining differences in men's and women's perceptions in Uganda in *SSM Population Health Vol* 8, August 2019

Changes you should expect to see

The sessions in the manual are designed to build the trust between couples and increase their awareness of the gender dynamics that exist in their households. As the training progresses, participants start to reflect on what influences their current decision-making and how this impacts different family members. Participants go on to analyse the benefits of joint decision-making and how this can improve the whole family's health, wellbeing and prosperity. Participants are encouraged to shift their decision-making processes and workload distribution to improve household nutrition and achieve farm goals.



The training includes simple and practical sessions that give individuals and couples the knowledge and skills needed to follow through on ideas and actions they have identified when they return home. Facilitators and/or field staff should provide ongoing support to training participants to maximise the uptake of learning into concrete behavioural changes. The changes will be small but significant in the beginning and should build up over time. Changes observed may include:

- Husbands and wives increasingly feeling like they are working as a team and sharing the load
- Women feeling more confident to bring up their opinions with their husbands and other family members, even if they may disagree
- Increased respect and ability to listen to opinions and ideas, with reduced possibility of conflict
- Improved trust that decisions are being made for the benefit the whole family, not just individuals
- Wives and husbands initiating financial discussions with each other more often, and including other family members
- Spouses undertaking more joint decision-making and/or shifting resources to improve household nutrition
- Men thinking more about nutrition issues and/or making additional small purchases of food (such as eggs, beans and fish)
- Women feeling improved ownership and control over household resources
- Men undertaking more household tasks such as child care and meal preparation
- Spouses (especially wives) feeling supported to take up opportunities to learn, including

attending technical trainings, or to attend trainings or activities together

- Couples and/or households setting goals together and working towards achieving them
- Couples being better able to cope with the stress and strain of managing their resources



How to use the facilitator manual

The manual should be used by facilitators who have been trained in the methodology. Ideally, the facilitation team should be made up of at least by one female and one male facilitator.

The sessions in the manual have been purposefully developed for farming couples or families to do together within a larger group with other couples/families. They are best used with families who are part of a medium to long-term activity or group, such as savings and loans groups, food production groups, farmer groups, and parent or family nutrition groups.

The training flows in a way that brings optimal understanding of the topics, while also building the trust and skills that participants need to communicate as a couple or family. It is recommended that facilitators running the training consider the following when planning their training to ensure the optimal learning and behaviour change outcomes:

- Follow the flow of the sessions from the beginning to the end. Following the sequence of sessions will maximise the participants' learning and their potential for behavioural change. Do all sessions as soon as possible in a maximum of 6 months.
- Sessions can run according to the available time of the group, including full days, half days, or as single sessions across a few months.
- Sessions can be delivered within a formal or informal training setting. The sessions are designed to be inclusive of participants with different literacy levels. There are no formal presentations and the activities are designed to be engaging, interactive and discussion-based. The training can be run in a community with limited facilities.

- There is flexibility in how the sessions can be delivered and facilitators may decide to choose individual sessions which best meet the needs of their participants or group. However, it is important that as many sessions as possible are covered. TOMAK partners are advised to contact TOMAK lead trainers to discuss any alterations.

Facilitators should provide a file or folder to each participant so that they can keep any materials or worksheets related to the sessions. These sheets allow the participant to take notes and to also retain a copy of some of their thoughts and ideas.

There is also an action worksheet for participants in Appendix 2 called '*My future plan*'. This worksheet is used at the end of each session or at the end of multiple sessions that have been delivered together. The facilitator first asks participants to reflect on the session(s) they just participated in. Participants should be encouraged to think about what ideas or thoughts they had during the session and if there is anything they would like to change going forward (individually or in their family). Participants can write and/or draw on the sheet. As they do this, the facilitator should ask them to think about what steps they can take towards achieving this change in 1) the next week and 2) the next month. Participants should keep the worksheet to remind them of what they had planned to do.

The action worksheets provide facilitators with information about how participants plan to use the information and skills they have learned once they return home. These sheets can be used as a reference in future meetings between the participants and the facilitator and/or field monitoring staff.

Training summary

Key themes	Description of the session	Learning outcomes
Session 1: General communication – 1 - 1.5 hours		
General communication and the importance of body language	This session introduces information about how people communicate, noting that communication is not just about what people say but also the body language they use. A role play activity asks people to act out different emotions without using words, while the other group members must guess the emotion.	Builds awareness that people often use body language to express themselves rather than speaking.
Session 2: One-way and two-way communication – 1 hour		
The importance of two-way communication as part of positive couple communication	This session highlights what it feels like to experience both one-way and two-way communication through a drawing activity. The group then uses this activity to reflect on common family communication dynamics and identify what they think are good communication skills between couples.	Participants reflect on their own communication practices in their family relationships.
Session 3: Trust walk - 45 minutes		
The value of building trust in relationships	This session requires a couple (husband and wife ideally) to take turns wearing a blindfold, with the other person guiding them with verbal instructions. Through the walk, the blindfolded person is instructed to perform different activities such as walking around an area or picking up a leaf. The group discusses how they felt when they were both guiding and being guided.	Participants reflect on how it feels to be trusted or to trust someone else and the importance of trust within a couple.
Session 4: Household decision-making processes – 50 minutes		
Understanding the difference between individual and household decision-making	This session explores how household decisions are made and the complexity involved in making these decisions. A montage of photos showing common household resources helps participants to reflect on who is included and excluded in the decision-making process over resources in their family.	Builds awareness that decision-making is gendered and some people can be included and/or excluded because of gender and age.
Session 5: Making decisions over family resources – 1 hour		
Understanding the factors and circumstances that influence family decisions over resources	Participants are split into three groups and look at one of three case studies that tell a story of complex but common situations in Timor-Leste families. The case studies pick up on nutrition and agriculture issues, such as feeding children, use of livestock, and use of income.	Case studies generate reflection and peer sharing. Couples identify the key influences impacting their decisions and why.
Session 6: Everyone's contribution in a farming family – 1 hour		
Analysing family responsibilities and workload based on gender and age	Participants use a worksheet depicting a range of different household and farm tasks and draw lines to the activities that different family members usually do in their household. Facilitators ask probing questions that ensure participants reflect on the workload balance in the family by age and gender.	Builds appreciation for each family member's contribution. Participants reflect on how age and gender can define men and women's household responsibilities and workload.

Key themes	Description of the session	Learning outcomes
Session 7: Everyday activities and timesheet – 1 hour		
Understanding the differences and similarities between men and women's daily workload and responsibilities	Participants fill out a daily timesheet reflecting their workload and responsibilities and then compare this to people of the same gender. Men and women then share a collective women's and men's timesheet as a group and eventually the couple are asked to reflect on their responses together.	Promotes self-reflection on the participants own workload and the workload of their partner. Explores gender differences and questions unbalanced workload distribution.
Session 8: Working together in the household – 40 minutes		
Reflecting on socio-cultural norms that define household roles & responsibilities and how this can change	Participants read a story together from Lafaek Magazine (Special Edition on Promoting Equality) that depicts a family assigning household tasks based on gender. When this leads to an unbalanced workload, the family attempts to change the distribution of household tasks. Group discussion asks participants to reflect on if they could make this kind of change in their own household.	Participants consider how to change gender imbalances in their family and the steps they might need to take, including how to manage negative judgement they may receive from others.
Session 9: Household financial resources - 1 hour		
Awareness of the way couples and families behave, interact and make decisions about the use of household income	Facilitators present participants with seven flip card images depicting different kinds of financial behaviours between couples in a household, and encourage group discussion. The illustrations end with a positive example that promotes joint decision-making over income. Through the activity, participants explore the negative and positive impacts of different financial behaviours on the household.	Promotes reflection on the different ways couples manage money in their household. Motivates participants to move towards joint financial decision-making.
Session 10: Negotiating for household resources – 1 hour		
Awareness of the importance of negotiation and persuasive arguments in family resource decision-making	Participants look at the role of negotiation between family members in household decision-making. Couples then participate in an activity where they must negotiate how to use their resources (eggs). Three participants are tasked with convincing couples to either sell, eat, or keep the eggs for hatching. Together couples must decide how they use their eggs, in the face of persuasive arguments to use the eggs in different ways.	Participants consider how to make persuasive arguments and practice positive communication in household resource negotiations.
Session 11: Positive communication - managing tension over resources – 2 hours		
Awareness that decision-making can be stressful, and can lead to tension and/or violence that in turn impacts on themselves, their relationships and their family	This session has 3 parts: Part A: Builds awareness that there can be tension in decision-making Part B: Reinforces the need for positive household relationships and communication Part C: Gives information and strategies for preventing tension and conflict in the household during decision-making A duty of care session that recognises making some of the changes suggested in the training can challenge other people's ideas and create tension. The session makes participants aware of the potential for backlash and/or negative reactions from others when they attempt to make changes in their household, and explores ways to prepare for this.	Participants explore positive solutions, skills and tools to prevent and manage household conflicts both individually and as a family.

Acknowledgements

The TOMAK program would like to acknowledge the efforts and contributions of the following people and organisations in the development of this training curriculum:

Authors: Inga Mepham and Cecilia Fonseca

Design team: Acacio Sarmento, Alice Passos, Cecilia Fonseca, Inga Mepham, Jenny Ikelberg, Lewti Hunghanfoo, Orlandina Leite and Sarah Meyanathan

Partner organisations in Timor-Leste involved in the development and review of the material:

- Catholic Relief Services, World Vision International and Mercy Corps

Special thanks to the following organisations who willingly shared their resources and knowledge:

- ACIAR & CARE PNG, *The PNG Family Farm Teams Manual* - <https://www.aciar.gov.au/publication/PNG-Family-Farm-Teams-Manual>
- Mercy Corps, *Household Dialogue Toolkit: Training manual, best practices, and guidance for implementing the Household Dialogue activity* - https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/Household%20Dialogue%20Toolkit_EN.pdf
- CARE International, *Farmer Field and Business School Toolkit* - <https://www.care.org/work/world-hunger/agriculture/models/farmers-field-and-business-school-toolkit>
- IWDA, *Gender and Economy in Melanesian Communities Manual* - <https://iwda.org.au/resource/gender-and-economy-in-melanesian-communities-manual/>
- Helen Keller International, *Nurturing Connections: Adapted for Homestead Food Production and Nutrition* - <https://www.fsnnetwork.org/nurturing-connections-adapted-homestead-food-production-and-nutrition>

About TOMAK

TOMAK (*To'os ba Moris Di'ak*, or Farming for Prosperity) is a 5-10 year agricultural livelihoods program funded by the Australian Government in Timor-Leste. Its goal is to ensure rural households live more prosperous and sustainable lives. To do this, TOMAK supports the implementation of parallel and linked interventions that aim to:

- Establish a foundation of food security and good nutrition for targeted rural households;
- Build their capacity to confidently and ably engage in profitable agricultural markets.

TOMAK works primarily in inland mid-altitude areas that have some irrigation capacity. In its first phase, this comprises 66 *suku* (villages) located in Baucau, Bobonaro & Viqueque municipalities.

Across the program, TOMAK is committed to understanding and promoting gender equality and ensuring women's voices are heard in decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods. This training promotes inclusiveness and joint decision-making over household resources, with an aim to ensure families have year-round access to sufficient and nutritious food and that women benefit equally from improvements to agricultural production and market access.

The approach and content of this training was drawn from various field assessments and the implementation experiences of TOMAK and its partners. Related materials from others working in this area were reviewed and, in some cases, adapted to the Timorese context. The original source has been referenced for any sessions where content draws from existing materials.

For more information on our work please visit www.tomak.org.