

Standing strong together: the story of **Fabienne**



Fabienne's family.

PHOTOGRAPHER: © SUNGKYU KIM

Fabienne is 27 years old, and she lives in Mache Kana with her husband, Ricardo. They live with their four children – Esther, Kervens, Frantz and Fabiola, aged nine, six, two and one. All three of her older children go to school and preschool.

Fabienne and her husband are in a good relationship. They discuss all household matters, make decisions, and work together. They interact actively and affectionately with their children through playing and singing. Even with the increasing demands from their successful economic activities, their uncompromising attitude towards the amount and quality of

attention to their children is remarkable. Both Fabienne and Ricardo are highly committed to their children's nurture, care, and upbringing.

Participation in the CLM programme

Fabienne joined the Chemen Lavi Miyò (CLM) programme in the summer of 2017. She selected small livestock (goats and a pig) as her main economic activities. She felt that livestock rearing and selling could be a profitable enterprise. Most often, Fabienne uses the generated income for household consumption and the children's education.



Boiling sugarcane syrup.

PHOTOGRAPHER: © SUNGKYU KIM

She is among the fastest growing beneficiaries in her village.¹ For instance, Fabienne has done well with the livestock. With the two goats and a pig that she received from the CLM programme, she has managed to expand to seven goats, three pigs, sixteen chickens, and eight turkeys. At the current rate of growth and reproduction, Fabienne foresees that she could manage to buy a cow soon. When she is not tending livestock, Fabienne goes to the market every Saturday to trade and sell charcoal and fruits.

Ricardo works actively in farming – cultivating family land, working on sharecropping (*di mwatye*), rental plots, or as a day labourer. He produces a variety of staples, vegetables, and fruits. Ricardo also works occasionally at the community sugarcane mill. He is responsible for firing the oven for boiling sugarcane water into syrup. He is paid and sought after for this work.

Fabienne's progress in the CLM programme is a testament to her hard work, as well as the effective coordination and partnership with her husband. Ricardo is very supportive of the CLM training and teachings and generously contributes to household needs and childcare responsibilities. He brings home food and treats for the children, and occasionally buys them gifts such as clothes and sandals. Although

these items are essential goods, the fact that Ricardo is fulfilling his responsibility as a father means a lot to Fabienne and her children; especially when the gifts that he brings home are of his choice (without consulting Fabienne).

Fabienne and Ricardo are highly responsive to their children's health conditions. They take active measures to seek out health care and do not think twice of the costs. For instance, when Fabiola was eight months old, she suffered from vomiting, a high fever, and started losing weight. Fabienne brought Fabiola to the hospital three times, and meanwhile, Ricardo sought treatments from a Vodou priest and gave Fabiola a herbal infused bath and a solution to drink. Ricardo is also attentive to the children's emotional wellbeing, and he often carries Fabiola in his arms for emotional support.

Positive or negative effects on her children

Fabienne's children have benefited from their mother's participation in the CLM programme. Thanks to a more flexible cash flow, increasing livestock assets, and savings, Fabienne can buy food to feed them on time, and soap and detergent to keep them clean and maintain a clean living environment. The most significant

¹ The CLM programme evaluates the rate of progress as slow versus fast. Their six-month evaluation survey sets the cutoff point at 70 out of 100 points, where below 70 would be slow, and 70 and above, fast. For example, a beneficiary receives a high score when their animals reproduce successfully; they purchase an animal on their own; they improve the household diet by increasing protein consumption; they have clean clothes and shoes to go out in (to church, for instance); and they keep the house and children clean; among other criteria.

impact for Fabienne's children was that before the programme, they had to interrupt their studies because of lack of money. Fabienne is grateful that 'now, thanks to CLM, they can resume school. It has changed their lives'. Moreover, training in hygiene and water treatment have notably reduced the incidence of food- and waterborne diseases.

When Fabienne needs help with childcare and supervision, she can rely on her in-laws and her aunt. If she wants to go to the market, for instance, she asks her father-in-law to look after Fabiola. Fabienne usually leaves food for her children with her in-laws to relieve the burden of feeding them. Also, if there are all the ingredients at home, Esther and Kervens can come back from school and cook for themselves and Frantz and Fabiola.

Moreover, the children help with other household chores. Esther does the sweeping, dish-washing, and fetches water, whereas Kervens and Frantz look after livestock and gather wood. However, all these chores are done once the children have come back from school, finished their school work, and eaten. As they grow, Fabienne thinks that their help will free up more time for her. With the extra time, she could work more on the family farm.

The bad intentions of some neighbours are a cause for concern for Fabienne and Ricardo. As Ricardo explains 'If I am progressing and developing well [economically] and they are not, they will get jealous.' They are

concerned that jealous neighbours may use magic to attack children if their curses do not work on adults. All of Fabienne's children had an instance of 'unnatural' illness that (according to Ricardo) could not be cured by medical interventions alone.

Challenges

The concern about children's security and protection from harm is an important issue for the family. Fabienne wants to move away from this area because of 'bad spirits' and the adverse influence of some people in the neighbourhood. Fabienne has complained of several unfortunate events that has made her decide to move away from the area. She recalls the incidents with her goats. Kervens brought the goat to a place to tether, but he did not peg down strongly enough, and the goat wandered into a neighbour's plot. The neighbour chased her goat away, and Fabienne never found it again (she believes it was stolen). Another time, she found her goat decapitated. Moreover, Ricardo fell victim to a curse and suffered greatly. Feuding between adults could be a negative influence on their children's wellbeing.

There are some limitations for Fabienne's CLM economic activities on a practical level. Since her youngest daughter, Fabiola, still needs her care and attention, she cannot leave her with others for too long. Fabienne believes that she will be able to engage more in commercial activities when Fabiola turns two or three years old because by then, she will cry less and others will be able to look after her more easily.



Ricardo pounding rice.

PHOTOGRAPHER: © SUNGKYU KIM



Fabienne instructing Esther.

PHOTOGRAPHER: © SUNGKYU KIM

Hopes and aspirations for the future

Fabienne wants her children to finish their studies, then find trade work and jobs that they want to pursue. She thinks that maybe the boys could become woodworkers and the girls could work in tailoring, but ultimately she will let them choose. Similarly, Ricardo wants his children to continue and finish studying. Then he hopes that they can find jobs and careers in, for instance, agronomy, or find life and work in another country. Ricardo imagines that by 18 to 20 years old, the children will be old enough and capable of making such a decision.

After the CLM graduation, Fabienne and Ricardo will keep on growing and improving their livelihoods and vow not to fall back into poverty. Ricardo agrees with Fabienne and prefers to move out of the area. It does not have to be in an urban centre far away. It could well be in any nearby (peri-urban) town. Fabienne does not have the means now, but when she has the money, she will ask Ricardo to find a house, even if it's a single room. That way, she will be able to bring her children with her and send them to schools in a bigger town.



This case study was written by **SungKyu Kim** and **Keetie Roelen**. The research was funded by the British Academy's Early Childhood Development Programme and W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS, the British Academy or W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

© Institute of Development Studies 2019



This is an Open Access case study distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited and any modifications or adaptations are indicated. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

IDS is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (No 877338).

Institute of Development Studies, Brighton BN1 9RE UK

T +44 (0) 1273 606261 E ids@ids.ac.uk W www.ids.ac.uk twitter.com/IDS_UK facebook.com/idsuk