

# Working with Cliques to Reach Everyone in Budikadidi Villages

FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL CENTER BRIEF #3 FOR THE HARNESSING SOCIAL NETWORKS STUDY

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The Harnessing Social Networks study is a collaborative effort led by Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, conducted as operational research within the Catholic Relief Services (CRS)-led multisectoral Budikadidi program in the Kasai-Oriental Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The study delves into the ways in which Budikadidi activities have interacted with local social networks through two case-study villages.<sup>1</sup> **This brief is one of four briefs and describes how some clusters of households (“cliques”) within Budikadidi villages may need special communications strategies to promote their participation.**

## What are cliques and why are they important to targeting?

By definition, a clique is a group of people within a larger group that has intense interaction within the group but less interaction with people outside of the group (Borgatti, Everett, and Johnson 2018). Cliques have high “cohesion;” that is, people in the clique usually share the same values, expectations, and beliefs (Giuffre 2013). This high level of cohesion can be both helpful and a barrier for behavior change programs. On the one hand, there is high pressure within a clique to conform to patterns of behavior, so individual clique members face greater social barriers to behaving differently from the rest of the clique (Giuffre 2013). On the other hand, their high connectivity to one another means information can pass quickly throughout the group. **If the leading influential people can be identified and convinced of a new behavior, there is a high likelihood that most of the clique will adopt that practice.**

Cliques can become examples of solidarity gone awry. While bonding within groups is usually a good thing, development program teams need to be aware when the clique’s internal solidarity turns into exclusion due to weak bridging to other parts of the community. For example, if a group of three football players within a team only pass to each other, the team will feel fragmented; sometimes the rest of the players will be resentful of the three players, and the success of the team will likely suffer. On the other hand, if the most successful players promote the skills of others, the whole team can function as a clique to more effectively compete with other teams.

Cliques were found in both of the case-study villages. **In each case, communications and participation in Budikadidi activities suffered because of the separation of these cliques.** This brief will look closely at one of those cliques as an example of the effects of a clique on participation and communication in development programming.



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Although this brief focuses on one clique, community networks are usually a web of less distinct cliques. While the analysis for this study was able to identify one significant clique in each village, identification of other less distinct and sometimes overlapping cliques came through qualitative interviews. In a sense, each Budikadidi group can be seen as a clique, with some people potentially belonging to multiple groups (or cliques). So while this study did find distinct groups with intense interaction within the group (or clique), there were overlaps and linkages between the groups. **Information often passes quickly within cliques, but more slowly between cliques.**

“Solidarity exists for a given set of actors to the degree that they are directly connected to each other and there is an absence of subgroups or cliques.”  
(Markovsky and Lawler 1994, p1)

People who are “bridges” between cliques have relationships in at least two cliques and so have access to more information. For example, a person in the Village 1 clique may have a friend in an Producers Organization (OP) and therefore may learn some agricultural skills taught in the OP, which the person can pass to others in the clique. Between-clique relationships (bridges) are critical for spreading information widely in a community (Granovetter 1973). If information in a community appears to be spreading slowly or with little real influence, identification and collaboration with these bridging individuals can help to pass information between groups or cliques.

### The Village 1 clique: separate but not totally disconnected

**The 27 households interviewed in the Village 1 clique live in a section of the village that is physically separate. They have their own governance system and are all members of a religious sect.** The leaders do not allow people from the rest of the village to walk or socialize within their area without explicit permission and have set up a physical barrier on the road through their section of the village (see Figure 1). They also usually refuse to allow the families in the clique to participate in any surveys, especially those related to healthcare. They do send their children to the local school, but because of their beliefs, they do not use the government health system and do not always recognize the village Chief as having authority over them. For example, in a vaccination campaign during a measles epidemic, they refused to allow their children to be vaccinated even when told to do so by the village Chief. Because the unvaccinated children posed a risk to the rest of the village, the Chief came with police back-up to force the clique leaders to allow the vaccination to proceed in the clique.



Figure 1. A physical barrier dividing a clique from the rest of the community, with community members soliciting entry

**This clique leadership does not access the typical information networks and were unaware of the Budikadidi activities.** The most common means of spreading information in the village is through a town meeting called by the Chief, but the clique leadership does not generally attend these meetings. When the research team approached the clique leaders about participating in the survey, they were unaware of what Budikadidi activities were available. In talking with them, it became clear that they did not object to most Budikadidi activities, but they did not want their population to be in formal activity groups that were a mix of clique and non-clique members.

On the surface, this group of families was no different from the rest of the population for most measures but were different for some key program participation measures. They were similar in age, food security, risk of having a stunted or wasted child, and the number of most types of interactions with other people. There were some informative differences. Clique members were more often named by anyone as giving important advice. They also had more spontaneous collaborative interactions in general, and they had more spontaneous collaborations with other clique members than with non-clique members.

**Table 1. Description of interactions and group membership among the people interviewed in Village 1**

	In clique	Rest of village
Interviews	27	348
Interactions with the most influential—median (IQR)†	0 (0) *	1 (2)
Interactions with the committee members—median (IQR)†	4 (5) *	2 (3)
Membership in any Budikadidi group (%)	39.3% **	67%
Membership in a Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC) group	17.9%**	42.9%
Membership in an OP	14.3%	21.5%
Collaborative interactions—median (IQR)	2 (4) *	1 (2)
Giving advice—median (IQR)	1.5 (3.5) *	1 (2)

\* significance p value < \*\*0.01, \*0.05– the lower the p-value the more confident that the difference is real and not due to chance; †IQR = interquartile range, the difference between the highest and lowest value of the middle 50% of all values. The IQR shows how spread out values might be.

Perhaps because of the policy of the leaders in the clique to remain separate, **clique members had fewer interactions with influential members of the community and were less likely to participate in Budikadidi groups, even though individuals within the clique had more personal interactions with the people on the Budikadidi committees than the rest of the population did** (see Table 1).

The non-participation of clique leaders and members in the initial meetings related to Budikadidi activities and surveys was interpreted by the Community Action Committee (CAC) as a “refusal” to participate. **The CAC has therefore made no effort to include them in community mobilization activities.**

**The separateness of Village 1 clique in the village network**

During the data collection, the study team had to negotiate with the clique leadership to gain permission to interview the members of the clique. The last day of data collection for Village 1 was spent in the clique’s section of the village interviewing those members. To the surprise of the team, we found that most members had already been interviewed. Frustrated by their leaders’ reluctance to participate in what they thought was a registration for a distribution, they had used their personal networks with the rest of the village to pose as residents of other parts of the village in order to be interviewed, indicating that their links with the rest of the village were by no means inactive.

Table 2. Odds ratio that a clique member will interact with another clique member versus another member of the village

	Odds ratio	Standard error
All interactions	6.49	0.70
Receiving resources	7.38	1.90
Giving resources	4.59	1.37
Receiving advice	5.71	1.40
Giving advice	8.63	2.39
Collaborating	6.84	1.65
Socializing	6.88	2.01

Note: For all interactions,  $p < 0.001$ , so we are very confident the differences in this sample are not just by chance. Standard error (SE) is a measure of how spread out the values in the sample are.

Table 2 shows the odds of a clique member interacting with one of the 27 members of the clique versus with any of the 197 other members of the community who were interviewed. An odds ratio in this table makes a ratio of the likelihood that someone in the clique would interact with someone else in the clique versus interacting with someone outside of the clique (Ranganathan, Aggarwal, and Pramesh 2015). **Members of the clique were about 6.5 times as likely to interact with another member of the clique as they were to interact with someone outside of the clique.** This trend was true for all types of interactions, with giving advice being the strongest. In ALL cases, the differences are large and statistically significant ( $p < 0.000$ ), meaning that these differences we recorded between talking to other clique members and talking to people outside the clique are not just by chance. Higher interaction within a group than with people outside a group is typical of a clique.

In interviews with mothers of young children in both case-study villages, the mothers felt the nutrition and hygiene information and training were the Budikadidi activities that had helped them the most to raise healthy children (see Brief 2). Unfortunately, the members of the clique are getting their information and advice from other members of the clique and are less likely to participate in Budikadidi activities. In other words, the children in the clique are less likely to benefit from the Budikadidi nutrition and hygiene education.

Although we show the results of just one clique, these results are typical of any clique. The more separate and distinct a clique is, the more it will affect the flow of information within a village, helping the information to flow within the clique but reducing the flow into and out of the clique. If we consider Budikadidi groups as cliques created by the program, and the majority of information from the program is passed directly to the group leaders, we may expect that information to pass very quickly to all the members within the group, but it may not pass well to people outside that group.

### Take-away lessons to ensure all parts of the community benefit from Budikadidi

**No one avenue of communication will reach all people in the community.** The program often depends on a downward flow of general information about Budikadidi activities, expecting the CAC or specific community members to make sure everyone who needs to have the information is informed. Specific program messages are passed through similar means related to specific types of groups: Neighbor Groups, SILC groups, Radio Listening Clubs, or OPs. Budikadidi group meetings are often used by the program as opportunities to pass messages unrelated to the purpose of the group; for example, cooking demonstrations are sometimes held during SILC group meetings. While it is convenient to the program staff to use such group settings, the flow of that information to others outside of that group may be limited.

The CACs and Chiefs in both case-study villages tended to use just one favored means of communication. Very rarely did they go door-to-door. The CAC in Village 1 told the study team that the clique leaders would not allow the study team to collect data from the clique population, that they refused to participate in the Budikadidi activities, and they did not attend meetings called by the Chief. On further investigation, it appears that the clique leaders object to certain aspects of programming, but not all. They were not hostile to Budikadidi; indeed, they knew little about the program. When the activities were explained to the members, many said they would welcome these activities. Some of the leaders felt that because the clique did not want their members to mix in formal Budikadidi groups with the rest of the village, they were intentionally excluded from other aspects of the program and didn't know they could set up OPs and SILC groups within the clique.

**Field staff need to be aware of how the CAC is working with and communicating to their villages, especially in terms of cliques, and to proactively ensure that all parts of the community have an equal opportunity to benefit from Budikadidi.** Budikadidi staff knew of the clique and their non-participation but did not report any efforts to engage them beyond the typical means of communication through the CAC, but the CAC had not made special effort to include the clique.

**Cliques can be engaged if special effort is made.** When organizing the survey, the CAC said that it would not be possible to interview the members of the clique, because clique members did not participate in any of the surveys or assessments any organization did in the villages. Nevertheless, the study team was able to gain access to the clique for the survey by specifically seeking out the leadership of the clique to explain the purpose and activities of the study and taking the time to listen to their responses. **Not identifying and engaging cliques reduces the true impact of the Budikadidi program, because an entire section of the population may be unintentionally excluded.**

While the formation of cliques is a barrier to communication at the village level, it also provides opportunities. In some ways, we might consider the formation of Budikadidi groups as the formation of small activity-oriented cliques. As noted above, the Village 1 clique did not participate in the village meetings for information and were less connected to influential people in the village, so they did not receive as much information through those networks, but interaction among the clique members was intense. They were 5.7 times more likely to go to someone within the clique for important advice than to someone outside the clique (see Table 2). **Identifying and working through key influential people within cliques would provide a very efficient, effective way to reach a section of the population that has not benefited very much from Budikadidi.**

The program can harness the dense connections and influential relationships within cliques to promote rapid uptake of behaviors within cliques. Identifying and promoting the bridges between cliques may help to spread the ideas and practices even further and in a way that carries more influence.

## TAKE-AWAY MESSAGES REGARDING WORKING WITH CLIQUES IN COMMUNITIES

- No one avenue of communication will reach all people in the community equally.
- Field staff need to be alert to how the leaders and committees in the community are communicating with members of their villages, especially in terms of cliques, to ensure all parts of the community have an equal opportunity to benefit from Budikadidi.
- Identifying and working through key influential people within excluded cliques would provide a very efficient, effective way to reach a section of the population that has not benefited very much from Budikadidi.
- Cliques can be engaged and incorporated into programming if program staff recognize them and make a special effort to include them.
- The program can harness the dense connections and influential relationships within cliques to promote rapid uptake of behaviors within cliques.
- Identifying and promoting the bridges between cliques may help to spread the ideas and practices even further.

### KEY TAKE-AWAY MESSAGE:

- Not identifying and actively engaging cliques may unintentionally exclude a whole section of the population reducing the true impact of the program.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Interim Report for a more detailed description of the villages, the study methods, and the statistical results underlying the findings in this brief. Only the most necessary statistical results are presented in this brief to increase its readability and hopefully its usefulness. Contact the author at [merry.fitzpatrick@tufts.edu](mailto:merry.fitzpatrick@tufts.edu) for a copy of this report.