

ANNUAL REPORT

2023



www.unitlife.org

ABOUT THIS REPORT

MPTF Office generic annual program narrative progress report.

Reporting period from 01.2023 to 12.2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNITLIFE, a multi-partner fund hosted by the United Nations and administered by the UNDP MPTF Office, continued its mission to combat chronic childhood malnutrition sustainably in 2023. Since the operational launch of UNITLIFE in April 2020, the strategic objectives of UNITLIFE remains unchanged: UNITLIFE funds interventions at different points of the food value chain that (i) position improved children nutrition as a primary outcome; (ii) promote nutrition-sensitive and climate-smart agriculture; and (iii) place women at the center. UNITLIFE impact pathway is as followed: If (1) nutrition-sensitive and climate-smart agricultural practices are promoted among rural women in combination with care and nutrition behavioral change programs, then (2) the prevalence of chronic malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies will decrease because (3) diet diversity, quantity, and quality will be improved.

In 2023, UNITLIFE structured further its investment pillar across three typology of programs (1) Climate-smart Food Systems: Sustainable and nutrition-sensitive Food Solutions along the value chain (2) Prevention – Nutrition & health: Reinforcement on health & nutrition capabilities for mothers & children (3) Nutrition at scale: Capacity building & empowerment of institutions on nutrition. Those pillars are supported by transversal focus on innovation, technology and data driven M&E components.

As UNITLIFE moves forward, it remains committed to its strategic objective and to fostering public and private partnerships that enable innovative, sustainable, and community-focused interventions.

In this context, UNITLIFE continued to scale-up the project implemented in Niger by the international NGO GOAL. The second phase capitalized on the success of the first phase while exploring new dimensions such as financial inclusion. The third phase will further explore scalability through community empowerment, agricultural innovations that are nutrition-sensitive and climate smart, and blended finance; enhancing the project's scope and impact.

UNITLIFE also launched two new projects: one in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with UN Women establishing a biofortified cassava food chain to empower women in their communities; and the second one in Senegal with Action Against Hunger (AAH) creating economic opportunities for youth and women along the food value chain in rural areas of Northern Senegal. These projects, detailed below, focus on improving access to nutritious food, promoting nutrition-sensitive and climate-smart agriculture, and empowering women in local communities.

UNITLIFE has established partnerships with both public and private sector companies to tackle malnutrition by mobilizing resources and expertise. In recent years, UNITLIFE has forged strong ties with several partners in the UAE. The Presidential Court of Abu Dhabi continues to support UNITLIFE, with additional core funding.

The Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI) foundation is also a strategic partner of UNITLIFE, as part of their recent and renewed "1 billion Meals Campaign," committed to building stable and prosperous societies by engaging in humanitarian, social, and development activities.

On the advocacy front, UNITLIFE continued to raise awareness about the importance of fighting malnutrition through digital campaigns and events. In particular, UNITLIFE co-organized with the NGO Worldview Global Impact, in Paris, the Transforming Food System event in December 2023. This event gathered public, private sector and academics actors to explore Food system sustainable transformation through Finance, Tech & Innovation.

The UNITLIFE Trust Fund continues to make significant progress, working in strengthened synergies with other actors in the eco-system, including UN agencies, NGOs, private sector and community institutions, for a more transformative and impactful approach.



PURPOSE

UNITLIFE is dedicated to the fight against chronic childhood malnutrition, which results in stunting, impaired cognitive development and weakened immune system. As such, its mission is carried out within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aims to deliver practical solutions in the fight against this silent and widespread pandemic.

The first 1,000 days of a child's life (through a women's pregnancy and until the child's second birthday) represent a critical period of growth and development. The rapid growth of their bodies and brains requires essential nutrients including protein, vitamins, and minerals.

Children who do not receive the nutrients they need during this key development stage suffer from chronic malnutrition. The consequences of chronic malnutrition – stunted growth, impaired brain development, and a weakened immune system - are largely irreversible, preventing affected children from reaching their full potential.

Today, 1 in 5 children worldwide are chronically malnourished. Compared with their peers, they will struggle to do as well in school and will on average earn 20% less income as adults. In addition to the human tragedy, chronic malnutrition is an enormous obstacle to countries' economic development. In Africa, where chronic malnutrition affects 1 in every 3 children, the cost of undernutrition is estimated at up to 16% of GDP in some countries.

Despite affecting 149 million children worldwide, chronic malnutrition remains little known and under-funded. Yet, the business case is strong for companies to invest in preventing chronic malnutrition: every dollar invested in nutrition generates up to sixteen dollars in benefits to local economies.

UNITLIFE fights chronic malnutrition through innovation harnessing the power of local businesses and the digital economy. UNITLIFE builds innovative partnerships with businesses to unlock financial resources. The funds mobilized are allocated through a transparent model and invested in rural women via climate-smart agriculture and education on essential nutrients. UNITLIFE supports innovative, sustainable, and integrated solutions.

In 2023, the UNITLIFE Secretariat, guided by a Steering Committee, focused on 3 workstreams to address its strategic objectives:

- ◆ **Program & Project portfolio:** support implementing partners to maximize impact on climate smart food system, prevention nutrition and health, and nutrition at scale
- ◆ **Partnerships & Innovative Finance:** mobilize public and private sector partners, and leverage blended finance to scale impact
- ◆ **Advocacy & Communication:** be vocal in order to contribute to positioning chronic malnutrition the development agenda

PROGRAM & PROJECT PORTFOLIO

Ongoing Projects



NIGER

Sustaining bio-fortified and climate-resilient agriculture to serve women in remote areas

Project Lead: GOAL Global

Location: Niger | Zinder region

Objective: *Reduce the prevalence of chronic malnutrition through agricultural innovations that are nutrition-sensitive and climate smart.*

Phase: II

Duration: 12 months

Project Budget: 300K USD



Project location: Zinder region (20 villages), Niger
53% rate of chronically malnourished children in Zinder

Overview

UNITLIFE continued to work closely with its implementing partner, GOAL, on the ongoing project Sustaining bio-fortified and climate-resilient agriculture to serve women in remote areas. The project targeted the reduction of chronic malnutrition among vulnerable groups such as children under five years old, and pregnant and lactating women. The project was active in 20 villages within the Mirriah and Gouré areas of the Zinder region and ran from November 2022 to December 2023. The overarching goal was to enhance food and nutrition security through three main strategies:

- 1. Improved Production and Availability of Nutrition-Sensitive Crops:** This initiative is part of a broader approach to Market Systems Development, aiming to increase the production and access to nutrient-dense agricultural products.
- 2. Enhanced Women's Empowerment:** Through Financial Inclusion strategies, the project boosts women's agency, income, and asset acquisition, empowering them economically and socially within their communities.
- 3. Improved Health and Community Well-Being:** Through Social and Behavioral Change efforts, the project promotes better nutritional practices and overall community health.

Main Achievements

The project successfully reached 24,118 individuals, 47% of whom were female, exceeding the target of 20,355. Notably, 90% of the beneficiaries were adults. The initiative made significant strides in enhancing the production and availability of nutrition-sensitive crops, with a marked expansion in seed availability that led to substantial improvements in seed sales year over year. Food consumption scores among the target population improved as well, with 71% achieving acceptable scores, highlighting the success of the project's nutrition-focused interventions. Broad community engagement fostered significant behavioral changes, contributing to improved health and nutritional practices. Furthermore, women's empowerment was significantly boosted through their increased participation in economic activities and financial decision-making, enhancing their roles within their communities and beyond. In total, over 12 months, 1,279,440 nutritious meals were enabled during Phase 2, underlining the substantial impact of the project on improving the nutritional profile and food security of the community.

1. Agricultural Innovations:

- **Production Increases:** Farmers who adopted improved seeds reported yield increases of 216-278% for millet, 137-235% for groundnuts, and 221-257% for climate-adapted cowpeas.
- **Seed Distribution:** In 2023 alone, 31 tons of improved seeds were sold in Zinder, showing significant growth from 15 tons in 2022.

2. Social and Behavioral Change:

- **Improved Nutritional Practices:** The percentage of the target population with an acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS) rose to 71% in 2023, during the lean season, compared to 53% in 2022.
- **Community Engagement:** The project reached 24,118 individuals, surpassing the target of 20,355 by 118%. Of those reached, 47% were female.

3. Financial Inclusion:

- **Women's Empowerment:** 99.9% of target women were trained on skills supporting food value addition, such as food processing, preservation, and storage techniques.
- **Access to Financial Services:** 81% of target women accessed informal or formal financial services by the end of the project, a substantial increase from a baseline of 0%.

4. Innovative Approaches:

- **Digital Outreach:** The use of digital platforms like VIAMO increased access to crucial information, with 152,736 calls registered from January to December 2023.
- **Improved Storage Technologies:** Over 81,000 low-cost Purdue Improved Crop Storage (PICS) bags were sold, significantly reducing post-harvest losses.

5. Sustainability and Resilience:

- **Enhanced Resilience:** The project's initiatives led to increased local capacities and systems strengthening that are expected to provide long-term benefits against climate and economic shocks.
- **Community Driven Solutions:** Activities were designed to empower local communities to sustain improvements in food security and nutritional practices independently.

UNITLIFE extends its appreciation to MBRGI Foundation for its support in financing this program.

SENEGAL

Creating economic opportunities for youth and women along the food value chain in rural areas of Northern Senegal



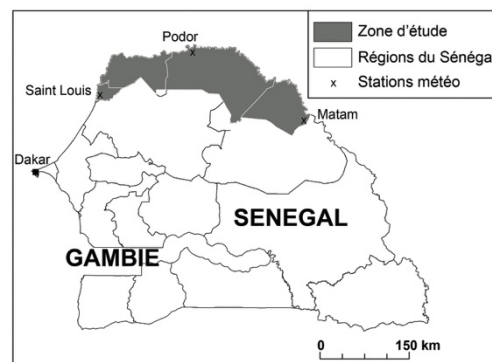
Objective: *Contribute to a sustainable improvement of food and nutritional security and the livelihood of vulnerable households in Matam, Podor and Linguère.*

Phase: I

Duration: 24 months

Project Budget: 595K USD

We acknowledge the support of the MBRGI foundation



Overview

Action Against Hunger (AAH), supported by UNITLIFE, is advancing the second phase of the Food and Nutritional Resilience Support Integrated Project (PIARAN) in Senegal. This project, operational since 2016, originally concentrated in the Podor department, has now expanded its activities into the departments of Matam and Linguère. Starting in March 2023, the project spans 11 communes across these four departments, including Louga. PIARAN aims to enhance the food and nutritional resilience of populations vulnerable to recurrent food and nutritional insecurity, proposing climate-adapted solutions for a healthier diet. The project focuses on consolidating previous achievements and extending activities to address the four pillars of food security. It adopts an integrated and partnership-based approach, structuring a sustainable agri-food system that emphasizes the development of local value chains. Central to this initiative is improving community food practices by providing high nutritional value foods from market gardening and promoting their adequate consumption.

The specific objectives of PIARAN 2 include:

1. Improving the availability, access, and use of high-nutritional-value products for vulnerable households, thereby enhancing food security and community resilience.
2. Enhancing optimal nutrition and hygiene practices, aiming to prevent acute malnutrition and improve overall community health.

These objectives are in line with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2024-2028 for Senegal, which seeks to enhance community well-being by helping them meet basic needs and secure food and nutritional security. Additionally, the project supports strengthening women's economic autonomy through the establishment of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA), improving food practices, further empowering women within their communities.

Main Activities

1. Agricultural Production Enhancements:

- Revitalization of 25 Health Gardens: Key actions included the rehabilitation and support of market gardening activities, particularly in cowpea cultivation which serves both human and animal nutrition.
- Infrastructure Improvements: Installation of boreholes with solar watering systems and support for dairy processing units (DPUs) across multiple departments, ensuring water self-sufficiency and reducing operational costs for Health Gardens.
- Seed Distribution and Agricultural Training: High-nutritional-value vegetable seeds were distributed, and beneficiaries were trained in good agroecological practices, significantly boosting local production capacities.

2. Community Engagement and Training:

- Health and Nutritional Practice Training: Community self-diagnosis sessions were held to identify gaps in dietary practices and develop tailored awareness-raising messages for behavioral change.
- Economic Empowerment through Training: Extensive training was provided in dairy processing, preservation techniques, and the management of Village Savings and Credit Associations (AVEC), enhancing women's economic empowerment and community food security.

3. Enhanced Water and Sanitation Facilities:

- Support for Water Purification: Distribution of Aquatabs and soaps to improve water hygiene and sanitation practices among vulnerable households.

4. Sustainability and Resilience Building:

- Strengthening Dairy Production: Support included the provision of equipment and training for DPUs, promoting sustainable dairy production and processing techniques.

5. Nutritional Improvements and Food Security:

- Production Outcomes: The project led to a total production of 24,675.08 kg of vegetables and 9,266 heads of lettuce, improving the access, availability, and use of high-nutritional-value products among the target households. The sale of surplus produce also helped cover other basic household needs.

UNITLIFE extends its appreciation to MBRGI Foundation for its support in financing this program.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Establishing a biofortified cassava food chain to empower women in their communities

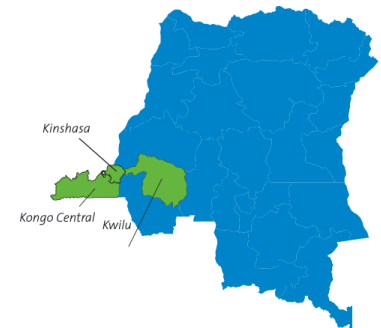


Objective: *Empower women in the biofortified cassava value chain for fighting against chronic malnutrition.*

Phase: I

Duration: 17 months

Project Budget: 500K USD



Overview

In Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), UNITLIFE collaborates with UN WOMEN on a project that focuses on establishing a biofortified cassava chain to empower women within their communities. This initiative, part of a broader effort to combat chronic malnutrition, targets the economic empowerment of women through improved agricultural practices. It commenced in January 2023 and spans several provinces, including Kongo Central and Kwango. The project includes activities such as identifying places, food availability, and eating habits, as well as training women in the production, processing, and marketing of fortified organic cassava. The project also aims to prevent chronic malnutrition within children's first 1000 days of life by promoting the consumption of bio-fortified organic cassava recipes and nutrient-rich supplements. The project aligns with SDG2 and SDG5, and its outcomes include women's economic empowerment and prevention of chronic malnutrition. The project will involve communication for behavior change, workshops for recipe design and validation, and community-level engagement to promote good food and hygiene practices.

Progress

Despite facing significant challenges in 2023, including construction delays due to tensions in the targeted territories, the project has made noteworthy progress. As of December 2023, the construction of crucial infrastructure was almost complete.

To address the setbacks and maintain momentum, a prospecting mission was conducted to identify and solidify the necessary conditions for project success. Additionally, the first round of training sessions has already been implemented, focusing on agricultural techniques and market strategies tailored to the biofortified cassava chain. These sessions are part of a broader effort to jumpstart production activities swiftly.

UN Women and the implementing partners have developed a new schedule to catch up on the delays. This revised plan aims to accelerate the start of further training and production phases, ensuring the project meets its objectives. This proactive approach emphasizes the commitment to overcoming obstacles and pushing forward the project's goals, focusing on building sustainable livelihoods for women and improving community nutritional outcomes.

UNITLIFE extends its appreciation to MBRGI Foundation for its support in financing this program.

New Projects

UNITLIFE has successfully secured new funding with the support of MBRGI to continue its impactful work in combating malnutrition and improving the lives of vulnerable communities in Africa. This includes funding for Phase 3 of the ongoing project in Niger, as well as initiating new projects in Africa, potentially in countries like Burundi, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Madagascar. While the specific countries and projects are still to be determined, they will all focus on climate-smart agriculture, nutrition and health education, and women's empowerment, demonstrating UNITLIFE's ongoing commitment to investing in sustainable solutions that target malnutrition and enhance women's empowerment across the continent.

NIGER

Sustaining bio-fortified and climate-resilient agriculture to serve women in remote areas

Project Lead: GOAL Global

Location: Niger | Zinder region

Objective: *Reduce the prevalence of chronic malnutrition through agricultural innovations that are nutrition-sensitive and climate smart.*

Phase: III

Duration: 24 months

Project Budget: 650K USD

Overview

UNITLIFE, in collaboration with GOAL International, is launching Phase 3 of the "Systems Approach to Resilient Food & Nutrition Security in Zinder" project in Niger, focusing on sustainable, nutrition-sensitive agricultural practices and women's socio-economic empowerment. Scheduled to begin in January 2024, this two-year initiative has a budget of \$607,476 and aims to directly benefit 40,000 individuals, including 47% women and 13% children, with an indirect reach of 200,000 individuals. New to this phase are initiatives such as the introduction of Vitamin A-improved maize, cassava, and sweet potatoes, the establishment of new community gardens, and the integration of innovative digital financial services. Additionally, the project will implement Zai hole techniques for water harvesting and soil regeneration, enhancing agricultural resilience. These additions aim to enhance food production, increase market linkages, and expand financial inclusion, building on the successes and lessons learned from previous phases. The program continues to prioritize women's empowerment and community well-being in the Zinder region, supported by a commitment from Irish Aid and aligning with UNITLIFE's ongoing strategies to combat chronic malnutrition and enhance food security.

UNITLIFE extends its appreciation to MBRGI Foundation for its support in financing this program.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

As part of UNITLIFE's commitment to enhancing food security and nutritional outcomes, we conducted two monitoring missions to assess the progress and implementation of our projects in Madagascar and Burundi. These missions allowed us to directly observe the on-ground activities, engage with project teams and local communities, and ensure that the projects align with our strategic objectives of combating malnutrition and empowering vulnerable populations through sustainable agricultural practices and economic empowerment initiatives. These visits were crucial in facilitating real-time feedback and adjustments, ensuring the effectiveness and impact of our interventions.

NIGER

The mission to Niger in June 2023 aimed at supervising field activities, refining monitoring processes, and assessing project progress, especially in nutrition and women's empowerment. Key takeaways included significant successes like improved nutritional statuses due to behavioral changes and increased financial autonomy for women through Village Savings and Loan Associations. However, challenges such as inconsistent success in goat banks and limited access to farming training for women were noted. Recommendations for expanding community gardens, utilizing bio-fortified seeds, and enhancing nutritional education efforts were made. These findings are instrumental in informing the necessary improvements and strategic changes for Phase 3 of the project, ensuring a focused approach to address the identified needs and challenges effectively.



SENEGAL

During the early implementation phase of the project in Senegal, the October 2023 mission observed various stages of rehabilitation for garden and dairy transformation units in Matam, Podor, and Linguere. Rehabilitation was complete in some regions, allowing the team to assess operational setups, while ongoing work in other areas offered insights into necessary enhancements. Field visits and discussions with local beneficiaries enriched the strategic planning by providing essential insights into local needs. Collaborative efforts with partners like USE and FAFD ensured effective coordination. Strategic discussions in Dakar with the Action Against Hunger team were pivotal in refining the monitoring and evaluation framework, discussing project timelines, future scale-ups, and funding opportunities. This mission established a solid foundation for ongoing vigilant monitoring and preparing for a follow-up mission to make further necessary adjustments, ensuring the project's alignment with local needs and its scalable success.

PARTNERSHIP & INNOVATIVE FINANCE

UNITLIFE has established **partnerships** with both public and private sector companies to tackle malnutrition by **mobilizing resources and expertise**:

- ◆ The **Presidential Court of Abu Dhabi**, longstanding donor, and Board member of UNITLIFE, continued to support UNITLIFE with an additional core funding contribution, and encourages a more transformative and systemic approach to scale the impact.
- ◆ The **French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs**, Board member of UNITLIFE, renewed its support to UNITLIFE in anticipation of the upcoming **Nutrition for Growth summit**, that will be in Paris in March 2025, and facilitated UNITLIFE's joining the **School Meals Coalition**.
- ◆ The **Ecobank Foundation**, Board member of UNITLIFE, continues to support UNITLIFE through the innovative finance "**Make the connection**" campaign.
- ◆ **Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI)** Foundation also renewed its support to UNITLIFE's activities as part of their "**1 billion Meals Campaign**", on both existing programs and new countries (presented in this document) through a significant contribution.



- ◆ UNITLIFE partnered with **Aidonic**, a start-up leveraging **blockchain, AI, and digital payment solutions**, we guarantee swift, secure, and effective aid delivery to those who need it most. Together they developed a platform for end-to-end transparency between donation and activation as part of programs through **vouchers and/or cash transfer**. UNITLIFE is working with **WFP** to maximize the reach and impact at scale of this solution.
- ◆ UNITLIFE also continues to develop its **Innovation Hub** as a space to envision innovation with partners willing to inject skills, expertise, and assets as part of **impactful field development** projects. Through the Innovation Hub, UNITLIFE continues to identify innovative solutions that can be smoothly implemented on the field as part of pilots / proof of concepts.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION

To be vocal and contribute to positioning further chronic malnutrition in the development agenda, UNITLIFE managed to deliver several Advocacy & Communication activities:

Creation of the **#17GoalsForTheFuture** NFT Collection in partnership with Retreeb. Each SDG is represented by 2 digital artworks projecting an optimistic and a dystopian version of the future. Presentation at **NFT Paris event** and organization of an **Auction of 2 NFTs** at the NFT Factory.



UNITLIFE co-organized with the NGO **Worldview Global Impact**, in Paris at Station F, the TFS event in December 2023. This event gathered public, private sector and academics actors to explore **Food system sustainable transformation through Finance, Tech & Innovation**. 20 speakers and 15 startups were invited in front of ~400 participants (onsite & online). Website of the event : <https://www.tfsevent.com/>



Discovering Start-ups and Networking



EVALUATION, BEST PRACTICES & LESSONS LEARNED



Throughout the year, UNITLIFE has rigorously evaluated its projects to ensure that all interventions effectively address chronic childhood malnutrition. These evaluations have provided critical insights that have shaped UNITLIFE's approach.

This ensures our projects are responsive and resilient, capable of achieving long-term impact in the fight against malnutrition. The continued development of data-driven tools and inclusive innovation remains a core focus, enabling UNITLIFE to measure impact more effectively and strategically scale successful interventions.

One of the key best practices identified is the integrated approach, where nutrition-sensitive agriculture is combined with community empowerment and strategic partnerships, significantly amplifying the impact on nutritional health. Engaging a broad range of stakeholders, from local communities to international partners, has been instrumental in tailoring interventions to specific needs and contexts, thereby enhancing efficacy and acceptance.

Moving forward, these practices and lessons coupled with blended finance mechanisms will guide UNITLIFE to ensure our projects are responsive and resilient, capable of achieving long-term impact in the fight against malnutrition. The continued development of data-driven tools and inclusive innovation remains a core focus, enabling UNITLIFE to measure impact more effectively and strategically scale successful interventions.

