

UNITLIFE NARRATIVE FINAL REPORT (November 2020 – July 2022)

1. OVERALL PERFORMANCE:

Between November 2020 and July 2022, with support from UNITLIFE, GOAL implemented a project with the ***overall objective of reducing the prevalence of chronic malnutrition among children under 5 years and Pregnant and Lactating Women (PLW), through agricultural innovations that are nutrition-sensitive and climate-smart in 20 villages in Mirriah and Gouré areas, Zinder region.*** Given the interrelated causes of chronic malnutrition with poor maternal and child health and nutrition, women’s limited decision-making power and food and nutrition insecurity, the project has three major objectives:

1. Improved production and availability of nutrition-sensitive crops,
2. Women’s empowerment (agency, income, assets) enhanced, and household nutritional status improved,
3. Improved health through behavior change (nutritional improved practices and community well-being).

Two evaluations contribute to the measurement of results at endline for this project, they were conducted in January and July 2022, by the GOAL Niger MEAL team with technical oversight and quality assurance from GOAL’s Regional MEL Advisor.

Reach

At the end of the eighteen-month project, **20,963 individuals (51% female), have been reached, 112% of the planned target of 18,656. Most of these individuals benefited from multiple interventions implemented under this project.** Of the total reached, 77% were adults, (39% women), and 23% were children, of which 49% were female. More people were reached than originally planned, mainly through two approaches that have a potential of reaching larger numbers i.e., Family MUAC and Community led Action (CLA) for COVID-19.

Outcome and output results

Outcome 1. Improved production and availability of nutrition-sensitive crops was measured through two indicators:

1. ***The percentage of target farmers producing nutrient-dense crops such as vegetable and biofortified crops in the catchment areas,*** at baseline this was 0%, the target was 70% and the result 57%. Possibly the target was set too high for communities unfamiliar with nutrient improved and climate adapted seed. In terms of production, an assessment of increased production, when compared to local varieties was conducted in January 2022 with farmers across Zinder who purchased improved seed, demonstrated substantially increased production of between 183% and 242% for nutritionally improved millet and climate adapted cow peas and ground nuts, with good evidence that production is being used for household food consumption, see learning brief below. In terms of availability, significantly larger volumes of seed were available and sold in 2021 (22.5 tons) when compared to 2020 (1.8 tons). This reflects an upward

trajectory in terms of availability, access to and uptake of improved seed and production. In 2022, utilizing Irish Aid support, a further 15 tons of improved seed was sold across Zinder. This initiative will require several years to stimulate demand with other private sector supply actors entering the Zinder market and creating supply competition which can drive demand and increase the nutritional value of what people already eat.

2. The second indicator, **the percentage of the target population with an acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS)** is intended to reflect the impact from all project initiatives. At baseline this was 52.7% (IA 2019), the target was 55% and the result 53%. Baseline and endline data were collected in different seasons, baseline in February when there is greater food availability (fed season), and at end line in July that falls within the lean season (May to September). So, while this data suggests little change, the overall FCS has been maintained during the lean season at levels commensurate with the fed season (October to March). It is also important to note that the percentage of households classified as having a poor FCS, has reduced significantly from 32.4% at baseline to 19% at endline. This has resulted in a greater number of households achieving borderline food security score rather than a poor food security score. **In summary, the data shows that the FCS was maintained during the lean season (when compared with data from the fed season), and more households moved from a poor FCS score to a borderline score, a positive trend. A subsequent FCS assessment will be undertaken in July 2023, to be able to compare data from the same season.**

Outcome 1. has three associated output indicators, detailed here, see log frame report for activity level reporting.

Outputs 1.1 Strengthened linkages between input suppliers and farmers for timely access to improved and diversified seeds was measured through ***the percentage of the target population linked to input suppliers of high-quality seeds of nutrient-dense crops & input sources***. At baseline this was 0%, the target was 90% and the result 82%. Through the final evaluation conducted in July 2022, 82% of households interviewed reported having heard of and know the retail points to purchase improved seeds in the project area, although it should be noted that seed retail agents were located and selling across the whole of Zinder and not only the target project area. This is important as improved supply stimulates demand for new products and increased demand stimulates supply. The evaluation in January 2022, shows that relatively inexpensive radio advertising seemed to be effective in creating demand for new seed varieties.

A notable area of success under this outcome is the substantially increased access to [Purdue Improved Crop Storage \(PICS\)](#) bags, a low-cost technology for storing grain and seed without using chemicals to control insect pests. Abdul Azizou, one of the two private sector partners imported PICS bags, and sold 27,000 bags in 2021 across Zinder. 15,000 bags were sold to women at a sale price (25% off), bringing the price nominally below the price of a poorer quality storage bag available in the market, additionally, men purchased 12,000 bags at the full price, demonstrating untapped demand for quality low-cost storage technology. GOAL will continue to monitor and collect data on this initiative, this initiative cost ~\$7,000, the return on this investment is expected to increase as more bags are sold at the full price in 2022.

Output 1.2: Improved production skills to increase availability of nutrient-rich foods is measured through the **percentage of the population (children 6-23 months) with Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD)**. At baseline this was 4.2%, the target 6.3% and the result 95%. MDD is a measure of a minimum number of food groups consumed by different age groups and breastfeeding status of infant 6 - 23 months of age. The baseline 4.2% and target 6.3% was based on the SMART 2019 Mirriah and Gouré survey results, the Ministry of Health (MOH) through the regional nutrition unit advised setting a conservative target. On reflection, this was set too low, with GOAL's Niger overall NIPP data (from multiple projects such as Irish Aid) showing an average of 89% acceptable dietary diversity at graduation. The baseline data collected at the beginning of NIPP activities was 1.1% in target NIPP households. The 2019 SMART report reported 4.2% from the wider community. This large increase in MDD is consistent with GOAL's national NIPP data for MDD and illustrates the positive impact of the NIPP methodology, an interpersonal Social Behavioural Change (SBC) methodology that supports individual's practical application of positive behaviours.

Output 1.3: Women's dry-season production and income generation increased was measured through the **percentage of target women trained on skills supporting food value addition such as food processing, preservation, and storage techniques**. At baseline this was 0%, the target 85% and the result 99.9%. There was very high participation of women in the NIPP activities.

Outcome 2: Women's empowerment (agency, income, and assets) enhanced, and household nutritional status improved was measured through the **percentage of target women associated in financial decision taking at HH level**. At baseline this was 25%, the target 85% and the result 38%. This indicator measures the increasing change in social and gender norms that govern women's role on economic decision making. It would appear from the results that men continue to make the decisions on economic issues such as purchasing larger livestock and crops for cash and woman on the smaller ruminant's purchases such as goats and hens so little change on the wider social and gender norms as yet. This could be attributed to the fact the intrapersonal SBC community conversation activities that have a greater impact on social and gender norms is still on going and will not conclude until Jan 2023. The provision of knowledge and skills to woman on animal rearing and financial skills (see output 2 below) would appear to have an impact, in that woman can make decisions on smaller livestock issues. However, due to the baseline being secondary data, the endline cannot be compared to show progress but encouraging to see that in GOAL's areas of operation the % of woman with an influence on household economics is higher than the secondary data used at baseline.

Outcome 2. has two associated output indicators, detailed here, see log frame report for activity level reporting, they are:

Output 2.1: Women's decision-making power and income increased measured through the **percentage of target women involved in decision making on use of household assets and income**. The baseline was 25%, the target estimated at 85% and the result 53%. For this household decision indicator, it appears that the majority of woman can make decisions on the

income required for the daily running of the household, can bring children to health care, can spend their own income, and decide on the smaller household purchases such as daily food and buying of household utensils. However, due to the baseline being secondary data, the endline cannot be compared to show progress but a 53% is an increase from secondary data used in the baseline. This higher percentage could be attributed to the fact that 14 goat banks were established, 392 women linked to veterinary services and 1007 joined Village Savings and Loans groups which may have translated into increasing their power within the household. The endline results will be used as a baseline for the 2022/2024 project to provide stronger evidence that the approach of building woman aptitude (knowledge, skills and confidence) with a change in social and gender community norms translates into increased resources power at the household level.

Output 2.2: Women’s financial literacy and inclusion increased, measured through the *percentage of target women who accessed either informal or formal financial services*. The baseline was 0%, the target 85% and the result 74%. While not meeting the target, this represents a substantial increase in women’s access to informal financial services, from a very low base. More work is required to explore formal financial service providers and appropriate financial products and services to support women towards financial inclusion, this will be undertaken in the follow-on project 2022 / 2023.

Outcome 3. Improved health-seeking behaviors, nutritional practices, and community well-being was measured through *the percentage of target community members with ability to care for their own well-being* (as a result of GOAL’s SBC approaches focusing on health-nutrition-WASH behaviors). At baseline this was 51.5%, the target was 80% and the result 83% demonstrating good progress through a combination of different social and behaviour change and communications approaches such as the intrapersonal, Community led Action approach creating community solutions for the adoption of positive health behaviours interpersonal peer approaches namely NIPP and Family MUAC to increase knowledge and the skills of individuals and mass media to create high awareness on the positive behaviors.

Outcome 3 has three associated outputs detailed here, see log frame report for activity level reporting, they are:

Output 3.1: Improved household nutritional awareness and practices measured through the *percentage of households with improved knowledge and skills in food preparation, use, processing, and storage including nutrient dense food*. At baseline this was 20%, the target was 60% and the result 95%, demonstrating high knowledge in food safety, important for good nutrition.

Output 3.2: Strengthened infant and child malnutrition household-level screening and self-referrals was measured through *Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) of children screened referred by Family MUAC and admitted at the health facilities*. At baseline this was 0%, the target was 75% and the result 83%. This was achieved through the extended roll out of the Family MUAC approach.

Output 3.3: Uptake of positive health and nutrition behaviors supported was measured through the *percentage of community members acquiring at least 2 of the promoted health and nutrition behaviors*. At baseline this was 45.5%, the target 70% and the result 87%. This was achieved through creating an enabling environment using the CLA approach to establish community discussion platforms and identify community solutions for people to adopt and community solutions for the adoption of positive health behaviors. Community COVID prevention activity through the CLA approach was carried out in 20 communities of the project. Through CLA it possible to reach 18,477 people made up of 10,286 men and 8,191 women across 2700 households. We should also note that each community has its own action plan followed by the communities' mobilizers with the support of the field agents of the project. All 20 communities developing action plans to support households to be able to take on small doable actions, such as establishing tippy taps, cleaning public places - referral to health services- visitors logs - plus isolation of visitors. The actions plan for the 20 targeted communities were evaluated with success. All the actions points identified and followed by each community have been reached which was improved the behavior change of those communities to prevent the propagation of COVID-19 pandemic in their environment.

2. CHANGES AND AMENDMENTS

Activity 1.1.4: Support FESA in developing marketing strategy

There was a change in a planned activity in relation to FESA's marketing strategy. FESA had secured assistance from USAID to procure a consultant to develop their first business plan, progress on this has been slow and in addition to this FESA's exposure to formal business capacity strengthening is limited, and for now they do not see the difference between a business plan and a marketing strategy. As we work with partners, aiming to do the 'right thing at the 'right' time, we could see that this was not the right time and therefore planned to redirect these resources to the following new initiatives, the budget realignment was approved by UNITLIFE in September 2021.

Training retailers & lead farmers in product knowledge and production skills

Despite the substantial increase in sales of nutritionally improved and climate adapted seed in Zinder (2021 sales 21.8 tons, in 2020 less than two tones), there was a lack of knowledge on the benefits of improved seed. In the strategic alliance meeting held in August 2021 with key players (wholesale input suppliers, retailers, off-takers, financial service providers), it became clear that the retailers are not equipped with enough information to be able to confidently promote the benefits of improved seed when compared to local varieties, in terms of their nutritional value and their climate adaptability. To sell responsibly to farmers, it is critical that retailers have this knowledge. Retailors, who are often also farmers, should be able to provide sound production advice while selling inputs. Retailors, who are buddied with lead farmers, who also support improved production skills in their communities are a critical avenue to knowledge / extension services in Zinder. To respond to this, redirected resources were utilized to train 30 retailers and 30 lead farmers (all male), in marketing, production and the nutritional value of bio-fortified crops. Training was conducted by the national agricultural research institute (INRAN) and

experts from the government agriculture department.

A note on lack of women’s inclusion: The sale of improved inputs leveraged FESA’s existing retail network, which were all male retailers. As the project did not plan to support new retailers, there were no opportunities to stimulate the identification of women retailers on this occasion. In this traditional society it is significantly less likely that women own shops, but this could be an interesting area to explore in future programming, while acknowledging that it must be the wholesaler who make the decision on who they will work with. In the identification of lead farmers, the criteria were farmers who were open to using improved seed, were located near the existing retailers and also well-known and respected in their farming communities to be able to influence others. This criteria does tend to lead to the identification of male lead farmer. That said, the project does acknowledge that there was a missed opportunity to specifically target women as lead farmers. This is a key learning and in future programming, an explicit target for women lead farmers will be set.

Leveraging FESA’s retail system to increase access to nutritious vegetable seeds:

The off-season flood recession in Zinder (October to March) is when households produce vegetables, primarily for household consumption. In Zinder, access to quality vegetable seeds is low and households do not see the return on their investment, negatively affecting production and dietary diversity. The previous initiative (mid 2021), to increase access to nutritionally improved and climate adapted seed for millet, groundnuts and cowpeas through FESA and their network of 32 retailers, demonstrates what is possible and signals a system level change in how the seed system can work more inclusively, sustainably and at scale.

GOAL and FESA co-designed a similar intervention to increase access to quality vegetable seeds but with an emphasis on increasing women’s access by ‘buying down’ 50% of the cost of vegetable seed inputs (carrot, cabbage, okra and moringa PKM1); men paid the full retail price. As before, GOAL monitored and verified sales of seed and FESA was paid based on seeds sold. This initiative was not as successful as hoped, as seed was not available early enough in the vegetable seed selling season (October - January 2022). Additionally, we learned that FESA wholesale supply came from Abdul Azizou, the other project private sector partner. This created an inefficiency in the systems, essential creating another ‘middle man.’ In programming in 2022, GOAL will partner directly with Adbul Azizou to increase access to vegetable seeds, with a sale price specifically for women.

Increasing access to low-cost post-harvest handling inputs (PICS bags), to reduce crop losses

Improved seed increases yields, good for household food security and farmers’ incomes. However, post- harvest losses substantially reduce return on investment for farmers. Cereal grains are the basis of staple food, and account for as much as 50–60% cereal grains loss during storage. Use of low-cost storage technology can reduce losses to as low as 1–2%. The Purdue Improved Crop Storage (PICS) bags are a low-cost technology for storing grain and seed without using chemicals to control insect pests.

From our market scoping assessment, we found that the national supplier of PICS bags

(Zanguina) retailer in Zinder Town (Alhaji Sani Lawali) sold approximately 5,000 PICS bags at a cost of CFA 1,000 in 2020. This represents a fraction of the PICS bags sold in other areas, highlighting the considerable opportunity to increase sales and use of PICS bags in Zinder to reduce post-harvest losses. Secondly, poorer quality storage bags (BEST) are available in the Zinder market, they cost 800 CFA, but represent a false economy for farmers due to low quality and durability.

An intervention was co-designed with Abdul Aziz, a retailer and supplier of other agricultural inputs in Zinder, to retail PICS bags through the established network of retailers who had earlier in the season retailed nutritionally improved and climate adapted seed with FESA. Abdul Aziz pre-financed the importation of PICS bags from an accredited manufacturer in Nigeria, just 300kms from Zinder. The project used redirected resources to increase access to PICS bags for both women and men farmers, but to provide a sale price of CFA 750 only for women farmers, male farmers paid the full price CFA 1,000. The 25% sale price for women was intended not only to increase their access to low-cost storage technology but also to increase their exposure to retailers selling other critical productive inputs and to make it an easier decision to buy the PICS bags rather than the other lower cost storage bag (BEST), in the market. Simple radio advertising was used to market and stimulate demand and 27,000 bags were sold, 15,000 to women. The GOAL team provided independent monitoring of sales data.

3. MEASURING RESULTS



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4. OVERALL BENEFICIARIES

	Female planned	Male planned	Total planned	Female reached	Male reached	Total reached	% reached/plan	% Female
Adult	7,421	7,130	14,551	8,278	7,823	16,101	111	51
Children under 24 months	887	852	1,739	1,349	1,505	2,854	164	47
Children 24 months and over	1,207	1,159	2,366	1,057	951	2,008	85	53
Total	9,515	9,141	18,656	10,684	10,279	20,963	112	51

At the end of the eighteen-month project, **20,963 individuals (51% female), have been reached,**

112% of the planned target of 18,656. Of the total reached, 77% were adults, (39% women), and 23% were children, of which 49% were female. More people were reached than originally planned, mainly through two approaches; Family MUAC and Community led Action (CLA) for COVID-19.

Beneficiary Selection / Targeting

For Outcome 1. Improved production and availability of nutrient sensitive crops used a market facing approach, participants self-selected. Both men and women benefited from the 50% sale price on nutritionally improved millet, cowpeas, ground nuts and vegetable seed. There was purposeful targeting of women who benefited more from the sale price on PICS bags and consequently they bought in greater numbers.

GOAL uses a Positive Deviance approach to identify caretakers from well-nourished, but similar socio- economic status as most households in their community. Volunteers are selected by their community using GOAL pre-defined terms of reference for NIPP volunteers (as per GOAL Implementation guidelines for NIPP) and verified by GOAL staff. A female peer is selected to facilitate the female circles, a male peer for the male NIPP circles and either a male or a female for the community leader NIPP circles. NIPP participants are selected based on their nutritional vulnerability as per GOAL Implementation guidelines for NIPP. They are pre-identified by their community and verified by GOAL staff.

A village assembly was organized in each community to clearly explain how the activities of the community gardens will be implemented. Following this explanation, women volunteers expressed their interest and were selected in a general assembly and therefore designated as direct beneficiaries of the community garden activity.

The female beneficiaries of the goats were identified using the Household Economic Analysis (HEA) targeting technique. The HEA methodology is a process that involves targeting beneficiaries from vulnerable households by involving communities through general assemblies.

Critical to the VSLA methodology is that VSLA groups are self-selecting as there are fundamental issues of trust in informal saving mechanisms. VSLA are a cost-effective way of helping communities prepare for access to and use of financial services, critical to their resilience to shocks, especially for communities dependent on agriculture. VSLAs usually become independent within a year. Linking them to the formal financial system is the challenge and a financial system assessment will be undertaken in the follow-on project.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT

In response to the following identified risks, GOAL implemented a holistic approach in conjunction with multiple stakeholders, that combined risk communication and community engagement, sub-national and national coordination.

1. The elections held in 2021 did not negatively impact activities. GOAL was able to rely on

the community workers for continued community involvement in SBCC and other activities; community level activities proceed as planned.

2. Disease outbreaks – (annual cholera outbreak August – December 2021 and meningitis March-June 2022), causing pause in activities to focus on immunization campaigns. As foreseen, the meningitis epidemic occurred between March-June and the cholera outbreak in August. Thanks to the preparedness of the health authorities and the contribution of partners, those two outbreaks were handled without seriously impacting the program. GOAL participated actively in the responses by supporting the health services with equipment, materials, and hygiene kits, building the capacities of caregivers, raising awareness among the populations through several communication channels including local radio stations, but also with logistical support and participating in cluster meetings with key partners and authorities.
3. Health workers strike and low staffing: there was no strike action during the life of the project, therefore, no advocacy mitigation action was required.
4. Increased transmission of COVID 19 and the associated risk of lockdown; COVID-19 rates of transmission are very low across the country and have not had a significant impact on the project activities. GOAL implemented awareness through community mobilizers under CLA and radio sensitization campaign via mobile phones and applied the COVID SOP in all activities.
5. Deterioration of sanitary condition: the Covid-19 pandemic is still at a very low level in general. However, GOAL has maintained the sensitization efforts through various mechanisms.
6. Before the field intervention, all GOAL staff have been trained on COVID-19 as per standard. A refresher is done systematically during each general staff meeting for maintaining vigilance. GOAL has conducted handwashing demonstrations and installed handwashing facilities in public places. Following CLA, each village had elaborated an action plan that include periodic environmental cleaning sessions. GOAL has developed a partnership with local community radios for broadcasting COVID-19 sensitization spots and messages in local languages in support of the MoH efforts. Digital sensitization messages are also made available on cell phones through the partnership with VIAMO.

6. INNOVATION

Increasing supply of nutritionally improved and climate adapted seeds

The project worked to demonstrate to an existing market player (FESA), how to do business differently to increase access to nutritionally improved and climate adapted seed and to increase turnover and profits. Although FESA had an established system of 32 retailers throughout Zinder region, they engaged with them informally, supplying small amounts of seed only once at the beginning of the season, and often not returning even to collect the money from seed sales. Through a co-design process, the project was able to persuade FESA to resupply retailers throughout the seed selling season, re-supplying retailers as their stock depleted. The result was a ten-fold increase in the sale of nutritionally improved and climate adapted seed in 2021 when compared to 2020, demonstrating that there is unmet demand for quality seeds. This resulted in increased profits for both FESA and their retailers, critical to sustainability and may herald the

beginning of a system level change to a more sustainable supply chain of critical productive inputs to farmers.

Incentivizing farmers to experience new crop varieties

Of the three improved commodities promoted in the project (millet, groundnut and cowpeas), the improved millet was considered to be the most challenging to market as the plant is significantly different from the local variety, having a much shorter 'head.' The project addressed this by making it possible for FESA to offer the seed at 50% of the market price. The intention was to make it an easier decision for farmers to risk trying a new variety. The sale of all commodities including millet is substantially higher than in previous years. Production is also higher than for traditional varieties, see learning brief.

Incentivizing women farmers to buy quality low-cost post-harvest handling inputs

With post-harvest losses impacting significantly on household food security and incomes, the project sought ways to increase access to low-cost quality storage bags (PICS). Market scanning identified two key dysfunctionalities. Namely, poor-quality lower cost alternative products (BEST) in the market and a district level supplier of PICS bags who was not reaching or stimulating demand. See above for more details.

Using digital technology to increase access to information

GOAL worked with VIAMO to use a digital platform (3-2-5) on Airtel mobile network to increase its health, nutrition, agriculture, and SBC messaging reach nationwide. VIAMO uses simple, low-cost technology for data collection and for the provision of information and communication technology for development through mobile phones. The pre-recorded messages available on the platform in several national languages can be listened free of charge for the users. The topics covered included protection, home gardening (including messages on nutrition and crop pests), VSLA, CLA, NIPP, Zai holes and composting, biofortified millet seed and linkages to seed retailers. as at end of June, 748,328 calls (68% male, 32% female) for the project content have been received across the 8 regions of Niger including an average of 106,468 calls originating from Zinder region. Community and home gardening were the most popular topics listened to. This is demonstrating demand for alternative trusted sources of information on multisectoral livelihoods, health and nutrition practices.

Figure 1: Distribution of users per month

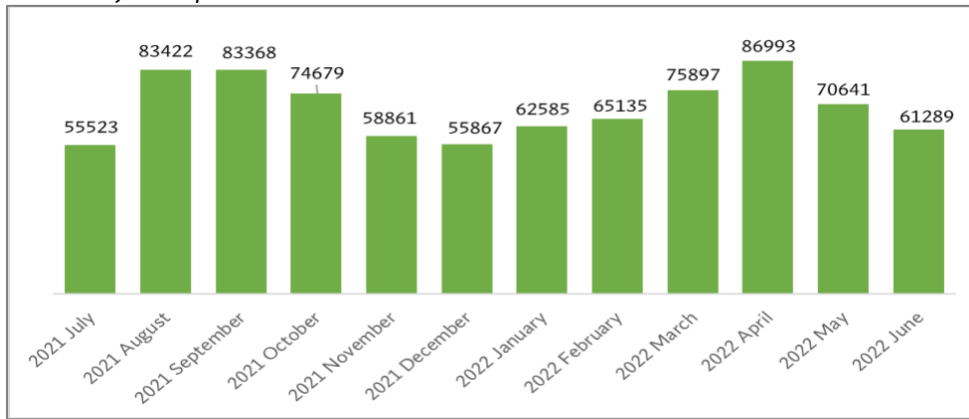
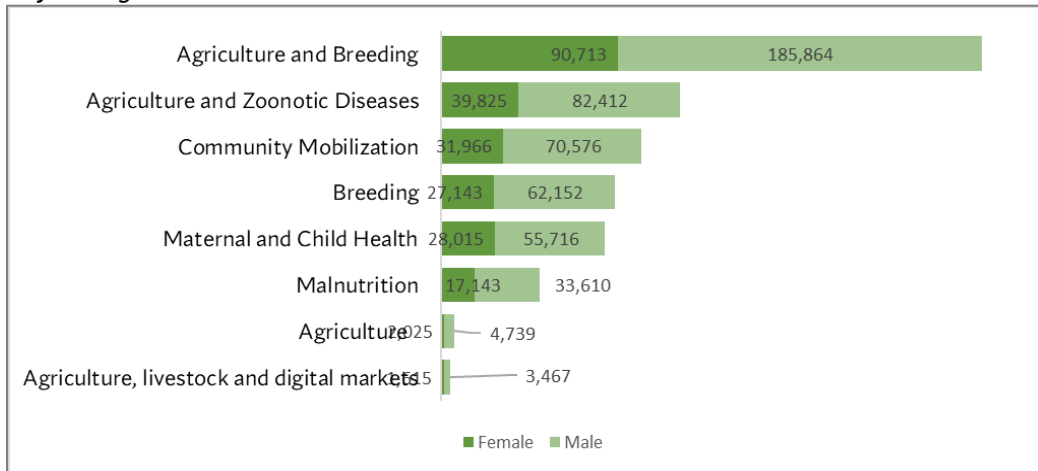


Figure 2: Key Messages Listened



Community empowerment

Community Led Action (CLA) for COVID-19 was introduced in all 20 target villages. CLA works on the premise that communities have the power and agency to stop the spread of COVID-19. Through the establishment of neighborhood units, communities do their own appraisal and analysis of COVID-19 and develop their own action plans to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and.

Community Conversation (CC) on family relationship to support women’s empowerment

This activity is aimed at reinforcing women empowerment in the communities through changing of social and gender norms on household decision making. The strength of CC is that it brings the whole community together to discuss the current social and gender norms around woman’s role within the household and how that role can be changed to improve the well-being of families. Community facilitators are trained in participatory skills and participatory learning in action tools that allows for sensitive subjects to be discussed and support the community to visual different social and gender norms that do not change the fabric of who they are as a community. This has been introduced to GOAL Niger in the frame of UNITLIFE project through a training of trainers led by the GOAL headquarters technical team.

Each of UNITLIFE supported community will hold three discussion session a month facilitated by a trained community facilitator selected by the community using criteria provided by GOAL. The community facilitators have been trained in the first week of December 2021 and the CC discussion sessions started in January 2022. The data collected during the first six weeks of CC has been analyzed to help identify the social and gender norms that cause barriers to woman's empowerment within the community. This data guides the remaining discussion sessions to allow the community to find solutions to overcome those barriers and achieve a result in positive social and gender norms change before the end of the CC process lasts encompasses 24 sessions that started in January 2022.

7. SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is all about 'how' we programme, and this is different depending on what we are trying to achieve, and who the key and permanent actors are in the system we are engaging with. To create change, it is always necessary to change behaviours, understanding how behaviours and relationships are currently working is key to stimulating change.

Target Communities

Although GOAL does not make formal agreements with community members, their contributions in terms of time, effort and expertise have been well recognized and appreciated over the life of the project. Many of the community-based initiatives such as NIPP, Community Led Action, VSLA, farmer groups, gardening, family MUAC, etc. would not be possible without the contributions of community members. GOAL community-based initiatives are designed to empower communities by building their skills and confidence so that community members are key actors of their development and well-being.

Involvement of market systems actors

Much of the work under outcome 1. has centered on demonstrating how changing business behavior can lead to increase access to improved productive inputs and better business. GOAL did this through a collaborative co-design process where GOAL and two businesses (FESA and Abdul Aziz), partnered, the proposals and milestone agreements are available on request. The joint proposals document the results of this collaborative process and demonstrate the investment leveraged from the private sector. By first understanding the seed system, we could see that FESA has a hundred percent of the market share for seeds in Zinder region, not usually the conditions for change to happen. We are hugely pleased that FESA came on the journey, even though they were not initially enthusiastic, they are now. We attribute this to them and recognize the importance of the co-design process which puts them firmly in the driving seat, they are the experts in seed sales, and in the relationship management, which if done well, over time begins to build trust.

The partnership with Abdul Aziz was as a result of his excellent performance in terms of sales of improved seeds, we could see that he was ambitious and had good capacity, demonstrating that one partnership can lead to another.

The project leveraged an existing network of retailers, their relationship management was primarily through FESA, who put in place agreements with them and provided sales training and their supply chain. The project responded to retailers request for additional training on product knowledge, so they could provide their customers with better information to make informed purchasing decisions.

Involvement of Government actors

Government authorities (Ministry of Agriculture, and National Institute of Agronomic Research of Niger) have been key actors in the project. They are collaborating in terms of information sharing and provision of technical support through trainings. GOAL adopted a facilitator role from the outset, working in collaboration with FESA and regional ministries and the relevant authorities, municipal, and state structures in planning, training facilitation and monitoring of activities. This collaboration throughout the duration facilitates these key actors' continued support beyond the life of the project.

Ministry of Health workers: through the regional public health (DRSP) and the health districts of Mirriah and Gouré made available to health workers in the respective project areas to facilitate the various trainings (NIPP, Community mobilizers, and the continuous supervision of these community actors). They also facilitate the systematic treatment of cases of malnourished children referred by MUAC mothers from communities to Health facilities.

8. INTEGRATION / COLLOCATION

Government

An implementation protocol is signed with the regional authorities guaranteeing the full involvement of state technical services. Also, the Grant Management Meeting (GMM) was organized at GOAL Zinder premises with the participation of some regional technical services. The local authorities (town halls, prefectures, decentralized technical services) were officially informed of the start of the project. The launch ceremony was a trigger for coordination of partner's interventions. The coordination with local authorities made it possible to identify other actors intervening in the target communities to ensure coherence and avoid duplication.

Collaboration with peers

For the design of digital awareness and sensitization campaign, in addition to the Government technical services involved (agriculture, health, livestock, community development, etc.), several partners including OXFAM, WADATA/USAID project, Regional Chamber of Agriculture, CARE international were invited to the co-design workshop.

GOAL Niger participates also to the food security and livelihoods as well as the health and nutrition cluster coordination meetings, both at national and regional levels. At the national level, a well appreciated presentation of the UNITLIFE project was made to the national health / nutrition technical working group on June 25th, 2021.

Accountability to communities

Appropriate community feedback mechanisms (CFM) were established at community level to facilitate interactions and exchanges with the target communities in relation to the activities undertaken by the project and shared their concerns and complaints. This allows beneficiaries to communicate feedback to GOAL and to have their voice heard, which is an important form of engagement and accountability toward affected communities. It also supports the early identification and mitigation of any protection concerns stemming from the project. Project participants were made aware of GOAL's Code of Conduct and were given information on GOAL's Community Feedback Mechanism at project set up.

By the end of the project (July 2022), 88 feedbacks were registered related to UNITLIFE activities, mostly to appreciate the quality of the interventions. Among those feedbacks, one complaint was registered from a woman wondering why she was not selected as a project participant. The project inclusion criteria were then explained. Other feedback included 14 requests for activities (goat roving banks and cash for work) and Five (5) recommendations on biofortified seeds from FESA retailers (training on bio fortified seeds, have a consequent stock at their levels, having an accountable from FESA in Zinder to ease their transactions). Those recommendations have been shared with the partner FESA and received the feedback from them. Note that, all registered *feedbacks* received appropriate responses to their concerns or feedback and within a reasonable time frame.

Collocation with other supporters

The UNITLIFE project is complemented by the Irish Aid funded interventions as their target area partially overlap and initiatives are complementary to both. Communities benefited from Irish Aid funded health system strengthening activities, allowing greater access to quality health and nutrition services at community and health facility level. Similarly, communities have increased access to agricultural inputs and skills, informal financial services, SBC initiatives that contribute to a decrease in chronic malnutrition from UNITLIFE supported initiatives. Irish Aid support also provided resources to offer nutritionally improved and climate adapted millet, cowpeas and ground nuts in the first season of 2022, using a 40% sale price, where 15 tons of improved seed were purchased by the community.

GOAC (Guernsey Overseas Aid Commission) funding complemented the community gardens supported by UNITLIFE, financing fencing, drip irrigation, solar pumps, solar panels, motor pumps, fertilizer, and capacity building activities.

9. IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

Partnerships

FESA is a Small to Medium Enterprise (SME), established in 2009, their core business includes the production and wholesale of improved seed through their network of retailers in Maradi & Zinder. Their role in the project was to co- design with GOAL an intervention to increase access

to climate adapted and nutritionally improved crop seed across Zinder. A second intervention in the second production season (Jan – April), is intended to increase access to vegetable seed with a smart subsidy to incentivize women farmers. Both interventions constitute a partnership and not a procurement as the intervention was jointly designed and leverage investment from FESA, who are responsible for the multiplication and sourcing of improved seed, the relationship management with retailers and the supply chain of seeds to their retailers. In terms of business capacity strengthening, the project piloted a new way of doing business for FESA which demonstrated increase turnover and profit for FESA. Efforts to strengthen business capacity through development of sales and marketing skills, were not successful at this time. It is hoped that as the relationship with FSA deepens there will be opportunities to revisit this capacity area. FESA were however responsive to some informal capacity strengthening sessions on financial management, conducted by the GOAL team.

Abdul Azizou is a retailer and supplier of other agricultural inputs (fertilizer, chemicals and seed), to retailers. Established in 2019 and based in Zinder, he worked with FESA as a retailer and had the largest sales volumes of millet, cowpeas and groundnuts seeds sold in the 2021 season. Although an informal business, Abdul Aziz is an entrepreneur with considerable potential to increase and formalize his business and increase farming input supplies in Zinder region. To date, he has pre-financed the importation of 27,000 PICS bags. No formal business capacity strengthening activities have yet been conducted with Abdul Aziz, but as evidenced by his ‘first mover’ behavior, there is every reason to suggest that investment in his business, could provide a good return on investment.

VIAMO was founded in 2012 and uses simple, low-cost technology for data collection and for the provision of information and communication technology for development through mobile phones. They provide solutions in landscapes such as Niger, where technology infrastructure is poor and where populations are divided by language diversity and where education and literacy levels are low. The project procured the services of VIAMO to set up a national awareness campaign on 15 UNITLIFE related topics available on a digital platform accessible through mobile phones.

Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development represented at the regional and departmental level by a Directorate is charged with the responsibility of initiating and implementing policies aimed at increasing food security, creating wealth and employment opportunities for rapid economic growth of the State. It is represented at the regional level by a Regional Directorate which is represented at the departmental level by a departmental directorate.

National Institute of Agronomic Research of Niger (INRAN) missions is to design and carry out agricultural research programs in all sectors of rural development; coordinate and supervise all agronomic research undertaken in Niger; to contribute to the development of national policy in the field of agricultural research; to participate in research training; to contribute to the development of scientific information. In the field of biodiversity, it contributes to the



knowledge of flora and fauna through these researchers. It also develops new varieties of improved seeds in the agricultural, rice and horticultural fields.

Complementary partners

GARKUA local NGO: GOAL partnered with GARKUA to implement a cash for work activities in the Mirriah department. From June to July 2022, 180 households in 3 villages 354,600 Zaï holes were made on 35ha of reclaimed land. These 180 households were also trained in the technique of making compost.

10. LESSONS LEARNED

Two learning briefs have been developed from this project they are:

Nutritionally Improved & Climate Adapted Seed and Storage Technology	Expanding the boundaries of SBC through multi-sectoral engagement to sustainably improve food & nutrition security
 UNITLIFE Seed Learning Brief.pdf	 UNITLIFE_SBCCLearning Brief_Final_0620

Learning from the nutritionally improved & climate adapted seed and storage technology initiatives

1. Nutritionally improved seeds can increase the **nutritional value** of what people already eat, short maturing crops mitigate **climate related risks** and improved seed also increases **production**, all contribute to increased food & nutrition security.
2. Using relatively small amounts of donor resources and leveraging private sector investment to test different ways of working, can change the **behaviours** of market actors, influence the **system** to work more efficiently, increase access to inputs that assist people to be more **resilient** to climate related shocks, increase access to productive inputs for those **excluded** and reach **scale**.
3. By using a MSD approach, it is possible to reach **scale with less resources** (Seed: Est. USD 30,804) when compared to direct delivery programming (Est. USD 92,819). The estimated difference USD 62,015 is significant & demonstrates how resources can be used more effectively to increase access to improved inputs & technology.
4. Using a sale price for key productive inputs offers a way for farmers to experience new products through the actors which can provide access to productive inputs on a **sustainable** basis. But initiatives must be grounded in a sound business model.
5. Incentives can be used successfully to **target more vulnerable groups** and to increase access to quality inputs.
6. Farmers are wise, they spread **risk** when trying new inputs by growing both local and improved varieties and by inter-cropping.

7. Simple, inexpensive radio advertising seemed to be effective in creating **demand for new seed varieties**, although the project bought down this cost, rather than the wholesaler/retailers.
8. In agricultural systems, inputs need to be within the market prior to when producers require them.
9. **Adaptive management** allowed the team to make changes during implementation & increase sales

See learning brief embedded above for more details.

Expanding the boundaries of SBC through multisectoral engagement to sustainably improve food & nutrition security

1. The observed change to date shows that households are embracing new ways of farming, of feeding their children and new way of approaching social and gender norms.
2. Providing knowledge, building skills, and finally creating a safe space for community's members to discuss sensitive cultural and gender issues creates an enabling environment that allows caregivers to start changing practices at household level. Multi-level SBCC targeting male and female caregivers and the community at large, coupled with on-demand mass communication via mobile, can positively change not only health and nutrition practices at household level, but also social and gender norms within a community.
3. Home gardening offers a simple but powerful way to support households accessing a diversified diet all year round. Findings point towards the need to further scale up this initiative beyond NIPP households.
4. A simple, low-cost communication technology providing information through basic mobile phones allows many people to listen to information of interest in their own time. They provide solutions in landscapes where internet access is poor, where populations are divided by language diversity and where education and literacy levels are low. However, gender digital inequalities should be considered to ensure women are also reached.
5. There is great interest and demand of communities, especially the youth, for alternative trusted sources of information on multisectoral issues such as food production and health and nutrition practices at household level.
6. Leveraging private sector investment to test different ways of working, can change the behaviours of market actors and influence a system to work more efficiently and at scale for people, including the most vulnerable groups. Behaviour change must be seen as being relevant and important for households, but also of paramount importance and value for the other permanent players across a system such as service providers and businesses.
7. By tackling the behavioural drivers associated to the systemic drivers of malnutrition, this integrated SBCC approach has the potential to support food and nutrition security more broadly.
8. See the learning brief embedded above for more details

Women's inclusion in male dominated roles:

The sale of improved inputs leveraged FESA's existing retail network, which were all male retailers. As the project did not plan to support new retailers, there were no opportunities to stimulate the identification of women retailers on this occasion. In this traditional society it is significantly less likely that women own shops, but this could be an interesting area to explore in future programming, while acknowledging that it must be the wholesaler who make the decision on who they will work with. In the identification of lead farmers, the criteria were farmers who were open to using improved seed, were located near the existing retailers and well-known and respected in their farming communities to be able to influence others. This criteria does tend to lead to the identification of male lead farmers. That said, the project does acknowledge that there was a missed opportunity to specifically target women as lead farmers. This is a key learning and in future programming, an explicit target for women lead farmers will be set.