

Mid-Term Evaluation of Feed the Future Sugu Yiriwa Activity in Mali

Summary Brief

Introduction

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Feed the Future (FtF) Mali is funding a five-year cooperative agreement with CARE International (CARE) to implement an activity in Mali, named Sugu Yiriwa, to improve economic growth through market access. Implemented by a consortium, in partnership with government, microfinance institutions, and private sector actors, and in collaboration with Dev Works, which is providing technical support to improve production among small farmers in the same regions of Mali through the FtF Mali Sènè Yiriwa Activity.

The approach is market-systems-oriented, which requires testing to assess what does and does not work and draws from evidence to scale up higher performing interventions. Sugu Yiriwa delivers a package of interventions that fall under three strategic objectives:

- **SO1:** Inclusive and Sustainable Agriculture-Led Growth Achieved
- **SO2:** Increased Resilience of People and Communities to Economic, Health, and Climate Shocks
- **SO3:** Improved Nutrition and WASH Status, Especially Among Women, Adolescent Girls and Children

Prepared by Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, this brief summarizes the results of the 2023 mid-term evaluation report, which assesses the quality of the activity implementation, achievements, and outcomes, and identifies areas of improvement for the remaining project period.



About Sugu Yiriwa

Intervention Period: January 2021 to January 2026

Funding: United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Feed the Future (FtF) for \$25,474,545

Overall Purpose: to contribute to strengthening the resilience of farming and business communities through market-based, inclusive, and nutrition-sensitive agricultural-led economic growth approaches.

Consortium Members: CARE International (Prime), AMASSA, Afrique Verte, and AMPRODE Sahel.

Intervention Area: The Delta Zone of Mali, including 12 districts in the Mopti and Tombouctou regions.

Targeting: The farming and market system community, including producer organizations (POs), micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), village savings and loan associations (VSLA) and formal finance providers (Bank and Microfinance Institutions)

Evaluation objectives

To achieve the evaluation purpose, the evaluation team assessed six main objectives. Briefly, these objectives are to:

1. Evaluate the quality of program delivery.
2. Assess the implementation progress of the activity.
3. Identify and analyze early evidence of changes.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of Collaborative Learning and Adaptation systems.
5. Assess the sustainability of existing services and systems.
6. Assess the effectiveness of the program's management and coordination systems.

Key findings

The Activity has made good progress on its strategic objectives, and interventions are generally meeting targets and well received by participants. However, the evaluation team found that some contextual factors beyond the control of the Activity, most notably growing insecurity, have affected the quality and impact of interventions, as well as the ability to establish a firm framework for sustainability.

Strategic Objective 1

Sugu Yiriwa has promoted critical approaches to increase crop production and profits, and established linkages among market actors to facilitate improved access to inputs and financial resources. The activity has successfully organized and implemented market events primarily at the regional level including business to business (B2B) workshops (4 in 2022), commercial trade events (8 in 2022) and seed fairs (2 in 2022), and sponsored market actors to participate in these important economic opportunities. These interventions, coupled with extensive training of market actors, including producers and agro-processors, in areas such as applications for public tenders and improved business skills, are highly relevant, facilitating critical business relationships resulting in product sales.

Major challenges include the lack of financial institutions and resources available in the target regions to provide loans needed to build businesses, limited capacity of existing storage facilities, and deficiencies in basic supplies such as fertilizer and improved seeds. In addition, the layered cascade training approach used by the Activity may jeopardize transfer of information and capacity building. Field agents lack adequate time to oversee village level training and provide mentoring as planned.

Evidence of change includes increased participation in public tenders, with some POs successful in receiving bids; increased financial opportunities, contacts, and sales through



An agrodistributor from Djenne in his second organic fertilizer storage store.

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participation in market events; and at least 260 signed contracts associated with the B2B workshops. Market events facilitated essential networking and partnerships, and in many instances, financial benefits, although big fairs are more profitable for larger POs and agro-processing units. Unfortunately, the evaluation team found instances whereby contracts signed during the B2Bs did not materialize. After market events, an after-action review is carried out to draw lessons learned to inform adaptations in future events.

To apply the knowledge gained and to procure needed inputs and equipment, beneficiaries need greater access to financial resources critical to sustainability. The continuation of the market events, which are organized and financially supported by Sugu Yiriwa, will depend on the capacity of the Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSP) responsible for overseeing the organization of these events and their ability to mobilize financial resources¹.

Extensive mechanisms have been established to ensure positive collaboration among the leadership and technical staff of Sugu and Sènè Yiriwa Activities. However, the evaluation team found that sharing of information and planning of market events could be improved among field staff. While the activity is coordinating activities with government technical services, additional approaches, such as involving them in field monitoring of activities, would enhance government ownership and sustainability of SO1 interventions.

Strategic Objective 2

Activities are designed to increase resilience to economic, health and climate risks. SO2 includes the Emergency Fund to mitigate the adverse effects of the Ukraine war on inflation and food availability, and the Innovation Fund, which is designed to tackle market constraints from both the production and post-harvest sides of the value chains and related issues in the socio-economic environment.

Central to resilience is the MSP, which is comprised of a wide range of key stakeholders. Sugu Yiriwa has provided critical support to strengthen the role of the MSP in market events. To mitigate risk, Sugu Yiriwa offers innovative, digital platforms to share key market and climate information and agricultural insurance. The Emergency Fund strategy is well aligned with USAID and the Malian Government strategic objectives, seeking to bring quick and substantial relief to targeted vulnerable populations affected by shocks, while at the same time reinforcing the capacity of businesses of target beneficiaries. Funds are also being used for the rehabilitation of a major pumping irrigation system – which affects the livelihoods of more than 300,000 vulnerable farmers – and 30 community storage facilities. The Innovation Fund has generated vast interest from a wide range of projects.

Challenges include erratic phone networks, restricted power for charging phones, limited phone ownership, and illiteracy, all of which impede extensive use of digital platforms. Many small farmers consider insurance costly. Constraints setting up relief mechanisms and delays related to insecurity and procurement have hampered the disbursement of the Emergency Fund and prevented the Activity from achieving some targets during the evaluation period.

Evidence of change includes the active participation of the MSP in the planning and implementation of the market events and the two special funds (Emergency and Innovation Funds). Trained beneficiaries demonstrated an understanding of the digital platforms. PO members are aware that insurance is offered and comprehend basic insurance principles. Emergency Fund cash and voucher transfers have been made to vulnerable populations, resulting in increased access to nutrient-rich foods for pregnant and lactating women and children under five, as well as key agriculture inputs (such as organic fertilizers and quality seeds) for vulnerable farmers. Innovation Fund winners have been identified; funds are being disbursed and training offered to proposed projects.

MSP members have the interest and capacity to continue to organize market events after the completion of Sugu Yiriwa. However, the MSP is presently unable to absorb the expenses involved in sponsoring market actors and implementing events. Sensitization has successfully conveyed the purpose of the digital tools, but current utilization is insufficient to sustain the platforms without financial assistance. The sustainability of agricultural insurance will also depend on increased enrollment, particularly of recurrent clients, which is presently low. Sugu Yiriwa plays a facilitating role in the process by building a bridge

¹ Since the evaluation, Sugu Yiriwa has undertaken the full diagnostic of the MSP to identify the organizational gaps and developed a tailored capacity building plan.

between farmers to the existing services through building trust, which will require time. Rehabilitation of the pumping irrigation systems and storage facilities should have long term impact on economic growth. The Innovation Fund provides important incentives for the creation of new agro-processing approaches and products, which can influence the success and sustainability of enterprises.

Sugu Yiriwa has effectively coordinated activities with a wide range of consortium members and partners needed to implement interventions constituting S02, with many collaborating partners speaking highly of Sugu Yiriwa for their responsiveness and collaborative approach. Sugu Yiriwa has done a commendable job of collaborating with the MSP to ensure the transfer of information and strengthen leadership and management capabilities needed to successfully organize and implement market events.

Strategic Objective 3

Sugu Yiriwa conducted research to inform a capacity building plan to improve the production and sales of nutrient-dense foods made by agro-processing enterprises from locally produced staple foods. Training figured significantly in the strategy to improve food processing, increase availability of nutrient-dense food products, and strengthen business approaches to increase sales. At the time of the evaluation, Sugu Yiriwa had trained 322 individuals involved in food processing, 98% of whom were women, on improved enrichment techniques, marketing, and packaging, with additional training offered on good business practices. Food processors reported developing new products, offering a greater variety of enriched foods, and using improved packaging. The activity also supported participation of women from 34 agro-processing units in at least eight marketing events, a large trade fair in Dakar, and cereal stock exchange markets. Women participants described increased visibility of their products and access to networks of input providers and buyers of enriched foods. By focusing on the agro-processing units, Sugu Yiriwa made a deliberate decision to reach a significant number of women and youth among its beneficiaries.

On the downside, agro-processors lack equipment needed to improve production and maintain the quality of processed foods, thus limiting their capacity to respond to public tenders. The evaluation team also identified the tendency to saturate markets with the same foods. The composition of processed foods in terms of nutritional value was planned at the time of the evaluation, and later completed.

Evidence of change includes increased sales of processed foods and numbers of participants in target markets, with both indicators greatly exceeding targets; correspondingly, the volume of enriched foods also increased. Several informants confirmed the uptake of techniques related to food processing and enriching food products recommended during training. Women reported using the increased earnings to contribute to household expenses, while others spent it on social events, underlining some of the social benefits of their participation.

Improvements in the technical and business capacities of agro-processing enterprises led to improved sales of nutrient-dense foods, which bodes well for their continuation. However, food processors lack adequate funds to purchase key equipment and raw materials needed to increase production and uptake of the enterprises, which may affect sustainability over the long-term if not addressed. Small enterprises may be particularly vulnerable once the support of Sugu Yiriwa is phased out. Sugu Yiriwa is using innovation funds to reinforce the capacity of several women-owned agro-



Members of the Mandemo agri-food unit in Bandiagara in front of one of their agri-food processing machines.

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processing units which will allow them to obtain critical equipment to bolster and scale up their enterprises. Lessons learned from these efforts can be used to inform future strategies designed to improve the productivity of food processing units. While it appears that production of nutrient-dense foods is increasing in the regions, agricultural production is not growing at the same rate to meet the increased demand of raw materials.

Implementation of S03 interventions has involved the three consortium partners, with specific tasks carried out by each member effectively. Government technical services collaborated on the implementation of activities to support agro-processors at the regional and circle levels. Their involvement helped to facilitate ongoing implementation in a context of growing insecurity.

Recommendations

The evaluation team presented the preliminary recommendations during a validation workshop attended by Sugu Yiriwa staff following the field data collection, which provided an early learning opportunity. During the drafting of this report, preliminary recommendations were prepared by the MTE and shared with Sugu Yiriwa for their feedback.

The final recommendations that emerged from this MTE are designed to prioritize implementation strategies during the remaining years of the activity. Core recommendations relate to improving access to financial services and sustaining business opportunities critical to economic growth, including the growth of medium and smaller organizations and enterprises. Key recommendations include:

- Strengthen efforts to improve availability of financial services and resources to activity participants.
 - Continue to advocate for the refinancing of microfinance institutions,
 - Work to increase the loan capital within micro-finance institutions by encouraging establishment of savings accounts.
 - Continue to work with financial institutions to provide better loan conditions such as reduced interest rates and increased loan periods so that they are better adapted to the activities of local market actors and their capacity to generate returns.
 - Persist in identifying other private sector providers to offer credit to activity participants.
- Strengthen support, coaching and mentoring of market actor beneficiaries on financial strategies designed to raise, obtain, and manage capital needed to facilitate access to inputs and technologies to improve production. Continue to unify enterprises to form larger groups with greater capital that are more attractive to loan institutions.
- Continue to decentralize the organization of fairs, B2B workshops and stock exchanges to the circle level as security conditions allow. This will enable greater participation by other Sugu Yiriwa non-participating producers, small agro-dealers, and agro-processors at the village level and balance competition amongst market actors.
- Identify mechanisms to improve communications between the POs and agro-dealers involved in commitments signed during B2B workshops and address misunderstandings regarding the terms of the contract that can occur after the workshops.
- Increase the number of field agents overseeing interventions. Adding more field agents should allow the agents to spend more time coaching participants and enhance the quality of activity implementation and data monitoring. Given the increase in security threats, bolstering the field staff is critical.
- Review the training strategy, especially regarding the selection of participants and the cascade approach. Determine weaknesses affecting information transfer and identify changes needed to improve quality, instill greater impact, and enhance sustainability in the field. This should involve examining more intensive and direct training approaches used by other USAID-funded development activities.
 - Continue to encourage emergency agencies to prioritize the purchase of commodity products for distribution such as seeds or food from POs and agro-processing participants. Set up buying contracts with emergency agencies and institutions

involved in the sale and distribution of commodities that guarantee that farmers and agro-processors will have buyers of their products.

- Reinforce and implement strategies to strengthen the capacity of the MSP.
- Facilitate delivery of goods and services to be provided through the Emergency Fund. Such strategies may include creating more profitable market opportunities for agro-processing units, reinforcing market linkages between small scale producers and agro-processing units, and encouraging smaller enterprises to form groups that can aggregate quantities of the required goods to meet Emergency Fund demands.
- Strengthen strategies aimed at increasing access to markets of nutrient-dense foods in the Mopti and Tombouctou regions and beyond.
- Collaborate with the Food Technology Laboratory to analyze the nutrient content of enriched foods.

Qualitative methodology

Phase 1- Preparation (May, June 2023)

- Desk review of key documents.
- Protocol and instrument development.
- Logistics planning.

Phase 2- Data Collection/Fieldwork (6 to 31 July 2023)

- Briefing
- Primary data collection in Bamako, Mopti, and Tomboctou
 - 53 Key informant interviews
 - 32 In-depth informant interviews
 - 8 Focus group discussions
- Validation workshop

Phase 3- Analysis and Report writing (August – October 2023)

- Data consolidation and analysis
- Draft report
- Incorporation of feedback and finalization of report