

SHE GROWS: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN RURAL MALI



March 2024



A Tree Aid impact paper

TACKLING GENDER DISPARITIES IN A CHALLENGING CONTEXT

Why was the project needed?

Across the Sahel, a semi-arid region between the Sahara to the north and tropical savannahs to the south, women are disproportionately affected by conflict, poverty, and the impacts of the climate crisis.

Of the 18 million people living in Mali, nine million of them are women. Despite this, the west African country ranks as one of the highest on the Gender Inequality Index.¹ Women and girls continue to experience severe disadvantages in many aspects of life, including health, justice, and education.

Whilst the Malian national Land Code provides equal rights for land ownership for women and men, customary law largely supersedes these, meaning men are usually the ones with access. However, in 2017, farmers gained new rights with a new agricultural land policy and law which also requires 15% of public land to be allocated to women's associations. The She Grows project was designed to support this target.²



MALI

KOULIKORO REGION



1 <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>.

2 <https://www.iisd.org/articles/insight/historic-new-law-secures-land-malian-farmers>.

CULTIVATING CHANGE FOR WOMEN IN RURAL MALI

This three-year project in the Koulikoro region of south-west Mali aimed to improve the economic and social status of 1,000 women living in ten villages by:

- Securing long term access to forest resources through establishing women's cooperatives, changing attitudes of men, and signing land rights agreements
- Supporting women in the cooperatives to adopt and implement effective and sustainable land management practices
- Supporting women to establish 40 profitable enterprises using forest resources.

This project helped vulnerable women to take fuller advantage of the opportunities for commercial trade in non-timber forest products (NTFPs), while improving their decision-making power within their households as well as their wellbeing. The establishment of sustainable land management practices helped to protect and restore the key resources these women rely on for their livelihoods.

The changes brought about by these interventions ensure the sustainability of these benefits beyond project completion. The women's families (around 6,300 people) also indirectly benefited from their improved economic status and availability of household income.

Project details

Timeline: February 2020 to February 2023

Budget: £294,549

Donor: UK public and UK government through UK Aid Match

Partner: Association pour le Développement des Activités de production et de Formation (ADAF GALLE)

Project participants: 1,586 (1,479 women, 107 men). The project estimates to have benefited 6,344 indirect beneficiaries (based on an average household size of five)



What did the project involve?

- 40 cooperative groups established, focused on shea butter and honey production.
- 10 cooperatives signed agreements to have access to land, representing the areas of land negotiated and allocated to the women cooperative groups.
- Women incorporated into natural resource management (NRM) brigade were equipped with bikes, torches, pairs of boots and machetes to implement forest management plans.
- Radio transmissions on gender awareness and sensitisation, created in partnership with project participants and local influential figures.
- Gender awareness and equality training to over 348 individuals. Men who received training committed to passing on this knowledge in their respective communities.
- Over 500 women trained in soil and water conservation (grafting, pruning, restoration techniques for trees, gully control, etc.)
- Women's cooperatives trained in nursery production, planting, beekeeping, land rights, advocacy, communication, public speaking, gender, shea butter production techniques.
- Equipment such as pots, barrels, tarpaulins, rubber seals, rubber basins and labels were distributed to support the transportation of NTFPs.
- Three kiosks were constructed. They reported their first sales of juices, syrups and honey in February 2023.
- Workshops took place between cooperatives, village savings and loans associations (VSLAs), and local sellers. Cooperative groups were presented with the different saving and banking services available which enabled them to understand how to leverage credit so they can be independent and have control of their own finances.
- Over the duration of the project, nine hectares of land benefited from soil and water conservation, and 427 hectares of land benefited from improved governance.

“

I play an important role in the community, because being a woman here means hard work and courage. I contribute to all household expenses.”

.....

Sitan Diarra lives in Ouolodo, a commune that is part of the Kolokani Cercle, a sub-division of the Koulikoro region. She and the women from her community process and market forest products like Balanites syrup. They are involved in the village cooperative and pay their savings into the cooperative.

Thanks to the project, Sitan learned how to speak confidently in public. She was also trained in water and soil conservation. Now, she can earn a sustainable income.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

Improved incomes

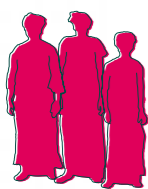


260% Income from non-timber forest products (NTFPs) increased by 260% (average increase of \$975.56).

171% Average household income increased by 171% (average increase of \$2,043.15).

11% The proportion of household income sourced from NTFPs increased from 31% to 42%.

Reduction in poverty



34% A 34% points reduction in the proportion of households below the poverty line, as measured in TVA.*

12% A 12% points reduction in the proportion of households below the poverty line, as measured in cash income.**

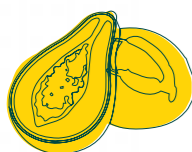
Improved gender equality



35% Increase in women reporting equal or more power than their partners, from 14% to 49%.

31% This was also reflected in the proportion of men reporting equal power to their partners, increasing from 13% to 44%.

Improved food security



26% Project participant households reporting 'severe food insecurity' were halved, reducing from 52% to 26%. Control households reported higher levels of 'severe food insecurity', at 42%.

Improved participation in decision-making processes



26% Women in management positions in natural resource management (NRM) structures increased from 31% to 57%.

* Total Value of Activities (TVA) = cash income + products consumed cash equivalent. Based on an estimated 1,496 households in the project, this equates to 515 households no longer below the poverty line.

** Based on an estimated 1,496 households in the project, this equates to 180 households no longer below the poverty line.

From our 37 years working with communities in the Sahel, we have learned that increased representation of women in natural resource management structures leads to greater empowerment, but the actual improvements in this project surpassed our expectations.

Through focus group discussions with project beneficiaries, we found that since women were integrated into these management structures, there has been a reported reduction in forest fires, destructive logging, and damage to trees, due to three reasons:

- 1 Empowerment of resource dependents:** Women, who are often the primary users of these resources, are now more empowered to manage them effectively.
- 2 Reporting rule breakers:** Women feel more empowered to report individuals who violate rules and regulations pertaining to resource management.
- 3 Women-focused training:** Women received specific training as part of the project, which they have been able to disseminate across the NRM structures, leading to positive changes.

These changes were achieved in a challenging context, where political instability impacted heavily on project implementation. Despite the challenges, the project demonstrated strong performance overall, making significant strides towards empowering women, increasing their incomes, and improving their participation in decision-making processes within the targeted communities.

What is 'voice, choice, and control'?

'Voice, choice, and control' is a 20-question survey that measures the relative power that a woman has in comparison to her male partner. The module is divided into three sections: voice, choice, and control, and across two domains: home and community. Power is always relative to the respondent and measured in perceived comparison to their partner.





IMPACT MONITORING & EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The impacts of the project have been measured through the following methods:

- The Rural Household Multi-Indicator Survey (RHoMIS), a well-established household survey designed for farming communities living in poverty and food insecurity that gathers data on agricultural practices, livelihoods, food security and dietary diversity, as well as gender roles.
- For this project, a baseline survey was conducted in June 2020 involving 197 respondents (no control, one 'income' outlier) from randomly selected households from project communities. An endline survey was conducted with 206 respondents (179 beneficiaries and 26 control households) in June 2023, from the same households surveyed at baseline. The size of the endline sample was calculated to support results with 95% confidence with a 5% margin of error.
- Focus group discussions held in July 2023 in 10 villages with random groups of nine to 15 project participants. Of the 127 participants, 125 were women and two were men. 53 hold management positions in village tree enterprise (VTE) cooperatives or natural resource management structures (52 women and one man); and 74 are active members of VTEs or village-level structures (73 women and one man). This participatory method allows participants to voice their experience and point of view with their peers.
- A baseline and endline assessment of local enterprise groups.

CONTINUING THE WORK TO IMPROVE THE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS OF WOMEN IN THE SAHEL

Drawing from our extensive experience working with communities across the Sahel, we have learned that ensuring women's access to land, providing them with tools for nurturing it, and empowering them to generate sustainable incomes are fundamental pillars for delivering enduring and transformative change for entire communities.

With that in mind She Grows focused solely on supporting women, recognising them as agents of change.

We know that:



Rural women can contribute vital knowledge to the management of climate adaptation projects, like Africa's Great Green Wall.



Their participation has multiple community benefits, such as poverty reduction and improving food security.



An inclusive approach also empowers women, expanding their social and economic opportunities.

This programme is a key demonstration to what can and must be scaled across the region to achieve the results needed for people and planet.

This is a sustainable and lasting return on investment which not only shows incredible value for money for funders, but also establishes a replicable model that can be used across the Sahel region.



At an average cost of \$225 per project participant over three years (\$75 per year) the project has been able to raise the average household income by **over \$2,000 per year.**





Beyond the dramatic income increases, the project has demonstrated impressive gains on women's empowerment and opportunities in a difficult context, becoming a crucial enabler in supporting the new agricultural land policy's aim of allocating 15% of public land to women's associations, as well as delivering long-term outcomes for the landscapes they manage. Scaling up such programmatic approaches must be prioritised in international aid efforts to ensure long lasting change within rural communities in the Sahel.

The heartbeat of the Great Green Wall initiative is grassroots action: a powerful force when given the right support. Leaders must show that they recognise the value of local actors and move from a 'trickle-down' model of climate finance towards more accessible forms of funding. In doing so, they will empower women in communities who can enact change at the scale so urgently needed.

With thanks to:



Donor
This project was made possible with funding from UK Aid Match.

Delivery partner
Association pour le Développement des Activités de production et de Formation (ADAF GALLE).

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