
Sun Osc Mali's "Champion Nutrition" Approach: A Healthy Nutrition Strategy

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Abstract

SUN-OSC Mali, in its efforts to contribute to nutritional well-being in the country, identified a number of nutrition champions in 2018 to serve as a platform for influence and advocacy to help it achieve its objectives. The identification of champions consisted of a selection of personalities within society who should belong to a national group to carry, support and influence legislation and policies, as well as planning and budgeting for nutrition in Mali. The analysis shows that 71% of the champions are male, mostly from the capital (Bamako), with the most represented fields being nutrition and communication. SUN (Scaling Up Nutrition) OSC (Civil Society Organisation) Mali's champions are mainly state or local government officials. From their inception to date, the champions have carried out many activities on nutrition awareness and advocacy. The analysis also identifies strengths and some weaknesses. To improve the approach, it is recommended that the champions be organized into a network and that the community level be taken into account in the nomination of champions. The nutrition champion approach of SUN CSO Mali is obviously a great innovation and a remarkable opportunity that will help it to achieve its objectives, the end result of which is nutritional well-being for all through influence and awareness. The analysis carried out through this study shows that the tool can be improved by organizing the champions into a network bringing together all the country's champions. It would be necessary to involve other state and/or non-state actors, to mobilize more resources, to seize every opportunity, for effective and efficient results in nutrition, a key determinant of the well-being of the populations.

Keywords: SUN CSO Mali, Nutrition Champion Approach, Mali.

1. History of the Champion Nutrition approach

In Mali, the question of nutrition is dealt with in its various aspects by tools developed for this purpose, such as the national nutrition policy, the multi-sectoral nutrition action plan, the infant and young child feeding guide, the national protocol for integrated management of acute malnutrition, etc. In spite of this abundant arsenal, undernutrition has remained a health problem in Mali for several years, trapping and robbing it of 4% of its GDP [1]. This situation has led SUN-OSC Mali, which is an emanation of civil society, in the process of contributing to nutritional well-being in the country; to identify in 2018 a number of nutrition champions to serve as a base of influence and awareness thus helping it to achieve its objectives. These SUN champions play a role in social mobilization, influencing policies, programs and development plans, and supporting initiatives to improve the nutritional status of the most vulnerable at all levels. It should be recalled that the initiative of setting up a network of celebrities/influential personalities was one of the results of the common fund financed by UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services). And since the end of the basket fund, several initiatives have accompanied the SUN-CSO champions' dynamic, notably the Right to Grow program, HRH2030 (Human Resources for Health2030), PAI-HUB in the framework of the GFF (CSPEEDA).

2. Identification of champions

The identification phase consisted in making a selection of personalities within the society to belong to a national group to carry, support and influence legislation and policies, as well as planning and budgeting in favor of nutrition in Mali. Then a contact with each personality was organized in order to obtain their adhesion to the group of champions to support and carry the actions of SUN-OSC Mali. Thus, the identified champions committed themselves to influence decisions for more resources for nutrition.

In October 2018; the establishment of the champions was done through a workshop that brought together some non-governmental actors (The representative of the Ambassador of CANADA, Coordinator of the network of donors in Mali; members of SUN CSO Mali, the Association of Municipalities of Mali, the network of parliamentarians in favor of nutrition) and governmental actors (SUN CSO Focal Point, Head of the Nutrition Coordination Unit; a representative of the sub-direction of nutrition of the General Directorate of Health and Public Hygiene; the Commissariat for Food Security).

3. Profile of nutrition champions

▪ **Distribution of champions according to gender**

The majority of the champions is male (12 men against 5 women) that is 71%.

▪ **Distribution of champions according to their residences**

REGIONS AND DISTRICT	NUMBER
Kayes	2
Koulikoro	1
Sikasso	1
Ségou	1
Bamako	12

The champions reside in the capital city of Bamako (71%) and 29% come from the regions. This geographic distribution of champions has the benefit of fostering influence at the strategic level, but minimizes efforts toward point four of the champions' commitments (Strengthen Awareness for Better Community Behavior Change).

▪ **Distribution of champions according to their fields of activity**

The areas covered by the champions were: religious (2), communication (3), nutrition (4), singer (1), humorist (1), civil administrator (1), politics (2), academic (1) and legislator (2). The majority of champions work in the field of nutrition (24%), followed by communication (18%); religious, political, and legislative exist at the same proportion (12%). This configuration tends to favor the collection or implementation of evidence on different aspects of nutrition, as well as its dissemination. It can also favor the sensitization on and in favor of nutrition.

▪ **Distribution of champions by civil servant status**

Among the champions, there are 7 state officials, 2 local officials and 8 non-state or local officials.

The majority of champions are either state or local officials (53%). This fact supports easy buy-in from decision-makers to the organization's ideas. However, for purposes of lobbying, this may be less effective due to the dependence on one another and the potential mobility of champions in their roles.

▪ **Public awareness of champions**

There are 4 champions known to the public throughout the country (Abdoulaye Diabaté, Souleymane Kanté, Oumou Diarra (Diéman), Imam Ousmane Traoré). Representing more than 23% of the champions, this category of champion and at this proportion facilitates awareness and advocacy for nutrition.

4. Summary of the champions' commitments

At the last follow-up meeting of the champions' activities; their achievements included:

- Advocacy with UNICEF/Kayes for funding the establishment of multi-sectoral platforms to fight malnutrition in 24 communes of the Kayes circle;
- Advocacy with UNICEF/Kayes for funding to cover 14 health areas in the Kayes health district using the PCIMA Surge approach;
- Organization of the restitution workshop of the supervision of the PCIMA Surge approach in 2021, which led to the commitment of the communities (town halls and community health associations) to finance nutrition activities (nutritional demonstrations, active screening of acute malnutrition in the community, monthly meetings of community actors, follow-ups and motivations of the support groups for nutrition activities) up to a total of more than 42 million CFA francs;
- Organization of follow-up for 32 nutrition support groups;
- Organized two workshops to coordinate the activities of the nutrition support groups;
- Workshop to formalize the commitments of 6 health centers in the framework of the implementation of the PCIMA Surge approach;
- Training of providers on preventive surveillance of children in the health district of Kayes;
- Exchange meeting with the World Coordinator of the SUN movement during the official launching ceremony of the MNAP 2021-2022 (Multi-sectoral Nutrition Action Plan 2021-2022) ;
- Distribution of more than 1000 copies of the nutritional advice;
- Animation on community actions of prevention of malnutrition and food diversification targeting 20 women in 9 communes of Ségou ;
- Exchanges continue between the various members of the CNT (National Transition Council) in order to support the activities of SUN OSC Mali.

It should be noted that this report does not take into account all the activities carried out by the nutrition champions because we based ourselves on the last activity report. These activities are in the areas of advocacy, health system capacity building, awareness raising and lobbying. Although beneficial, they represent less than 50% of the commitments made by the champions.

5. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Champion Nutrition SUN CSO Mali Approach

FORCES	WEAKNESSES
Champion status motivates actors committed to nutrition; Capacity building on nutrition issues; Framework for experience sharing among champions; Diverse profile of champions; Funding for groups of champions to achieve commitments.	Strong majority of champions reside in Bamako ; Low media coverage of champions' activities; Deficit in tracking champions; Lack of a competitive framework between champions; Low coverage of the country by the champions; Lack of a Community Level Champion.

6. Success story of the Kayes health district in appointing a nutrition champion

The nutrition officer of the Kayes health district was named Nutrition Champion of SUN CSO Mali in 2021, allowing for replication under the influence of this champion. The restitution of the supervision of the PCIMA Surge approach in 2022 served as a framework for appointing the first nutrition champions of the Kayes health district.

Among the nominees were:

- Three sub-prefects;
- Two Mayors;
- Two COHA (Community Health Association) presidents;
- Two DTCs (Technical Director of the Health Center).

These actors had distinguished themselves by their commitment to the fight against malnutrition. For the sub-prefects, they had actively participated in the supervision of nutrition activities in the different health areas. Their presence during these activities made it possible to ensure the participation of decision-makers (mayor and president of the ASACO) in the restitution of the supervision, thus facilitating the resolution of problems. They ensured a sustained advocacy in favor of local financing of nutrition activities as well as the motivation of community actors in the health areas (community relays, GSAN (support group for nutrition activities), CHWs (community health agents)).

The champion mayors were among those who had injected significant funding into the implementation of nutrition activities in their respective communes.

The DTC champions were noted for their efforts and success in implementing nutrition activities in their health areas.

As an illustration, they were the DTCs of the first two best CSCom Surge. Indeed, following the supervision, an evaluation on different parameters was carried out to rank the Surge CSComs. The chairpersons of the champion ComHAs had their particularities in the local financing of nutrition activities in their health areas, but also their leadership in understanding and explaining the ins and outs of community health to the ComHAs with a view to increased financing of nutrition activities at the local level.

All the champions of this first wave were distinguished by their ability to influence their peers and the community.

The second wave (appointed in 2023) of champions included two sub-prefects, one mayor, two DTCs. The latter met the same criteria as the former.

What can be considered as the results of the champion approach is the commitment of the actors to nutrition, and the champions are the most determined. Each year, we note that the financial envelope (local funding) for nutrition activities increases from more than 8 million in 2019 to 9 million in 2020 and 10 million in 2021. These are financial resources mobilized by the community (mayors and ASACOs) for the execution of activities such as nutritional demonstrations, monthly meetings with community relays, nutrition activity support groups (GSAN), quarterly active screening for acute malnutrition, motivation of GSAN members.

7. Discussion

This study is based on the reports of the monitoring and identification meetings of nutrition champions. The most appropriate method would have been, in our opinion, to exchange with the champions and the initiators at the level of SUN CSO Mali. This would have allowed us to deepen our knowledge of the approach and to highlight the achievements of the various champions.

- Champion approach

Our study finds that the nutrition champion approach is an incentive and recognition tool for champions and a device that facilitates the achievement of SUN CSO Mali's objectives. It stimulates champions and promotes advocacy for nutrition, awareness raising and screening for acute malnutrition. It certainly helps to influence decision makers to adapt the texts governing the issue of nutrition in Mali. It needs to extend its anchorage from the central level to the most peripheral ones by creating a network of nutrition champions who will be able to manage themselves and benefit from the coaching of SUN CSO; in order to conceive and implement nutrition projects in all its dimensions. Data from the Internet, for the most part, reports the existence of the nutrition or food system champion approach. We can cite the network of multi-stakeholder champions of food systems which is a global network set up in 2021 by the United Nations [2], the network of nutrition champions created in 2011 and revitalized in 2013 in West African countries [3], the RECHANUT which is the network of nutrition champions in Chad, set up in 2015 and rather local compared to the last two mentioned [4]. While the nutrition champions of SUN CSO Mali are nominated by the organization, in Chad, the nomination is made by the Permanent Technical Committee on Nutrition and Food supported by SUN and the

REACH initiative. For the Multi-Stakeholder Food Systems Champions Network, champions are nominated by the UN Summit Special Envoy on Food Systems or the network leadership.

- Profile of the champions

The Nutrition Champions of SUN OSC Mali are mostly men residing in Bamako, from the field of communication and nutrition, civil servants (of the State or communities). It should be noted that four of the 17 champions are known to the public at the national level. This constitutes a major asset to be exploited. While SUN OSC Mali has named 17 champions, this number is 106 for the Multi-Stakeholder Food Systems Champions Network and 11 for RECHANUT. The profile of SUN OSC Mali champions is comparable to that of the food systems champions, which includes civil society actors, academics, government and international officials, mayors, members of parliament, etc. The RECHANUT is unique in that 6 of the 11 champions are ministers. In addition, there is a Member of Parliament, a Secretary General of a Ministry and an advisor to the Prime Minister. This may be due to the fact that it is the permanent technical committee on nutrition and food that serves as a multi-sectoral platform that appoints the champions. This framework in Chad facilitates the authorities' adherence to changes in favor of nutrition and food, however most actors have little time to sensitize the population. SUN CSO Mali does not have a minister among its appointed champions; however, most of the champions are in contact with the target populations, which can facilitate their buy-in to change.

- Champion Engagement

The commitments of the nutrition champions of SUN CSO Mali concern the realization of advocacy activities in favor of the financing of nutrition, sensitization, pooling of efforts of some NGOs for more efficiency and effectiveness in the fight against malnutrition, sharing of experiences, realization of specific nutrition activities, mobilization in favor of the inclusion of the right to food and nutrition in the constitution, accompaniment of a multisectoral program of fight against malnutrition in a region of the country. These activities of the SUN CSO Mali champions are similar to those carried out by those of the West African champions network; however, the documents we worked on show a completion rate of less than 50% of the planned activities among the Mali champions. Given this situation, many questions can be asked about the causes of what appears at first glance to be underperformance if we were to set the achievement of 50% of commitments as an acceptable standard. The most probable causes to our understanding lie in the deficit of follow-up of the champions. This too may be explained by the limited resources available to SUN OSC Mali. The SUN CSO Mali organization can be more creative and innovative in its approach to championing nutrition by broadening the base of support through the involvement of state and/or non-governmental structures. Another solution would be to organize the national champions like those in Chad in a network with different levels (National, Regional and District) with the objective of coordinating the activities of the champions by giving them more visibility with the possibility of mobilizing resources.

Conclusion

SUN CSO Mali's nutrition champion approach is obviously a great innovation and a remarkable opportunity that helps it to achieve its objectives, the outcome of which is nutritional well-being for all through influence and awareness. The analysis carried out through the present study shows that the tool can be improved by organizing it in a network with a spider web framework, gathering all the champions of the country. It would be necessary to involve other state and/or non-state actors, to mobilize more resources, to seize any opportunity, for effective and efficient results in nutrition, a key determinant of the well-being of the populations.

Recommendations

- Ensure a balanced distribution of champions by residence and gender;
- Select Nutrition Champions from all regions;
- To create a framework of competition between the champions, which will consist in the choice of the best nutrition champion of the country by defining clear criteria by a representative commission of the world of nutrition;
- Strengthen champions on Lobbying, Advocacy, Leadership and Communication, Resource Mobilization for Nutrition Funding;
- Reinforce the symbolism of Nutrition Champion by granting badges, diplomas that will remind each champion that he/she is on a mission for the cause of nutrition; and to others to understand that the fight for the said cause leads to recognition;
- Selecting champions at the community level: Remarkable actions are being carried out at the community level by committed actors whose flames can be sustained by the organization's recognition, capacity building and support;
- Strengthen the monitoring of Champions' activities: Monthly monitoring through the collection of activity reports and the organization of semi-annual meetings can push Champions to take more action;
- Strengthen media coverage of champions' activities: Champions' activities and SUN CSO activities related to them should receive sufficient coverage to promote the approach and garner support;
- Organize nutrition champions into networks to maximize their impact.

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ANNEXE 1 : Nomination list of SUN OSC Mali champions

Pièce jointe : Liste nominative des championnes et champions SUN OSC Mali

Nom et Prénom	Structure	Observation
Imam Ousmane TRAORE	Imam à la grande mosquée Almoutada	76 44 47 73
Dr DIARRA Houleymatou	Coach	66.74.51.20//66.73.35.27
Bernard COULIBALY	Préfet central de Kayes	75.15.79.80
Dr MOUNKORO Mariéta	UNICEF// Bamako	21.52.13.76
Dr DIARRA Kita Karim	DRS// Sikasso	76.07.83.32
Adama PAUL DAMANGO	Personne Ressource	79.35.35.65
Abdoulaye DIABATE	Artiste	76.36.70.90
Djaffra TRAORE	ACF // Niger	79.13.83.66
Oumou DIARRA	ORTM	66.71.35.69
Modibo Oumar COULIBALY	Président de l'association forum presse de Ségou	76.08.52.25
Kébé Mamoudou	Point focal SUN Koulikoro	76.17.63.04
Souleymane Dembélé Dit KANTE	Humouriste// Bamako	75.04.30.79
Dr DIALL Hawa	Pédiatre CHU-GT et néonatalogiste	94.17.80.04
Pasteur Sir Mathieu FANE	Association AMEN REVEIL	76 13 85 31
Dr Samou DIARRA	Référent Nutrition District/Csref Kayes	75 16 60 07
Mme Oumou Touré	Femme leader Bamako	66 78 51 13
Ousmane Kornio	Conseil national de la Transition	66 79 17 62