

Doing things differently in Djalé

The small village of Djalé, located in the Sikasso region of Mali, is the perfect example of a community determined to overcome malnutrition and poverty, with the help of Feed the Future.



Mariam Dembélé in the community garden of Djalé

After observing a Feed the Future project at work in nearby villages and demonstrating their commitment to improving their village's food security, the women of Djalé asked to join the project. Their determination paid off, and they were soon invited to officially participate in the project, led by the World Vegetable Center.

Three village leaders, including the chief, gave them one hectare of land for vegetable production, and Feed the Future helped the women access seed. They later expanded this plot to 2.5 hectares to accommodate demand as more women in the village became interested in producing vegetables.

"I gave the land to establish the community garden because our wives were motivated to produce vegetables for their families, especially to improve the diets of our children," said Kadary Dembélé, a village leader. "In the past, we had many malnourished children in our village. Nowadays our kids are healthy."

Although Djalé's women had the

initial motivation, they knew Djalé's men needed to understand how a community garden would benefit the village to keep it going. Feed the Future helped raise awareness among the village leaders and men about the importance of supporting their wives in the effort to improve the health and well-being of their families.

"Now, if it is his wife's turn to water the garden and she is not available, a husband will take care of the job," Kadary said.

Feed the Future also trained the women on nutrition, emphasising the importance of vegetables and a diverse diet as well as good water, sanitation and hygiene practices to overall health. "We learned how to cook nutritious porridge with milk, vegetables, eggs, meat and peanuts," said Mariam Dembélé and Djenebou Dembélé, neighbours who are active in the community garden. Families sell surplus vegetables to buy other food items, or dry and keep them for the lean period.

"The knowledge acquired during the

training sessions and the awareness activities have made the adoption of new behaviour much easier for women," said Rokia Dembélé, another community garden member. "Now in my household, I have the support of my husband and my mother-in-law to space my births, breastfeed my babies and to continue breastfeeding after I begin feeding other foods when my child reaches six months."

Her husband built a new latrine for the family and keeps it stocked with soap so they can wash their hands, thereby reducing the risk of infections including diarrhoea. "Now my kids are healthier, and the health expenses of our family have been reduced, Rokia said.

Other community activities are making Djalé a healthier place to live. The village dedicates Monday and Thursday mornings to cleaning, and households now have latrines with handwashing stations and soap.

The chief provided funds to repair the village's manually operated water pump to restore a steady and safe supply of water. Now, all villagers have access to drinkable water.

With help from their husbands and other villagers, the Djalé community gardeners have produced 250 kilograms (551 pounds) of tomatoes, 1441 kilograms (3176 pounds) of okra, 2330 kilograms (5136 pounds) of African eggplant, 115 kilograms (253 pounds) of amaranth and 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of hot pepper as of November 2017 — enriching the community's diets with vital nutrients.

The USAID Mali Scaling: Deploying Improved Vegetable Technologies to Overcome Malnutrition and Poverty project is an integrated agriculture, nutrition, WASH and health project aiming to reduce malnutrition, especially among children, through diet diversification and improvement of nutrition, hygiene and care practices. It is funded by USAID through Feed the Future and Global Health efforts and is led by the World Vegetable Center.

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