

# **THE SUFOSEC ALLIANCE**

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COORDINATING MONITORING & EVALUATION FOR  
A GLOBAL AGRIFOOD JOINT-PROGRAMME

JUNE, 2023

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# SUMMARY

The Sufosec Alliance is a consortium of six major Swiss NGOs partnering on a joint-programme to promote agroecological practices and strengthen local food systems for millions of people in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

To operate as a cross-organisation and cross-country programme, Sufosec required a monitoring and reporting tool that could be easily integrated into Alliance members' existing M&E systems, while also enabling the instant aggregation of reporting at the project, country, organisation and Sufosec programme levels.

Following a thorough review process, TolaData was chosen to coordinate the entire Sufosec M&E process. TolaData has enabled Sufosec members to track progress across hundreds of projects globally, implemented with the support of over 250 partner organisations in as many as 34 countries.

Programme results are routinely collected in TolaData, where they are reviewed and analysed by the Sufosec Alliance M&E team before being reported to local and national stakeholders, including Swiss federal donors.

<b>CLIENT</b>	SUFOSEC ALLIANCE
<b>SECTORS</b>	FOOD SYSTEMS & AGROECOLOGY
<b>DURATION</b>	2021-2024
<b>REGIONS</b>	AFRICA; ASIA; LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

*“We have found TolaData to be a lean, user-friendly and inexpensive option for data collection and programme tracking, all without the need for significant user onboarding. So it was obvious that we faced no investment risk in resources – financial or human.”*

Thomas Gass  
Sufosec AMEL Coordinator

100  
UNIQUE

TOLADATA  
USERS

462

PROJECTS  
TRACKED

>1  
MILLION

HOUSEHOLDS  
REACHED

# OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

## A Confluence of Crises: Drivers of the Global Food Emergency

Among the countless improvements to human living standards over the past century – be it in poverty reduction, education or healthcare – one simple data point stands in stark contrast to the achievements: world hunger is on the rise.

It signals a reversal of major gains at the global level, as progress towards the second of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, 'Zero Hunger', has receded sharply since 2019. But even prior to the supply shortages induced by the conditions of pandemic and war, progress in food and nutrition security had been stagnant for years, due in large part to rising food prices, conflicts, and climate shocks that destroy the crops and livelihoods required to feed households.

Today, commodity prices remain at the core of the current crisis as food, fertiliser and fuel costs around the world have soared. While some countries have been fortunate to absorb inflation, less wealthy communities often find themselves priced out of markets as demand outpaces supply. In nearly all low- and middle-income countries, recent data has shown that food price inflation has soared.

"Conflict, economic shocks, climate extremes and soaring fertilizer prices are combining to create a food crisis of unprecedented proportions. As many as 828 million people are unsure of where their next meal is coming from."

World Food Programme<sup>1</sup>

While all food systems require resilience in order to resist the worst effects of such crises, systems in the Global South are particularly vulnerable when facing the effects of natural or human-made shocks.

### Share of the global population that is undernourished

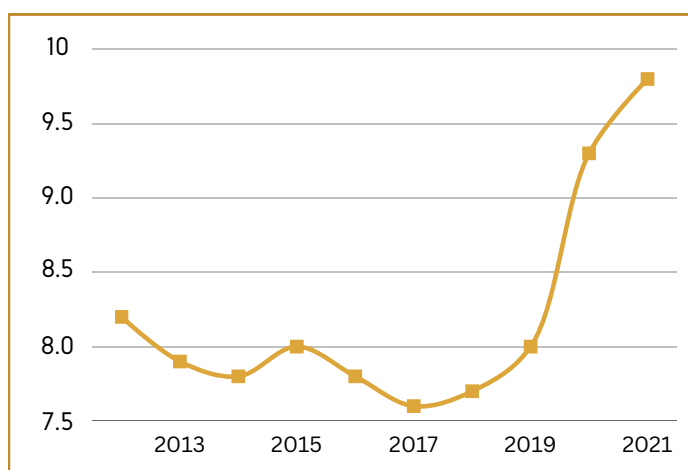


Figure 1: Undernourishment is understood to be habitual food consumption that is insufficient to provide the dietary energy levels that are required to maintain a normal active and healthy life. Source: FAO<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, the stakes of this extraordinary food crisis are enormous. In 2021, one in ten people on the planet is estimated to have been affected by hunger, and nearly one in three (29%) were moderately or severely food insecure, a dramatic increase compared to the period preceding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conflict is one of the strongest drivers for hunger too, as 70 percent of the world's hungry people live in areas affected by war and fighting – part of a well-established cycle that positions hunger as both a cause and result of violence.

As is often the case with crises, there is also a strong gendered component to hunger, as women are known to be disproportionately affected by the

impacts of food insecurity, often eating last and eating least.

Food systems are increasingly prioritising the needs of wealthier adult men, leaving women, children, and the elderly to have different nutritional requirements. As a result, the global prevalence of anaemia in women has remained immense for a decade, affecting almost one-third of all reproductive age females (aged 15-49) worldwide.

Any strategy to tackle hunger and its worst effects would therefore require a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of food insecurity, including poverty, supply chains and climate change, and prioritises the needs of the most vulnerable populations, particularly women and children.

### % of the Population Experiencing Moderate or Severe Food Insecurity

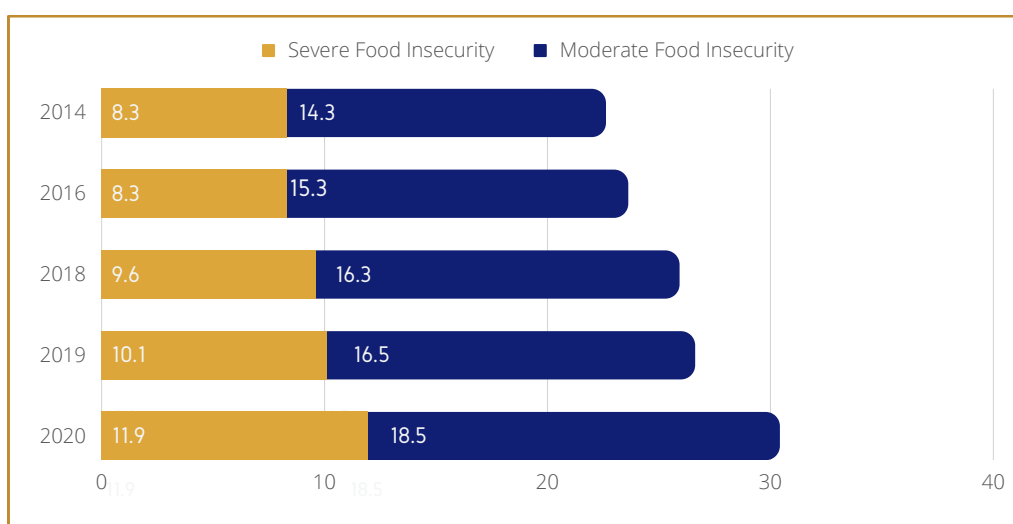


Figure 2: Moderate food insecurity is associated with the inability to regularly eat a healthy, nutritious diet. Severe food insecurity is related to an insufficient quantity of food and therefore relates to undernourishment or hunger. Source: FAO<sup>3</sup>

1. [A Global Food Crisis](#) (2023), World Food Programme
2. [Sustainable Development Goals: Indicator 2.1.1](#) (2023), FAO
3. [Sustainable Development Goals: Indicator 2.1.2](#) (2023), FAO

# THE ORGANISATION

## The Sufosec Alliance: Sustainable Food Systems and Empowered Communities

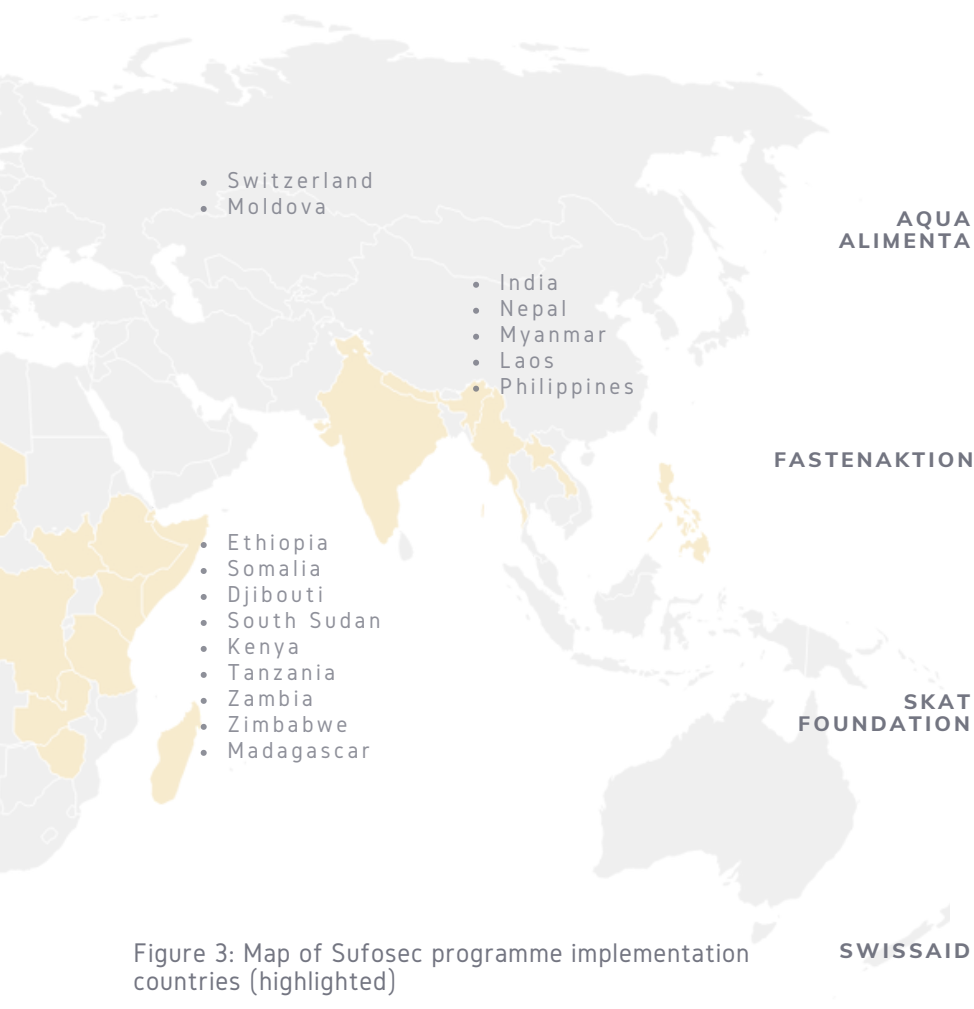
To address this deepening crisis, local and international actors are working to improve agrifood systems and reduce dependence on volatile global supply chains, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, in order to enhance strategic autonomy for communities.

The Sufosec Alliance, a consortium of six major Swiss NGOs, combats hunger and malnutrition by promoting local food systems and utilising agroecological methods. Formed in 2020 and currently operating in 34 countries across four continents, the Alliance aims to sustainably enable sufficient and healthy nutrition and reduce malnutrition and hunger by 20 percent in project areas by the end of 2024, while also ensuring that women are situated at the core of their activities.

To achieve these goals, the Alliance is promoting scientifically-backed agroecological methods. Agroecology involves practices like crop rotation, intercropping, and natural pest control methods, which can improve soil fertility, increase crop yields, and reduce the need for expensive synthetic fertilisers and pesticides in local food systems.

Local food systems, often run by small-scale farmers, provide affordable, nutritious food for the majority of the rural and urban population in low- and middle-income countries, many of whom live in poverty. Co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Alliance brings together major international development actors, including Aqua Alimentaria, Fastenaktion, Skat Foundation, SWISSAID, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse, and Vivamos Mejor, to provide a broad spectrum of expertise across the programme's activities.





**AQUA ALIMENTA**  
Works with communities to create simple and low-cost water transport and irrigation systems, focusing on promoting and supporting smallholder agriculture on several continents.

**FASTENAKTION**  
Strengthens communities in the global South and promotes self-sufficiency and sustainable development to advance solidarity and justice worldwide.

**SKAT FOUNDATION**  
Provides technical expertise in the fields of development and humanitarian aid with the aim to foster the exchange of knowledge and experience in development cooperation.

**SWISSAID**  
Improves the lives of communities in South Asia and other areas of the Southern Hemisphere with a focus on gender equality and agriculture.

**VÉTÉRINAIRES SANS FRONTIÈRES SUISSE**  
Promotes pastoral livestock management and animal welfare while aiming to ensure that healthy people derive their livelihoods from healthy livestock in a sustainable environment.

**VIVAMOS MEJOR**  
Provides socially marginalised communities in Latin America with a fair chance at social participation, education, and income to overcome poverty.

Figure 3: Map of Sufosec programme implementation countries (highlighted)

The joint-programme reflects the portfolio and thematic priorities of Alliance members and aims to maximise impact by fostering cooperation and learning. Sufosec hopes that the program’s ambitious scale will serve as a proof of concept and encourage greater cooperation and interest in operational and sectoral synergies between development actors.

## Developing the Sufosec Monitoring Framework

From Sufosec's inception, Alliance members stressed the importance that joint-learning should play within the programme and throughout its development. Generating evidence is essential for this purpose, as well as for providing data for reporting, programme steering, and accountability processes. To formalise these components, Alliance members developed five principles that form the theoretical backbone of the monitoring system:

### 1. Integrated monitoring & reporting

Sufosec integrates its monitoring with the existing systems of six Alliance Members, proposing the use of "basket indicators" to report progress within a defined thematic range instead of creating additional parallel systems.

### 2. Results-based project cycle mgmt.

Sufosec utilises measurable indicators to deliver results that contribute to national and international development frameworks such as the UN SDGs.

### 3. Learning

Joint learning is facilitated by thematic learning projects and a monitoring system that enables knowledge sharing at all levels, providing additional means for Alliance members to reflect and review their results and steer their operations accordingly.

### 4. Accountability

The monitoring system identifies and provides information for Alliance members to account for their actions towards all stakeholders, with an online project management software introduced to make such information accessible to stakeholders, with monitoring reports created for and shareable with non-system users.

### 5. Gender disaggregation

As a key component of the Sufosec programme, it is vital that progress on gender outcomes be trackable. Sufosec applies a gender-sensitive monitoring system, disaggregating quantitative indicators by sex to promote equity by identifying and addressing gender inequities in their areas of intervention.



As part of the process, Alliance members developed a results framework to guide M&E for the joint-programme’s duration, providing a clear ‘line of sight’ between the operations of members and partner organisations, and clarifying Sufosec’s programme logic to secure local livelihoods through agroecological transformation and empowered communities. To support this goal, members also agreed to five UN SDG-aligned outcomes which included a set of proposed indicators for tracking progress.

The results framework and indicators established by Sufosec were developed using existing programmes from the six Alliance members, and relies on the concept of “basket indicators” to allocate locally existing data towards the programme tracking. This enables the aggregation of different existing indicators that contribute to the same thematic area. While most indicators are locally determined, there are also a handful of standard indicators that the six Alliance members monitor across various projects and programs.



Figure 4: Simplified logframe displaying Sufosec goal and UN SDG-aligned outcomes

# THE CHALLENGE

## Overcoming Integration Hurdles for Streamlined Multi-level Reporting

As part of the planning process, Sufosec required a monitoring tool that could meet a number of key requirements.

### ADAPTABILITY

The tool should seamlessly integrate with the established M&E systems of the six major international NGOs and the newer system developed by the Sufosec AMEL (Alliance Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning) Unit, allowing all end-users at HQ, in-country offices, and implementing partner organisations to use it within their existing workflows.

### INTUITIVE

The monitoring and project management system should be deployed without the need for extensive training and onboarding. As partner organisations on the ground would be responsible for monitoring the majority of the project

indicators, the system would need to simplify the M&E process for personnel who may not have extensive prior experience in monitoring and evaluation.

### ROBUST

The tool should support the global scale of the joint program, enabling the collection of large amounts of data and secure management in a centralised system. Results should be able to be aggregated for analysis across the entire programme for reporting back to stakeholders, including Swiss federal donors.

The Alliance's reporting process consists of four levels, each aggregating upstream from the local to the national, and then to the member and Alliance levels. Partner organisations at the local level are responsible for project monitoring, thereby providing in-country offices with project results for reporting at the country programme level. These results are then aggregated upwards into the Alliance member's international programme monitoring, which contributes to the entire Sufosec programme results.

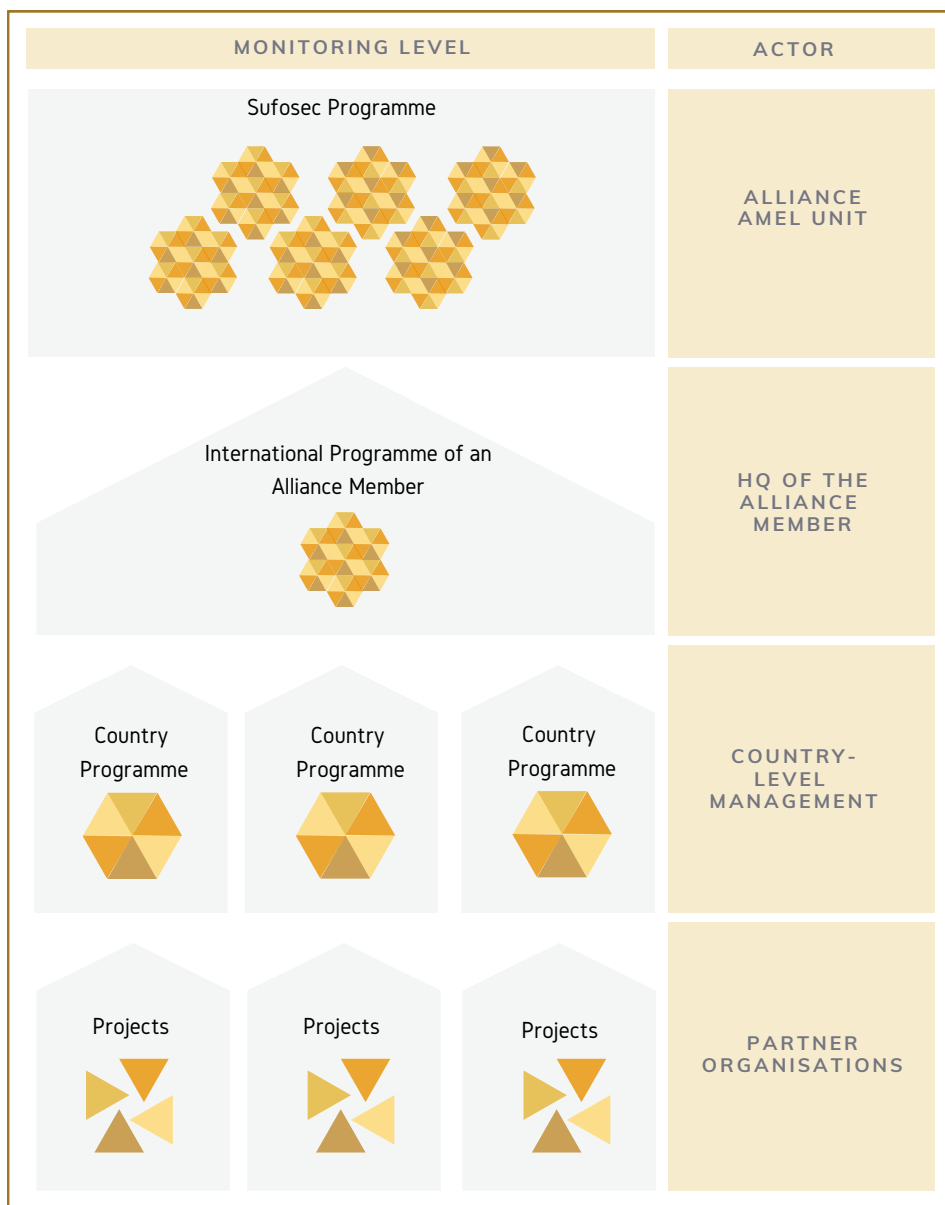


Figure 5: Reporting structure at various levels of the Sufosec programme

Furthermore, the software tool should be able to guarantee the integrity of the five key Sufosec monitoring principles including accountability, learning, gender disaggregation, results-based management and integrated monitoring and reporting.

This would ensure that evidence is generated in line with the broader philosophy of the Sufosec initiative and that the programme remains aligned with its core values and objectives.

# THE SOLUTION

## Adaptable M&E with TolaData

Since the second half of 2021, TolaData has been rolled out to 100 users among the Sufosec AMEL Unit, Alliance members' HQ, as well as to programme and project personnel at in-country offices and partner organisations. After developing and adapting monitoring plans, and conducting a rigorous review process of software tools, TolaData was selected to coordinate M&E across all 462 Sufosec projects.

As a secure cloud-based platform, TolaData can be deployed instantly to all Alliance members and operating partners across the world, with reporting on a theoretically-infinite number of indicators made immediately available to teams in-country and back at headquarters. Projects within the system can be designed as large as required while still retaining an intuitive simplicity for all platform end-users, including non-experts.

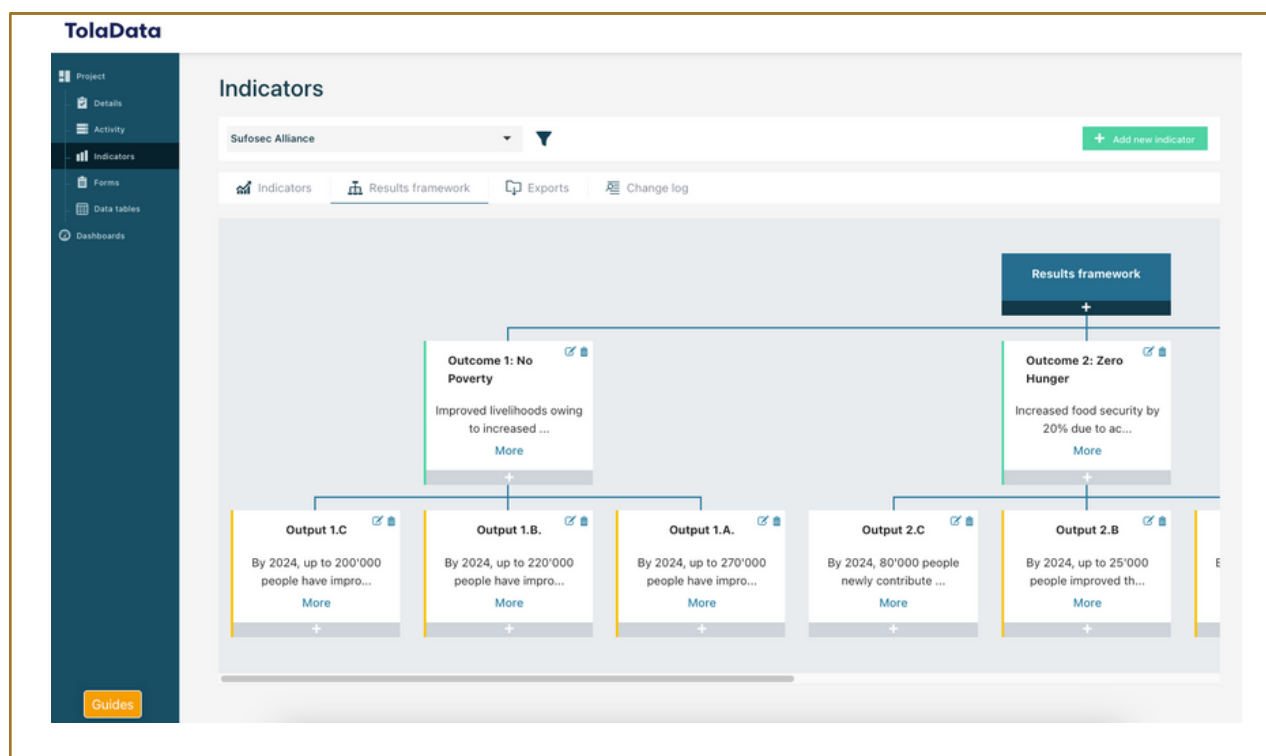
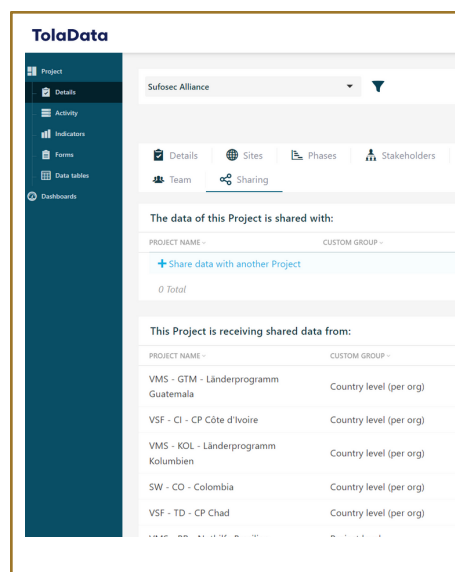


Figure 6: Screenshot of Sufosec results framework adapted into the TolaData platform.

Minimal additional steps were required to integrate TolaData into the existing monitoring work of Alliance members and partners. Sufosec teams and partners have managed to merge TolaData effectively into their existing workflows while benefiting from its support for a range of integrations.

For example, Sufosec’s monitoring system encourages flexibility for Alliance members and partner organisations in the collection and reporting of data in line with their existing systems. As such, any team can continue to collect and manage their project monitoring data as per usual, while TolaData provides a range of options to ensure streamlined data input.



**This Project is receiving shared data from:**

PROJECT NAME	CUSTOM GROUP
VMS - GTM - Länderprogramm Guatemala	Country level (per org)
VSF - CI - CP Côte d'Ivoire	Country level (per org)
VMS - KOL - Länderprogramm Kolumbien	Country level (per org)
SW - CO - Colombia	Country level (per org)
VSF - TD - CP Chad	Country level (per org)
VMS - BR - Nothilfe Brasilien	Project level
SW - GW - Guinea Bissau	Country level (per org)
VSF - ET - CP Ethiopia	Country level (per org)

Figure 7: Screenshot magnification of Sufosec data sharing tab on the TolaData platform.

Collected data can be pulled from any machine readable source (i.e. directly from spreadsheets or through KoboToolbox) or, alternatively, users can simply input data manually, allowing for results to be reliably entered at the project level and aggregated for review and reporting at the country, member and Alliance levels.

as described in the Sufosec monitoring structure (p9). While dashboards are inbuilt into the platform, the flexibility of TolaData also lets Sufosec teams export programme outcome data for reporting through their chosen visualisation software.

Once indicator data is input into TolaData, project and programme progress can be observed at the various monitoring levels

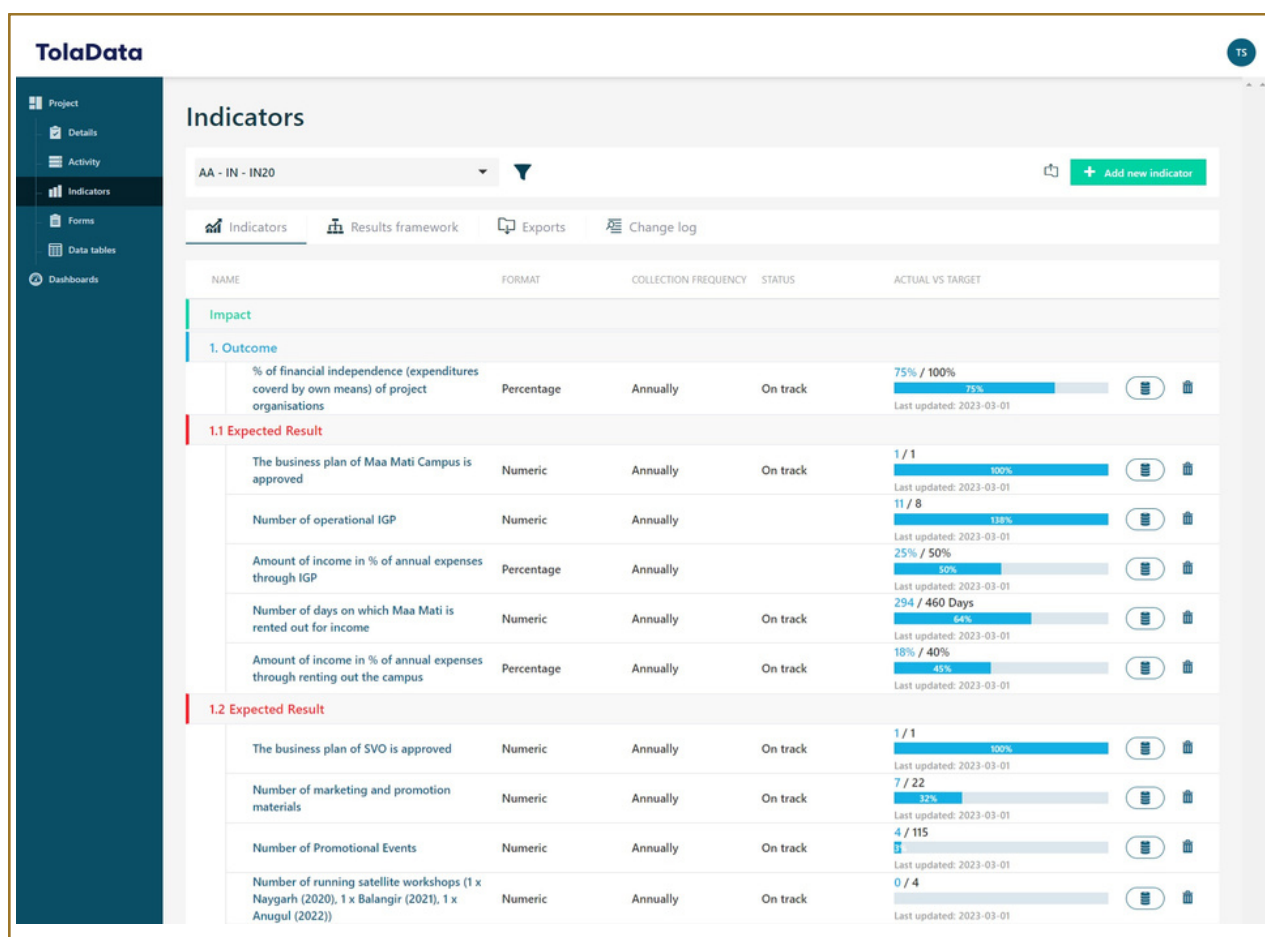


Figure 8: Screenshot of Sufosec indicator data and targets for an Aqua Alimenta project on the TolaData platform

### TolaData Within the Sufosec Reporting Structure

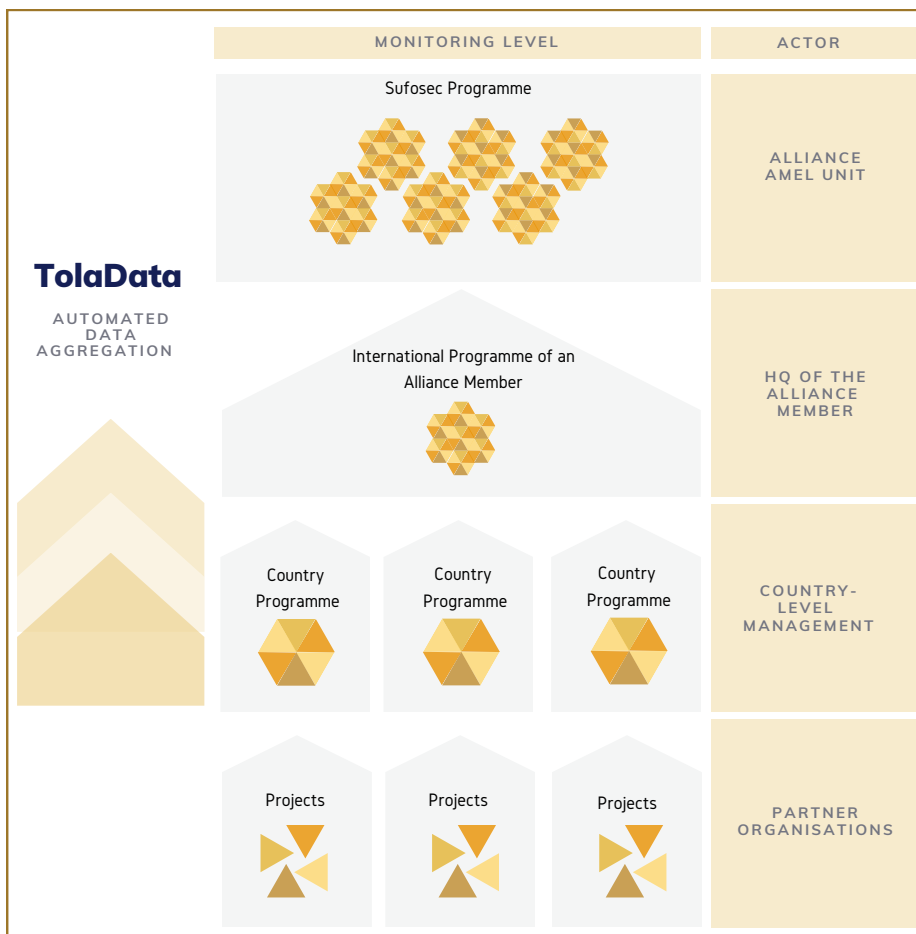


Figure 9: How TolaData aggregates reporting data at the multiple Sufosec monitoring levels

### Phases of the Sufosec Data Reporting Cycle

TASK	DATA COLLECTION	DATA MANAGEMENT	DATA VISUALISATION
MONITORING ACTOR	Partner orgs	Alliance member Sufosec AMEL Unit	Sufosec AMEL Unit
TOOL OPTIONS	TolaData KoboToolbox csv/xlsx	TolaData	TolaData Power BI

Table 1: Illustration of the possible applications of TolaData for the various Sufosec data cycle phases

# THE RESULTS

## Measuring impact of the joint-programme

As of October 2022, the Sufosec Alliance has reported reaching around 1.1 million households and is on track to achieve its goals, with positive interim results published in [a recent report](#) highlighting key outcomes on the ground.

Among its list of achievements, the joint-programme has supported 52,000 families to adopt at least one new agroecological

practice, contributing to sustainable nutritional situations and lowering the danger of malnourishment in these communities by up to 16%.

The programme has enabled over 8 thousand families annually to achieve adequate, healthy, and sustainable food supplies by embracing agroecological and economically viable techniques, such as crop rotation, intercropping, and the utilisation of natural fertilisers and pest control measures.

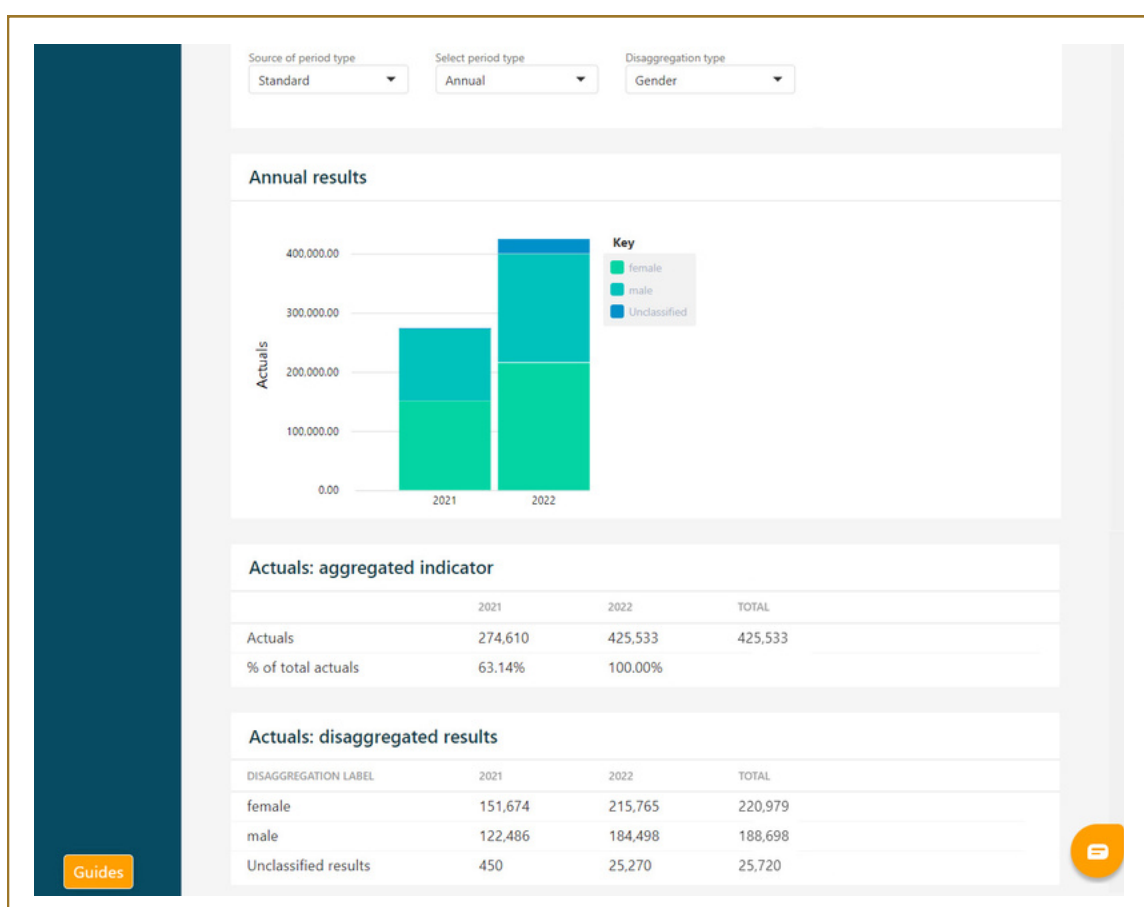


Figure 10: Automated time-based analysis for Output 2.B as seen in the TolaData platform



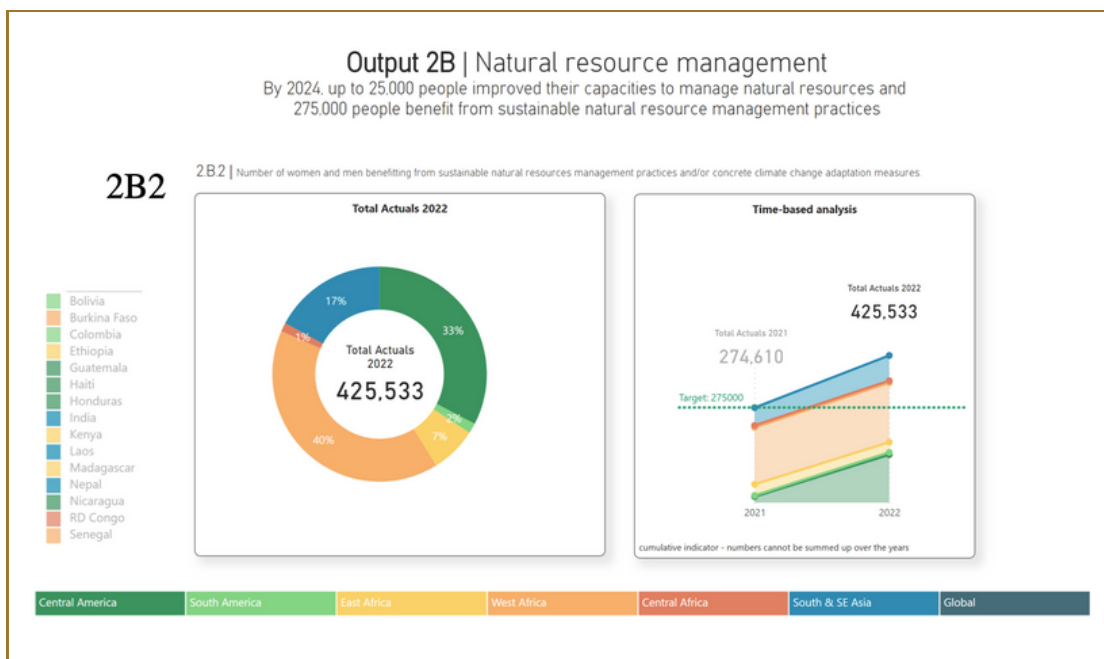


Figure 11: 2022 programme results for Outcome 2.B –collected in TolaData and exported to Power BI  
 Source: Sufosec AMEL Unit

In all five outcome areas – no poverty; zero hunger; empowered communities; effective CSO and partnerships; and awareness raising – the Alliance’s initiatives have had a significant impact on the communities it has assisted.

Some key results from Sufosec projects include:

- In India, a SWISSAID-led project on promoting environmentally sustainable and climate adaptive livelihoods for Baiga communities resulted in a 20% increase in agricultural production. Since project implementation, the share of families with access to a diversified range of vegetables has increased from 10% to 39%.

- A Skat Foundation project in Bogota, Colombia, has promoted urban agriculture by providing families with vertical gardens and composting techniques. By diverting 100 kilograms of organic waste from landfills, up to 420 kilograms of CO2 equivalents can be avoided.
- In Mali, an initiative by Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse and local partners has improved milk production and market systems, particularly for small-scale farmers and cooperatives. Since the project began, there has been nearly a doubling in the average milk production per cow per day, and an increase in the number of female farmers participating in milk production from 10% to 30%.

- In Guatemala, the More than Maize project by Vivamos Mejor, which supports small changes in household hygiene and nutrition to positively impact ecology, has seen success through an increase in dietary diversity and crop variety. This has resulted in a 10% increase in corn yields, and a 33% decrease in infant diarrhoea.
- An Aqua Alimenta initiative in Madagascar is underway to improve the quality of life of rural families and peasant farmers by empowering them to develop better agriculture, with a focus on nutrition, income and environmental sustainability, while using agroecological principles and digital tools. In two years, the project trained 982 farmers in agroecology with 80 percent applying the methods they have learned.
- In Kenya, Fastenaktion works with local partners in forming solidarity groups among rural communities for knowledge-building in agroecology and increasing access to local seeds. The initiative has seen a significant improvement in community nutrition and additional income, especially among women, providing most farmers with educational access for their children.

In early 2023, Sufosec convened an annual MEL workshop for Alliance members to critically reflect on the previous year's results based on the data compiled through TolaData and visualised in Power BI (Figure 11). The review and learning process will now be expanded to the programme countries and partner organisations.

The process also revealed valuable insights in areas such as data quality and indicator quality, including methods for measuring, recording, and interpreting cumulative and incremental indicators, which were previously considered a significant challenge. The Alliance and its partners will continue to use TolaData in their extensive monitoring of affiliated projects until 2024.

# ANNEX

Alliance Sufosec PRINCIPLE	TolaData SUPPORT
Integrated monitoring and reporting	Provides teams with tools to integrate into existing monitoring systems, so that users can implement TolaData into their workflow at any point of a project's cycle.
Result-based project cycle management	The platform has been designed to enable the assessment of a project's impact through the process of tracking and reviewing measurable outputs and outcomes.
Learning	As a cloud-based platform, knowledge sharing occurs across teams and with all members of a project or programme regardless of physical distance, so that lessons can be adapted to future programming and to other contexts.
Accountability	Users can monitor, report on and display (through public dashboards) project results at any point of implementation, allowing Alliance members to account for their activities and their impacts in a way that is transparent and accessible for all stakeholders, including local communities.
Gender Disaggregation	The ability to collect and report on data in a disaggregated manner provides teams with the necessary tools to confirm that projects and programmes are reaching their target groups. This includes ensuring outcomes for women and girls within target communities.

Table 2: How the TolaData platform aligns with and supports the five Sufosec monitoring principles.

## TolaData Case Study

### The Sufosec Alliance: Coordinating Monitoring & Evaluation for a Global Agrifood Joint-Programme

This document was produced by TolaData with support from Sufosec Alliance in April 2023. All screenshots were generously provided by Sufosec, with charts and maps adapted by TolaData from Sufosec documents and other sources. Cover image generated with Stable Diffusion.

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Special thanks to Thomas Gass & Melanie Brantschen, Sufosec AMEL Unit.

Photo credits: Shreya Shah/SWISSAID

Caption: Farmer Bhagotin Bhai, part of a SWISSAID project in Central India.

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# TolaData

Alliance Sufosec  
Alliance for Sustainable Food Systems  
and Empowered Communities

