

UNITLIFE TECHNICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE (TRC) – TERMS OF REFERENCE

I. Background and purpose:

UNITLIFE is a fund hosted by the United Nations dedicated to the prevention of chronic childhood malnutrition, a disease affecting 1 in 5 children in the world and leading to life-long consequences including stunted physical growth, impaired cognitive development and a weakened immune system. Chronic malnutrition is irreversible, but it can be prevented with the right interventions in the first 1,000 days of a child's life, from conception to age two. UNITLIFE leverages technology and innovative financing to bring new resources for development partners – NGOs and UN agencies – who work in developing countries to deliver practical solutions to prevent chronic malnutrition.

UNITLIFE has two operating modalities:

- 1- 1st operating modality: Funding is secured, after which UNITLIFE allocates funding through an annual call for proposals organized by the UNITLIFE Secretariat. Interested organizations (International NGOs and United Nations Organizations) submit a proposal for a project to be funded. The funding is acquired ahead of the call for proposals.
- 2- 2nd operating modality: UNITLIFE Secretariat identifies existing projects and then mobilizes resources from the private sector stakeholders to fund these projects. The Secretariat identifies up to 3 projects in each country of interest through a specific call for existing projects. The funding for the project is mobilized after the projects have been identified.

The Executive Board (ExBoard), which is UNITLIFE's primary governance body, has the ultimate responsibility for project approval. In order to assess these projects, UNITLIFE is seeking advisors to form a Technical Review Committee (TRC), which will be responsible for recommending projects for funding to the ExBoard and the Secretariat, based on the group's independent review of the strategic value, technical soundness and potential for impact of proposals received.

Composed of leading external experts and technical advisors of UNITLIFE's Executive Board member organizations, the TRC will play a key role in ensuring a fair and transparent proposal review process resulting in the selection of the most deserving projects.

II. Mandate:

The TRC is responsible for:

- Assessing project proposals based on their strategic value to UNITLIFE's Investment Strategy, technical soundness and potential for impact, using a pre-defined scorecard to ensure fairness;
- Providing recommendations to the ExBoard and the Secretariat on which projects to prioritize, based on the above-mentioned assessment. This task may include assisting in prioritizing between two equally scored projects.

The TRC:

- May seek clarifications from the organizations requesting funding or from the identified existing projects, with the assistance of the Secretariat;
- Only for the first operating modality process, the TRC may recommend adjustments to project proposals, including the removal or addition of specific elements. Proposed changes should systematically be discussed with the requesting organization to determine feasibility before a decision is made.

III. Membership:

The UNITLIFE Secretariat will issue a call for interest to join the TRC, which will be composed of an expert chairperson and a team of experts with a range of specializations including (but not limited to) chronic malnutrition, gender empowerment in rural areas, and climate-smart agriculture. A minimum of 7 years of relevant experience is requested. Additional experts may be placed in a pool of experts, which can be called upon to join the TRC should specific expertise be required that is not met by the active TRC members, or in the event that an active TRC member is unable to participate in the annual proposal review.

Experts must have previous experience reviewing, analysing, or implementing nutrition projects. They may have a practitioner or academic background. In addition to technical expertise, a commitment to fighting chronic malnutrition and a track record of ethical behaviour is required.

The composition of the TRC will be carefully designed to enable an integrated, balanced, technically competent and professional assessment of proposals. Efforts will be made to ensure geographical and gender balance.

The TRC may include advisors from the organizations which are members of UNITLIFE's Executive Board.

TRC members are appointed for a specific period of time and may be reappointed.

IV. Working arrangements:

In both operating modalities, interested International Non Governmental Organizations and United Nations agencies (excluding UN Women, FAO, IFAD and WFP which have a separate process) will be asked to submit their project through a UNCDF platform. After the closure of the platform, the Secretariat will conduct an initial review of proposals to verify that they meet minimum requirements, prior to sharing the proposals as well as the review scorecard and other supporting documents with the TRC members.

Process for the first operating modality: The TRC members will receive the project proposals from the Secretariat two weeks prior to the TRC meeting and are expected to allocate the equivalent of 3 working days¹ during that period for their independent individual assessment of the proposal, in line with the scorecard. During this period, the TRC members may solicit the Secretariat as needed for any clarifications or technical information, as well as information on policies or any aspects of the UNITLIFE Investment Strategy. The TRC members may not contact requesting organizations during that time.

The Secretariat will convene a three-day TRC meeting² of the TRC two weeks after sharing the proposals. During the meeting, the TRC will review proposals as a group, share and discuss observations and agree on project scores.

The TRC may also, with the support of the Secretariat, request clarifications from requesting organizations and discuss possible changes to project proposals with them. By the end of the meeting, the TRC will assign a score to each project. When possible, an in-country focal point³ will also serve as a resource person on country context.

¹The expected days of work may be adjusted depending on the number of proposals received.

² The meeting may take place remotely.

³ The in-country focal point may be a Nutrition Cluster/Sector representative or a representative from a relevant Ministry

The Committee will score each proposal according to standardised criteria. The highest scored proposals (number to be dependent of funding available) will be recommended to the Executive Board for approval, through a report drafted by the Secretariat and approved by the TRC Chairperson.

If the Executive Board cannot reach consensus, the Chair shall call for a decision by majority vote of those present.

Process for the second operating modality:

The process is lighter for existing projects. TRC members will receive the projects descriptions from the Secretariat two weeks prior to the TRC meeting. When reviewing the projects descriptions, the TRC members may solicit the Secretariat as needed for any clarifications or technical information, as well as information on policies or any aspects of the UNITLIFE Investment Strategy.

During the TRC meeting, the members will review the projects as a group, share and discuss observations and agree on project scores. By the end of the meeting, the TRC will assign a score to each project. When possible, an in-country focal point⁴ will also serve as a resource person on country context for the TRC and be available remotely.

The Committee will score each project according to standardised criteria. The two highest scored projects per country will be recommended to the Executive Board for approval, through a report drafted by the Secretariat and approved by the TRC Chairperson.

If the Executive Board cannot reach consensus, the Chair shall call for a decision by majority vote of those present.

V. Administrative arrangements:

The UNITLIFE Secretariat provides substantive and administrative support to the Executive Board. To this end, UNITLIFE Secretariat will provide the Technical Review Committee with the approved Investment Strategy and Standard Operating Procedures for Proposal review, and will brief the Committee on the UNITLIFE programme and guiding principles. The Secretariat will also appoint a TRC Chairperson amongst the experts, to guide the process and ensure that the TRC deliberations are independent.

⁴ The in-country focal point may be a Nutrition Cluster/Sector representative or a representative from a relevant Ministry

The Technical Review Committee will be supported by the Secretariat to facilitate its activities including arrangements for convening the meetings, as well as provision of the relevant documentation for review. The UNITLIFE Portfolio Specialist will serve as the Secretary to the TRC.

For the 1st Operating modality, the Chairperson and TRC Members will receive 3 days of professional fees. For the 2nd Operating modality, the TRC Chairperson will receive 1 day of professional fee. In addition, in case of physical meetings all expenses related to expert participation in this process including travel, accommodation and meals will be covered by the UNITLIFE Secretariat in accordance with UNCDF rules and regulations⁵.

VI. Confidentiality and conflict of interest:

Members of the TRC undertake to keep in strict confidence all information that they may come across in the course of their role and responsibility in the TRC. If a Member believes he or she may have a conflict of interest in any matter being considered by the TRC, this conflict of interest must be reported immediately to the Chairperson, who, in consultation with the Secretariat, shall rule on the appropriate action to take, including but not limited to, the member abstaining from contributing to a decision on the matter at hand.

Annex – UNITLIFE Proposal Review Process (1st and 2nd modality):

The Executive Board is responsible for approving project proposals received by the UNITLIFE Secretariat, based on the recommendations of the Technical Review Committee and the UNITLIFE Project Manager. This will ensure a technically competent, credible and transparent review.

Steps for the Review and Approval of Project Proposals (1st modality)

1. The UNITLIFE Secretariat will launch a call for proposals in line with UNITLIFE Investment Strategy. Interested organizations will have no less than 60 days to submit a proposal. During the proposal submission period, interested organizations may send a preliminary concept note for feedback before the fully fledged proposal to the Secretariat, no less than 30 days after the call for proposal.

⁵ The Secretariat will prioritize remote meetings.

In any case interested organization may reach out to the Secretariat for clarifications.

2. After the submission deadline, the UNITLIFE Secretariat will pre-screen proposals to verify their compliance with minimum eligibility criteria such as eligibility of the organization, basic alignment with the Investment Strategy, as well as any additional minimum criteria specified in the call for proposals.
3. The Secretariat will then send the proposals along with supporting documents to a pre-identified TRC two weeks prior to the TRC meeting. TRC members are expected to allocate 3 working days for their independent individual review of proposals, following a pre-defined scorecard to ensure fairness. This time may be adjusted depending on the number of proposals to review.
4. The Secretariat will work with the TRC Chairperson to convene a three-day proposal review workshop. During the meeting, the TRC will review proposals as a group, share and discuss observations and agree on project scores. The TRC may also, with the support of the Secretariat, request clarifications from requesting organizations and discuss possible changes to project proposals with them. By the end of the meeting, the TRC will assign a score to each project. When possible, an in-country focal point will also serve as a resource person on country context.
5. Following the TRC meeting, the Secretariat may ask some requesting organizations to resubmit a revised proposal, based on recommendations from the TRC.
6. The Secretariat will send all reviewed Proposals (including any revisions received from the implementing partners) accompanied by a report of the meeting to the UNITLIFE Executive Board. The Chair of the Executive Board may invite the Chairperson of the TRC to present its recommendations to the Executive Board.
7. The Executive Board, with the support of the UNITLIFE Secretariat and based on the recommendations of the TRC, may approve projects for funding. Approval may be given by Round Robin, and should take place once request submitted, within 7 worked days of submission of the TRC report.
8. The UNITLIFE Secretariat will send the results of the reviews to the implementing agencies and request short term clarification or additional information as necessary.
9. The UNITLIFE Secretariat, together with the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund, will work with successful organizations to prepare the Standard Administrative Arrangement and proceed with the first disbursement.

Steps for the Review and Approval of Projects (2nd modality)

1. The UNITLIFE Secretariat will launch a call for existing projects in line with UNITLIFE Investment Strategy. Interested organizations with ongoing projects corresponding to the criteria will have 30 days to submit their projects, in the format of their choice (proposal previously prepared for another donor, existing project concept note, etc.) as long as it covers essential elements listed in the call for projects (e.g. location, # of beneficiaries, results framework etc.). During the proposal submission period, interested organization may reach out to the Secretariat for clarifications.
2. After the submission deadline, the UNITLIFE Secretariat will pre-screen projects to verify their compliance with minimum eligibility criteria such as eligibility of the organization, basic alignment with the Investment Strategy, as well as any additional minimum criteria specified in the call for projects. At this stage, the UNITLIFE Secretariat may request additional information/clarification before sharing their projects with the TRC.
3. The Secretariat will then send the projects along with supporting documents to a pre-identified TRC two weeks prior to the TRC meeting. TRC members are expected to review the projects, following a pre-defined scorecard to ensure fairness.
4. The Secretariat will work with the TRC Chairperson to convene a project review meeting. During the meeting, the TRC will review projects as a group, share and discuss observations and agree on project scores. The TRC may also, with the support of the Secretariat, request clarifications from requesting organizations. By the end of the meeting, the TRC will assign a score to each project. When possible, an in-country focal point⁶ will also serve as a resource person on country context.
5. The Secretariat will send all reviewed Projects accompanied by a summary of the results from the technical review to the Executive Board. The Chair of the Executive Board may invite the Chairperson of the TRC to present its recommendations to the Executive Board.

⁶ The in-country focal point may be a Nutrition Cluster/Sector representative or a representative from a relevant Ministry

6. The Executive Board, with the support of the UNITLIFE Secretariat and based on the recommendations of the TRC, may approve projects for inclusion in UNITLIFE's portfolio. Approval may be given by Round Robin, and should take place once request submitted, within 7 worked days of submission of the TRC report.
7. The UNITLIFE Secretariat will send the results of the reviews to the implementing agencies and request short term clarification or additional information as necessary.
8. Selected projects will be included in the UNITLIFE Portfolio of projects, which means that UNITLIFE will act as an Ambassador for these projects, providing them with visibility and identifying financial partners on their behalf.
9. Once a financial partner is identified for a project, the UNITLIFE Secretariat, together with the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund, will work with successful organizations to prepare the Standard Administrative Arrangement and proceed with the first disbursement. At this stage, the Implementing Partner will be required to transpose the project into the standard UNITLIFE Project Document format and may be asked for inputs towards project communications (e.g. project update, photos).