

## 5.12: THE SAHEL RESILIENCE INITIATIVE, INTEGRATING FOOD FOR ASSETS, SCHOOL FEEDING, NUTRITION, CAPACITY STRENGTHENING AND SEASONALITY.

### Problems/challenges addressed in relation to food systems resilience

Many countries are experiencing record levels of hunger as a result mainly of conflicts, the effects of climate change and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. If current trends continue the current situation could worsen. Alongside the humanitarian response to the immediate and acute needs in crisis and emergency situations, there is a sense of urgency in tackling the underlying causes of crises. This is key to **reduce the rising needs** of the most vulnerable people affected by food insecurity and chronic and acute malnutrition. These **people play a critical role to the achievement of resilient food systems**. Small-scale farmers for instance who are likely to suffer from hunger, are vital for feeding both rural and urban people and to maintain nutritional diversity especially in contexts where the need is greatest. As they mostly serve domestic markets, they are particularly important in times when trade is compromised. Since a number of factors are putting the resilience of small producers - and food systems more generally- at risk, their local knowledge needs to be preserved and their capacities be strengthened.

Addressing the concurrent and multiple shocks that are impacting the resilience of people and communities requires a holistic and intersectional approach. In fragile and conflict settings joint humanitarian and development action is needed to strengthen resilience at the individual and household, community and ecosystem, as well as national systems level. **Yet, the interventions taken in response to food crisis, too often remain scattered, isolated, small-scale, poorly integrated, uncoordinated and often short-term, achieving little transformative change to create sustainable livelihoods (“building back better”).**

### Description of the proposed solution/approach

In conflict-plagued and fragile contexts the impact of resilience building interventions focusing on nutrition and capacity strengthening, could be maximized if designed and implemented as an integrated package of activities that rests on the following drivers for change:

- **Sustained investments and concentration of interventions:** Food assistance and complementary interventions of different partners should target the same community (-ies) in the same locations over several years. They should be designed with a context-specific strategy focusing on strengthening resilience, food security and nutrition and have sustainable exit-strategy.
- **Context-specific and multi-sectoral approaches:** Overcoming crises at the local level always requires a whole set of interventions which are tailored to the individual needs on the ground.
- **Joint action and coverage of activities:** Operations need to go beyond meeting the sole minimum of food consumption aspects, in order to break negative coping strategies and allow people to strengthen their resilience. Joint action and complementary partnerships based on comparative advantages of different actors will be key to implement a multidimensional and multisectoral response.
- **Scaling up to match the ‘size’ of the problem:** The scope and size of interventions of a coalition of partners need to be commensurate to the size of the crisis or shock that impacts specific target districts and communities. Failure to achieve sufficient scale results in external pressure forcing relapses back to food insecurity and malnutrition and exposure to shocks.

**Investing in evidence:** Aiming at working more impact-related and evidence-based, resilience-building interventions should be informed by concrete analysis and data collection.

## Implementation Approach/“Best practice”

Through support of BMZ, a comprehensive programme, the **BMZ/WFP Sahel Resilience Initiative (SRI)**, is being implemented by WFP across the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger) to address the root causes of vulnerability and sustainably improve the nutrition and livelihoods of the most vulnerable people, mostly smallholder farmers. Strengthening their capacities is facilitated by building on existing structures and knowledge of the population. All measures are planned in a participatory manner, thereby facilitating dialogue and strengthening social cohesion. An integrated package of activities—combining Food for Assets (FFA), school feeding, nutrition, capacity strengthening and seasonal support—is implemented across the region, at scale and in the same communities. The same vulnerable people are targeted over a period of at least five years. The package is nuanced to suit different livelihood contexts pastoralist and agro pastoralists-alike and meet the needs of the population. Thereby the programme addresses both environmental degradation and communities’ lack of productive assets, as well as individual households’ chronic vulnerability and lack of livelihood opportunities.

Based on shared outcomes and respective comparative advantages, UNICEF is complementing WFP’s resilience interventions. UNICEF’s activities cover WASH, education, nutrition, health, and social protection ensuring geographical convergence, joint planning and coordination mechanisms as well as joint strategies for resilience programming.

To generate robust evidence of the transformative impact of this approach, interventions in Mali and Niger are currently being accompanied by impact evaluations in cooperation with the World Bank. The findings will inform ongoing programming and allow for adjustments if measures do not achieve the anticipated impact.

## Impact potential at scale (including potential return on investment)

Since its inception, 1.2 million people were reached through activities of the SRI. Achievements include, among others, the rehabilitation and treatment of 31,000 hectares of degraded land and the provision of regular meals to children in 1,200 schools.

**Overall, first trends indicate the intervention’s positive effect on community resilience and food security.** Preliminary evidence suggests that after just one year of programme implementation, beneficiary households had stronger capacities to absorb and adopt to shocks during the COVID-19 crises in comparison to non-beneficiaries.

The first annual follow-up surveys answered by beneficiaries revealed, for example, that assets created or rehabilitated in their community protected their household, goods and productive capacities. Most interviewees stated that assets allowed them to increase or diversify their agro-pastoral production and that they contributed to the improvement of the natural environment, including increased vegetative cover or groundwater, less erosion, etc. The results further show that agricultural practices of assisted communities are increasingly becoming nutrition-sensitive with the cultivation of diversified crops and the development of market gardening. Also trends on food security and nutrition are encouraging and show an overall improvement of communities’ food security. The accompanying impact evaluations will provide further insights into successes of strengthening resilience of vulnerable smallholder farmers and thereby of food systems more generally.

First evidence shows that this integrated package of activities, implemented in different countries by different actors, and aligned with collective outcomes, is the way that generates the biggest impact. Therefore, **we work on scaling up our approaches and incorporating additional resilience sites across the region.** This expansion will be informed by lessons learned and the need to focus on highly vulnerable communities which have both, commitment and potential to achieve resilience.