

# 88. SCALING UP RESILIENCE IN FRAGILE & CONFLICT SETTINGS THROUGH INTEGRATED & SUSTAINED ACTION

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| ACTION AREA      | CLIMATE RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS      |
| SOLUTION CLUSTER | CLIMATE ADAPTATION, MITIGATION & RESILIENCE |
| THEMATIC AREA    | ARID, SEMI-ARID LANDS AND DESERTS           |
| SUBMITTED BY     | GERMANY-WFP                                 |

## PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES ADDRESSED IN RELATION TO FOOD SYSTEMS RESILIENCE

Many countries are experiencing record levels of hunger as a result mainly of poverty, conflict and displacement, degraded environments, and the effects of climate change. Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic fallout have placed additional strain on already vulnerable regions and precarious livelihoods. If current trends continue, the situation could further deteriorate and the number of chronically hungry people could reach 840 million worldwide by 2030 (SOFI 2020).

In a number of contexts by the combination of Conflict, Climate change, COVID-19 and increased Competition over scarcer environmental resources, poses the need to move away from linear continuums between humanitarian and development actions but find context-driven “concomitance” of humanitarian, development and peace actions commensurate to the scale of the multiple risks and vulnerabilities that affected populations are facing. This is required to both meet the foreseeable surge of humanitarian responses able to meet the immediate food and nutrition requirements in emergency situations, whilst developing programmes and mobilising resources able to reverse negative trends, reduce vulnerabilities and risks, and enable truly transformational changes that tackle the underlying causes of hunger and build resilience at all levels (individual, household, community, systems).

Food systems are integral part of ecosystems and vital socio-economic interactions – including the networks that are needed to produce and transform food, and ensure it reaches consumers – something particularly challenging in contexts impacted by multiple risks, shocks and stressors. Currently, most food systems are not resilient enough to meet the food and nutrition needs of large sections of society. However, in these very challenging contexts, **various forms of adaptation and resilience practices (e.g. creative affiliations and major solidarity mechanisms and culturally savvy safety nets, local know-how, etc.) play a critical role in promoting or enhancing resilient food systems.** Small-scale farmers, for instance, who are often themselves prone to multiple vulnerabilities, are vital for feeding both rural and urban people and to maintain nutritional diversity. As they mostly serve domestic markets, they are particularly important in periods such as the current one, when supply chains are disrupted and trade is compromised.

However, food systems do not operate in a vacuum and neither can the efforts aimed at strengthening their resilience. In fragile and conflict settings joint humanitarian, development and peace action needed to strengthen resilience simultaneously at the individual, household, community, ecosystem, as well as institutional systems level requires “scale” to meet the dimension and multifaceted nature of the challenges. Achieving scale will require a combination of “concomitant and multi-level actions”, a change of “pace” to counter the negative trends, and “sustained investments” over time. **Yet, many of past interventions taken in response to food crisis, too often remain scattered, siloed or isolated,**

**small-scale, poorly integrated, uncoordinated and often short-term, achieving little transformative change to empower the most vulnerable and create sustainable and resilient livelihoods (“building back better”).**

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED SOLUTION/APPROACH

The multi-dimensional nature of risks and shocks in fragile and conflict affected (or prone) contexts marked by high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition simply indicates that in order to achieve sustained resilience an integrated package of activities is needed - resting on the following drivers for change:

- **Convergence of** different partners’ interventions in the same geographic locations targeting the same vulnerable people and communities. Operational partnerships and complementary intervention packages based on different actors’ expertise and comparative advantages are key to design and implement a truly multi-sectoral response, as well as leverage synergies and efficiency gains.
- **Concentration or integration** of different interventions over a period of several years to address the various dimensions and multifaceted nature of vulnerabilities and risks. Interventions need to go beyond meeting minimum food consumption needs to break the cycle of negative coping strategies and allow people to gradually offset risks and invest in a better future. Activities should be layered (e.g. different activities working in synergy) and sequenced (e.g. some activities can enable others) depending on the context.
- **Coverage or scale** to match the scale of the challenge. The scope and scale of the problem requires an equally commensurate response in terms of the solution (s). Failure to achieve scale results in external pressure on basic services, environmental resources, and support mechanisms in the targeted locations.
- **Community-focused** through participatory planning methods that generate context-specific, needs-based, and inclusive solutions, building also upon local innovation and solidarity.
- **Government-led and government-owned** programmes and coalitions to support national systems and policies, as well as operationalize resilience objectives at scale.
- **Strengthening capacities at all levels** to build a new generation of talents and practitioners able to learn and apply local solutions and innovation.
- **Investing in evidence** to demonstrate transformative impact, enable learning, and refine approaches and interventions.

### **“Best practice”: scaling up integrated resilience in the Sahel**

The Sahelian countries commonly known as the G5 Sahel countries – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger – form a vast geographic belt of territories that are affected by complex and protracted crises. Food insecurity as well as chronic and acute malnutrition are persistently high, fuelled by poverty, escalating conflict and displacement, an environment threatened by land degradation, limited and unequal access to basic services, poorly integrated markets, recurrent episodes of drought and flooding, erratic rainfall patterns in the face of climate change, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic fallout. In a predominantly rural context, where livelihoods depend largely on agriculture, pastoralism or combinations thereof, these factors together clearly constitute a fragile and risk-prone environment for individuals, communities, and societies.

Despite these challenges, the Sahel is far from being defeated: the region holds enormous potential for ecosystem restoration, including a wealth of untapped groundwater and renewable energy sources, people have shown a great level of solidarity building the foundation of endurance in the face of hardships, and the demographic dividends could be enormous if the very young population is provided with the necessary resources and opportunities to grow.

With major support from BMZ, WFP launched an innovative programme across the G5 Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) to address the root causes of vulnerability, boost resilience, and hence sustainably improve the food security and nutrition of the most vulnerable people. For the first time, **an integrated package of activities** is implemented across the region and at scale:

- Restoring ecosystems through **food assistance for assets (FFA)** investments designed along landscape continuums, using different soil conservation and water harvesting techniques to

restore and improve soil quality, enable vegetation regrowth and groundwater recharge, and increase productivity, while safeguarding biodiversity and reducing vulnerability to natural disasters. Assets creation is also used to restore or build community and market infrastructure, such as feeder roads, bridges or storage facilities, among others.

- Providing nutritious **school meals** and take-home rations to incentivize access to education and allow children to learn and perform better. Complementary school-based activities, such as school gardens, herds managed by women's groups and the installation of grain mills contribute to food supply and diversification for school canteens and present an entry point for sensitizations related to gardening, nutrition and environmental stewardship.
- Delivering **nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions** to treat and prevent the direct causes of malnutrition, while simultaneously addressing the underlying factors, such as poor knowledge of feeding practices or limited access to basic social services, and promoting the availability and consumption of nutritious foods;
- **Smallholder agricultural market support (SAMS)** activities to optimize the use of assets and produce generated from rehabilitated or developed lands, create (agri-) businesses, reduce post-harvest losses, develop value chains, and connects farmers to markets.
- **Capacity strengthening** of governments institutions at all levels as well as of local communities to strengthen decentralized technical services, foster a network of resilience experts and build a new generation of talent.
- Integrating **lean season food/cash and nutrition support** to safeguard resilience gains during the peak hunger period.

In practice, this means bringing degraded land back to life, getting children back to school, investing in healthy diets for mothers and children, creating jobs for the youth and building social cohesion throughout entire communities. Crucially, this occurs in the same communities, targeting the same vulnerable people over a period of at least five years. This brings the necessary investments at scale to boost the resilience of Sahelian communities.

The programme is not working in isolation. The resilience scale-up is spearheaded by national governments at the centre of planning and implementation, building upon local solutions and good practices. Seeking operational complementarities and leveraging synergies, the programme is working in partnership with UN agencies, including the Rome Based Agencies (RBAs) and UNICEF, with NGOs, technical and financial partners, as well as regional institutions such as the G5 Sahel Executive Secretariat and CILSS. Further, it has been instrumental in setting up the Sahel University Network for Resilience (REUNIR), including universities from five countries, to facilitate knowledge sharing, advance the institutionalization of resilience tools, and help build the future generation of resilience experts.

Above all, the programme works with the communities, who take ownership of their own transformative journey. Focusing on the empowerment of the most vulnerable, women and youth act as key protagonists of change within their communities. Through participatory approaches as well as reduced pressure on populations, dialogue is fostered and tensions reduced, ultimately with the potential to contribute to social cohesion and improve the prospects for peace in the Sahel.

The package of activities is designed to evolve over time, shifting from a primary focus on environmental rehabilitation to income generation and value chain development, and anticipating a progressive reduction in lean season support. As gains are solidified, community and partner contributions are expected to increase. In the long-term, it is anticipated that a certain level of support will continue (e.g. school feeding), though not in the framework of the integrated package but hopefully through national social protection schemes and home-grown solutions.

To generate robust evidence of the transformative impact of this approach, interventions in Mali and Niger are currently being accompanied by impact evaluations led by WFP's independent Office of Evaluation in cooperation with the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation unit. The findings will inform programming and complement ongoing evidence-generation efforts based on 1) regular collection of outputs and outcomes including piloting resilience-specific metrics and indicators; 2) arial imagery and geospatial monitoring to monitor assets and environmental changes over time; 3) dedicated studies to thoroughly investigate certain priority aspects; and 4) documentation and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned, including through the support of University research.

## IMPACT POTENTIAL AT SCALE

With the support of BMZ and other donors, more than 1.7 million people benefitted from the integrated resilience package over the past year. Since the beginning of the scale-up in 2018, WFP together with the communities and partners rehabilitated more than 70,000 hectares of degraded land, created some 1,400 hectares of garden to produce fresh vegetables and fruits, and built more than 380 wells, 830 ponds and 75 boreholes to enhance access to water. Over the past year, 1,500 schools were supported under the school meals programme, some 650,000 children and women benefitted from nutrition activities, and more than 25,000 people trained as part of capacity strengthening (including smallholder farmers, cooperating partners, government staff, community committees, etc.).

**Overall, first trends indicate the intervention's positive effect on communities' resilience and food security.** The first annual follow-up surveys 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.

As a result, first trends on food security and nutrition are encouraging and show an overall improvement of communities' food security. Beneficiary households' food consumption has become more frequent, regular and diversified, without the need to resort to negative coping strategies that would undermine their resilience in the long-term (e.g. selling productive assets). They also spend a smaller share of their expenses on food, which indicates that they had more resources to cover non-food related needs, such as health or education.

With COVID-19 and its socio-economic repercussions, communities' resilience, i.e. their capacity to absorb and adapt to shocks, was put to a particular challenging test. Due to the pandemic and related containment measures, households experienced difficulties to access markets and food, as well as loss of jobs and revenues. Nonetheless, evidence collected throughout 2020 shows that in terms of food security, beneficiary households were better off than the general population living in the same areas.

This first evidence shows that the integrated resilience package, implemented by a coalition of partners and at scale, as well as aligned with national objectives and communities' needs, is likely to have farther reaching and more sustainable impacts on the resilience of people, communities and systems than scattered, standalone interventions focusing on a single shock or stressor. It provides a comprehensive model to strengthen all elements of food systems, including production, transformation and consumption, while safeguarding the sustainability of their environmental bases and building a new generation of innovators. 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 with both commitment and potential to achieve resilience. Furthermore, the Sahel resilience initiative represents altogether a major learning opportunity for WFP and partners regarding what it takes to build resilient food systems. It will inform the possible adaptation and replication of several of the above-mentioned ingredients required in other contexts where vulnerable populations keep facing persistent hunger, severe hardships, and exposure to multiple risks.