



SAVING  
LIVES  
CHANGING  
LIVES

# Scaling-up Resilience in the Sahel: A Story of People, Partnerships and Practice

An integrated approach to tackle hunger  
from the source and build peaceful communities

July 2021





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## Foreword

The Sahel is a region which presents a complex and diverse context. It is affected by recurrent, rapid onset and long-lasting crises: chronic poverty, pervasive food and nutrition insecurity, fast depletion of natural resources, climate change and extreme climate events such as droughts and episodes of floods, fuelling negative coping mechanisms (e.g. early marriages, unsafe migration), social tensions, conflict and displacement. The G5 Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) are home to some 80 million people, a mostly young population (under 30 years) that is expected to double within only two decades.

Together, multi-dimensional crisis patterns and population growth put pressure on existing natural resources, limited and stretched basic services, local safety nets and on existing capacities of communities and systems to cope with and adapt to uncertainty. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the hardships experienced by communities, placing additional strain on health and food systems and on already precarious livelihoods.

However, many communities find creative ways to face the hardships and they demonstrate amazing levels of coping mechanisms, showing not only their capacity to optimise the use of their environments and livelihood systems but also their aspiration at building a better future for the young generation.

To respond to these challenges and strengthen communities in their endeavour to become resilient towards crises, since 2018 WFP has embarked on a journey by scaling up an Integrated Resilience Programme in the G5 Sahel countries. WFP promotes a package of different activities in the same communities over a period of 5 years addressing the various stresses they have to face – combining Food Assistance for Assets (FFA), school feeding, nutrition, capacity strengthening and seasonal support. The package is implemented across the region, at scale and nuanced to context.

*The story of the Sahel would not be complete without shedding light on the enormous potential that lies within the very young population and the resilience of the Sahelian communities.*

Over 2 million beneficiaries in 800 communities are planned to benefit from the integrated package of activities that aims to strengthen the resilience of individuals, households, communities and systems with a particular focus on participation and empowerment of vulnerable groups, such as women and youth, as key protagonists of change.

Since the beginning of the WFP resilience scale-up, communities have rehabilitated and/or restored 85,000 ha of degraded lands. Formerly arid areas have been transformed into green belts of pastures and trees, and agricultural fields allowing communities to increase their harvest, feeding their families and even gaining some income. Through a research-action model, 145 students have conducted their master's theses at WFP resilience sites thereby training a talent pool of educated young people about the socio-ecological and economic dynamics of the region. Moreover, at least, 355 community-based participatory planning (CBPP) exercises clustering over thousand villages have been completed involving local authorities, technical services and representatives of the communities. The CBPP aims to truly put the communities at the centre of planning and their transformative change!

Certainly, working towards resilient and inclusive communities is a joint project that cannot be achieved without partners. It involves first and foremost national governments, that are in the driver's seat of the programme spearheading planning, implementation and monitoring of the activities. It furthermore involves communities and partners from academia. That is why we are actively partnering with other UN agencies, including the

Rome Based Agencies (RBAs) and UNICEF, as well as with NGOs, and other institutions such as the World Bank, GIZ, the G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat, and universities in the Sahel.

Against the background of increasing security incidents in countries like Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso and in the light of Covid-19, joint efforts across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and a massive scale-up of resilience and social cohesion activities in the G5 Sahel countries are more important than ever. The integrated resilience programme is already showing a remarkable return on investment: After only the first year of the programme, evidence across the integrated resilience sites shows that in terms of food security, beneficiary households were able to cope better during the Covid-19 crisis than non-beneficiaries. This gives us hope. And it is just the beginning of our journey.

I take this opportunity to thank the G5 Sahel Government institutions engaged and leading this endeavour and the donors that are so generously supporting this initiative and are actively engaged in promoting resilience. We are encouraged and will continue to advocate and pursue investments in integrated efforts through actionable partnerships for a resilient Sahel – as the saying goes in the region “On est ensemble!” (“we are in this together!”).

Chris Nikoi  
Regional Director WFP Regional Bureau  
for West and Central Africa









# SAHEL CONTEXT



## Sahel Context

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.

With all its possible nuances, the region is first and foremost characterized by climate variabilities that include recurrent episodes of drought and flooding as well as erratic rainfall pattern. Most people live in rural contexts and are dependent on two main livelihood systems that intersect and are mutually dependent: agriculture and pastoralism.

Taking a closer look, the areas most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition are those where livelihoods systems correlate with largely degraded environments, poor density of market infrastructure, limited and unequal access to basic services, high rates of school drop outs, early marriages of adolescent girls, unsafe outmigration and unemployment. Adding to the complexity, escalating conflict and social tensions, particularly in the Central Sahel, force millions of people to flee

their homes, and the ever scarcer availability of key livelihood resources endangers the delicate balance between farmers and herders sharing food and water resources. Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic fallout place additional strain on already precarious livelihoods.

Despite these challenges, the Sahel is far from being defeated: the region holds great potential for ecosystem restoration, including a wealth of untapped groundwater and renewable energy sources, and the demographic dividends could be enormous if the very young population is provided with the necessary resources and opportunities to thrive.

**53% OF POPULATION DEPENDS  
ON FARMING AND PASTORALISM;  
APPROX. 13% OF LAND DEGRADED<sup>1</sup>  
28% OF CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL<sup>2</sup>**



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