



WFP EVALUATION



**World Food
Programme**

SAVING
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Impact Evaluation for Resilience Learning in the Sahel

Mali Inception Report



TRANSFORM DEVELOPMENT

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1. Introduction

1. In 2020, 155 million people worldwide faced “crisis or worse” levels of food insecurity. Close to 115 million of them lived in countries affected by conflict or weather extremes.¹ Extended food crises are predicted in 2022, which would necessitate continued large-scale humanitarian assistance. Since the beginning of armed rebellion and coup d’état in northern Mali in 2012, which later evolved into an extremist insurgency,² 3.6 million people on average (18 percent of the population) experience food insecurity. Conflict, forced population displacements, and climate change exacerbate food insecurity.³ However, evidence is lacking on how development outcomes are affected by these shocks, and how WFP’s programmes support populations to effectively respond to these shocks.
2. The World Food Programme’s (WFP) Office of Evaluation, Asset-Creation, Livelihoods and Resilience Unit, and the Climate and Disaster Risk Reduction Unit partnered with the World Bank’s Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) department to create the Climate and Resilience Impact Evaluation (IE) Window (see Annex 1 for a summary of the window). WFP’s Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019–2026) focuses on delivering impact evaluations that contribute to global evidence and organizational learning. Impact evaluation windows help to achieve this strategy by focusing portfolios of impact evaluations on priority evidence needs identified through literature reviews and extensive consultations.
3. The climate and resilience window aims to understand how the WFP’s programmes contribute to the resilience of populations supported. The first round of impact evaluations selected for this window aims to estimate the impacts of integrated packages of resilience activities on households’ capacities to absorb shocks (absorptive capacity), adapt to increasing environmental or economic stressors (adaptive capacity), and improve well-being in the long term (transformative capacity).
4. The Mali impact evaluation aims to estimate the impacts of the WFP’s Integrated Resilience Programme on absorptive, adaptive, and transformative resilience capacities. The WFP’s integrated resilience programme in Mali consists of activities including food assistance for assets (FFA), nutrition support, school feeding, and smallholder agriculture market support (SAMS) activities. The intended direct outcomes of the intervention are increasing both household resilience capacities and food security.
5. This inception report outlines the strategy for assessing the impact of the WFP’s resilience programme in Mali on the dynamics of population well-being and resilience. Through this impact evaluation, the WFP and DIME are working together to complement other ongoing efforts and guide future investments and activities related to resilience in the Sahel.
6. This inception report also builds on a [pre-analysis plan \(PAP\)](#) registered with the American Economic Association’s registry for randomized controlled trials. The pre-analysis plan includes detailed information on primary outcomes, research design, randomization method, randomization unit, clustering, sample size (total number, number of clusters, and units per treatment arm), and regression specifications. The purpose of the PAP is to outline the set of hypotheses and analyses that will be performed on the data before it is collected.

1FSIN. 2021. Global Report on Food Crises: Joint Analysis for Better Decisions. [Link]

2 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. N.d. Mali. [Link]

3 World Food Programme. 2020. Mali Country Strategic Plan (2020–2024). [Link]

2. Evaluation Context

2.1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

7. Mali is a vast, land-locked country in the heart of the Sahel. With social indicators among the lowest in the world, the country ranks 184 out of 189 on the UNDP's 2019 Human Development Index and faces serious challenges in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 on zero hunger and improved nutrition. Every year since the 2012 conflict, 3.6 million people (18 percent of the population), on average, experience food insecurity, including 600,000 severely affected people. Food insecurity varies from one region to another, with the north and central regions (Gao, Mopti, and Tombouctou) particularly challenged.⁴
8. Food insecurity in Mali also sees seasonal variations, often peaking before the main cereal harvest for farmers (June–September). The widespread drought occurring in Mali every few years results in the advanced onset of lean seasons.⁵ The 2020 lean season pushed 1.3 million people in central and northern Mali into food insecurity, triggering a state of emergency.⁶ These variations are further aggravated by conflict and insecurity. The WFP's satellite imagery analysis indicated reduced agricultural activity in 2020, as the conflict expanded to more areas in central Mali.⁷ Conflict, and its effect on agricultural activities, already risks year-round food insecurity challenges in the country. Several parts of the country also experience recurrent weather extremes (rains, floods), further adding to the problem. In 2020 alone, heavy rains and floods damaged the livelihoods of more than 11,000 households in the Koulikoro, Menaka, and Segou regions. Figures from 2021 indicate that 907,000 children under five years of age suffer from moderate acute malnutrition, and 309,800 from severe acute malnutrition.⁸ Multiple, recurring shocks and stressors both directly threaten food security in the immediate future and affect livelihoods, assets, and basic services, which contribute to sustained food security in the long run.
9. As explained above, the climate and resilience window aims to examine the interaction between shocks and stressors, people's livelihoods, and food security. Given the seasonal nature of Mali's food insecurity, it is particularly important to monitor food insecurity over time to identify vulnerable populations. It is equally critical to understand how and when the WFP's resilience programmes can support people in maintaining food security in the face of shocks and stressors, including unpredictable weather events and conflicts. Past studies demonstrate that multifaceted economic interventions in the region (Niger) can contribute to addressing people's vulnerability to shocks and help them maintain food security.⁹ However, past studies do not closely examine the dynamic nature of food security in the region or seasonality and other factors.
10. Given this context and policy environment, DIME and the WFP, with support from Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), are collaborating to generate evidence on how multiple interventions can be combined or sequenced to boost the resilience of poor and vulnerable households in Mali. This evidence agenda contributes to the implementation of the WFP's integrated resilience programme in the Sahel and is also of interest for the World Bank programme.

4 World Food Programme Mali. 2021. Country Brief. [Link]

5 World Food Programme. 2020. Mali Country Strategic Plan (2020–2024). [Link]

6 Cadre Harmonisé (CH). March 2020. This figure is higher than the projected figure by the November CH (1.1 million), and represents a 142 percent increase compared with the 2019 lean season, when 553,770 people were estimated to be food-insecure.

7 The imaging analysis was conducted in November 2020. The most affected areas are those where intercommunal tensions led to increased violence in 2020.

8 World Food Programme. 2021. Mali Emergency Dashboard, December 2021. [Link]

9 Bossuroy, T., Goldstein, M., Karlan, D., Kazianka, H., Parienté, W., Premand, P., Thomas, C., Udry, C., Vaillant, J. & Wright, K. 2021. Pathways Out of Extreme Poverty: Tackling Psychosocial and Capital Constraints with a Multi-Faceted Social Protection Program in Niger. Policy Research Working Paper 9562. World Bank, Washington, DC.

11. This impact evaluation in Mali aims to identify the impact of the WFP's programme on resilience, as measured by people's capacity to maintain food security while experiencing shocks and stressors. The evaluation will also use bimonthly surveys to track food security and coping strategies of households supported by the programme and those who are not part of the programme. This approach will help provide an understanding of when food security peaks in Mali, and which households are vulnerable to becoming food-insecure at different phases. Surveys will be complemented by qualitative data and analysis to understand how the programme is implemented and identify opportunities for future improvements, how the support provided is perceived by beneficiaries, as well as to generate insights about the patterns observed in the quantitative data. The impact evaluation aims to inform planning for the subsequent programme cycle as well as the WFP's next country strategic plan for Mali.

2.2. PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

12. Given the dynamic food security situation, the WFP's Mali Country Strategic Plan 2020–2024 (CSP) has adopted a two-pronged approach to address both the short-term and long-term needs of beneficiaries in its programming.¹⁰ The CSP stresses the importance of maintaining the WFP's capacity to respond to emergency needs while also increasing its focus on longer-term outcomes (such as diversified livelihoods, agricultural productivity, peace, and social cohesion), to improve households' and communities' capacities to respond to shocks and stressors, and to therefore enhance resilience.
13. Mali's resilience programme is aligned with the CSP objectives and includes interventions that aim to promote the capacities of households and communities to absorb shocks, adapt to risks, transform livelihoods, and, more broadly, in the living environment, to exit poverty. It includes (i) food assistance for assets (FFA), (ii) nutrition/health, (iii) value chain and smallholder agriculture market support (SAMS), and (iv) school feeding. These are implemented in parallel with social safety net interventions aiming to address the immediate needs of the most vulnerable people within the targeted communities (e.g., lean season support and COVID-19 cash transfers). The planning and prioritization of these interventions is supported and guided by the community-based participatory planning (CBPP) process.
14. By introducing a combination of layered and sequenced activities targeting the most vulnerable, the WFP resilience programme in Mali aims to promote the resilience capacities of individuals, households, and communities:
 - At the community level, activities aiming to promote resilience focus on environmental rehabilitation and food systems development. These include the FFA and SAMS components.
 - At the individual and household levels, activities promoting resilience include investments in human capital by providing an integrated package of school feeding and nutrition services, and lean season support for vulnerable households. These activities complement government efforts to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities.
15. More specifically, the WFP resilience programme in Mali includes the following:
 - *The food assistance for assets (FFA) component* aims to meet the immediate food needs of households while restoring degraded landscapes, improving water harvesting, reducing the risk of environmental disasters, creating productive assets to secure ecosystem services, increasing productivity and yield, supporting economic development, and strengthening social ties between community members and villages. New assets are selected via a community-wide participatory process and are built through asset-creation activities tied to cash or in-kind support. Beneficiary households for FFA activities are targeted through a community-based participatory planning (CBPP) process. Households are categorized into four socioeconomic groups: very poor, poor, average, and well-off. Households in the very poor and poor categories are eligible to participate in FFA activities. They are paid approximately USD 35 per month (CFA 19,500) for approximately

10 World Food Programme. 2020. Mali Country Strategic Plan (2020–2024). [Link]

three months to work on the assets, typically between March and June before the rainy season, but the period can be extended as needed.

- *The nutrition/health component* aims to prevent malnutrition through a combination of nutrition-specific and sensitive interventions (i.e., a lifecycle approach) that seeks to improve the availability, access, and use of nutrient-dense food and the adoption of key nutrition and healthy family practices. To do so, the WFP provides food supplements to households with children under two years old, and to pregnant or lactating women. This is complemented with intensive capacity-building activities at the community level on how to develop local initiatives that can improve community feeding practices. The WFP also provides incentives to pregnant or lactating women to boost attendance at nutrition sensitization sessions, and to antenatal and postnatal care in health facilities. This component is implemented in synergy with the prevention and treatment of wasting through health facilities and the general food assistance platform. Synergy is also developed with the FFA and SAMS components to nutritionally optimize food production across different assets and support the development of a nutrition-sensitive value chain that increases the availability of locally produced nutritious foods. All of these activities are backed by large sensitization campaigns to promote good practices related to feeding, nutrition, health, and hygiene for infants and young children.
 - *The smallholder agriculture market support (SAMS) component* aims to complement FFA activities by supporting smallholders in managing assets and increasing their incomes through related activities, such as improving storage (reducing post-harvest losses), agri-food processing, capacity-building, and market access facilitation.
 - *The school feeding component* aims to increase access to education and school retention rates by providing nutritious school meals and support to adolescent girls. Complementary activities, such as nutrition education, the creation of school gardens, or trainings on canteen management, leverage schools as a platform to contribute to food diversification and deliver messages on hygiene, family practices, and environmental stewardship. School feeding is a government-led programme, which the WFP currently implements in 650 schools.
 - *The lean season support component* is unconditional cash/food assistance provided to extreme poor households to offset the peak hunger and malnutrition period. It amounts to approximately USD 52 (CFA 30,400) for two or three months between June and August. Lean season support helps households to meet their gaps in food needs during the lean season. The support may only be provided in the first year of the resilience programme.
16. Among these components, FFA is an entry point for targeting and implementing the other activities to strengthen households' and community resilience capacities. The FFA programme guidance manual describes the core functions of FFA,¹¹ which include, simultaneously, the direct provision of food or cash-based transfers to meet the consumption needs of the most vulnerable (i.e., short-term access to food), as well as the construction/development of household and community assets that reduce the risk of

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