



## Sahel Social Cohesion Research in Burkina Faso and Niger: Summary of Findings



World Food Programme

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# WFP's resilience programme in the Sahel contributes to social cohesion and peace beyond food security

## Context and background

**The Sahel region is one of the most structurally vulnerable and food-insecure regions in Africa.**

It faces multiple challenges: high levels of acute and chronic food insecurity and malnutrition, unequal access to basic social services, conflict and displacement, political instability, economic shocks, and an environment threatened by land degradation and climate change.

**In 2018, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and partners launched an innovative programme – the Sahel Integrated Resilience Programme – to help individuals, communities and governments in addressing these challenges and boosting their resilience across five countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. From 2018, WFP**

and its partners invested into the resilience of 3 million people in over 2,750 villages with integrated resilience activities.

**In the same period, security has deteriorated drastically in the Sahel.** According to ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project), the number of fatalities associated with violent events in the five countries increased from around 2,800 in 2018 to nearly 11,000 in 2022. Insecurity is not only increasing in intensity, but also in terms of its geographic extent, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. As a result, the Sahel now hosts over 3 million internally displaced people and over 1 million refugees and asylum seekers.

Alongside forcing people to flee their homes, **insecurity has serious repercussions on people's livelihoods and food security**, such as inaccessibility of agricultural

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and pastoral production areas, disruption of economic activities or complete loss of livelihoods, limited access to production factors such as labour and agricultural inputs, and closure or limited functioning of health services, schools and markets. At the same time, land and resource-related conflict is one of the root causes of violence across the region, and increasingly intensified because of population growth, land degradation and climate change.

**In this context, WFP is committed to improving the prospects for peace and enhance resilience to conflict.** At the local level, this requires WFP to leverage its operations to strengthen social cohesion, i.e., the levels of trust, respect, tolerance, solidarity and equal opportunities in a society.

### Sahel Social Cohesion Research in Burkina Faso and Niger

The latest research by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), conducted in collaboration with WFP and the Institute for Peace and Development, titled “Sahel Social Cohesion Research in Burkina Faso and Niger” highlights how WFP’s interventions are strengthening social cohesion in the region.

The study entailed mostly qualitative research in Burkina Faso and Niger, with about 250 Key Informant Interviews and 25 Focus Group Discussions involving participating

and neighboring communities, local government, cooperating partners, and WFP field staff. Qualitative data collection was complemented with a light quantitative survey.

The report details how WFP’s interventions go beyond food security. In particular by supporting the rehabilitation of lands, construction of water-harvesting and retention structures, reforestation and protection of farmlands and pastures, and soil fertility improvement interventions, WFP is supporting communities in reducing tension over natural resources, promoting equitable access to them and improving food security in a region with high levels of conflict and insecurity.

In summary, the study found that:

- 1 Planning and management of activities allowed to develop a common vision.** Participatory planning exercises and various programme-linked decision-making or consultation forums created spaces of encounter and allowed to develop a common vision within and between communities as well as with community leaders, traditional chiefs, subnational government services, etc
- 2 Collective action strengthened trust between different groups.** Resilience activities requiring collective action, such as the development of communal assets, brought individuals and groups of different identities together, reducing stereotypes and suspicions



WFP’s resilience programme in the Sahel contributes to social cohesion



as well as enabling stronger bonds and bridges within and between communities. This was instrumental in creating greater trust between different ethnic, religious, livelihood, gender and age groups, as well as host and displaced communities.

**3 Improved relationships between farmers and herders.** Asset creation activities focused on restoring degraded environments enhanced natural resource supply and management, reducing conflicts between farmers and herders and allowing them to find ground for symbiotic relations.

**4 Women expressed a sense of empowerment.** Women expressed a sense of empowerment and rapprochement with community leaders through increased participation in community planning, decision-making and economic life as a result of livelihood and nutrition activities.

**5 New opportunities reduced distress migration and increased youth involvement.** Asset creation and livelihood support activities created new economic opportunities, reducing outmigration, increasing involvement of youth in community life, and enhancing trust between youth and elders.

**6 More equitable access to natural resources and communal assets.** Participation of different identity groups in resilience activities improved equitable access to natural resources and communal assets. Support for local resource management structures and/or the institutionalization of asset management and feedback & complaints committees helped to address grievances and reduce tension. However, the findings are not as clear cut for women and access does not necessarily translate into ownership.

## Testimonies from participants of the study

### Point 1. Planning and management of activities allowed to develop a common vision.

“The interaction between community members and their leaders is much better because the leaders no longer sideline the community and [now] involve them in local issues. They understand that it is together that we can succeed.”  
*Community-level participant from Niger.*

“Before the arrival of the WFP we did not meet at the chief’s place if it was not during traditional festivals, that is to say periodically but thanks to the activities implemented by the WFP, we cannot go 10 days without meeting.” *Community-level participant from Burkina Faso.*

### Point 2. Collective action strengthened trust between different groups.

“By initiating these activities, the members of our community and those of other communities got to know each other, putting aside their ethnicity to be a single community. No doubt this has positive consequences for social cohesion.” *Community-level participant from Niger.*

“WFP activities have positively impacted relations between IDPs and villagers. Thanks to the activities they carry out together, the displaced people feel integrated into the ranks of the community, there is a certain familiarity between them, thus improving their relationship.” *Community-level participant from Burkina Faso.*

### Point 3. Improved relationships between farmers and herders

"Relations between farmers and herders have improved because there is social cohesion between them. Animals have a place of grazing and no longer spoil farmers' fields. There is better collaboration between us." *Community-level participant from Burkina Faso.*

"WFP has developed very rich grazing areas, the animals of the herders no longer need to graze in the farmers' fields, so there is no longer any source of tension." *Community-level participant from Burkina Faso.*



### Point 4. Women expressed a sense of empowerment

"Before, the women did not go to the assemblies that were held at the homes of the elders, but now following this program, they are no longer afraid to go to their elders and even to exchange with them" *Community-level participant from Burkina Faso.*

"Women have become aware of the role they can play in the development of their communities based on economic activities and active participation in decision-making bodies. Today, there are rare situations where women remain silent in the face of an attempt to exclude them." *Community-level participant from Niger.*

### Point 5. New opportunities reduced distress migration and increased youth involvement

"Young people no longer go on exodus, it reduces youth banditry and prevents young people from going to join the armed troops, respecting the elders." *Community-level participant from Niger.*

"WFP's activities have led to "the reduction of the exodus of young people; before the young people go on an exodus because they have no work to do but thanks to the program they will stay because it allows them to have money but also to contribute to the development of their locality." *Participant comprised within WFP program implementer, such as WFP field staff.*

### Point 6. More equitable access to natural resources and communal assets

"Equity of access is guaranteed by the rules [and] the decisions of the various committees because they clearly stipulate that each member of the community has the right to have access to the infrastructures installed." *Community-level participant from Burkina Faso.*

"WFP's procedure for implementing its activities means that all (ethnic) groups are represented in community activities, which makes access [to resources] as equitable as possible." *Community-level participant from Niger.*

#### Read the full working paper:

<https://www.ifpri.org/publication/sahel-social-cohesion-research-burkina-faso-and-niger-working-paper>

#### Read the research brief:

<https://www.ifpri.org/publication/sahel-social-cohesion-research-burkina-faso-and-niger-research-brief>

#### Find out more about WFP's Integrated Resilience Programme

<https://www.wfp.org/publications/integrated-resilience-sahel>

**Photo page 1:** WFP/Richard Mbouet

**Photos pages 2-4:** WFP/Evelyn Fey

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