

Rome-based agencies plan of action for the Sahel

Strengthening the resilience of the livelihoods of most vulnerable populations for food security, nutrition and sustained peace in the Sahel

1. The three Rome-based agencies (RBAs) have agreed on this plan of action to enhance their support for the people of the Sahel in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This plan of action is based on the strategic objectives and programmes of the RBAs in the Sahel, with a view to scaling up collaboration in support of food-insecure and otherwise vulnerable populations in the region. The joint plan proposes to operationalize an “integrated package” of RBA complementary approaches, tools and services that support governments’ efforts to: i) respond to the needs of vulnerable communities; ii) address the root causes of vulnerabilities; and iii) establish the economic and social foundations for sustained peace and equitable development.
2. This plan is primarily framed within the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and represents the RBA contribution to the 2018–2030 “United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel”, which is the principal United Nations vehicle for contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Sahel. It is also intended to complement the development plans and strategies of individual Sahelian countries as well as regional plans and strategies.

Added value of Rome-based agency collaboration

3. The RBAs, with their shared interest in advancing, among other things, food security, proper nutrition, agricultural productivity and rural development, can significantly contribute to the international, regional, national and local efforts to make the Sahel a prosperous, resilient and stable region and bridge the gap between humanitarian assistance and development efforts. Furthermore, RBA collaboration will contribute to more coherence and strengthened effectiveness of resilience measures. This can best be achieved through a combination of coherent agency-specific activities, coordinated RBA programmes, collaboration and partnerships with other actors – both within and outside the United Nations – with a particular focus on the Permanent Interstate Committee for drought control in the Sahel (CILSS), the G5-Sahel, the Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative-Sahel (AGIR) and the Sahel Alliance.
4. This plan of action aims to further operationalize, in the specific context of the Sahel, the 2015 “RBA conceptual framework for strengthening resilience for food security and nutrition”,¹ which provides the foundations and the vision for increased RBA collaboration and demonstrates how the RBAs can seek to build convergences and synergies across existing approaches and interventions. It builds on the positive outcomes of ongoing RBA collaboration in the region, as highlighted during the August 2018 principals’ visit to the Niger and presented in the November 2018 progress report on RBA collaboration.²
5. As demonstrated by the example of the Niger, joint RBA work can have a significant impact on breaking the cycle of disasters, conflicts, hunger and undernutrition, and contribute to economic development and stability. Where the RBAs have joined forces in the Niger, production has increased, the levels of migration have decreased and people, including the poorest, have been able to diversify their livelihoods and diets hence improving food security and nutrition. This has translated into more jobs and income also for youth

¹<http://www.fao.org/resilience/resources/resources-detail/en/c/335336/>.

² FAO 125th session of the Programme Committee and 173rd session of the Finance Committee, Rome, 12 November 2018.

and makes for a safer and more prosperous community. The RBAs' plan of action for the Sahel builds on proven good practices that yield greater results and impacts, to apply them across the Sahel.

6. In the Sahel, the RBAs are committed to engage in coordinated actions as the lead group of agencies within the United Nations system to deliver SDG 2 on zero hunger, also taking into account the RBA Conceptual Framework for Collaboration and Partnership, the United Nations reform, the United Nations Common Guidance on Helping Build Resilient Societies, while contributing to the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

The context

7. The geographical priority focus is the five countries of the G5 (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger) and Senegal (G5+1), while efforts will also undergo to support the other four countries included in the UNISS support plan (Nigeria, Cameroon, the Gambia and Guinea).³
8. In the Sahel region, a large part of which is drylands, agriculture is the single most important contributor to economic and social development and provides the bulk of employment. Up to 70 percent of the population and 80 percent of the poorest depend on the agricultural sector for their livelihoods, jobs, income, food security and well-being. The region has among the highest poverty and malnutrition rates in the world and is constantly affected and threatened by a multiplicity of crises and risks: climate extremes and weather variability (i.e. drought, floods, erratic rains, etc.); degraded ecosystems with increasing demand for finite natural resources; plant pests and diseases (i.e. locust and fall armyworm); animal diseases (i.e. small ruminant pest); conflicts, resulting in food security and nutrition crises, displacement of people and human rights violations; and limited domestic resources for addressing these challenges. Additionally, the security situation is challenging especially in cross-border areas, where security is extremely volatile.
9. The Sahelian population (about 80 million people in the G5+1 countries) is expected to double by 2050. In 2018, around 2 million children suffered from acute malnutrition in the Sahel, with some areas of Chad, Mauritania and the Niger exceeding the 15 percent emergency threshold. The Cadre harmonisé food insecurity projections for the 2019 lean season (June to August) indicate that 3.8 million people are still at risk of severe food insecurity.
10. Combating hunger, food insecurity, malnutrition and poverty through supporting the development of more resilient livelihoods for the people of the Sahel requires significant and convergent investments in the agricultural sector and beyond. Furthermore, all activities must address key cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, nutrition, governance, conflict sensitivity, land tenure and land use, access to water and other renewable natural resources, youth employment, value chains, disaster risk reduction and climate change.

The plan of action

I. RBA joint objectives

11. Given the many challenges that the people of the Sahel face, the RBAs agree to take a coherent and coordinated approach based on the following objectives:
 - i) strengthen the living conditions of vulnerable populations through better access to food, quality basic services and infrastructure;

³https://www.un.org/africarenewal/sites/www.un.org.africarenewal/files/English%20Summary%20Report_0.pdf.

- ii) address the root causes of vulnerabilities of rural communities, including vulnerabilities in the face of disaster and climate risks to enhance the resilience of livelihoods and food security and nutrition; and
- iii) improve social inclusion and gender disparities, peaceful dialogue and natural resource conflict management to contribute to building and sustaining peace.

II. Process of RBA collaboration

12. The RBA collaboration in the Sahel, in line with the RBA conceptual framework for strengthening resilience, will build on the many years of working together on a variety of concrete interventions as well as the shared understanding of the policy constraints and risks faced by vulnerable populations. Going forward, the RBA plan of action will revolve around the following six intrinsically linked pillars:
 - continuous policy dialogue;
 - shared risk analysis and common geographic targeting;
 - joint planning and programming built on agreed collective outcomes or results (including working together on community-based participatory planning);
 - coordinated implementation, supervision and reporting;
 - coherent measuring of impact on strengthening resilience; and
 - complementary monitoring, evaluation, learning and knowledge sharing.

III. RBA principles of engagement

13. The RBAs' engagement builds on the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between them in June 2018 that seeks to enhance their joint contribution towards the 2030 Agenda. The MoU has been inspired by their common vision that achieving food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture requires comprehensive and holistic approaches to the set of closely interlinked issues and linkages to many other parts of the 2030 Agenda.
14. The RBAs' approach to strengthening resilience aims at enhancing livelihood's resilience, food security, and nutrition outcomes along the three core resilience capacities (absorptive, adaptive and transformative). It focuses on reducing needs and root causes of vulnerabilities, enhancing specific household, community and institutional capacities and assets in prevention to, anticipation of and in response to shocks and stressors that undermine the agricultural livelihoods, food security and nutrition of vulnerable people.
15. RBA collaboration is guided by six principles (as per the RBA conceptual framework of 2015), reflecting the joint understanding and approach of the three agencies to support the resilience of individuals, households and communities, in partnership with and in support of other stakeholders, including people affected by shocks, stressors and crises, national and local authorities and other international partners:
 - i) local and national ownership and leadership;
 - ii) multi-stakeholder approach;
 - iii) combining humanitarian relief and development (and working towards improved prospects of peace);
 - iv) focus on the most vulnerable people;
 - v) mainstreaming risk-sensitive approaches; and
 - vi) aiming for sustained impact.

16. These principles form the understanding, scope, process, results/outcomes and modalities for the RBAs to support resilience building, taking into account their specific mandates and the comparative advantages of each of the agencies, in working together towards the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and for the overall achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The RBA approach is practical and flexible. It acknowledges the complexity of the three agencies working together and recognizes that cooperation is not feasible nor desirable in every context. It also recognizes that synergies can be leveraged with other agencies' collaboration, as well as with other strategic partners, both within and outside the United Nations system, depending on contexts. For instance, FAO, WFP and the G5 Sahel signed in February 2018 an MoU for joint action to strengthen resilience in the G5 Sahel countries. It is translated in operational coalitions at country level which involve different partners. In addition, regionally targeted instruments to deliver greater impact will build upon the existing programmes of loans and grants. For example, in close coordination with the G5 Sahel Secretariat, Member States and other regional and national stakeholders, IFAD is financing a number of investment programmes in the Sahelian countries, which also promote its mainstreaming priorities (youth employment, women empowerment, resilience to climate change, nutrition-sensitive food systems) and business model. These investments and interventions complement the MoU and play a critical role in building an integrated transition between a response to emergency crises (driven by conflict, famine and food insecurity, droughts and other calamities) and longer-term development where an effective RBA partnership is key.

IV. Reporting

17. The RBAs will report on RBA collaboration and the joint activities implemented as part of this plan of action in an annual progress report to the RBA Governing Bodies. This report will highlight how the three agencies are working together in specific contexts and showcase examples of strengthened coordination efforts under the six pillars of RBA collaboration.
18. Examples of such reports for Mauritania and the Niger are attached. Similar reports will be drafted for the other Sahel countries and updated annually.

RBA collaboration: Mauritania

Under the 2018–2022 Sustainable Development Partnership Framework, FAO and WFP committed to focusing on “convergence zones”. Both agencies agreed to leverage their common geographic prioritization criteria and comparative advantages to layer their interventions in the same localities and achieve greater impact. This approach is a concrete operationalization of the RBA resilience framework and New Way of Working and is in line with the UNISS and support plan. WFP and FAO are working on the elaboration of a country-level MoU. In 2018, WFP and FAO carried out a joint crop and food security assessment mission.

In addition, WFP and IFAD are seeking operational synergies, following the approval of IFAD’s country strategic opportunities programme and the endorsement of WFP’s country strategic plan. Both agencies are working on the elaboration of a country-level MoU and intend to promote large-scale integrated community-based resilience packages. The implementation of complementary interventions within the same localities will be sought between IFAD’s small community-based infrastructure programmes (PASK II and PROGRESS) and WFP’s broader resilience package including food-for-assets, school meals, and food and nutrition assistance. Opportunities for joint programming will be identified through participatory planning (three-pronged approach). A mapping of IFAD-WFP common areas of intervention is underway.

The RBAs were part of the steering committee which oversaw and validated the zero hunger strategic review in December 2017.

WFP and FAO are co-chairing the Food Security Sector, whereby they ensure a smooth and regular exchange of food security and nutrition information and consolidate the sector’s inputs to the United Nations development assistance framework (UNDAF). FAO and WFP also jointly support the follow-up of the agropastoral season (three times a year) through a recently created “specialized technical group”.

FAO, the United Nations Children’s Fund and WFP implemented a project that was completed from 2012–2016. It was leveraging on the added value of each agency to strengthen economic capacities, nutrition services and social safety nets in Assaba and Guidimakha regions. Both WFP and FAO have also supported the elaboration and roll-out of governmental policies and strategies in the country (food security, agriculture, livestock, fishing, nutrition, school feeding, etc.), as well as the elaboration of the 2016–2030 Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity (SCAPP). Finally, FAO has actively participated in the 3PA (three-pronged approach) trainings organized by WFP in 2016 (seasonal livelihoods programming) and 2017 (community-based participatory planning).

RBA collaboration: the Niger

In the Niger, FAO, IFAD and WFP are working together to support the Government to achieve zero hunger and eradicate poverty. The partnership draws a special focus on leaving no one behind and reaching those furthest behind first, while ensuring interlinkages with the other SDGs.

The RBA partnership is aligned with the Niger UNDAF, in support of the country's 3N initiative (*Nigeriens Nourish Nigeriens*) that aims at increasing resilience to food crises and reducing poverty. It is aligned with the joint United Nations-Government "*communes de convergence*" approach to create programmatic, thematic and geographical synergies for resilience. The RBA partnership builds on the strengths and added value of each agency to ensure that a comprehensive, holistic and complementary response is provided to support the Government's efforts to achieve zero hunger.

Inventory of past and ongoing activities of the Rome-based agencies in the Niger

The RBAs are working within the United Nations country team for the delivery of the 2030 Agenda through the achievement of SDGs, particularly those related to poverty (SDG 1), hunger and food security (SDG 2), climate change (SDG 13) and ecosystem sustainability (SDG 15). Regarding SDG 2 "zero hunger", the following joint initiatives have been implemented in recent years:

- i) **"Strengthening resilience of vulnerable households to food insecurity in the Niger"** is the first joint resilience programme being implemented by FAO and WFP since 2013 thanks to regular contributions from France. The cumulative funds received from 2013 to 2019 reach euro 5 million;
- ii) **"Operationalizing partnerships for resilience building in the Niger (2014-2017)"**: a joint FAO-WFP project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USD 3 million) with a systematic and integrated land rehabilitation approach taking into account different ecologic units of watershed;
- iii) **"Purchase from Africans for Africa (PAA)"** (2012-2016) a joint FAO and WFP project funded by Brazil and the Department for International Development (United Kingdom) (USD 1.1 million) aiming at strengthening the value chain and leveraging the purchasing power and operational capacities of United Nations agencies; a national strategy for local purchases from smallholder farmers was formulated by the Niger Government;
- iv) **"RBA partnership for complementary resilience actions in protracted crisis contexts"** (2016-2020): a joint FAO, IFAD and WFP project funded by Canada (over CAD 15 million);
- v) **"Joint Program Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (RWEE)"** (2012-2018): a joint FAO, IFAD, WFP and UN-Women project funded by Norway (USD 245,482 in 2014-2015) and by Sweden (USD 1,143 257 in 2015-2018).

For these initiatives, FAO and IFAD focus on a long-term response in their respective technical expertise, WFP provides targeted food assistance to vulnerable people to meet their needs and support them in creating productive assets. FAO complements asset creation by providing improved seed varieties, technical advice to boost agricultural and pastoral production and small-scale irrigation systems. IFAD interventions include construction of infrastructure such as rural feeder roads, small dams, etc., thus contributing to creating an enabling environment for long-term agricultural development.

As for the RWEE programme, the RBAs also partner with UN-Women to empower rural women: FAO provides assistance on agriculture and food security through farmer field schools, nutritional education; IFAD provides livelihood support and WFP purchases the food produced by the women to supply the school canteens. UN-Women provides a multifunctional platform, capacity development and undertakes gender analysis.