Rehabilitation and development of productivity of degraded lands

Context
The Dargué site is located in the commune of Chadakori, one of the 35 commune de convergences prioritised by the High Commissioner of the “les Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens” (3N) initiative (HC3N) to converge the efforts of humanitarian and development actors to build the resilience of the vulnerable communes. The main livelihoods of this site are agriculture, livestock, and small trade. In Dargué, land degradation, amongst others, was one of the biggest problems that hindered agricultural production and resilience of the population. Rainfall deficits, weak capacities of access to agricultural techniques and tools and rapid population growth are also the major constraints of the communities.

Sustainability and replication
Close support of the physical activities by capacity development as well as by creation of a management system contributed to the sustainable continuation of the activities. The establishment of the local management committee of the rehabilitated pastures areas ensured better coordination and regular monitoring as well as implementation of the site management plan with support of the technical services, the mayor, and the community members both female and male. The study of RECA fond that the management committee played a significant role to ensure the protection and the management of the rehabilitated lands. The participatory community based planning and awareness of the community and of the management committee create the conditions for sustainable ownership and contribute to the use and the sustainable management of the assets created by the communities. The beneficiaries created a local group for the fight against the degraded lands “Yakin Hako”. This local expertise was used several times by the commune for the rehabilitation of the land.

It is also observed that the agricultural techniques acquired by the beneficiaries (zai planting pits, semicircular bunds) have been replicated by the community members in the other sites (outside of the project sites) on about 100 ha (between 2014 and 2015).

Conclusion
The scheme of the collaboration of FAO, IFAD and WFP as applied has demonstrated interesting results and the factors of success of the collaboration should be systematically based on other intervention sites. In Dargué, the three agencies should keep engaging in the very critical work of beneficiary empowerment and definition of the progressive exit strategy well-articulated and coordinated by:
- Seeking complementarities in other domains such as nutrition and education;
- Consolidating the experiences gained namely by reinforcing the capacities of technical services to ensure their ownership of site management plan;
- Developing women’s leadership;
- Strengthening the income generating activities through a broad range of trainings and technical supports;
- Defining the linkage between the activities in the way to develop a solid exit strategy and avoid the scattering and the duplication of the activities for the replication of the collaboration.

Summary of the intervention
The idea of the collaboration was born in 2012 when IFAD and WFP started to work together in the area of rehabilitation and development of the degraded lands. This fruitful experience of the collaboration has been consolidated over the years and perpetuated and expanded through different projects of IFAD and WFP and then of FAO from 2013. Currently the three agencies collaborated with AREN (partner NGO) and technical services to deliver an integrated package of multi-sectorial activities for the sustainable resilience building. The intervention targets the vulnerable households, primary school pupils, children, pregnant women and lactating mothers.
**Approach**

Based on the joint participatory diagnosis and planning under the leadership of the Government, the Rome Based Agencies – FAO, IFAD and WFP, developed an operational plan which frames the interventions and defines the roles and responsibilities to deliver an integrated package to the beneficiaries as shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interagency programs</th>
<th>Project-level activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation of degraded lands through Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) for asset creation (Zai planting pits for the agricultural lands; semi-circular bunds for the pastoral lands)</td>
<td>Provision of equipment to management committees for the protection of the rehabilitated land; agricultural advice support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of productivities of the rehabilitated lands (seeding of grasses on the pastoral areas; provision of seeds for the rehabilitated agricultural lands; tree plantation; agricultural and pastoral technical supports)</td>
<td>Technical support and advice including technical expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchase of agricultural products from smallholder farmers for the food assistance operation of WFP (school meals)</td>
<td>Agricultural advice support including technical expertise</td>
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<td>Construction of agricultural and pastoral seed and input banks (Banque d’Intérêts Agricoles (BIA) and banque de semences pastorales)</td>
<td>Development of value chain through the improvement of the capacities of the producers Support for the Farmer and pastoral field schools; training of smallholder farmers</td>
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<td>Reinforcement of the smallholder farmers’ capacities (trainings on the use of PICS bags (for beans), management skills, elaboration of receipts etc.)</td>
<td>Prevention of malnutrition; treatment of moderate acute malnutrition; community based screening of acute malnutrition</td>
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<td>Sensitisation on use and consumption of locally produced nutritious foods and nutritious domestic foods</td>
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<td>Support to the school meal at primary schools (with locally purchased foods); installation of grain mills around these schools for the school meals and domestic consumption</td>
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<td>School gardens</td>
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<td>Sensitisation on the key family practices</td>
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<td>Unconditional cash transfer, Blanket supplementary feeding (BSF)</td>
<td>Distribution of seeds (vegetables and other irrigation crops)</td>
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**Achieved results**

The RBA collaboration in Darguè has achieved considerable results in the following domains:

- Rehabilitation and development of 1,500 ha of land with a significant improvement of the agricultural production, beyond 1 ton per hectare in the farms rehabilitated and fodder crops (7,904 units of livestock per day for more than 50.9 tons of dry matters);
- Return of fauna owing to the systematic production development of the rehabilitated lands;
- Reinforcement of the social cohesion through the participatory planning and the community management of the activities. According to the voices from the field, they have created a community credit which allowed to recover the village tax of Darguè in 2015;
- Women’s empowerment through the development of income generating activities such as sales of pastoral seeds (more than 4 million FCFA of gain) and of straws (thanks to the land rehabilitation) and establishment of small commerce owing to the stabilisation acquired by transfer;
- Building of livestock owing to the generated revenue throughout the programme, contributing to generate further revenue and to women’s empowerment. On the pastoral sites, the total gains of the community is estimated more than 10 million FCFA for three years; 3 out of 5 female beneficiaries developed income generating activities and bought 1 to 2 animals;
- Improvement of health and nutrition: actions against malnutrition and the sensitisation on the key family practices has enabled an improvement of the nutrition status of children, a good use of family planning (37% against 27% of the national average), and improvement of the coverage of vaccination (marked by the head of integrated health center of Darguè);
- Reduced adoption of negative coping strategies, such as seasonal migration, and improvement of the food quality and diversification (milk and meat) and frequency of food consumption as found by the analysis of LASDEL;
- Reduction of impact of floods on farm lands and the village which used to be constantly flooded before the rehabilitation of lands;
- Improvement of the socio-economic status of the very poor beneficiary households for the land rehabilitation activities founds by several studies.

**Factors of success, constraints and lessons learned**

In the view of very positive tendencies observed, the RBA have decided to capitalise this successful experience in order to extract good practices of the collaboration at the field level with an analysis of impacts on beneficiaries and of the added value brought by the collaboration, and to identify the perspectives of scaling up the practices in the future.

The factors of success in this collaboration are the following:

- **Joint objective and vision.** This enabled to frame the roles and the responsibilities of the agencies and to systematise and coordinate the collaborations with the actors such as decentralised technical services, micro finance institutions and implementing partners with a smooth internal and external coordination framework.
- **Common framework of operational planning amongst three agencies** allowing to ensure the continuum between emergency and development. A joint operational plan at the regional level covering 12 communes enabled to ensure the general operational coordination of the RBA, framing the cost repartition, the roles and the responsibilities of each agency, the targeting of the beneficiaries, and the selection of implementing partners. This operational planning is also applied at the site level to ensure effective integration and coordination of the interventions and the delivery of a holistic and integrated package;
- **Integration of a participatory planning approach through the Seasonal Livelihood Programming (SLP) and Community Based Participatory Planning (CBPP).** Together with the government and partners, the community applied the SLP at the commune of Chadakori and the CBPP at Darguè to identify the needs and priorities, taking into account the characteristics of agro ecologies of the land, the seasonality of the livelihoods, risk management and gender aspects. This enabled to obtain decent and common comprehension of the local context and to develop a framework of joint planning integrating the interventions of three agencies and cooperating partners and responding to the needs and priorities. This allowed also to prioritise the