



World Food Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Responding to the 2022 food crisis in the Sahel

Leveraging and strengthening social protection to mitigate the impact of current and future crises

August 2022

In 2022, the West Africa region and more particularly the Sahel, is experiencing a dramatic deterioration of the food and nutrition security situation due to rainfall deficits in 2021, intensifying conflict, and the enduring economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by the global ramifications of the Ukraine crisis.



Even before the onset of the Ukraine crisis, the Sahel region was already heading towards a major food and nutrition security crisis and facing the highest levels of food insecurity since the launch of the Cadre Harmonisé (CH) in 2014, with **38 million people projected to be food insecure.**

Sahelian countries face a major food security and nutrition crisis which is aggravated by the impacts of the crisis in Ukraine, notably disrupted supply chains, leading to shortages in the availability of grains and fertilizers, and inflation, including increased prices of basic food commodities.

Poor and food-insecure households suffer disproportionately from the impact of shocks of all nature. In a context like the Sahel, poverty and food insecurity are high and pervasive, and intertwine with recurring shocks, trapping millions in recurring protracted food crises. The impacts of the Ukraine crisis are particularly felt in the region through disrupted supply chains, increased inflation, and increased prices of basic food commodities.

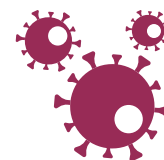
Prices rose between 33 to 70 percent by March 2022, as compared to last year in the region, which implicates an even more reduced purchasing power

of all households, but exponentially the already poor households, affecting their food security and nutrition even more. In a context of recurrent shocks, persistent stressors and structural vulnerabilities, WFP is committed to seizing opportunities to build the resilience of individuals, communities, and systems and address the root causes of vulnerability while at the same time ensuring immediate impact on those most affected.

Both the COVID-19 crisis as well as the current Ukraine crisis have however shown the weaknesses and gaps in the current social protection systems to respond effectively and comprehensively to these shocks. It is therefore crucial that strengthening of social protection systems is part of the response and needs to be prioritized. **Effective social protection delivery as well as system building** should therefore go hand-in hand in the response to global food crisis, in order to reach the dramatically increased needs of the population in the Sahel region and simultaneously enhance the structural underlying causes of food security and vulnerability.



Existing social protection systems in the Sahel are critical investments to respond to this year's food security and nutrition crisis while strengthening the resilience of populations



Year-round, social protection programmes and benefits can play a crucial role in supporting people better manage and cope with risks and shocks. The primary function of social protection is to shield people from the risks that they face across the life cycle. Access to regular social protection benefits supports households to smooth their consumption over time and avoid resorting to negative coping strategies to mitigate the impact of shocks, thus creating a buffer effect. Adequate and comprehensive social protection, especially when implemented in synergy with other sectoral interventions, can also have promotive functions helping lift people out of poverty and address some of the root causes of vulnerability.

In the face of a large shock such as the current global food crisis, **social protection systems serve as a vehicle to deliver crisis response and offer a channel to deliver a response in an effective and timely manner.** Using existing programmes, social protection can be leveraged and expanded to deliver emergency relief to existing or new beneficiaries. Already, in response to the COVID-19, WFP has contributed to an unprecedented expansion of social protection programmes in Sahel, and continues to do so for the global food crisis response.

Social protection investments are growing in the West Africa region, with all countries having at least one social safety net in place, mainly school feeding or social cash transfers. Coverage is however critically low, with **only about 12 percent of the population receiving at least one social protection benefit,** compared with 47 percent globally. Given the risk exposure of the region and the frequency of shocks, investing in social protection systems is essential to enhance resilience, and protect and prevent people from further deprivation in the face of predictable, recurrent, and protracted crises.

LESSONS FROM THE COVID-19 RESPONSE THROUGH SOCIAL PROTECTION

In Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, WFP and UNICEF are supporting the government to reach an additional **1.8 million people in response to COVID-19,** with support from Germany's BMZ and KfW. We are looking to extend our support to the same governments to address the socioeconomic impacts of the Ukraine crisis and reach an additional 1.2 million people. As part of our support, we are supporting government systems to become more shock responsive, so that national systems can take over part of this response and contribute to building peoples' resilience.



WFP's expertise spans across all pillars of social protection systems

WFP's contributions to strengthening social protection are provided through both technical assistance and advisory services, delivering on behalf of governments, and complementarities with our own programming. WFP is committed to accelerating our efforts to support government systems, and support preparedness efforts to strengthen shock responsive systems at all levels.

AT THE POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

strong government leadership, robust legal and policy frameworks governing disaster risk management and social protection, supported by effective coordination mechanisms create a conducive enabling environment for shock responsive social protection. WFP is supporting bringing sectors together and ensure policy frameworks are informed by evidence and data on food security and nutrition.

- In **Mauritania**, WFP has supported the Government in setting up a national coordination body for prevention and response to food and nutritional crises. This mechanism is considered essential to enable the government to anticipate and act quickly in the event of a crisis and to provide adapted and concerted food and nutritional assistance to vulnerable populations. It will provide the country with an inclusive framework and procedures for assessing needs, developing and validating national response plans, and coordinating the actions of national actors and partners.

AT THE PROGRAMME LEVEL

to address poverty and vulnerability comprehensive social protection programmes and benefits need cover a high share of the populations with adequate and comprehensive benefits. These programmes should be risk-informed and have contingency plans and operations that allow benefits to be continuously and increasingly available, including before, during and in the aftermath of a shock. In the Sahel, WFP is supporting national programmes and built synergies with our regular interventions to expand the coverage and the comprehensiveness of social protection interventions.

- In **Niger**, since 2021 WFP aligns part of our emergency cash response with the Wadata-Talaka programme (flagship national safety net) in the response to COVID-19 and the subsequent crises (with support provided to more than 500,000 people and an additionally planned 300,000 people), shaping a shock responsive social protection response. In 2022, WFP is supporting the expansion of the "drought response pilot" from the national safety net to double its reach.
- In **Mali**, WFP is targeting Jigisemejiri's recipients (flagship national safety net) and providing pregnant and lactating women and children under 2 with nutritional support, supporting the affordability of nutritious foods for these vulnerable groups. We are also aligning with Jigisemejiri in 21 communes where the national programme isn't yet present to extend its benefits to affected populations.
- In Mauritania, WFP is supporting the expansion of the national El Maouna programme to support population severely affected by the lean season.
- In response to COVID-19, **across West Africa** WFP scaled up its school feeding operations to support 970,000 students and their communities through take-home rations and alternative delivery mechanisms.
- In **Burkina Faso**, WFP is working hand in hand with the Government to test the transition of our own beneficiaries into the national safety net programme.

DATA AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS SUPPORT

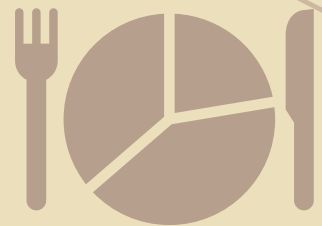
shock responsive social protection systems by better informing the design of programmes. Social registries hold a tremendous potential to serve as effective gateways for assistance, including in response to shocks if their coverage is sufficient and their data updated.

- Across the region, WFP is supporting **national early warning systems** development, which is key to predicting needs and promoting timely response.
- In addition to supporting evidence generation and analysis on how social registries capture **vulnerability** across the region, WFP is also supporting safer registries when it comes to **data sharing and protection**, for instance in The Gambia.

RISK FINANCING STRATEGIES

are key to sustainably supporting the scale-up of social protection programmes to respond to shocks. For instance, macro-insurance mechanisms, such as the ones provided by the **African Risk Capacity**, provide more sustainable financing pathways to Governments.

- In **Mauritania**, together with the World Bank, WFP is helping the Government develop a risk-financing strategy and supported the institutionalization of the National Food and Nutrition Crisis Response Fund.



ENSURING COMPLEMENTARITIES TO SUPPORT SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

WFP ensures **strong linkages with nutrition**, by supporting innovative programmatic approaches at household level and by influencing social protection systems to tackle the challenge of affordability of nutritious diets.

WFP is also **helping small farmers, themselves recipient of social assistance schemes, access micro-insurance mechanisms** to protect their livelihoods in the face of climate shocks.

The **Sahel resilience initiative**, which is based on participatory watershed planning, is triggering a variety of land rehabilitation activities and linking them to school meals, nutrition programmes, and support to smallholder farmers, and has demonstrated outcomes on regeneration of natural resources, economic empowerment, access to basic social services, and social cohesion.

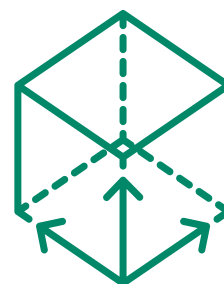
Building on these good practices and finding synergies between different approaches and interventions contributes to increasing the promotive functions of social protection.

WFP is committed to leveraging emergency response and deepening our technical assistance to support governments' systems

Efforts are needed to support governments' investments and **significantly increase the coverage, comprehensiveness, adequacy, and quality of social protection interventions in the West Africa region**. Such investments should also ensure preparedness and shock responsiveness, thereby addressing the root causes of vulnerability and breaking the cycle of humanitarian crises.

WFP is committed to supporting Governments, notably in the Sahel, to expand and strengthen their social protection systems to ensure that they safeguard and foster people's ability to meet their food security, nutrition, and associated essential needs, and to manage the risks and shocks they face.

Responding to government needs, WFP can leverage our emergency response as well as our longer-term engagement to support strengthening shock responsive social protection systems.



**COVERAGE,
COMPREHENSIVENESS,
ADEQUACY
AND QUALITY
OF SOCIAL PROTECTION
INTERVENTIONS**



In response to the 2022 food security and nutrition crisis in the Sahel, WFP can align and coordinate as much as possible and whenever possible with national social protection systems, to expand their reach and provide urgent assistance to affected populations.

Over the long term, our efforts will continue focusing on strengthening the contribution of social protection to resilience, food security and nutrition, by supporting governments' work and priorities.



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