



Responding to COVID-19 through Social Protection Systems in the Sahel

Annual Report
August 2021 - July 2022



KfW



Project Summary Information

The project, 'Responding to COVID-19 through Social Protection Systems in the Sahel', is funded by BMZ through KfW.

Countries	Mali, Mauritania, Niger
Project Title	Responding to COVID-19 through Social Protection Systems in the Sahel
WFP Grant References	Grant 10038974 & 10042537 (Mali) Grant 10038946 & 10042536 (Mauritania) Grant 10038957 & 10042538 (Niger) Grant 70001450 & 70001872 (RBD)
UNICEF Grant Reference	Grant SC 200554
Total Grant Amount (EUR)	€94 million (€47m UNICEF / €47m WFP)
Grant duration	36 months: 1 August 2020 - 31 July 2023
Type of report	Annual progress report
Reporting period	August 2021 – July 2022

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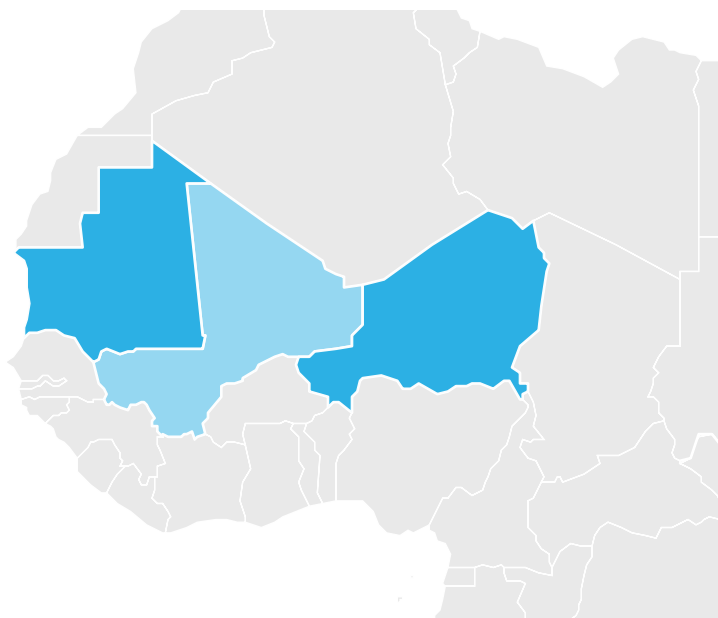
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Executive Summary

This joint project implemented by UNICEF and WFP supports the Governments of Mali, Mauritania and Niger to respond to the immediate massive needs generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and helps strengthen overall national capacities to adapt and build more shock-responsive, nutrition- and child-sensitive social protection systems moving forward.

The project initially had an 18-month duration up to January 2022 (Phase I) and was extended to July 2023 (Phase II) to provide additional support, given the continued socioeconomic impact of the pandemic combined with other shocks - including drought, conflict and rising prices. This annual report covers the last six months of Phase I and the first six months of Phase II (August 2021 - July 2022).



Three Outcomes

1. Delivery of cash transfers and complementary services
2. Systems Strengthening
3. Knowledge, Evidence and Learning

Delivery of Cash Transfers and Complementary Services

Cash transfers and complementary services are delivered to vulnerable people to absorb the social and economic impacts of multiple shocks. WFP and UNICEF take a two-track approach to deliver cash, in support of national social protection response plans.

Track 1

Cash transfers are provided via government social protection programmes

69%

110,372 households reached (700,000 individuals)



31%

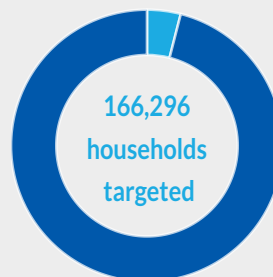
49,012 households remaining

Track 2

Cash transfers are delivered directly where national capacities are saturated, in line with national social protection response plans.

89%

148,155 households reached (1 million individuals)



11%

18,141 households remaining

By 31 July 2022, the joint project had reached over 1.7 million vulnerable people with cash assistance, 80 percent of the planned number of people to reach by the end of the project (July 2023). During the reporting period 658,242 people were reached (101,393 households).

Post-distribution monitoring surveys during Phase I have shown that cash has had a significant positive impact on the well-being of families by enabling them to meet basic household needs and improve their livelihoods. For instance, in Niger recipients of emergency COVID-19 cash transfers were nearly unanimous in stating that the transfers helped mitigate the effects of the pandemic, particularly through the purchase of food (97 percent) and the provision of other household food needs (45 percent). In Mauritania, monitoring surveys showed a 16 percent increase in the acceptable food consumption score among beneficiaries during the 2021 lean season.

Complementary Services



Blanket supplementary feeding



Nutrition sensitisation (infant and young child feeding practices)



Child protection interventions



Psychosocial support



Life and digital skills training for women and young people



Income generating activities



COVID-19 prevention messages

Complementary services are provided alongside cash, to maximise its impact on nutrition, ensure child protection, promote economic recovery and prevent the spread of COVID-19. During the reporting period, social workers, community nutrition officers, community health workers and women leaders were trained on promoting Infant and Young Child Feeding/Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition practices in communities with the project's cash beneficiaries. Households were also reached with information on key family practices, child protection messages, referrals, and psychosocial support provided by trained social workers. **So far, over 2.1 million people have been reached with messages on nutrition, health, and child protection.**

The project also worked with the governments of all three countries to design interventions, and select beneficiaries for the productive inclusion component of this project. This component targets households that already receive cash assistance and aims to create productive and economic inclusion opportunities for specific groups, such as women or persons living with a disability.

Systems Strengthening

Alongside delivery, the project provides technical assistance to governments to enhance the shock-responsiveness, nutrition- and child sensitiveness of national social protection systems. The project comprehensively supports all dimensions of national social protection systems and enhances their ability to address food security and nutrition challenges, sustainably scale up routine social protection programmes and assist existing or additional beneficiaries affected by COVID-19 or other shocks.

Snapshot of Achievements per Building Block



Delivery Systems

- Improved government delivery systems based on lessons from the project, e.g., for targeting and delivery modalities, feedback mechanisms and monitoring., drawing on learning from capitalisation workshops (e.g. in Niger) and findings from the near-complete analysis on the use of social registries for shock responses.
- Expanded and strengthened social protection . information systems, notably social registries, in the three countries. In Mauritania, the social registry has been extended to Nouakchott (covering vulnerable urban groups) and to include Malian refugees.



Programmes

- Identified lessons learned with Niger's Government on using the twin-track approach and implications for strengthening shock-response capacity
- Ongoing and scheduled reviews of complementary service packages across the three countries
- Completed preparations and launch of new drought-response initiative in Niger, as well as design of the cash plus approach under the productive cash component.



Policy

- Mauritania: provided technical support to launch the national social protection strategy revision process
- Mali: supported elaboration of the national social protection action plan



Finance

Supported governments in developing strategies and identifying mechanisms for risk financing. E.g., in Mauritania supported establishment of the National Food and Nutrition Crisis Response Fund, to give more predictability in funding the response to food and nutrition crises.



Coordination

- Mauritania: supported operationalisation of the new mechanism for the prevention of and response to food and nutrition crises
- Niger: launched analytical work to underpin measures for stronger coordination
- Mali: recruited technical experts to enhance coordination through harmonisation of tools and the establishment of a single coordination mechanism to replace existing structures

Knowledge, Evidence and Learning

During the reporting period, the delivery of cash assistance and parallel strengthening of national social protection systems allowed both agencies to identify or confirm several lessons learned:

1 Strengthening national social protection systems requires long-term support, a joint vision, and the involvement of multiple actors at national level.

The 2021 mid-term review highlighted the importance of supporting policy-level revisions, vision development, overall coordination of social protection and shock-responsive social protection, and financing. The 2021 Adaptive Social Protection update (held in March 2022 in collaboration with the German development cooperation and the World Bank) concluded with similar lessons and highlighted the criticality of governments having medium- to long-term financing frameworks that underpin coverage expansion of both routine safety net programmes and shock-responsive programmes. The multiplicity and protracted nature of overlapping shocks and crises in the three countries have re-emphasised the crucial role of routine social protection and safety net programmes that operate at scale, which is a prerequisite for an effective shock response.

2 The importance of supporting government-led coordination of social protection at policy, strategy and operational levels.

Lessons show that policy-level revisions and stronger coordination are critical for enhancing government leadership in defining a common vision and clear goals, roles, and responsibilities. The policy revision processes offer an excellent opportunity to support these goals. This is the backbone of a strong and coherent social protection sector, and the systems' strengthening approach of the joint project will have to facilitate and strengthen sector-wide coordination as a priority in the remainder of the project.

3 Joint project implementation has continued to generate valuable operational lessons and reflections on using social protection to respond to shocks.

One of the key lessons is the importance of providing longer term support to vulnerable households who are disproportionately affected by cyclical and other covariate shocks, as a prerequisite for effective shock-responsive social protection interventions.

Learning is captured and deepened through on-going analytical work and documentation of the experiences, including on the twin-track approach. During the reporting period, the project launched several studies at both country and regional levels that focus on strengthening national social protection systems and programmes, including analytical work on the use of social registries in national responses to COVID-19 and their adequacy to facilitate targeting across multiple vulnerabilities for social assistance programmes. All three countries are involved in system-wide assessments on the social protection systems' sensitivity to nutrition and child protection issues, as well as their responsiveness to shocks. In parallel, several country-level reviews and studies are underway or being prepared to capture programme impact and operational learning from delivery.

The project engaged with the Economic Community of West African States commissions in charge of social protection, governments and other partners to capitalise on lessons learned from the joint project to identify strengths and draw on recommendations to improve the strategic and operational areas of ongoing and planned social protection programmes and their ability to support responses to shocks, particularly the region's looming 2022 food and nutrition crisis.

