



Collective academics forces for a resilient Sahel

Sahel University Network (REUNIR) and WFP partner on human development and evidence generation building

Background – building coalitions for resilience

In support of national resilience strategies, WFP is promoting **integrated resilience programming** to invest in ecosystems, livelihoods, education, health and nutrition in the Sahel. Since 2018, an integrated package of activities – combining asset creation and livelihood activities, school feeding, nutrition interventions, capacity strengthening and seasonal support – is implemented across the region and at scale.

However, transformative change cannot be achieved by one organization or entity on its own – a comprehensive, multi-sector and multi-actor approach is needed to support people facing multiple risks and vulnerabilities in areas that are hit year after year, decade after decade by climate shocks.

That is why coalition building is a key element of WFP's approach, leveraging linkages and complementarities with partners, including governments, UN and NGO partners, as well as academia.

REUNIR - universities for a resilient Sahel

Since 2017, WFP has been actively promoting partnerships with local universities in countries of the Sahel region. Multiple exchanges on issues related to community resilience and opportunities for collaboration between universities in the region have led to the official establishment of the **Sahel University Network for Resilience: REUNIR**.

The network includes six universities from five countries : Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey (Niger), Dan Dicko Dankoulodo University of Maradi (Niger), Nazi Boni University of Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso), University of N'Djamena (Chad), Gaston Berger University of Saint-Louis (Senegal), and the Rural Polytechnic Institute (IPR) of Koulikourao (Mali). A cooperation agreement was signed in January 2020 in Ouagadougou and an official secretariat established at the University of Nazi Boni.

From 2024, the network will grow from 6 to 11 universities, with the addition of 5 new ones, including the University of Diffa (Niger), the University Amadou Makhtar Mbow (Senegal), the University of Fada Gourma (Burkina Faso), the University of Abéché (Chad) and the University of Ségou (Mali).



Objectives of the REUNIR network

The creation of the REUNIR network provides a unique opportunity to facilitate cooperation and knowledge sharing on building resilience for food and nutrition security across the region, advance the institutionalization of resilience tools, and help train the next generation of resilience experts. The main objectives are :

- **Strengthen research on resilience:**

- Conduct research on key topics for the Sahel region: resilience for food security and nutrition, adaptation to climate change and response to natural disasters;
- Develop and implement regional training programs focused on resilience;
- Together with communities of the Sahel, explore new strategies and techniques for resilience ;
- Contribute to enhancing the quality of scientific and technological research on resilience in the Sahel;
- Promote the mobility of university teachers, researchers and students;
- Establish multinational and multidisciplinary research teams.

- **Build strong partnerships around resilience:**

- Provide advisory support to partner institutions through teaching and research, focused on priority development issues in the Sahel;
- Accompany member states and partners in the design and development of decision-making tools;
- Develop and implement projects covering all Sahelian countries in partnership with regional or sub-regional organizations working in the field of resilience.

Partnership with WFP

The WFP has supported the development and institutionalization of the REUNIR network. Although the network has been established as an independent entity, WFP remains a key partner. The partnership comprises three main areas of collaboration:

Field research: Masters and PhD students from universities are deployed to WFP resilience sites to carry out research for their theses ([summary of some of the research findings](#)). This enables students to gain practical experience and promotes action-oriented research. To date, 215 students (including 66 in 2023) have benefited from WFP scholarships to carry out research on resilience and food security issues (48 students in Burkina Faso, 15 in Chad, 23 in Mali, 117 in Niger and 12 in Senegal).

Development of training modules: WFP is helping universities to develop training modules on [the three-pronged approach \(3PA\) planning tools](#) and a standardized range of climate-sensitive assets, these are included in the universities' curricula. Of the six member universities, three have already integrated the 3PA tool into their training modules.

Training and knowledge sharing: WFP and the member universities of LARA (Livelihood and Resilience Academy) and REUNIR are working together to train WFP staff, cooperating partners and decentralized government departments to build capacity in soil and water conservation, agroforestry practices, monitoring and evaluation, 3PA tools, value chain development, soil conservation and restoration. The aim is to improve the technical standards of resilience interventions and to promote knowledge sharing in the region through technical publications.

[Discussion between the community of Sokorbé, Dosso, Niger, and participants of the training of trainers on participatory community planning \(CBPP\) and asset creation technologies in February 2023. Photo: WFP/Richard Mbouet](#)



LARA : Livelihoods and Resilience Academy

The WFP Livelihoods and Resilience Academy (LARA) was born in 2022 with a key goal in mind: **bring together a network of African universities to promote the localization of resilience experts capacities across the continent.** There is a need for skilled local staff who can interpret complex livelihood systems and design, implement and monitor high-quality, integrated livelihood assets interventions. It is particularly important to bring women in who can be the protagonists of agricultural and environmental change, given that they constitute the greatest number of small-holder farmers on the continent.

In the pursuit of this objective, WFP has cultivated a network comprising 21 African universities over the past two years under the banner of the Livelihoods Assets & Resilience Academy (LARA). Through a series of impactful boot camps – exemplified in 2023 by events held in Malawi and Niger, with an impressive turnout of over 140 participants – LARA endeavours to amass a critical mass of national and regional experts. These experts are envisioned to seamlessly complement the capacities of WFP, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and governmental institutions.



Training in the field: bootcamp in Niger

In February 2023, WFP organized a resilience bootcamp in Dosso, Niger, bringing together 120 resilience and environment professionals from various countries and organizations, including teacher-researchers, staff from Niger's Ministry of the Environment, WFP staff and counterparts from government technical services in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal, as well as teacher-researchers from the REUNIR network, Zimbabwe and Kenya. The aim of the bootcamp was to build regional capacity in community-based participatory planning (PCP), integrated with the implementation of FFA (Food Assistance for Community Assets) activities in order to exploit synergies and improve technical capacity. For the time being, this training model focuses mainly on arid or semi-arid areas, where the WFP's integrated resilience programme is being implemented. For the community of Sokorbe, which hosted the bootcamp, the impact of the resilience programme has considerably improved their livelihoods over the years.

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REUNIR Network's outlook

Between now and 2028, REUNIR will focus on the areas defined below in its 2023-2028 strategic plan:

- **Strengthening cooperation, inter-university mobility and the network's visibility** by promoting the mobility of lecturers and students, developing communication and information strategies, and attracting new research and training institutions;
- **Developing partnerships and building the capacity of actors in the field of resilience in the Sahel** by developing scientific partnerships with development structures and supporting Member States and partners in the design and development of decision-making tools;
- **Developing resource mobilisation strategies and results-based governance** by ensuring good governance of the network, and the development of resource mobilisation strategies;
- **Building a regional centre for action research into food security and nutrition , climate change and natural disaster management**, by setting up relevant training courses, developing action research into food security and resilience in the Sahel, developing and implementing collaborative projects in the field of resilience.