FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A CIVIL SOCIETY ASSESSMENT ON THE STATE OF PLAY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHARTER FOR FOOD CRISIS PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA
1. INTRODUCTION

The Sahel region has historically suffered from chronic food insecurity, punctuated by peaks of suffering triggered by extreme weather events – droughts and flooding. Rather than the situation improving, the frequency and severity of crises in the region appears to be increasing. In just the last 7 years the region has experienced four severe food crises – in 2005, 2008, 2010 and again in 2012. People’s ability to withstand these shocks is also diminishing. Population growth, climate change and food price volatility have combined to undermine the fundamental coping mechanisms. Crises occur with such frequency that communities do not have time to fully recover from the previous crisis before facing the next. The 2012 crisis graphically demonstrates that even moderate shocks - leading to slightly lower than average production, and increases in prices – can be enough to send populations over the edge.

Yet, whilst droughts and floods are inevitable, the disasters that ensue can be avoided. Food insecurity in the region has been aggravated by poor governance, under-investment in marginalised areas and a failure to introduce the right set of policies to both prevent and effectively manage food crises. Examples exist from across the globe of countries that have succeeded in adopting disaster management measures that have reduced the risks their populations face. In the Sahel, investments have been made by governments, regional organisations and donors to construct functioning early warning systems and improve the governance of food security. The combined efforts of national governments, regional organizations, technical and financial partners and civil society could make a critical difference. It is possible to break the cycle of hunger.

2. BACKGROUND

Introducing the Charter

It was in this vein that the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RCPA), member countries of the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and donor members of the Club du Sahel came together to tackle these issues and adopted in 1990 the Food Aid Charter. In view of the prevailing food insecurity in the region, it was agreed to review and update the Charter, culminating in the Charter for the Prevention and Management of Food Crises adopted by ECOWAS Heads of State at the beginning of 2012. The Charter was also signed by the Mauritanian and Chadian Government.

Further information about the Charter can be found on the OECD website - http://www.oecd.org/swac/topics/charterforfoodcrisispreventionandmanagement.htm. This site includes links to the full text of the original Food Aid Charter as well as the updated version of the Charter.
The Charter is a comprehensive and ambitious text that provides a clear & commonly agreed set of responsibilities and recommendations across key sectors. It includes specific commitments for all those involved in food crisis management and prevention, recognising the role each signatory must play in order to bring about the whole of system reform that will be required.

Civil society welcomed the adoption of this charter as an opportunity to inject fresh momentum in a long-standing political debate that is central to the future well-being and prosperity of citizens across the region. We believe the Charter can provide a unique toolkit for making an objective assessment of the systems in place and a clear framework to hold all signatories to account for their actions.

Taking stock – Management of the 2011/2012 Food Crisis

As the finishing touches were being put on the Charter, warnings of the latest food crisis in the region were emerging. Over 18 million people in 9 countries across the region have been affected by food insecurity in 2011-2012. This latest crisis provides a first critical test of the extent to which the principles of the charter are being applied in the region.

Since May 2012, civil society in Burkina, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal came together to assess the response to the latest crisis and see to what extent it lives up to the principles of the Charter. On the back of extensive national research, debate and advocacy, civil society leaders from each country came together in Niamey at the beginning of November to develop a collective regional analysis.

This report offers the insights and opinions of civil society groups – organisations that have been involved in the response to this crisis, organisations that represent interest
groups such as farmers’ organisations sometimes marginalised from mainstream debate on food security policies and organisations that represent those communities most affected by food insecurity in the region. In providing this perspective, our objective is to promote greater awareness and accountability for the commitments made. With this report, we hope to stimulate further debate and progress on the Charter, and create momentum for the urgent reform required.

It is important to note that the report does not claim to provide a fully comprehensive analysis. The report only covers six of the 17 countries that are signatories to the Charter. By focussing on countries affected by the 2011/2012 food crisis, the report deliberately focuses on the management part of the Charter’s commitments. At the outset, groups had planned to draw up a regional scorecard, with an assessment of performance by a set of objective indicator for each country. However, it became apparent that such a comparative exercise would be difficult without further work to develop a common methodology and support to boost the technical capacity of civil society to assess these trends. This is something we shall seek to achieve in subsequent monitoring exercises. In the meantime, we believe the analysis will nonetheless provide an invaluable snapshot of the state of play of the implementation of the Charter.

The remainder of the report is divided into three sections:

a. **REGIONAL ANALYSIS.** The first section presents an overview of the progress and challenges in the implementation of the food crisis management principles in the 6 participating countries with respect to the Charter’s 5 main areas of commitments,
   - Pillar 1 Information & Analysis
   - Pillar 2 Consultation & Coordination
   - Pillar 3 Consensual Analysis
   - Food Aid & Assistance
   - Assessing & Monitoring

b. **COUNTRY ANALYSIS.** A snapshot of the performance of each country assessed - the specific context of the country, areas of strength and areas for further improvement.

c. **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS.** The final section draws conclusions from this analysis. It puts forward a set of recommendations to all signatories of the Charter on how to ensure its further implementation in order to bring about more effective management of food crises in the region.
3. REGIONAL ANALYSIS

- PILLAR 1: INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

The first pillar of the Charter focuses on the information and analysis of food and nutrition security situation. It looks at the ability of national systems to produce timely, quality analysis of the food situation, where possible avoiding duplication of food security information systems and promoting joint analysis across agencies to produce consensual analysis.

Evidence gathered in the national reports found that since the adoption of the Food Aid Charter in the 1990s, all countries surveyed had made efforts to introduce a national system to manage information with regard to food security. However, reports found that that the existence of these systems alone was insufficient to guarantee food security information and analysis in accordance with the principles of the Charter.

The greatest challenge faced across the board related to the ability of governments to ensuring adequate financing and human resources capacity in order to be able to guarantee the effectiveness of such systems. These systems are consistently heavily dependent on external support and yet the support is regularly inconsistent or patchy. For example, the Government of Burkina Faso had put forward a comprehensive proposal for the financing of their Food Security Information System, donors had preferred to fund certain sub-sections of the system rather than the system as a whole. These difficulties clearly have a knock-on impact on the quality of analysis developed.

The pathway to resolving the situation with regard to effective information production and management is however far from clear. In the face of shortcomings within the information available from state systems, international actors in some instances – including donors, agencies and NGOs – have used alternative mechanisms to ensure the availability of timely good quality information. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) is a USAID funded project that provides early warning and vulnerability information on emerging and evolving food security issues across the globe. The World Food Programme’s Vulnerability and Analysis Mapping has also provided an essential supplement to government analysis.

These systems have often been very successful in providing timely warnings of oncoming food crises and, indeed, the response to the 2011-2012 food crisis was been widely celebrated for being considerably earlier than the 2009-2010 response, partly as a result of the quality of these systems. However, evidence from national reports suggest that these initiatives can also have a negative impact - leading to a duplication of sources of analysis that are potentially incoherent and undermining efforts to establish effective whole of country information management systems. It was particularly felt that further efforts could have been made on this front by FEWSNET.
Over the course of this response, efforts have been made to reduce these problems and, where possible, promote joint analysis. The case of Mali was highlighted in the report. In that country, following problems initially, since November 2011, the main stakeholders have come together to establish a system for joint analysis, and bring an end to the development of separate and contradictory analyses of the food security situation. From this date onwards, joint assessment and analysis has become increasingly common place, leading to the availability of more reliable and practical data for use by humanitarian actors. In this respect, regional efforts led by CILSS and FEWSNET to improvement assessment methodology are also particularly noteworthy.

In November 2012, country level training and assessments were conducted to develop national level analysis according to a standardised food security classification - Cadre Harmonisé II - and feed into the regional food security mapping. The system promoted with commonly agreed indicators and triggers, national government leadership under the aegis of a regional organisation, is the closest we have globally to an “ideal” information management system, although in practice considerable investment will be required over the coming years to ensure that the reality can live up to this theoretical ideal.

Overall verdict: Mixed. The fact that all governments have a framework for information and analysis is an important step forward. Further efforts are required to address the financing and sustainability of these systems, and to consolidate efforts to promote joint, high-quality consensual analysis at a national and regional level.

- PILLAR 2: CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The second pillar of the Charter is centred on the need for dialogue between actors and coordination of actions as “fundamental pre-requisites for ensuring fast decision-making and greater synergy and coherence of interventions”. Analysis of progress on this pillar is assessed according to two key principles – the principle of accountability: governments and intergovernmental organisations are responsible for making prompt decisions, and the principle of participation: all actors, including civil society, should be involved.

Progress on Pillar 2 is closely related to the overall governance of the food crisis system and whether each stakeholder within that system understands and respects the role it is meant to play. The Charter is clear in establishing the principle that national governments have the responsibility to play a leading role in the management and prevention of food crises and that other actors should seek to support the government in its leadership. In order to assess this, national reports analysed the degree to which governments had successfully established a single unified and permanent body for consultation and coordination, and whether the decisions taken within this body were respected by its members.
The majority of countries were found to have a single body where such coordination was designed to take place. In the case of Senegal, the system was deemed to be inadequate. Following considerable delay as a result of political uncertainty around the elections, a forum was only established at the end of May, and only on a temporary basis. In other countries, problems were encountered because decisions taken were not always based on the outcomes of discussions within these fora. For example, in Chad, civil society groups felt that a lack of coordination meant that the recommendations issued by the technical bodies were not always automatically taken up by political bodies.

National reports included examples of how donors and UN agencies have helped reinforce coordination, but also at times potentially undermined it. The establishment of CAP appeals and permanent OCHA offices in Burkina, Mali and Mauritania led to UN Clusters being established for the first time in these countries. Reports stressed the need for greater exchange with government bodies to ensure the additional UN structures bring added value and support the overall coordination carried out by the leading Government coordination body. There were some positive examples of where such support was taking place. Donors and UN agencies in Chad have provided considerable technical and financial support for the functioning of the Dispositif National de Prevention et de Gestion des Catastrophes et Crises Alimentaires (the “Dispositif”). In Chad, OCHA is currently conducting a mapping of UN and Government coordination groups in order to eliminate unnecessary duplications.

Specific challenges at a sub-national level, where space for coordination may be even more limited, were also noted in some national reports. Workshops conducted with local groups in Kayes (Mali), Kolda and Kedougou (Senegal) underlined the need to reinforce coordination, by introducing coordination structures at the level of communes, improving the representation of local leaders and civil society and developing common strategic frameworks.

Across the 6 countries surveyed, concerns were raised about the extent to which the full role of civil society, and particularly national civil society, was recognised within food crisis structures. In some cases newly established fora have provided a space for engagement by civil society. Mauritanian civil society underlined the opportunity they now have to express their concerns in the country’s “Forum des Urgences” and have used this forum in order to express their position on country’s strategic plan for the response to the 2012 crisis. However, it was acknowledged that dedicating increasing space to civil society would also require a new level of responsibility from civil society itself – ensuring sufficient resources are dedicated to issues related to food security in emergencies and that there is coordination across our members to bring quality and consensual analysis to the system as a whole.

**Overall verdict:** Fora for exchange and overall coordination structures can be effective with the combined efforts of national governments and agencies. However,
coordination issues will not be fully resolved without further clarity and respect of respective roles of the key actors within the food security systems. Further attention should also be paid to increasing the space for civil society within these systems.

- PILLAR 3: CONSENSUAL ANALYSIS FOR CHOOSING FOOD AND NUTRITION CRISIS PREVENTION & MANAGEMENT TOOLS

The third pillar puts forward recommendations for the choice of tools for food and nutrition crisis prevention and management (focusing on the latter for the purpose of this report). This includes analysis of the response plans developed by governments – its content and role in guiding interventions – as well as the relationship between government plans and donor funding decisions. The Charter includes a specific commitment for donors to gradually increase funding for the prevention of food crises via state budgets.

Once again, the findings from national analysis suggest there is considerable room for improvement in order to ensure that government response plans provide adequate guidance with regard to appropriate tools for the response and play a central role in informing the decision-making of all key stakeholders. Often, national plans did not contain the necessary detail in order to inform responses.

“It is regrettable that within the framework, there is an absence of detail in the guidelines for the response. For example, in the area of food assistance, the plan doesn’t contain any precise information with regard to the relative importance that should be attributed to each type of response (food security, nutrition or non-food based interventions).” Burkina Faso national report.

Many civil society groups noted that response plans accorded a lower priority to recovery and rehabilitation elements of the response. Some governments are making efforts to address this. In Chad, civil society noted the Government’s political commitment to implement the recommendations developed at the “Forum du Monde Rural”, although this still needs to be converted into concrete policies. In Niger, whilst specific initiatives for resilience building were included in longer-term government plans, these parts of the plans appear to be consistently underfinanced and significantly less well-financed than the emergency side of the plan. Although these areas were not covered in detail for the purposes of this initial report, there was common agreement across the signatories of the report that an increasing emphasis on addressing the root causes, and greater finance for these areas, would be key to ending drought emergencies in the region. The absence of an overarching response plan in Senegal resulted in it scoring particularly poorly according to these indicators.

In part as a result of weaknesses within national response strategies, and in part perhaps as a result of donors’ own interests and imperatives, the commitment for
donors to increasingly provide finance for prevention via state budgets appears to be poorly upheld. Only a few donors provide some parts of their assistance to governments in the region via state budgets. This is despite clear guidelines within the Charter and commitments in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness to increase country ownership and coordination of aid. Chad stood out as a country where this indicator remained particularly challenging, as a result of donors reticence to provide funding via state budgets, and as a result of ongoing governance issues in the country. As long as national governments continue to be responsible for the direct delivery of a fraction of the funding delivered, any claim to full leadership will remain merely theoretical.

With regard to the management of funding for the response, it is interesting to note that in some countries a compromise has been stuck whereby donor assistance is directly provided to state institutions to lead on the response, with donors maintaining an oversight of how money is spent via membership of a central decision-making body. Although this does not represent a full empowerment of Governments in the region for the response, this can nonetheless be seen as an important step in the right direction given ongoing challenges with regard to state capacity, and sometimes transparency and guarantees of good governance. However further progress is required and the mechanisms established must provide the framework to allow for gradually increasing the leadership and financial autonomy of Governments.

Overall verdict: Significant efforts still required. Whilst government response plans are in place, the governance of food crises does not match the ideals of the Charter. There are weaknesses within plans, they are on the whole not respected in decision-making and donors still show a great degree of reluctance in distributing funding via state budgets.

- FOOD AID AND ASSISTANCE

Whilst recognising the fundamental role that food aid can play in respond to food emergencies, this section of the Charter underlines the needs to consider the full set of food assistance interventions and provides guidelines on the principles that should cover their use. It stipulates that food aid should only be used as a last resort, when alternatives have been exhausted, focused on the most vulnerable and where possible come from local purchases. Commitments also include ensuring strong needs assessments, reinforcing food reserves and implementing policies to allow for flows from areas of excess production to deficit areas.

The response to the 2011/2012 food crisis in the Sahel has used a more varied and refined approach to food assistance than any previous crisis according to information compiled in the national reports. In Burkina Faso and Mali, for example, the government integrated the latest Household Economic Analysis in order to better target its response to those most vulnerable populations. In Mauritania, cash
interventions were used for the first time by humanitarian actors. In Niger, the Government introduced cash for work and food for work interventions, alongside generalised food distributions.

As a result of these innovations, we have seen further notable progress in the quality of the response. Nonetheless, reports found that further progress is still required. Effective targeting continues to be problematic and further investments are necessary to develop interventions for specific vulnerable groups, such as support for pastoralist groups or women in particular. These alternative interventions will need to be assessed for impact so that their use can be further refined and, where appropriate, expanded in the future.

On national food reserves, reports found political support from a large number of governments on the constitution of reserves but significant shortcomings in how they worked in practice. In Burkina, rules guiding their use remain inappropriate and rigid. In Chad, there is insufficient clarity on the availability and use of stocks in the national reserve. Further efforts are also required so that the use of food reserves is integrated into national response strategies as the first line of defence.

Positive progress was noted on both the use of market analysis to identify areas of deficit and excess production and a number of governments have introduced policies that have actively promoted the redistribution of stocks within the country. Burkina and Mali provided specific cause for concern; it was found that their Governments had put in place restrictions on the export of food\(^2\). Such restrictions contravene the ECOWAS principles of regional solidarity and free movement of people and goods. Immediate steps should be taken to remove any restrictions still in place and to ensure that such restrictions are not imposed in the future.

**Overall verdict:** Reduced dependence on food aid and increasing use of alternative interventions within the response, including cash and cash and/or food for work. Further attention required to improve targeting and assess the impact of alternative interventions in order to refine and, where appropriate expand their use. ECOWAS can play a key supportive role in ensuring regional, national and local food reserves are effective across its Member States.

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**ASSESSING & MONITORING THE APPLICATION OF THE CHARTER**

_The Charter includes a specific commitment that the RPCA shall be responsible for the coordination of the monitoring and assessment of the application of the Charter. Steps to be taken include yearly independent reviews to be examined at the annual RPCA meeting. There is also an agreement that national level monitoring systems should be_

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\(^2\) Food Security Information Note – Number 45, February 2012, Food Crisis Prevention Network.
established (via parliamentary committees for example) and that further support should be provided to civil society to participate in the monitoring.

Through the work carried out in 6 countries, it has become apparent that the one of the first and most fundamental challenges for the application of the Charter is the very limited awareness of its existence and of the commitments it contains. In the initial survey conducted in Chad, less than a quarter of those interviewed had prior knowledge of the Charter. In Mali, Niger and Senegal, specific awareness raising sessions were conducted in order to increase knowledge and understanding of the Charter. Awareness of the contents of the Charter is clearly a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring progress in its application. In addition, to date, no official monitoring work of the Charter has commenced in any of the 6 participating countries. Equally neither Parliamentary Committees nor Civil Society fora have been officially established in order to boost evaluation and monitoring.

In compiling this first report, civil society groups have been able to take stock of their own capacity to monitor Charter commitments. The reports identified a number of factors that limited civil society’s capacity to engage, including the exclusion of civil society groups from key discussions, limited resources and technical capacity. Moreover, for many groups, despite its importance, food security in emergencies has not been a traditional area of focus. Nonetheless, there was a general and widespread recognition of the potential role civil society could and should play in holding signatories to account for the application of the Charter and a demand that civil society be provided adequate support so that it is able to respect its commitments. Through this work, some initial capacity building exercises have been conducted, including awareness raising seminars with civil society groups and Parliamentarians and the development of specific materials. Through the strong engagement of the Civil Society “Right to Food” Committee, Niger is particularly advanced in this respect.

Overall verdict: No official monitoring taken place and no Parliamentary or CSO bodies established. However, civil society did initiate efforts to reinforce their own capacity and conduct preliminary independent assessments of the implementation of the Charter, which has provided the basis for this report. This should be further supported by governments and regional organisations.
4. COUNTRY ANALYSIS

The following paragraphs provide a summary assessment by civil society working at the national level on the current state of play of the Charter in their countries.

**Burkina Faso**
Burkina Faso developed a national response plan and established coordination structures in accordance with the principles in the Charter. They undertook efforts to maintain regular, sustained dialogue across key stakeholders and develop a joint analysis for the response. However, it was found that the agreements and conventions that had been adopted by the Government were not always fully respected. Despite the fact that the National Food Security Strategy is comprehensive in its proposals to tackle both acute and chronic food insecurity, it is only partially implemented, largely as a result of a lack of finance.

**Strengths:**
- the development of strategies and government bodies that respect the spirit of the charter;
- adopting the Household Economic Analysis in needs assessments;
- the production of regular joint analysis under the coordination of the Committee for Food Security Forecasting, which brings together all significant stakeholders, including civil society.

**Areas for improvement:**
- government leadership in the coordination and monitoring of actors involved in food security responses;
- collection, management and analysis of information to provide reliable basis for joint analysis;
- coordination mechanisms, particularly at the local level;
- strengthening the involvement and interest of elected officials and civil society in the Charter;
- respect of ECOWAS sub-regional trade agreements for the free movement of goods

**Chad**
Although a number of efforts have been made by all actors involved in the response, Chad’s performance with respect to the implementation of the charter is nonetheless concerning in a number of respects. To this end, strengthening government leadership in the prevention and management of food crises will be key. Political will and good governance are essential in order to ensure strong coordination with financial and technical partners, as well as promoting greater exchange and synergies across different actors. Under the leadership of the CNCPRT, the process for the monitoring of the implementation of the charter was launched by Chadian civil society. This work should contribute to increasing the awareness of commitments the Charter contains.
Strengths:
- the existence of a National Food Security Strategy and a national body for the management and coordination of food crises, known as the Comité d'Action pour la Sécurité Alimentaire et la Gestion des Crises (CASAGC);
- the existence of a national food security analysis system and relaunch of the national early warning system (scheduled for 2013);
- improved targeting of food aid and assistance as a result of increased use of Household Economic Analysis by NGOs.

Areas for improvement:
- national plan needs to be further elaborated to provide the framework for the coordination of activities of all actors;
- quality and quantity of government interventions, as well as increased transparency around government actions, particularly the management of national food reserve;
- ways of working of the coordination body, CASAGC, through, inter alia, better exchange of information across different sections, more significant financial support from both the government and donors, and greater participation by civil society groups;

Mali
The political and security context in Mali over the course of the last year has inevitably had a considerable impact on capacity of the Malian state to focus and deliver on effective food security policy. Nonetheless, efforts were made to develop a coherent system for the effective prevention and management of food insecurity. The progress achieved in the course of the response was particularly appreciated. Initial difficulties were encountered to ensure that the figures on agricultural production that were published were both reliable and consensual and that joint analysis was produced in order to inform the response. However, evidence from subsequent phases of the crisis suggests that these problems appear to have been largely overcome. Although the role of civil society can be further strengthened, it has already played a key role this time in providing early warning of the crisis.

Strengths:
- a space for coordination and exchange across different actors (government, technical and financial partners, humanitarian agencies, civil society);
- momentum to strengthen the capacity of national early warning systems as part of efforts to reinforce joint analysis.

Areas for improvement:
- greater government leadership and investment in the prevention of food crises;
- regional and local level coordination for crisis management measures;
- establishing a better functioning national and local food reserves and developing social protection schemes for the most vulnerable populations.
Mauritania:
For Mauritania, there were few areas where significant strengths or weaknesses were noted. The Government’s awareness of the seriousness of the situation was welcomed and the development of national emergency response plan represented an important step towards the effective management of the crisis, even if this plan was criticised for the lack of transparency and limited civil society involvement. The UN’s presence and particularly the establishment of the “Forum des Urgences” was also felt to make an essential contribution to reinforcing coordination. Further efforts are required to boost agricultural production and enhance resilience-building. Since a number of interventions, such as cash, were used for the first time in the country, it will also be important that a full assessment of their use and impact be carried out to learn lessons for future responses.

Strengths:
- strong systems for the collection & analysis of information and early warning;
- development of joint analysis for markets, food security and nutrition;
- substantial progress in terms of coordination and cooperation.

Areas for improvement:
- better targeting to focus assistance on most vulnerable populations;
- strengthened government leadership;

Niger
This year, the scale of the crisis in Niger was exceptional, with almost 50% of population affected by food insecurity. Despite this, comparing the 2012 crisis to that of 2010, the country appears to have made considerable progress on a number of aspects related to the prevention and management of food crises. With the launch of the 3Ns initiative (Nigeriens Feeding Nigeriens), Niger has made an important first step on the road towards building resilience. Nonetheless, additional efforts are still required, particularly ensuring the plan is implemented with concrete measures. Civil society groups, and particularly the Consortium for the Right to Food, stand out for their exceptional degree of engagement and notable efforts in increase awareness of the charter through a wide variety of tools.

Strengths:
- strengthened dialogue between the government and partners through the « Dispositif » (DNPGCCA), the body responsible for coordination of actors for the prevention and management of food crises;
- greater recognition of local early warning systems;
- new types of intervention integrated into the government’s response plan, including cash or food for work.

Areas for improvement:
- further reform to strengthen government leadership and the participation of civil society in the « Dispositif »;
• increasing the proportion of funding that’s dedicated to the prevention of food crises and donors to increase their share of funding allocated directly to state budgets;
• greater progress on resilience building measures through the practical implementation of the Nigeriens Feed Nigeriens initiative.

Senegal
Official recognition of the crisis didn’t take place until April, shortly after national elections. Following the announcement, what had been a delayed response, moved more quickly. However, significant barriers to an effective response still exist. There is still no permanent state coordination body to develop recommendations jointly across government actors, financial and technical partners, and NGOs. As a result, there was no overall response plan, nor clear guidance on appropriate instruments for the response. Those organisations that had been involved in the response at field level also raised concerns about the quality of the coordination that had taken place.

Strengths:
• early warning issued by NGOs and the quality of coordination between national and local NGOs in the response;
• greater use of alternatives to food aid such as cash transfers or vouchers, food for work, and strengthening cereal banks;
• better involvement of local authorities in the response at a regional level

Areas for improvement:
• timely early warning by the Government;
• strengthening Government response structures;
• establishing a permanent central coordination body which brings together NGOs, the Government, and Technical and Financial Partners, in order to ensure better coordination and monitoring of the response.
5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst it is important to recognise the steps forward that have been taken, and in particular the improved humanitarian response to the 2011/2012 Sahel food crisis compared to previous crises in the Sahel, it is also clear that there is still substantial room for improvement in the application of the Charter’s principles and an urgent need for further reform. Differences between countries and examples of best practice can help bring about some critical changes, yet the majority of challenges appear to be largely structural and require a systemic shift across the region, with the active involvement of all stakeholders.

The Charter and the findings of the reports underscore the central role that must be played by governments for effective food crisis prevention and management. All too often they are prevented from playing this role by a lack of consistent financial support, insufficient technical capacity, and crucially a lack of political leadership from government actors themselves. As a result, donors and international agencies have often respond and fill these gaps - providing invaluable support in mapping ongoing vulnerabilities, developing early warning systems and playing a vital role in providing assistance to affected populations to mitigate the worst impact of food crises. Whilst playing a vital role in saving lives, the international response has often involved insufficient consultation and efforts at alignment, and thus taken place in parallel to national actions. The system has also often left national civil society actors marginalized and unable to play their full role on food security issues.

For an efficient and sustainable improvement in the way in which food crises are managed, a step change in the system of governance will be required by all actors. There is a need to clearly acknowledge that international efforts can only offer a partial and temporary solution. The scale of investment in UN agencies and International NGOs continues to dwarf the scale of government responses. Establishing an effective and collaborative system of response means that international actors need to invest more in dialogue with national government counter-parts, provide technical support and demonstrate an increased willingness to finance government efforts directly where possible. National governments must take the lead in demanding a new approach and this will only be possible if they also express their political will to live up to the principles enshrined in the Charter and commit an appropriate level of national resources to achieving these goals. Only leadership from national governments, with the backing of donors, agencies and civil society, can deliver the comprehensive, multi-sectoral, coordinated and long-term approach require in order to break the cycle of hunger in the region.

Whilst the Charter has the potential to be an invaluable tool to push for further reform in the effective management and prevention of food crises, so far there is scarce awareness of its content and commitments, and thus its potential remains unfulfilled. As civil society actors working at national and regional level across the Sahel
participating in this report stated their commitment to take on their role and responsibility as guardian and watchdog of the Charter. They stand ready to share the lessons learned from this exercise to inform the formal monitoring process. In accordance with the Charter’s commitments, civil society will also seek further support from the members of the RPCA to be able to fulfil this function. All other signatories must also restate their commitment to respect their role as enshrined in the Charter. In order to achieve immediate and much needed progress in its application, signatories of the Charter should commit to taking the following steps:

Recommendations

PILLAR 1 – INFORMATION & ANALYSIS

- To establish effective systems of information management, governments, financial and technical partners should collectively establish priority areas for funding and capacity support. Where possible, donors and agencies should prioritise support to information systems that make direct contributions to reinforcing government capacity rather than creating parallel structures.

- To improve the quality of information analysis, all actors involved in mapping vulnerabilities should reach an agreement on appropriate coordination mechanisms in order to reach consensus, and the steps to take in the case of disagreement, in order to avoid the duplication of information and the existence of non-consensual analysis.

- To establish a strong system of regional food security mapping based on national analysis led by Governments, with the support from technical and financial partners, CILSS should prioritise ongoing technical support to national governments officials to ensure the effectiveness and legitimacy of this work.

PILLAR 2 – CONSULTATION & COORDINATION

- To strengthen coordination and reinforce government leadership, governments, donors and agencies should work together at a national level, to conduct a full mapping of existing coordination mechanisms, replacing UN-led coordination structures where national structures already exist and are collectively judged to function well, and developing capacity building plans in areas where national leadership needs to be strengthened.

- To restore confidence and establish a clear vision and demonstration of political will, governments should develop and implement national plans to respect commitments in the Charter with respect to food crisis management and prevention. Where possible, these plans should be linked to ongoing discussions around the Agir Sahel and ECOWAS Faim Zero initiatives to avoid multiplication of plans of action.
PILLAR 3 – CONSENSUAL ANALYSIS

- To clarify donors’ expectations and increase the proportion of aid provided via state budgets, donors should clearly and publicly communicate the conditions to be fulfilled by national governments to enable donors to provide funding via state budgets. Where these commitments are met, donors should quickly move to shift funding practices and invest in national capacities when leadership is guaranteed. Where necessary, support to state institutions’ response to food crises, with strong donor and agency oversight, can provide a useful intermediary steps towards achieving this objective.

- To increase understanding of best practice in food crisis interventions, all members of the RCPA should agree a mechanism to assess the impact of interventions for the 2011/2012, with a particular focus on use of food assistance (moving away an exclusive focus on traditional food aid activities) and effective targeting of vulnerable groups. Lessons and best practice should be disseminated to bring about more effective responses in the future. To this end, the RPCA should also urgently finalise and disseminate the intervention toolbox guidelines that it has been developing.

FOOD AID & ASSISTANCE

- To put in place effective regional, national and local food reserves, the RCPA should support ECOWAS in the rapid implementation of Regional Food Reserve Strategy, which includes important measures to reinforce both local and national reserves and how to integrate these reserves within response mechanisms.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

- To move forward efforts to assess and monitor the application of the Charter, the RPCA should agree a timetable for the implementation of official national level monitoring, and a deadline for the submission of the first annual report, in time for April RPCA meeting. Examples of best practice and clear indicators of expected behaviours should be developed to guide governments in their actions.

- To demonstrate political support for the implementation of the Charter, Governments in the region should use the RPCA meeting to provide a clear indication of the importance of the text and their commitment to move forward on its implementation. Regional organisations and Technical and Financial Partners should indicate their commitment to actively support and encourage governments in the application of the charter, as well as respect their own responsibilities.

- To support civil society in its role as guardian and watch-dog of the Charter, the members of the RPCA should indicate their readiness to provide financial support and call for a submission of proposals ahead of the April RPCA.
A CIVIL SOCIETY ASSESSMENT ON THE STATE OF PLAY OF
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHARTER FOR FOOD CRISIS PREVENTION
AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail scockburn@oxfam.org.uk. The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press. Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78077-313-1 in December 2012. Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

APESS: APESS (The Association for the Promoting of Livestock Rearing in the Sahel and Savana) brings together livestock breeders from 9 countries in West Africa and 3 in Central Africa, including Chad. APESS works to modernise family farms to allow breeders to ensure their food security and increase their income. APESS was created in 1989 in Burkina Faso and reaches over 75,000 families across the countries it works in. APESS conducted a study in Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon on the strategies developed by live stock breeders to meet their family’s food needs. This study showed that the integration between livestock and farming is better able to ensure food security. APESS will continue to encourage this strategy.

CNCPRT (Chad): The CNCPRT (the National Dialogue Council for the Rural Producers of Chad) is a national farmer’s association that brings together 56,480 rural farmers’ organisations drawn from the 18 of Chad’s 22 regions. It was launched in June 2002, under the initiative of about sixty representatives from producer organisations. Its main aim is to promote socioeconomic and cultural development for rural farmers. Through its advocacy work on the Charter, the CNCPRT came together with a number of other Chadian civil society groups that have been involved in food security projects in the country.

CONGAD (Senegal): CONGAD was created in February 1982 by Non-Governmental Organisations working in Senegal to provide support for the public service missions being carried out by NGOs in Senegal and to develop an appropriate partnership framework with the Government and other partners. CONGAD now has 178 national, foreign and international NGO members. CONGAD’s aim is to consolidate civil society activities and strengthen the contribution and positive influence of the NGO movement on development processes in Senegal and the West African sub-region, to meet the challenges of globalisation and sustainable development. www.congad.sn

Consortium for “The Right to Food and Food Sovereignty” (Niger): Created in 2007 by five of Niger’s civil society organisations and with the support of Oxfam Novib, the Consortium brings together three human rights and civic education associations (Alternative Espaces Citoyens, Association Nigérienne de Défense des Droits de l’Homme and Timidria) and two farmer and pastoralist organisations (Fédération des Unions et Groupements Paysans du Niger Mooriben and Association pour la Redynamisation de l’Élevage au Niger). These 5 member organisations pool their various complementary expertises and are grouped into a Consortium to address the food security issue from a human rights perspective, an
innovative approach for West Africa. Since it was created, the Right to Food and Sovereignty Consortium has conducted numerous activities within the framework of its mission to contribute, by 2015, to the efficacy of the right to food in Niger, through policies and laws guaranteeing food sovereignty.

CSSA (Mauritania): In Mauritania, the CSSA (the Food Security Monitoring Committee) is a network of 13 non-profit, apolitical, registered organisations working on food security and human rights. The aims of the CSSA include: being an interlocutor for the State and development partners (and vice versa); gathering and sharing information on food security; advocacy to help secure means of production and promote farmer good citizenship; encourage dialogue and information exchange between civil society organisations on this issue; serve as an advisory body for developing food security policies in Mauritania; play a monitoring role for the implementation of food security projects and programmes.

CSO Forum (Mali): The CSO Forum of Mali is an informal space for consultation and action for civil society organisations. Membership is free and voluntary for any 3rd or 4th level civil society organisation. It is made up of 63 organisations which are autonomous, officially recognised, and already in dialogue with other development actors. The CSO Forum of Mali aims to encourage the CSOs to collaborate so that they can individually and collectively take part in developing, implementing and monitoring and evaluating development policies and programmes in the country. www.societecivilemail.org

SPONG (Burkina Faso): SPONG (permanent secretariat of non-governmental organisations) is a collective of NGOs and non-profit organisations working in Burkina Faso; it was created in 1974. It is a national platform made up of 114 organisations including NGOs, national and international development agencies, foundations, research and training centres, youth movements and thematic networks. SPONG aims to give rise to “A Burkinabe civil society that is strong and dynamic, and works in synergy to influence public policy to create a just, fair and democratic society”. www.spong.bf

Oxfam: Oxfam is an international confederation of fifteen organizations working together in 92 countries to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice. Oxfam is active in all the most affected countries of the Sahel, launching or scaling up programmes focussed on food security, livelihoods and access to safe water and good hygiene practices, to meet immediate needs as well as strengthen resilience. Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit www.oxfam.org

ROPPA: The network of Peasant organizations and Producers in West Africa (ROPPA) was officially founded on July 2000 during a meeting in Cotonou. The network gathers 13 nationals’ farmer’s organisations from West Africa and some associated members (Cap Verde and Nigeria). As a strategic actor on food sovereignty issues, ROPPA’s attention was quickly raised by the first signs of a food crisis in West Africa. This commitment has been demonstrated by efforts done in monitoring the situation as well as interacting with keys stakeholders and participating in forward thinking with regional partners on research tools for sustainable management of the structural causes of the crisis and its implications. ROPPA’s advocacy work reaffirmed its original vision of “promoting the development of family farms and family farming while managing policies related to the liberalization of national economies and the globalization of trade. www.roppa.info

Réseau Bilital Maroobé: Réseau Bilital Maroobe (RBM) brings together associations of pastoralists and breeders from 7 West African countries, and plays a role in monitoring the situation of pastoralists in zones affected by the food crisis. In 2010, RBM conducted a study that highlighted the shortcomings of mechanisms to support strategies of pastoralist communities, while in October 2011 the network drew the attention of governments and donors to the impending food and pastoral crisis in the Sahel. RBM has been highlighting the impact of the current crisis on pastoralist and is currently engaged in action research on access to food and livestock in vulnerable pastoralist households. www.maroobe.org