WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

Case studies on the triple nexus in West Africa

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The West Africa region is facing a multidimensional crisis marked by acute humanitarian crises, a development deficit and conflicts, in addition to other factors that exacerbate people’s vulnerabilities, such as climate hazards. These humanitarian, socio-economic, security and climate crises exacerbate structural weaknesses, including inequalities, chronic food insecurity, poverty and discrimination against women. They affect a large part of the population, which finds it impossible to exercise the most fundamental human rights such as the right to life and access to basic social services and natural resources. This situation is affecting both sedentary and nomadic displaced and host communities contending with long-term crises and displacement, as well as people impacted by environmental shocks, climate shocks or epidemics, who are often the same extremely vulnerable people.

The triple nexus (H-D-P) approach aims to challenge a linear and sequential intervention logic. Humanitarian aid, development programmes and peacebuilding programmes must be implemented simultaneously to address the systemic inequalities and weaknesses that keep people in poverty and make them vulnerable. This paradigm shift requires major transformations in both the humanitarian and development sectors.

The huge challenge is to identify how to implement these interventions simultaneously, respect humanitarian principles and develop synergies and common goals that address both the short-term emergency and longer-term processes of social change, while also pursuing peace. Although the link between humanitarian assistance and development is not new, the incorporation of the peace dimension poses additional challenges in already complex interventions and recognises that those interventions have impacts on social and coexistence dynamics.

The following case studies show how some of our interventions are adapting to and incorporating this new logic. The process of seeking synergies occurs at different levels: in a geographical area where there is a convergence of programmes and within a given target population. Meanwhile, coherence is achieved to varying degrees, with some of the case studies revealing a deep, shared analysis of the context and new ways of working.

In Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) concrete, albeit newly emerging, initiatives are being carried out to articulate the links between humanitarian, development and peace programmes. These short case studies, produced following a learning process in 2022, examine external and internal experiences and challenges in moving towards a more holistic approach, in coordination with other actors, to better meet the full range of people’s needs and create more resilient and sustainable local and national systems. They illustrate how Oxfam is adapting to develop interventions in the area of peacebuilding, which is the most innovative aspect of the triple nexus.
“NEXUS BY DESIGN”: THE EMPLOYMENT, RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL COHESION PROJECT IN THE SAHEL BELT AND THE LAKE CHAD REGION

The context

The Sahel belt and the Lake Chad region comprise a geographical area in western Chad that has been suffering from the effects of climate change for years, with a rise in hazards such as drought, desertification and invasions of crop pests. This is having a direct impact on the food and nutrition security of the people living there. The main livelihoods are limited and access to basic food items is uncertain for the population. Both regions also lack basic infrastructure, particularly with regard to access to good quality water and sanitation, and to healthcare and education.

This area is also marked by intercommunal conflicts between crop farmers and herders over access to natural resources. These conflicts occur between herders themselves and also between crop farmers. In addition, the region is affected by a major conflict between non-State armed groups and the States of the region (Chad, Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon). This conflict has caused population displacements and is directly affecting the livelihoods of populations in crisis. The conflicts have disrupted the transhumance routes of nomadic herders, forcing them to stay in one place or find new routes, which gives rise to fresh conflicts between crop farmers and herders.

An evolution in Oxfam’s intervention strategy

Oxfam began working in the Barh El Gazel region in 2012, on emergency and rehabilitation projects in the nine sub-prefectures. After a few years of activities, the assessment carried out by the teams in 2016 showed that the intervention in the Barh El Gazel region was marred by a “scattering” effect, with dispersed activities, and was failing to provide lasting solutions to the root causes of vulnerability or preserve the progress made in terms of development, giving rise to a situation of chronic crisis.
At a time when “humanitarian” funding was declining in the country in general, and after carrying out a series of scoping missions, it became clear that Oxfam needed to adopt a different intervention strategy that better addresses structural issues, without ruling out the possibility of mounting ad-hoc responses to meet the urgent needs of the most vulnerable people affected by the crises (food, climate, security, etc.).

**A new approach: the “Employment, resilience and social cohesion project in the Sahel belt and the Lake Chad region”**

With funding from the European Union’s Emergency Trust Fund, it has been possible to set up a project that is better adapted to the reality of the context, in light of the assessment of our intervention so far. This will enable the teams to better address structural causes, without excluding the possibility of responding to any urgent needs that arise during specific crises and developing coherent programmes in a volatile and unstable environment.

In order to avoid the scattering effect that was observed, Oxfam, in collaboration with other organisations, has chosen to focus on a more limited geographical area. This will constitute a convergence zone where complementary activities will be implemented, in different sectors of activity, for smaller population groups [geographical and targeting convergence, being able to target different groups in the same geographical area, through a cluster approach].

The project is characterised by the fact that it is “multi-sectoral”: the teams are working to strengthen employment and income-generation opportunities, while also constructing water and sanitation infrastructures, establishing grain banks and improving governance and social cohesion. In parallel, the distribution of cash and emergency agricultural inputs and equipment will help meet the needs of the most fragile households, particularly during the lean periods.

During the project, Oxfam will mobilise its emergency fund (“CatFund”) and other funds available through projects financed by humanitarian donors, to respond to specific crisis situations that occur in the intervention area.

Participatory context analysis activities are carried out to identify and characterise vulnerabilities, risks and capacities (VRA analysis), with flexible funds available to develop local plans and find solutions to the problems identified by the communities during these context analysis exercises.

Based on studies of the types of conflicts in the area, initiatives are set up to promote social cohesion: social mediation structures, “wells of peace” and Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) for women that foster collaboration and solidarity at the community level.
Learnings: the value of a consortium approach, the strength of joint work

The consortium model has been identified as having very clear added value, right from the project design stage. The harmonisation of approaches, with guidelines that favour common understanding among the consortium members, contributes to the quality of joint work and is a key factor for the success of the project. A multidisciplinary team has been set up to coordinate and monitor the activities. Resources have been made available to the project to ensure that the activity of the consortium is a driver of success: ongoing communication; strong coordination through regular meetings; identification and sharing of experience among members; etc. The consortium’s activity has made it possible to create strong cohesion between the various stakeholders involved (NGOs, State institutions, other actors).

The expertise of the different parties is leveraged. The organisations in the consortium make their specific contributions and support each other to strengthen complementarity between them. The local authorities and the decentralised State technical services are also involved in this coordination.

The consortium serves as a multi-stakeholder platform where information is shared and decisions about crisis responses or development objectives are taken. The platform makes it possible to address governance issues, which are at the heart of the project, through the involvement of all the actors present in the different project areas.

The consortium model has facilitated the involvement of various actors in different phases of the project: identification of villages and targeting; participation of local actors; consensus-building and harmonisation of approaches is achieved across all aspects of the project through information sharing, exchanges, learnings and dialogue between the actors involved.

Another strength of the project is that it has set up a robust monitoring and evaluation system in order to be able to monitor and measure the impact of its activities: after establishing a theory of change, control villages were identified for comparison purposes, to serve as a control group.

Additional factors of success for a nexus approach

- **The involvement** of the authorities and the strengthening of **local capacity**, which ensures follow-up once the project has been completed (sustainability);
- Ownership by communities and other local stakeholders;
- **Flexibility in financing**: the high degree of flexibility given by the donor in the implementation of activities allows for modification and adaptation to the changing context;
- **Adaptability/flexibility to meet demand** according to people’s needs (more or less immediate/more or less long term). VRA analyses and community action plans make it possible to adjust and prioritise the types of activities planned at the community level;
- **Advocacy**: it is important to have substantial resources to carry out influencing work at the regional and national levels in order to encourage policy changes. Taking into account women and young people in community organisations [committees] and advocacy with local authorities.
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The context

The Ségou region, including the Office du Niger zone, is located in central Mali and has for several years been in the grip of the armed conflict that began in 2012 in the north of the country. The deterioration of the security context is seriously affecting the civilian population, especially women and children, who are forced to flee from their villages, leaving everything behind. These people have taken refuge in the towns of Niono and Ségou. The humanitarian needs of displaced people are high and it is a challenge for the host communities to take them in due to the lack of financial and material resources or space to accommodate them.

Women are particularly vulnerable, as many of them have become the heads of their households when the men have returned to armed groups, have been killed or have migrated. They then take on sole responsibility for the children’s schooling, the survival of the family and medical expenses. Women are also the main actors at the weekly markets. However, market attendance remains low due to frequent attacks by armed groups.

The Office du Niger zone is on a State-owned site that also has irrigated land which is loaned to small-scale rice farmers subject to payment of a water charge. It is a large rice-producing and market gardening area, which is renowned for its irrigation system. However, the effects of climate change, women’s limited access to land and the recent insecurity are contributing to a decline in agricultural production. Insufficient water and recurrent episodes of drought and flooding are having a direct impact on the food security of many people and are reducing the communities’ resilience. Again, women are often denied access to land on family farms and control over resources in general.

Oxfam’s intervention

Oxfam Mali has been working for more than ten years in the Ségou region, particularly in the Office du Niger zone. Interventions include emergency, development and peacebuilding programmes and projects. Oxfam works with vulnerable people, especially women, whose situation prevents them from having a decent standard of living (due to a lack of access to land, inputs or know-how).
Oxfam’s approach to building resilience is appropriate insofar as it links emergency and development initiatives. For example, the impact of agroecological practices increases the capacity for land recovery in a context of recurrent droughts and the use of cash transfers in humanitarian activities can contribute to restoring production equipment.

In addition, Oxfam is contributing to peacebuilding by setting up citizens’ peacebuilding committees, with young people and women, to raise awareness about conflict management, strengthen social cohesion and advocate to the authorities about respecting people’s rights.

These interventions are accompanied by advocacy actions to demand better access to land and water for those who do not currently have it, particularly women.

**Ségou as a convergence zone**

**Convergence of activities around women**

In order to respond to the diverse range of women’s needs and vulnerabilities, Oxfam’s interventions are articulated between projects that address conjunctural and structural problems, at both the individual and collective levels.

Specific actions to meet the most immediate needs of displaced people, including cash support, are implemented from a humanitarian perspective. At the same time, capacity-building activities for women are open to both women from host communities and internally displaced women. A convergence of actions is organised around women, taking into account their most urgent needs, including food insecurity, access to education for children and healthcare, while in the medium term, vulnerabilities linked to displacement, reintegration into community life and rebuilding their livelihoods are addressed.

In order to foster peaceful coexistence, displaced women participate in activities set up for female members of the host communities. Both have access to the same training courses, sources of knowledge and social relations that will help them in their livelihood projects (in Ségou, integrated into local dynamics, or in their villages of origin for women who decide to return home). Oxfam supports the protection committees to strengthen advocacy to local authorities with a view to asserting their rights now and in the long term.

A peacebuilding component also involves both host communities and displaced people with the aim of strengthening social cohesion. Activities in this pillar encourage exchanges between groups and communities to help bring displaced people and host communities together. Solidarity networks are created and promote the integration of displaced persons and displaced women are included in local development initiatives.

**Convergence of projects and teams**

The concentration of multi-sectoral interventions across the three pillars of the nexus naturally led the teams to exchange experiences, come to a shared understanding of the context, improve communication and knowledge about our programmes, share tools and find areas of complementarity between projects, and manage relationships with local actors.

The search for synergies, efficiency and impact has led to changes in the way we work, with the establishment of spaces for coordination and exchanges. The teams share tools and good practices, such as Gender Action Learning, that have proven their value and can be applied in one pillar or another. There is ongoing, joint learning between the different teams.

**Assessment and outlook regarding the convergence of actions**

Thanks to the programmes and projects that have been carried out in the Ségou region, it has been possible to identify good practices to pursue intensified focuses of work in keeping with the nexus approach.

**Women as key contributors to nexus programming**

The experience in the Ségou region illustrates the potential of working with women through a nexus.
approach. The cooperation dynamics established between women and the central role they play in building resilience at the community level have prompted us to strengthen programmes with and for women. Social cohesion is strengthened by women in the Ségou region who are willing to take in and work with displaced people. This support among women is vital for vulnerable people and the medium-term dynamics. They are now the priority targets of our various activities in different projects: cash, social protection, the Gender Action Learning System, resilience, capacity-building and peacebuilding. The successes achieved in this respect have led us to continue and strengthen this way of working.

**Working with local partners**

Working in partnership and collaboration with local actors is a core aspect of all the types of intervention: humanitarian, development and peace. Local actors include community-based associations and civil society organisations; they are responsible for implementing short-term and long-term activities and programmes. These organisations do not distinguish between humanitarian, development and peace activities, as they work in a much more holistic manner.

There are also possibilities to work with the authorities decentralised to the level of the commune councils, district councils and regional councils. These authorities are involved in the three projects in the Ségou region, namely: BMZ, DGD Humanitarian and DGD Development. Coordinating and supporting local authorities makes it possible to articulate interventions between areas of activity and between short- and long-term activities to create more sustainable local systems.

**Evolution of our practices: collaboration and complementarity**

From now on, in both long-term projects and humanitarian projects, the social cohesion component has been integrated; the teams are now working together to share capacities, expertise and approaches.

Meetings are now being held between the teams of the different pillars in order to establish coherence between pillars, programmes and...
projects with a quarterly joint planning meeting where the construction of the nexus approach is addressed as an agenda item.

Today, women from the Ségou region are producing market garden crops that support the food security of people affected by the crises. In future, synergies will be explored between programmes in different regions, for example, by using soy flour produced by women in the Ségou region in a nutrition programme.

**Strengthening internal expertise and practices in line with the nexus**

The teams recognise that the triple nexus approach is well suited to the current context of a prolonged, complex crisis, and to the people’s multiple needs and vulnerabilities. Capacity-building must also be extended to the teams of Oxfam and local organisations in the Ségou region to ensure common understanding and coordination efforts.
THE CAPACITY OF LOCAL ACTORS TO ADDRESS THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF A FRAGILE CONTEXT - CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The context

After more than a decade of political and security crisis, CAR remains a fragile State with considerable needs for assistance in the humanitarian, development and peace areas. Poor governance at all levels is central to the main factors of fragility in CAR.

In its intervention to assist communities in the country, Oxfam recognises the importance of identifying local capacities and the role of local organisations in the humanitarian response, as well as their participation in development and peacebuilding processes. Oxfam has noted the limitations of local capacity and the need to strengthen it across the board, in terms of structuring, technical capacity and networking.

Oxfam conducted an in-depth analysis of humanitarian capabilities in 2016. The results revealed the lack of capacity of local organisations in key areas including identity and mission, management capacity, operational capacity and technical expertise. Other assessments confirm this analysis.

The Civil Society Services Centre (CSSC)

To address the weakness of civil society organisations, in 2018 Oxfam set up a Civil Society Services Centre (CSSC) designed to support capacity-building for national and local organisations. The CSSC, whose vision is to "build an active civil society to support resilience, recovery and peace in CAR", offers different capacity-building initiatives for CSOs through seven free services:

1. A resource centre (computers, internet, printer, meeting room) to provide a workspace for organisations that have lost their premises during the conflicts
2. Continuing professional development courses adapted to the category of organisation
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3. Tailored advisory support to address the organisations’ specific needs
4. Inter-CSO exchange workshops to promote the sharing of experiences between peers
5. Support with setting up projects
6. Linking CSOs and universities to enhance the professionalism of CSOs
7. Micro-grants to promote and support local initiatives

The CSSC, which currently has 388 member organisations of different levels and different categories, gives CAR a pool of local actors that any intervention can draw from to better localise aid.

Two key factors led to this initiative:
• The development of a localisation vision by Oxfam CAR
• The establishment of a good governance programme to analyse the root causes of the conflicts in order to tackle them

Since 2020, all the actions implemented contribute to increasing the autonomy of the CSSC, particularly through the creation of a Board of Directors, which is a governance body emanating from the General Assembly of the member CSOs. Oxfam is committed to strengthening the capacity of this body through a model that gives it autonomy through a process of gradually transferring skills, adaptation of our procedures and joint management.

Overview and impact to date

The CSSC has transformed the living conditions of several communities by strengthening the capacity of numerous local organisations that contribute to providing responses to the population’s needs.

An important aspect has been the establishment of thematic groups in key areas such as WASH, EFSI, Protection, Health, Education, Gender, Social Cohesion and Democratic Governance. This has enabled CSOs to mount more effective collective responses, with greater geographical coverage (by coordinating efforts), and to ensure that civil society is represented in the different clusters to efficiently influence humanitarian aid. The response capacity of actors has been strengthened, and collaboration and coordination between actors is encouraged. Work to influence response management structures is carried out to promote the space reserved for local actors.

At the structural level and for long-term impacts, the CSSC encourages CSOs to undertake reflections on public policies, in particular by focusing on the analysis, impact and perspectives offered by the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan. The CSSC initiative helps position local actors in national plans (from responding to emergencies to strengthening local governance), which are the documents that set out CAR’s vision in terms of emergence and stability. This support from the CSSC has had the effect of positioning CSOs as key players in their country’s recovery.

E LE SONGO

E LE SONGO is a women’s organisation that has been supported by the CSSC to set up a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) using the female members’ own funds. This organisation has offered its community many opportunities by creating a small factory for processing agricultural products that serves various groups. The organisation is now going even further and in the medium term wants to set up a micro-finance institution (MFI) to better support its peers and contribute to economic recovery as an anchor of lasting stability. It should be noted that this success has been achieved without any external financial support, only the technical support and coaching of the CSSC.
Lessons learned

The establishment of the CSSC has shown Oxfam that localisation makes a strong contribution to a nexus approach and that the promotion of local leadership is possible, even in fragile countries like CAR.

More specifically, this experience has demonstrated that:

1. Local capacity is an important asset for humanitarian aid
2. Building on existing capacities and supporting them in the humanitarian response or participating in development processes is an approach that we must adopt as a principle of intervention; recognising and helping develop capacities must be central to our approach
3. Even in highly fragile contexts, it is possible to contribute to constructive dynamics in which local actors play a central role in helping vulnerable people
4. Building local leadership is a factor of stability and sustainable recovery
5. Around the concept of governance, synergies can be developed with humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programmes
6. The absorption capacity of local actors is a significant challenge in CAR
7. Risk management and an approach based on humanitarian principles are important to ensure that Oxfam is not perceived as a party to the conflict and to minimise reputational risk.

An organisational evolution in service to the approach

Internally, Oxfam has driven an evolution of its programmes and organisation that has helped promote synergies between its areas of activity, teams and pillars. Today, it has a single programme with different focuses of work (humanitarian, recovery and peace, which includes good governance) and a single Programme Director. Development and peace actions are included in the good governance component, and this focus is inserted across all Oxfam activities in CAR. Multi-sector projects are established with an approach based on a root-cause analysis to seek sustainable responses to urgent needs, with the different thematic leads participating in the process of defining humanitarian response projects.

Possible contradictions and clashes between different logics are managed on a daily basis. Sustainability issues are discussed constantly and consultation is ongoing. To that end, it was necessary to convince and train people and adapt procedures in order to change practices. These new ways of working still need to be further strengthened and deepened, but a new dynamic is underway.

Today, many international NGOs are turning to Oxfam and the CSSC to establish partnerships with local organisations (new law on working with local organisations) and learn from Oxfam’s experiences.
TRIPLE NEXUS ENTRY POINT: PEACEBUILDING PROGRAMMES BURKINA FASO

The context

The Liptako-Gourma area, which covers the Nord, Centre Nord, Sahel and Est regions of Burkina Faso, is a vast geographical area where the living conditions are extremely precarious. There are various causes for this instability, which are related to structural and conjunctural factors that compound each other.

This area has been suffering for years from the effects of climate change hazards, particularly successive droughts and floods. These recurring phenomena are making traditional livelihood activities – mainly agriculture and livestock farming – increasingly difficult due to the growing scarcity of natural resources and the deterioration of security, which generate tensions in communities.

Moreover, decentralised State services are typically weak and communities lack access to basic services. In particular, the marginalisation of certain groups based on gender and age continues to be a problem. Young people represent 80% of the population and women 52%. The closure of schools due to the insecurity reinforces a sense of being abandoned by the State and that there is a lack of opportunities for young people.

In recent years, the security context has deteriorated markedly with the proliferation of offensives by non-State armed groups and military operations by the defence and security forces. These armed conflicts have severely impacted civilians and have led to mass displacements, as well as the destruction of property and infrastructure. The presence of a large number of internally displaced persons, combined with the insecurity, affects people’s ability to carry out their income-generating activities, increasing vulnerability and weakening communities. Displaced people find themselves with fewer resources and less capacity to cope with shocks, tensions and conflicts.

Oxfam’s intervention

In this context, Oxfam in Burkina Faso has launched the project entitled “Building inclusive peace in the Sahel”. The objective is to promote
peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflicts by giving women and young people the opportunity to get involved in peacebuilding by carrying out peace initiatives. This approach has been implemented in the Centre, Centre-Nord and Plateau Central regions with a local partner, Réseau des Femmes de Foi pour la Paix au Burkina Faso (Network of Women of Faith for Peace in Burkina Faso, or REFFOP).

Within the framework of this project, the following activities have been developed:

- **Building the capacity of the local organisations** charged with implementing the project in the areas of peacebuilding, conflict sensitivity and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.
- **Facilitating and strengthening collaboration and dialogue between civil society organisations** working on peacebuilding through the creation of alliances and networks for sharing experiences and coordinating interventions.
- **Promoting the involvement and participation of young people and women** in peacebuilding efforts.

The project’s contribution in terms of the nexus

**Building peace, reducing fragility**

Through this project, Oxfam has succeeded in building the capacity of local actors and fostering collaboration among them, especially with State actors working on building peace and social cohesion. Thanks to the capacity-building work carried out within the framework of the project, local actors are better able to provide responses to various community conflicts, such as land conflicts between crop farmers and herders.

Working on the issue of peace (and existing conflicts) has enabled the main actors, local authorities, community, religious and customary leaders, and young people, to address and explain the root causes of conflicts that could fuel tensions and violence and to get involved in the promotion of social cohesion. Based on community dialogue, solutions are formulated and roadmaps are developed for the short and medium term. Dialogue helps defuse potential conflicts, mediation can be set up and the social cohesion index improves.
Towards new ways of working (collaboration and complementarity to benefit communities)

An analysis conducted jointly with external actors, including humanitarian, development and peacebuilding organisations, has given all the stakeholders an overview of the various dimensions of the context and the conjunctural and structural issues. This analysis was a first step towards a change in the attitude of the actors and teams working in different areas of intervention towards greater coordination, collaboration and complementarity.

Through training in the conflict-sensitive approach, the humanitarian and development teams of Oxfam and its partners that do not specialise in peace have begun to better understand the importance of analysing the conflicts in the areas where we are working and integrating conflict sensitivity into our practices.

Conflict sensitivity as a nexus entry point

The capacity-building on conflict sensitivity offered in Burkina Faso was very well received and has been taken up as a good practice. Two changes have been observed: conflict sensitivity is now taken into account by the different teams, regardless of their speciality (humanitarian or development, water & sanitation, protection, EFSI) and new ways of working are beginning to emerge. In the project definition phase, a committee is now set up, made up of people from the different pillars: development, humanitarian and peace. Consequently, right from the stage of identifying and formulating interventions, the various teams liaise in order to address funding issues and define strategies that will have a positive effect in the short and medium term. Synergies and bridges between programmes are identified, enabling complementarity and coherence.

Lessons learned

Implementation of the project has contributed enormously to strengthening the capacities of community actors and has led to the promotion of inclusive social cohesion. Indeed, the following lessons were learned from this first intervention experience:

- Religious organisations have expertise in peacebuilding;
- The involvement of religious leaders facilitated the design and implementation of the project;
- The commitment of the project actors is a determining factor in achieving the objectives of the project;
- The involvement of young people and women is an advantage in peacebuilding, based on good knowledge and application of the principles of Resolution 1325 and Resolution 2250;
- Inter-faith dialogue has helped break down barriers between young people and women of different religions;
- With an open-minded attitude and inter-community integration, the actors involved in implementing the project have become peacebuilders.

‘Thanks to the project, we have a better understanding of that Resolution, its pillars and its content. As it was men who had implemented the project activities, we are seeing things differently because we didn’t know that there were texts that called for the participation of women. In our circle, there were concerns about our involvement; in the end, they finally understood and the association gained more visibility. That prompted other people to want to join the association. In addition, at the end of this project, we responded to a call for projects on youth dialogue for the promotion of peace with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and obtained funding thanks to our experience with OXFAM.’ the President of REFFOP
FROM RISK MANAGEMENT TO DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL COHESION BASED ON LOCAL LEADERSHIP – NIGER

The context

Since 2015, the security situation in Niger has deteriorated, resulting in significant population movements and loss of life and property. This situation is linked in particular to the growing instability in the neighbouring countries of Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria, including repeated bloody incursions by non-State armed groups. The situation of Nigerien civilians living in the border departments of Maradi, Tillabéri, Tahoua and Diffa has rapidly worsened due to a significant increase in the number of attacks, abductions and extortion of property and livestock perpetrated by non-State armed groups in those areas. It is also due to the anticipated effects of restrictions related to the COVID-19 health crisis, population growth and climate shocks. All these crises linked to food insecurity, socio-economic challenges, climate hazards and insecurity explain why a substantial proportion of Niger’s population is unable to meet its basic needs.

Niger is experiencing growing domestic insecurity and regional political instability, which are having direct and indirect impacts on overall economic performance, public finances, access to markets and basic services, including a loss of education opportunities and increasing social tensions. Thus, Niger is facing a combination of health, climate and security shocks and crises that are exacerbating people’s vulnerability as well as impacting the growth of the economy whose vulnerability is also linked to its population, more than 70% of whom work in subsistence agriculture which is exposed to volatile weather conditions.

Oxfam’s intervention

The project entitled “Strengthening the early warning and rapid response system in the regions of Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéry and Zinder” aims to strengthen the early warning and emergency response system in those five regions. While there was already an alert system in place it did not function satisfactorily, mainly because the community structures were not working as they should. The objective is to make the system operational through the collection, analysis, processing and reporting of information from the
community level to the national level. The aim is also to avoid the plight of already vulnerable people worsening, by organising local support actions using resources allocated for that purpose.

The initial diagnosis carried out through the project identified the need to strengthen capacities at the community level to enable the system to function without depending on external support, instead giving the communities the necessary capacity to mount a preliminary response. The diagnosis revealed that community meetings scheduled to identify alerts are not held, tools are duplicated and their use is limited.

To follow up on this diagnosis, a participatory process was launched to decide how to work at the different levels and with what tools. A national workshop was held with the different regions. The workshop brought together all the stakeholders involved, civil society and the State, as well as experts in humanitarian action and development. The workshop served as an opportunity to identify and define indicators on the basis of which to analyse the context and the possible emergence of crisis situations; thresholds are established and indicators are adapted according to the reality of each region.

In parallel with this work to improve the system for monitoring the situation and ensuring early identification of risks, including conflict risks with specific indicators for each region, resources are allocated at the local level for early response actions by local actors to prevent and limit further deterioration of the situation of the already vulnerable population.

**Effects of strengthening community structures**

Beyond improving the early warning system, the project has contributed to strengthening local capacity, so that the system is sustainable and autonomous, allowing the communities themselves to organise early responses should the indicators deteriorate.

Jointly creating these systems with the communities has given rise to the identification and development of local initiatives. Resources are allocated to ensure that the early warning system is autonomous and sustainable. The communities have defined the solutions themselves, drawing on local know-how and ancestral practices that had previously been forgotten. Community fields have been revived, stocks of produce have been created and villages have set up a system of monthly collections. Thanks to the existence of sustainable community resources, local people taking ownership of the system, the transfer of capacity and the strengthening of community structures and endogenous capacity, the system is becoming sustainable.

The early warning system is the foundation for development and resilience-building initiatives that are in place and with which Oxfam continues to work. Oxfam found that, thanks to the establishment of the system, when the crisis broke out in the Tillabéri region, communities were able to provide responses to support those affected. Local leadership has emerged and has been strengthened and equipped to be able to ensure ongoing, regular monitoring of the evolution of indicators, to alert and anticipate the response at the community level.

In addition, the project has succeeded in contributing to social cohesion: thanks to the networking of community structures, between herders and crop farmers, and between communities through exchanges, a climate of solidarity has been fostered and the different groups and communities have found ways to compensate each other. The Community Early Warning System and Emergency Response System inform each other of the risks and the measures to be taken. Joint management of land for livestock farming and agriculture, with upstream planning, helps limit potential conflicts. The sharing of information generates trust between groups and strengthens social cohesion.
Lessons learned

The project has demonstrated the importance and relevance of strengthening sustainable community structures in order to generate a local response capacity that can be swiftly mobilised. Community mobilisation makes it possible to have long-term effects in contexts of chronic crisis, making it possible to manage risks, launch early actions and responses, and ensure there is the capacity to organise and take decisions at the community level.

The information-gathering system designed to identify risk situations early on has been used by communities to make decisions regarding the sale and trading of goods in a way that is aligned with development logics. Access to information helps households make decisions that limit their vulnerability. The information made available to households is a resource that enables them to be better prepared, avert crises and make more judicious choices for their resilience and for peace.
CONCLUSION

The case studies from the five countries show a variety of ways of adopting the main concepts of the triple nexus approach and demonstrate that Oxfam’s teams understand the need to work differently in contexts of complex, long-term crisis. Humanitarian or “scattering” solutions alone cannot solve structural factors of crises.

Triple nexus entry points vary according to the programme, the ways of working internally and with other actors, and the funding, and must be specific to the contexts and Oxfam’s added value. The Oxfam teams have demonstrated a willingness to work differently, to analyse the context and arrive at a common understanding of the areas where we are working, to foster complementarity and flexibility in order to better adapt to the context.

Firstly, two case studies were made possible thanks to funding from the Emergency Trust Fund, which offers flexibility, adaptability and space to work on innovative pilot projects such as the Civil Society Services Centre in a fragile and conflict-affected country like the Central African Republic, which would not be possible with humanitarian or development funding. Chad’s Employment, Resilience and Social Cohesion programme is unique. The Emergency Trust Fund allows projects to encompass humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities.

Secondly, funding for the peacebuilding programme in Burkina Faso provided funds to train our teams and partners in the conflict-sensitive approach and change how we work internally. That same funding, focused on building peace in Mali, complements humanitarian and development projects for women in the Ségou region.

In all the case studies, and particularly in Niger and CAR, the importance of building the capacity of local actors is clear and includes the authorities, the private sector, civil society organisations and community-based organisations. Indeed, partnering with local actors enables us to work on emergency responses, such as medium- and long-term programmes, and strengthens programming within the framework of the nexus. In Oxfam’s experience, this ensures accountability, sustainability and the continuation of our interventions.

Convergence zones seem to be the modality of choice for applying the triple nexus approach, as demonstrated in Mali, Niger and Chad. Implementing humanitarian, development or resilience projects and peacebuilding initiatives in the same geographical area to address short-term needs as well as the structural causes of crises and conflicts shows potential for more transformative impacts, constructive social dynamics and strong community resilience. The convergence of beneficiaries, as demonstrated in Mali, is an interesting example of focusing on a vulnerable segment of the population that nonetheless has significant potential for change.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Donors

• Flexible, multi-year funding is essential to make a nexus approach viable and to finance pilot projects and other innovative projects in the medium term as well as promoting reflection and learning, including in contexts of crisis or conflict (as demonstrated in CAR).

• Donors should provide funding to build the capacity of our teams and partners to better understand the triple nexus logic and a conflict-sensitivity approach that is essential for interventions in fragile contexts and to mitigate risks.

• Publicly support, including with funding, the local humanitarian leadership agenda and the strengthening of local actors both in humanitarian responses and in peacebuilding and development, to ensure the sustainability of interventions, encouraging innovation.

• Increase funding for peacebuilding programmes by supporting women’s and youth organisations as agents of change to strengthen social cohesion and improve conflict management and resolution at the local level.

Ways of working

• Working in a way that ensures a more coherent approach in a convergence zone requires changes both internally and externally. Joint analysis and planning are an excellent starting point, and actively seeking synergies must also be part of this new approach.

• Improve coordination with external actors working in the same areas and seek complementarities within a framework of common objectives to strengthen the impacts of all interventions.

• Identify indicators to measure the outcomes and impacts of interventions with a nexus approach.

Endnotes

1 “Convergence zone” or “impact zone”, e.g. providing a minimum package of complementary activities in a cluster of 10 to 15 villages and/or reinforcing actions underway in a given area.


3 As of 31 August 2022 there were more than 1.5 million internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso. OCHA 2022, Burkina Faso Humanitarian Snapshot.

4 Project funded by Danida, implemented at the regional level in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger over four years.