

CASE STUDY 71

Response to the food and pastoral crisis in the Gao region, Mali Coping with the changing environment and partners needs

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Context

Situated in the North East of Mali, Gao region covers 170,566 sq. km and like any Saharan-Sahelian zone, has a climate characterised by irregular spatial and temporal low rainfall. 58% of its area is potential pasture that could regenerate every rainy season. Livestock based on mobility is the only economic activity that adds value to this space and is the main source of income for local communities who remain nomadic or transhumant to 89%. This is why the SNV Gao's team placed pastoralism at the heart of its operations. SNV Gao works to secure sustainable and equitable access to factors of production such as: pastoral resources, health coverage, animal feed, and secondly, the development of sustainable and equitable livestock and its by-products.

After two years of rainfall deficit, pastoralists were forced in 2010 to begin their seasonal migration prematurely but also to make moves of unusual magnitude. Meanwhile, higher prices for basic food commodities which began in 2007, led to a gradual erosion of coping capacities of pastoralists. In addition, the livestock market value deteriorated due to cattle poor physical condition. Therefore in March 2010, the purchasing power of people decreased considerably thus placing them in a situation of food insecurity.

Challenge

Considering the high risk of mortality for livestock and the potential risk of livelihoods destruction for pastoralists, the SNV team in Gao decided to refocus its activities during this period of crisis in order to remain relevant and to respond to the new priorities of its partners who work directly with pastoral populations.

Clients and Partners

SNV Mali strengthens the capacity of producer organisations in the livestock sector. These include the Association of Professional Producers (AOPP), the Federation of Livestock Meat in Mali (FEBEVIM), the Malian unit of the Regional Network Billital Maroobé (RBM) and the Regional Federation of Pastoralists Breeders Amadane. These organisations are mostly members of the National Confederation of Farmers Organisations (CNOP). Moreover, to increase the sustainability of their actions SNV advisors also strengthen the capacity of local development organisations. As such, in the region of Gao, the SNV team collaborates with the Association for Solidarity and Development of the North (ASDN).

Regarding the strategic role given by the Malian government to regional agriculture chambers in the implementation of its emergency response to the crisis, the team has accelerated the process of contracting its representation in Gao. The changing environment led the team to adapt its support with all these partners.

Intervention logic and methods

Advisory activities implemented by SNV in this context have been defined in consultation with the partners: their strategic positioning in pastoralism and the analysis of their capacities in the response of the pastoral and food crisis were taken into account. In addition, SNV worked to embed these activities in the continuity of support previously introduced.

Considering that since 2008, SNV Mali strengthened the capacities of producers' organisations in advocacy - lobbying, SNV Gao facilitated the implementation of a trajectory led by producers' organisations towards the Malian government to adapt its responses to the crisis needs of pastoral populations. With this support from SNV, together, AOPP, FEBEVIM and RBM held several press conferences both in Bamako, the capital of Mali, and Gao between April and June 2010 to alert on the magnitude of the crisis. Realising the difficulties in releasing this information in the official media, a press conference was filmed and a DVD illustrated by field images, were published and distributed to relevant authorities, international organisations and various embassies. It was submitted to the President of the Republic of Mali by FEBEVIM during a National Higher Council of Agriculture Meeting held in May 2010.

This approach focused on strengthening the strategic positioning of partners has also been applied with the Regional Chamber of Agriculture Gao (CRA). Recipient of several tens of tons of animal fodder subsidised by the government for its members, the CRA was supported by SNV Gao in monitoring the distribution of these quantities throughout the region. Furthermore, SNV supported the CRA in organising outreach missions in areas of high concentration of livestock in order to facilitate a peaceful management of natural resources and to prevent conflicts between users.

In order to ensure a greater consistency in its operations between local and national teams, SNV Mali multiplied exchanges at all level with the various actors and stakeholders involved in the crisis' response in order to facilitate the consideration of its partners' interests.

In that perspective, as a member of the Food Security Thematic Group of the International NGOs' Federation of in Mali (FONGIM), SNV has facilitated the linkage of producers' organisations with international organisations. And indeed on the basis of a shared understanding of issues related to the pastoral and food crisis, international NGOs and producers' organisations, have supported a common position of advocacy on behalf of Malian civil society Forum at the annual meeting of technical and financial partners, government and civil society.

SNV Gao sensitised local members of producers' organisations in collecting and sharing critical information with international organisations concerning the movements of cattle, pasture conditions and available water in the region. In this way, the partners' organisations of SNV helped the GIS project for Pastoral Monitoring of Action Against Hunger-Spain (ACF-E). The information gathered helped to target the neglected areas where remained the most vulnerable populations, women and children.

SNV Gao also facilitated the linkage of partners' organisations with donors for the implementation of emergency programs. These initiatives resulted in funding for two collaborations: Malian National Unit of RBM and Oxfam GB and the second between ASDN and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Mali. As part of the project led by ASDN, SNV Gao was committed to provide technical support. During the three month period of the program, the advisory activities of SNV focused both on the logistics, administrative and financial aspects of the program, but also its technical implementation.

Finally, SNV Gao led a platform which brings together international NGOs operating in the region in the crisis context. Indeed, SNV Gao animated several meetings to facilitate geographic consistency in approaches and encourage mutual learning experiences to enhance the impact of the various initiatives.

Outcome

In an insecure situation characterised by the need to intervene quickly, the reorientation of SNV Gao activities has allowed its partners to strengthen their strategic positioning in the sector of pastoralism. Their ability to defend the interests of their members and beneficiaries in these circumstances contributed in enhancing their legitimacy and increased their visibility among the Malian civil society.

The consolidation of coherence between the national and the local level through the strengthening of SNV's role as a facilitator in the exchanges with technical and financial partners, local organisations has enabled the implementation of emergency activities essential to limit the loss of livestock and the increasing vulnerability of pastoralists.

Moreover, in this specific context, SNV has supported its clients in the development of adapted tools for instance in monitoring distribution of animal fodder for ASDN or with the organisation of missions around peaceful resource management for CRA, thereby improving management principles and performance within these structures.

Impact

Finally, by leading a platform for the dialogue, SNV has fostered a better account of local realities in the operations of international organisations and encouraged a synergy of action for a greater impact.

Furthermore, advocacy messages initiated by the producers' organisations had been relayed by international NGOs such as Oxfam GB who had communicated on the management of the crisis by the Malian Government in July 2010 at United Nations headquarters in New York. This action gave rise to the order of an assessment mission by United Nations in August 2010.

The animal fodder quantities assigned to the CRA was distributed throughout the region of Gao. ASDN and Malian National Unit of RBM had implemented projects to support pastoralists and reduce mortality in herds. Through this experience, they developed partnerships with other international development organisations and confirmed their role as providers of services to their members and beneficiaries.

Lessons learnt

The flexibility of SNV teams, their commitment vis-à-vis their partners, their knowledge of the intervention area have allowed them in these circumstances of crisis to strengthen the coherence between the support provided at national umbrella producers' organisations and their regional representation in Gao. However, the producers' organisations functioning showed deficiencies in collecting information from local level. Strengthening the operational link between producers' organisations and their members is emerging as a decisive factor for the future of these structures. And this, especially as their representation at community level gives them a key role in the prevention and management of risks faced by pastoralists.

The role that SNV played in linking some partners with donors had been crucial, particularly in the decision of financing the project ASDN by the Embassy of the

Kingdom of the Netherlands. If it can be welcomed, the support provided by SNV in this context raises the question of its responsibility for the quality of the projects results. The success of such an institutional arrangement should be based primarily on a clear definition of roles and explicit responsibilities of each party involved in the project but also on mutual trust.

SNV has contributed to the development of knowledge on pastoralism by increasing exchanges with development partners on the roots causes of the crisis. It has fostered a better consideration of local context. However, the persistence of many prejudices towards pastoralism and its economic value to the development of northern Mali still remain. Therefore SNV is encouraged to continue its work to demonstrate the importance of this production system for the semi-arid areas.

Taking into account the long-term consequences of this crisis and lessons learned through this experience, SNV Gao intends to initiate a reflection on the prevention and management of recurring risks in the Sahel in order to better integrate them in future interventions. Similarly, the multiple exchanges now allow high expectations in innovative collaborations. Indeed, discussions are taking place with structures such as Action against Hunger-Spain to strengthen the link between economic development of pastoral people and their access to basic services, or with VSF Belgium on pastoral milk value chain as the basis of food security for local populations of the region.

Photos and quotes :



Concentration areas where access to water were at stake

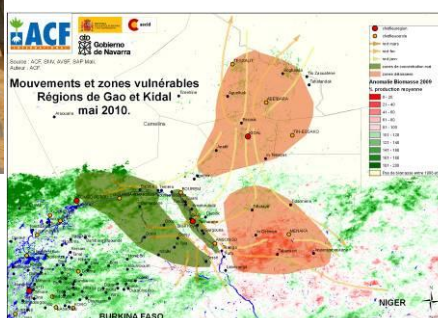


Dialogue between natural resources users facilitated by SNV in areas of high livestock concentration



Emergency program led in Menaka with subsidised fodder distribution

contribution of SNV partners'



Map produced by ACF-E GIS project with the