

## **Development and Peace's Response to the Sahel Food Crisis 2011-2016**

In 2011, the food crisis that followed the droughts in the Sahel region affected more than 18 million people, primarily in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, but also affecting communities of Mauritania, Chad, and Senegal. This crisis quickly grew in complexity, first due to the serious political conflict that broke out in 2012 in Mali which displaced hundreds of thousands of Malians, and later due to the growing number of attacks carried out since 2015 by Boko Haram in countries sharing a border with Nigeria, that led to significant displacements of the population into the region of the Lake Chad Basin.

This crisis is still ongoing, and hence Development and Peace is still committed to provide ongoing assistance to the region of Sahel. However, as the funding raised by the Canadian public in 2012 to contribute toward the Sahel food crisis reached its end in 2016, this report is intended to cover only the interventions supported by Development and Peace in the Sahel over the period of 2011 to 2016. The funds available to respond to this crisis totaled \$9.8 million dollars, of which \$5.3 million came from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB), \$2.5 million from the funding drive launched in May 2012, \$335,000 from Development and Peace's own funds, and \$2 million from the Canadian government's International Humanitarian Assistance (IHA). In what follows, we will describe the multi-faceted response of Development and Peace to this crisis, and the way the organization adapted its approach to the evolving contexts of the countries targeted and the regional implications of these changes.

### **1. The context**

**The food crisis of 2011-2012** — The number of people in the Sahel region estimated to be affected by the food crisis in 2012 was approximately 18 million, primarily in Niger (6.4 million people, or 39% of the population), Mali (4.6 million people, or 27% of the population) and Burkina Faso (2 million people, or 12% of the population). People in Mauritania, Senegal, Chad and certain regions of Nigeria and Cameroon were also affected. Niger was the most gravely affected by this crisis, both in terms of the real number of people impacted and in terms of percentage of the country's population.

The reasons for this food crisis were multiple, complex and localised: changes in the amount of rainfall, shortages in grain and agricultural yields, the rising price of food commodities, etc. The growing vulnerability of affected populations, who had been subjected over the course of preceding years to multiple successive crises, also aggravated the impact of the specific growing conditions of the 2011-2012 agricultural season. From one year to the next, vulnerable

households have seen their resources continue to diminish, such that even a good growing season doesn't enable them to re-establish a sufficient level of food security. During an evaluation mission carried out by Development and Peace and the CFGB in February, 2013, a Nigerien village chief reminded that it was the fourth year in a row that agricultural production had been deficient, such that the entire village was now in a state of vulnerability. He recounted how, over the course of the years, many peasants had sold or pawned off portions of their fields and they were no longer able to get these back. Young men had left for Libya or Nigeria and the women had gone to beg in the city during the pre-harvest period, when the grain from the preceding year's harvest had begun to run out. The vulnerability of these households was further amplified by the return of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers to their countries of origin in 2011, fleeing political crises in the Ivory Coast and Libya.

The Malian political and security crisis aggravated food insecurity, pushing hundreds of thousands of families onto the roads as they fled northern zones occupied by armed groups. It was estimated that the conflict in northern Mali affected 1.7 million people in 2012, limiting their access to basic social services and infrastructure and leading to the displacement of more than 400,000 people within the country or into the neighbouring countries of Burkina Faso, Niger and Mauritania.

Governments and local and international actors, including Development and Peace and the Caritas network, mobilized a response to this crisis fairly quickly, beginning in 2012. However, although thanks to this national and international response the food security situation had shown overall improvements by the end of 2012, what the UN calls the *triple crisis* in the Sahel persisted over the course of subsequent years. The *triple crisis* refers, first, to the long-term consequences of drought; second, to the chronic food insecurity that so diminished populations' resilience; and third, to the Malian political and security crisis with its displacements of the population within Mali and into neighbouring countries.

**Ongoing violence and insecurity** — In Mali, in spite of the 2015 signing of the *Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation*, peace and reconciliation have remained fragile. The presence of numerous armed groups in the region led to increased crime and impeded vulnerable populations' access to essential goods and humanitarian aid. Attacks of armed groups continue to affect the northern regions of Mali, and also the centre of the country and the capital Bamako.

Insecurity grew significantly in the region of Diffa—located in the south-east of Niger, on the border with Nigeria—due to the threat posed by the group Boko Haram. The violent conflict that broke out seven years ago in Nigeria has intensified in recent years, spreading to Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, causing a severe and complex humanitarian crisis in the part of Africa that we call the Lake Chad Basin. This crisis is the result of an armed conflict, fed by long-standing socio-economic marginalization, against a backdrop of ecological crisis. The number of people displaced by this crisis in affected countries exceeds 2.6 million. In Diffa, Niger, some displaced people found refuge with host families, while others live in a greater condition of precariousness, without safe drinking water, and with no means to carry out agricultural or pastoral forms of production. Many people and families find themselves without shelter. The huge population influx overwhelmed the receptive capacity of host populations, who were already living in very precarious conditions prior to this crisis.

**The persistence of food insecurity** — Many communities in the Sahel region continue to be affected by food insecurity, in particular those communities that are already vulnerable due to difficult growing conditions. The region is prone to conflict between farmers and pastoralists in certain zones due to increased competition for access to agricultural land, pasture and water sources. In 2017, 3.8 million people in Mali and 1.3 million people in Niger remained in a situation of food insecurity according to the estimation of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

## **2. The Response of Development and Peace**

The Sahel region is not experiencing its first food crisis. Development and Peace, over the course of the years, has always responded to the urgent calls issued by Caritas to help countries affected by humanitarian crises. The Caritas branches in countries impacted by the 2011 food crisis were very rapid and effective in identifying the areas and households that were most affected and in sending out urgent calls for help. Thanks to their rootedness in local communities and their expertise in evaluating the food security of populations during each growing season, these national Caritas branches played an important role in this crisis. Development and Peace responded quickly to their calls for assistance, using its own emergency funds and in collaboration with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB).

### **The first response to calls from national Caritas organizations (between April and June, 2012)**

As these were considered the countries most affected, it is principally in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso that Development and Peace carried out its initial response to the food crisis. Caritas Mali, Caritas Niger (CADEV-Niger), and Caritas Burkina Faso (OCADES) had submitted their requests for funding to the Caritas Internationalis network between January and April, 2012. These calls sought to increase the availability of food through different means (food distribution, subsidized production of cereals, money transfers, etc.) as well to put in place various activities supporting agricultural and pastoral production, to a total of about \$11 million. In partnership with the CFGB, Development and Peace was able to make significant responses to these calls. The Development and Peace/CFGB contribution was \$5.3 million dollars toward food distribution, or 47% of the total amount requested by the three Caritas branches (70% of total amount requested for the Malian Appeal). This food distribution initiative directly fed 21,450 families (188,000 people) over a period of 2-4 months between May and September 2012.

In addition to food distribution initiatives in these three countries, Development and Peace responded with support to requests from other Caritas in the region—Senegal, Mauritania and Chad—with a contribution of \$325,000 thanks to emergency funding to finance activities supporting food availability, as well as agricultural and pastoral production.

### **A Call to Solidarity Issued to Canadians (May to September, 2012)**

On May 29, 2012, in parallel with the first intervention, Development and Peace, in collaboration with the CCCB, launched a call for Canadians to respond with solidarity to this food crisis and to the drought that had been devastating the Sahel region of West Africa. The brief reminded the public that Pope Benedict XVI had recently invited the international community to mobilize itself to prevent a humanitarian disaster in this region. This campaign was slow to begin, as it fell in the middle of summer, but in August 2012, Development and Peace and the CCCB relaunched the

campaign following an announcement by the Canadian government of their intention to match all funds collected. Recall also that in the summer of 2012, Development and Peace went to Niger—one of the countries most affected by the famine—along with a film team from Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation, in order to document the impact of this crisis on affected populations. They produced a 30 minute documentary, *A New Leaf*, that focused on the complex reasons for the food crisis and the ways in which our solidarity could make a difference. In the end, this call led to the collection of a total of \$2.5 million, enabling Development and Peace to greatly increase its capacity to intervene in the short and medium term in this region.

As a complement to the funding raised by Development and Peace, in 2015-2016, Development and Peace received a financial contribution from the Canadian government's International Humanitarian Assistance to respond to the needs of populations in insecure zones of Mali (Tombouctou) and of Niger (Diffa) for total of \$2.2 million. We should note also that a second project in Mali financed by IHA (\$1.4 million) has begun recently, in the spring of 2017.

### **3. The Objectives and Results of Development and Peace's Interventions**

After the first response to the emergency in partnership with the national Caritas branches, Development and Peace fleshed out a program framework to present to the Emergency Aid Committee the primary objectives of its intervention in Sahel. Niger and Mali, severely affected by the food crisis and consumed by specific crises linked to conflicts, were priority countries. The target populations were vulnerable families in a rural milieu suffering from food insecurity, as well as persons displaced by conflicts and their host communities. The program was oriented along three principal axes:

- 1) Bring humanitarian assistance to people in emergency situations
- 2) Build the resilience of populations in order to prevent future food crises
- 3) Contribute toward the prevention and the resolution of conflicts around natural resources

Most of this program's partners were members of the Caritas network already implicated in the first response to the emergency: the Caritas branches (national and diocesan) in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Senegal. Development and Peace also worked with some civil society partners that were particularly involved in food security initiatives in Mali and Niger, from a sustainable development approach. The IHA funding in 2016 for Niger and Mali was put to work in these two countries in collaboration with CRS (Catholic Relief Services). CRS has the capacity for significant on-the-ground interventions, and Development and Peace has often collaborated with this organization in order to carry out projects financed by IHA.

***Humanitarian Assistance*** — Of total funds dedicated to the Sahel crisis, close to 83% (\$8.1 million) went to humanitarian assistance, that is to say, to improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable populations: victims of severe food insecurity, populations that had been displaced or become refugees due to conflicts. Humanitarian assistance served to ameliorate conditions such as lack of food, water, sanitation infrastructure, and other basic necessities.

*Food distribution in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso* made up the greater part of the contribution toward the Sahel crisis. A contribution of \$5.3 million enabled the distribution, in these three

countries, of food constituting a complete food ration to 21,450 of the most vulnerable households

(188,000 people) for a period of 2-4 months according to the country, between May and September 2012. In order to keep tabs on this exceptional commitment, Development and Peace and the CFGB led an assessment mission to Niger and Burkina Faso in February 2013. Due to the escalation of conflict and the arrival of French troops on the ground, a visit to Mali was not possible.

*Development and Peace also responded to emergency calls from Caritas in Senegal, Chad, and Mauritania*, contributing \$325,000 in 2011-2012; and making a further contribution of \$50,000 in 2014 to Senegal, and \$100,000 in 2015 to Mauritania. These funds contributed by Development and Peace were responses to specific calls issued by the Caritas national branches as they confronted the food crisis that was devastating their region. The Caritas branches were proposing to carry out activities that would assist both with food availability, and with pastoral and agricultural production.

*IHA funding that was put to work from April 2016 and March 2017* improved the living conditions of 1,959 families (13,000 people) in northern Mali by providing access to water, and nutritional support to mothers and children. In Niger, this funding was used to improve the sanitation infrastructure and other living conditions of 9,800 displaced persons, refugees, and members of host communities in the Diffa region, in the north-east part of the country, on the border with Nigeria.

Some funding also contributed to the *reinforcement of Caritas organisations' capacities to confront emergency situations* by equipping them with better oversight, intervention, and management procedures in order to have a better impact in the medium and long-term:

- A project reinforcing specific capacities of Caritas Mali (proposed to be three years in duration, and still ongoing) enabled the development of emergency management policies and procedures, the establishment of emergency watch systems, and a better integration of risk reduction strategies into development programs.
- Another project also enabled improved coordination between the response of the four national Caritas organisations (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal) and their diocesan Caritas branches, when responding to humanitarian needs caused by the crisis in Mali. This project enabled them to better support internally displaced persons, refugees and host populations; to improve the technical capacities of their personnel (in money transfers, market analyses and security management); and to reinforce the coordination and communication between Caritas branches in order to carry out a more targeted intervention.

***Building the resilience of communities*** — The FAO defines *resilience* as “the ability of people, communities or systems that are confronted by disasters or crises to withstand damage and to recover rapidly.” Development and Peace invested \$1,581,000 in projects oriented toward building community resilience. This corresponds to 16% of the total funds dedicated to the Sahel, and 64% of Development and Peace’s own funds contributed toward this crisis. This reflects Development and Peace’s approach to the management of emergency programs and

reconstruction efforts: Development and Peace prioritizes using financing generated by its own fund-raising to invest in medium-term resilience projects, which are otherwise more difficult to finance than immediate humanitarian assistance programs.

The following are examples of key initiatives that improved food and nutritional security and reinforced the resilience of rural families who had been affected by chronic crises and climate change:

- The reinforcement of agricultural and pastoral production as well as the technical capacities of agriculturalists and pastoralists, through seed distribution and formation opportunities; through the distribution of small ruminants in order to rebuild the livestock base; and through apprenticeship in climate change adaptation strategies.
- The prevention of future food crises by setting up community cereal reserves to ensure greater food security during times of deficit in cereal production. Community granaries were built and stocked with local cereals sold at prime cost or lower than market price during critical periods of price inflation (during the period preceding the first harvest or during times of food shortage). These community granaries reinforced community solidarity by enabling the free distribution of foodstuffs to households in need, and revitalised the social and cooperative life of communities.
- Support for market garden production, the preparation of market garden sites, seed distribution and technical training, have contributed to the diversification of food sources (especially in times of cereal deficit), as well as providing a source of income for many families. As these activities mainly involve women, they served to improve women's incomes and living conditions, and in turn, those of their families. Alongside the development of gardens, small savings and credit initiatives initiated and managed by women contributed toward the creation of income-generating activities.
- A project carried out in collaboration with the Catholic Committee Against Hunger and For Development (CCFD) enabled leaders of nearly 300 peasant farmers organizations, as well as the local elected representatives of 45 rural communities from 4 Sahelian trans-border zones to learn about public policies surrounding food security, to improve their capacity for dialogue with public authorities, and to develop strategic alliances between citizens, leaders of grass-roots organizations and local elected representatives, in order to better defend their shared interests.

***Conflict prevention and management*** — A project implemented by CADEV in Niger was primarily dedicated to conflict prevention in a situation in which conflict risks were linked to inter-religious tensions and the electoral context. Religious leaders, young people, leaders of women's associations and other civil society organizations were informed of the issues and participated in initiatives promoting peace, tolerance, and the peaceful cohabitation of members of different communities.

In addition, in the context of projects designed to help build resilience, some partners developed specific activities for preventing and managing conflicts between farmers and pastoralists using the same territory. This was considered to be extremely important because both in Mali and in Niger, tensions between farmers and pastoralists have been exacerbated in recent years by climate change and displacements of the population.



*Women's participation* — The initiatives promoted during this crisis involved a significant number of women who played a vital role in the mobilization of their communities. Women generally take responsibility for the nutrition, health, and nurture of their family, such that periods of complex humanitarian crisis like the one in the Sahel—combining drought, conflict, population displacements, etc.—have a disproportionately severe impact on women.

#### **4. Observations and perspectives**

The programming of Development and Peace responded in a coherent manner to the complex and changing situation in the Sahel. The projects carried out were intended to create a bridge between the emergency situation and the long-term development of this region, which is very important in this region. Partner organizations supplied Development and Peace with privileged access to information enabling the organization to track the evolution of the situation on the ground. Most importantly, due to the prevailing insecurity of the region, Development and Peace's capacity to work with local organizations, rooted in communities, permitted Development and Peace to intervene in areas where there were sometimes few humanitarian actors capable of responding to the crisis.

In addition, Development and Peace is closely following the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region, consumed by a complex and urgent humanitarian situation that affects some 17 million people in northeastern Nigeria, in the extreme northeastern region of Cameroon, in western Chad and in southeastern Niger. The Lake Chad Basin crisis is currently considered to be the most acute crisis in Africa, according to an evaluation conducted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The combined impact of aggravated insecurity, of rapid population growth and serious vulnerability resulting from the effects of climate change, environmental degradation, poverty and under-investment in social services, has resulted in a record number of persons needing emergency aid. Development and Peace currently supports Caritas Nigeria's work to assist populations affected by this crisis in the region of Borno, in the northeast of Nigeria, as well as CRS Niger in a zone to the east of Diffa where there is little humanitarian presence due to the region's insecurity. Development and Peace also continues to work in the north of Mali to support populations affected by insecurity linked to recurrent conflicts.

The funding period for the Sahel humanitarian program was closed in 2016, however the crisis is certainly not over, but rather has changed and grown more complex over the course of time. This region, which continues to be marked by poverty, food insecurity and displacements linked to conflicts, will continue to be a priority of Development and Peace in its humanitarian interventions.