



FOOD SECURITY CLUSTER
Strengthening Humanitarian Response

FOOD SECURITY AND GENDER CONCERNS – THE SAHEL FOOD CRISIS

February 2012

Taking into account the different needs of women, girls, boys and men makes our humanitarian response more effective and equitable.

The people of the Sahel Region are likely to experience severe food shortages in 2012. The on-going food crisis in the Region is exacerbated by a range of variables that include climate issues and deep-rooted gender inequalities. The challenge for humanitarian and development actors is to pinpoint the root causes of the crisis and act in a way that addresses the distinct needs, priorities and perspectives of women, girls, boys and men. Failing to do so may perpetuate or even increase existing disparities and further marginalize vulnerable groups, thus increasing food insecurity. Ultimately, addressing the underlying causes of recurring food-related crises in the Region will help to ensure better humanitarian outcomes and a more sustainable impact.

KEY GENDER and FOOD SECURITY *Messages*: SAHEL FOOD CRISIS

- 1. Nutrition:** Malnutrition leads to the death of almost 800,000 children under 5 years (UNICEF and Groundswell International 2011) in the region, annually. Tackling the underlying issues related to malnutrition will help to build local resilience to recurring food related shocks and provide a strong focus on the gender aspects of poverty, as women are often the poorest, yet, culturally responsible for household food and nutrition security.
- 2. Food Security:** in tackling the underlying causes of food insecurity in the region ensure that **women's as well as men's access to and control over production means** (credit, agricultural inputs, farming tools and land) are recognised and addressed. In the face of increasing land degradation and consequential migration of men, women's workloads and responsibilities have also increased. In addition, women's already limited access to assets such as land, water and livestock perilously restricts their ability to ensure the wellbeing and survival of their families and themselves.
- 3. Protection:** The crisis in Libya has led to the return migration of hundreds of thousands of people to the Sahel region. Since December 2011, the IOM has registered the return of 209,030 people from Libya into Niger, Chad, Mali and Mauritania; 95% of the returnees are male, aged between 20 and 40 years, with low levels of education and, for some, it is the first time they have been to their countries of origin. Some have been victims of robbery, extortion and human rights violations and are suffering from psychosocial trauma due to the conflict. The majority of the returnees are from the poorest and least developed communities in the region. There is urgent need to ensure that response planning meets their needs while protecting the needs and rights of host communities, who are themselves subsisting on increasingly smaller plots of land that are subject to degradation and overuse. Deteriorating natural resources and the types of agricultural production practiced (subsistence, cash crop and single crop cultivation as primary sources of livelihoods), coupled with unregulated market forces have already

increased the vulnerability of women, girls, boys and men in the region. Those vulnerable people now have to share dwindling food and income resources with a larger extended family group without the safety net of much needed remittances the returnees provided in the past.

4. **Cash transfers:** The crisis in Libya and the struggle to recover from years of conflict and recurring natural disasters in certain countries in the Region, coupled with the impact of drought and global soaring food prices, is putting inordinate pressure on the poorest households. The price of millet, a staple for the region, is currently 20% higher than it has been over the past five years, leading to concerns about its contribution to the rising number of malnourished children. Lessons learnt from existing cash transfer projects show that individuals and households can make effective use of cash to improve their livelihoods and to negate the need to resort to negative coping strategies such as the sale of productive assets. The gender aspects of these programmes, which include community-level awareness-building - with women and men - on malnutrition and other health and food security related issues needs to be incorporated into humanitarian responses. Humanitarian actors should recognise the fact that short-term cash transfers have not had significant impact on gender roles within the food security response in the Region, if anything cash transfers are perceived as helping women to continue to carry the burden of food provision at the household level and reinforce negative male stereotypes in relation to household food security¹. **Gender and social analysis needs to be part of all potential emergency responses** together with an assessment of the context in which the crisis is occurring. This is an important factor in deciding if cash and vouchers are the best options for the vulnerable women, girls, boys and men being targeted. Analysis of the local socio-cultural context should inform whether or not cash transfers or vouchers will assist the most vulnerable households in restoring their livelihoods and should have clear gender equality goals.

5. **Social Protection:** Actions to promote social protection should link gender-sensitive, pro-poor economic measures to relief efforts from the humanitarian response community. This will help partners meet SPHERE and Gender in Emergencies Minimum Standards. Humanitarian organisations that are part of the food security response need to have clear and operational commitments to gender equality that are in line with gender in emergencies minimum standards and an integral part of all of their programmes.

6. **Data Disaggregation.** Data should always be collected in a disaggregated fashion – age, sex and diversity – to ensure that protection and assistance activities are needs-driven and respond to the different concerns and risks of women and men of all ages and background.

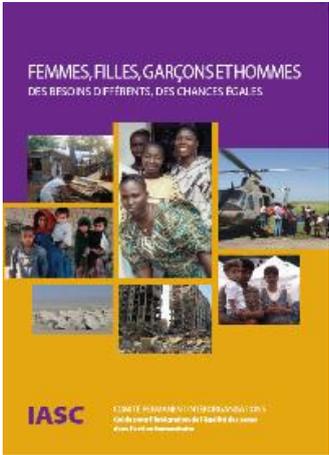
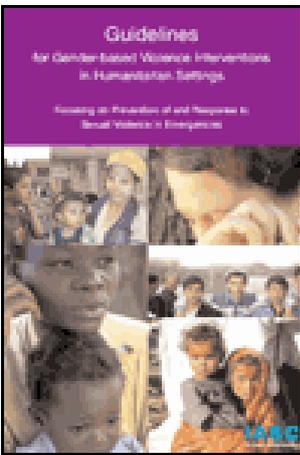
7. **Building on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and development successes at the community level:** There is a solid evidence base that DRR strategies in the region, which have been undertaken over the past five years are contributing significantly, in targeted communities, to reducing the impact of shocks on the resilience of vulnerable households. Initiatives that include seed and fertiliser distribution, market gardening, rehabilitation and drilling of wells, training of women and youth in income-generating activities, etc. have contributed to the overall wellbeing of targeted households and communities. These development activities form an integral gender-sensitive part of the humanitarian support that will be provided.

Contact Information		
OCHA HQ	Kate Burns New York	burns@un.org Tel: 1917 3679002
GenCap Adviser with the Food Security Cluster	Patricia Colbert Rome	patricia.colbert@wfp.org Tel: +39 0665132307

¹ Please see footnote 1 above.

For more details, please refer to aspects of the ADAPT and ACT framework for gender programming found in the IASC Gender Handbook and use the GBV guidelines. These tools are available in French.

<http://gender.oneresponse.info>
<http://gencap.oneresponse.info>
<http://oneresponse.info/crosscutting/gender/Documents/Gender%20Handbook%20-%20French%20FINAL.pdf>
<http://oneresponse.info/crosscutting/gender/Documents/GBV%20Guidelines%20-%20French.pdf>



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