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RESEARCH BRIEF

Sahel Social Cohesion Research in Burkina Faso and Niger



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Disclaimer

This research brief is a summary version of a study commissioned by the World Food Programme to help increase conflict-sensitivity and contribute to social cohesion building within WFP's integrated resilience programming in Niger and Burkina Faso. The full report with the same title is published as an IFPRI Working Paper and can be accessed on the IFPRI webpage (www.ifpri.org/publications). This brief has not been independently peer reviewed. Any opinions expressed here belong to the authors and are not necessarily representative of or endorsed by IFPRI.

Acronyms

3PA	Three-pronged approach
BF	Burkina Faso
CBPP	Community-based participatory planning
COFOB	Commission Foncière de Base (Village Land Commission)
COFOCOM	Commission Foncière Communale (Municipal Land Commission)
CVD	Village Development Committee
FFA	Food Assistance for Assets
FGD	Focus group discussion
IDP	Internally displaced person
KII	Key informant interview
MoDA	Mobile operational data acquisition
NR	Niger
SLP	Seasonal livelihood programming
ToR	Terms of reference
WFP	World Food Programme
YE4P	Youth Entrepreneurship for Peace

I. Introduction

1.1 Study Background

The World Food Programme (WFP) supports communities to mitigate the impact of and build resilience to natural and human-made shocks and stressors that contribute to food insecurity and destabilize people's livelihoods. WFP's interventions, therefore, aim to equip communities with the knowledge, skills, and tools to avert or mitigate the impact of cyclical natural events such as droughts and floods through asset and capacity building in affected communities. In the Sahelian areas of Burkina Faso and Niger (as part of a broader regional program also covering Chad, Mali, and Mauritania), WFP promotes climate-resilient agricultural infrastructure and systems to help address issues of land degradation, deforestation, dwindling pasturelands, and depletion of water sources, which all trigger competition for productive resources and migration of people and livestock into better-resourced areas. The interventions also aim to address the impacts of violent conflict from within and outside communities in the Sahelian belt of the two countries, especially those related to extremist groups operating in the area.

Though primarily designed to increase community assets for productive purposes, WFP's support for the rehabilitation of lands, construction of water-harvesting and retention structures, reforestation and protection of farmlands and pastures, and soil fertility improvement interventions also aims to increase the availability of, reduce intergroup competition for, and ensure equitable access to these resources. In this way, WFP hopes to reduce conflicts over community resources. The use of participatory and collaborative processes for mobilizing and engaging communities should also contribute to increased dialogue within and between different communities and promote peaceful coexistence among the different groups. In particular, the requirement of collaborative approaches to development of communal assets is intended to create spaces of encounter and dialogue that could ease tensions, promote equity in the distribution and use of the created assets, and build relationships among various stakeholders and community groups to ensure that actions for resilience building have the support of government, development partners, and other decision-makers at several administrative levels.

1.2 Research Objectives

Despite the intent to ease tensions, WFP's interventions did not specifically set out to promote social cohesion building within and between the participating groups and communities. However, anecdotal evidence suggested that different groups had seized the opportunity of working together on WFP's asset creation activities to build relationships at multiple levels that improve cohesion within and across different identity groups. In particular, WFP's three-pronged approach,¹ — that is, integrated context analysis (ICA), seasonal livelihood programming (SLP), and community-based participatory planning (CBPP) — appeared to have created spaces of engagement that encouraged participant groups and communities to create new relationships. However, WFP and partners had no grounded evidence to support these impressions.

Although past studies by WFP and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute had established that WFP's interventions may be contributing to strengthening social cohesion and conflict sensitivity in participating communities, there was a need for more and stronger evidence to verify these theoretical assumptions. Hence, WFP and partners deemed it “[...] crucial to further investigate and identify the exact programming nuances and conditions under which social cohesion within communities is likely to be strengthened while unintended tensions and new sources of conflict can be avoided” (ToR, p. 2). Accordingly, the **core question** this study sought to answer was: **“How do WFP interventions contribute [...] to reducing tensions and improving social cohesion?”** (ToR, p. 4).

The specific research questions pursued in this study may be summarized as follows:

- i. How do WFP's interventions in Burkina Faso and Niger reduce the scarcity of natural resources, improve equity in access to these resources for different identity groups (e.g., by gender, age, religion, citizenship, migrant status), and contribute to reducing tensions and improving social cohesion within and between participating groups and communities?

¹ For more information, see: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/2017-three-pronged-approach-3pa-factsheet>.

- ii. What roles could WFP play to facilitate participatory processes that promote intra- and intercommunity dialogues and support inclusive management and equitable access to land and water resources in Burkina Faso and Niger?
- iii. How can WFP support the development of consensual communal asset creation, distribution, and management that benefits extremely poor households and minority groups?
- iv. What are the opportunities and risks for replicating observed practices in Burkina Faso and Niger in other contexts where WFP supports communal asset creation initiatives?

1.3 Summary of Literature Guiding Conceptual Framework

The research was grounded in the knowledge that social cohesion does not happen in a vacuum. It occurs within “[...] groups having intimate face-to-face communications [and] substantial time spent together” (Cooley, 1909 in Fonseca, Lukosch, and Brazier, 2019, p. 233). It is this space and time that allows them to create strong social organizations. The context in which such direct interactions occur is a major determining factor as it defines and limits what groups and individuals can do, and the level and nature of their engagements (Lewin, 1946 in Fonseca, Lukosch, and Brazier, 2019, p. 233). This is because strong bonds can only be formed when the context permits interactions to transcend the different strata of the organization and create links that allow bonds to form organically at each level.

Multiple levels of distrust had emerged within and between communities in WFP’s operational areas in Burkina Faso and Niger due to the intense competition for natural resources, incidents of violence from extremist groups, and the influx of displaced persons, among other stressors (Brottem, 2022; Demuynck, 2022). These events raised the perception of risk within the participating communities due to the low levels of both generalized trust and specific trust (Larsen, 2014).² Intergroup and intercommunity trust-building for collaborative work was central to WFP’s interventions in Burkina Faso and Niger. Having preexisting shared norms and values is important for fostering binding and bonding that support cross-identity collaboration.³ However, for cross-cultural social cohesion building to occur, the groups must have access to spaces that promote acceptance of diversity, inclusion, tolerance, equity, and equal opportunities as well as the accommodation of different, and even contradictory values, norms, and points of view. In such contexts, experiences of trust, safety, and security are foundational for social cohesion. In particular, trust is a prerequisite for individuals to feel safe (Larsen, 2014, p. 4) to engage in collaborative actions that pursue the collective interest of peers at different levels (Axelrod and Hamilton, 1981; Rothstein and Uslander, 2005). For instance, peer groups of young men or women from different and hitherto adversarial economic communities (e.g., herders and farmers), ethnic groups, or religious traditions can initiate actions that lead to strong social cohesion. This can happen at the community, district, provincial, or national levels.

Groups experiencing high levels of distrust do not stay helplessly entrapped in their cages of distrust. In fact, distrustful communities that also have an increased sense of collective victimhood, directly or indirectly, may increase trust levels because of their shared post-traumatic experiences. This is manifested in a “[...] higher level of prosocial motivation,⁴ measured by altruistic giving, public good contributions, investment in trust-based transactions, and willingness to reciprocate trust-based investments” (Gilligan, Pasquale, and Samii, 2014 in Fonseca, Lukosch, and Brazier, 2019, p. 238). It is also evidenced by the need for such communities to develop mechanisms for “[...] collective efficacy (the sharing of norms and values), trust one another, and willingness to intervene to address common problems” (Ohmer, 2016 in Fonseca, Lukosch, and Brazier, 2019). This is because, usually, “[...] violence-affected communities exhibit higher levels of prosocial motivation” (Gilligan, Pasquale, and Samii, 2014 in Fonseca, Lukosch, and Brazier, 2019, p. 238). Additionally, the power of participation in fostering social cohesion rests in the fact that “[s]ocial cohesion is affected by how much the friendship networks of individuals of different groups overlap”

² Generalized trust relates to trust of previously unknown people; specific trust relates to trust of neighbors or people one already knows or specifically identified people (Larsen, 2014).

³ Cross-identity collaboration refers to collaboration that takes place between people of different identity groups such as men and women, youth and elders, herders and farmers, persons of different faith traditions, etc. Cross-cultural social cohesion relates to interaction between people of different nationalities, ethnic, racial, backgrounds, among others.

⁴ Prosocial motivation relates the propensity or willingness to engage in actions that help other people based on empathy and concerns for their rights, feelings, well-being, or the need to comfort others in times of need or share helpful information the other might need.

(Granovetter, 1973 in Fonseca, Lukosch, and Brazier, 2019, p. 235). Hence, it is important to understand the nature, type, and mix of preexisting friendship networks at individual and group levels that can be used as important entry and leverage points for rebuilding trust and supporting engagements in mutually beneficial collective actions.

The foregoing multidimensional view of the preconditions for social cohesion to develop highlights the transactional nature of social cohesion, both in its process and outcomes. Process-wise, social cohesion is the product of interactions and engagements between diverse individuals and groups who see value in collaboration for the achievement of a shared and higher-level goal. The participating individuals or groups may disagree about what goes on between them daily but see a higher level of concrete direct or indirect rewards accruing from their engagements, either to them personally or to the collective. In terms of outcomes, the rewards need not be objective, tangible, material, or monetary; they can be as intangible as the subjective experience of peace, acceptance, and belongingness. These insights underpinned the design and reporting in this research.

1.4 Philosophical Guide and Methodology of Study

This research used multiple sources of data to explore the knowledge, perceptions, behaviors, and practices of different categories of stakeholders for understanding how, where, and why social cohesion building may be taking place in WFP's intervention communities in Burkina Faso and Niger. The researchers used the constructivist philosophy that knowledge must be approached through multiple perspectives (Dawadi, Shrestha, and Giri, 2021), since reality is socially constructed through the interaction of different actors. The blending of data from quantitative surveys (positivism) with qualitative data from key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) (interpretive approaches) puts the voices and views of respondents from the qualitative data behind the figures of the quantitative data to provide "convincing answers to the question that the investigation is intended to settle" (Thomas, 2003, p. 7).

This mixed method approach not only allowed the study to ascertain the different shades of perspectives on social cohesion building across the different population and geographic subgroups that participated in the study (by country and by region); it also allowed the study to "[...] tap into [different] participants' perspectives and meanings" (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17-18) on the topic under investigation. This facilitated the exploration of "a broader and more complete range of research questions" (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 21). In sum, the mixed method approach has allowed the research to "combine deductive and inductive thinking [derived from] both qualitative and quantitative data" (Creswell and Clark, 2011, p. 43) to give equal value to objective and subjective knowledge in the outcomes. It has allowed the research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that affect the creation of social cohesion in the participating communities.

1.5 Research Design

The study integrated the collection, analysis, and reporting on qualitative and quantitative components in a single conceptual frame with mutually reinforcing components. Hence, the study employed the "cross-stage mixed-model design" (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 20), also known as the "embedded design" (Creswell and Clark, 2011, p. 71), to collect qualitative data using KII and FGD as well as quantitative data using surveys.⁵ This integrated design distinguishes the mixed method approach of this study from the "[...] 'combined approach' in which qualitative and quantitative elements are used together but not integrated" (Halcomb, 2019, p. 1).

The study was conducted in 14 intervention sites in the Centre-Nord, Nord, Est, and Sahel provinces of Burkina Faso, and another 14 sites in the Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri, and Zinder regions of Niger. Table 1 presents the number and distribution of respondents across the two countries and by data collection method.

⁵ The survey covered 278 participants. Burkina Faso had 106 participants of whom 37 were men, 49 women, and 18 respondents not indicating their gender category. Niger had 172 respondents comprising 56 men, 45 women, and 71 not indicating their gender category.

Table 1: Distribution of participants across data collection protocols

Country	Key Informant Interviews			Focus Group Discussions		Mini Survey
	KII_01 (number)	KII_02 (number)	KII_03 (number)	FGD_01 (sessions/ participants)	FGD_02 (sessions/ participants)	
Burkina Faso	105	7	5	12/95	2/16	106
Niger	109	21	16	9/107	0/0	172
Total	214	28	21	21/202	2/16	278

Source: Authors.

KII_01 covered community-level participants, including community/traditional leaders (men and women), traditional landowners/custodians, leaders of women's social and economic groups, youth leaders, leaders of herders/migrant pastoralist groups, leaders of local farmers associations, and leaders of internally displaced persons (IDP)/refugee camps, where applicable. KII_02 participants were drawn from noncommunity members closely associated with the design and implementation of the interventions and included staff of government agencies responsible for agriculture, natural resources, and water and land management, leaders of WFP collaborating partners, leaders of non-participant community-based groups, and representatives of other NGOs working on similar issues in the area. KII_03 participants comprised WFP program implementers such as WFP field staff at the provincial/regional and national level, as well as leaders of WFP collaborating partners. FGD_01 participants included members of community-level men's, women's, and youth groups engaged in identifiable communal activities such as dry season gardening and women's income-generation activities, among others. FGD_02 focused on participants in community activities who are living in IDP/refugee camps around the participating communities.

Trained research teams collected qualitative and quantitative data concurrently in the communities they visited. The data collection agents administered KIIs or facilitated FGDs before they administered the survey questions to all KII participants and subsets of FGD participants. The agents collected the data for all three components of the study using questionnaires programmed on smartphones and tablets that ran on WFP's mobile operational data acquisition (MoDA) platform. To ensure participants were answering questions relevant to their respective scopes of reference and worldviews, field agents used different KII and FGD protocols to collect the data from different categories of participants. All categories of participants, however, answered the same survey questions. Field agents uploaded the collected data to WFP's MoDA platform, where the research team monitored quality, downloaded, cleaned, and analyzed the data using Excel and SPSS, as well as open-coding techniques for the qualitative data.

II. Summary of Findings

2.1. Vulnerability Context

Respondents confirmed how the confluence of natural and human-induced shocks and stressors impacted their resilience to food insecurity. Cycles of droughts and floods, increased deforestation, depletion of soil fertility, and spreading attacks on communities by violent extremists contributed to decreased food production, displacement of people and livestock, and increased competition for available natural resources. These shocks and stressors increased intra- and intercommunity conflicts over ownership of, access to, and use of farmland, pastures, and water sources, especially between farmer and herder communities. The COVID-19 pandemic further constrained activities related to nonfarm income generation due to restrictions on trade and travel. Communities that hosted people displaced by conflict bore additional burdens of accommodating and supporting their guests with their already limited resources. Appendix 1 provides a graphical representation of the overall vulnerability context.

2.2. Contribution of WFP Interventions to Asset creation and Distribution

Physical and natural assets development.

Respondents acknowledged that WFP-sponsored farmland, agroforestry, and pastureland development initiatives, as well as the water resource development and conservation activities, including the construction of dams, ponds, and wells, enabled participating communities to expand their natural resource and agropastoral assets. Farmland development through the construction of half-moons, stone bunds, and zaïs led to the recovery of large tracts of previously uncultivable lands that they have put under food crop cultivation. The soil conservation and fertility improvement activities, using the acquired knowledge and skills in composting techniques, enabled farmers to transform farm and household refuse into more and better manure, which improved the quality of soils and hence the productivity of their land assets. These activities enabled them to increase their cultivable land. The reforestation,⁶ pasture development, and other agroforestry interventions also increased availability of grazing fields for livestock in the communities. Together with the supply of seeds for fodder cultivation, livestock breeders now have access to an increased quantity and variety of livestock feed for their animals. This has not only led to communities “[...] noticing a change in the diet of the animals thanks to the activities of creating pasture fields [...]” (BF_KII_01_9667_F); for some, it has eliminated the need to travel far in search of feed for their animals. See Box 1 for further examples.

WFP’s support for the construction of other infrastructure such as roads and bridges increased the stock and quality of physical assets available in participating communities. These assets, respondents said, helped improve their resilience to agro-climatic shocks and stressors such as cyclical floods, droughts, and the associated reduction in food production and livestock.

Enhanced Financial Assets and Creation of Opportunities. The construction of dams, ponds, and wells not only increased access to water for domestic and livestock use, but also enabled some community

Box 1: Witnesses of change in asset recovery

“The construction of zaïs, half-moons, and stone bunds has made it possible to increase the surface area of our land. There were lands that were degraded, so it made it possible to recover these lands and increase its area” (BF_KII_01_9952_F).

“WFP came to teach us the technique of half-moons and zaïs and this allowed us to recover the soils which had been degraded by erosion, and now the lands which we had abandoned are used for cultivation, so this has increased the area” (BF_KII_01_8177_F).

“With the half-moon technique, we were able to recover our soils which had been degraded by erosion so suddenly it helped to extend our fields since long before that we no longer cultivated because it was spoiled by erosion” (BF_KII_01_8173_M).

“There has been an increase in area; now there are people who have doubled the area of cultivated fields thanks to WFP’s intervention. Before, many people went to work in other people’s fields as labor in order to feed their families” (NR_KII_01_4114_M).

“Through the FFA I cultivated more area. Spaces that I haven’t cultivated for 20 years I did this year. Before, I went to work to be paid and provide for my family. Availability of food [assistance from WFP for communities] allowed the increase in cultivated area” (NR_KII_01_4119_M).

⁶ Reforestation allowed for the growth of trees that animals can eat. Also reforestation allowed for the regeneration of grass and shrubs in the protected forest areas.

members to start dry season gardening, which brought in extra income and food for participating households. In particular, participants acknowledged that the off-season market gardening and other economic activities enhanced their income-earning capacities, supported personal and family asset accumulation, and enhanced their resilience to food insecurity.

Human asset development. The knowledge and skills that participating communities acquired through the various WFP training programs as well as the activities that promoted education and healthcare service delivery contributed to longer-term human assets building in the communities. Respondents expressed gratitude to WFP for the knowledge and skills gained from the various training programs, because “[...] thanks to the program, the communities have the experiences enabling them to face any terrain to produce and earn income from agricultural activities” (NR_KII_01_2500_F). In addition, women who acquired skills in childcare are not only able to take better care of their children, but also they have secured the respect of their male counterparts because of their demonstrated knowledge in this domain. Men respected the women because of this new knowledge and skills, and began to invite women to participate in community decision-making processes. Similarly, individuals who gained knowledge and skills in other key areas such as in land rehabilitation and management, natural resource management, compost production, and dry season gardening, among other areas, gained new respect from the community and became more involved in decision-making processes.

2.3. *Role of WFP in Facilitating Intra- and Intercommunity Dialogue and Social Cohesion Building*

Dialogue between different groups. WFP and partners promoted collective action as a critical pathway to ensuring that different groups and communities worked together to plan and implement activities to create and manage their communal assets. In addition to mobilizing communities for the labor-intensive work of rehabilitating or constructing assets such as dams, ponds, and wells, among other things, collective action ensured greater participation in the processes for and collective ownership of the rehabilitated or created communal assets. Above all, the requirement that communities work together directly and indirectly facilitated dialogue between different groups within and across participating communities. WFP’s CBPP processes allowed communities to collectively decide what activities served their shared interests. It is important to note that social cohesion is not an event; it is a process that requires continuous engagement and working together on common interests to create the bonds and bridges that bind people together.

Box 2: Bonding and appeasement

“Through the activities implemented by the WFP, there was more rapprochement between the different groups and thus bonds of brotherhood created between each other; even if two groups held a grudge against each other, working together can appease hearts and restore sociability between them. Also, some elements of the community become aggressive for lack of money and with a lot of financial burdens but now [that they are] able to benefit from the financial aid of WFP these people become less aggressive and are in perfect cohesion with the whole community” (BF_KII_01_5065_N).

Hence, while the CBPP processes created spaces of initial encounter for different groups, it was the regular interactive decision-making and consultation forums throughout the program’s duration that allowed members of the different groups to get to know each other better and experience the benefits of working together for their collective benefit. In the context of the Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) activities, working together to realize their shared interests allowed once disparate groups to get to know each other better and dissolve mutually held prejudices and suspicions, and helped the different groups to build new bonds and bridges that promoted unity, inclusiveness, and a sense of equality between them (see also Box 2). Through the collaborative engagements and “[...] interaction during WFP activities, many people have forged close ties, many suspicions have also diminished within the community” (BF_KII_01_7951_M). In the mini-survey segment of the study, more than 96% of respondents in both Burkina Faso and Niger agreed that participation in WFP’s activities helped them overcome stereotypes and prejudices against each other (see Table 2).

Table 2: Statements measuring levels of prejudice and stereotype reduction

Level of agreement	Groups do not look down on me		No longer call others by negative names	
	Burkina Faso (n = 106)	Niger (n = 172)	Burkina Faso (n = 106)	Niger (n = 172)
Strongly agree	84.9%	78.5%	86.8%	78.5%
Agree	12.3%	19.8%	9.4%	20.3%
Disagree	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Strongly disagree	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Not sure	0.0%	1.2%	3.8%	0.6%
Prefer not to say	0.9%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: Authors based on the mini-survey.

Collective action was also instrumental in creating stronger social bonds and building trust between members of different ethnic, religious, economic, gender, and age groups participating in WFP's activities. This is because "working together has greatly reduced tensions because by working together you discover the other and there is friendship that is established" (BF_KII_01_2108_F; see also NR_KII_01_0531_F). In particular, "WFP activities have, for example, enabled farmers and herders to work well together, something that was not possible before" (BF_KII_01_3403_F). WFP's activities that led to the creation of pasture lands, forests, and increased production of food crops also created greater awareness of interdependencies, shared destinies, interconnections of interests, and symbiotic relationships between farmers and herders. While herders benefited from the increased availability of livestock feed from the residues of farms and the collectively developed pasture lands, farmers, in turn, benefited from the increased accumulation of animal manure within the community, since the herders did not have to travel far with their livestock in search of feed and water (see also Box 3).

Gender-based dialogue. Collective action also facilitated dialogue between community members and their elders. The collaborative planning processes created open spaces and opportunities for community members to engage with their leaders on collaborative assignments. As result, "there is more trust between leaders and their members" (BF_KII_01_5943_M; BF_KII_01_7577_F). In particular, women have gained greater acceptance and respect from the men and elders in the community and are now invited to participate on more equal terms in decision-making. The collaborative and inclusive nature of the activities created spaces and opportunities of engagement for

Box 3: Testimonies from lived experiences

"By initiating these activities, the members of our community and those of other communities got to know each other, putting aside their ethnicity to be a single community. No doubt this has positive consequences for social cohesion. Only yesterday, so-and-so went to a village to attend the wedding of one of his friends whom he met thanks to the activities of WFP" (NR_KII_01_4128_M).

"The activities created opportunities for communities to meet between 20 and 25 days to work together each month; as such there is no more tension between us. Even if you had a grudge against someone and the fact that you have to work with them, you forget that" (NR_KII_02_3211_M).

"WFP activities have positively impacted relations between IDPs and villagers. Thanks to the activities they carry out together, the displaced people feel integrated into the ranks of the community, there is a certain familiarity between them, thus improving their relationship" (BF_KII_01_0051_F).

"Relations between farmers and herders have improved because there is social cohesion between them. Animals have a place of grazing and no longer spoil farmers' fields. There is better collaboration between us" (BF_KII_01_9950_M).

Box 4: Witness statements on amplification of women's voices

"Thanks to this program, the women have their say and are able to express themselves in front of the elders to express their needs because the elders respect what they do" (NR_KII_01_4872_F).

"Now women are free to present themselves at the level of the elders to share their concerns and their plans" (NR_KII_01_0778_F).

"Women have become aware of the role they can play in the development of their communities based on economic activities and active participation in decision-making bodies. Today, there are rare situations where women remain silent in the face of an attempt to exclude them" (NR_KII_01_6969_M).

women and the elders. Unlike in the past, when women “[...] couldn’t even tell [their] needs to the elders” (NR_KII_01_4870_F), now “women rub shoulders with older people. They are more open to them, and the elders give them a lot of importance” (BF_KII_01_7963_M).

Women also reported how their enhanced childcare and nutritional skills as well as their increased ability to contribute to household income, derived from WFP-supported livelihood activities, enabled them to demonstrate their value to their families and communities. As a result, women earned greater respect from their male counterparts, especially traditional leaders. For example, community leaders now invite women to meetings and other decision-making forums: “Women are now consulted in decisions that affect them or the whole village. We work together and now we know each other even more” (BF_KII_01_9660_M). Consequently, “women [are able to] talk a lot more with elders and are more and more respected in the community” (BF_KII_01_7632_M) (see also Box 4).

Dialogue between elders and youth. WFP emphasized the need to involve youth in the planning and implementation processes related to asset creation activities. This created spaces for youth to directly engage in the community’s decision-making processes. WFP’s community sensitization activities encouraged a change in cultural attitudes, beliefs, and practices that governed the relationships between the elderly and the youth. These activities “[...] created good understandings between young people and elders by offering them spaces for expression based on the activities of the collectives” (NR_KII_01_2500_F). This contributed to changes in perceptions and attitudes on both sides and “[...] facilitated the rapprochement of young people and their elders” (BF_KII_01_9707_F). As a result, “young people are increasingly considered in decision-making with elders” (BF_KII_01_9664_M) because “youth and elders have seen that the activities carried out by WFP are in the interest of both” (BF_KII_01_5070_F). The elders now invite the youth to “[...] participate in decision-making without problems” (BF_KII_01_1114_F).

As one elder noted, “before, the elders decide[d] on behalf of the young people; as soon as the young people speak, we will tell them that it is rudeness, [not] freedom of speech” (NR_KII_01_4137_M). Now, however, the “elders are increasingly involving young people in decision-making and encouraging them to get involved in local issues. We see more communication and exchanges between young people and elders” (NR_KII_01_4130_M) and young people now participate in “various meetings of the elders and can freely give their thoughts” (BF_KII_01_9660_M). In particular, WFP’s activities such as “half-moon work which requires both the participation of elders [and] young people” (NR_KII_01_1524_F) have created spaces and opportunities for dialogue that has “[...] allowed young people to rub shoulders with elders in order to address the issues that interest them” (BF_KII_01_4523_F). In return, young people have changed the negative perceptions they once held of the elders, because “the young people have become aware that the elders want their development [and so] young people now respect elders, something that was not done” (BF_KII_01_9952_F).

In sum, WFP’s activities created opportunities for social bonding in participating communities through increasing trust building, respect, and reduced suspicions between different groups. See Appendix 2 for a graphical representation of outcomes.

Reduced migration and impact on social cohesion building. Another factor that has facilitated greater cohesion between the elders and the youth is the opportunity created by WFP activities to retain young people in the communities during the off-farm periods. Before the WFP interventions, out-migration of the youth to small-scale mining areas was rampant in participating communities, where few or no economic opportunities existed, especially during the off-farm season. As respondents noted in the off-season, most “young people went to the mining sites” (BF_KII_01_8327_M) to undertake informal, small-scale mining, but thanks to the interventions of WFP and its partners “[...] they no longer leave the country” (BF_KII_01_8327_M). One respondent sums up the feeling in recalling the experiences of the youth in the following words: “according to a young person from this community: it has been

Box 5: Reduced youth migration

WFP’s activities have led to “the reduction of the exodus of young people; before the young people go on an exodus because they have no work to do but thanks to the program they will stay because it allows them to have money but also to contribute to the development of their locality” (NR_KII_03_1540_M).

three years since I left on exodus thanks to the *gina ka vi*⁷ because what I earn in exodus does not reach [i.e., is not as much as] what I earn here, so I stay to be near my elders” (NR_KII_01_4870_F) (see also Box 5).

The retention of young people in the communities year-round created spaces and opportunities for dialogue. As one respondent noted, the “decreases in out-migration [mean] we stay at home to have the blessing of the elders, the young people are also involved in collective activities so they are consulted in everything that will be done for the community” (NR_KII_01_0962_M). Now, with the youth at home, the “elders are increasingly involving young people in decision-making and encouraging them to get involved in local issues. We see more communication and exchanges between young people and elders” (NR_KII_01_4130_M).

Restoring safety and security to participating communities is another way WFP’s activities contributed to building social cohesion in the intervention communities. As a respondent recalled, because “young people no longer go on exodus, it reduces youth banditry and prevents young people from going to join the armed troops” (NR_KII_01_1632_F). The mini-survey of this study confirms the increased sense of safety and security expressed by the KII respondents resulting from communities’ participation in WFP’s activities. The findings show that more than 74% of respondents very strongly or strongly agreed that they now feel safe engaging with other ethnic groups; they no longer fear to be part of activities of other groups (religious or ethnic); they feel secure and protected from experiencing harm; and they do not feel discriminated against when engaging with people from other identity groups (ethnic, religious, herder-farmer, etc.) because the young people now have gainful employment at home.

Collective action also reinforced social bonds between IDPs/refugees and their host communities. Even though host communities were willing to receive and help settle IDPs/refugees, reliance on their own resources alone often overstretched their generosity and tested their hospitality to a point where the newcomers “[...] were a burden at the beginning of their arrival” (NR_KII_01_4114_M). WFP’s food assistance helped the hosts to cope with this burden and the subsequent joint activities created opportunities for engagement that strengthened the bonds between the host and refugee communities. Notwithstanding the predisposition of host communities to receive and integrate IDPs/refugees, respondents from both sides acknowledged that the activities of WFP helped to deepen the integration of IDPs/refugees in their host communities, thus “[...] improving their relations” (BF_KII_01_0053_F). Members of host communities said, “we form a single community with our refugees” (NR_KII_01_4874_F; NR_KII_01_4872_F). This union between host and IDP/refugee communities has translated into “benefits such as marriage ties especially [that have] been registered in our different [host/IDP] communities” [and] “through the marriage bond, the refugees were able to integrate without any difficulties” (NR_KII_01_4885_F). Members of IDP/refugee communities attested that because of working together on WFP’s interventions, they “[...] were able to integrate and work with the natives who now consider us as natives too. We feel loved and we are considered in the same way as the host families” (BF_KII_01_8327_M).

Vertical social cohesion building. Working together on WFP programs also created spaces and opportunities for closer encounters between persons of different hierarchical groups, such as community members and government officials and other state and nonstate actors at district and regional levels. Respondents cited how the CBPP process brought their communities closer to subnational government agencies and officials, who worked with them on the planning of their WFP activities. Working alongside these actors reduced mutual suspicion, mistrust, stereotypes, and prejudices. It helped them to dissolve preexisting boundaries of separation between groups and community members and to dispel the perception that such offices were beyond their reach. “The interaction between community members and their leaders is much better because the leaders no longer sideline the community and [now] involve them in local issues. They understand that it is together that we can succeed” (NR_KII_01_4132_M). Appendix 3 presents excerpts of witness statements on the contribution of WFP’s activities to promoting vertical social cohesion in both countries.

⁷ The phrase *gina ka vi* loosely translated into French means “creuse et mange”, which is used in reference to the activities of digging half-moons, zais, stone bunds, etc. that lead to the production of food for the family table.

Increased social interactions and accommodation. Participation in collaborative work on communal asset creation brought different groups together, allowing them to get to know each other better. It created spaces of regular and structured encounter for members of different ethnic and religious groups, herders and farmers, as well as IDPs/refugees and their respective host communities. This helped to establish channels of communication and interaction across ethnic and religious lines and triggered opportunities for enhanced relationships and cohesive living between different identity groups. Respondents cited increases in intermarriage across ethnic lines, participation in cultural and social events of other ethnic and religious groups, and their willingness to trust members of previously untrusted groups to take care of their property and children as examples of the social cohesion that WFP activities triggered.

Increased trust, respect, reduced suspicion, and social cohesion building. The levels of trust and respect in relationships and engagements between different groups participating in the same social, economic, political, cultural, and other activities or spaces are important determinants of social cohesion. Increased interactions between different identity groups created opportunities to increase trust and respect and to reduce mutual suspicions. Hence, the study sought the views of respondents on how participation in WFP's activities may have supported or hindered the building of trust, reduction in stereotypes and prejudices, and promotion of a sense of safety and security. The study assessed the perception of social bonding through WFP activities at three levels — (a) interpersonal social cohesion building, (b) vertical social cohesion between community members and their local leaders; and (c) inter-communal social cohesion.

- a. Interpersonal trust and social cohesion building. To ascertain the degree of trust building that WFP's activities may have created at the interpersonal level among program participants, respondents were asked in the mini-survey to indicate their level of agreement with statements regarding their willingness to leave their children in the care of neighbors of different identity groups or to ask such neighbors to take care of their property in their absence. More than 96% of respondents in both Burkina Faso and Niger participating in WFP's activities said that trust between them and their neighbors had increased so much that they were willing to leave their children or property in their care. Participants in the qualitative studies confirmed the emergence of interpersonal trust as a result of encountering each other in the course of working together on WFP-sponsored activities, which reinforced tolerance and accommodation "[...] of the other as he is" (BF_KII_01_6808_M).
- b. Trust and social cohesion between citizens and leadership (vertical trust building). In Burkina Faso, respondents noted that joint work on WFP activities resulted in "good collaboration between us and our leaders" (BF_KII_01_3403_F). Consequently, "there is more trust between leaders and their members" (BF_KII_01_5943_M). This contributed to mutual respect between the members and their leaders (BF_KII_01_2737_F). "Leaders who brought people together for collective work become highly respected and everyone helps each other under their leadership" (BF_KII_01_1614_F). This is because community members accord "more respect and consideration for the leaders" (BF_KII_01_5076_M) when these leaders step up and champion community mobilization for the collective development activities sponsored by WFP. Similarly in Niger, respondents observed that the "changes noticed between community members and their leaders is that there is now more unity and trust" (NR_KII_01_5528_F). The openness with which community members engage their leaders on collaborative assignments has also led to "[...] more trust between leaders and their members" (BF_KII_01_5943_M; BF_KII_01_7577_F), which has resulted in greater "[...] transparency in the management [styles of leaders, and] therefore more confidence" in their leadership roles (BF_KII_01_5065_N). This has enabled "[c]ommunity members [to] interact confidently with their leaders" (NR_KII_01_9003_F). Indeed, "The interaction between community members and their leaders is much better because the leaders no longer sideline the community and involve them in local issues. They understand that it is together that we can succeed" (NR_KII_01_4132_M).
- c. Intercommunity trust and social cohesion building. Levels of trust and distrust as well as the nature and depth of stereotypes and prejudices toward individuals in outgroups constitute determinant enablers or barriers to social cohesion building. As summarized in Table 3, more than 73% of respondents in the mini-survey indicated that they had witnessed increased levels of trust and respect as well as reduced levels of suspicion (except for Niger) between ethnic groups within communities that are participating in the WFP activities.

Table 3: Contribution of WFP-supported activities to trust building, respect, and suspicion reduction between the ethnic groups

Country	Burkina Faso (n = 106)			Niger (n = 172)		
	Very High/High	Moderate	Very Low/Low	Very High/High	Moderate	Very Low/Low
Increased Trust between Ethnic Groups	87.8%	8.5%	3.7%	73.8%	12.2%	14.0%
Increased Respect between Ethnic Groups	86.8%	10.4%	2.8%	75.0%	11.6%	13.4%
Reduced Suspicion Between Ethnic Groups	89.6%	6.6%	3.7%	61.1%	17.4%	21.5%

Source: Authors based on the mini-survey.

Reduced tensions between farmer and herder communities. WFP's activities also led to changes in the level of trust between farmers and herders, albeit to different degrees in Burkina Faso and Niger (see Table 4). As one respondent in Burkina Faso testified, “[h]erders and farmers thanks to the activities of the WFP knew that there was a lot of complementarities between them and that they had to work together for the good of all. The farmers use the manure of the herders in order to enrich their fields and promote growing grass for animals” (BF_KII_01_3403_F). In Niger, WFP activities that contributed to increased access to animal feed from farm residues, rehabilitated pasturelands, and afforestation projects have diminished distinctions between herders and farmers, as herder communities have assumed more sedentary and mixed agricultural methods like the farmer communities.

Table 4: Observed levels of trust between farmers and herders

Trust between farmers and herders	Burkina Faso	Niger	Total
Very Low	0 0.0%	11 6.4%	11 4.0%
Low	3 2.8%	27 15.7%	30 10.8%
Moderate	9 8.5%	38 22.1%	47 16.9%
High	40 37.7%	44 25.6%	84 30.2%
Very High	54 50.9%	52 30.2%	106 38.1%
Total	106 100.0%	172 100.0%	278 100.0%

Source: Authors based on the mini-survey.

The opportunity for “herders and farmers to work together” on developing half-moons and other communal facilities not only contributed to reducing suspicion and stereotypes between the different groups, but also led to the creation of communal agropastoral assets such as “open agricultural and fodder spaces and water resources” (BF_FGD_01_9501_M_R1). Through these activities, “WFP has developed very rich grazing areas; the animals of the herders no longer need to graze in the farmers’ fields, so there is no longer any source of tension” (BF_KII_01_7963_M). In the words of another respondent, “By the fact that there is grass, it easily helps the animals to find food, so there are no more problems between farmers and herders. Before, the animals often ate our crops, but since we did that [expanded access to grass], there are no more problems” (BF_KII_01_8310_F). The development of transit corridors for livestock also minimized conflicts between farmers and herders (BF_KII_01_8180_M; NR_KII_01_0780_F; NR_KII_01_1553_M; NR_KII_01_1651_F). It has also helped with the transformation of livelihood systems, creating a convergence between farming and livestock rearing, as the statement in Box 6 exemplifies.

Box 6: Changing livelihood systems

“We no longer have herders today, but rather sedentary people, that is to say farmers who practice agriculture while raising a few heads [of animals]. Often, they are entrusted to the shepherd of the village or are attached to the house. So, to ensure harmony or anything that can impact relations, we make people more aware of the procedures, the management of breeding in a sedentary context” (NR_KII_01_2268_M).

Engaging in these mutually beneficial agropastoral asset creation and management activities also helped to dispel stereotypes, prejudices, and foster greater social interaction between members of the herder and farmer communities. As respondents in Niger noted, “At the beginning, it [was] difficult for the wives of the herders to come to the ceremonies in the farming community, but since we are all working together, we all can go to other villages to see a program beneficiary” (NR_KII_01_4874_F). And as “[...] relations are improved as a result of the marriage ties uniting us, a farmer participates in all the ceremonies of a herder, neither of them wants to commit harm to their neighbor, and so on” (NR_KII_01_3863_F).

2.4. Role of WFP Activities in Promoting Equitable Access to Resources

In addition to increasing the availability of natural resources through asset rehabilitation and creation, WFP also aimed to ensure that all segments of society benefited equally, especially vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and IDPs/refugees. This was particularly critical in the case of communal resources created on private lands.

Diffused nature of regulatory mechanisms for land ownership, allocation, and access. Prior to WFP’s interventions, the mechanisms for mediating equitable access to land and other natural resources were split between customary and religious rules as well as unwritten conventions and norms. Hence, when asked what mechanisms are in place to access natural resources, participants’ perspectives ranged from the nonexistence of any formal system to the use of unwritten conventions that govern who owns, controls, or has access to such resources.

In Burkina Faso, participants who said there are no mechanisms in place to ensure equitable access to public resources, including those on private lands, pointed to the communal nature of land ownership in most communities. Consonant with that view, they argued that “there is no mechanism [to regulate access because] the land belongs to everyone” (BF_KII_01_9667_F; BF_KII_02_9098_M; BF_FGD_01_8260). It was further pointed out that the absence of formal mechanisms for regulating land access does not disadvantage any member in having access to the public resources. This is because even though “there is no mechanism, [...] we are not aware of any discrimination” (BF_FGD_01_1613).

In Niger, participants described an elaborate state-led and hierarchically structured system for land management under the Code Rural: “[...] management mechanisms at [subnational] level are the COFOCOM⁸ at the municipal level and the COFOB⁹ at the village level. The COFOBs are the entry point, and it is only when issues are not resolved that they are escalated to the level of the communal land commission, the customary chiefdom, and then up to the level of the competent court.” Respondents noted, however, that “these mechanisms are effective [and] all the problems rarely go beyond COFOCOM. Everything is managed at the village level” (NR_KII_02_8114_M; also NR_KII_02_8125_M). Another respondent pointed out that these structured conflict management “[...] mechanisms are effective because they have social legitimacy and community confidence. For example, the complaints committee set up during the village assemblies, its members are chosen by the communities” (NR_KII_02_4122_M; also NR_KII_02_8777_M).

Collaborative asset creation promotes equitable access. In addition to the customary land management systems in Burkina Faso and the state-led structures of Niger, respondents in both countries acknowledged that through working together on WFP activities, participating communities have developed cross-identity management structures and systems for community natural resources that ensure equitable access to the rehabilitated or created communal assets for all. Respondents noted that, “Equity of access is guaranteed by the rules [and] the decisions of the various committees” (BF_KII_01_7065_F1) because they clearly “[...] stipulate that each member of the community has the right to have access to the infrastructures installed” (BF_KII_01_8182_F). There is a high degree of “respect for rules” (BF_KII_01_7061_M4) because community members understand that “compliance with this regulation generates mutual benefit” (NR_FGD_01_8780). Hence, in Niger, observance of community rules and regulations on land management is a precondition for enjoying the rights of access to the resources (NR_KII_02_1557_M;

⁸ Commission Foncière Communale (COFOCOM) – Municipal Land Commission.

⁹ Commission Foncière de Base (COFOB) – Village Land Commission.

NR_FGD_01_1555; NR_FGD_01_1649). In Niger, as in Burkina Faso, “sanctions are issued for all offenders” (NR_FGD_01_1649) who flout the rules. In Burkina Faso, anyone who breaches these rules of access “[...] is liable to a penalty – a fine” (BF_KII_01_5947_M).

Gray areas of land access for women and young people. Despite the guarantee of the above systems of equitable access to land for all persons in the communities, findings from the study suggest that women, young people, and IDPs/refugees may be in gray areas regarding their rights to land. In many cases, access is culturally and contextually defined with certain limitations imposed on some of these groups. The dominant view in both Burkina Faso and Niger is that women’s access to land is conditional and contextual. For instance, while in Burkina Faso one respondent said that “women also have access to land like men” (BF_FGD_01_7961), another in the same country held the view that “women do not have [automatic] access to land; however, each woman can use the field, or the space allocated to her by her husband” (BF_KII_01_1614_F) (see also Box 7). The latter observation resonates with the case in Niger where respondents said, “wWomen do not necessarily have access to land like men. They cannot access and use part of their husband’s field” (NR_FGD_01_9176). Indeed, “married women have access only to a part of her husband’s field, or a field that she inherited from her parents, because she is under the control of her husband; widows also have access by inheritance to her and her children” (NR_KII_01_4119_M). In Burkina Faso, widows appear to inherit land from their deceased husbands unconditionally. In Niger, however, widows may inherit only one-eighth of the land of their deceased husbands or one-third of the land from their fathers.

Box 7: No land ownership for women

“The woman has no right to land in our community and she cultivates with her husband, and it is the part that her husband gives her that she uses. Widows continue to use the land of their deceased husbands” (BF_KII_01_8173_M).

Access to land does not translate into ownership of land. Respondents also made very clear distinctions between access and ownership of land. While women may have access to land by cultivating the plots assigned by their husbands, they cannot own such land unless they have leased or purchased it. This also applies to young males, who likewise have only usufructuary rights to family lands. They may use part of family lands for their private purposes but can only own land when they reach the age of maturity, that is, when they get married or when their fathers die. Otherwise, they work on their father’s farm under his tutelage. Likewise, refugees and internally displaced persons may be granted access to land for settlement and cultivation, but they cannot own such lands, and therefore cannot transfer ownership by way of lease, sale, or inheritance.

2.5. Replicability of WFP Interventions

When asked about replicating WFP’s activities in other communities, respondents recommended the expansion, enhancement, and/or intensification of activities that promote agricultural production and productivity, with particular emphasis on the provision of agricultural inputs, such as motor pumps and fertilizers. They also recommended the expansion of opportunities for off-farm food production and income-generating activities to reduce the exposure of households to the risk of food shortages. To minimize conflicts over communal natural resources, they recommended the intensification of training of community actors on the transparent management of collective assets that advance collective food and income security objectives.

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1. *What Made Change Happen – the catalytic and trigger contributions of WFP’s activities to social cohesion building*

The study findings show that the populations in participating communities were not passively enduring the agro-climatic and conflict events characterizing their communities; neither were they waiting helplessly for external interventions to address their vulnerabilities. On the contrary, they tried within their technological and local resource limitations to do what they could to address the impacts of droughts, floods, soil erosion, and the associated consequences on food and livelihood insecurities within their communities. Nonetheless, they recognized that WFP’s activities contributed greatly to improving their resilience to food insecurity shocks and building of social cohesion within and between their communities. They attributed major improvements in their food and income security, intra- and inter-identity relationships, and the overall transformation of their food security and livelihood systems to the technical, physical, and financial support received from WFP.

WFP’s contribution to social cohesion building happened indirectly through catalytic and trigger processes. **Catalytically**, the distribution of food, cash, seeds, and other resources helped to mobilize and sustain the interests and engagement of community members in the collective activities for rehabilitation, creation, and management of community assets. Effectively, WFP’s activities stimulated community organization, provided resources and technical know-how, and introduced the communities to appropriate and affordable technologies that expanded their scope of action. WFP leveraged and enlivened the pre-existing will of communities to engage in actions that could help address the challenges of food insecurity and the resource-based conflicts confronting them. Participating communities were already inclined to help out their most vulnerable members, especially persons displaced by violence and other forms of disasters. Hence, WFP’s activities leveraged preexisting socio-cultural predispositions of altruism, empathy, and willingness to help people in distressed situations, often related to their shared experiences of trauma.

The **trigger effects** occurred largely within the context of collaborative work. In both countries, respondents consistently pointed out how effective the different activities of WFP and partners were in bringing different groups together for collective action to advance their common interests and promote togetherness. The recognized shared interests in the activities had convening and mobilizing powers that brought people of different identity groups together to decide and work on common projects that met their needs. By creating the space for different groups or communities to jointly decide on these activities, the CBPP processes allowed the participating communities to get to know each other better and to envision alternative ways of living and working together for their mutual benefit.

3.2. *Respondents’ Recommendations for Improving Social Cohesion*

When asked for their recommendations on WFP’s activities for their communities or new entrants into similar programs, respondents called for the intensification of peace education that directly supports social cohesion building as part of activities that promote collaboration between different groups of people.¹⁰ In their view, activities that bring together many people strengthen social cohesion between communities. Respondents also recommended that WFP and partners focus on agribusiness capacity development for young people to help them develop alternative sources of income and livelihoods. They suggested training of youth in commercial livestock development and other agro-entrepreneurial techniques to increase their income-earning capacities; creation of jobs for young people who cannot run their own businesses; and promotion of joint ventures that expand local business opportunities. The **Youth Entrepreneurial Capacity Development Package** should include the creation of “[...] a learning center for in-school and out-of-school youth” to meet, share ideas, and collaborate on the development of businesses along

¹⁰ While WFP did not have a formal peace education intervention alongside the FFA activities, participants referred to WFP’s “educational talks” in the participating communities as peace education because such talks “[...] helped us respect each other and work together hand in hand” (BF_KII_01_6921_F) or “enabled young people and elders to get along thanks to the training and educational talks that WFP and its partners organize” (BF_KII_01_8325_F). The call for intensification of such talks therefore signals a desire to see more intentional and structured education on peace and social cohesion.

identified value chains. Respondents wanted to see increased investment in complementary infrastructure, such as roads to make their villages accessible to everyone during the rainy season, “because during the rainy season, we are a little disconnected from the neighbors” (BF_KII_01_7965_F). Respondents also suggested continued support for the formalization of land transactions (acquisition and use) through documentation. This will improve land management because landowners will not only be able to trade land but also to grant access to third parties based on transparent land titles and rules of engagement.

3.3. *Program and Research Recommendations*

The relief, rehabilitation, development, and social cohesion building needs of communities differ widely, and WFP and its partners may not be in a position to meet the needs of all communities and groups to their satisfaction. However, based on the findings of this study, and in addition to the direct suggestions of respondents, the following priorities and recommendations should be considered.

Continue, consolidate, and spread. To consolidate and spread the benefits of the FFA interventions for social cohesion building, we recommend that WFP continue to use and deepen the CBPP processes to create platforms for collaboration that attract complementary services from other agencies. Through expanded stakeholder participation in the CBPP processes, WFP and the communities can identify which activities are within their power to implement and which are better addressed through collaboration with and leveraging the resources and expertise of other agencies working in the same geographic and/or thematic areas. For instance, WFP may not have the mandate or capacities to directly contribute to social cohesion building. However, WFP and partners can work with the communities to identify and leverage the interventions and capacities of other agencies to promote social cohesion building in WFP’s intervention zones.

Review, reorient, and retool. Social cohesion building is not an explicit aim of WFP’s current set of interventions within the integrated resilience program. Given the importance of social cohesion to the resilience of communities, we recommend that, in addition to leveraging the capacities of other agencies in the short term, WFP and partners, for the long term, consider reviewing their current set of intervention strategies to more intentionally mainstream social cohesion activities in their future intervention portfolio. This should pave the way for the conscious design and integration of training and other capacity building packages that make social cohesion programming an integral part of WFP’s FFA activities. Reorientation of interventions to support social cohesion building also includes recalibrating incentive packages to meet the needs and interests of different categories of participants.

Recognize, validate, and harness local capacities and potentials. Communities have preexisting values and institutional capacities that are useful stems on which to graft WFP’s interventions. However, the multiplicity and potential overlap of roles and functions risk creating dissonance and conflicts in some cases. For instance, respondents cited instances where pseudo-political and state-created Village Development Committees (CVDs) tended to usurp the roles of more indigenous institutions of chiefs and religious leaders in the management of land and other natural resources. To minimize such disruptions, we recommend that WFP and partners support the development and use of more intentional approaches to identifying and strengthening the capacities of indigenous social safety and resilience networks embedded in the social fabric of communities. In particular, we recommend that WFP and partners more explicitly recognize and use indigenous networks of men’s, women’s, and youth associations, as well as the joking relationships between different ethnic groups, as entry points for social cohesion building initiatives. We also suggest that local capacity assessment and validation processes include recognition of and support for harmonizing local leadership structures and capacities to ensure synergy in the roles played by traditional and customary chiefs, faith leaders (such as imams and pastors), and CVDs, among others, in promoting constructive engagements between identity-based groups. For instance, future initiatives could explore ways to create intercommunity youth engagement opportunities through economic and sporting activities.

Leverage, innovate, and deepen. Leveraging the emerging social and economic networks to build new and stronger local capacities for conflict prevention and management is critical to growing and sustaining the budding social cohesion building efforts in WFP’s program communities. Hence, we recommend that WFP and partners explore supporting the collaborative development of community peace and security

infrastructure, especially in communities in conflict-affected areas. Such initiatives could include identifying and leveraging local knowledge and networks of hunters, itinerant traders, and herdsman, among others, to develop intercommunity alerts and early response systems against infiltration and violent attacks by extremist groups. WFP could also explore opportunities for leveraging the capacities of other humanitarian and development organizations, within and outside the UN network, with expertise in this domain to promote the building of local capacities for peace.

Other areas of leverage and innovation include support for the development and institutionalization of market-led extension delivery services. The study noted the demand for technical support from members of communities that are not benefiting from WFP's technical support for land reclamation, water conservation, and soil fertility improvement activities. To scale up the reach of these services, we recommend that WFP and partners institute measures that enable trained technicians from communities participating in FFA activities to provide technical training and advisory support for the construction of half-moons, zaïs, and other infrastructure in nonparticipating communities. This will create the opportunity to expand the reach of WFP-implemented activities beyond selected project communities. Such services may be provided by the trained extension workers for a fee, which may serve as a motivation to institutionalize the replication of the interventions beyond the communities targeted by WFP.

Similarly, the development of **Youth Entrepreneurship for Peace (YE4P)** initiatives will be an important innovation that would not only create opportunities for gainful employment of youth, but will also help them appreciate the need to protect the peace and build cohesion within and across communities and other identity lines for the growth of their businesses. The study has highlighted how the development of gainful employment opportunities in participating communities reduced the outmigration of young people to the informal mining sector and other places in search of income-earning opportunities. YE4P initiatives are likely to expand, diversify, and/or enhance the productivity and sustainability of such opportunities available to the youth within or around their communities by equipping them with knowledge, technologies, and market access opportunities, as well as basic management skills to successfully manage their micro and small enterprises. Young people who see value in and have interest in growing their businesses will self-organize and/or engage in actions that protect the peace in their communities in order to protect their businesses.

Recommendations for further research and learning opportunities. Due to its limited coverage and sample size, the study leaves room for further research to enhance learning on how WFP and partners can stimulate and sustain social cohesion building through their FFA activities. We recommend the expansion of the scope of this study to include the voices of outlier groups, such as those in conflict or conflict-prone areas that were not covered in the sampling, who can share additional or alternative views on the contribution of WFP's interventions to social cohesion building. This recommendation also relates to the geographic scope of the study by including more communities, provinces, or even countries (e.g., Mali or Chad) to extend the knowledge base on WFP's contribution to social cohesion building. In addition, the research design should include control groups to help validate the findings in a more statistical sense.

We also recommend deepening the substance of the research to i) reveal and harness the potential of joking relationships and cousinhood for social cohesion building within and across countries; ii) deepen our understanding of the role of religion in social cohesion building, especially in countries like Niger with a nearly homogenous religious composition; and iii) focus on equity and distributional justice in the allocation and use of WFP resources, with increased emphasis on issues of power dynamics, culture, gender, and women's rights in land ownership.

In addition to the above, there are questions about the sustainability, growth, and replicability of WFP's intervention methods without equal or larger injections of resources. For instance, WFP makes cash payments to support the participation of members in some of the activities, including those supporting community-level management structures. Questions that arise include: To what extent do community-level structures derive their existence from extrinsic motivations based on cash and other resource injections or intrinsic motivations of community members for continued engagement in their functioning? What would sustain the existence and effective operation of these structures beyond the WFP program cycle? Will community members continue to engage and sustain actions on various FFA activities once WFP's cash

and food incentives are ended? Answers to these questions will enhance the design, implementation, and sustainability of WFP's social cohesion and resilience building activities in its target communities.

Finally, it is anticipated that different FFA activities would elicit different responses in different settings. For instance, while the construction of zaïs, half-moons, and other soil and water conservation techniques may be appreciated in one community, improving access to water through the construction or dredging of dams, wells, and water ponds, or other activities will be more appreciated in other settings. Within the scope of this research, it has not been possible to identify an optimal intervention mix of WFP's FFA activities that would be best suited or have the greatest potential to elicit community engagement for asset creation and social cohesion building in similar contexts. Additionally, this study was not able to isolate the exact elements in each set of WFP's activities that had the greatest catalytic and/or trigger effects. Therefore, we recommend that future work in this area focus on the development of standard practices¹¹ for social cohesion building to include in WFP's future intervention protocols. This should include assessments of how the 3PA and FFA soft management aspects (asset management committees, training, etc.) could be further turned into "social cohesion sensitive" processes. What additional steps, if any, would enhance the outcomes of the 3PA and FFA management processes? What aspects and activities should be added or implemented differently?

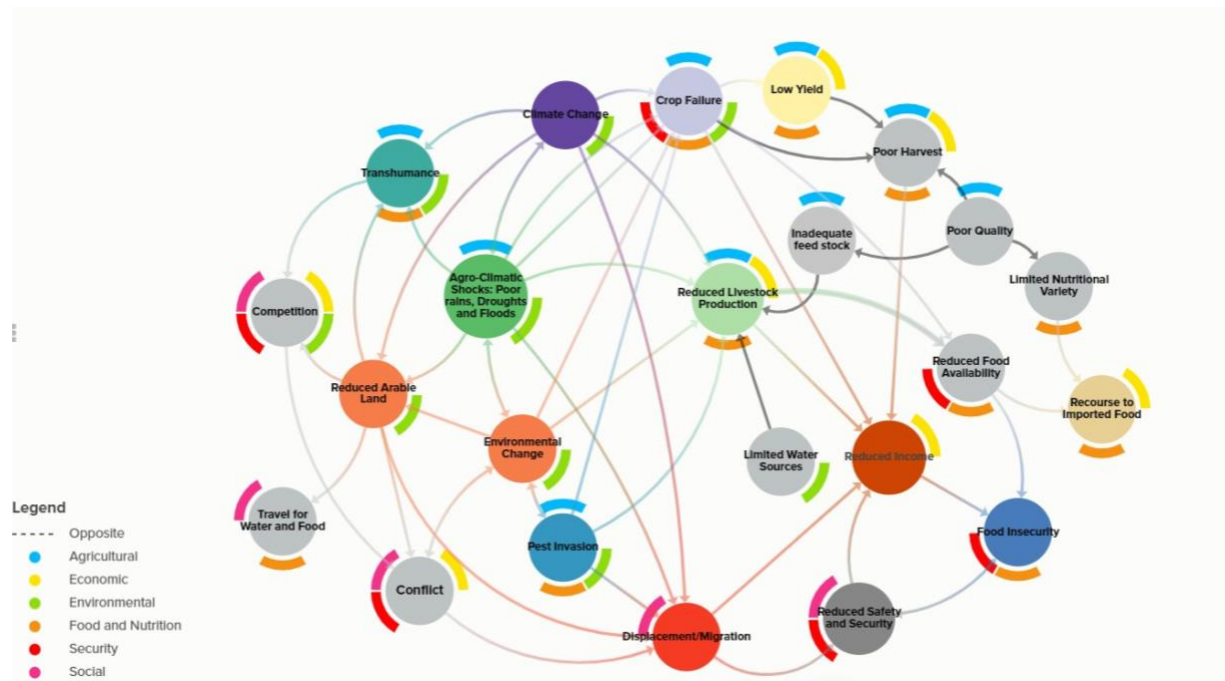
¹¹ Standard practices need to be distinguished from standard packages. Standard practices focus on the processes and mechanisms that can be used in different contexts to identify communal interests, needs, and activities in order to create the optimal conditions for social cohesion building. A standard practice, for instance, could be the intentional incorporation of peace and social cohesion education into FFA interventions. Intervention packages on the contrary necessarily need to be contextualized, not standardized.

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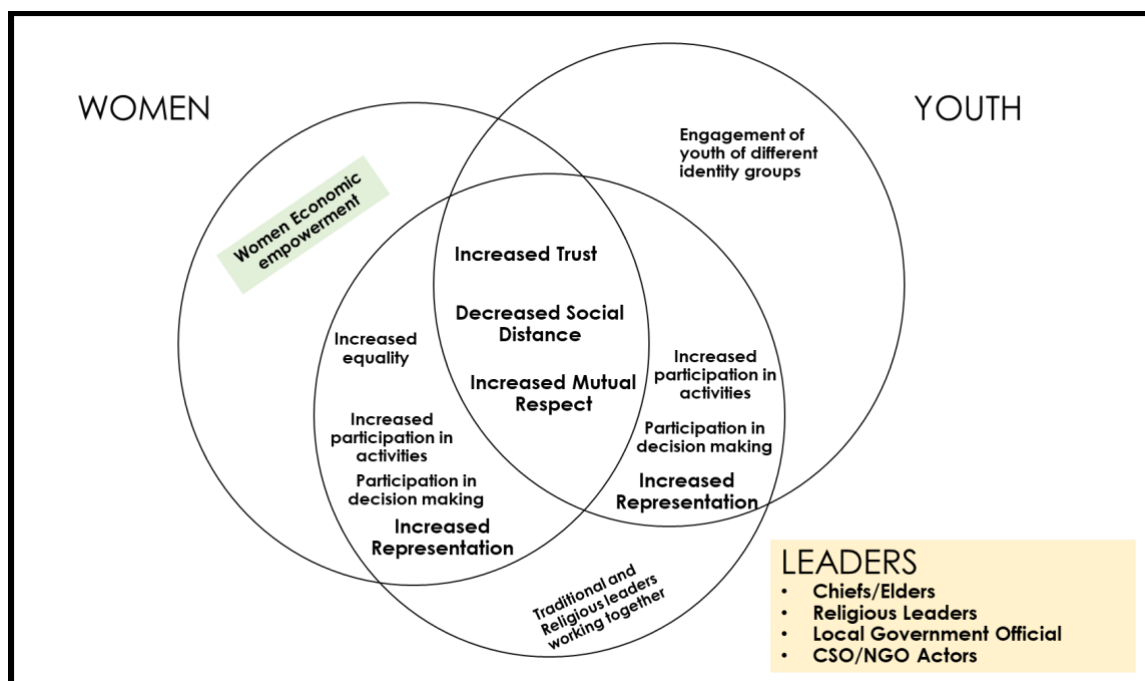
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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Map of vulnerability context from the respondents' perspective



Appendix 2: Graph of improved relationships in intervention communities



Appendix 3: Witness statements on contribution to WFP's activities to vertical social cohesion

- “As a result of WFP activities, relations between leaders and community members have improved enormously” (NR_KII_01_1518_F).
- This has translated into a new “union of the members with their leaders, they work in unity and together” (BF_KII_01_9952_F).
- “Through the activities we established a connection between the different groups and their leaders” (BF_KII_01_9662_F).
- WFP activities have created “good communication between community members and leaders” (BF_KII_01_9238_F).
- Because of the greater “connection between community members and our leaders” (BF_KII_01_8177_F), the leaders are now attentive to suggestions or opinions from community members (BF_KII_01_1123_F). The leaders are also in contact with the young people, and they often support them (BF_KII_01_1378_M).
- For women, “WFP activities have brought women and traditional elders together” (BF_FGD_01_1414_F_R2).
- The “changes noticed between community members and their leaders is that there is now more unity and trust” (NR_KII_01_5528_F).
- The increased levels of trust as a result of these activities enable “community members [to] interact confidently with their leaders” (NR_KII_01_9003_F).
- “The interaction between community members and their leaders is much better because the leaders no longer sideline the community and involve them in local issues. They understand that it is together that we can succeed” (NR_KII_01_4132_M).