

SUB-REGIONAL EVALUATION OF COUNTRIES
WITH FRAGILE SITUATIONS IN IFAD-WCA

Learning from experiences of
IFAD's engagement in the
**G5 Sahel countries
and Northern Nigeria**

Executive Summary



IOE

IFAD
Investing in rural people

Independent Office of Evaluation



Sub-Regional Evaluation of countries with fragile situations in IFAD-WCA. Learning from experiences of IFAD's Engagement in the G5 Sahel Countries and Northern Nigeria

Executive summary

A. Background

1. **Introduction.** In 2021, the Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE) conducted a sub-regional evaluation (SRE) of IFAD's engagement in countries with fragility situations within IFAD's West and Central Africa division (WCA), covering the period 2010 to 2021. SREs were introduced in 2021, to support evidence-based learning. They evaluate intra-regional issues or common development challenges within a defined geographical zone to identify common strategic and programmatic lessons.
2. **Selected countries.** The SRE covered the G5 Sahel countries – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger – and IFAD operations in the Northern region of Nigeria. These sample countries, referred to as G5+1 hereafter, were selected due to the similar fragility challenges they are facing, which pose threats for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. According to the OECD (2020), all the G5 Sahel countries and Nigeria are considered as being in fragile situations in 2020 (with Chad extremely fragile), while the World Bank (2020) considered Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria as being in situations of conflict affected fragility and Chad in a situation of social and institutional fragility.
3. **Rationale.** The IFAD's 2019 Special Programme for Countries with fragile situations states that, "Fragility represents a serious threat to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". In this regard, IFAD's support has led to the "Joint Programme for the Sahel Response to the Challenges of COVID-19, Conflict, and Climate Change" (SD3C). This programme was approved by the EB in December 2020 and implemented in partnership with FAO, WFP, and the G5 Sahel Secretariat. This sub-regional joint programme, being the first of this type, raised significant interest within IFAD in providing evidence-based learning for its effective operationalisation.

B. Evaluation design and Methodology

4. **Objectives and scope.** The SRE objective was to assess IFAD's operations between 2010 and 2021, using fragility lenses, to identify useful and relevant lessons. Its scope entailed ascertaining: (i) the extent to which IFAD's operational objectives and achieved results contributed to addressing fragility drivers and related root causes within the sub-region; and (ii), whether applied tools and approaches were adequate, considering the reality of volatile circumstances due to economic, natural, and insecurity factors.
5. **Theory of change.** The SRE design was theory-based, aligned with the IOE's evaluation guidelines, focusing on exploring how and why performance was achieved / not achieved in contexts of fragility. The SRE team constructed a theory of change based on the SD3C results framework and interaction outcomes with key stakeholders (at HQ and in the field).
6. **Analytical framework.** The SRE utilized an analytical framework, which outlines the need to foster resilience. The framework includes five groups of fragility drivers linked to: (i) socioeconomic issues, (ii) social disruption; (iii) environmental and climate change challenges; (iv) institutional weaknesses and weak social contracts; and (v) insecurity and conflict issues. IFAD's support contributes to enhancing rural resilience through the development of absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities at grassroots' level.
7. **Methodology.** The SRE applied a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collected through desk reviews, interviews with stakeholders (in groups and with key informants), and primary field data collection. Virtual interviews were also conducted with various categories of stakeholders at IFAD-HQ, sub-regional and country levels. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, national consultants

carried out field missions in the six countries. Overall, conclusions were based on triangulation of evidence from several sources.

C. Main Findings

Relevance

8. **The COSOPs and programmes were relevant in supporting rural resilience building, which is a critical objective in fragile situations.** COSOPs are frameworks for IFAD's engagement for inclusive and sustainable rural transformation, which clearly outlined resilience building in the Sahelian contexts. The evaluation found no evidence of flexible and adaptive usage of COSOPs in those unpredictable fragility contexts. They also fall short to provide strategic orientation on transboundary fragility issues, such as cross-border trades and transhumance.
9. Reviewed strategies and operations included contextual analyses, which focused extensively on three fragility drivers where IFAD makes a direct contribution. These analyses relate to economic / poverty, natural resources management / climate change, and social inequality. Deep analysis related to the other two drivers (weak public institutions and insecurity/serious conflict) was broadly absent.
10. **There is lack of clarity on how to perform holistic fragility analyses and the benefit of doing this, in comparison to analyses already done at design stage.** Reviewed experiences showed weak analyses of interactions within and across all categories of drivers. While lessons learned have informed the design of programmes, they do not explicitly relate to how to address holistically drivers of fragility. In fact, holistic fragility analyses were missing, and instances of simple designs, critical in those situations, were very limited.

Coherence

11. **IFAD loan-supported programme was coherent between and within consecutive projects over the reviewed period, although with no explicit intent of tackling fragility holistically.** Indeed, internal coherence was evident across IFAD lending operations with good evidence of seeking for it between consecutive loan operations in the same geographic areas. Evidence suggest that, except in the case of Nigeria, KM and policy engagement activities could not broadly enhance the efficacy in working in a fragile context, as they did not focus on lessons and/or actions for a better engagement in those fragile situations, including with the governments.
12. There was a broad complementarity of IFAD's operations with programmatic priorities of other IFIs' (AfDB and WB namely) in the G5+1 countries. However, evidence is still lacking on the extent to which such complementarity translates into either, formal mechanisms to strengthen relative comparative advantages, or to deliver synergies at the field level. Opportunities for partnerships were identified among RBAs, but there is no solid evidence on previous use of such approaches to deliver better. The SRE identified the SD3C programme as a good opportunity for stronger collaboration and partnerships among RBAs.

From effectiveness to impacts in fragile contexts

13. This section presents the extent to which supported interventions contributed to tackle fragility drivers, aligned to the analytical framework, and the recent Covid-19 shock, enabling to identify lessons learned.

Socioeconomic fragility drivers

14. **Promoting income generating activities helped in strengthening absorptive and adaptive capacities of beneficiaries in fragile contexts.** Improved farming practices led to increased yields, reduced yield variability, promotion of new crops and animal husbandry techniques, and adoption of asset building strategies. The latter included (i) reliance on public subsidy policy in some countries; (ii) in-kind

credit to support the most vulnerable to accumulate primary assets; or (iii) internal in-kind savings. These strategies contributed to building capacities of producers to resist or mitigate shocks.

15. **Capacity building and non-financial support have been critical in developing the necessary human and social capital of individuals and groups, necessary in fragile situations.** Most projects therefore developed comprehensive packages for supporting micro-projects and rural enterprises around three main categories of actions: training, support along the VC segments including promotion of market access and enabling inclusive rural finance services.
16. **Support to customary credit and saving groups was instrumental for smallholders' resilience building strategies.** In the absence of formal financing systems, supporting local mechanisms facilitates expanding productive assets for poor smallholders (e.g. farm inputs and processing equipment in Chad, irrigation pumps and fences for oasis gardens in Mauritania). It also contributes to profitable investments, and strengthening of absorptive and adaptive capacities of producers.
17. Cereal bank facilities contributed to improving absorptive capacities, by making food available for poor smallholders and reduced hunger burdens in the lean season, as well as buffering the variation of food prices. Support focused on providing technical, managerial and governance skills for committee members who managed collection, storage and redistribution of grains deposited by farmers. This was particularly important in Chad and Niger when erratic climatic events were combined with insecurity.

Environment and climate change fragility drivers

18. **Promoting soil and water conservation (SWC) practices in Sahelian arid and semi-arid contexts was critical in improving the resilience of smallholders.** IFAD supported projects have accumulated significant knowledge on effective interventions aiming at SWC, restoration of vegetation cover and small-scale irrigation schemes (in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger). These interventions were bundled with sustainable agricultural intensification methods to improve productivity and climate change adaptation. In fact, most interventions that include a SWC component were found relevant in line with climate-smart farming practices.
19. Supporting beneficiaries and decision-makers in those situations to prioritise the implementation of effective sustainable NRM practices has been pivotal to enhance capabilities towards resilience. A good example is the internalisation of SWC and Natural Assisted Regeneration in Niger, being up scaled through a national programme supported by the government and other partners.
20. **Support using GEF and ASAP funding has been instrumental in promoting successful strategies for smallholders' adaptation to climate change.** GEF additional funding promoted smallholder livelihood diversification (income sources through off-farm activities), which contributed to effective adaptation (Neer Tamba in Burkina Faso and PASADEM in Niger). Support through ASAP grants effectively promoted participatory communal planning that contributed to climate change adaptation strategies and fostered climate sensitive enterprises (PAPAM in Mali, PARSAT in Chad).
21. **Achieving effective NRM results in the Sahelian contexts requires full engagement of all parties to manage adequately differing interests on water and grazing resources across communities.** Availability and access to water is key to improving management of natural grazing land under Sahel region's arid conditions, as shown by the example of Chad (with the Pastoral Water and Resource Management Project in Sahelian Areas). In Mauritania, support through the GEF component established three grazing corridors with pastoral wells for the

transhumance. Overall, the SRE found that IFAD support to pastoralists has been modest, restricted to the development of transhumance corridors at a reduced scale.

Institutional fragility: role of farmers' organizations

22. **Empowering producers' and farmers' organisations (POs/FOs) to deliver effectively and sustainably has been instrumental to building absorptive and adaptive capacities, and can lead to transformative capacity.** Working with those organisations has been an area of comparative advantage for IFAD within the sub-region. Key steps have included enhancing their capacities to deliver services for improved input supply and product marketing; linking institutional strengthening and lobbying capacities with economic promotion; and helping them to federate into apex organisations. Positive results were achieved at national level in all evaluated countries and at regional level with the regional Apex ROPPA.
23. IFAD's support to chambers of agriculture improved the governance in local development processes and built social capital. Projects in Burkina Faso and Niger played a significant role in fostering the involvement of regional CAs in both project implementation and participation of apex producers' organizations in policy dialogue, supporting food security interventions and government led service delivery, and performing participatory marketing diagnosis. In many of such cases, a positive externality was building trust between beneficiaries and government.
24. **Mixed results were achieved for functionality of water users' associations for small-scale irrigation schemes, where local management committees had to play important roles,** despite intensive efforts by projects (in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger). Some explanatory factors were identified including internal divergence of interests, unequitable allocation of rights, low capacity of associations to deliver maintenance services to keep the investments functional, insufficient time to establish functional management committees, low maintenance fees for irrigation systems, and insufficient support to apex users' associations.
25. Experience suggests that nurturing local conventions for NRM to ensure social cohesion and confidence within and between communities has been effective. There are several instances where IFAD supported projects promoting such approaches in Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Mali, which were effective and demonstrated relevance and ability for consensual management of natural resources.
26. **IFAD support created favourable conditions for farmers' organisations to participate in relevant policy discussions.** The SRE found instances where producers' organisations influenced decisions on food security policy, with positive benefits for resilience building. A good illustration was found in Niger (with PASADEM), where consultation frameworks were established to foster trade linkages between different economic interest groups.

Fragility issues linked to social inequalities

27. **Lack of land tenure security discourages smallholders from investing in long-term land rehabilitation.** Available evidence in the G5+1 contexts revealed that this was addressed to some extent, mainly around investments supported for NRM infrastructure, but not always translated into policies. An exception was found in Mali, where the recent land law promotes use of existing local and national level land commissions and producers' representatives were trained for effective use of these frameworks to prevent conflicts.
28. In the G5+1 contexts, women and youths have restricted land rights and are more subject to insecure land access. However, IFAD supported projects have partially addressed the issue of inequality in land access, as it requires long term support and involvement of different actors (from local to national levels).
29. **Pastoralism is an important issue in the Sahelian context. However, it received an insufficient focus in IFAD supported operations, over the**

reviewed period. Pastoralists have insecure access rights to both farm- and grazing land near their settlements and other grazing land during transhumance. They are also subject to conflicts over access to water resources or protected areas. Very few IFAD projects have tackled transhumance and its transboundary aspects, yet climate change is making this issue more conflictual in the sub-region. Evidence suggests that, supporting effective joint management committees of competing users can be effective to prevent pastoral related local conflicts.

30. **Including a user rights dimension to NRM remained a necessity, especially in social conflict prone areas, where land access and use conflicts easily escalate.** The SD3C programme recognises this fact and intends to apply it in supporting producer' groups in efforts to manage NRM sustainably and tackle climate risks by adopting more suitable practices and improving productive land and water infrastructure to enhance resilience of rural livelihoods.

Violent conflicts and insecurity

31. **A nexus approach addressing poverty and conflict was missing in IFAD supported operations in the G5+1 contexts** IFAD supported projects have been affected by various forms of conflict, e.g. in Mali, Niger and Nigeria yet conflicts are treated as risks to be managed rather than problems IFAD can directly contribute to solving or preventing. For instance, results frameworks of IFAD projects in Nigeria do not consider how project outcomes fit within the poverty-conflict nexus. This makes it challenging to assess the extent to which interventions were intended to address conflict related drivers.

Shocks due to the COVID 19 pandemic

32. Actions implemented in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, illustrate IFAD's ability to act in emergency situations. There are several cases where IFAD support has shown flexibility in contributing to Governments' effort to respond to Covid-19. Examples are the development of a contingency plan for the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 in Niger; the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility; and other short-term country-level initiatives implemented in Chad, Mali, and Nigeria. While lessons from these initiatives are yet to be generated, they however illustrate IFAD's strength to adapt to change in circumstances.

Ensuring inclusiveness of interventions

33. **Evidence suggests that IFAD supported programs had a clear focus on gender equality, albeit not yet sufficient to address root causes underpinning the high vulnerability of women in such fragile contexts.** Women are more sensitive to fragility drivers in Sahelian rural settings and the Covid-19 crisis exacerbated their vulnerability. Projects have applied positive targeting approaches enabling women and girls to benefit from interventions. However, gender impacts, critical in fragile situations, are not depicted (explicitly or clearly) in the ToC pathways to integrate interventions that address roots causes of their vulnerability, which are mostly linked to sociocultural issues. Moreover, some project design documents had no specific gender strategies.
34. IFAD's support contributed to empower rural women and improve access to productive assets, critical in building absorptive and adaptive capacities. All projects have sought to empower women economically, and some addressed issues related to workload (Mauritania, Mali and Chad). Evidence also demonstrates: (i) a gradual but slow improvement in strengthening women's position within communities, especially in governing bodies of FOs and to a lesser extent within households; (ii) progress in addressing land access rights for women in Burkina Faso, and access to inputs for diversified economic activities in Chad and Niger. Nevertheless, the SRE found no evidence on women' participation in processes related to local NRM mechanisms, and their role in strengthening social contracts and keeping peace.

35. **Approaches to promote youths, core in several recent projects, generally focused on income generation activities and training, to build their absorptive and adaptive capacities.** In fragile situations, modalities for accessing funds (e.g. credit) have been more flexible and tailored (as provided by examples found in Mali and Niger). Evidence (e.g. in Nigeria and Burkina Faso) suggests effectiveness of integrating women and youths in upstream and downstream activities of VCD, contributing to diversifying economic opportunities for them, and mitigating effects of fragility drivers such as extreme poverty and climate change.
36. Youth effectively contributed to building resilience of rural communities, when adequately targeted and involved in key actions, as showed by instances in Niger and Mauritania. Effective interventions simultaneously include goals for improving technical capabilities, increasing access to productive assets, and profitable markets. Overall, the effectiveness of IFAD's youth support, aligned with outcomes of sustainable youth entrepreneurship and job creation, require deeper analysis of major youth fragility drivers at design stage. .

Efficiency, Sustainability and Scaling up

37. Findings show that achieving efficiency gains in fragile situations was challenging, but possible. IFAD intensified supervision and technical missions to projects in the G5 countries, as well as recourse to non-governmental service providers, and these yielded positive results in addressing few barriers to efficiency gains. These help addressing delays in launching projects, slow disbursement rates, and project coordination issues. However, management costs were generally higher in those situations, due to unforeseen / unplanned issues.
38. **The SRE identified challenges in relation to the IFAD business model in supporting operations in those fragile contexts.** In fact, sovereign loan financing are not flexible enough to allow swift adjustments in cases of critical events (e.g. severe drought, economic crisis, political disruption), while grant windows financing seemed more appropriate and adaptive due to their flexibility (for disbursement and management), but are very limited in their amounts. Meeting co-financing agreements has been challenging for governments of the G5 countries. Positively, the availability of funding with other international co-financiers (e.g. GEF and GCF) were useful to supporting resilience building interventions. During the reviewed period, most country directors (five out of six) did not reside in the countries, thus constraining IFAD's ability to work with key partners and respond quickly to changing contexts.
39. **Evidence suggest that results can be sustained in fragile situations, by strengthening CBOs' capabilities to deliver and follow-up achievements of IFAD supported projects, as well as ensuring a greater social cohesion within communities.** Examples from Niger and Chad confirm that strengthening effectiveness of resources user associations and management committees increases likelihood of sustainable results. Evidence from Niger and Nigeria indicated that supporting CBOs for broadening and deepening social cohesion as well as strengthening the social contract contributed to sustainable results in fragile situations. Such support include the "social engineering" (or social mobilisation) approaches applied in strengthening the bonding, bridging and linking social capitals (with examples in Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania).
40. Regarding scaling up, the SRE found that supporting governments to define and implement a scaling up strategy is critical. Examples of scaling up results by governments were found in Mali and Niger, while examples of upscaling by other development partners were found in Chad. The anchorage of interventions within national programmes has been a paramount factor for achieving effective scaling up results.

D. Conclusions and recommendations

41. **Conclusions.** The five categories of fragility drivers, identified in the evaluation analytical framework, were evident in the contexts of the G5+1 countries, with variability between and within countries. Building resilience (the key solution to fragility), is therefore critical in those countries. The reviewed IFAD country strategies, programmes, and projects increasingly prioritised resilience building in their objectives, although comprehensive fragility analyses were not conducted.
42. IFAD's support contributed to positive change in economic opportunities, NRM and adaptation to CC, which was instrumental in enhancing resilience of beneficiaries by building their absorptive, adaptive, and on-going transformative capacities. Findings show that women and youths (who are critical actors in fragile situations) have been supported through inclusive VCD activities; but achievements were moderate in terms of tackling context-specific factors underpinning their greater vulnerability. Moreover, strengthening social cohesion through grassroots' organisations (FOs and CBOs) and using existing endogenous mechanisms are key to achieving and sustaining results.
43. Lastly, the SRE identified the following key challenges. First, IFAD's engagement did not adequately reflect specificities of working in the G5+1 fragile contexts (e.g., simplicity of design, prior holistic analyses to understand the root causes of fragility, transboundary issues). Second, IFAD's business model (in terms of financial instruments and country presence) is better suited for delivering in non-fragile situations, than in the G5+1 contexts. Third, non-lending activities could not support the lending operations in holistically addressing fragility drivers.
44. Aligned with the previous findings, the SRE made the following recommendations.
45. **Recommendation 1. Develop a comprehensive resilience framework for the sub-region or region to guide assessments, designs and implementation of operations (at field, national and regional levels).** The framework should build on existing guiding documents and on past IFAD experiences to guide holistic analyses in order to: (i) understand the various drivers of fragility and root causes; (ii) develop sound ToC that help identifying pathways to tackling the fragility drivers identified, including those of trans-boundary nature; (iii) design interventions that are simple but effective along the nexus resilience and rural transformation; and (iv) identify strategic and operational partnerships for engagement. Given the trans-boundary nature of many of these issues, IFAD should consider piloting partnership frameworks that extend across national borders and build on experience from the on-going pilot for regional operations. Sources of funding (available and potential) should be analytically presented to ensure a proper mix of financial instruments to support resilience building interventions in those contexts.
46. **Recommendation 2. Use the opportunity of IFAD decentralisation 2.0 to improve the capabilities of country teams, interactions, and agility for effective delivery in the G5+1 fragile contexts.** This entails strengthening the technical capacities of country teams' members (capacity building) to adequately support operations in those situations, to identify key players to partner with for specific fragility aspects, also to increase interactions for planning and implementation of joint actions, taking into account the comparative advantage of each organisations, and to define appropriate but simple designs.
47. **Recommendation 3. Revisit approaches for VCD support within the sub-region to further improve the inclusiveness, and to build on community-driven approaches in highly fragile areas.** This requires, on one hand, to improve the targeting of women and youths and develop appropriate support packages (including: digital solutions, access to market, climate-smart agriculture) that take into account their specific conditions and respond to their expectations. On the other hand, to apply community-driven approaches that involve marginalised groups for better management of natural resources (including rangelands), adaptation to CC

and to prevent conflicts on natural resources. A specific focus should be to understand pastoralism issues in order to find ways to promote positive interactions between agricultural and pastoral production systems.

48. **Recommendation 4. Further promote the resilience of rural communities through supports to POs/FOs and CBOs to effectively deliver services and strengthen their capacity to engage in policy dialogue on topics related to them.** This entails to capitalize on past IFAD's achievements with POs/FOs and their apex bodies, which should include pastoralist organisations, through long-term engagement for their effective contribution to building resilience of their members, especially in most fragile areas. Supports to women organisations should be increased and tailored to each context to address progressively their specific fragility root causes, to raise sustainably their leadership profile, voice social and economic status.
49. **Recommendation 5. Organise greater support to country teams for a greater effectiveness of non-lending operations in those contexts.** This entails increasing the provision of technical backstopping (in terms of missions, learning events, studies and policy consultations) for better engagement with government partners on specific resilience issues (e.g., exclusion, social contract, pastoralism and transhumance), in partnerships with other actors both national and international.