

Program FASO

An innovative approach to building sustainable household resilience through integrated health, agriculture and capacity strengthening

THE PROBLEM

Eighty percent of households in Burkina Faso survive through subsistence farming. However, over the past 10 years, poor soil conditions, climate change and inappropriate agricultural and health practices have increased the occurrence of drought and flooding in the country, making it more difficult for farmers to meet their food needs—both in terms of quality and quantity. Agricultural productivity is low and malnutrition rates are high. Women and children tend to be the most affected.

PROGRAM FASO'S APPROACH

CRS Burkina Faso and its partners (Helen Keller International, GRET/Nutrifaso, OCADES-Kaya and Tin Tua Association) are building the resilience of households through Program FASO (Families Achieving Sustainable Outcomes), an integrated and comprehensive response to food insecurity, focusing on the sectors of health and nutrition, agriculture and capacity strengthening. This \$37.8 million program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)/Food for Peace, works to reach 51,000 mother-child pairs in the three health districts of Mani, Boulsa and Gayeri in Burkina Faso.

Program FASO promotes prevention of malnutrition for children under 2 (PM2A), which is the approach endorsed by USAID. This program seeks to prevent malnutrition before it becomes life-threatening by promoting good health and nutrition practices. PM2A relies on three major strategies: supplementary and complimentary feeding, access to health services and communication for behavior change.

Complementary and Supplementary Feeding

Complementary and supplementary feeding was needed in the project zone because of high malnutrition and the overall food security situation. This program complements the health services offered at health centers. Program FASO also provides monthly food rations (comprised of a high-energy corn soy blend, oil, bulgur and lentils) to pregnant and nursing mothers and their families to prevent malnutrition—under the condition that families attend medical centers and take advantage of health services, especially for maternal and child health. Last year, 1,330 metric tons of food rations were distributed to families in the provinces of Namentenga and Komondjari. A total of 14,100 pregnant and nursing women and 7,884 children were recipients of rations. By the end of the project, 51,000 mother-child pairs will be reached by complementary and supplementary feeding.



A woman preparing Misola (millet, soy and peanut) flour, which is used to treat malnutrition in children in Bogande. Photo by CRS staff.



Above: Leader mothers sharing health practices with the Care Group. Photo by CRS staff.
Left: Women constructing dikes for lowland improvement. Photo by CRS staff.



A sesame demonstration plot in Gayeri. Photo by CRS staff.

Access to Health Services

In PM2A, mothers and children in the targeted area benefit from health services that are offered for ante- and postnatal care, child vaccination and other health interventions, such as bed net distributions. These broader health interventions help sustain households through overall improved health for women and children. Program FASO collaborates with Burkina Faso's government-run health centers to deliver services at the centers. Program FASO also coordinates closely with the government at the food distribution sites. In the program area, children 6–59 months old were screened for malnutrition, and one-third were referred to a health center for treatment.

The conditional food rations had a positive effect on the number of pre- and postnatal health visits as well as on the timing of health visits. The rate of prenatal consultations grew by 15 percent in the second year, and postnatal consultations showed an increase of 164 percent. More mothers received consultations in the medical center earlier in their pregnancies. The number of women who attended the health center at the end of the first trimester decreased slightly by 4 percent, but there was an increase of 1,873 pregnant women who consulted a physician before the end of the first trimester, making up 11.5 percent of all consultations. With the coordinated Program FASO response, the number of reported cases of moderate and severe malnutrition dropped by 77 percent and 22.6 percent, respectively. Moreover, the proportion of underweight babies dropped from 6.86 percent to 4.57 percent in one year.

Communication for Behavior Change in Health, Nutrition and Hygiene

One important innovation in communication for behavior change is the Care Group. The Care Group embraces a community-based approach that uses a network of volunteers to improve health coverage and inspire behavior change in health and nutrition practices. The Care Group model relies on interpersonal communication to reach mothers and allows women to develop a network of support for these new practices. Within each village, there are Care Groups made up of 10–15 leader mothers and two leader grandmothers. In the Care Groups, a health promoter

that is based in each village passes along messages pertaining to good health, hygiene and nutrition practices to leader mothers in a way that is easy for them to share with their community. Each leader mother supports 10–15 households with pregnant or nursing mothers by checking up on families and sharing messages from the health promoter. The groups of households and the leader mothers are selected based on existing ties, and this ensures that there will be regular communication among the women.

The Care Group system has had a ripple effect. At this date, 31 animators have reached 253 village promoters in the target region. These village promoters have formed 364 Care Groups that hold regular meetings. Through the Care Groups, leader mothers have reached 5,123 women with important health, hygiene and nutrition messages. These messages have already produced results, as 5,767 mothers with children under 6 months old have adopted the practice of breastfeeding exclusively, and 4,638 mothers with children 6–23 months old have continued breastfeeding combined with appropriate dietary diversity.

BETTER YIELDS AND GREATER GAINS

Responding to food insecurity and increasing the resilience of households requires improving the quality and yield of crops in the short and long term. Program FASO improves outcomes for farmers through parallel initiatives—improving inputs and farming techniques and improving revenue by adding value and increasing market access. Over the past year, 16,164 men and women have benefited directly from agricultural activities.

Improving Productivity

Program FASO implemented a strategy for behavior change communication that relied on radio and demonstrations throughout the program area. The principal activity that allowed Program FASO to share techniques was Farmers' Days. Over the course of the program, 24 Farmers' Days have been held. These events featured demonstration plots that show the difference in results between the seed typically used and improved seed varieties. The improved seed varieties are either adjusted for a shorter growing season with less rainfall or selected for a better fit with market demand. Other demonstrations on thinning sesame plots and split application of urea on rice fields have been shared with farmers for a total of 357 demonstrations throughout the target area, including 57 demonstrations on conservation agriculture for the benefit of 2,611 producers. In addition to conducting Farmers' Days, Program Faso held promotions for certified, improved seed varieties. These promotions sold coupons to farmers so they could purchase rice and cowpea at a 50 percent discount and sesame at a 70 percent discount.

Restoring the Land

The most depleted pieces of land are reserved for the most vulnerable members of society, especially women. To strengthen their harvests, Program Faso supplied tools and taught farmers the Zai technique, a traditional small-planting-basin technique for water management. This



Women using the Zai technique. *Photo by CRS staff.*



Asséta Ouedraogoo was able to raise a large crop on formerly unproductive land using the Zai technique. *Photo by CRS staff.*

technique involves digging holes, filling them with compost and then sowing the seeds in these holes to produce staple crops on degraded lands, effectively regaining soil quality. This technique has the potential to increase yields by 30–40 percent. The impact of this long-established technique has been impressive. In the first year of the program, with the food-for-work approach, 236 hectares of land have been restored and 547 women have benefited from an improved crop, ensuring their food security in a difficult growing season.

In addition, Program FASO has promoted lowland improvement to increase the productivity of the land. Program FASO provides program participants with a plot of 0.15 hectare of improved land for rice cultivation. Participants could claim large yields despite an agricultural season marked by inadequate rain. As a result, 91.61 hectares of lowland have been improved. Five hundred fifty farmers benefited from the lowland improvement, including 261 men and 243 women who were able to operate their plots. In spite of the fact that many of the farmers had never cultivated rice before, overall production reached 74 metric tons of paddy rice, or approximately 147 kilograms per farmer who cultivated rice.

Improving Revenue

To increase the revenue of households after the harvest, Program Faso improves the quality of the crops through cleaning, storage and processing. At Farmers' Days, field agents hold demonstrations for threshing rice and sesame over a tarpaulin to gather the clean crop and sifting the sesame through a filter to remove stones and debris. There have been 97 rice threshing demonstrations and 144 sesame threshing demonstrations to date. To reduce spoilage, Program FASO encourages the use of hermetic sealing for cowpea. Along with the improved seed available at seed promotion events, hermetic storage bags are available to farmers at a reduced price with purchase of Program FASO coupons. Farmers are trained in cowpea hermetic sealing techniques at Farmers' Days. Program FASO has also provided technical assistance to women in rice processing. To date, 403 women have been trained to parboil rice, an efficient method of precooking rice that increases its quality. Beneficiaries took in a total of 3,513,650 CFA francs in sales of parboiled rice, resulting in a 17.7 percent return on the investment in parboiling.



Women constructing dikes for lowland improvement. *Photo by CRS staff.*

Education, Governance and a Focus on Women

Promoting education is a long-term strategy for strengthening household resilience. Program FASO focuses on promoting girls' enrollment and attendance and addressing food insecurity through school feeding and take-home rations. A total of 36,075 primary school children and 194 preschool children have benefited from school feeding in 324 primary schools and 7 preschools in the three districts. A total of 194.37 metric tons of food (bulgur, lentils and vegetable oil) were served in the school feeding program. In addition, 4,462 girls in 127 primary schools received 79.18 metric tons of food commodities in take-home rations for high rates of attendance.

The past year's efforts have also focused on empowering village development committees and parent-teacher associations. Six sessions were held with the PTAs to encourage them to mitigate environmental damage by planting trees and using improved stoves. In response, the PTA in the northern Boulssa district mobilized resources to train 13 local masons in the construction of improved stoves. A total of 34,863 seedlings were planted in the three districts. Finally, many agricultural activities were designed to support women. Approximately 30 percent of the improved agricultural plots and coupons were designated for women. Moreover, the program targeted women to help



Lowland farming yields a stable crop. Photo by CRS staff.



A mother and her child. Photo by CRS staff.

them learn various farming and processing techniques, such as the Zai technique and parboiling rice.

Program FASO will promote savings and internal lending communities (SILCs) in the areas of program coverage. SILC has had remarkable results in increasing women's savings and in providing social funds for communities. In SILC groups, women leverage their own assets to improve their financial situation and increase self-esteem. Next year, SILC groups in the program's three districts will promote savings to increase the resilience of vulnerable households so they are better able to cope with food insecurity during droughts and other disasters.

LOOKING AHEAD

Market gardening was promoted by the program that preceded FASO from 2004 to 2009. One very successful example of small-scale irrigation is the market garden at Tougouri, where Program FASO's technical support has allowed an entire community to support itself on the rice and millet harvest and take vegetable crops to market. 170 heads of households, including 89 women, have benefited from the program. Although the close of the irrigation project took place in Tougouri in 2009, the project has been sustained by the community ever since, and it has allowed households to manage the crisis of low rainfall in 2010 and 2011. Because of the promising results, Program FASO will introduce market gardening for the target population women next year, using a technique that is adapted for the conditions within the program area. In Tougouri, water was drawn from a nearby reservoir, but for the remaining areas of Program Faso, wells will be dug to provide a water source for irrigation.

Efforts are already underway to train field agents to share methods for farmers to better market their crops. Field agents will hold trainings focusing on business planning, market analysis, cost calculation and price fixing, negotiation techniques, measures of crop quality and managing competition. Another exciting collaboration that is set to take place in the coming year is the use of mobile technology to gather market information. Afrique Verte and Program FASO will partner to inform farmers of the availability of mobile technology. Farmers will be trained in the use of Short Message Service communication using the Esoko platform to collect price information and prepare themselves for changes in the market.

For more information about CRS programming, please visit www.crsprogramquality.org.