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Experience of Social Safety Net Pilot Projects in West Africa



Introduction

Social safety nets are cash or in-kind social assistance programs that provide free service packages.

They contribute to control poverty through wealth redistribution and support to the most vulnerable households.

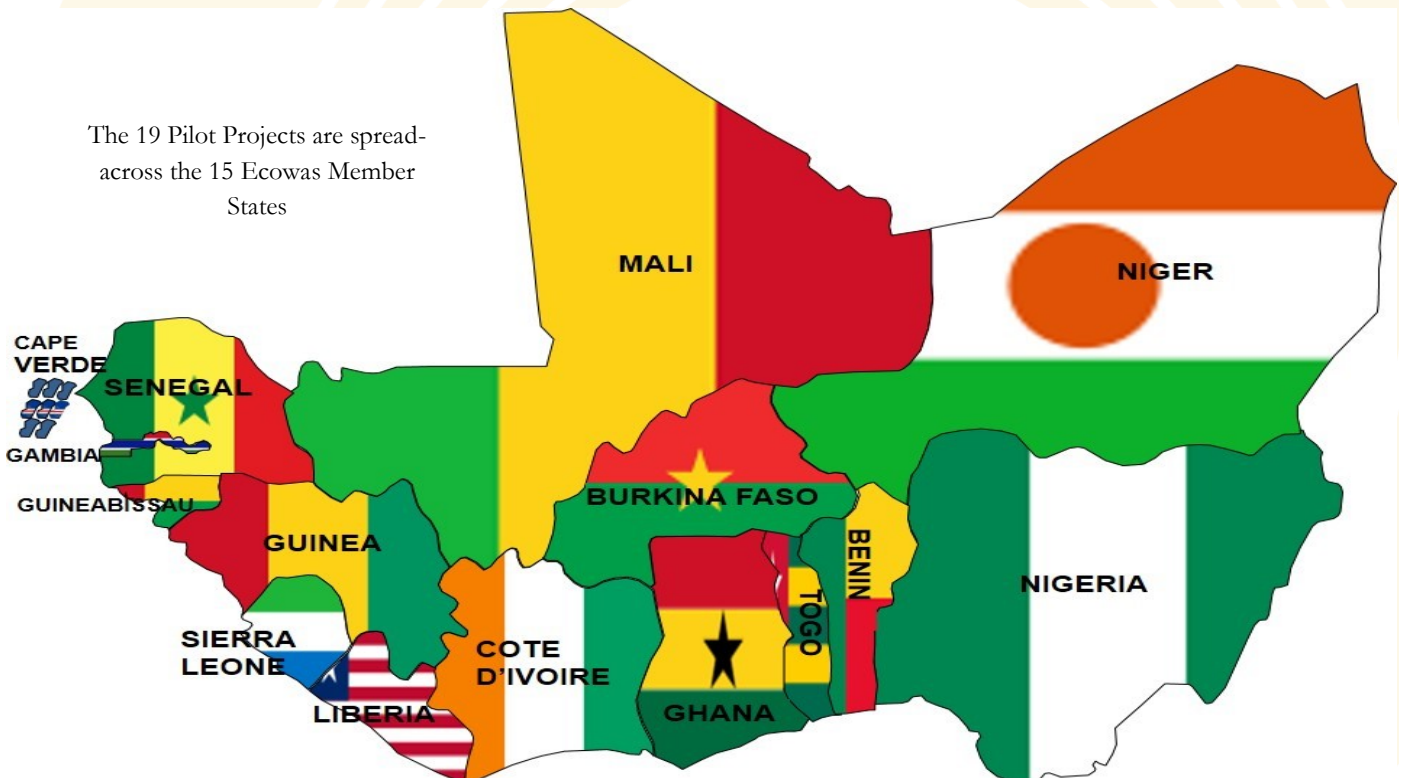
In this perspective and as part of the regional program to support national safety nets in West Africa, nineteen (19) pilot projects were implemented in the 15 ECOWAS Member States.

The program aims to strengthen the livelihoods of the poorest households and communities and their resilience to the various shocks affecting their food and nutrition security.

The total grant of € 3 530 971 is co-financed by the ECOWAS Commission and the Spanish Cooperation adding to the € 353 097 representing the expected 10% contribution of project promoters to the grant.

The program is implemented by RAAF, the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food with the financial and technical support from the Spanish Cooperation.

The 19 Pilot Projects are spread-across the 15 Ecowas Member States



Results and Achievements

These pilot projects, whose implementation began in 2016, contributed to impact the lives of the various beneficiaries.

The achievements include:

1. Food distribution, child development and access to basic social services with significant results in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Senegal, Liberia, and Togo.

The main instruments used are :

- school feeding with the involvement of local producer networks and organizations,
- screening for malnutrition and distribution of nutritional supplements for young children,
- socio-educational meetings for behavioral change and,
- support to income-generating activities.

2. Development of the main source of incomes and food security of vulnerable households. Results in this sector are particularly visible in the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Niger to name but a few countries. They derive from:

- the distribution of agricultural inputs and equipment to producers,
- the support to and technical capacity building of producers,
- the design and adaptation of social nets to the pastoral and fragile realities of the Sahel region.

3. Strengthening of the livelihoods of vulnerable households and their resilience to shocks. Countries such as Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Cape Verde recorded good results in this regard. Innovative actions have facilitated multiple-use cash transfers in the countries:

- cash transfers,
- cash for work, food for work (this instrument supports labor-intensive works e.g. development of production sites, rehabilitation of agricultural lands) and,
- income-generating activities.

4. Development and experimentation of targeting methods. Benefits in this sector are documented in countries such as Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali. Activities were deployed through:

- the establishment of an agreed method of targeting beneficiaries and,
- an innovative approach to adapting the analysis of the household economy to the pastoral realities and the fragile environment of the Sahel region.



School feeding



Distribution of agro-inputs



Cash transfers



Distribution of animal kits

Other achievements at the regional level include the empowerment of women and capacity building of most countries that do not have sufficient experience in social safety net programs management in relation to national social protection strategies or policies.

Therefore, the 19 pilot projects have positively impacted the lives of more than 53,349 direct beneficiaries, 62% of whom are women.

Beneficiaries are either individuals, groups, households, family farms, municipalities, districts, or villages, etc.

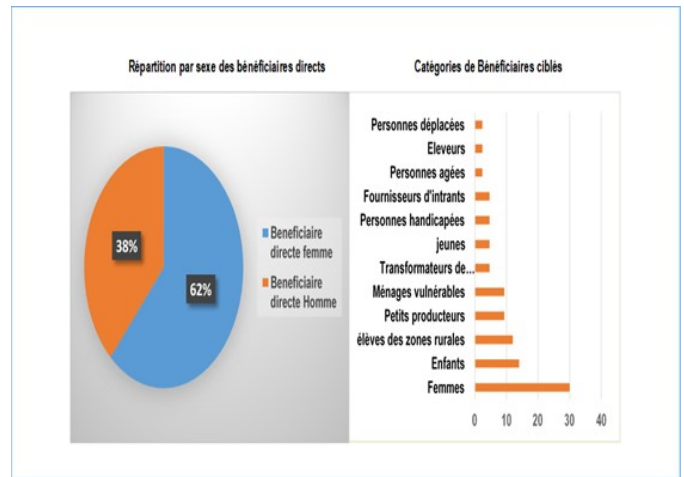
Challenges et lessons learned

The **main challenges** related to the implementation of these 19 pilot projects include the following:

- sustainability of the actions
Despite the encouraging field results recorded during this pilot phase, the issue of sustainability has not yet been solved. In general, actions die as soon as the funding ends.
- targeting of beneficiaries
Targeting remains a major concern in a context where demand outstrips supply. As a matter of fact, how does one select, among plenty vulnerable people, the populations to be supported and accompanied?
- alignment of projects with field realities
This is often observed during field activities implementation. It is therefore high time to ensure that projects objectives and expected results are in line with the real needs of the populations as well as with the allocated financial and human resources.

Key lessons learned are as follows:

- Because they are well focused and not too complex, small initiatives can positively impact beneficiaries' lives and boost their welfare,
- collaboration with public authorities facilitates the scaling up of innovative actions. Thus, strong advocacy is needed for considering good innovative practices in public policies for safety nets and social protection,
- a combination of social safety net instruments that consider social and environmental conditions leads to better results in terms of improving the resilience of the vulnerable populations,
- greater gender sensitivity in targeting the vulnerable populations enables effective responses to household food and nutrition problems.



Beneficiaries segmenting



Mobilisation and water management during dry season



Infant nutrition and animal breeding

Conclusion

The ECOWAS Commission strongly believes that social safety net actions contribute to sustainably preserve the capacity of the most vulnerable populations to protect their livelihoods and boost their resilience to shocks.

Through the 19 pilot projects, ECOWAS therefore brings together the Private sector, the Civil society, and the beneficiaries themselves. It is a multi-stakeholder approach based on the contribution of each and everyone.

These innovative actions are carried and implemented by non-profit, non-state organizations (international, national, and local NGOs, federations, associations and organizations of producers, breeders, agropastoralists and the agroindustry, rural women's associations), local authorities, universities and research centers.

ECOWAS Member States now have a clear-cut interest in social safety nets. Slowly but surely, most of the national agricultural investment programs for food and nutrition security take into account in their policies social safety net instruments including among others: school feeding, cash transfers, distribution of economic recovery kits, resilient production techniques, security and resilience of pastoral systems, promotion of integrated school feeding and agroecological systems, protection of the reproductive essence for agropastoralist households, resilience of populations through child-sensitive social net systems.

Perspectives

Field achievements and lessons learned from the 19 pilot projects suggest taking actions towards the promotion of some innovative social safety net instruments such as:

- integrated models of school feeding with local products and the promotion of agroecological practices,
- design of social nets tailored to the pastoral context,
- cash transfers combined with support measures for production,

In short, the ECOWAS Commission wishes to:

- better understand and increase knowledge on the concept of social safety nets,
- identify and capture, in all its Member States, good practices or innovative actions for scaling up at local, national, or regional level.



Distribution of food kits



Counter Season gardening

- support to women's income-generating activities and the acknowledgement and promotion of their role in food and nutrition security.

Yet, additional conditions such as capacity-building of some stakeholders, improvement of the regulatory framework and sustainability, remain a major concern.

Moreover, the current coronavirus pandemic calls on ECOWAS and its Member States to deploy the most appropriate social safety nets to ensure food and nutrition security and the welfare of the region's most vulnerable populations.

Otherwise, the stability of the region which already faces several challenges, especially insecurity, could be more weakened.

ECOWAS Commission

Department of Agriculture, Environnement and Water Resources

Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development

River Plaza Annex- 496 Abogo Largema Street - Central Business District