The CASH+ approach in the Sahel

AS A TOOL TO REINFORCE RESILIENCE

Mali // Mauritania
Nejiba, a CASH+ beneficiary, at her market stall ©FAO/Sonia Nguyen
Recurrent shocks affect the food and nutritional security of millions of people living below the poverty line in the Sahel. Prolonged exposure of poor households to multiple environmental and climatic risks contributes to perpetuate high levels of vulnerability.

In order to break the vicious circle of hunger in the Sahel, FAO is committed to the development, protection and restoration of sustainable livelihoods. It uses a “twin-track” approach, on the one hand taking immediate steps to protect and support agriculture, food and nutrition, and on the other addressing in the longer term the underlying factors driving risks and crises.
The CASH+, an innovative approach in the Sahel

The CASH+, through its cash transfer component, helps cover households’ needs during the lean season when food stocks are depleted, and prevents them from contacting debts and selling their productive assets. Through the assistance to productive activities, the CASH+ promotes the accumulation of assets and helps kick start a virtuous cycle of production and income generation, which can improve food and nutrition security and lead to economic empowerment.

The CASH+ approach is a flexible methodology of intervention geared towards restoring resilient livelihoods. This social protection approach combines two complementary modes of intervention, namely cash transfers and productive assistance, in order to create synergies thus increasing their respective impacts.

The CASH+ approach was first developed in Burkina Faso and Niger in 2013 and 2014 through a pilot project. Its impact on the socio-economic, food security and nutrition situation of beneficiary households was very promising. This initial experience also demonstrated that interventions combining cash transfers and productive inputs had a higher ‘cost-effectiveness’ ratio than distributions of productive inputs of equivalent value alone.

In Burkina Faso, the CASH+ programme helped increase households’ incomes and assets faster than input distribution or cash transfers alone of a similar amount. The programme supported increases in revenue (by 27 percent), savings and asset ownership, improvements in food security (75 percent of beneficiary households were food secured by the end of the programme, compared with only 35 percent initially) and dietary diversity (82 percent of beneficiary households had an acceptable diet two years after the intervention).
CASH+ in Mali and Mauritania

The CASH+ programme in Mali and Mauritania benefitted 1250 vulnerable households affected by food insecurity and targeted using the Cadre Harmonisé analyses and the Household Economy Approach (HEA) at the geographic and community level respectively. Women, and in particular women heads of households, were the main recipients of the program, as increasing women’s access to economic opportunities, productive resources and social protection helps to promote their economic empowerment.

Goats were selected as a productive input for this programme due to their hardiness and short breeding cycle, which allows a rapid growth of the initial nucleus and regular milk production adapted to household consumption.

Modalities of interventions

Two different modalities of interventions, of a similar total value, were used in each country:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Modality 1: goats+cash</th>
<th>Modality 2: Cash</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>1 goat nucleus (vaccinated &amp; dewormed)</td>
<td>2 x 100 000 FCFA (USD 160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 kg of animal feed</td>
<td>375 beneficiary households</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 000 FCFA (USD 32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>1 goat nucleus (vaccinated &amp; dewormed)</td>
<td>3 x 96 000 MRO (USD 270)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 kg of animal feed</td>
<td>250 beneficiary households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 000 MRO (USD 56)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Goat distribution
©FAO/Aissata Lam

Echange rate as of January, 1st 2017
Impacts

Food security improvement

Evolution of the use of negative coping strategies
The productive transfers have limited the use of negative coping strategies in the face of shocks. Beneficiary households, in their vast majority and for all combinations, didn’t resort to emergency coping strategies such as the sale of land, child labor and begging.

Income increase

Evolution of the average income of beneficiary households
Under the CASH+ program, the average income of all beneficiary households increased, with increases ranging from 10 to 56 percent depending on the kits received, between the baseline and the endline.

Nutrition

Changes in practices and behaviours
The CASH+ program has had a positive impact on the nutrition of beneficiary households. Significant improvements have been noticed in practices and behaviours especially for hand washing before preparing food and exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life.
The productive transfers have enabled beneficiaries to cover their food needs during the lean season.

“Many men have moved far away from our villages to look for work, we have now few people to work in the fields. And as the rains are increasingly irregular, it is getting very difficult to make ends meet,” explains Maman, whose meager harvest came to an end when she received the first cash transfer. “For the first time in years, I did not have to borrow money to buy food.”

In Mauritania, 20 percent of women beneficiaries have taken advantage of the CASH+ program to engage in income-generating activities.

At age 55, Nejiha heads a family of nine children and four grandchildren. She used the cash transfers to pay off her debts, and to start her business with a small food stall at the village market. It provides her the regular income that she needed. “With the money I earn, I can pay the children’s school fees, buy food and cover the health expenses of the whole family.”

FAO included a nutritional component into the CASH+ program to improve the quality of food intake, with a view to reducing malnutrition related to poor feeding practices.

Aissata took part in the culinary demonstrations and nutritional education sessions organized by FAO in her village. While she was pregnant, she learned how to cook an enriched porridge made from nutritious local foods, which she now prepares several times a week. “Thanks to this recipe, my baby is very fit, and I have also diversified my own diet. I know more about the ingredients and the rules of food hygiene.”