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Organization of the
United Nations

GOOD PRACTICES 

Sustaining peace

Sustaining peace in the Sahel and West Africa

Lessons learned and best practices
from FAO Peacebuilding Fund projects



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Contents

Foreword	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction.....	1
What is the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund?	2
Background and rationale	3
The flare-up of conflict and violence in the Sahel, coupled with the spread of insecurity to the countries of the Gulf of Guinea	3
Commonalities of PBF projects implemented by FAO in terms of theories of change and categories of actions	4
Working guidelines and methodology.....	8
Main findings from the analysis of PBF projects.....	10
Strengthening social ties by improving women's and young people's access to natural resources and land rights in Sierra Leone	11
Significant progress in local peace dividends.....	11
Benefits of improved approaches to PBF project formulation.....	14
The crucial issue of improving the formulation approach of PBF projects: the case of Côte d'Ivoire	15
Main effects of peacebuilding interventions.....	16
Promoting rural employment, an effective lever for building resilience and consolidating peace: the case of Liberia	17
Women's and young people's access to decision-making power, a lever for conflict transformation in the medium and long term: the case of the Niger.....	19
Coordinated border management to secure and develop cross-border areas	21
Sustainability of interventions	22
Partnership, the key to effective intervention: the case of Côte d'Ivoire	23
Consolidating and sustaining local peace: lessons learned and recommendations	24
Main lessons learned from the project formulation process	24
Main findings concerning operational implementation and project monitoring.....	27
References.....	29

Figures

Figure 1. Funds mobilized 2017–20225

Figure 2. Thematic breakdown of funding5

Foreword

The expansion of insecurity is combined with the food and nutritional crisis to weaken the situation of millions of West Africans and Sahelians, as evidenced by the data regularly published by the Cadre Harmonisé. These cumulative crises feed each other, as the multiplication of security incidents leads to the abandonment of croplands, the interruption of agricultural campaigns, the disruption of livestock mobility systems, the closure of livestock markets, the abandonment of fishing zones and the loss of property and assets of rural households. Clearly, the resurgence of conflicts over access to natural resources and the multiplication of security threats have become the main drivers of food insecurity in the region.

After more than a decade of outbreaks of armed violence, security conditions continue to deteriorate sharply in the Sahel and West Africa, where we are witnessing a diversification of crisis hotspots, as well as the geographical spread of insecurity. At present, there are three types of insecurity hot spots in the region: (i) areas facing separatism, mainly in the northern part of Mali; (ii) geographical areas affected by violent extremism; and (iii) areas plagued by deadly intercommunity clashes. The contextual evolution we are witnessing reflects the persistence of certain major challenges linked, to a large extent, to the fragility of the governments and the lack of governance, but also to the deepening of social fractures which encourage the security crisis to take root in endogenous socioeconomic dynamics.

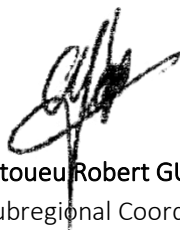
The increase in insecurity is taking place against a backdrop of rising conflict over access to natural resources, due to the combined effects of several factors: intensifying climate change, strong demographic growth, inherent shortcomings in rural governance systems and discrimination stemming from social stratification. The interweaving of these conflict dynamics has plunged many segments of rural Sahelian and West African communities into a situation of great precariousness, resulting from the interruption of public services such as education, health, energy and security. The dramatic protection crisis facing civilian populations in many rural areas is leading to massive displacements of rural families forced to return to refugees camps and internally displaced persons. This situation is creating enormous humanitarian challenges, and is also aggravating antagonisms between displaced persons and host communities over access to natural resources (arable land, water points, grazing areas, forest resources, etc.).

Faced with these challenges, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has become involved in the implementation of a collective multidimensional response to conflict and insecurity. Within this framework, FAO values the opportunities offered by the United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to develop and implement projects aimed at acting on peace and conflict drivers that are linked to livelihoods, natural resource management, rural employment, cross-border programming, intra- and inter-

community relations and reintegration. Since 2018, the portfolio of PBF projects implemented by FAO in the region has consolidated considerably, with a tripling of funding mobilized. It is with a view to reinforcing this momentum of increasing PBF projects that the FAO Subregional Resilience Team for West Africa and the Sahel (REOWA) has initiated a process of exchange between country offices, with a view to generating knowledge aimed at developing best practices in peacebuilding.

This summary report makes available the results of the self-assessment of the PBF projects and the highlights of the virtual workshop held on 31 May 2022, focusing on: (i) the effects induced by the interventions carried out by FAO on the peacebuilding dynamic; (ii) the good or promising practices promoted in terms of building sustainable peace; and (iii) the main lessons concerning the approach to formulating PBF projects, as well as the strategies for operational implementation and monitoring-evaluation of the interventions.

This feedback will help to improve programming practices in the region's country offices, as well as fostering exchanges with colleagues from country offices in other regions of Africa and United Nations agencies that collaborate with FAO in implementing PBF projects.



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Introduction

Faced with a steadily worsening security situation, the governments of Sahelian and West African countries, regional integration institutions and cooperation partners are stepping up collective, multi-faceted responses aimed at maintaining peace and security, and consolidating sociopolitical stability. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is fully involved in the concerted response to crisis situations in the region, and is making an additional contribution to reinforcing the collective dynamic of consolidating peace and stability. Within this framework, the Organization is committed to making the most of the opportunities offered by the United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), a funding mechanism for post- conflict and peacebuilding activities.

The FAO Subregional Resilience Team for West Africa and the Sahel (REOWA) has initiated exchanges on the experience of projects that are implemented by FAO in the region, thanks to funding allocated by the PBF. This capitalization work has been based on ongoing consultation and joint work with colleagues from FAO's Conflict and Peace Unit (CPU) working on conflict-sensitive programming as well as contributions to peacebuilding¹ and from FAO's Knowledge Sharing Platform on Emergencies and Resilience (KORE) of FAO's Office of Emergency and Resilience (OER) responsible for identifying and documenting FAO good practices in emergency and resilience.²

¹ For more information on the role of the CPU: www.fao.org/emergencies/our-focus/sustaining-peace

² For more information on the role of KORE: www.fao.org/in-action/kore

What is the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund?

The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) is the United Nations' instrument of first resort for responding to violent conflict. The PBF was created in 2005 as a multi-year funding mechanism to support post-conflict and peacebuilding activities.

The PBF comprises two windows:

- The **Peacebuilding and Recovery Facility (PRF)** is a financing mechanism based on PBF programmes. It provides peacebuilding support to countries over a period of up to three years. This support can only be granted to countries that have been declared eligible for PBF support by the UN Secretary-General.
- The **Immediate Response Facility (IRF)** is a financing mechanism based on projects supported by the PBF. It is generally used in situations requiring rapid action, as well as to address immediate peacebuilding and recovery needs.

Source: FAO. 2021. *The Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund: Presentation for FAO Workshop. Internal Webinar.* Rome.

Exchanges between FAO's decentralized offices have helped to make up for the lack of mechanisms for sharing peace programming practices, by providing a clear understanding of what the various decentralized offices do, how interventions are carried out and for what results.

This document presents the results of the analysis of the experience of PBF projects implemented since 2019 and is based on: (i) a literature review; (ii) a self-assessment exercise carried out by FAO decentralized offices on a sample of PBF projects; (iii) in-depth interviews with selected decentralized offices, to deepen reflection on a few central themes; and (iv) the results of a virtual workshop on the experience of PBF projects implemented by FAO in the Sahel and West Africa, held on 31 May 2022.

The exercise mainly involved the focal points of the PBF projects in the FAO country offices in the Sahel and West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

The final objective of this document is to present the work carried out by FAO in the formulation and implementation of PBF projects, focusing on experiences gained, good practices promoted in several West African and Sahelian countries, lessons learned and recommendations for future work.

Background and rationale

The flare-up of conflict and violence in the Sahel, coupled with the spread of insecurity to the countries of the Gulf of Guinea

Since 2012, the Sahelian zone has been faced with a shifting and chronic security crisis that intertwines development, governance and stability issues across vast cross-border natural spaces. Traditionally, these spaces do not constitute fault lines. Rather, they tend to foster the construction of networks that are able to exploit sociocultural similarities and economic complementarities between different spaces. However, they have now become preferred zones for civil insecurity, fuelled by the interweaving of several conflict dynamics, in this case antagonisms linked to modes of access to natural resources and the security crisis caused, in large part, by sociopolitical instability and governance deficits. Added to this is the interference of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in social relations, through the exploitation of frustrations of certain populations for political or religious ends.

The flare-up of conflicts as violent extremism takes root in the Sahel is illustrated by the multiplication of security incidents, the number of which has quintupled in three years, rising from 90 in 2016 to 465 in 2018 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2019). With regard more specifically to the Liptako-Gourma area, a World Food Programme (WFP) study carried out in 2020³ indicates that it is currently the second epicenter of insecurity in the Sahel and West Africa (WFP, 2020). Armed violence is affecting increasingly large areas covering: (i) northern and central Mali; (ii) eastern, central-northern Sahel and Boucle du Mouhoun in Burkina Faso; (iii) eastern and western Niger; (iv) western, southern and eastern Chad; and (v) northeastern and northwestern Nigeria. Overall, West Africa is facing a complex and difficult security situation, coupled with turbulence in democratic governance (political violence resulting from electoral confrontations). In addition, the worsening security crisis has been accompanied, since April 2021, by a series of military coups.

One of the salient facts to be mentioned is the considerable increase in the number of civilian victims of conflict, which now exceeds that attributed to fighting between armed forces and NSAGs. It should be added that women pay a heavy price for conflict and insecurity. They are not only victims of violence perpetrated by NSAGs and self-defence militias, but also of abuses attributed to the defence and security forces. Civilians facing a dramatic protection crisis are developing a strategy of abandoning areas plagued by violence in search of safety elsewhere. This leads to a considerable increase in population displacement. In June 2021, there were 1 446 183 internally displaced people in Burkina Faso alone, according

³This study indicates that in the period between 2014 and June 2020, more than 3 240 security incidents were recorded, resulting in the deaths of almost 10 000 people.

to data published by the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (2023). These massive displacements of rural households create enormous humanitarian challenges, and are also accompanied by rising tensions between displaced people and host communities over access to arable land, water resources and grazing areas.

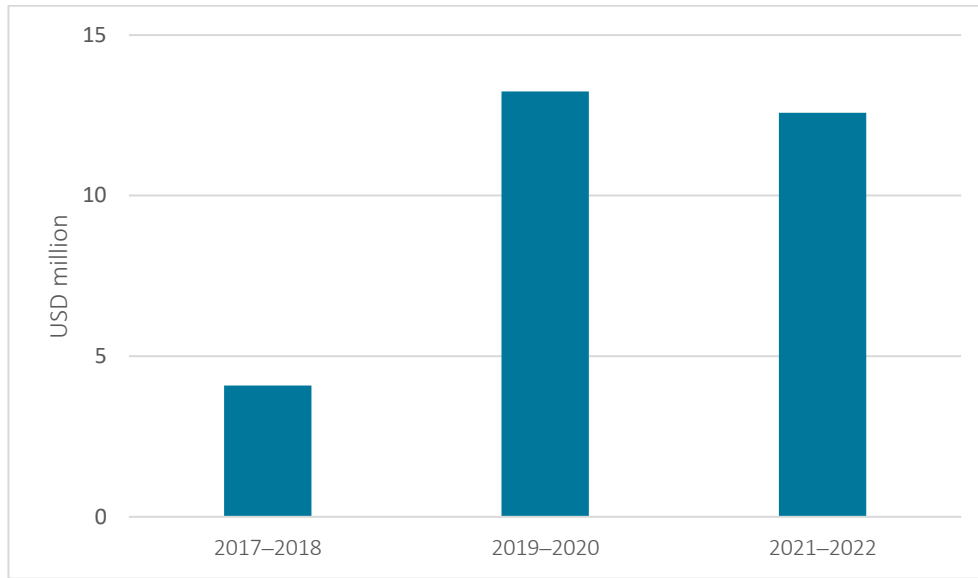
Increased levels of violence are keenly felt in areas where the weak presence of public administrations and defence and security forces has led to the interruption of public services in the fields of education, health, energy and security. In addition to hampering people's access to basic social services, growing insecurity has a direct impact on the food and nutritional security of rural households (abandonment of cropland in areas affected by insecurity, interruption of agricultural campaigns due to security incidents, disruption of livestock mobility systems, closure of livestock markets, abandonment of fishing grounds, loss of property and assets, etc.).

Faced with the rapid development of insecurity in Burkina Faso, which shares borders with several countries on the Gulf of Guinea (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo), the risk of a contagion of the terrorist threat to the south of West Africa has increased considerably. Public authorities in several coastal countries have expressed fears that NSAGs could use Burkina Faso as a launch pad for terrorist attacks on their territories (ICS, 2019). Moreover, since 2020, there has been an increase in the number of deadly attacks perpetrated in northern Côte d'Ivoire and Benin; this tends to reinforce the potential regionalization of insecurity in West Africa.

Commonalities of PBF projects implemented by FAO in terms of theories of change and categories of actions

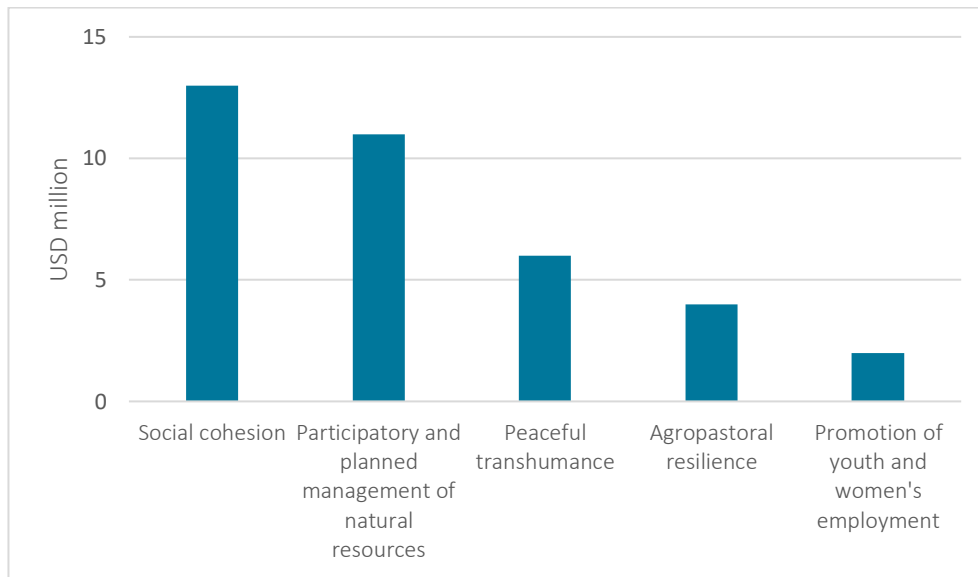
Since 2019, the portfolio of PBF projects implemented by FAO decentralized offices in West Africa and the Sahel has been considerably strengthened. The aim of these projects is to support national, regional and UN peacebuilding priorities. To this end, they are based on a common set of concerns relating to the creation of the necessary conditions for effective action on the drivers of peace and conflict that are linked to FAO's mandate and competencies. In this way, the projects contribute to local peacebuilding by following different paths, each of which describes how the expected change might materialize, and the likely hypotheses that might contribute to it. These hypotheses constitute the theory of change, demonstrating the logical link between the proposed intervention and the expected peacebuilding outcome. In other words, the pathways to local peace are structured in a coherent way, clarifying the underlying logic and causal mechanisms by which interventions can generate the expected impacts.

Figure 1. Funds mobilized 2017–2022



Source: FAO. 2023. *Field Programme Management Information System*. Rome. Cited 27 April 2023.

Figure 2. Thematic breakdown of funding



Source: FAO. 2023. *Field Programme Management Information System*. Rome. Cited 27 April 2023.

FAO interventions, based on PBF projects and in line with the Organization's mandate and competencies, are organized around the following core themes:

- cross-border programming;
- relations between host populations and displaced persons;
- rural employment;
- support for rural livelihoods;
- natural resource management; and
- reinstatement.

By examining the entry points that have been selected, with a view to defining the configuration of interventions and optimizing their contribution to peace, it is possible to divide the projects carried out in West Africa and the Sahel into several categories of action. If we refer to the categorization of thematic areas made in the *Operationalizing pathways to sustaining peace in the context of Agenda 2030 – A how-to guide* (FAO, 2022), the main types of intervention to which the projects refer are as follows:⁴

- Strengthening regulatory frameworks and institutions to regulate the use of and rights to renewable natural resources more effectively and equitably, but also to manage users' access rights (prevention and management of conflicts linked to access to common resources); this corresponds to pathway 1 (FAO, 2022).
- Strengthening formal and conflict-management mechanisms linked to access to natural resources (consolidation of endogenous mechanisms for dialogue within communities); this corresponds to pathway 2 (FAO, 2022).
- Enhancing equitable and inclusive access to natural resources across community members and social groups (improving land governance, promoting the rule of law and human rights); this corresponds to pathway 4 (FAO, 2022).
- Improving relations and increasing the ability for joint problem-solving within and between communities (prevention and management of inter-community conflicts, community reconciliation, consolidation of living together, promotion of mechanisms for the peaceful and concerted management of transhumance, promotion of resilient pastoralism); this corresponds to pathway 5 (FAO, 2022).

⁴ We have not identified any ongoing PBF projects that can be linked to the two other pathways contributing to local peace that focus on: (i) improving the productivity of natural resource to reduce scarcity (pathway 3); and (ii) enhancing constructive engagement between communities and local authorities and more inclusive decision-making (pathway 6).



- Maintaining the viability of agricultural livelihoods in situations of conflict and insecurity (promoting rural employment and the socioeconomic integration of women and young people⁵); this corresponds to pathway 7.

An in-depth examination of the impacts generated by these different types of intervention makes it possible to validate the paths contributing to local peace identified in the Compendium, to assess the value of taking the different paths, and to identify recommendations likely to improve the impact of interventions dedicated to local peacebuilding, in the specific context of the Sahel and West Africa.

⁵ The experience of PBF projects carried out in the Sahel and West Africa shows that, in order to successfully involve young people in such interventions, it is essential to understand the realities experienced by these social strata, as well as their aspirations and expectations. It is therefore necessary to gather information on young people's needs, and in particular on the types of activities that correspond to the lifestyle model with which they identify.

Working guidelines and methodology

The overall objective of this analysis and capitalization exercise led by REOWA, CPU and KORE is to stimulate a participatory process of exchange on the experience of PBF projects in the Sahel and West Africa, in order to have a synthesis of lessons learned to improve FAO's programmatic approach and increase its contribution to sustainable peace in the specific context of the Sahel and West Africa.

This overall objective is broken down into several specific objectives aimed at:

- To provide a space for in-depth discussions focused on analysing the experience of PBF projects carried out in the Sahel and West Africa, as well as on evaluative learning about the local peacebuilding pathways in which FAO is engaged. Discussions focused on the themes and technical categories of contribution to peace, in order to validate the different paths identified in the FAO Compendium (FAO, 2022), while illustrating them with concrete examples.
- Sharing knowledge on good or promising practices promoted in PBF projects and on lessons learned, with a view to maximizing the contributions that FAO can make to local peace.
- Use all the materials collected (methodological grid, interviews and results of group work during the workshop) to build a local peacebuilding knowledge management system.



From a methodological point of view, the exercise integrated several complementary approaches, thanks to the active role of the three FAO teams involved (REOWA, CPU and KORE):

- exploiting relevant documentation relating to the formulation and evaluation of PBF projects carried out in the Sahel and West Africa; and
- gathering information from FAO decentralized offices based on: (i) the administration of a questionnaire at the start of the exercise, targeting four cross-border and national PBF projects; and (ii) the completion of a self-assessment of eleven PBF projects positioned on different pathways contributing to local peace, based on a grid to help identify lessons learned;
- the organization of interviews with nine decentralized offices, to delve deeper into certain key themes (contextual analysis, conflict sensitivity, project formulation approach, partnership, peacebuilding impacts); and
- a virtual workshop to present the results of the self-evaluation of PBF projects, focusing on the impact on peacebuilding and the main lessons learned.

Main findings from the analysis of PBF projects

The elements mentioned below seek to demonstrate how PBF projects articulated around FAO's mandate have generated a positive impact on peace, through the reduction of conflict factors and/or the strengthening of peace factors that are of great importance in the specific context of the Sahel and West Africa. They also attempt to describe how the implementation of PBF projects by FAO decentralized offices operating in the region is helping to consolidate their approach to conflict sensitivity:

- better consideration of the interrelationships between restoring the livelihoods of populations living in food-insecure areas and mitigating conflict situations;
- more systematic consideration of the need to establish appropriate mechanisms for targeting the beneficiaries of diversified livelihood promotion activities (income-generating activities, green rural jobs, etc.), with a view to generating a positive socioeconomic impact for vulnerable groups and reducing the risk of conflict linked to their feelings of injustice and frustration;
- greater investment in strengthening the social inclusion of women and young people to meet development and security challenges; and
- greater attention to improving land governance as a means of reducing social injustice and inequitable access to natural resources.

In Sierra Leone, for example, the PBF project entitled *Creating peaceful societies through improving women's access to natural resources, land rights and economic empowerment in Sierra Leone* addressed the issue of land governance, focusing on: (i) the mapping of land disputes; (ii) support for the consensual delimitation of family landholdings; and (iii) the establishment of community-based systems for monitoring land conflicts, based on a platform for dialogue between landowners and land users, and on the optimization of conflict resolution mechanisms already in place within communities.

Strengthening social ties by improving women's and young people's access to natural resources and land rights in Sierra Leone

The above-mentioned PBF project in Sierra Leone is based on the observation that, despite the development of action plans recognizing the land rights of women and young people, these social strata are victims of great land vulnerability; as a result, they are exposed to poverty and forced to adopt survival strategies based on rural exodus, the exercise of illicit economic activities, etc. To meet this challenge, the intervention focused on:

- promoting intra- and inter-community dialogue on gender and land rights;
- raising awareness among community decision-makers (chiefdoms), landowners and the various users of rural areas (women, young people, etc.) of the need to promote the inclusion of all producers and preserve women's right to land ownership, including in the case of inheritance;
- drawing up community land regulations and setting up village land committees comprising 40 percent women;
- the appointment of local conflict observers, the majority of whom are women (60 percent) and whose capacities have been strengthened in the field of alternative dispute resolution; and
- setting up a network of gender champions to ensure that women's land rights are respected and to defend their access to land and productive assets.

Significant progress in local peace dividends

At regional level, the strengthening of the portfolio of PBF projects implemented by FAO has gone hand in hand with the adoption of a continuous improvement approach to programming. In the Niger, for example, the thematic entry points for peacebuilding are defined taking into account the guidelines contained in the strategic plan of the High Authority for Peacebuilding, which has defined four priority areas of intervention, on the basis of which the configuration of PBF projects is defined. Particular attention is paid to the regulatory framework and to formal and/or informal conflict prevention and management mechanisms. When constructing the peacebuilding logic of PBF projects, three levels are taken into account:

- at national level, through the revision or popularization of legislative and regulatory texts governing access to and management of natural resources;
- at decentralized level, by strengthening the institutional set-up of decentralized technical services and civil society organizations (capacity-building for technical services, customary authorities, elected municipal officials, civil society organization leaders, etc.); and

- at community level, by setting up or revitalizing local mechanisms for the prevention and peaceful management of conflicts, using Dimitra Clubs,⁶ community radio stations and multi-stakeholder platforms (interview with the focal points of the PBF projects in the FAO Office in the Niger).



⁶ Dimitra Club is an approach promoted by FAO to encourage groups of rural women, men and young people to organize themselves in order to discuss their development problems and find appropriate solutions. Dimitra Clubs facilitate the social mobilization and participation of rural populations in the economic, political and social life of their communities. They help strengthen transparency, local governance and social cohesion.

According to the results of the self-assessment of PBF projects, a similar approach was adopted by the FAO Office in the Gambia as part of the implementation of a PBF project on the resolution of conflicts linked to access to land and natural resources, whose intervention is designed to address existing conflict factors at national level (improving the legal and regulatory framework), but also at local level (supporting the application of legislation, restoring citizens' confidence in traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. In fact, the project's formulation took into account the challenges identified at the various levels of intervention:

- at national level, land governance is negatively affected by the superimposition of several legal frameworks (common law, customary law and Islamic rules), the inadequacy of modern legislation and the poor enforcement of regulatory laws; and
- at local level, citizens' confidence in customary institutions and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms (leadership of Alkalo and other traditional chiefs) has deteriorated sharply. Traditional methods of conflict regulation are losing ground due to the erosion of their legitimacy, which is attributable to the supposed or proven bias of these institutions in favour of certain actors.



Benefits of improved approaches to PBF project formulation

Overall, the structural causes and drivers of conflict are receiving greater attention in defining the relevance of interventions. By appropriately addressing the key drivers of conflict, interventions are helping to strengthen the peace component of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus (HDP) nexus. However, these achievements should not blind us to the fact that some interventions are still focused more on mitigating the socioeconomic consequences of conflict (addressing the economic needs of vulnerable groups, for example), rather than addressing its root sociopolitical causes (strengthening the inclusion of stakeholders in access to natural resources and economic opportunities, through improving the institutional representation of vulnerable groups and consolidating their ability to influence decision-making processes, for example).

One of the major challenges is to implement interventions that can lead to sustainable results in terms of peacebuilding, which translate into the continuation of the positive dynamics fostered after the end of PBF projects, thanks to the unfailing commitment of state actors, local leaders and rural professional organizations. In order to meet the challenge of consolidating and sustaining peace, it is essential to enhance the effectiveness of interventions, which must not only act on the key drivers of conflict, but also change the dynamics at work in the field, by focusing on the prevention and reduction of violence as a means of combating social, economic and political inequalities.

To consolidate the gains made, efforts will have to be made to overcome the pitfalls inherent in the current approach to programming PBF projects. Indeed, this approach has to comply with deadlines that are too short and do not allow for a real dynamic of consultation with stakeholders, particularly those present in the field.

The crucial issue of improving the formulation approach of PBF projects: the case of Côte d'Ivoire

The self-evaluation of the experience of the PBF project implemented in Côte d'Ivoire entitled *Consolidation of peace in the northeastern border area of Côte d'Ivoire through participatory and planned management of natural resources* highlighted the importance of conducting a good project formulation process to guarantee the relevance of interventions and their appropriation by stakeholders. At present, the process is caught between the need to formulate the project within a short timeframe and the need to collect the information required for a proper conflict analysis. Two consultations were held with the regional councils concerned and the relevant ministries, during the drafting of the project document. The contextual analysis was strengthened by exchanges with the people we met and the documentary resources collected.

Conflict analysis has benefited from the expertise and experience of the agencies concerned, whose staff have a good knowledge of the intervention zone and a solid grasp of the issues addressed. The partner agencies provided data relating to their areas of expertise. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided information on the dynamics of the movement of people and cross-border transhumance of livestock, which is currently accompanied by increased competition between users of rural areas. FAO provided information on conflicts over access to natural resources, as well as data on the region's agricultural context. Information obtained from the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) was very useful, as this Organization has been active in the area for several years, providing support for the conservation of the Comoé National Park, as well as for the concerted planning of development projects in outlying areas. The complementary nature of the analyses carried out by the various institutions facilitated the identification of relevant entry points for peacebuilding.

The PBF project formulation process cannot always count on a fortunate combination of favourable circumstances. Consequently, it is essential to prepare project formulation thoroughly, by carrying out a preliminary conflict analysis exercise. This investment in the preparation of PBF projects could be made with the support of Technical Cooperation Programmes (TCPs), one of FAO's action instruments.

Main effects of peacebuilding interventions

As a general rule, PBF project evaluation exercises are based on the classic criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability – supplemented by cross-cutting issues (gender and youth inclusion). Rather than recapitulating the findings and analyses associated with each of these criteria, it seems more appropriate here to focus on the salient points relating to the effects induced by interventions in the field of peacebuilding.

With regard to the significant changes made, the actions that have been decisive in producing impacts can be identified at several levels:

Structural changes

As part of the implementation of the projects selected in the sample, the main actions that have produced a leverage effect revolve around several key areas, in particular:

- revitalizing and/or strengthening local mechanisms for preventing and managing conflicts linked to access to and use of natural resources (e.g. local land commissions in the Niger);
- networking of community structures for land management and conflict prevention, to encourage concerted action on common challenges;
- building bridges between local land management structures and institutions operating at a higher level (local authorities, communal and departmental land commissions, etc.), so as to strengthen consultation and synergies;⁷
- the implementation of federative activities that generate benefits for all stakeholders (as in the case of land zoning in Côte d'Ivoire, to facilitate cohabitation between agricultural and pastoral activities, by defining the purpose of the land; this led to the demarcation of cropping areas, grazing areas and cattle tracks); and
- raising awareness of the costs of conflict and the benefits of peace.

⁷It is worth mentioning that the various effects overlap to some extent, as far as land management institutions and conflict prevention mechanisms are concerned.

Promoting rural employment, an effective lever for building resilience and consolidating peace: the case of Liberia

The FAO Office in Liberia formulated the PBF project entitled *Maintaining peace and improving social cohesion through the promotion of rural employment*, following a study which identified the main factors of conflict and peace, as well as the geographical areas affected by conflict and insecurity. Consultation with national institutional players and local communities led to the definition of several types of action, in particular:

- the establishment of a multistakeholder dialogue platform involving members of local communities, officials from public institutions and private-sector operators; these players discussed the issue of granting land concessions to private companies;
- promoting alternative livelihoods for young people, to support their empowerment;
- the involvement of women and young people in decision-making processes concerning the regulation of producers' access to land;
- support for the implementation of recommendations made by reconciliation commissions, which are responsible for applying retributive justice decisions; and
- strengthening inter- and intra-community collaboration, by mobilizing players around shared objectives and common infrastructures.

Institutional changes

The inclusion of conflict sensitivity in the programming cycle has led to the adoption of measures designed to encourage the involvement of all social strata and categories in decision-making processes, through the establishment of inclusive governance bodies that complement existing formal mechanisms (land management structures, conflict prevention and management mechanisms, etc.). On another level, the PBF projects examined as part of this exercise have used several levers of action to defuse potential conflicts and strengthen the peace dynamic, focusing in particular on:

- the creation of networks of Dimitra Community Listening Clubs that can function as instruments for promoting citizen participation at local level;
- improving the inclusiveness of land management institutions and conflict prevention mechanisms, by increasing the representation of women and young people in these decision-making spheres, through the creation of networks of leaders determined to become champions of gender equality;
- strengthening the effectiveness of different types of conflict prevention and management mechanisms linked to access to natural resources, in particular through the application of participatory conflict management tools; and

- restoring a climate of trust between local authorities and grassroots community members, by promoting transparent decision-making processes in local development matters (natural resource management, local public service provision, etc.).



Women's and young people's access to decision-making power, a lever for conflict transformation in the medium and long term: the case of the Niger

In the Niger, the implementation of the Rural Code has led to significant achievements, including: (i) strengthening of the institutional and legal framework governing the management of natural resources; (ii) registration of the land rights of users of rural areas who take the appropriate steps towards the land commissions; and (iii) securing of certain shared natural resources. These advances should not, however, blind us to the persistence of multiple constraints linked to the fact that: (i) the institutional set-up is not fully in place, nor fully operational; (ii) the collegiality of land commissions is not effective in all areas; and (iii) the operating resources of these structures are limited.

Added to this is the fact that the management of land disputes is often problematic. Indeed, the resolution of these conflicts can constitute a source of income for certain actors in charge, legally or otherwise, of land dispute management, who work to sideline land commissions. Violence is often resorted to when the authorities in charge of conflict management adopt a partisan stance, leading the protagonists to consider that the settlement of disputes is unfair. To remedy this, the FAO Office carried out an intervention aimed at improving the representativeness and efficiency of land commissions.

For example, the PBF project, entitled *Promotion of social cohesion between farmers and herders in the Dosso and Maradi regions through an approach based on gender and diversity* and implemented in the Niger, provided support to the Permanent Secretariat for the Rural Code so that it could better take gender and diversity into account in its institutional and operational set-up, as well as train a critical mass of women mediators involved in the prevention and management of land conflicts. The project's evaluation report notes that: *"the representation of women and young people [on local land commissions] has improved significantly. The number of women has risen from two (as stipulated in the legal and regulatory texts of the Rural Code), to four, and even five in some land commissions. Women and young people now occupy decision-making positions and play an active role in community decision-making.*

Societal changes

The interventions we have focused on have brought about a qualitative transformation in the way social structures operate, drawing on a number of levers in particular:

- stimulating social mobilization around actions of collective interest (reclaiming degraded land, establishing water points, demarcating and marking transhumance routes, etc.) likely to serve as a cement for social cohesion;
- building the capacity of community management structures to promote inclusive decision-making on access to shared natural resources and socioeconomic infrastructure (pastoral land, livestock tracks, boreholes, etc.); and
- building the capacities of vulnerable groups often excluded from public decision-making, so that they can establish themselves as agents of change capable of playing a decisive role in the public sphere of governance, including in the fields of mediation, conflict prevention and management.

The PBF project *Creating peaceful societies through improving women's access to natural resource management, land rights and economic empowerment in Sierra Leone* was formulated following a study of women's land vulnerability and extensive consultation with grassroots communities. The PBF project's theory of change identified land and gender issues as the main sources of conflict. By addressing these two issues simultaneously, through the creation of bridges between women's access to land and the development of women's enterprises, the project has strengthened the income-generating capacities of beneficiaries. By giving impetus to the structuring of the women concerned and organizing training sessions, they acquired the confidence they needed to develop viable businesses. The project focused on strengthening the financial capabilities of women farmers by enhancing their business skills and facilitating their access to gender-sensitive financial products; this has increased agricultural economic opportunities and, through the development of women-led cooperative enterprises, increased women's participation in decision-making at all levels (FAO, 2021a).

The PBF project entitled *Empowering youth-at-risk as a resource for maintaining peace and community resilience in the Tonkolili and Kenema districts of Sierra Leone*, which is currently being implemented, seeks to foster the empowerment and reintegration of youth-at-risk, offering them greater opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and secure sustainable livelihoods. It supports local and national institutions (security and civil) to strengthen their capacity to address the concerns and needs of at-risk youth. A dynamic of positive cooperation has developed between these actors and their communities, thanks to joint initiatives to consolidate livelihoods and build socioeconomic infrastructures.

In addition to these qualitative changes, which are driven and supported at national level, there are also changes at cross-border level. Indeed, FAO's

interventions through its PBF projects also address cross-border issues, which are of crucial importance because border areas have become the main theatres of operations for NSAGs, armed bandits and mafia groups. Given the interweaving of economic stakes and security challenges, cross-border communities play an important role in stabilizing borders and preventing the spread of insecurity. It is for this reason that the FAO decentralized offices in the Gambia and Senegal have undertaken to implement, in partnership with IOM, a cross-border cooperation project aimed at promoting resilience and social cohesion.

Coordinated border management to secure and develop cross-border areas

A joint assessment carried out in 2021 by agencies of the United Nations system identified several factors of conflict along the border between the Gambia and Senegal. As a result of the violent conflict that has been going on in Casamance for over 40 years, the security situation in the border area has deteriorated, encouraging the growth of various illegal trades (drugs, timber, livestock, goods, etc.). The development of this parallel economy in an area affected by violence contributes to weakening the authority of the public authorities.

Faced with such a situation, the PBF project entitled *Supporting cross-border cooperation to increase community resilience and social cohesion in the Gambia and Senegal* has set itself the following objectives:

- build trust and commitment between communities and border authorities to improve border management;
- improve cross-border natural resource management through a community-based participatory approach; and
- strengthening community resilience through inclusive dialogue and the promotion of green livelihoods.

Activities focus on:

- capacity-building for border service agents and infrastructure;
- cross-border community involvement; and
- identifying concerted solutions to combat deforestation and promote climate-resilient strategies.

Sustainability of interventions

FAO's decentralized offices have been working to lay the foundations for the sustainability of local peacebuilding actions, by adopting an approach focused on learning and mastering conflict management tools. To this end, they emphasized the organization of awareness-raising campaigns and training workshops, with a view to disseminating a culture of peace in communities. In order to generate a significant impact, the decentralized offices were careful to take into account the need to support processes that would enable training beneficiaries to effectively apply the newly acquired conflict prevention and resolution skills in their environment. This is an extremely important requirement, as it helps to create a dynamic of behavioural change at individual level, and to promote its transformation, in the long term, into institutional practices (changes at sociopolitical and institutional level). In other words, while interventions are relatively short-lived, they can, in some cases, get the behavioural change process off to a good start.

Another factor influencing the sustainability of achievements in terms of establishing mechanisms for dialogue, mediation and conflict resolution relates to the ways in which the actions promoted are anchored at local level. By coordinating their activities with existing institutional and organizational structures on the ground, decentralized offices help to strengthen local skills, thereby creating the conditions to ensure that the peacebuilding momentum continues under endogenous leadership. The establishment of a partnership alliance between decentralized offices, local authorities, decentralized technical services, community structures and rural professional organizations creates a space for sharing tools and pooling experience, with a view to promoting the dissemination of best practices in conflict management.

Partnership, the key to effective intervention: the case of Côte d'Ivoire

FAO's decentralized offices take into account the fact that PBF projects face a double constraint, namely a short lifespan and limited financial resources. This means that great attention must be paid to developing partnerships, so as to be able to rely on players who are already active in the target areas. For example, as part of the implementation of the PBF project *Consolidation of peace in the northeastern border area of Côte d'Ivoire through participatory and planned management of natural resources*, the FAO Office in Côte d'Ivoire has developed a strong collaborative relationship with GIZ, which provides support for the conservation of the Comoé National Park and the management of its peripheral areas. *"GIZ is interested in conflict issues as part of the planning exercises carried out with the populations of the park's riparian zones, but this is not an entry point for them. FAO is interested in conflicts from a peacebuilding perspective. We have avoided creating separate organizational arrangements. We have used a common organizational framework for the sake of efficiency. In line with this choice, the community action plans drawn up with the support of the PBF project were integrated into the more global planning carried out by GIZ. We have also developed a collaborative relationship with the NGO Acting for Life (AfL), which has supported pastoral development in the area. We divided the tasks between AfL, which took charge of developing pastoral water points, and FAO, which financed the construction of water access infrastructures for agricultural use"* (interview with the focal points in charge of PBF projects at the FAO Office in Côte d'Ivoire).

It is worth mentioning that, in the context of the intervention by FAO decentralized offices, training and the accumulation of human capital constitute an important lever for the sustainability of peacebuilding achievements. For example, the PBF project to support the promotion of social cohesion between farmers and herders in the Dosso and Maradi regions of the Niger focused on building a critical mass of skills, by combining different means of action (setting up 362 Dimitra Clubs, improving the efficiency of 60 land commissions and training 600 women mediators) (FAO, 2021b). This facilitated the resolution of 483 community conflicts linked to access to natural resources. The project's final evaluation drew attention to the fact that capacity-building for a critical mass of women mediators has enhanced the representativeness of this social category within land commissions and peace committees, resulting in increased access to decision-making power. In addition to improving the status of women within their communities and strengthening their participation in community decision-making, the emergence of the group of women mediators is a catalyst for far-reaching social transformation, through women's participation in wider networks and the exercise of political power within local authorities.

Consolidating and sustaining local peace: lessons learned and recommendations

The material used in this study can only partially reflect the wealth of lessons that can be learned from the interesting experiments that have been carried out at different scales of intervention (local, national and cross-border). The considerations presented in this section of the note focus on lessons learned concerning the formulation of PBF projects, but also the operational implementation and monitoring of interventions. By showing interest in these issues, REOWA hopes that the lessons learned will be well internalized and constitute success factors in the formulation and execution of interventions.

Main lessons learned from the project formulation process

- Decentralized offices need to pay greater attention to the difference between the formulation and implementation of a technical intervention aimed at tackling rising levels of food insecurity, and those of a PBF project focused on local peacebuilding. When formulating PBF projects, geographical targeting often concerns areas that are not necessarily affected by food and nutrition insecurity, as the example of Sierra Leone shows. Consequently, it is not appropriate to use the same programming approach for both types of intervention, even if facilitating access to natural resources is central to both (livelihood improvement logic and conflict reduction logic). For the purposes of formulating projects to strengthen food security, the starting situation is generally well known, because information is already collected, processed and validated at all levels. The Cadre Harmonisé provides precise indications of the number of people affected by food insecurity, according to their degree of vulnerability, making the exercise of formulating interventions easier and more reliable. When it comes to formulating PBF projects, preliminary conflict analyses are often lacking (structural causes, drivers and lines of conflict, stakeholders, typology and effectiveness of management mechanisms, etc.). The information available is often incomplete or outdated, given the variability of contextual elements in areas facing a shifting and volatile insecurity situation. Added to this is the difficulty posed by the relatively limited time available for consultation with stakeholders in the field, in line with the short duration of the PBF project formulation process. Contextual analysis is generally carried out on the basis of secondary data (bibliographical information) collected by the teams responsible for drafting the concept note and project proposal. The literature review is complemented by stakeholder consultation,⁸ a crucial step in identifying priority needs or problems to be solved. In several countries, exchanges with Peacebuilding Support Offices (PBSOs), where they exist, help to deepen and refine the contextual analysis.

⁸ These are mainly ministerial departments, territorial administration, deconcentrated technical services, grassroots communities, local authorities, civil society organizations, and so on.

- To generate significant impact in a conflict or post-conflict context, interventions need to draw on the best conflict management practices developed by similar initiatives. In the specific context of the Niger, the formulation of PBF projects has been inspired by best practices drawn from the experience of the PBF project entitled *Youth, peace and development in the Tahoua region*. This project focused on promoting women's and young people's access to decision-making bodies, with a view to making them an effective lever for resolving conflicts linked to the control and management of natural resources. The FAO Office has focused on disseminating and promoting a number of best practices (setting up peace committees and consultation frameworks, strengthening and improving the effectiveness of local land commissions), with a view to making them a springboard for scaling up local peacebuilding. As for the cross-border PBF project entitled *Preventing inter-community conflicts and contributing to peacebuilding through the development of resilient pastoralism in the Diffa and Kanem cross-border zone (the Niger/Chad)*, its formulation was inspired by the best practices tested in the Chad/Central African Republic cross-border project, particularly those concerning the creation of consultation forums between cross-border players.
- Eradicating the roots of conflict requires building the foundations of mutual trust between all stakeholders. The experience of projects carried out in Burkina Faso, Guinea Conakry and the Niger shows that it is important to set up frameworks and mechanisms capable of facilitating exchanges and consultations between the various stakeholder groups (local communities, territorial authorities, customary authorities, rural professional organizations, decentralized technical services, etc.).⁹ Indeed, the adoption of such an option has made it easier to bring together actors involved in conflict management at different levels (peace and mediation committees, consultation frameworks, multi-actor platforms, land commissions, etc.). A number of provisions have proved relevant in consolidating this partnership in the service of peacebuilding:
 - strengthening intra- and inter-community communication, by setting up and/or reinforcing consultation frameworks at commune level, training customary authorities and consolidating social intermediation systems;
 - improving the supply of natural resources and socioeconomic infrastructure, the lack of which is a source of conflict. To this end, efforts have focused mainly on restoring degraded pastoral lands, developing or rehabilitating water points, establishing inclusive access systems, etc.; and

⁹ These are mainly the following PBF projects: Promotion of peaceful transhumance in the Liptako-Gourma region; Prevention of inter-community conflicts in Forest Guinea through a mutualized economy and improved land governance; and Support for the preventive management of conflicts linked to access to natural resources in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas in seven communes of the Niger.

- boosting awareness of the challenges of preserving peace among the population as a whole, using information and awareness-raising caravans, as well as the Dimitra Club and community radio networks.
- With a view to improving the relevance of interventions, FAO's decentralized offices need to build bridges between the actions they seek to implement at local level and those carried out at higher levels. This requirement is justified by the fact that the main drivers of conflict are to be found at local level, while the structural factors enabling action to be taken on the dynamics of conflict can be identified at macro level (improvement of the legal and regulatory framework governing the management of natural resources, incorporation of social inclusion and gender equity issues into legislation and public policy, for example).
- If we want to significantly increase the impact of PBF projects, we need to activate a number of levers to improve the programming process:
 - formulate a relevant and robust theory of change, to enable projects to activate the appropriate levers for sustainable change in the field of peacebuilding;
 - allow more time for project formulation, to enable FAO Offices to undertake analysis/preparation before any annual submission window;
 - define the means of accessing the information required in conflict zones, taking into account the difficulties of access resulting from insecurity and/or the prohibitions on travel and missions in these zones imposed by the United Nations System;
 - plan an ex-ante assessment of the conflict situation at the start of the project, focusing on the dynamics and determining factors, as well as on the strategies developed by the various stakeholders;
 - introduce greater flexibility in the formulation of activities, to facilitate the application of the adaptive management approach to interventions, which is essential in a highly changing context; and
 - pay greater attention to strengthening the catalytic financial results of PBF projects, so that the momentum generated can be consolidated through the use of other, more traditional financing methods, thereby consolidating and extending the gains made in peacebuilding.

Main findings concerning operational implementation and project monitoring

- Setting up a monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) system is essential, not only to enable the necessary subsequent adjustments to be made in response to contextual changes, but also to provide an evidence base for the contribution of projects to peacebuilding. A further requirement relating to the information and awareness-raising of PBF project implementation partners on the importance of the monitoring and evaluation framework deserves to be taken into consideration.
- Efforts to identify conflict drivers and stakeholders need to be complemented by a process that takes conflict sensitivity into account. Conflict-insensitive projects run the risk of undermining peacebuilding achievements.
- Interventions need to pay greater attention to the process of promoting evidence-based practice and evidence-informed peacebuilding. The benefits of such an option can be identified on at least two levels: (i) evidence-informed interventions have a higher probability of being relevant; and (ii) integrating evidence into information and awareness-raising campaigns would promote tolerance and the sharing of community resources that are the bedrock of local peace.
- Partnership between agencies brings significant added value in terms of promoting synergistic actions and generating significant impacts in the field of food security and peacebuilding. However, the pooling of activities in the field sometimes proves difficult to achieve because each agency gives priority to the activities it has to implement and to the application of its own administrative procedures. This creates a logic of operating in isolation, whereas coordination is essential if optimum results are to be achieved. In the specific context of the Niger, such biases are tending to be corrected within the framework of the PBF projects currently underway, thanks to the organization of joint missions and the holding of regular consultations. Strengthening the role of national institutions (land commissions, communal councils, etc.) in the implementation of interventions would reinforce synergies between the various stakeholders. In parallel with the adoption of such a course of action, a commitment to zero visibility (which would mean displaying only the logos of the PBF and the government) or joint visibility of the agencies implementing the interventions could be envisaged.
- The search for greater efficiency in our interventions calls for greater attention to the duration of projects, given that the complexity of situations in our intervention zones, as well as that of the activities to be implemented, call for a longer intervention time to achieve sustainable solutions and stimulate catalytic dynamics. By the same token, we need to go beyond joint partnerships (cooperation with other UN system agencies and, to a lesser extent, civil society organizations as joint partners), to develop genuine collaboration with implementing partners, right from the start of the project

formulation process, given the considerable value these players bring to such interventions.

- Improving the project results framework requires reducing the number of indicators selected, focusing attention on output and outcome/impact indicators. With this in mind, decentralized offices could test indicators associated with pathways contributing to local peace (FAO, 2022), integrating them into the results framework of future PBF projects.



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