



TARGETING THE RIGHT PEOPLE FOR AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON SURVIVAL AND RESILIENCE

The use of The Household Economic Analysis

Most of the food security projects in humanitarian or development contexts aim at increasing food production. The underlying assumption being that rural population should be self-sufficient with regards to their food production.

Focusing on production-based interventions (community garden, seeds and tools distribution, irrigation etc.) is not taking into account the fast evolving reality of rural population in the Sahel over the past decades: Impoverishment and increasing reliance on markets.

Since 2007, the Household Economy Analysis (HEA) is used in West Africa to explore livelihood patterns, income, expenditure and consumption of populations in different livelihood zones (pastoralist, agro-pastoralist, etc.). Each of these population groups, based on their own wealth and poverty criteria, are divided into four socio-economical groups: -Very Poor, -Poor, -middle, -better-off.

The introduction of the HEA methodology in the Sahel has shown the scale of poverty in the rural areas (more than 50 % of the population) and drawn the following main interlinked outcomes:

- The -Very poor and -poor households generally do not have access to food security interventions based on production increase due to inherent exclusion factors: financial contribution needed to participate in community associations, lack of money to participate in works that do not produce immediate income, lack of access to fertile land to benefit from seeds and tool distribution or simply lack of social strength to be selected at local level.

As a result, the expected impact on poverty reduction is not reached: food insecure population continues to increase (high birth rates helping), as well as prevalence of malnutrition.

- For poor agro pastoralist households, resources drawn from own cattle and crops do not represent the main source of food and income anymore (see diagram below). Daily wage from rural or urban labor during seasonal

migration, as well as casual self-employment, such as sale of wood, has become their main source of income. They struggle so much for cash after the lean season due to indebtedness that they have to sell their own production just after harvest, when prices are the lowest. They will buy food during the lean season when prices are high.

- Strong reliance on cash and market make the rural or urban poor extremely vulnerable to price increase or any other shock. The poorest households are the most-affected in case of a crisis, as they do have little resilience to cope with any even minor reduction in food or income. Very poor households are the first ones to be affected by acute malnutrition. The worst case scenario is a combination of poor harvest and price increase, as currently seen in the Sahel.
- Due to low purchasing power, poor households struggle to cover their minimum food needs even in a "normal" year, i.e. without any special shock. They face troubles to afford a nutritious diet. Even when rich foods is available locally and mothers know what is best for their children, poor households simply lack money to buy the needed food items on the local markets.

To have an immediate impact on malnutrition rates, food security projects must have as an objective the reduction of **survival deficit** and include:

- Appropriate targeting mechanisms of the ones most at risk, "very poor" and "poor" households, as well as avoid exclusion factors, to get this population group back into a productive cycle.
- Ensure the 3 pillars of food security (food availability, food access and food utilization) depending of the context and situation.

To have an impact on resilience of populations at risk, avoid cumulative loss of assets, break the impoverishment cycle and re-build resilience to protect them from future shocks, medium and long term projects must consider:

- Appropriate targeting of the ones at risk, "very poor" and "poor" group in the targeted livelihood zone,
- Secure proper social network to protect their livelihoods with accessible safety nets: predictable and regular cash transfers, free access to basic services (health, water and education),
- Quality early warning systems able to identify every year in a timely way households most at risk of acute food insecurity.

Household Economic Analysis : Food and Cash income in time of crisis

