FASO Program

BUILDING 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 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.

OUR 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 FASO Program (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 $55 million program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)/Food for Peace, seeks to reach 51,000 mother-child pairs in the three health districts of Manni, Tougouri and Gayeri in Burkina Faso from June 2010 to September 2017.

FASO Program 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: complementary and supplementary feeding, access to health services and communication for behavior change.

COMPLEMENTARY AND SUPPLEMENTARY FEEDING
Complementary and supplementary feeding was needed due to high rates of malnutrition and the overall food security situation. FASO Program complements the health services offered at health centers while also providing 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 visit health centers and take advantage of health services, especially for maternal and child health. By May 2015, food rations were distributed to 25,000 pregnant and nursing women and 24,500 children in the provinces of Namentenga and Komondjari.

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. FASO Program collaborates with Burkina Faso’s government-run health centers to deliver services at the centers. FASO Program also coordinates closely with
the government at the food distribution sites, facilitating child vaccination. 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. With the coordinated FASO Program response, by the fourth year, the overall increase compared to baseline data was 22% for exclusive breastfeeding, 16% for prenatal visits, 63% for postnatal visits and 14% for assisted deliveries.

COMMUNICATION FOR BEHAVIOR CHANGE IN HEALTH, NUTRITION AND HYGIENE

One important innovation in communication for behavior change is the Care Group system. 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 then 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, ensuring regular communication among the women.

CARE GROUP RIPPLE EFFECT

- 31 animators reached
- 253 village promoters formed
- 4,078 Care Groups leader mothers reached
- 63,218 women received health, hygiene and nutrition messages

RESULTS

- 62% of mothers adopted exclusive breastfeeding
- 77% consume food rich in vitamin A
- 56% of children 6-23 months old consume foods rich in vitamin A

ACCESS TO POTABLE WATER AND SANITATION INFRASTRUCTURES

Best practices in health and nutrition are intimately linked with access to potable water, personal and environmental hygiene, and sanitation. In order to support health and nutrition activities, FASO Program introduced water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities in 2012. It drilled 15 new boreholes and rehabilitated 40 boreholes over ten years old. Equipped with hand pumps and protection walls, these boreholes have improved access to potable water for 16,500 individuals in 55 villages. In addition to improving access to potable water, the boreholes have also facilitated improvements in hygiene and the development of new income generating activities such as tree nurseries, brick-making and vegetable gardens. The boreholes were constructed in accordance with Environmental Guidelines for Small-Scale Activities in Africa (EGSSAA) standards.

FASO Program also promotes hygiene and sanitation by implementing the community-led total sanitation (CLTS) approach. The CLTS approach is a powerful behavior change communication strategy with a proven capacity to quickly reach scale in awareness creation followed by action. It uses a combination of sensitization techniques, including a “community walk of shame” around the sectors of the village with the prevailing practice of open air defecation to create self-awareness of the negative effects of that practice on the health of the community members. Subsequent community discussions of the mode of fecal contamination of the unprotected food and water sources highlight the health benefits of the construction and use of latrines and the importance of hand washing. FASO Program also facilitates the training of local masons who provide technical support to the households who decide to construct a household latrine without subsidies from the program- a total of 600 latrines in 36 villages in 2014. The importance of encouraging families to build a latrine using their own means enforces ownership of the infrastructure, including its effective use and maintenance, and increases sustainability, which is a core element of FASO Program’s vision.

Ten of the 36 villages involved in the CLTS approach (28%) have already constructed a latrine for every household in the community, with the goal of reaching the open defecation free (ODF) status. Through this work, the percentage of homes surveyed having a latrine in Manni, Tougouri and Gayeri health districts has increased from 8% in 2012 to 18% in 2014. In addition, the percentage of improved latrines has increased from 34% in 2012 to 50% in 2014. Finally, the percentage of latrines following EGSSAA standards has increased from 7% in 2012 to 16% in 2014.

BEHAVIOR CHANGE COMMUNICATION THROUGH DEMONSTRATIONS AND SEED PROMOTIONS

FASO Program implemented a strategy for behavior change communication to improve agricultural productivity that relied on radio and demonstrations throughout the program area. The principal activity that allowed FASO Program to share techniques was Farmers’ Days. Over the course of the program, 902 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 1,747 demonstrations throughout the target area, including 329 demonstrations on conservation agriculture for the benefit of 30,119 producers. In addition to conducting Farmers’ Days, FASO Program held promotions for certified, improved seed varieties. These promotions sold partially subsidized coupons to farmers so they could purchase rice and cowpea at a 50 percent discount and sesame at a 70 percent discount. These efforts along with the technical assistance to the rice farmers resulted in a significant increase in yield from 1.2MT/ha to 3.7MT/ha.

RESTORING THE LAND

Typically, the most depleted pieces of land are reserved for the most vulnerable members of society, especially women. To strengthen their harvests, FASO Program supplied tools and taught farmers the Zai technique, a traditional small-planting-basin technique for water management. This 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. To date, 9,173 hectares of land has been restored and 19,331 women have benefited from an improved crop, ensuring food security in a difficult growing season.

In addition, FASO Program has promoted lowland improvement to increase the productivity of the land. FASO Program provides program participants with a plot of 0.15 hectare of improved land for rice cultivation. As a result, 635 hectares of lowland have been improved. More than 3,900 farmers benefited from the lowland improvement, including 2,383 men and 1,600 women. In spite of the fact that many of the farmers had never cultivated rice before, overall production reached 1,270 metric tons of paddy rice per year, or approximately 326 kilograms per farmer.

IMPROVING REVENUE AND ACCESS TO CREDIT

FASO Program’s efforts to increase the revenue of households have included improving post-harvest crop quality, supporting the development of land for vegetable production, and introducing credit systems. At Farmers’ Days, field agents hold demonstrations for threshing rice and sesame to gather a clean crop and sifting sesame to remove stones and debris. There have been 136 rice threshing demonstrations and 184 sesame threshing demonstrations to date. To reduce spoilage, FASO Program encourages the use of Purdue Improved Crop Storage (PICS) bags. These bags have three layers of plastic sheeting, which when properly tighten create a hermetic environment unfavorable to insects, thereby preserving the stored crops without any addition of chemicals. Along with the improved seed available at seed promotion events, hermetic storage bags are available to farmers at a reduced price with purchase of FASO Program coupons. Farmers are trained in hermetic sealing techniques at Farmers’ Days.

FASO Program also supported the development of 17.67 hectares of land for vegetable production in 2013; 77% of its 573 beneficiaries were women. In Gayeri province, CRS and its partner Tin Tua organized the first ever market gardening day in the region, mobilizing local authorities and offering locally grown produce. The estimated average revenue per beneficiary per production cycle of four months ranged from $20 to $120 in Gayeri and $102 in Dakiri. The difference was due to varying water management methods and application of improved production techniques by farmers.

Inventory credit systems, also known as warrantage activities, were introduced in 2014, allowing beneficiaries to improve and diversify household production and revenue. The FASO program linked six farmers groups and institutions of microfinance (Caisses Populaires) for warrantage activities. A total of 131 MT of commodities was stored in a form of in-kind guarantee against $31,512 of credit allocated to beneficiaries. With the credit obtained, the 158 beneficiaries (including 50 women) were able to undertake income generating activities such as animal fattening and small commerce. The average net revenue per beneficiary was $161 which was used at the household level to pay school fees and health expenses. In addition, poultry activities were introduced as a form
of improving revenue in 49 villages in the three districts. To date, 358 beneficiaries in Tougouri, Gayeri and Manni districts have received poultry kits composed of 10 hens and 1 rooster. The distribution of kits to the remaining beneficiaries in Tougouri and Gayeri districts is ongoing.

Access to credit is a major constraint in rural areas, particularly for the most vulnerable people. Savings and internal lending communities [SILC] are a cross cutting component of FASO and have had remarkable results in increasing women’s savings and in providing social funds for communities. SILC is a strategy to mobilize internal resources in the form of savings which is in turn lent to members to support their income generating activities. In SILC groups, women leverage their own assets to improve their financial situation and increase self-esteem.

The FASO Program stimulates savings and facilitates access to credit. Tadia Tiombiano/Tin Tua

For 2014, 17% of the 38,024 agriculture beneficiaries were members of SILC groups. Furthermore, participation in SILC activities has now expanded to include 177 members of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), 287 members of Mothers Associations (MAs), 101 Mothers Leaders, and 1,851 members of the Care Groups. SILC members mobilized a total amount of $970,119 in savings, interest and social funds from 2013 to 2015. Much of the internal loans was used for the purchase of agricultural inputs, for the fattening of sheep or cows, for the strengthening of commercial activities, and to overcome the food needs during the lean season. The SILC groups mobilized $54,298 for unpredicted events with many groups deciding to use the social funds to repair school furniture, buy soap for health centers or to buy trees for the schools.

EDUCATION AND A FOCUS ON GIRLS

Promoting education is a long-term strategy for strengthening household resilience. FASO Program focuses on promoting girls’ enrollment and attendance and addressing food insecurity through school feeding and take-home rations. A total of 41,838 primary school children and 3,297 preschool children have benefited from school feeding in 358 primary schools and 45 preschools in the three districts. Food commodities were also distributed in take-home rations to 10,665 girls in 159 primary schools for high rates of attendance.

In addition to school feeding, mentoring activities have been implemented in 10 schools with 126 mentors coaching a total of 384 girls through home visits, school visits and rehearsal sessions. As a result, no dropout was observed among the mentees and no mentored girls left school while being engaged in the scheme. Nearly all (97%) mentored girls successfully moved up to the upper-classes. The success rate of Certificat d’Etude Primaire (CEP) was 92% for mentored girls against 82% at the national level.

LOOKING AHEAD

An evaluation conducted in March 2015 documented FASO’s progress in positively impacting food production and the generation of revenues for vulnerable beneficiaries, as well as the effectiveness of the Care Group Model and the Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach in the adoption of appropriate health, nutrition and hygiene practices. Based on these findings, USAID is granting a two year program extension through September 2017.

During the extension period, FASO will focus on key proven successful strategies, approaches and technologies documented as supporting the most vulnerable in its areas of intervention. FASO will advocate for the official recognition of the contribution of the Care Group Model to the national scaling-up strategy for infant and young child feeding (IYCF). More resources will be directed to strengthen the organizational capacity and improve the internal governance of producer groups, community service provider groups and associations, we well as foster targeted private-public partnerships to sustainably improve livelihoods and the adoption of improved production, marketing and nutrition practices. The geographic and programmatic overlap between FASO and new USAID-funded programs offers an opportunity to foster integration, collaborating, learning and adaptation with these and other programs.