

High-level meeting, Brussels, 18 June 2012

A partnership for resilience to food crises in the Sahel *AGIR – Alliance Globale pour l'Initiative Résilience - Sahel*

Joint statement of the high-level meeting

High-level representatives of the countries of the Sahel, regional organizations, multilateral development and humanitarian aid agencies, non-governmental organizations, donor governments and the European Parliament met in Brussels on 18 June 2012 at the invitation of the European Commission to discuss lasting responses to the dramatic food and nutrition crises which, year after year, hit the Sahel.

Participants took stock of the acute food and nutritional crisis in the Sahel which is affecting more than 18 million people with 8 million people and more than one million children in urgent need of assistance, and discussed the ongoing emergency response to the crisis. They expressed concern at the impact of the crisis in Mali. They also reflected on ways of strengthening longer-term resilience to such crises in the region. Participants agreed that a concerted effort by governments and organisations of the region and humanitarian and development partners is needed, both to address the current crisis and to minimize the scale of similar crises in the future.

Specifically, participants agreed that:

- The food crisis in the Sahel remains of acute concern, and the situation is likely to further deteriorate in the coming weeks. The situation has been compounded by the refugee and displacement crisis in and around Mali. A substantial funding gap remains in the humanitarian emergency response until October when the people of the region can hopefully rely on the next harvest. This funding shortfall is particularly significant for the response to the refugee and displacement crisis. Donors have recognised the need to make an urgent effort to find additional resources, as well as other means of cooperation and support. The humanitarian funding for a total of € 940 m or USD 1.2 bn by international donors was welcomed in this regard.
- Food crises and under-nutrition are a chronic challenge in the Sahel region, and building long-term resilience and pursuing disaster risk reduction, particularly at community level, is key to avoiding the increasingly frequent recurrence of severe food crises. Efforts to build resilience need to focus in particular on putting in place social safety nets for the most vulnerable segment of the population, particularly women and children, so that they can withstand the economic and food stresses especially during the lean period between harvest cycles.
- A strong agricultural sector, supported by adequate national policies and donor assistance, is crucial. A particular effort needs to be made to strengthen drought resistant agricultural production (including through the preservation and restoration of ecosystems, the elimination of pests and combating locust invasions); invest in healthcare and other social sectors, invest in the functioning of food markets, and empower women, including in agriculture.

- In order to achieve a substantial and durable improvement in the resilience of the most vulnerable populations, the West African countries and organisations of the Sahel region and their international partners agreed to launch a Partnership for resilience through a multi-stakeholder initiative (AGIR – Sahel / *Alliance Globale pour l'Initiative Résilience* – Sahel). The AGIR-Sahel initiative is part of wider international efforts and initiatives aimed at promoting development resilience approaches, such as the Global Alliance for resilience and the Political Champions for Disaster Resilience.
- This Partnership should also be clearly driven by the affected countries and anchored in the region. It needs to build on and reinforce existing regional strategies (such as the joint regional strategy of ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS on "*Situation de l'Agriculture de l'Union et Perspectives pour la Réalisation de la Sécurité Alimentaire et du Développement Agricole Durable*" recently presented in Lomé), as well as international efforts such as the G20 initiative on food security, food price volatility and regional stocks. There should be adequate ownership by the affected population. The participants welcome the efforts already undertaken by the countries and organisations of the Sahel on food and nutritional security, including investments in health and other social sectors. They look forward to a consolidation of these various initiatives with a view to placing resilience at the heart of the Sahel countries' development strategies.
- This Partnership must be a vehicle for close coordination among donors and existing initiatives with a view to improving sharing of information and analysis, facilitating alignment of aid strategies, strengthening the link between emergency response and development, and ensuring aid effectiveness in programming.
- The Partnership will establish a detailed overview of vulnerabilities and risks, including the root causes of the chronic crises, seek to maintain an overview of vulnerabilities through a Sahel "resilience dashboard", and contribute to the effective targeting of resources.
- A "roadmap" for strengthening the resilience of the most vulnerable households, including through social protection schemes, such as safety nets (drawing on experience from other regions/countries), and for strengthening resilience through key sectors (health, agriculture/livelihoods, transport, water and sanitation and related basic social services) should be drawn up quickly. It should indicate clear priorities for action.
- This would seek to draw in the expertise of the private sector, especially in providing a fast and direct cash delivery mechanism to those targeted (with useful examples from the telecommunications and financial sectors for cash transfers).
- The Partnership would allow donors and governments to sign up to basic targets for building resilience in the Sahel, and seek to agree on a division of labour in meeting these targets. The Partnership would map and track funding for resilience in the region. Civil society at the local, national and international level will have a key role to play.

- A small technical group composed of representatives of governments of the region, regional organizations and key international partners, including civil society, should be constituted and anchored in the region, with a view to drawing up a draft roadmap.
- This roadmap will need to set out what additional resources are required in order to build resilience in the region. Indicatively, a minimum investment of €750 m may be required only to build safety nets for the most vulnerable between now and 2015, with significant additional funding required in other areas such as agricultural development, health, and trade.
- Governments of the region, regional organizations, humanitarian and development agencies and donors commit to maintain their collective engagement. Participants will reconvene again at a high-level conference before the end of 2012 to take stock of progress and map out the way forward.