

Health gardens to combat malnutrition

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in Africa, with 44.6% of the population living below the poverty threshold. Food insecurity affects 1.5 million people and around 350,000 need emergency assistance, while 20.1% of children under five are underweight (Source: WFP 2015). The situation is particularly serious in the Nord, Centre-Nord, East and Sahel regions. The rural population in the east of the country is dependent on family subsistence farming which is highly vulnerable to weather conditions. The levels of food insecurity and malnutrition are above the alert thresholds. The Action Against Hunger (ACF) programme aims to reduce the poorest families' economic and food vulnerability and to promote good nutrition habits through the creation of vegetable gardens that will provide communities with good-quality produce and boost dietary diversity.



(Picture: © ACF/Vojta Vancura)

DURATION: 2014-2017

CHALLENGE: Women's Social and Economic Development, Access to Basic Services

COUNTRY: Burkina Faso

PARTNER: Action Against Hunger

CONTEXT

The east of Burkina Faso is the country's vastest region. It is very remote, poorly served by transport and has few resources, while its population is rapidly growing. Poverty is rife and families' living conditions are extremely precarious: one farming household in two does not produce enough grain to meet its needs. The rural population depends on fragile family subsistence farming which is highly vulnerable to weather conditions.

Food shortages have direct consequences on the population's nutritional status. Malnutrition is the cause of death in over 40,000 children each year in Burkina Faso and is above the alert

threshold. This situation is closely linked to women's lack of access to the land, their difficulty in obtaining non staple foods, their low level of literacy, the lack of hygiene and inappropriate infant care practices (like early weaning, the use of inadequate food supplements, lack of dietary diversity).

ACTION

The Action Against Hunger (ACF) programme aims to reduce the economic vulnerability of the poorest families in the east of the country, to improve their diet (especially during the lean season, from May to November), and to promote good infant care practices.

The health gardens campaign involves:

- Creating vegetable gardens (to grow fruits, vegetables, cereals and groundnuts) both for family consumption and to sell at the markets;
- The promotion of healthy eating through training and awareness sessions (breastfeeding, hygiene, food and nutrition);
- Demonstrations showing the women how to cook balanced meals with produce from the vegetable garden and commonly used local foods. The demonstrations also promote the use of enriched infant foods produced by local food processing operations to prevent malnutrition.

Women are the main beneficiaries of the programme, because of their role in the household, particularly in feeding and caring for children. The programme also endeavours to:

- strengthen women's groups with training, sessions on group dynamics and administrative support
- promote post-harvest activities (vegetable preservation, processing and storage) to improve food preservation.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The programme targets 945 families, i.e. 6,600 people, in 30 women's groups in the three provinces of Gnagna, Kompienga and Tapoa.

Around 1,650 children under the age of 5 will benefit from the distribution of enriched infant food and 5,400 inhabitants of villages with community health gardens will benefit from the awareness campaign. Concretely it will:

- increase the availability of quality foods and boost dietary diversity
- improve the health of families and children
- create discussion spaces within the community and between communities
- boost families' incomes

LONG-TERM STRATEGY

Health gardens are an effective strategy for combating dietary deficiencies by enabling local communities to produce and eat food that is better suited to their needs and more nutritious. This strategy recognises and respects the social role of food and highlights the many benefits of a varied diet. The ACF initiative is part of a national strategy that aims to improve the long-term scope and quality of the management of acute malnutrition.