



## FNS-REPRO Newsletter

Jan-Mar 2021 - Issue #1



### Building food system resilience in protracted crises



### Strengthening value chains for resilient livelihoods

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of FAO, I am happy to present the first newsletter of the Food and Nutrition Security Resilience Programme (FNS-REPRO). Through this newsletter, we will keep you informed on our progress towards building resilient livelihoods and food systems, as well as our contributions to sustainable localized peace in Sudan, South Sudan and Somaliland.

As you probably know, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, hunger was on the increase. In 2019, more than 690 million people – or nearly one in ten people in the world – went hungry. In these times, strengthening the resilience of food systems is particularly urgent.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a compounding threat on existing crises such as conflict, natural disasters, climate change, animal and plant pest and disease upsurges, - that are already stressing our food systems and triggering food insecurity around the globe.

Through the generous financial support of the Government of the Netherlands, FNS-REPRO will show that it is possible to make significant gains and build resilience in the most vulnerable, even in complex environments. Implemented in partnership with the Wageningen University and Research Centre, the programme's design and evidence-based approach allows us to set examples of building food system resilience in protracted crises, showing that there is hope for the most vulnerable in a global context of increasing food insecurity.

Follow our progress and enjoy the read.

**Dominique Burgeon**  
Director ad interim  
Office for Emergencies and Resilience

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- **Recap of the Inception Phase**
- **Developing capacities of gum arabic farmers in Sudan**
- **Finger on the pulse of community needs in Sool and Sanaag – Somaliland**
- **Building robust seed systems in South Sudan**
- **FNS-REPRO and the private sector**
- **Steering committees implementation support**
- **The Learning Agenda**
- **COVID-19 and FNS-REPRO implementation**

## Recap of the Inception Phase

Apart from setting up the required programme structures, committees, country and regional teams, the Inception Phase (October 2019 - February 2020) was an opportunity to review FNS-REPRO's approach, assumptions, priorities and logframe to adjust indicators, establish targets and modify output statements and activities, based on the current situation and needs in the target areas.

A range of analyses, assessments and baselines were undertaken at country & regional level – followed by the development of a detailed intervention strategy: the annual plan for October 2020 – September 2021.

Inception phase activities were undertaken in close consultation and collaboration with national and local government in the target countries/regions, as well as with (potential) partners and beneficiary communities. The results of this work were validated by the communities and governments during national validation workshops.

The Inception Report, together with the Annual Plan, therefore provides the basis for adaptive and context-specific implementation

### Key outcomes from the Inception Phase include:

- FNS-REPRO's Theory of Change is valid, and its impact, outcome, and output statements are well defined and timely.
- FNS-REPRO's outcome will be resilient livelihoods and food systems and contributing to sustainable localized peace. This will contribute to improved food and nutrition security, and capacity of households (within their livelihoods) to withstand and adapt to shocks (the impact).
- Activities were revised and strengthened according to the conclusions and recommendations from the field studies, assessments and consultations, and reflect the current situation and needs in the target areas. This includes selection of implementation areas and final beneficiary targets.
- Other key outputs from inception phase include updated project implementation & management arrangements, a dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Plan, a dedicated communication and visibility plan, in addition to a sustainability and exit plan.

## Developing capacities of gum arabic farmers in Sudan



*Siham Eltahir Elsharief, FNS-REPRO beneficiary in Broush village, North Darfur, showing the acacia senegal seedlings she intercropped with sesame on her farm.*

FNS-REPRO activities in Sudan are implemented in North and East Darfur states and are centered on the gum arabic value chain. Gum arabic is a strategic sector for the Government of Sudan, generating social, economic and environmental dividends for thousands of vulnerable communities in the region. The gum-arabic business is booming because of the growing international demand of the natural resin which is widely used in food, soft drinks, cosmetics and medicines.

The Darfur region presents favorable conditions for the production of high quality gum arabic, from the *acacia senegal* tree, commonly known as Hasab. However, producers and upstream value chain actors face key challenges concerning productivity, negotiating good farm-gate prices, access to market and finance.

Millions of farmers and livestock producers in Darfur depend very much on the successful outcome of the summer agricultural season, which lasts from June up to September/October. This is the only rainy season in Sudan and farmers in Darfur rely almost entirely on rain-fed production systems. In the project target areas, the average rainfall goes from 250mm-350mm in the Northern part (North Darfur state localities) to 500-600mm in the southern part (East Darfur state localities).

During the farming season in 2020, FNS-REPRO in Sudan supported 3 000 small and medium-scale households with a customized set of *acacia senegal* seedlings and seeds, mixed food and cash crops, and a set of basic tools to support integrated production methods. Each beneficiary was entered into a digital database which will allow the project team and implementing partners to follow up on their progress and challenges. In Darfur, activities to improve the capacity of gum arabic farmers in good harvesting and post-harvesting practices were carried out.

The gum arabic harvesting season in Sudan goes from October/November up to March, with approximately 5-7 harvesting cycles per season.



A gum arabic farmer in Sani Karaw village, North Darfur, practices gum arabic tapping using the *Sonki*. This is a long wooden pole tipped with a straight shaped pike blade with curved “bill hook” and point. The *Sonki* is driven under the bark of the tree without penetrating the wood, between the outer bark and inner cambium, and allows a strip of bark to be removed, stimulating gum exudation on the exposed strip.

Despite the long tradition in the cultivation of *acacia senegal* trees, protracted years of conflict and deliberate actions to keep the Darfur region underdeveloped have contributed to negative coping strategies. Communities started cutting trees for energy purposes and stopped engaging in gum arabic tapping as a key source of income. Over time, many farmers especially the younger generation, are now not aware of the economic and environmental potential that farming the tree can generate for the food security and resilience of their families.

### A new way of life for Zakaria

Zakaria Adam Ibrahim is a young farmer in Lawabit village, North Darfur state. He is a part of the village community committee established by FNS-REPRO to promote a participatory and inclusive decision-making process in project implementation activities.

Zakaria attended FNS-REPRO’s training on good gum arabic harvesting and post-harvesting practice, where he shared with the project team. ‘When my father died three years ago, my family and I inherited approximately 100 *acacia senegal* trees. Before meeting the FAO team and learning about FNS-REPRO, I was not aware of the economic potential of gum arabic,’ he says. ‘I did not have any expertise in gum arabic and since my father died, I have never tapped the trees.’



Zakaria Adam Ibrahim in front of his garden of *acacia senegal* in Lawabit village, North Darfur state

### Finger on the pulse of community needs in Sool and Sanaag – Somaliland

At the end of June 2020, COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings and meetings were lifted, enabling the undertaking of field missions to Erigabo in Sanaag, and Lasanood and Ainabo in Sool. Consultations took place with the local authorities, including governors, mayors and focal points from the Ministry of Livestock and Fishery Development and the Ministry of Agricultural Development. Representatives were extensively briefed and informed about the FNS-REPRO project, their approval was obtained for the selected villages, as well as their support for the project implementation. Lastly, the FNS-REPRO team held consultations with the local universities of Nugaal and Sanaag to seek their partnership in the implementation of activities under Output 1.



FNS-REPRO team meets with the Regional Governor, the Mayor of Erigabo and other regional Officers (6 July 2020)

During the field missions, the project team identified a number of lead farmers and visited their farms to assess their needs, confirming the support needed to tap the opportunities fodder production offers in both Sool and Sanaag. These lead farmers will be key drivers in the project implementation as they will gain knowledge and encourage other fodder producers to adopt good agronomic practices (GAP). Adherence to GAP practices

will not only improve the quality and the production of fodder, but will ultimately increase the income of the household.

In all of this, consultation meetings with community members have been critical. They provided an introduction to FNS-REPRO, and its differentiation from other projects that adopt a “handouts” humanitarian approach. The communities also had an opportunity to clarify their expectations and give their ideas on the programme implementation. This included a very important group of community leaders and elders, who have a critical role in creating and maintaining peace and will be a key partner in ensuring localized and sustained peace in the programme areas.



FAO team discussion with village elders in Marawade village, Erigavbo district, Sanaag.

The inclusion of additional villages necessitated a second Resilience Measurement Index Analysis (RIMA) and food Systems Resilience Analysis (FOSRA), successfully conducted in October 2020 and will provide the baseline information for the project. As of February 2021, all implementing partners in Somaliland [are on board](#) and [have started implementation](#) of field activities in Sool and Sanaag.

## Building robust seed systems in South Sudan

In South Sudan, FNS-REPRO is focusing on developing an integrated, robust, sustainable seed sector and seed systems. Seed is a key factor in any agricultural system, and shortage of quality seeds has been a constraint for many generations in South Sudan. The situation was made worse during the 21-year civil war, in addition to recurrent floods and drought that have impacted the local seed supply significantly.

Thus, FNS-REPRO seeks to address complementary past and present Integrated Seed Sector Development (ISSD)

initiatives by key stakeholders in the South Sudan seed sector while drawing relevant experiences from several other African countries.



Characterization of local landraces during a Seed System Resilience Assessment (SSRA) in Torit.

The programme approach in South Sudan contributes to improved agro-biodiversity conservation and sustainable use by identification, cleaning and promotion of local landraces, and establishment of community seed banks for local landrace diversity. Furthermore, FNS-REPRO promotes an ISSD approach that recognizes and builds upon the diversity of seed systems to guide in the design and implementation of seed sector interventions that are coherent with farmers’ agricultural practices, while stimulating policy reforms that support local seed sector growth.



Distribution of improved cassava cuttings and orange-fleshed pro-Vitamin A sweet potatoes to target project beneficiaries by Star Trust Organization (STO) in Yambio.

Lastly, FNS-REPRO promotes harnessing of traditional crops varieties, indigenous knowledge and practices, towards reducing cases of malnutrition’s across South Sudan. The rich biodiversity, especially within the informal system, provides an opportunity for nutrition-sensitive livelihood support.

## FNS-REPRO and the private sector



FNS-REPRO team conducting a scoping mission in the project target areas with representatives of the Fair Factory for Manufacturing & Packing Gum Arabic (FOGA), Sudan.

A critical aspect for the success of any project, including FNS-REPRO, is to guarantee a stable and reliable market for small and medium-scale producers engaged in sustainable agriculture practices. To this end, the project team in Sudan has started engaging with private sector companies. Through working in partnership with the private sector, FNS-REPRO aims at closing the supply-demand gap by contributing to the development a sustainable and fair gum arabic value chain in Darfur, an area characterized by protracted crises.

FAO will provide technical expertise and capacity building to farmers and producer associations in North and East Darfur states, enabling them to supply high quality organic gum resin. The private sector will then guarantee a stable and reliable market for small-scale producers engaged in sustainable agriculture practices, through contract farming agreements. Since the gum arabic market is international, FNS-REPRO beneficiaries will also benefit from the marketing and selling of their organic gum arabic to the European market, in line with the organic and fair-trade principles.

## Steering committees: Playing a key role in adaptive and context-specific implementation.

FNS-REPRO's Steering Committees have been established at both global and national levels. Membership consists of FAO, WUR, government and donor representatives, among others. Meeting biannually, they will play a key role in providing policy and strategic guidance to the programme, as well as ensuring that it remains on track vis-à-vis its objectives and work plans.

In June 2020, FNS-REPRO held its first Global Programme Steering Committee (GPSC). Chaired by FAO's Director ad interim of the Office for Emergencies and Resilience, the

GPSC took stock of the achievements of the inception phase, discussed and endorsed the key decisions and priorities for implementation. This reflects FNS-REPRO's approach to adaptive and context-specific implementation, in which the GPSC plays a key role.

Following the first GPSC, FAO country offices organized their first National Programme Steering Committee (NPSC) meetings in November 2020. Attended by representatives from the government line Ministries, FAO, WUR and Netherlands Embassies, the NPSCs provided national policy and strategic guidance to the programme. In all three countries, the commitment of the respective governments to build resilient livelihoods and food systems while contributing to sustainable localized peace was noteworthy and highly appreciated by the implementation team.



"We are looking forward to sustained and concrete relations with the Netherlands", said Mr Turkawi, Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of the Sudan, in a virtual address to the second Global Programme Steering Committee on behalf of the Sudanese Government.

Following the national steering committees, the second GPSC was convened on 25 November 2020. Noting the impressive progress made since the last meeting, it identified opportunities for FNS-REPRO to enhance its contribution to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus & the implementation of the Netherlands-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution 2417. In addition, members reviewed the programme's progress, activities for the next six months, and provided guidance on strategic issues, which will further enhance the catalytic role that FNS-REPRO plays in building food system resilience in protracted crises.

## The Learning Agenda: Reinforcing field activities while informing policy at the highest levels



Joint FAO-WUR enumerator training in February 2020 in Hargeisa, was held to prepare government staff to collect RIMA and FoSRA data that will form the baseline for FNS-REPRO.

FNS-REPRO's Learning Agenda is establishing and implementing a learning mechanism that informs evidence based programming, captures good practice and promotes development of policy recommendations on promoting Food System Resilience (FSR) for improved food and nutrition outcomes in protracted crisis contexts.

FNS-REPRO has developed various instruments to facilitate the Learning Agenda and knowledge management on food system resilience, in particular the Food & Seed System Resilience Assessments (SSRAs and FoSRAs) and the Communities of Practice (CoPs). The Food & Seed System Resilience Assessments facilitate joint learning by local actors and stakeholders to co-create a shared understanding on how food and seed systems function and change in the face of shocks and stressors. Based on food system behaviour and dynamics, food system pathways are developed that allow different actors and stakeholders to making investments for more resilient and context sensitive food systems for improved food nutrition security outcomes.

As part of the Learning Agenda, FNS-REPRO is establishing CoPs which will bring together governments, UN (FAO in particular), NGOs, private sector, and local knowledge and research institutes. Through the CoPs, these stakeholders will develop learning journeys to address the critical challenges of building more resilient food systems. The CoPs will be coordinated by The Wageningen University's (WUR) country-based Learning Agenda Focal Points.

Annual learning and sensemaking events will be organized at country and regional level to inform evidence based FNS-REPRO programming, to capture and promote good practice on FSR amongst sector actors and to develop policy recommendations. A first Regional Learning Exchange was organized by WUR and the Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP) in November 19th 2020.

It brought together around 50 professionals from governments, universities, NGOs, UN, and research institutes, to discuss food system resilience programming in the region. Finally, WUR in collaboration with NUFFIC and universities in Sudan, Somaliland and South Sudan are currently designing tailor-made trainings on seed systems, horticulture and fodder systems. Together with a Joint Regional Master's programme and short courses for mid-career professionals, the trainings will provide integrated learning pathways for addressing critical challenges in building food system resilience.

## COVID-19 and FNS-REPRO implementation

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the world. It has caused setbacks to development, particularly in the poorest countries and in the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable communities – including Somaliland, South Sudan and Sudan. This exacerbates the existing situation of poverty and hunger. According to the latest edition of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI 2020), almost 690 million people did not have enough to eat in 2019. The report continues to signal that significant challenges remain in the fight against food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms, as a result of conflict and climate change.



In October 2020, the virtual RIMA training took place in Hargeisa, with participants observing social distance and wearing masks. The FAO Resilience Team for Eastern Africa and WUR team joined the training via Zoom.

In the first few months of the global pandemic, implementation of FNS-REPRO was affected. This was mainly due to international and local travel restrictions which affected staff travel to project areas, government bans on public gatherings which affected important activities such as workshops, conflict resolution forums and capacity development trainings, and slowdown of international trade and transportation, which slowed down procurement and delivery processes.



Training workshop in Sudan (with masks and at social distance).

To address this, FAO implemented a range of measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on FNS-REPRO, including:

- Further strengthening the collaboration and partnerships with the government (ministries and local administration), national research organizations (universities and research centers) and national NGOs. This collaboration guarantees continuation of activities as local actors have better access and presence in the field, building on strong relationships with the communities in target sites to increase the effectiveness despite the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Enhanced coordination with FAO field-based officers for joint planning and implementation. Where necessary, field officers were trained to take over certain roles and responsibilities on behalf of country-office staff.
- Full adherence to government, WHO and FAO guidelines and regulations on COVID-19, to ensure that FNS-REPRO activities do not lead to a further spread of the disease, and minimize disruption of planned activities.
- Integrate awareness creation and advocacy on COVID-19 in the project activities. This meant having smaller groups in trainings and providing

personal protective equipment and sanitization facilities for all during trainings.

- Maximizing the use of web-based communications for conducting virtual trainings or other events.
- Preparation and obtaining technical clearances for inputs and equipment, for advance consolidated procurement and delivery.

Although the governments of Sudan, South Sudan and Somaliland eased some of the restrictions around August and September 2020, others are still in place, and international travel continues to be a challenge.

In the near future, FAO will therefore continue to implement FNS-REPRO in a “COVID-19-smart” way, with as much field presence as possible taking into account the necessary mitigation measures.

### FNS-REPRO in the news

- [Netherlands donates \\$28 million to build more resilient food systems in protracted crises.](#)
- [Food and Nutrition Security Resilience Programme gears up implementation amid COVID-19.](#)
- [Sudan: FAO organizes the 1st National Programme Steering Committee meeting of the Food and Nutrition Security Resilience Programme](#)
- [FNS-REPRO inception validation workshop in Somaliland \(video in Somali\).](#)
- [FNS-REPRO’s second virtual GPSC meeting](#)

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