



FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING IN A FRAGILE CONTEXT - THE JOURNEY OF SIRBA PROGRAMME IN NIGER

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-  **PROGRAMME** Sirba Area Programme
 -  **SECTORS** Health, nutrition, livelihood, water sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education, and child protection
 -  **GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE & POPULATION** Commune of Gotheye with a population of around 65,000
 -  **TIMELINE** 2005-2023
 -  **LOCATION** Tilaberi Region, Niger



Introduction and context

World Vision UK's journey in the Sirba community - in the Tilaberi region of Niger began in 2005 and ended in 2023. Alarming levels of malnutrition, along with lack of access to clean water and education, were critical challenges.

Our programming changed over the years, due to external factors (see Table 1 below). In addition, in order to deepen our commitment to the world's most vulnerable children, we moved towards evidence based models and approaches¹.

The Sirba programme was implemented in three phases. Project interventions were around health, nutrition, livelihood, access to water, sanitation and hygiene, education, and child protection.

During this time we worked with community leaders and parents and all who care for children to assess need and plan for change in child wellbeing. Local government, mayors, faith leaders, health workers, teachers and volunteers were all essential partners.

Table 1 - Sirba programme timeline – key context variables

	2005	2008	2010	2012	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Droughts		X	X	X	X	X						
Floods						X			X			
Insecurity							X	X	X	X	X	X
Covid									X	X	X	
Cholera										X		
Hunger Crisis											X	X
Ukraine War											X	X

Table 1 gives critical insight, especially in the area of food security and the negative impact in areas related to malnutrition and household income.

¹ These are sets of evidence-based practices for improving child wellbeing. They are made up of processes and interventions that have been found to work across a variety of contexts to design and implement programmes that are cost-effective and deliver sustainable results.

2005-2016

Critical activities to address malnutrition included screening for malnutrition, ensuring supplementary feeding, and supporting health centres with equipment and capacity. To improve food security support was also provided to farmers with seeds and farming techniques. Cereal banks were established, and boreholes were drilled to ensure access to water. Promotion of hygiene and sanitation behaviours also took place.

Our education interventions included: the construction of schools, teacher training, and provision of access to water and sanitation services within schools. Children's clubs were also established - for child participation and child empowerment. To address child protection issues, our programme included prevention - through awareness raising - as well as establishing and strengthening reporting and referral mechanisms for child protection.

The results (shown below) from this period were both positive and negative. During this time Niger faced repetitive droughts, which is important in understanding why change in Sirba Area programme was both positive and negative.

Niger has faced a changing climate for over 20 years, resulting in detrimental effects on children and communities. Rising temperatures and more extreme weather events have reduced food production and led to food insecurity. Increasing numbers of droughts and floods have been impacting crop production. Average temperatures in Niger for 2010-2019 were 2.1% higher than in the 1950s³.

Insecurity has worsened over the years and the Tillaberi region is one of the worst affected areas, experiencing



a spillover of several armed groups' activities. This combination of climate change and insecurity has led to people being displaced - and a hunger crisis. The impact of the Ukraine war is also a significant context factor, World Vision's local partners' analysis found. Inflation, caused by the global supply chain interruption, pushed more vulnerable households into extreme poverty.

OPPOSITE: Kids club members in Sirba, happy in new t-shirts!
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ABOVE: Bilali 13, in grade 6 with his Mother, happy to show their millet - proof of the good harvest due to the improved seeds received in the Sirba programme. ©2023 World Vision

Results

In 2016 an evaluation² was conducted showing a mix of positive and negative progress.

Positive Progress

- More children were going to school. Data reflected a 30% improvement in the school enrolment rate.
- More households had access to water, from 45% to 62%.
- Percentage age of children with a better understanding of child protection issues and appropriate responses rose from 19% to 36.5%.
- Qualitative evidence showed that there was a sense of achievement in becoming more resilient.

Negative Progress

- There was still insufficient food production which meant food security got worse. The percentage of households with access to enough food throughout the year fell from 30% to 20%.
- Nutrition got worse – our data noted an increase in the rate of acute malnutrition which rose from 15% to 18%.
- Households reported that their incomes had decreased.

² The general objective of the evaluation was to assess the changes induced by the interventions. It also served as a reference to refocus the investments to increase the welfare of the most vulnerable children.

³ Niger is ranked 11th in The Physical Vulnerability to Climate Change Index (2018) and is the most vulnerable in the vulnerability element of the ND-GAIN Country Index 2020.

2017-2023

Health, Nutrition and Livelihood

To continue the urgent work to improve nutrition our programme adopted the Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition approach which empowers communities to both identify and treat malnourished children. In parallel, caregivers were trained to identify and cook locally available nutritious food as one of the key interventions within the Positive Deviance Health project model.

To support households' income, our programmes incorporated saving groups - member-owned and community-run groups that allow people to save together in a flexible way, whereby savings can be lent to members as credit.

Farmers were trained with more effective farming techniques as well as supported with seed distributions.

Finally, healthcare centres were supported with both training and equipment, which were scaled up during the Covid response.

What did we see?

- Decrease in acute malnutrition (from 18% to 9%) helped by better incomes through savings groups, mass screening and early treatment of malnutrition, and government food assistance.
- Community members with access to healthcare rose from 52% in 2016 to 67% in 2022.
- 83% of households with sufficient access to credit as a result of saving groups

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“Since the training, the cases of malnutrition have greatly decreased in our village, thanks to the knowledge gained on how to use local foods to prepare nutritious meals for our children” Fati, mother

BELOW: Training in nutrition through the PD Health approach allows Fati (pictured standing) to prepare nutritious food and pass on her knowledge to her neighbours. ©2023 World Vision





Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

To ensure access to drinking water, we continued with borehole drilling. We targeted schools and healthcare centres to ensure they had access to basic drinking water sources. These were coupled with the promotion of behavioural change practices on hygiene and sanitation, such as handwashing.

To strengthen sustainability, the WASH programme also focused on building community know-how on water treatment and water source management.

What did we see?

- 85% of households with improved access to drinking water (vs 45% in 2013)
- All 8 health centres in the commune of Gotheve with improved sources of drinking water
- 17 out of 28 schools with accessible and improved water sources
- Existence of community members trained and equipped with tools for repairing motor pumps.

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“Since we have been drinking water from the borehole, we no longer have stomach aches and we are regular at school” Hassana, 9 years old

Child Protection

Our Child Protection and Advocacy project model (CPA) used a set of specific interventions that focus on strengthening the child protection system (both formal and informal) at community level, thus empowering communities, and local partners, to strengthen the protection of children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other forms of violence. Child protection referrals and reporting have been established and strengthened. Together with local partners and children, awareness raising on the negative consequences of practices such as early marriage were conducted. Children were empowered and equipped with knowledge and skills through children’s clubs.

As a Christian organisation, World Vision has a unique position to effectively work with religious leaders of all backgrounds. As part of World Vision’s *It Takes a World* campaign, international efforts and partnerships were forged with religious leaders and community leaders to address early marriage.

Finally, parents and caregivers were supported to have a better understanding of issues affecting children through dialogues and awareness raising.

ABOVE: Children in Sirba taking advantage of the accessibility of drinking water thanks to the construction of hydroelectric boreholes by World Vision. ©2023 World Vision

What did we see?

- % of children with improved self-esteem and life skills rose from 37% in 2019 to 70% in 2022
- Households that can understand and recognise abuse towards children rose from 19% in 2019 to 46% in 2022.
- Caregivers who believe children live in a peaceful environment rose from 15% in 2019 to 55% in 2022

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“I thank World Vision for the child protection [training] as I can continue my studies. I am also raising awareness among the girls in my community - now when they have a problem, they know to whom and how to report it”

Karima, 15 (pictured below)



Conclusion and Learning

Using evidence-based approaches across our work has improved our effectiveness and Sirba Area Programme is a positive story of change in child wellbeing despite great difficulty.

‘wherever there are people in need, World Vision can be there.... When they move, we move with them... where there are people, there are solutions’

Souleymana Mamane, WASH Associate Director, World Vision Niger.

However, the needs of internally displaced people and host communities are increasing. Niger was classified as a Fragile State by World Vision due to a deterioration of security in the Sahel region. Schools have been closed in some places and since the coup in August 2023, attacks have increased. Sanctions have caused further problems and aid cuts have compromised all in need of life-saving assistance.

Recommendations

Urgent and flexible funding: Work continues and Sirba is a priority area for World Vision’s Hunger Response in Niger. Donors are urged to add urgent and flexible funding to Niger to allow humanitarian actors to save lives.

Flexibility in Programme design to adapt programmes, in collaboration with local partners, to maximise impact on child wellbeing whilst coping with contextual challenges.

Supporting local partners we work with, to reach inaccessible communities. Due to the ongoing insecurity it is especially important to support our partner organisations with resources, information and know-how as required.

LEFT: Karima was 15 when her father decided to give her in marriage. Following training in child protection, Karima acted, and her marriage was cancelled. “I personally went to see the president of the child protection committee and explained my case.” ©2023 World Vision

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At World Vision, our focus is on helping the most vulnerable children, in the most dangerous places, overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian faith, we’ve worked together with communities, partners, local leaders and governments, for over 70 years, so that children – of all faiths and none – are empowered to experience fullness of life.

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COVER PHOTO: A grade 5 class in Sirba, showing a high number of girls, due to the multiple awareness and advocacy campaigns of World Vision with community and religious authorities. “I am very happy to have been enrolled in school in the same way as the boys in my community” says Hadjara (dark blue scarf). ©2023 World Vision

