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RESILIENCE AND ECONOMIC  
GROWTH IN THE SAHEL -  
ENHANCED RESILIENCE (REGIS-ER)

# CITIZEN WORKING GROUPS

COMMUNITY LED DEVELOPMENT  
TO FOSTER RESILIENCE



# COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT TO FOSTER RESILIENCE AND SELF-RELIANCE

A citizen working group is a civil society organization that consists of representatives from local or village councils and other groups, such as mother-to-mother groups, savings and loan associations, youth groups or farmers' associations and private sector. A citizen working group is an inclusive, participatory platform that gives voice to citizens' interests, communicating needs and priorities. In collaboration with the municipal council and development partners, the citizen working group plans, builds awareness of, and monitors activities that strengthen resilience.

With sustainability in mind, our approach is above all to strengthen existing structures. Municipal Councils exist in all project communes as formal structures of decentralized governance. In Burkina, Village Development Councils (CVDs) exist in every village and are government-mandated institutions.

The Resilience and Economic Growth in the Sahel – Enhanced Resilience (REGIS-ER) is a seven-year activity (2013-21) of the RISE portfolio, supported by USAID. It aimed to increase the resilience of chronically vulnerable populations in marginal agro-pastoral areas in Burkina Faso and Niger by strengthening livelihoods, governance and the health and nutritional status of communities. From November 2013 to November 2018, REGIS-ER worked in six regions, 25 municipalities, reaching 570 villages across the RISE zone of intervention in Burkina Faso and Niger. From October 2019, the project entered cost-extension phase, concentrating on eight municipalities in three regions of Burkina Faso and Niger.

But as many CVDs were not fully functional, REGIS-ER revitalized and strengthened them. In Niger, the Local Development Committees (CLDs) are not currently official institutions, but their existence dates back to the Kountché regime in the early 1980s. Some (unofficial) CLDs still existed, and REGIS-ER used these and other such informal entities as a community institutional anchor.

REGIS-ER's community engagement spurred the revitalization of the Burkinabe village development councils (CVD) and Nigerien local development committees (CLD), but the project noticed that there were limited avenues for civil society actors to formally engage with the commune government and vice versa. In response, REGIS-ER worked with community groups and commune government to form Citizen Working Groups that operate at the commune level to facilitate two-way communication between villages and municipal government. To this end, REGIS-ER has formed 15 functional Citizen Working Groups in Burkina Faso and Niger that support 1200 villages. With official recognition from municipal councils, Citizen Working Groups monitor and report to the council on successful development activities; monitor and alert authorities of situations that affect peace, security or resilience; coordinate the activities of the Burkinabè Village Development Councils (CVD) or Nigerien Local Development Committees (CLD); and advocate with municipal councils for scaling-up sustainable solutions to enhance resilience.

# LINKING COMMUNES AND VILLAGES

A Citizen Working Group monitors and assesses resilience activities in the commune, which helps municipal councils make informed decisions based on data coming from their own communities. The CLDs and CVDs are the contact points of the Citizen Working Groups at the village level. Each CLD or CVD coordinates the implementation of resilience activities in its community and provides the Citizen Working Group with detailed information on the progress of these activities.

Citizen Working Groups conduct a wide range of tasks: supporting the development and monitoring the implementation of action plans; collection, analysis and dissemination of activity data; building community awareness of activities and local implementing partners; advice and support to village committees and thematic stakeholder groups; advocacy with development partners and local government; and linking private sector, government technical services and producers.

Citizen Working Groups provide a platform for communities and even for communes to learn

REGIS-ER contributed to enhanced resilience of chronically vulnerable populations in marginal agricultural and agro-pastoral areas in Burkina Faso and Niger. NCBA CLUSA successfully demonstrated, scaled-up and disseminated resilience activities centered on conservation farming, health and nutrition, water, sanitation, and hygiene, local governance, and shock responsiveness for the benefit of nearly 320,000 families in Burkina Faso and Niger.

from one another and adopt new practices. Sub-committees of the Citizen Working Groups provide guidance and advisory services to village groups on best practices for building resilience, assuring quality and consistency of activities.



# ESTABLISHING THE CITIZEN WORKING GROUP

The first step is to ensure that all necessary conditions are met to establish a functional Citizen Working Group. This starts with consultation with commune authorities to elaborate a strategy. Once the strategy is approved, the mayor issues a decree to authorize the creation of a Citizen Working Group in the commune. The decree includes details about the Citizen Working Group organization, composition and operation. The commune then organizes an informational workshop for stakeholders, including CVD or CLD presidents, municipal council sub-committees chairs, women and youth organizations, technical services and other resource partners, such as community health volunteers or veterinary auxiliaries.

All villages are members of the Citizen Working Group, but in practice it is the executive bureau that coordinates and implements actions. The executive committee is elected at a general assembly attended by two to five representatives from all the villages. The members of the executive bureau must fulfill

three criteria: 1) Be delegated by their CLD/CVD to participate in the general assembly; 2) be willing and available to work as a volunteer; and 3) demonstrate leadership skills (for example by speaking to the general assembly in support of their candidacy). Most members of the executive bureau have been actively engaged with REGIS-ER and have acquired many skills for building resilient livelihoods, as well as training in approaches such as Positive Youth Development or data management. An executive bureau must include at least one woman.

The positions to be appointed are Citizen Working Group president, a secretary and two treasurers. The election of the executive bureau is documented in an election report. One copy is given to the mayor, and the executive bureau-elect keeps another copy. The mayor and municipal council then have 30 days to consider and validate the election of the executive bureau election, including adjudicating any disputes or objections. After 30 days, the validated bureau is communicated by the mayor who publishes the list by decree.

The executive bureau is elected for a term of three years, renewable once. At the end of each term, the renewal begins with an information campaign and then follows the election, validation and installation phases, as described above. In the event of the death, resignation, revocation or ineligibility of an executive bureau member, s/he is replaced through special election for the remainder of the term.

## LAND TENURE FOR WOMEN

The Citizen Working Group of Tondikandia Commune (Niger) successfully secured 10 new sites whose total area was 12 hectares, for women's groups. The land was initially degraded, but with bio-reclamation efforts, the women's groups made the land fertile again. The Citizen Working Group also obtained a loan for a 2-hectare garden cultivated by a women's group. The group of 100 women each earned \$130 in a year after reinvesting part of the gross proceeds into garden maintenance and inputs.

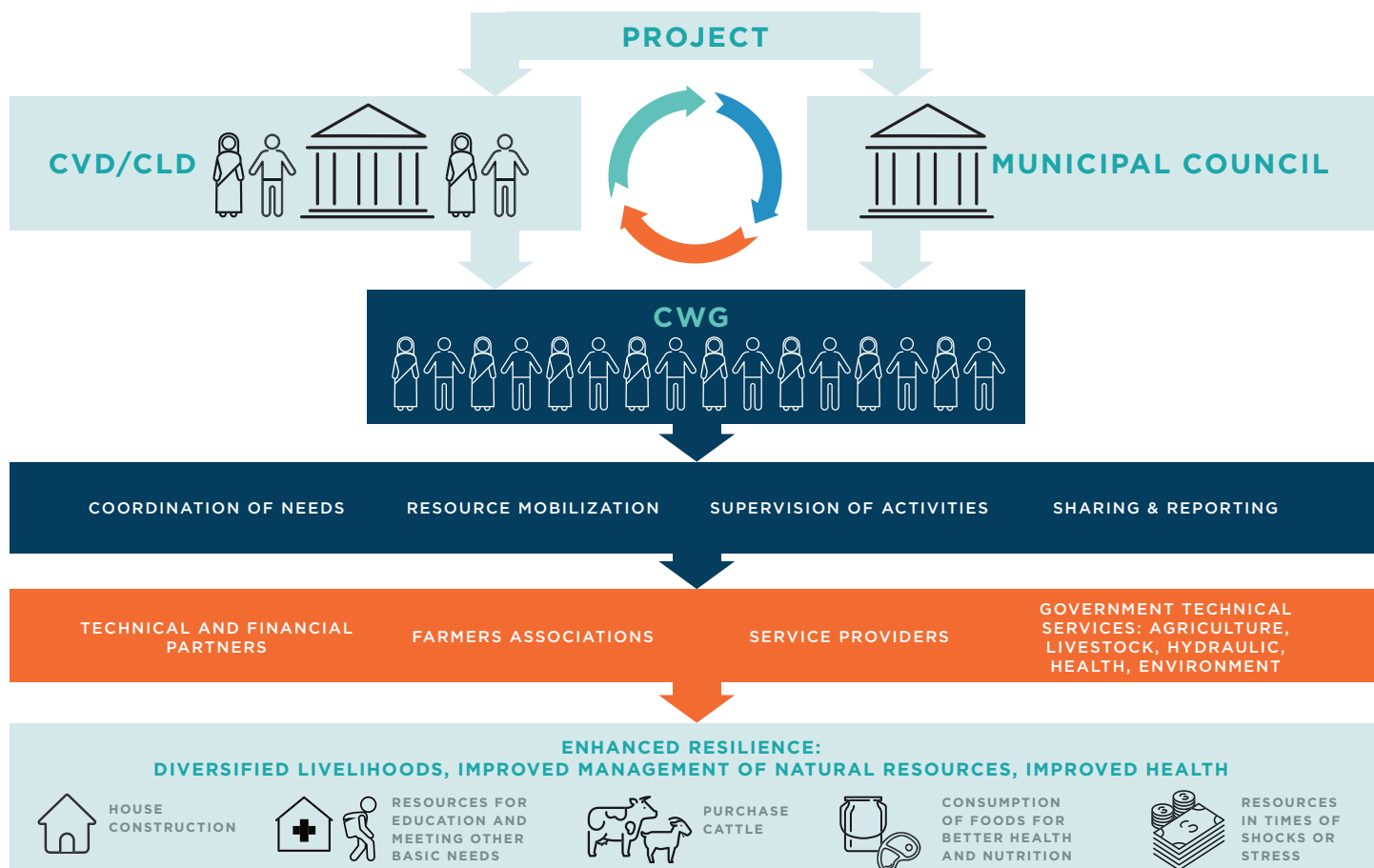
## CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

An initial self-assessment provides the benchmark for existing capacities and results in a capacity-strengthening plan to which both the Citizen Working Group and project agree. Commitment towards the achievement of capacity building goals is established through a contract (MOU or grant agreement), and forms the basis of a coaching approach based on contract. Annual self-assessments track

## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

- Citizen Working Groups collaborate with local radio stations and community-based health workers to raise awareness about measures and behaviors to prevent COVID-19.
- Citizen Working Groups have organized community clean-up days and advocated for and secured the construction of family latrines with support from the regional directorate of water and sanitation.
- Citizen Working Groups successfully managed habbanaye (livestock transfer) activities and persuaded municipalities to contribute by acquiring animals for placement with beneficiaries (vulnerable women).
- Citizen Working Groups strongly advocate for and facilitate access to land for women and young people, and help them obtain deeds.
- Using WhatsApp, Citizen Working Groups and municipal councils have supported youth entrepreneurs to open kiosks to charge cell phones.
- Citizen Working Groups helped village committees to improve soil and water conservation and restore degraded land, improving agriculture and horticulture production on these sites to the benefit of women.

## CITIZEN WORKING GROUP FUNCTIONING



# LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

progress towards the goals. Both REGIS-ER and the institution itself were responsible for providing capacity improvement, focusing on key criteria for sustainability, such as technical capacity, financial viability and linkages with other actors in the system. The ultimate objective was to enable the Citizen Working Group to continue service delivery after the end of the project. As the Citizens Working Group's knowledge and capacity deepened, NCBA CLUSA's role evolved from trainer to facilitator to mentor, until full responsibility was handed over by the project's end. Through the life of REGIS-ER, NCBA CLUSA's role was to monitor and guide the Citizen Working Group as they led and managed activities.

The specific training topics included orientation on the regulatory framework relating to the organization, functioning and roles of the Citizen Working Group (as a civil society association), and the relationships between the Citizen Working Group and the CVD/CLD and the other institutions existing in the commune. REGIS-ER also provided training project planning and data collection, analysis and reporting.

REGIS-ER commissioned an independent assessment of the Citizen Working Groups, which found that they play a vital and valued role in development and have "good potential for sustainability in both countries." This determination was based on criteria including the profile of the Citizen Working Group and the dynamism and commitment of the leadership and specialized committees, and the quality of the collaboration with local government.<sup>1</sup> The key findings include:



The coaching approach based on contracts with local institutions fosters accountability between the project and the local institutions, as well as between the Citizen Working Groups, the CLDs or CVDs and municipal councils. The analysis of the relationships between these different actors showed that each stakeholder feels responsible for resilience activities in the commune and understands its role.

<sup>1</sup> Abdou Diouf. 2020. Étude sur la durabilité des groupes de travail citoyen dans la coordination et la mise en oeuvre des initiatives de résilience au Niger et au Burkina Faso. NCBA CLUSA : USAID | REGIS-ER. Cooperative Agreement No. 625-A-14-00001.





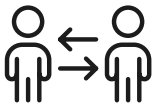
Specialized or best practice sub-committees within the Citizen Working Groups promote and develop local human resources in the technical aspects of successful resilience activities.

With these committees, Citizen Working Groups extend the operational reach of technical services.



The role of government technical services is to support the Citizen Working Group sub-committees, to ensure technical capacity, quality control and monitoring-evaluation.

Technical services also ensure compliance with national policy guidelines and standards.



The intensity and quality of the relationship between the Citizen Working Groups and the municipal authorities is highly dependent on the leadership of the Citizen Working

Groups as well as the openness and commitment of the mayor and municipal council. Where these relationships are strong – where the municipal authorities view the Citizen Working groups as a working arm of the municipal program – the Citizen Working Groups have more markers of sustainability, such as purpose and financial resources.



Collaboration between the Citizen Working Group and municipal authorities on resilience initiatives produces high socio-economic impact at the community level, especially for disadvantaged

social groups such as women and youth.



Securing legal recognition for this institution at the national level is a priority. While Citizen Working Groups in Niger and Burkina Faso are recognized by municipal acts, these

do not guarantee legal personality as an associative or cooperative civil society institution.



The insecurity in Burkina Faso and Niger creates opportunities for Citizen Working Groups to intervene where others cannot. But insecurity also creates obstacles to sustainability as it hampers their efforts to mobilize resources.

## FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19: THE TAGAZAR CITIZEN WORKING GROUP INSPIRES LOCAL AUTHORITIES

With the first COVID-19 cases in Niger, in March 2020, the Tagazar Citizen Working Group in Tillabéri Region of Niger stood out for its proactive engagement. Understanding the threat of the disease, the local Citizen Working Group took the initiative to use its WhatsApp group, “Tagazar Ma Zaada,” to raise awareness of the pandemic.

Noting the impact of this initiative, the prefect of the Department of Balleyara decided to use the WhatsApp group to relay government announcements and other important messages relating to the number of cases and measures to limit the spread of COVID-19. Messages shared by the Tagazar WhatsApp group included communications from influential local leaders such as the interim mayor and the president of the Municipal Youth Councils, a youth non-governmental organization, who shared dozens awareness messages.

The energetic chairman of the Tagazar Citizen Working Group undertook awareness-raising sessions in six villages (Téguef, Sassaba, Gao Tawey, Tinkafa, Kogori Tondikiré and Kogori Bangoubi) with small groups of five CLD members (respecting social-distancing guidelines), who in turn raised awareness in other villages in compliance with social distancing and safety guidelines. The Citizen Working Group pivoted from its regular development work to implement COVID-19 precautions, such as the installation of hand washing stations, and the designation of a compliance officer to remind community members to observe the correct social distance and to wear face masks.

The response of the Tagazar Citizen Working Group to COVID-19 demonstrates its integration and contribution to the local development system. Its reach expands beyond the initial project zones of intervention and it has grown into a trusted and leading local institution.



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