



# Brakna Recovery Initiative (BRI)

Catholic Relief Services in partnership with Caritas Mauritania

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## 1. BACKGROUND

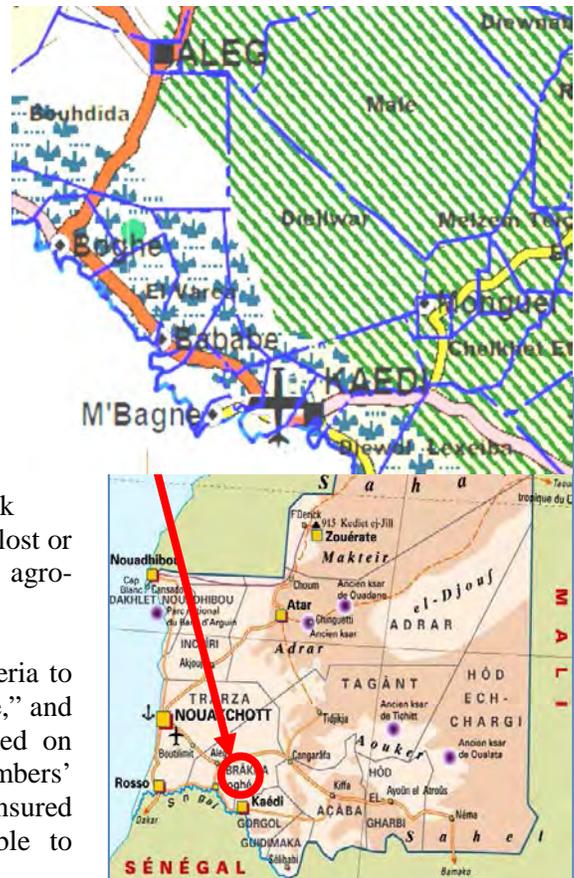
Mauritania, a vast country comprised of 75% desert or semi-desert landscape, has a population of approximately 3.54 million. The majority of the population resides in and around the capital Nouakchott and in the southern part of the country that borders Senegal. Mauritania is subject to a variety of dramatic climatic changes including poor rainfall, desertification and the degradation of natural resources, and is among the world's least developed countries, ranking 161 out of 187 on the 2014 UNDP Human Development Index. According to the January 2014 Humanitarian Overview released by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 42% of the population lives below the poverty line and 470,000 people are at risk of food insecurity. The Brakna Recovery Initiative (BRI) aimed to build household resiliency to food insecurity in the Brakna region, an area still suffering from the effects of the 2011/2012 Sahel food crisis and identified as food insecure in a January 2012 World Food Program (WFP) Food Security Assessment. A Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Senegal rapid assessment conducted in 3 villages in March 2013 in the Boghe, Bababe and Mbagne Departments further assessed and confirmed food security and challenges leading up to the region's traditional "lean" season.

In partnership with Caritas Mauritania, CRS completed the 12-month \$899,987 USAID/OFDA-funded BRI project, providing assistance to 2,600 extremely vulnerable and vulnerable households in Mauritania (approximately 15,600 individuals). BRI targeted the Bababe and Mbagne departments in the Brakna region of Mauritania. The project began mid-June 2013 and ended mid-June 2014, with an aim to restore community assets through Cash for Work (CFW) opportunities, Cash Transfers, small ruminants for those who lost or sold livestock, and technical trainings on improving soil fertility in agro-pastoral zones

CRS and Caritas Mauritania targeted households using specific criteria to classify the "Extremely Vulnerable," "Vulnerable," "Less Vulnerable," and "Non Vulnerable" households in each village. The approach relied on community participation, thus increasing local community members' participation in project implementation. Use of this methodology ensured that the 800 most vulnerable targeted beneficiaries were eligible to participate in the small ruminant fairs and Cash for Work activities.

The goal of the BRI project was: *Vulnerable households' livelihoods have been restored in agro-pastoral zones in Bababe and Mbagne departments in the Brakna region.* In order to contribute to this goal, CRS Senegal and Caritas Mauritania integrated agriculture, food security and economic recovery and market systems activities to achieve two strategic objectives with the results listed in the section below.

Map - Targeted Project Zone: Brakna



## 2. PROJECT RESULTS AGAINST INDICATORS

### 2.1 Agriculture and Food Security

**SO 1:** *Agricultural livelihoods for extremely vulnerable and vulnerable households are restored in agro-pastoral zones*

#### Sub sector: Livestock

Many vulnerable households sold or lost most of their goats during the 2012 food crisis. Once livestock is gone, it takes years for the most vulnerable of families to rebuild their resources without external support. As planned, the BRI project held 5 fairs; one in each commune. Beneficiaries were required to show their identity cards in exchange for vouchers at the time of distribution. Field agents had distribution lists with identification information for beneficiaries and village authorities helped the field agents in order to avoid issues of identity fraud. Each of the 800 most vulnerable households received a voucher in the value of 19,500 MRO (66 USD), worth the purchase price of one animal from pre-approved vendors.

CRS has experienced great success with activities in which participants are given vouchers so that they have their choice of animals and can engage in bargaining processes to pick their own animals. BRI staff therefore encouraged beneficiaries to bargain for their small ruminants in order to increase their purchasing power. CRS and partner staff were present at each fair, supporting beneficiaries in making purchases, monitoring the quantity and quality of purchases, and checking on overall beneficiary satisfaction. More than 820 animals were bought during these fairs. Partner staff worked with vendors to monitor coupon exchanges and provide a certificate for each vendor. This certificate was used to verify the vendors' requests for payment. A total of 17 local vendors successfully provided beneficiaries with goats and sheep during the five fairs and received their final payments at the end of November. Payments were made via checks, with vendors picking up their payments at the closest bank in Boghe.

In November, prior to the fairs, BRI staff and the veterinary agent trained more than **836** households on animal management topics, including disease and treatment. In December, the project organized a first refresher training session for **1,588** beneficiaries, followed by one in March for **1,537** beneficiaries and a final one in April for a new total of **3,286** persons (**1,316** men and **1,970** women). The veterinary agent was also present at all small ruminants fairs to prevent the introduction of diseases and to provide the necessary vaccines to all distributed animals. Goats and sheep were branded with an ear tag so that they can be identified as having been distributed through the project.



*Beneficiaries with small ruminant vendors and veterinarian*

CRS and partner staff worked with village leaders and beneficiaries to discourage the reselling of project-financed livestock during the lean season. CRS and partner staff explained to participant households that project-provided goats should not be sold before reproduction. However, even with the birth of 200 offspring, a large number of fatalities among both the newborns (118/200) and the adult animals (119/820) reduced the total number of livestock to 783. According to

the veterinarian upon regular visits, the main causes of death are diseases such as Sheeppox, Rift Valley fever and pasteurellosis, which are currently common in the region.

### **Sub sector: Improving Agricultural Production/Food Security**

In order to improve agriculture production and food security, BRI program staff offered trainings in post-harvest techniques and agriculture conservation techniques.

Trainings in post-harvest processing and storage can reduce harvest loss and in turn increase income and improve the livelihoods of farmers. Enhancing crop productivity in food crops is generally not enough to lift smallholder farmers out of poverty since food losses and postharvest waste are estimated at 30 to 40% of production. Imparting and encouraging improved postharvest practices often results in reduced food loss, improved overall quality, and higher profits for growers and marketers. Training topics included improved practices for harvesting and field packing, storage for perishable crops, improved solar drying or packaging of dried horticultural crops. Communities also benefited from a training program on biopesticides. If prepared and used correctly, biopesticides can be as effective as conventional pesticides. Biopesticides can be easily produced locally with inexpensive materials and simple equipment, and can generate additional household income for women's groups. One example of biopesticide is found in the neem tree. Bioneem is used to control a wide range of insects (up to 200 insect types) including white flies, leaf miners, mealy bugs, fruit flies, leaf hopper, red spider mite, weevils and many more.

CRS and Caritas Mauritania also supported beneficiaries through training on improved agriculture techniques to increase soil fertility and food production. Project staff conducted trainings and created demonstration plots with program participants on how to cultivate year round vegetable gardens using conservation agriculture techniques such as gray water recycling, key hole or permaculture garden, and half-moons. Farmers also took part in field-based trainings, learning how to prepare and use compost. The farmers will now be able to make informed choices thanks to their improved knowledge of the best ways to store and apply compost in the field. BRI staff facilitated a training-of-trainers and established **nine** demonstration gardens in select beneficiary villages to illustrate the key-hole garden approach. They were further able to create **30** regular permaculture sites.

In December, project staff and beneficiaries worked together to plant a test garden in each village in order to demonstrate the half-moon technique. Beneficiaries in most of the targeted villages (a majority of whom were women) began off-season gardening in December and January, in order to extend their growing season. Using the half-moon technique, they were able to increase the agricultural production in their community vegetable gardens. During a January focus group discussion in the village of Wendou Idy, beneficiaries explained that the half-moon training was attended not only by beneficiaries from their village, but also by neighboring villagers, who were not formal beneficiaries of the project. The women from the neighboring village explained that even though their village would not receive anything from the project, they would still use the half-moon techniques. The adoption of these techniques at the household level and in neighboring villages demonstrates their popularity and effectiveness.

BRI also introduced the Irrigasc system on a pilot basis in **four** villages. The Irrigasc system uses plastic "semi-conductive" tubes for market gardening in order to avoid water loss, using less water and bringing higher yields. This system has been tested and is being used in the Sahel to plant mango, cashew or eucalyptus trees (more than 950,000 trees in Senegal for example). This technique saves 90% of water and nutrients and trees are rapidly autonomous (18 months for mango) with deep roots and request little care and maintenance after.



*Half-moon, key hole and Irrigasc system*

CRS and Caritas Mauritania staff delivered a series of trainings on post-harvest techniques and on agriculture conversation over the course of the project for **2,600** households. As for the livestock management, project staff did a first refresher for **1,588** beneficiaries, followed by one in March for **1,537** beneficiaries and a final one in April. In order to make the last refresher training and the creation of half-moon gardens as successful as possible, the project recruited 15 new field agents to better supervise the construction and improve the quality and quantity of gardens. The field agents spent a full day and night in each village and the number of people reached during the last trainings on agriculture production techniques for **3,407** persons (**1,202** men and **2,205** women) and on post-harvest processing and storage for **3,515** persons (**1,348** men and **2,167** women).

**Table 1: Number of techniques known by beneficiaries (baseline compared to final evaluation)**

Number of practices	Post-harvest technique		Conservation agriculture		Livestock management	
	Baseline	Final	Baseline	Final	Baseline	Final
0	19%	2%	37%	2%	35%	5%
1	51%	8%	33%	3%	23%	6%
2	15%	20%	15%	16%	17%	13%
3	10%	19%	9%	11%	9%	13%
More than 3	5%	51%	n/a	n/a	17%	61%
4	n/a	n/a	5%	28%	n/a	n/a
More than 4	n/a	n/a	1%	40%	n/a	n/a

## 2.2 Economic Recovery and Market Systems

**SO 2: Extremely vulnerable households have received supplemental income in agro-pastoral zones of Brakna**

### Sub sector: Livelihoods Restoration

The first unconditional cash transfer (CT) was made in early November. The second one occurred in December and the third one was made in early March. All **2,600** beneficiary households received cash each time. BRI distributed **8,500 MRO (approx. \$30 USD)** per transfer per beneficiary household in each village, totaling **\$ 234,000** in total. CRS managed the disbursement of cash to beneficiaries in conjunction with Caritas Mauritania staff and coordinated with village level beneficiaries, local leaders, and village chiefs to ensure precautionary measures were taken prior to the cash distributions.

CRS has also seen the impact of cash grants in encouraging economic recovery. During each of the CTs, participating households received **\$30**, which is enough to cover mandatory household costs (food, supplies, and other essential expenses) for a month for an average family of 6 number of people. If households have available cash assets during key times of the year, they are able to meet financial obligations (such as longstanding debt repayment) and have the

purchasing power to cover basic household expenses without needing to sell off other assets prematurely. CRS noted that a large number of BRI beneficiaries used a portion of the funds to pay back their outstanding debts. Based on the learning that it takes at the three CTs to allow households to pay back minimal debts, the project was able to stabilize the flow of financial assets per household and maximize the potential impact of other project activities, such as livestock restocking and conservation agriculture practices.



*Envelopes, cash box and beneficiaries during the first cash transfer*

### **Sub sector: Temporary Employment**

Representatives from the **800** most vulnerable households participated in CFW activities over seven days per month during two separate months (January and April) in exchange for **8,500** (approx. **\$30**) per month. A total of **\$48,000** was distributed through CFW, benefitting approximately **4,800** total family members.

The first round of CFW consisted of perimeter fence repair around gardening sites, village sanitation and hygiene initiatives, preparation of compost for the creation half-moon gardens in April, and land restoration projects including erosion control and assisted natural resource generation. Each village received a limited number of tools to be used in carrying out the CFW activities. Beneficiaries were also asked to contribute their existing tools to the activities. Upon completion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> CFW in May, the tool kits will be donated to each community and managed by a local committee.

The second round of CFW consisted of the preparation of half-moon gardens. The beneficiaries, with the help and supervision of the BRI project team, were able to achieve the internal goal of constructing 3 half-moons per household (totaling **2,400** gardens). The project also relied on the **15** new field agents to better supervise the construction and improve the quality and quantity of the half-moons gardens.

Both men and women were encouraged to participate in contributing to CFW and the project took into close account the realities of population demographics, along with the cultural attitudes about formalized work and labor. CFW activities were coupled with sensitization activities to help beneficiaries understand the importance and relevance of carrying on these types of activities beyond the life of the project. Extremely vulnerable individuals including pregnant women, the elderly, or disabled individuals who were unable to participate in more rigorous activities engaged in lighter activities such as village clean-up or childcare during the CFW activities (thus allowing others to participate in the work while their children were looked after). These households also had the option of selecting another representative from within the community to participate in their stead.



*BRI Beneficiaries working together to repair fencing around a village garden, January 2014.*

### **III. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT**

#### **Sensitization of local government leaders and targeted communities**

CRS and Caritas conducted sensitization visits about the project in each village and commune in July. Prior to each village's public meeting, a sensitization meeting was held with governmental officials. Endorsement of the activities by the local government (including the prefect, sub-prefect, and village leaders) is critical for gaining community acceptance and ensuring government participation in activities. District leaders then formally requested the participation of all members of targeted villages in public meetings at a specified date, time and location.

The public meetings introduced the BRI approach and explained how project beneficiaries will be selected; project staff provided comprehensive information on Cash Transfers, Cash for Work activities, the small ruminant fair and trainings on improved agricultural production and post-harvest techniques and conducted specific household targeting focusing on criteria associated with Extremely Vulnerable, Vulnerable, Less Vulnerable and Non Vulnerable in each village. Use of this methodology ensures that the **800** most vulnerable targeted beneficiaries will be eligible to participate in the small ruminant fair and Cash for Work activities.

In order to identify the **800** most vulnerable and food insecure households, CRS and partner staff as well as local authorities and communities established the following criteria for beneficiary identification in July 2013:

- Permanent residence in the selected village
- Lost or sold livestock or other livelihood assets during the 2011-2012 food crisis
- Meet other extremely vulnerable criteria such as female headed households, disabled household members, and/or members with poor health
- Households with malnourished children
- Households with pregnant or lactating women

#### **Baseline Survey**

The CRS Mauritania Emergency Coordinator, MEAL officer, with the help of the regional MEAL technical advisor, developed a household questionnaire with 58 questions. They held a two day workshop, which included a pre-testing survey, in the Caritas Mauritania office from August 23– 24. All survey staff received training on the questionnaire so that participants had the same understanding of the questions. Data collectors also were fluent in the local languages of the communities. Temporary enumerators conducted the survey from August 25– 27 for the **150** questionnaires

## **Project Launch Workshop**

CRS and Caritas Mauritania conducted a project launch workshop in Bogue from August 25-27. The CRS Emergency Coordinator and MEAL program manager facilitated the workshop. Project staff prepared all monitoring and evaluation documents, discussed CRS and Caritas roles and responsibilities and continued to discuss beneficiary validation, which were then presented to local authorities in each department for approval.

## **Quarterly coordination meetings**

CRS and Caritas Mauritania held quarterly coordination meetings, in December, in March and in May with key staff to review quarterly results, reporting and review upcoming quarterly activities. These meetings provided the opportunity to make sure that Caritas understood which information and data would be needed, (i.e. the total number of permaculture or key hole sites, the number of livestock, and disaggregated data (by sex) from all trainings.).

Monthly meetings were held in each Rural Community to share and to discuss projects activities, accomplishments, challenges and possible solutions with community volunteers (*relais*), 2 per village. These meetings reinforce the clarity of relais roles and help them to organize their weekly meeting with beneficiaries. Project staff comes to one of these weekly meetings to sit and discuss with beneficiaries. This approach also ensured a sufficient level of visibility and continued support from local leaders and government authorities and helped for the major activities such as CFW and CT activities, or agriculture trainings.

## **Others surveys**

The CRS Mauritania Emergency Coordinator, MEAL officer, and Program Manager developed a household questionnaire to study the agriculture production for the upcoming year (2014). In November 2013, BRI surveyed individuals from **150** randomly selected households across **11** villages. The survey revealed that **79%** of respondents had a “bad” or “very bad” harvest compared to last year. **80%** of the total respondents attribute the production decline to late and inadequate rainfall during the 2013 rainy season.

BRI project staff used the same sampling methodology and household questionnaire that was used for the baseline survey for the mid-term evaluation. The geographical cluster sampling methodology was used to identify a target sample of **150** beneficiaries (**95%** Confidence Level and **8%** Error Range) and data collectors conducted the survey in **11** villages. The **11** villages were selected using an online number generator and the **150** total beneficiaries were selected randomly (identified by their unique beneficiary ID) using the random.org web site. Temporary enumerators conducted the survey from **January 31 to February 3, 2014**.

For the final evaluation, BRI project staff used the same sampling methodology and household questionnaire that was used for the baseline survey and the mid-term evaluation. Temporary enumerators conducted the survey from **May 4 to May 6, 2014**.

## **IV. LESSONS LEARNED**

*Delays in the initiation of project activities:* Due to the later than anticipated award signing date between CRS and USAID/OFDA, some difficulties arose in regards to the original proposed implementation timeline and the agriculture calendar. The project technically began in June 2013, but several CRS staff and local implementing partner staff were not fully recruited until September 2013. The majority of activities did not take place until October 2013 (with the exception of start-up activities such as targeting, baseline and coordination meetings)

As a consequence, BRI was not able to initiate certain activities, such as trainings on key agro-ecological techniques such as composting and half-moons, until later than initially planned. As a result, the outcome and benefits of these techniques will not be seen completely by the beneficiaries before the end of this one-year program. The new USAID/OFDA-funded integrated Brakna Recovery Initiative (iBRI) will allow CRS and USAID/OFDA to maximize the current investment through BRI by continuing to work with the same vulnerable communities.

*Water shortages:* Focus groups with beneficiaries coupled with observation from CRS and local partner staff highlighted inadequate or non-existent water sources and retention methods in most of the targeted villages. This had an impact on household and community vegetable production. Properly designed gray water management systems, such as the permaculture or key-hole garden were introduced on a pilot basis in the project villages. As the most effective way to learn a new technique and to change cultural practices in regards to water and food production is to see the methods in action, CRS and Caritas decided to create the maximum of number of demonstration sites possible to ensure the project's success, given the project's size (**30** for the permaculture and **nine** for the key-hole garden).

*Introduction of Half-moon technique in Mauritania:* The half-moon technique has proven to be one is highly effective in arid climates and thus widely used across the Sahel. Thanks to this technique learned in December 2013, BRI beneficiaries are now able to grow food all year long. The results of the half-moon gardens have proven so impressive that neighboring villages are now interested in learning how to create a half-moon garden. It appears that villagers will continue to plant half-moon gardens even without the support of the project. The complete results of the 2,400 half-moon gardens planted in April should be evident after the upcoming rainy season (July-August 2014). The activities of the 2,600 BRI beneficiaries will continue to be monitored during the newly funded iBRI follow-on project, which began in May 2014 and will continue until November 2015.



*A Caritas Mauritania staff member (left) observing a recently dug half-moon with a group of beneficiaries, January 2014*

*First trainers for the Master Farmers program:* The final refresher trainings in April 2014 served as an opportunity for project staff to begin recruiting the first trainers for the Master Farmers program, which will be developed during the implementation of iBRI. CRS has found that farmers are less receptive to being “lectured” to by outsiders and instead prefer to watch a fellow farmer share his or her experiences in a manner similar to the informal social networks in which they generally interact.

*Loss of small animals:* Upon conclusion of the November 2013 livestock fairs, more than **820** animals were purchased by the beneficiaries. Even if the veterinarian recorded the birth of **200** offspring, due to a large number of fatalities among both the newborns (**118/200**) and the adults (**119/820**), the total number of livestock is currently **783**. According to the veterinarian, the main causes of death are diseases such as Sheeppox, Rift Valley fever and pasteurellosis, which are common in the area. CRS will assure that efforts to prevent and control the spread of animal diseases are increased during iBRI by strengthening monitoring systems and providing more comprehensive animal care training, vaccines and other veterinary supplies to beneficiaries. iBRI will, along with the distribution of livestock, distribute sufficient animal feed and mineral and vitamin supplements.

## V. BRI SUCCESS STORY

The CRS Brakna Resilience Initiative helped thousands of people, including Mohamet Salem. Mohamet, a father of nine, is from the Darel Beyda village in the Brakna region Mauritania. Through the Brakna Recovery Initiative project he learned dry-season gardening and how to raise goats that so they can feed their families well into the future. People in this region are still feeling the effects of disastrous harvests back in the 2011-2012 growing season, which led to the worst food crisis the Sahel had seen in years. "Some families in the village only used to eat once a day," Mohamet recalls



"The cash that we receive can be used straight away for food, medical bills or for repaying debts," explained Mohamet. "But what stays with us forever are the techniques that we're taught. If you give someone knowledge, they can pass it down to their children and grandchildren. It stays with them." He added, "There are lots of good changes in the village. With the goats, we have something valuable, and the new and improved agricultural techniques we've learned will help the community have enough food in our homes for years to come."

Among the techniques that Mohamet and others learned are water-saving and higher-yielding gardening methods especially suited to dry climates. They also learned how to store grain to prevent spoilage and how to make natural compost to replace chemical fertilizers. "We're doing work, earning money — and others members of the village even come and help. Everyone is interested in helping their neighbors," Mohamet says. "When we work together, it brings a sense of solidarity in the community." Mohamet says he can see the results all around him.

## VI. FINANCIAL

Please see the SF-425 for final financial information.

## VII. IPTT

			Jul- Sept 2013	Oct- Dec 2013	Jan- Mar 2014	April- Jun 2014		
Strategic Objectives	Performance Indicator	Annual Objective	Actual Q1	Actual Q2	Actual Q3	Actual Q4	Cumulative Achieved	% of Target Achieved
<i>Sub-Sector: Livestock</i>	OFDA 1 : Number of animals benefiting from or affected by livestock activities	800	0	820	10	-47	783	98%
	OFDA 2 : Number of people benefiting from livestock activities, by sex	Men		2,324				
		Women		2,518				
		4,800	0	4,842	0	0	4,842	101%
	OFDA 3: Number of veterinary interventions (e.g. treatments, vaccinations, etc.)	800	0	820	0	0	820	102%
OFDA 4: Number of animals treated	800	0	820	0	0	820	102%	
	CRS 1 : Percentage of Household using at least 3 livestock techniques	50%	26%	0%	41%	61%	0.61	122%
	CRS 2 : Number of people benefiting from the Habanaye approach sensitization	800	0	800	0	0	800	100%
	CRS 3 : Number of households trained on livestock good management techniques	800	0	836	1537	2600	2600	325%
	CRS 4 : Number of households benefiting from one animal	800	0	800	0	0	800	100%
<i>Sub-Sector: Improving Agricultural Production/ Food Security</i>	OFDA 1: Projected increase in number of months of food self-sufficiency due to distributed seed systems/agricultural input for beneficiary households	1 month	0	0	27 days	38 days	0	127%
	OFDA 2: Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural input activities, by sex	Men			0		0	
		Women			3,573		3,573	
		4,800	0	0	3,573	0	3,573	74%
	CRS 1 : Percentage of household knowing at least 3 conservation agriculture techniques	50%	14%	0%	55%	78%	0.78	181%
CRS 2 : Percentage of household knowing at least 3 post harvest techniques	50%	15%	0%	33%	70%	0.70	157%	
<i>Sub-Sector: Livelihoods Restoration</i>	OFDA 1: Number of people assisted through livelihood restoration activities, by sex	Men		7,488	7,488	7,488		
		Women		8,112	8,112	8,112		
		15,600	0	15,600	15,600	15,600	0	100%
	OFDA 2: Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	75%	0%	0%	0%	61%	0	81%
OFDA 3: Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	286,800	0	209,900	124,500	0	334,400	117%	
<i>Sub-Sector: Temporary Employment</i>	OFDA 1: Number of people employed through CFW activities, by sex	Men			412	412		
		Women			388	388		
		800	0	0	800	800	0	100%

OFDA 2: Average total amount per person earned through CFW activities	<b>\$60/ Person</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>
OFDA 3: Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	<b>\$48,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>24,000</b>	<b>24,000</b>	<b>\$48,000</b>	<b>100%</b>
OFDA 4: Number of hectares reclaimed and protected for agro-pastoral use through CFW activities	<b>60</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25%</b>
OFDA 5: Number of households trained in the implementation of post-harvest storage and agro-ecological farming approaches	<b>800</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,588</b>	<b>1,537</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,588</b>	<b>199%</b>