Réseau de Lutte contre la Faim
RELUFA

Providing Hope and Resilience

Social Impact Report:

Fighting food insecurity in local communities in the Far North Region of Cameroon

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The following organisations have supported RELUFA's food security programme in the Sahel region of Cameroon and have therefore played a crucial role in helping us reach our goal.

GROWING HOPE GLOBALLY	Growing Hope Globally (GHG)
	Japanese Embassy in Cameroon
PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE	Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA)
PRESBYTERIAN HUNGER PROGRAM PC(USA)	Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP)
Umverteilen! Stiftung für eine, solidarische Welt	Umveitelen

Their passion and commitment to the cause is truly inspiring and we are deeply grateful for their generous support to RELUFA over the years.

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1. Background

The Far North region of Cameroon is the most populated and poorest region of the country, with food insecurity and hunger is a major concern for many decades. This situation is mainly due to the harsh climate, with low rainfall, rocky terrain in some areas, locust attacks on crops, etc. Poor harvests caused by these conditions worsen food insecurity as people in the region's villages rely solely on farming and livestock rearing for their subsistence. Generally, they only produce enough food to feed their families for eight months out of the year and during the lean period, hunger is widespread with many families struggling to afford barely one meal a day.

With support from the Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP) of the Presbyterian Church in (U.S.A), RELUFA launched the community grain bank initiative in 2006 to address the recurring problem of hunger in the affected villages. In a context worsened by land degradation, climate hazards, and limited access to agricultural inputs, promoting local production is a necessity. Consequently, after the successful experience with community grain banks, another initiative was conceived in 2021 to improve local agricultural production with support from Growing Hope Globally (GHG). This social impact report examines the milestones that have been made through these combined initiatives to improve local food security.

Faithful to its mission of tackling the systemic causes of hunger and poverty, RELUFA first worked with local communities to understand what kind of intervention would meet their food needs in a sustainable way. This was done mainly in the Mayo-Tsanaga and Diamaré divisions, where food insecurity challenges made many households vulnerable, with fewer meals and the use of precarious survival strategies to survive. These communities suggested a system that would make food available in the community at all times, given that during the lean season, most of them generally have to buy food in the market at very high prices or borrow from wealthy traders to repay three or four times the amount borrowed. But due to the widespread poverty in the region, it is difficult for most families to cope with the situation. The community grain bank creates a permanent rotating food stock within the community and allows food insecure families to borrow cereal during the lean season and repay during the harvest period. With this type of system, food is available at any time of the year in the villages so that people don't have to leave for other regions in search of food.

Over the past 20 years, more than 2.234 households and about 15,638 people across 53 villages have benefited from RELUFA's food security program. Hunger has therefore been significantly reduced in these villages, and the participating families have developed new ways to increase their income, improve their life quality and provide a better education for their children. We can say that the living conditions of around 100,000 beneficiaries have improved with the strengthening of local agricultural production, regular access to food, and the resilience in the face of food insecurity challenges.

2. Setting up the Community Grain Bank System

In the villages selected facing food insecurity, community grain banks have been established. This is useful especially during the lean season, which usually runs from June to September each year, when household food stocks run out before the new harvest. To start the program in any selected village, RELUFA provides the village's Common Initiative Group (GIC) with an initial stock of grain (millet, sorghum) bags, which is then lent to households during the lean season. After the next harvest, beneficiaries repay the borrowed grain with an interest in kind based a local measure ("daro") that each group determines. This usually ranges between 14 to 20 kg, depending on the village's decision. This mechanism helps gradually rebuild and increase the community stock while ensuring sustainable access to grain for the neediest families. This system reduces the need to resort to survival strategies, such as selling the family's goat or sheep just to buy food, daily work in other people's farms or seasonal migration from the villages to other towns, in order to find work and earn money to purchase food.

The community grain bank system has had the following impact in the beneficiary villages:

Strengthened food security

Village grain banks are now permanent grain reserves in the villages, with, RELUFA providing the interested villages, organized as a Common Initiative Group (CIG), with a quantity of grain (45 to 60 bags). The grain banks are managed by representatives designated by the villagers themselves. The grains are stored and kept safe, in order to be later accessed by food deprived families of the community granary during the lean period, when food becomes scarce and expensive on the local market.

RELUFA has so far set up 53 community granaries in the different villages of the Mayo-Tsanaga and Diamaré divisions of the Far North region. So far 2,234 households have directly benefited, with about 15,638 direct beneficiaries, receiving more than total of 57.41 tons of cereal.

Cereals stored in the storage shed

Wabi Gilda, Boudoum Fedem Village @relufa 2024

"My name is Wabi Gilda, from the GIC Boudoum Fédem. Before, I suffered a lot with my family during the lean period. Thanks to RELUFA, we no longer suffer during the lean period because food is available in the village that we can borrow. Today, I feel on top of the mountain. I have my petti sales activities that generates a bit of money for my family's needs. At first, I used it to buy millet for family meals. But today, that money is used to send my children to school and this year, all my children, including those of other members of our Common Initiative Group, are enrolled in school and have successfully completed the school year."

Reduction in post-harvest losses

Many communities in the Far North Region of Cameroon face poor housing and storage conditions. Limited space for food storage contributes to post-harvest losses, poor knowledge of storage techniques, and the high cost of treatment products. These significant losses reduce the availability of cereals for household consumption. To address this, the project supported the construction of durable storage facilities for common initiative groups (GICs) in various villages.

Storage shed built

As part of the food security program, more than 48 durable storage facilities have been built in different villages to date. These communities now have sustainable storage infrastructure, strengthening their capacity to preserve cereals. According to testimonies, these communities faced several difficulties related to poor cereal storage, notably attacks by weevils, vulnerability due to climate hazards with rains flooding the granaries, the presence of pests, amongst other things. This intervention allowed for longer storage of stocks, a significant reduction in post-harvest losses, and better grain management, thus helping to improve household food security.

Improving management and monitoring by communities

Community management committees of grain banks play a key role in implementing and monitoring project activities and enabling community ownership. The composition of the management team is made up of the president, who is always locally called the Delegate, who is assisted by a vice-delegate. Then there is the secretary who keeps the records and a treasurer who keeps the finances, along with a storekeeper who supervises the cereal stock. This team coordinate the actions of the common initiative group at the local level and encourage beneficiary involvement. They help identify needs, track activities, and manage resources, while also raising community awareness about best practices. Their commitment strengthens transparency, social cohesion, and the sustainability of the actions carried out. Community monitoring committees of grain banks ensure oversight and support for project activities, making sure that implementation is proper and that financial and material resources are used transparently. They help identify problems and track interventions, boosting community ownership and the sustainability of the results. A manual for the monitoring committees was developed and distributed. Likewise, a brochure was created on the use of local seeds and was distributed in the communities.

Introduction of a local Complaint Mechanism

An accessible and transparent complaints mechanism was also established, allowing beneficiaries to express their concerns, suggestions, and/or complaints in order to find solutions. This system relies on channels suited to the local context, including community focal points and management committees. With this mechanism, the local facilitator now becomes the contact point between granary members who file a complaint and the members of the management board.

Complaints are collected, recorded, and handled confidentially, with regular follow-ups to ensure quick and appropriate responses. In the past, communities faced several issues within the community granary, including poor stock management and non-reimbursements by some influential group members. Many of these earlier complaints were unreported due to fear of retaliation by these powerful community members. The establishment of the complaint mechanism has helped to strengthen accountability.

Tchinami Carine, membre du GIC de Zongoya

"My name is Tchinami Carine, a member of the Zongoya common initiative group. I have been a member since its creation, but I noticed that with the previous board, decisions were made without consulting other group members. The delegate would open the store alone, without the approval of the storekeeper or the other members. With the possibility to complain or express our concerns, we have now set up a new board to change the old one that was not performing well. At each general meeting, we convene all members for decision-making, and we have noticed a big change compared to the old board, especially with the construction of this new store. We thank you and the RELUFA team; may God help you continue your work."

To strengthen the management and sustainability of community granaries, a monitoring and management manual for the granaries has been developed. This document outlines the operating procedures, the roles and responsibilities of the different actors, as well as the monitoring tools. It also includes a complaints mechanism that allows members to report any difficulties they encounter confidentially and ensures a transparent and effective handling of the concerns raised. So far, about ten complaints have been received, and solutions have been reflected and provided to the better functioning of the community grain banks.

Photo 3 : Grain banks and monitoring and management manual © RELUFA

3. Strengthening Local Agricultural Production

Development of resilient local seed systems

Déli Bouba, délégué du GIC Gourringuel ©RELUFA 2026

My name is Déli Bouba, representative of the Gourringuel Common Initiative Group. Last year, RELUFA provided us with 14 kg of maize seeds and an amount of 420,000 F. At harvest time, we obtained 15 sacks of 120 kg of maize which we sold, earning us a profit of 155,000 CFAF. With this income, we bought 10 sacks of 120 kg of maize to reinforce the stock in our store; we shared a portion with community members and kept the rest for the next season. This year, thanks to RELUFA's support, we again started a seed field and obtained 25 sacks of 120 kg of seeds.

We began selling them in April 2026 and the rest remains in our store for sale. Thanks to the sales this year, we have already gathered an amount of 500,000 F. This year, we have decided to become independent seed producers and have already made our declaration to the regional delegation of Agriculture for the Far North Region. We want to become self-sufficient and we always need the support of the agriculture engineer to achieve good results. We thank RELUFA because this year, we just received an invitation from the regional delegate for agriculture for the launch of the 2025-2026 agricultural campaign. We are very happy because we will go there to present our work and our group, and maybe we will receive a bonus. I thank RELUFA for their support.

The establishment of seed fields has also helped strengthen local seed production networks. For example, in order to support the victims of a fire that occurred in the Kolofata internally displaced peoples camp on February 7, 2026, RELUFA through the local facilitator was able to acquire over 500 kg of seeds directly from the Common Initiative Group in Ouro Domayo village, a beneficiary of the community seed fields initiative. These seeds were then redistributed to 100 affected households affected by the fire incident so they can cultivate since all their belongings and food were consumed by the fire. The ability of local communities to produce quality seeds that meet local needs has created an economic opportunity which marks a significant transformation in villages that previously faced food insecurity and very poor.

Boosting local productivity through bio-inputs

Promoting bio-inputs, like compost and biopesticides, has helped sustainably improve soil fertility and crop yields while reducing reliance on chemical inputs. Through hands-on training, participants gained skills in producing and using bio-inputs from local resources. Before this training, agriculture in these communities relied on chemical products for those who could afford them, but now they are expensive and scarce. Today, thanks to the training, beneficiaries who once depended on chemicals find these biological inputs more suitable and cost-effective. 138 people have been trained, who in turn trained about 1,506 other people in the villages, during the feedback sessions. Those who have put these techniques into practice have noticed improved yields in terms of both quality and quantity; the corn cobs are more uniform, as are the millet stalks. Some cotton farmers are now even using these inputs for their crops instead of chemical fertilizers.

This approach has encouraged the adoption of agroecological practices, contributing to a significant improvement in soil fertility. It has also helped reduce production costs related to the use of chemical inputs, while strengthening the technical skills of the producers. Additionally, it has improved the resilience of farming systems to climate variability and promoted environmentally friendly practices.

Maize grown using compost

Provision of farming equipments

As part of the project, 18 irrigation devices were also distributed to make access to water easier for Common Initiative Groups located near riverbeds. 24 groups were equipped with rickshaws, and 194 beneficiaries received boots, helping to better protect them in the field from snakes and harmful plants.

This support significantly improved the working conditions of the beneficiaries and made it easier to transport agricultural inputs, thus optimizing the implementation of activities and household productivity.

Beyond improving agricultural production, the project also had positive effects on the beneficiary households' social and family lives.

Seed field

Strengthening family cohesion

As explained earlier, some men usually left the village and their families, in order to move to other towns to look for work and money to buy food for their families. As a result, the women or the wives, remained alone with the children to work on the farms. Children would then abandon school to help their mothers. They would also fetch firewood to sell so they could get money to buy food for the family. All of these departures weakened family stability and cohesion exposing children to all forms of new risks. The introduction of community grain banks and contribution to improve local agricultural production now allows children to go to school as there are rotating food stocks in the villages along with improved local food production. Women and their husbands now work in their own fields and can finally have 2 to 3 meals a day, which further strengthens family cohesion and balance.

4. Summarizing the Change

RELUFA's interventions in villages in the Far North region over the past 20 years-creating community grain banks, building storage facilities, and rehabilitating others has brought positive transformation in many villages and reduced food insecurity. The establishment of 15 seed fields, strengthened skills on compost and bio-pesticide production techniques of about 138 direct beneficiaries along with nearly 1,506 indirect beneficiaries, and the provision farming and irrigation equipment to several villages are major milestones. Thanks to these various interventions, the program has contributed to the sustainable improvement of local agricultural production, strengthened the food security of beneficiary communities, and reduced food insecurity vulnerability. Beneficiaries have thus improved their access to grains while adopting more sustainable farming practices, thereby also enhancing their resilience during the lean periods. The main changes seen at the end of the project are summarized in the table below.

Before	After
Limited access to cereals	Regular access to cereals through community grain banks
Lack of storage facilities and high post-harvest losses	Improved storage facilities and methods and reduced post-harvest losses
Low productivity	High productivity with improved farming techniques
A lack of transparency in grain banks management	Improved grain bank management through functional complaint mechanism
Dependency on costly chemical fertilizer	Accessiblity to bio-inputs

The beneficiaries' testimonies confirm the positive impact of the project on their farming practices and food security. Using bio-inputs, such as compost and biopesticides, has significantly improved crop yields and protected the fields from pests. Additionally, access to grain banks has helped households get through the lean season without difficulty, thus contributing to strengthening their resilience and food self-sufficiency.

5. Conclusion and perspectives for the future

Conclusion

By introducing community grain banks and promoting improved local food production in the Far North Region of Cameroon over the years, we can proudly say that the program has resulted in increased food security and community resilience, with tangible results at both the household and community levels in the villages concerned. Hunger in most households especially during the lean season has been reduced while the precarious survival strategies that were adopted by many households have decreased. Families have been able to work on their own farms while allowing children to regularly attend school. Grain stock management , along with improved participation from members of different groups, has contributed to better organization of stocks and strengthened seed autonomy. This has led to observed increases in agricultural yields and sustainable strengthening of community autonomy in terms of seeds and food security.

Perspectives

Despite the successes, we cannot affirm that food insecurity is conquered in the entire Sahel Region of Cameroon since we worked in 2 out of 6 divisions in the region the selected villages in Mayo Tsanaga and Diamare Divisions. Even in the two divisions, not all the villages in need have been covered making it still relevant for expansion if we want to significantly eradicate food insecurity according to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Number 1. Actively listening to the communities involved in the program has helped to envision the next steps with several perspectives for this program under development. The main ideas revolve around:

- **Conducting similar interventions in villages that have not benefited,** while also extending to other food insecure divisions in the Region. This would include expanding the project to other villages not yet covered and divisions in the Far North Region, particularly in Mayo-Sava and Mayo-Kani, which face similar problems as in Mayo Tsanaga and Diamaré, for security reasons, only safe areas could be targeted. Kolofata, for example, cannot be included given the ongoing unrest in the area.
- **Establishing a second phase of the program to support income generating activities,** such as onion farming in areas where irrigation is possible, especially near riverbeds. This could further transform the lives of these vulnerable populations. The savings from these activities could allow beneficiaries to strengthen their grain stocks, ensure seed self-sufficiency, and acquire the necessary faming equipment, such as grinding mills, boots, and irrigation tools to improve and sustain their livelihoods.

- **Ensuring greater involvement of state structures, especially the departmental agriculture delegations, etc.** In the long term, RELUFA's goal remains to connect communities with state services, in order to share best practices observed in communities that could further benefit from various support. Ideally in the long term, support for communities should fall within the state's responsibilities given the resources the state can generate.
- **Continue working on local participation and local community democracy** and handling conflicts through the complaint mechanism. The results from this program confirm the relevance of scaling up and reinforcing RELUFA's interventions.

We want to express our deep gratitude to all our partners who supported us during this phase of the program. Without their support and renewed trust, these positive impacts would not have been possible.

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