

# Gender, an overlooked opportunity for sustainable food security

A photograph showing a group of people, including women and children, herding a large group of goats in a dry, open landscape. The women are wearing colorful headscarves and traditional clothing. The goats are scattered across the foreground and middle ground. The background features sparse trees and a clear sky.

Workshop Gender & Food Security  
Introduction by Marie Monimart

**Gender roles are changing...  
against tenacious clichés**

**Dusting some myths...**



# **Myth 1 : Men ensure family food security all the year round**

- Less and less the fact, especially in the more vulnerable families – also the more numerous
- In case of bad years, women must ensure up to 8 months food for the family ;family granaries are locked to spare food for reproduction of manpower during the farming season (4 months)
- Valid men (15-45) leave the village for seasonal migration (national or crossborder) ;
- Women have to take care of the remaining family

## **Myth 2 : Men are the sole or first providers of staple food**

- Less and less the fact, even in ethnic groups whose women used not to farm ; this is also true for pastoral livelihoods
- Women are led to farm more and more millet, maize, sorghum in their personal plots, for family consumption
- These crops are detrimental to specific women's agricultural production (diversity)

## **Myth 3 : women's production is secondary**

- It has become ordinary to have recourse to the women's granaries : as a result, women are losing control over their production (upstream and downstream)
- Varieties cultivated by women had a high added nutritive value : diversity of family diet, including vegetal proteins, vitamins, condiments ...
- They were benefit opportunities either through sale or processing : accumulation of assets for the future generations, insurance versus decapitalisation of productive assets in case of crisis

## **Myth 4 : Women's production is frivolous just "for their little needs"**

- The "little needs" were supposed to be addressed by husbands : this is less and less the case
- The frivolity of "the little needs" is questionable : what about investment in social capital (ceremonies); clothing, cross- generational expenses such as school fees, health, children's wedding, and purchase of food
- ...or in production factors such as man power, agricultural inputs, tools, land, cattle ...
- If any, the small benefits earned are invested in "tontines" (traditional savings groups), or emergency loans
- They play the crucial role of family life insurance and "retirement" insurance for women

## **Myth 5 : Men manage the family granaries, women manage their own granaries**

- Less and less the fact ; a new hierarchy is ruling the management of food stocks at farm level : in case of shortage, women's granaries are used in first place.
- In second place, there is recourse to cereal banks or warrantage (if any available) which protect the family granary
- Purchase of cereals are also financed by women as a "loan" to the husband – voluntary or forced – but never reimbursed : the **invisible** contribution of women to family food security is growing





## Myth 6 : Women “get by”

### how do they manage during 4, 6, 8 months ?

- Managing shortage : process daily millet , sell it and feed the family with the benefit, preserving the stock as long as possible...
- Reduce the shares and/or the number of meals : cf. rates of chronic child malnutrition in Niger : 51%
- Mobilise the social capital kept alive all the year round through “the little needs” - the safety nets!.
- Recourse to the non ligneous products of the commons (if any left or available) : fruit, leaves, grains..
- Best use of small ruminants : fattening, sales, milk ...
- IGA, most of them based on the processing of their agricultural or livestock production
- Employment... under worst conditions..

# Exacerbated problems : access to land and constraints to mobility

- Paradox: the more is required from women, the less is facilitated in terms of access to land and NR: no transfer of resources
- Growing control of female mobility , restricted access to more promising exchange places (markets)
- Trend towards de-feminization of agriculture and of some IGA (doughnuts) : landless / jobless men tend to take the control of these activities while secluding women

## Big challenges : resistance of discriminating social norms, high demographic growth

- The ancient social norms ruling the division of labour and roles resist change – though they are more and more perceived as inadequate to cope with the ongoing changes
- Growing weight of care chores vs productive activities : raise of fecundity index per woman in Niger up to 7.6 children in national average (more in rural) (census 2011)
- Space for productive activities is shrinking for poor rural vs growing needs

# Promising changes :

## NICT, rights, behaviour

- Women have more and more access to cell phones and want to control them : contacts, sms/literacy , information on market prices , money transfers : a true social revolution
- They buy personal radio sets with memory cards
- They use more family planning , with or without the husbands' authorization
- They claim their rights to land (heritage) , buy fields, collectively or individually
- Female groups are organizing, networking, defending women's rights

**Food Security**  
**or**  
**Food Sovereignty ??**

**Targeting production**  
**or**  
**Targeting decision ?**

## **Food security :**

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life

## **Food Sovereignty (Declaration of Nyeleni)**

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food.

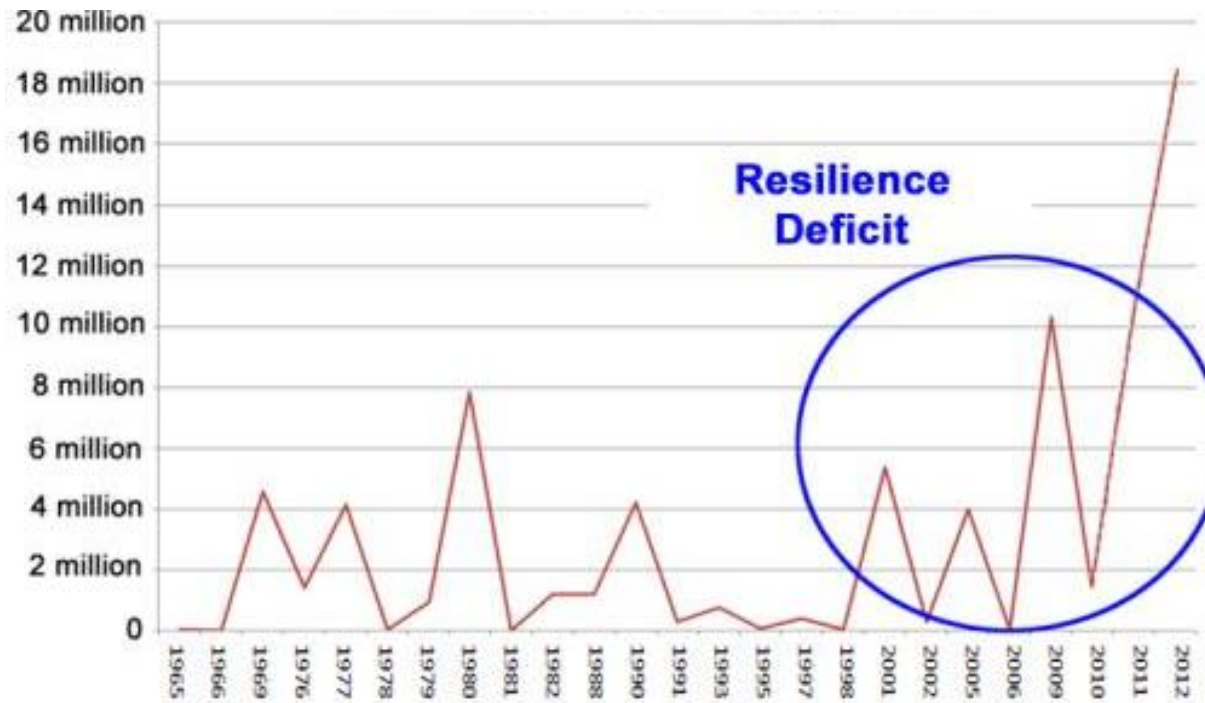
Food sovereignty **implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women,** peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.

At the Forum for Food Sovereignty in [Sélingué, Mali](#), 27 February 2007, about 500 delegates from more than 80 countries adopted the "Declaration of [Nyéléni](#)",<sup>[2]</sup> which says in part:

- Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.

# The context of Sahel has changed

## Number of persons affected by food crises in 6 Sahel countries 1965 - 2011



The driver of the Sahel crises is no longer a food shortage caused by climate change only, but by a **deficit of resilience (Peter Gubbels)**



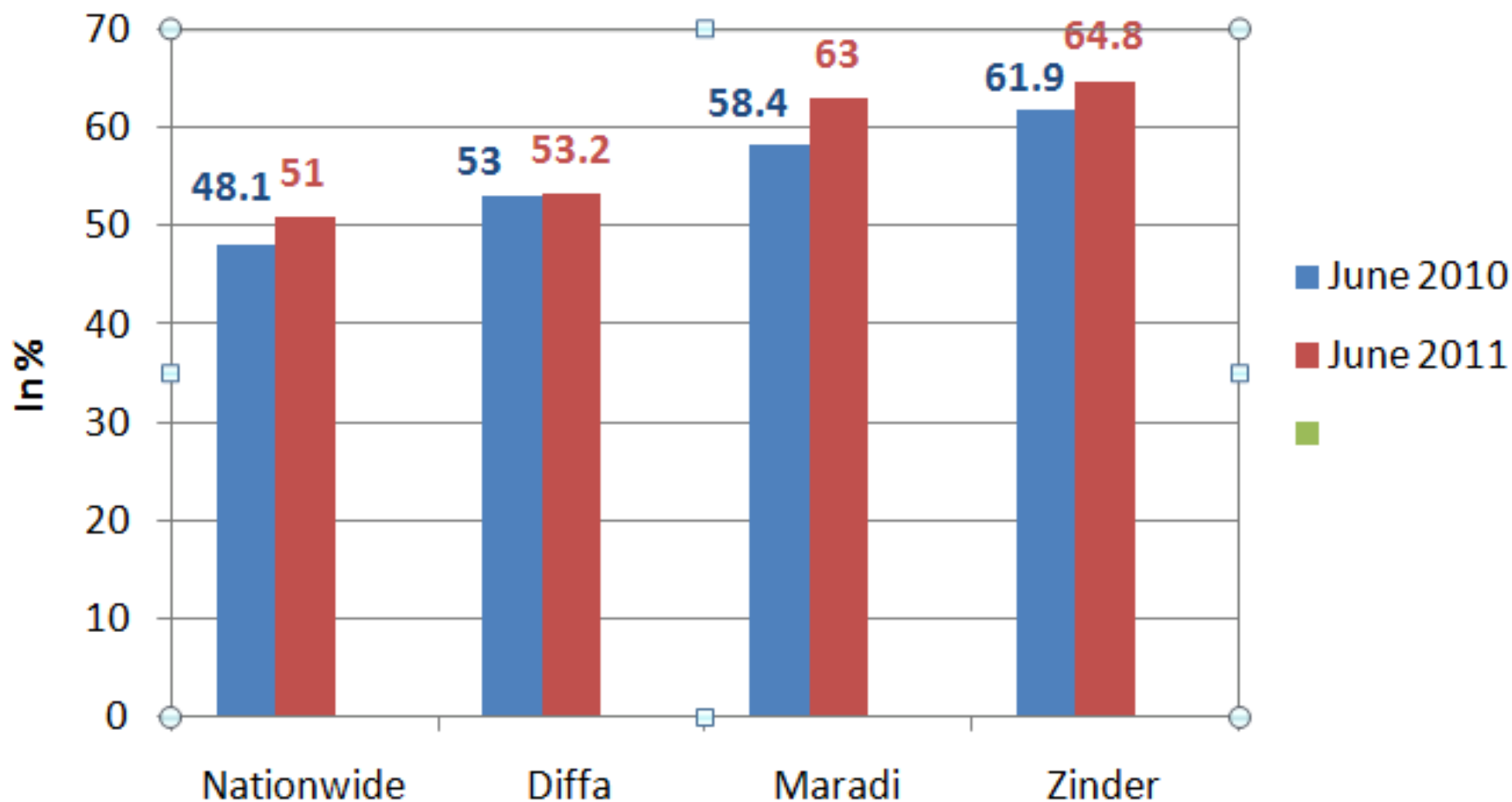
# Food, or nutrition ?

The late food crises in the Sahel show that the crucial issue is not the availability of grain, but the power to access grain

The following graph shows that the Niger regions which faced the worst child malnutrition rates were the “millet granaries” of the country : let us look for the error or have a gender look !

# Chronic malnutrition in Niger

Chronic malnutrition prevalence



But Nutrition **is not** adequately addressed in agricultural programmes

# Farm production : who decides what ?

**The farm chief:** land management, speculations, trees, food (cereals) taxes, debts, sales/purchase, investments, mechanization, male migration...

**Women farmers:** personal fields (if any) : speculations, consumption, transformation, sales, **but:**

- Women's fields are small, poor, precarious, marginal : this does not help investment for intensification
- Restricted rights : trees, manure, mechanization
- Growing loss of control over production
- Exclusion from land: decision making reduced to nearly nothing for family food and nutrition



## **Strategies : invisibly aiming at transforming gender relations, accessing decision**

- Securing land tenure : collectively or individually (cf IFETE, Zéguesso, the film...
- Organisation : female groups more and more professional and/or involved in advocacy and action for claiming women's rights
- Progressive investment of the local public arena and men-controlled decision making institutions : COFO, mixed committees, councils..

## **IFETE (2010-2014)**

### **significant evolutions in women's access to land**

- 4% women inherited land before the project
- 8% women inherit land 2 years later
- Land Commissions (COFO) : female representation is more than the usual 10% and rises to 20 to 40% : the critical mass for decision
- More than 3300 women part of MMD groups project partners are informed of their rights and have claimed and secured their land rights

## Significant changes

- Women know their rights and the ways to claim their land rights
- They claim them (through justice) in case of necessity
- They buy land and get the title
- They farm these lands both traditionally and with planting of trees with high nutritional value (moringa)
- Women were also given collective fields from the customary chiefs or council.
- Women can implement agro-forestry on their collective fields : they introduce or re-introduce high valued species, disappeared or disappearing

# Challenge: Harnessing Agriculture for Resilience

Current agricultural policies and programs in the Sahel often do

- not have **long-term resilience and sustainability** as explicit objectives, only “increased productivity”
- not identify and overcome barriers for women farmers caused by gender inequality in access to land, credit, extension support
- not explicitly aim to improve nutrition, or assess outcomes using nutrition –relevant indicators
- not integrate nutrition education with agricultural extension





# Challenge: Improved Support for pastoralism

## Challenges faced by Pastoralists and their way of life:

Efforts to “modernise” land tenure, privatize pasture land and establish ranches

Programs aimed at **settling pastoralists** which undermined traditional systems for managing water, pasture and conflict

Constraints to Mobility (Security Cross Border)

## Opportunities

- Pastoral codes protecting rights and livelihoods (Niger, Mali)
- well planned systems for pastoral wells to enable mobility
- use of satellite images of pasture and water for EWS (Mali)

# Innovation !

- Family farming , family pastoralism : family consists of men and women, youth and children, not only a male family head : is this reminder an innovation ?
- Modernising family farming and livestock is crucial : this is women's as much as men's concern.
- Cell phones : women want to master it through literacy : a highway to fill a huge gap
- ... Dare !

Thanks for attention  
Karima is calling...

