



# IMPACT ANALYSIS

## Learning and policy brief

Enhancing Resilience and Well-Being: Insights from the  
“Scaling-Up Assistance in Hard-to-Reach Areas, Phase II”  
(SAHaRA II) Humanitarian Project in Borno State, Nigeria

July 2024 - Needs assessments and evaluation implemented by movimantar GmbH - Project Management & Data Science (<https://movimantar.eu>). For questions, comments, and requests to access the full report, please e-mail us at [contact@movimantar.eu](mailto:contact@movimantar.eu).

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# INTRODUCTION

## About this brief

This learning paper synthesises the key findings, lessons learnt, and best practices from the SAHaRA project, focusing on both quantitative impact analysis and qualitative evaluation. The “Scaling-Up Assistance in Hard-to-Reach Areas” (SAHaRA) project aimed to enhance humanitarian support in Borno state, Nigeria. Funded by the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the project was a collaborative effort led by Caritas Germany in partnership with the Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (Caritas Nigeria), the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) Maiduguri, and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD).

The impact analysis is based on four needs assessments conducted from January 2021 to December 2023. These assessments provided quantitative data on the project’s outcomes. Complementing this, an independent evaluation conducted by movimantar in April/May 2024 involved document reviews, key-informant interviews, and an online survey to provide a qualitative perspective on the project’s implementation and impact.

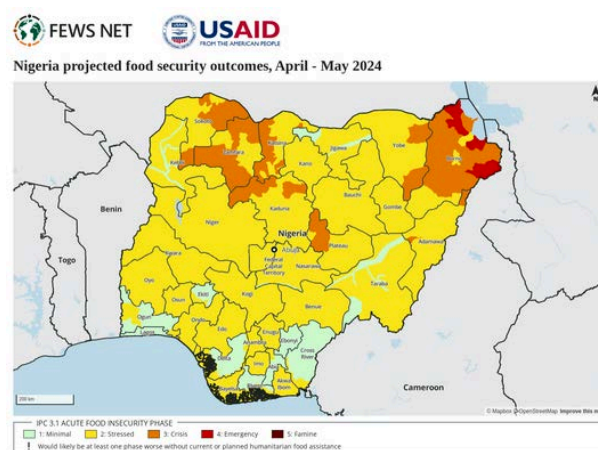
This learning paper compiles insights from the impact analysis and evaluation, providing a comprehensive overview of the SAHaRA project’s achievements and challenges. It highlights lessons learnt during implementation to enhance future humanitarian efforts.

## Context and importance of the problem

The humanitarian crisis in North-East Nigeria remains one of the world’s most severe, now in its fourteenth year. Nigeria is grappling with severe humanitarian issues, including displacement from violence, high malnutrition, food insecurity, and inadequate services and protection. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in 2024 that despite a reduction in the overall number of people in need, over 7.9 million individuals in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY) states still face severe deprivation and protection concerns, worsened by insecurity, climate change, disease, and economic instability, disproportionately affecting children and women, who make up 83% of those in need.

Conflict in the northeast, particularly in Borno state, has severely disrupted agricultural activities, the primary livelihood for many in the region. People venturing beyond protected community boundaries risk exposure to violence, including kidnapping, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced recruitment by non-state armed groups.

Economically, Nigeria struggles with a devaluing Naira and worsening macroeconomic conditions. The removal of fuel subsidies has spiked fuel costs, which has led to higher transportation costs and unusually high prices for goods. This crisis is seriously reducing people’s ability to buy things, leading to more crime, making it harder for people to access food, and worsening food shortages ([FEWS NET, 2024](#)).



Source: FEWS NET.

The BAY states confront multiple crises. In July 2024, the International Rescue Committee Foundation (IRCF) reported a high Global Acute Malnutrition rate of 19.9%, with the number of severely malnourished children increasing by 24% from May to June 2024. This nutritional crisis reflects broader food insecurity worsened by conflict-induced displacement. As of December 2023, over 1.19 million people have been displaced in the Northwest and North Central states due to ongoing banditry and communal conflicts ([UNHCR, 2023](#)).

Borno state has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children in Nigeria, with nearly 75%, or just over 1.4 million children, not attending school ([UNICEF, 2019](#)). Health concerns include inadequate disease surveillance coordination and limited access to essential services such as clean water and sanitation facilities, especially for internally displaced persons (IDPs). This displacement further intensifies food insecurity, as displaced individuals face severe food and nutrition insecurity. The April 2024 outlook from the FEWS NET (Famine Early Warning Systems Network) indicates ongoing conflict and economic decline in Nigeria, especially in the northeast. In Borno state, conflicts have caused major displacement and limited access to farmlands and fishing zones. Areas such as Abadam, Guzamala, Bama, and Marte LGAs face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) conditions due to severely restricted access to markets and services.



## The project

SAHaRA II targeted internally displaced persons, returnees, and host community members in remote and marginalised locations. The project focused on improving food security, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, and protection against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Key interventions included unconditional cash transfers to strengthen food security, hygiene campaigns, facility repairs, new infrastructure construction to enhance WASH standards, and awareness campaigns to safeguard against SGBV.

## Impact analysis: Objective and methods

The evaluation employed a robust mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected through household surveys and group interviews at four key points: January 2021, December 2021/January 2022, December 2022/January 2023, and December 2023. This encompassed 5,421 households, split into treatment (receiving project support) and control (not receiving support) groups.

5,421 surveyed households



39 assessed villages



30 key-informant interviews (evaluation)



8 focus-group discussions (evaluation)



This comprehensive dataset formed the basis of the impact analysis, which was supplemented by qualitative data gathered from 19 sites (villages). The qualitative phase included 30 face-to-face and remote key-informant interviews, 8 focus-group discussions, and 12 observational surveys, conducted between 24 April and 15 May 2024. Data collection utilised the UN OCHA KoboToolbox system, available in both English and Hausa.



Quantitative data focused on households that either received project support (treatment group) or did not (control group), facilitating direct comparison. Advanced statistical techniques, including Difference-in-Differences and Propensity Score Matching, were employed to accurately measure the project's impact.

Data sources included four needs assessments conducted between 2021 and 2023, providing a solid foundation for evaluating the project's impact on food security, WASH, and household demographics. Data preparation involved merging datasets, standardising village names, addressing missing data, and converting variables into suitable formats for analysis. Key metrics such as the Coping Strategies Index and Food Consumption Score were calculated to assess food security and coping mechanisms.

## Analytical approach

The analytical approach comprised:

- Exploratory Data Analysis:** Initial exploration to understand data distributions, relationships, and potential issues.
- Data transformation:** Variables were transformed for machine learning analysis using methods such as one-hot encoding.
- Random Forest Models:** Used for classification and regression to identify key predictors.
- Difference-in-Differences analysis:** Estimated the causal effect of the project by comparing changes over time between treatment and control groups.
- Propensity Score Matching:** Addressed potential selection bias by matching treatment and control households based on identified predictors, creating a balanced dataset for comparison.

This analytical framework was designed to deliver reliable insights into the project's impact on target populations. Data were processed and analysed using RMarkdown to ensure robust and reproducible results. Anonymised data and the complete codebase are publicly accessible for review and sharing at:

<https://github.com/movimentar>





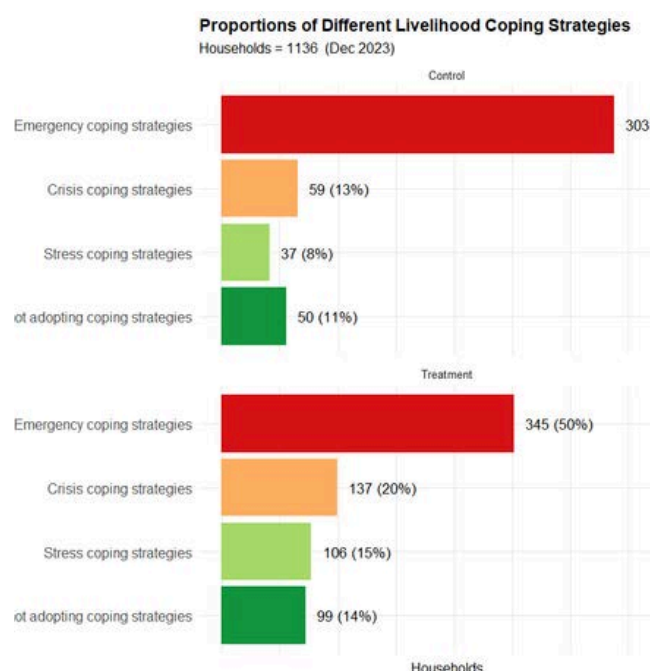
# KEY FINDINGS

The SAHaRA project has driven significant positive change across multiple dimensions of community well-being, with notable results evident at both the village and household levels. Evidence gathered from both village-level impact assessments and detailed household-level surveys, alongside insights from beneficiaries and stakeholders, paints a comprehensive picture of the project's effectiveness across various sectors. The full impact analysis report is available at:

<https://movimentar.co/echo-sahara-impact-analysis-2024/>

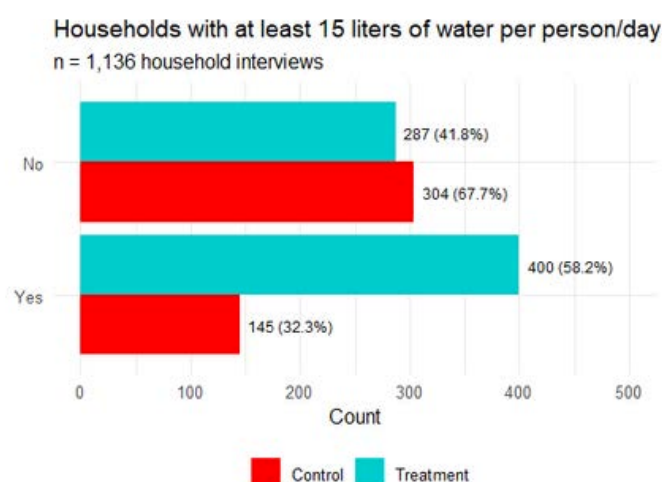
## Village-level impact:

- **Reduced vulnerability:** The project successfully mitigated vulnerability across participating villages, with a statistically significant reduction in the composite vulnerability score. Villages involved from the project's outset (Year 1 to 3) experienced a remarkable 28% decrease in vulnerability compared to those without intervention.
- **Improved food security and coping mechanisms:** Participating villages reported significant improvements in food consumption, with a 29% decrease in households facing inadequate food consumption. Additionally, a notable reduction in the Coping Strategies Index indicated enhanced resilience and reduced reliance on negative coping mechanisms.
- **Enhanced protection and WASH:** The project fostered a more secure environment in targeted communities, with a significant positive shift in safety feelings. Moreover, interventions led to substantial improvements in water access, with a 41% increase in households reporting adequate water supply in villages participating from Year 1 to 3.



*"The project really did excellently, because the main problems we were facing were lack of food and water. So, they brought cash transfers for food, they rehabilitated the water facility, and they constructed a sanitation facility to reduce the risk of open defecation. They also distributed laundry soap, and environmental cleaning equipment."*

(Ibrahim, farmer based in Ngamdu Ward, Kaga)



## Household-level impact:

- **Enhanced food security and stability:** Beneficiary households showed marked improvements in food security, with a statistically significant increase in the average **Food Consumption Score (FCS)** compared to the control group. The project's intervention also led to greater stability in food consumption patterns, as evidenced by reduced variance in FCS over time.
- **Positive shift in coping strategies:** The project successfully facilitated a transition away from severe coping strategies, with a notable decrease in the proportion of households resorting to emergency coping mechanisms from 67% in the control group to 50% in the treatment group.
- **Increased access to water:** A substantial proportion (58%) of beneficiary households reported having access to at least 15 litres of water per person per day, compared to only 32% in the control group, underscoring the project's positive impact on water accessibility.
- **Strengthened protection:** The project's interventions led to a significant improvement in safety feelings among beneficiaries, particularly during the first to third years of implementation.



## Consortium arrangement: A catalyst for success

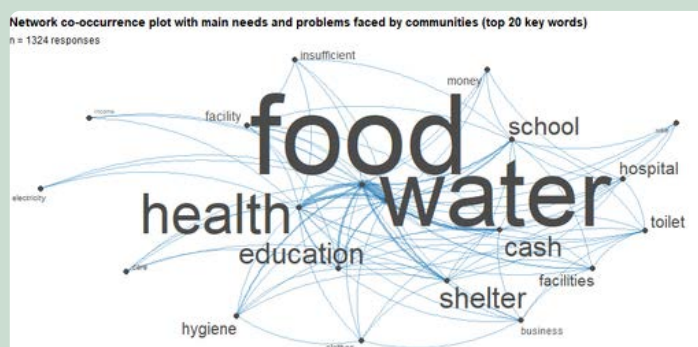
The SAHaRA project has employed an innovative consortium model. The SAHaRA consortium, composed of Caritas Germany, Caritas Nigeria, JDPC Maiduguri, and CAFOD, prioritised localisation and effective coordination. The consortium model's effectiveness is evidenced by the continuous funding secured since 2021, highlighting its efficiency and the positive outcomes achieved through this approach.

- **Localisation:** Unlike conventional consortiums, where international partners often dominate, the SAHaRA consortium has placed a substantial emphasis on national and sub-national partners, with more than 70% of the funding directly allocated to them. JDPC, the sub-national partner, contributed over 60% of the staffing, reflecting the localisation agenda and promoting sustainability and local ownership.
- **Role of international partners:** The roles of the international partners were primarily focused on coordination, quality assurance, high-level engagements, and control, which is a significant departure from the traditional setup where international NGOs often lead project implementation.
- **Centralised staffing approach:** Key staff from each partner work full-time from a central office at the epicentre of the conflict area, facilitating better access to remote locations, unification of standards, and improved coordination.
- **Enhanced coordination and project control:** This centralised approach enabled the consortium to streamline coordination and project controls, making the implementation process more efficient and cohesive.



## Consortium learning framework and culture

- **Multifaceted learning approach:** The consortium adopted a comprehensive learning framework, including regular training, workshops, and peer-to-peer learning, to build capacities among staff and community members.
- **Collaborative problem-solving:** Challenges were viewed as learning opportunities, with the consortium actively seeking feedback and refining approaches through collaborative dialogue and community engagement. For example, initial challenges in beneficiary selection were overcome through refined processes and increased community engagement.
- **Knowledge-management practices:** The use of digital tools and a robust MEAL framework facilitated real-time data collection, analysis, and dissemination of lessons learnt, enabling continuous improvement and informed decision-making. The MEAL system received positive ratings from 51% of respondents, who considered it 'very good'.



## Collaborative learning, monitoring & evaluation

- **Partnerships and networks:** The consortium actively fostered collaborative learning with external partners, exchanging knowledge and experiences to refine strategies and strengthen overall project implementation.
- **Monitoring & evaluation for learning:** The MEAL framework provided vital feedback and insights, allowing for monitoring of progress, identification of challenges, and adaptation of interventions to enhance project outcomes. The project team's active involvement in the data collection and reporting further shows their commitment to evidence-based decision-making.

## Applied learning and future directions

- **Enhanced programme outcomes:** Lessons learnt from previous experiences were actively integrated into project design and implementation, leading to improved outcomes and increased effectiveness. For instance, the shift from in-kind food distribution to cash transfers empowered beneficiaries and fostered greater self-reliance.
- **Commitment to continuous improvement:** The consortium's emphasis on learning, adaptation, and knowledge-sharing demonstrates a dedication to ongoing refinement and innovation in future interventions. The positive feedback on the project's exit strategy, with 59% rating it as 'very good', further reinforces this commitment to sustainability.

*"We had easy access to food when the project was ongoing because we cultivate grains. So we use the money to buy nutritious food items such as fish, beans, palm oil, rice, vegetables, and spices. Since the project started, you hardly see cases of sickness or malnutrition among children because people eat good/nutritious food."*

(Fatima, housewife and beneficiary, Hoyo ward, Magumeri)



# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The independent evaluation of the SAHARA II project reveals a robust response to the humanitarian needs of communities in Borno state, Nigeria. The project's integrated, multi-sectoral approach and effective consortium structure have resulted in significant and sustainable improvements in food security, WASH conditions, protection, and community resilience.

Key findings highlight the importance of early and sustained intervention, community engagement, cash transfers, and a collaborative learning environment in achieving these positive outcomes. However, challenges related to coordination, beneficiary selection, and gender inclusivity also emerged, offering opportunities for future improvement.

## High-priority recommendations

### 1. Enhance coordination and beneficiary selection

- Streamline coordination and communication processes regarding the release of funds and beneficiary selection.
- Strengthen partnerships with local authorities to expedite aid delivery.
- Ensure clear and transparent communication of beneficiary selection criteria to communities.

### 2. Increase community awareness and engagement

- Expand community engagement initiatives, focusing on building local capacities and promoting awareness of international and sectoral standards.
- Prioritise hygiene promotion and education to ensure the sustained use and maintenance of WASH facilities.

### 3. Foster gender inclusivity

- Enhance community engagement and gender inclusivity throughout the project cycle, particularly in MEAL processes.
- Actively seek and incorporate the perspectives of women and marginalised groups to ensure their needs are comprehensively addressed.
- Implement gender-sensitive programming and monitoring to promote equitable access and benefits.

### 4. Prioritise protection

- Address protection concerns, especially regarding SGBV and early marriage, through the provision of safe spaces, awareness programmes, and integration of protection considerations into all project activities.
- Ensure ongoing sensitisation on the harmful effects of early marriage and provide survivors with access to counselling, medical care, and legal assistance.

### 5. Improve WASH facilities

- Increase the availability, accessibility, and maintenance of WASH facilities, adhering to Sphere Standards, particularly in underserved areas.
- Construct additional water points and latrines, ensuring equitable distribution and accessibility for people with disabilities.
- Further investigate and address any perceived gaps in gender segregation of latrines.
- Construct facilities for discreet disposal and washing of menstrual materials, conduct awareness campaigns, and distribute menstrual hygiene management kits.
- Address the need of handwashing facilities, particularly in Kaga, by ensuring an adequate supply of soap and water.

## Medium-priority recommendations

### 6. Build long-term community capacities

- Develop and implement programmes focused on skill-building, resilience-building, and sustainable income-generating activities.
- Prioritise training that supports long-term economic stability and resilience against future shocks.
- Focus on the sustainability of project benefits by training community members and establishing committees to manage key activities.

### 7. Strengthen partnerships and collaboration

- Enhance coordination and communication within the consortium, ensuring regular meetings and shared learning opportunities.
- Leverage local resources and expertise through effective partnerships with community organisations.

## Low-priority recommendations

### 8. Dissemination and future research

- Publish and disseminate project findings to inform similar support actions and policy development.
- Conduct further research to monitor long-term impact and identify areas for future improvement.



## Policy recommendations

The impact analysis identified targeted recommendations for government officials, donors, and policymakers to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of humanitarian interventions.

### • Government:

- Invest in long-term development initiatives that address the root causes of vulnerability and build community resilience.
- Strengthen coordination and collaboration with humanitarian actors to ensure effective and efficient aid delivery.
- Prioritise protection and gender equality in all policies and programmes.

### • Donors:

- Support multi-year, flexible funding mechanisms that allow for adaptation and long-term impact.
- Prioritise projects that demonstrate strong community engagement and local ownership.
- Encourage the use of evidence-based approaches and data-driven decision-making.

### • Policy makers:

- Develop policies that address the underlying causes of conflict and displacement in Borno state.
- Promote a rights-based approach to humanitarian assistance, ensuring the dignity, safety, and participation of affected populations.
- Invest in long-term development strategies that focus on building sustainable livelihoods and strengthening community resilience.

The SAHARA II project stands as a testament to the transformative power of collaborative, community-centric humanitarian interventions. The project's success in addressing critical needs and fostering resilience underscores the importance of sustained, multi-sectoral approaches, informed by robust monitoring and evaluation and driven by a commitment to learning and adaptation.

Embracing these lessons and recommendations can improve future initiatives and continue to build upon this foundation, empowering communities and creating lasting change in Borno state and beyond.

