



Ghana, 20, picks vegetables in front of her family's home. Photo credit: E Millstein / Mercy Corps, October 2018, Biu, Nigeria

SCALE Survey Results: Agriculture and Natural Resource Management in Fragile and Emergency Contexts

How can agriculture and natural resource management (NRM) programming lead to more productive and resilient food systems and ecosystems in fragile contexts? What approaches have humanitarians used to incorporate these activities and what support do they need to enhance that work? In 2019, the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)-funded [Strengthening Capacity in Agriculture, Livelihoods and Environment \(SCALE\)](#) Award conducted a survey and a series of interviews with emergency program implementers to answer these questions. **This document summarizes the review findings and highlights practical steps for strengthening agriculture and NRM programming in places affected by conflict, weak institutions, volatile markets and climate-related shocks.**

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Respondent Demographics and Use of Findings

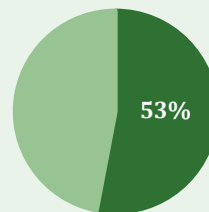
These findings¹ have informed and influenced SCALE's priorities for supporting BHA-funded emergency program implementers. These include adapting technical materials to fragile and conflict-affected contexts; establishing a discussion platform for emergency practitioners; and documenting best practices and research related to agriculture and NRM activities in emergency programs. The COVID-19 crisis has further shaped SCALE's support plans, particularly by elevating the need for remote training and virtual learning opportunities, as well as the necessity of incorporating public health messages in all activities.

59 respondents indicated experience in agriculture and/or natural resource management in humanitarian response

12 participated in follow-up interviews



53% worked on BHA-funded initiatives



28 different organizations were represented, from a range of staff positions including:



23 countries were represented in the survey responses

- **22%** US- or Europe-based, or identified as remote advisors supporting multiple countries
- **3%** from Americas
- **20%** from Middle East & North Africa, particularly Yemen and Syria response
- **44%** from sub-Saharan Africa; by order of frequency: Nigeria, DRC, Burkina, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia
- **7%** from Central and South Asia, mostly Afghanistan

¹ This survey was designed in collaboration with the [PRO-WASH Award](#). Agriculture and NRM were one component of the larger multi-sectoral survey, which also addressed activities related to WASH and alternative livelihoods programming. A summary of the alternative livelihoods results is available [here](#).

Nearly eighty percent of survey respondents were implementing programs in either an immediate response or early recovery phase. Half of field-based respondents were working in system-wide (L3²) emergencies or were being monitored by the global Food Security Cluster (gFSC). A quarter of respondents were working in contexts described as fragile or complex, such as Afghanistan and Burkina Faso, and the remaining quarter were responding to natural disasters, including Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

Of the respondents who said they were implementing programs in an immediate response or early recovery phase, approximately 25% were incorporating preparedness activities related to agriculture and/or natural resource management.

Key Results: Top Challenges

Biggest challenges associated with implementation

The biggest implementation challenges teams experienced fell into five main categories:

1. A lack of timely, flexible funding for agriculture and NRM activities
2. Fragility related to conflict and insecurity
3. Capacity gaps and inadequate guidance materials
4. Competing priorities and low adoption rates
5. Agroclimatic shocks and stresses and land-related challenges

Respondents detailed the issues they faced within each of these categories and provided recommendations around the resources and changes required to respond to their needs.

1. Funding

27% of respondents cited **funding as the most important constraint** to integrating agriculture and NRM activities within their emergency programming. Reflections on this challenge included the following:

- "Funding is often not available in acute emergencies, despite the need for NRM and agricultural support in this phase to enable preparedness and transition to early recovery." - Global
- "The challenge we face is having the funding and resources necessary to focus on interventions that have strong resilience building elements." - Malawi
- "There are limited resources allocated for agriculture activities in EFSPs." - Mozambique
- "Funding is only for one single activity at the time (patch by patch or piece by piece). In reality, we need a full cycle. For example, funding the seeds and fertilizers and inputs without providing support for controlling plant diseases is not a complete job and cannot produce full results as planned." - Syria

The Ask: Respondents requested a number of adjustments to donor funding that would enhance their ability to implement agricultural and NRM programming. These included:

- Ensure funding is available at earlier phases for all types of emergencies

² L3 Responses are activated in the most complex and challenging humanitarian emergencies, when the highest level of mobilization is required, across the humanitarian system, to ensure that the right capacities and systems are in place to effectively meet needs

- Make funding available for longer time periods in complex humanitarian crises
- Provide funding for activities that are less focused on meeting basic needs (food, water, shelter) and more focused on livelihoods, agricultural value chains and other complementary activities
- Allow for flexible funding to adapt to evolving crises and reduce the number of steps required to pivot or implement crisis modifiers

2. Fragility

25% of respondents cited fragility as their primary challenge, with a focus on conflict and security-related issues. Particular issues related to the following:

- "Access due to insecurity and uncertainty" - Yemen
- "Stability of targeted communities to continue work throughout the season" - DRC
- "Continued conflict and relocating populations" - Ethiopia
- "Implementing in an ongoing conflict and dealing with restrictions on inputs" - Nigeria
- "Insecurity issues that don't allow groups of people to assemble for training" - Burkina Faso

The Ask: Respondents expressed a need for tools, guidance materials and best practices tailored to the realities of working in fragile contexts. Requests for support included:

- Develop or modify tools and guidance to account for the realities of working in emergency and fragile contexts, rather than only addressing natural disaster-related crises in otherwise "stable" contexts
- Ensure materials incorporate guidance on conflict management and resource governance, including strategies for working with customary systems on peacebuilding and resource sharing
- Document and share successful practices from partners who have implemented agriculture and NRM programming in fragile contexts.
- Strengthen the capacity of local civil society groups and government partners who can continue supporting interventions during insecure periods

"We're always stuck for some time because of conflicts. We have to stop, and so we lose development gains. To protect those gains, in terms of NRM, we have to better plan for resource conflict and know about conflict resolution. [...] We have to bring people together around shared resources and water sensitivity across a larger area, at a systems level."

- WASH and Climate Change Adaptation Advisor, Ethiopia

3. Capacity

24% of respondents identified capacity as a major weakness, noting gaps in their own staff's expertise as well as that of government and private-sector partners in implementing agriculture and NRM interventions in emergency contexts. Respondents' reflections on capacity gaps included:

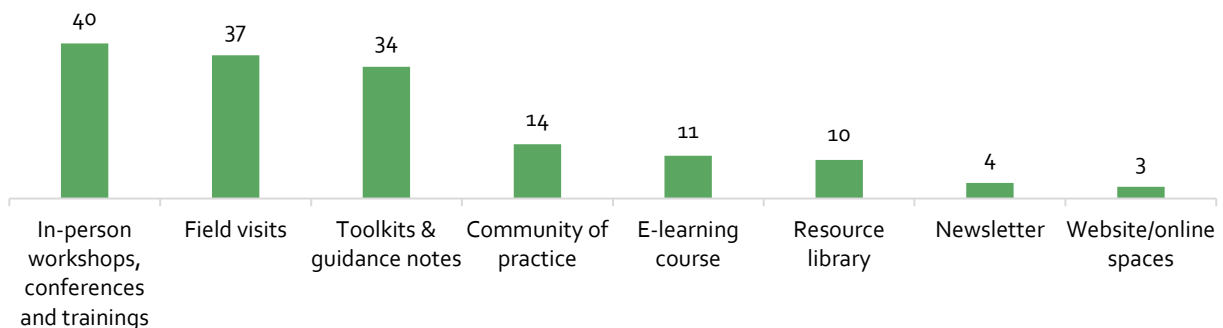
- "Limited on the ground knowledge. We need to ensure all staff have in-the-field experience" - Kenya
- "Limited staff capacity. We need training, toolkits and guides" - Nigeria
- "Lack of private agricultural input suppliers in remote areas to engage them in emergency seed and tools supply. Limited government extension system and government staff capacity, as well as budget and logistic problems." - Ethiopia

- “Limited staff capacity and presence of key support market actors such as extension services, financial services and logistics providers.” - Nigeria
- “We see frustration around natural resource management, teams not knowing how to integrate it and how to do it at scale. I don’t have the training materials or resources for my team to ensure they’re doing it correctly and consciously.” - South Sudan

The Ask: Respondents asked for opportunities to enhance their knowledge and capacity in a variety of ways, including:

- Develop training materials tailored to strengthening the capacity of emergency response teams and government extension services to implement agriculture and NRM activities
- Provide practical case studies and in-person exchange visits to learn from other partners implementing agriculture and NRM activities in fragile contexts
- Connect practitioners to experienced technical experts or mentors who can provide advice throughout the implementation process
- Establish a collaboration platform for practitioners to share resources and questions directly with one another
- Promote market systems approaches that strengthen the knowledge and skills of private sector actors

Which platforms or methods are most useful for learning about new approaches and best practices in agriculture and/or NRM interventions in emergencies or ongoing crisis humanitarian crises? The chart shows number of respondents (out of the 59) who mentioned each platform or method.



4. Competing Priorities

12% of respondents noted how competing needs and limited time have led program implementers and community members to prioritize other activities over those related to NRM and agriculture. Reflections on this topic included the following:

- “The competing needs of households - especially during early recovery stages - and the time consuming nature of some of the essential NRM practices makes it difficult for participants to accurately and properly adopt the techniques, even if they perceive them to be valuable.” - Madagascar

“Most farmers have three or four different plots where they rotate crops. And so when practices are tedious and time consuming, we have a problem with adoption.”

- Agriculture & Livelihoods Advisor,
Zimbabwe

- "In an emergency, people cannot wait for three months for crops to mature or more for a degraded environment to be reclaimed. People care less about these even though some of the causes of their predicament are related to misuse or misapplication of agriculture or NRM practices." - Somalia
- "Uptake by displaced persons is a problem, given agriculture and NRM activities take a long time to show results." - DRC
- "Limited understanding by communities and beneficiaries of the livelihood advancing concepts of agriculture, as these communities are used to receiving food packages or non-food packages through the humanitarian approach." - Syria
- "Identification of genuinely vulnerable communities and meeting their priority/immediate stabilization needs in order to undertake normal activities." - Mali

The Ask: Respondents suggested the following activities could help to enhance implementation and adoption of NRM and agricultural programming:

- Prioritize technical guidance on agriculture/NRM activities that can produce results quickly, with minimal labor, small teams and limited time
- Develop or share resources that are accessible to community members as well as program staff; this might involve using visuals, graphics and local language
- Provide evidence of the feasibility and positive impacts of adopting new practices to encourage farmers and other agricultural practitioners to shift their approach
- Integrate market systems approaches to decrease dependence on/expectation of aid



Abubakar, 48, works in his fields in Daddare, Nigeria. Photo credit: E Millstein / Mercy Corps, October 2018

5. Agroclimatic shocks and stresses

10% of respondents noted how agriculture and NRM activities are constrained by agroclimatic shocks and stresses, as well as challenges accessing arable land such as:

- "Access to appropriate land is a challenge. There is a need for strategies for agricultural activities that can successfully be implemented on degraded land. Accessing water for agriculture is also a challenge." - Ethiopia
- "People are struggling with crops because of the need for water. From 2016 October to 2018, the area was very dry, so water was used for livestock and consumption." - Somalia
- "Drought and crop disease are a challenge." - Syria
- "Limited access to land." - DRC
- "Dealing with the impacts of climate change." - Nigeria
- "Climate variability." - Sudan

"SCALE should share relevant experience from other countries, including guidelines on climate smart agriculture, training on permagardens, guidelines and experience in pest management and seed certification/systems."

- Food Security & Livelihood Technical Advisor, Syria Response

The Ask: Respondents suggested the following activities could help to enhance implementation and adoption of NRM and agricultural programming:

- Support programs to carry out climate change adaptation planning
- Provide tools tailored to the specific agroclimatic risks different programs experience. Requested guidance included:
 - Climate Smart Agriculture and agroecological approaches
 - Water resources management for drylands
 - NRM best practices for disaster risk management
- Encourage discussion on strategies to implement agriculture in refugee and IDP camp contexts, including crops that can be used for livelihoods (i.e. selling fodder)
- Support teams to advocate for changes in laws related to land use, access and tenure

Key Results: Successful Approaches

Respondents were also asked to share successful activities or promising innovations in implementing agriculture and NRM activities in emergency and fragile contexts.

- **Improved Agricultural Practices and Capacity Strengthening (50%)** - The largest share of responses related to training for extension workers and farmers, including through Farmer Field Schools and agricultural cooperatives. Respondents cited a number of agricultural approaches and techniques they considered promising, including Climate Smart Agriculture, hydroponics, permagardens, terracing, no tillage methods and Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration. Training farmers for market-oriented production and value chain activities (linking on-farm and off-farm) was also viewed as a promising activity.

Key challenges that have limited the impact and scale of these practices include youth disinterest in agriculture and gender-related cultural norms and security concerns that restrict women's participation.

- **Cash and Voucher-based Approaches (24%)** - Respondents working in the immediate response phase were most likely to cite cash and voucher assistance as a promising practice. Examples included vouchers for agricultural inputs and veterinary services, Cash for Assets focused on watershed improvement activities and unconditional cash transfers, including via mobile money which respondents viewed as cost effective and safe.
- **Monitoring and Preparedness Activities (12%)** - Early identification and monitoring of potential shocks and stresses (including early warning for conflict) and annual scenario planning were noted as key components of successful agriculture and NRM programming. Predictive assessments, livestock and agricultural insurance, and crisis modifiers were also viewed as promising practices for emergency response. Several respondents noted the importance of community-led assessments, so that local actors take the lead in identifying risks and proposing solutions.
- **Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) Support and Private Sector Engagement (7%)** - Several respondents noted the importance of supporting private sector and SME development. These local partners and businesses have a critical role to play in ensuring the continuity and sustainability of activities in the wake of an emergency, as well as after programs end. Private sector extension services, in particular, were seen as a sustainable approach to delivering capacity strengthening.
- **Other (9%)** - A smaller number of respondents noted other promising practices, including the use of alternative energy (wind, solar) to enhance year-round agricultural production and the importance of savings groups.

"From my experience, the challenges the smallholder farmer faces relate to access to transportation, storage facilities and technologies, inadequate laws and regulations that protect them from exploitation. Strengthening these market systems will be the priority of a program team that wishes to make an impact."

- Food Security & Livelihoods Area
Manager, NE Nigeria

Next Steps:

The findings and insights from this survey and interviews have been valuable in informing SCALE's priorities for engaging with BHA partners moving forward. In particular, SCALE is prioritizing: the sharing and development of tools and guidance materials that are tailored for fragile contexts; creating space for practitioners to learn and share experiences directly with one another; and actively seeking opportunities to grow the evidence base for agriculture and NRM programming, including through research and case studies. In consultation with implementing partners, these activities continue to be shaped by the needs, priorities, and constraints related to the current COVID-19 crisis, which emerged after this survey was completed.

Related resources, events, and further opportunities to engage with and provide feedback to the SCALE team will be available at fsnnetwork.org/scale and via the FSN Network newsletter.

Does your team have tools, resources or case studies related to agriculture and NRM in emergency and fragile contexts? Contact us at scale@mercycorps.org.