

***Strategic Collaboration between World Bank Group and  
World Food Programme  
Bridging Humanitarian Assistance and Social Protection  
Systems***

**MAURITANIA CASE STUDY**

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## **1. Introduction**

This review is part of a multi-country collection of case studies showing that humanitarian assistance and national safety nets are not necessarily mutually-exclusive. In particular, country cases will provide a fresh examination of the ingredients and conditions under which international humanitarian assistance (with support from WFP) and national safety net programs (with support from the WBG) could better coexist and converge, as well as challenges – including failures – in doing so. Cases will cover contexts where humanitarian assistance built on national social protection systems to deliver emergency response; experiences in using humanitarian response to contribute to the building blocks of longer-term national social protection systems; cases of institutional coordination between disaster risk management, social protection and humanitarian response agendas; and direct operational financing between WBG and WFP under exceptional circumstances of disrupted state capacities.

Lack of sustainability and limited coordination of programs launched as emergency responses is a classic scenario. However, reorienting funds towards purely preventive measures in a context where vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity remains very high is difficult to justify, both on humanitarian and political terms. The story of WFP, the World Bank and others collaborative efforts initiated in 2011 in Mauritania is that of trying to build on different institutional strength and experiences to support the country find a way through this deadlock. The aim of these collaborative efforts are to help the country adopt a social safety net model that is better targeted, that contributes to address chronic poverty and vulnerability, and that responds to conjectural shocks in a predictable way. Such a vision is shared by both the WB and WFP and is the cement of documented partnerships in Mauritania. The element that concentrated collaboration efforts so far is the development of a National Social Register (NSR) of priority target households for social protection programs including such a safety net system.

## **2. Context – poverty, food and nutrition insecurity and safety nets in Mauritania**

### ***Poverty and vulnerability to food and nutrition crises in Mauritania***

Mauritania lies at the border between the Arab Maghreb world and the western side of the Sahel, with above 3.5 million inhabitants and an immense – 1 million km<sup>2</sup> – and mainly arid territory. Economic growth has been very dynamic over the last decade, mostly supported by mining exports and fisheries. The country acquired the status of lower-middle income country in 2014, with an income per capita above US\$ 1,160 (PPP) since 2013. The country is experiencing a very rapid urbanization process, with over 48% of the population living in urban areas, and about 1/4 of the population living in Nouakchott area.

Despite these structural changes and recent economic growth, the country faces serious challenges. First, while poverty incidence has declined over the recent years (see table 1), it remains high, particularly in rural areas, and has stagnated. Urban poverty, though lower, is growing in relative absolute terms. Second, the country food consuming is very dependent on import, making the country vulnerable to variation of world and regional food markets. Beyond this dependence on imports, national food and livestock production is strongly dependent on climatic fluctuations, and experiences severe fluctuations, such as in 2012 when domestic food production dropped by 75%. Moreover, despite economic growth the country has made relatively more limited progress in terms of education, health, and gender inequality. Finally,

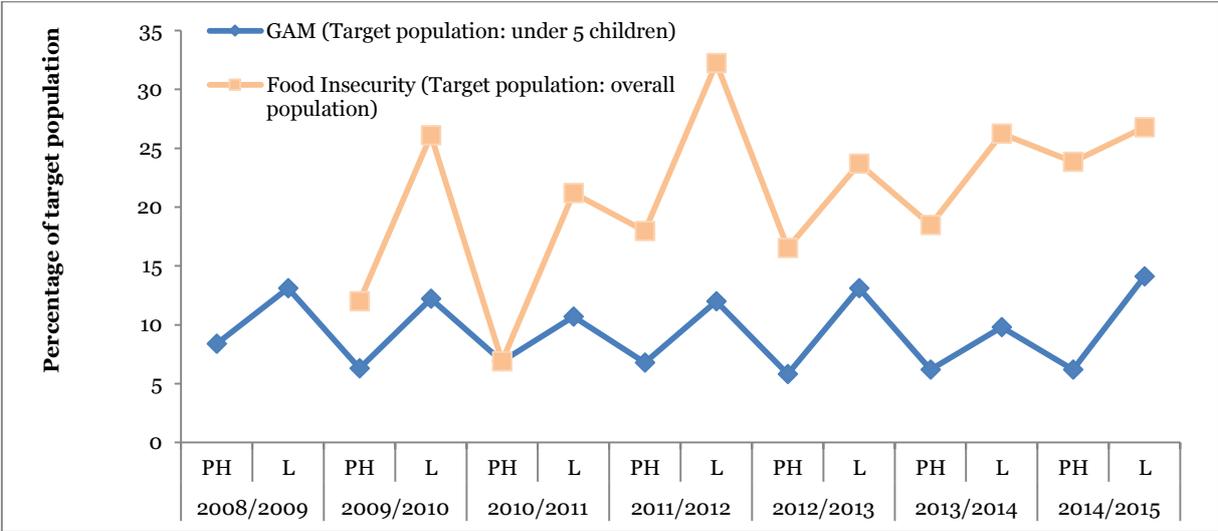
the Mauritanian society remains very fragmented, with in particular poverty rates much higher in southern parts of the country.

**Table 1: Evolution of the incidence of poverty and extreme poverty 1988-2014**

Year	extreme poverty		poverty		Number of poor	Poverty threshold (MRO/year/person)	Extreme poverty threshold (MRO)
	NKTT	RIM	NKTT	RIM			
2000	12,3	31,4%	25,1	51%	1 348 976	72 600	54 880
2004	10,9	28,8%	25,9	46,7%	1 390 344	94 600	71 550
2008	4,8	25,9%	15,6	42%	1 408 759	129 600	96 400
2014	5,9	16,6%	14,4	31%	1 096 584	169 445	126 035

Source: WB 2014

**Figure 1: Incidence of Food insecurity and under 5 global acute malnutrition in Mauritania**



Source: WFP. Notes: PH - Post Harvest, L - Lean season, GAM - Global Acute Malnutrition

As a result of persisting poverty and inequalities, combined to Mauritania’s vulnerability to environmental and economic shocks, large portions of the population are still experiencing food and nutrition insecurity, reaching very high levels during lean seasons. Food security and nutrition data (Figure 1), suggest that around 25% of the population is food insecure and the malnutrition rate is fluctuating around emergency thresholds with not substantial progress over the last 8 years.

**Safety net programs in Mauritania under the 2012-2016 period**

This section very briefly presents main safety nets programs operated in Mauritania over the 2012-2016 period. The purpose of this section is illustrative. It gives an overview of the diversity and heterogeneity of these programs, but doesn’t enter into the details of each program category. The targeted pluriennial cash transfer programs adopted by the Government of Mauritania with WB support in 2013 is not presented in this section but later in the document. Its implementation started late 2016 at a limited scale and is planned to be implemented at full scale by 2020.

*National programs*

Since the 2007/2008 World food and energy prices crisis, the country is subsidizing energy prices. In response to the 2011/2012 drought, the country adopted the *Emel* (hope) program, combining a human food security component and a livestock feed subsidy program.

The *human* food security component is largely food based: until 2014, it combined food distributions, with restocking of village cereal banks and, most significantly the *Boutiques Emel* (a network of over 1,200 shops selling basic food items at subsidized prices). While restocking of cereal banks has been abandoned, and food distribution are now only used for emergency response purposes, the *Boutiques Emel* program is still running though with lower volumes than in 2012/2013. The *livestock* component consists of subsidized sales of livestock inputs (feed and medicines) to livestock owners.

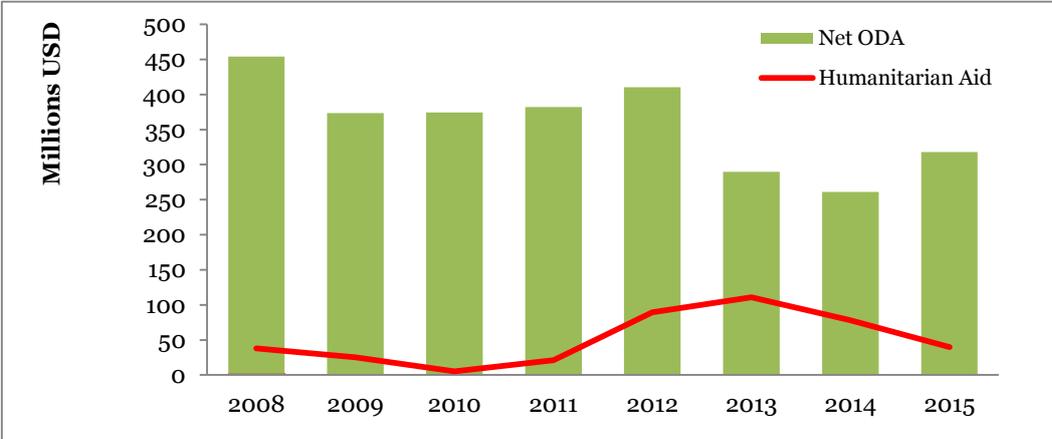
National safety nets programs have represented up to 5.4 percent of GDP (18.1 percent of Government spending, including fuel subsidies) in 2012. Energy subsidies are not targeted (and therefore benefiting most to the most important energy consumers – that is the better off populations). The *Emel* program targeting principles vary across components. Emergency distribution and restocking of village cereal banks are mostly targeted on geographic basis (repartition of benefits are left to community decision), while *Emel boutiques* and the livestock component combine geographic targeting element (location of subsidized selling points) and a self-selection element (low quality of products and/or quantities limitations). Resources invested in these social safety nets almost halved between 2012 and 2013 (WB 2013) and kept declining since as sustaining related financial efforts was difficult for the country with the decline of iron international prices.

Mauritania joined the African Risk Capacity (ARC) risk pooling system since 2012, and benefited from ARC payments following the 2015 drought. ARC disbursements are conditioned by the presentation and validation of an operational plan, including a geographic and individual targeting strategy.

*International assistance*

The 2011/2012 food and nutrition crisis, as well as the consequences of the Malian crisis led to increase international support to Mauritania.

**Figure 3: International assistance to Mauritania for the period 2008-2015**



Source : OECD, OCHA

WFP contributed to support the CSA to implement emergency food distributions as well as restocking of villages' cereal banks. WFP also supported the Food Security Commissariat (CSA) in mobilizing resources and implementing the nutritional component of the national response (nutritional supplementation to malnourished<sup>1</sup> children and pregnant and lactating women). In 2011, WFP support targeted up to 9 *willayas*, covering Nouakchott and the entire southern part of the country. Since 2015, WFP intervention targeted a reduced number of regions and excluded Nouakchott.

Beyond these food based safety nets, international actors (NGOs and UN agencies, mostly with EU support) developed cash transfers targeted southern *willayas* of the country.

The repartition of international assistance efforts among southern *willayas* is influenced by the results of bi-annual food insecurity and nutrition analyses, coordinated by the Food Security Observatory (OSA), with WFP and UNICEF support. Within southern *willayas*, geographic targeting is the result of a combination of factors: (1) the geographic repartition of implementing partner capacities, (2) historical analyses of food and nutrition insecurity risks (3) disaggregated analysis of regular food security analyses (although not statistically representative), (4) local coordination among actors to reduce overlaps, and (5) identification of priority communes through participatory processes involving local authorities. Individual targeting is the result of a process combining: (1) assumptions on local incidence of food and nutrition insecure populations based on seasonal analyses as well as on livelihood profiles (classifying populations into 4 categories: very poor, poor, average and better-off, and describing associated socio-economic characteristics) representative of the area, (2) community based targeting of households matching with pre-identified household criteria rather than quotas per localities, (3) verification of targeted households socio-economic characteristic through a survey process. Complaint handling mechanisms have been put in place to reduce the risks of exclusions errors.

Coverage targets vary each year, depending on available information on severity of the food and nutrition insecurity: in bad years such as 2012 and 2015, "poor" and "very poor" households were supported, and the response period could be extended out of the lean season, while in better years (e.g. 2016), assistance was provided only to "very poor" and solely during the lean season.

The volume of assistance per household is variable among operators, depending on organizational technical policies as well as on available funding. ECHO funded NGO operators progressively aligned their standards to cover monthly 75% food expenditure for households of 8 people (about 24,000 MO<sup>2</sup> per month). In 2015 and 2016, WFP planned to distribute reduced amounts per month (12,000 MO), but for longer periods (8 months). From 2012 until now, most operators moved from mixed cash and food transfers to cash only transfers, food items being mostly nutritional supplements. Transfers can be unconditional, conditioned to contribution to community works or coupled with sensibilisation sessions. Actual transfer's volumes often need to be adapted to actual funding availability.

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<sup>1</sup> Moderately acute malnourished children. Severely acute malnourished children are receiving a treatment through the health system, with UNICEF and partners support.

<sup>2</sup> Mauritanian Ougya

Both national program and international assistance safety nets in Mauritania have been initiated as emergency responses mechanisms. A major divergence however relates to targeting strategies. National programs are either not targeted (energy subsidies) or use self-targeting strategies (*Emel* shops), while humanitarian responses were geographically and individually targeted, using decentralized targeting approaches. The rationale behind national programs targeting strategies is to avoid geographic gaps - politically difficult to justify - , as well as reduce targeting costs. However, access to *Emel* shops revealed more difficult in rural areas where population density can be very low, and subsidized food sales revealed insufficient to enable access to poorest populations (WB 2014). The rationale behind international assistance strategies was to aim at maximizing the cost effectiveness of a response constrained by resources limitations, but running the risk of inequitable targeting at national scale. While chronic and seasonal food and nutrition insecurity remained high since the 2012 crisis, these responses have been perpetuated, but also gradually downscaled and concentrated in time during the lean season. Beyond lack of financial sustainability of these emergency programs, the other limitation is their lack of transformative impact. Although much still need to be done, progress towards reforming these systems have happened since 2011.

The following sections of this report document three dimensions of the collaborative efforts to support the country adopting a targeted, transformative and responsive safety net are documented: (1) strategic alliances developed at country level, progressively developing a shared vision of priorities, in particular that of a more predictable and better targeted emergency response mechanism, articulated with a permanent social transfers program targeted at the most vulnerable populations; (2) lessons learnt from practical experiences implemented of targeted social transfers in Mauritania since 2010; (3) the national register design and development process.

### **3. Building strategic alliances**

#### **Benefiting from a favorable policy environment at global and regional level**

Although this trend was initiated earlier, the 2012 food crisis in the Sahel marked an inflection point in the regional policy environment. Commitments were made at global, regional, and country level to move away from primarily responsive approaches to crises, considered ineffective but also inefficient. Sahel is a priority region for resilience building policies adopted by major donors<sup>3</sup>. At regional level, the AGIR alliance was initiated. The UN adopted similar orientations (e.g. World Bank 2016 for deeper analysis). In 2011, WFP revised its safety net policy (WFP, 2011), asserting an objective to contribute to develop national systems. The 2015 WFP resilience policy underlines the need for vulnerable populations to be supported by a combination of complementary services, “*beyond the capacity of any single institution*”. The Resilience agenda, embraced by WFP and the WB but also most policy actors, focused on building local and national capacities, inter-sectoral coordination and complementarities, better complementarities and articulations between emergency response and longer term development efforts, and additional efforts to M&E and learning.

Helping the country to develop a shock responsive social protection system was at the interest of these global policy commitments.

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<sup>3</sup> UKaid 2011, EU 2012, USAID 2012.

## Shaping a favorable policy environment at country level

In Mauritania, a corresponding policy evolution occurred. Formulated in 2011, the country adopted the National Social Protection Strategy (SNPS) in 2013 - a year after the launch of the *Emel* plan -, which established a coherent framework to articulate all social protection instruments, including social transfers. In 2012, the IMF alerted the Government of Mauritania (GoM) of rising public expenditures on untargeted social transfers while national revenues were declining. In 2013, the IMF incited the GoM to adopt a strategic framework for social protection as well as the development of a targeting strategy for social strategies, based on the WFP – CSA experience in Nouakchott (see section 4.2).

Design and implementation of the SNPS was directly anchored at the Ministry of Economy and Finances (MEF)<sup>4</sup> to facilitate multi-sectoral coordination. UNICEF provided technical assistance for the SNPS preparation as well as for the underlying diagnostic analysis (Watson 2010). The SNPS implementation is governed by a steering (CP-SNPS) and technical (CT-SNPS) committee chaired by the MEF and co-chaired by the Ministry of Childhood and Social Affairs (MASEF).

The principle of a national register of poor household was adopted in the 2013 version of the SNPS. This vision has clearly been reaffirmed in the draft version of the SCAPP published in 2016 (RIM-MEF 2016). In 2013, the Government of Mauritania formulated a request to the World Bank to support the country developing a National Social Register as well as a targeted social transfer program. The PNTS (National Safety Net Program), initiated in 2013, is a twofold program: (1) development of a National Social Register (NSR); and (2), implementation of a pluriennial cash based social transfer program (*Tekavoul*), targeting 100,000 poor household<sup>5</sup> across the country. Analytical work was conducted by the World Bank to support the design and implementation of the PNTS: an analysis of social safety nets in Mauritania, an impact analysis of the *Emel* program, and a review of EWS (Early Warning System) in Mauritania. The Development of the NSR was managed by the Social Protection Cell lodged in the MEF until the creation of a national register directorate in 2016, while the implementation of *Tekavoul* was assigned to the Tadamoune agency.

Since 2013, the World Bank and UNICEF provided the most significant support to the governing bodies of the SNPS. WFP is a member of the SNPS governing bodies, and some WFP staff strongly engaged in the technical dialogue related to the NSR design (see 4.2). However, the scope for NGO participation to related consultative processes was relatively limited.

In 2016, at the initiative of the World Bank and WFP, a group of international stakeholders (including UNICEF, FAO, ECHO and NGOs) initiated strategic discussions on how to strengthen the crises prevention and management systems in Mauritania. The initial talks have focused on early warning systems and contingency and response planning, and coordination. The intention of this initiative is not to add an additional layer to the coordination forums in Mauritania, but to define a common vision of policy and technical dialogue priorities with the national institutions prior to approaching them with concrete suggestions.

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<sup>4</sup> Until 2016, the Ministry of Economy and Finances (MEF) was named Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development (MAED), but to avoid confusion, the current acronym is used throughout this report.

<sup>5</sup> Targeted households are to benefit of 15,000 MO every 3 months. This transfer value has been calibrated as an income complement. Its cumulated annual value is lower than the cumulated value of seasonal transfers operated by NGO and targeted to food insecure households calibrated to cover 75% of Households food expenditure over the lean season.

## 4. Building on earlier practical targeting experiences

### *Cash transfers funded by the European Union (EU) since 2011*

Like in all other countries of the Sahel region, humanitarian actors progressively moved away from food based intervention to cash based interventions. Beyond the adoption a new transfer modality, cash based experiences were associated to the development of harmonized targeting approaches.

In Mauritania, the EU delegation funded a program of four experiences of “cash based social safety nets”, initiated in 2011, and respectively implemented by ACF, Gret, the French Red Cross and WFP. The WFP pilot program was implemented Nouakchott and in rural areas (Gorgol). This initial cash based experiences was followed by a “post 2012 crisis” program, implemented at higher scale through the same actors, and leading UNICEF, FAO and WFP to design and implement a joint approach associating cash based social transfers with complementary .

While Humanitarian actors progressively adopted cash a default transfer’s modality for social transfer, they also worked on harmonizing their targeting approaches. This approach used by humanitarian actors is derived from the Household Economy Analysis (HEA) framework, of which the use has been developed in the Sahel with the EU support since the mid 2000’s and generalized since 2012<sup>6</sup>. The method is based on the following key elements:

#### Geographic targeting based on:

- An historical analysis of vulnerability and risks: The historical approaches in Mauritania (ZAR: Risk Areas Identification) has been reinforced by the analysis of 9 livelihood zones in Mauritania (5 were initially analyzed in 2011) and the introduction of integrated risk analyses (e.g. Integrated context Analysis (ICA) - WFP).
- A conjectural analysis of food and nutrition vulnerability (OSA analysis supported by WFP, FEWSNET, UNICEF and other actors such as ACF).
- Selection of priority communes of interventions though the District Development Committees (CODEP) involving commune representatives and chaired by the district representative (*Hakem*).

#### Individual targeting based on:

- The determination of target number of beneficiaries by locality based on conjuncture and vulnerability analysis.
- Such targets are indicative and identification of actual household beneficiaries though a participatory process guided by household categories characterized by livelihood zone profiles and complementary targeting criteria depending on each actor’s intervention objectives (e.g. presence of young children within households).
- Verification of compliance of selected households with targeting criteria though administrative verification of beneficiary lists (verification surveys).
- Progressive generalization of complaints handling mechanisms to manage potential exclusion errors.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.hea-sahel.org](http://www.hea-sahel.org)

Beyond convergence of targeting methodologies, documentation of experiences initiated in 2011, particularly those implemented by NGOs (e.g. CFR 2013, Oxfam 2013), generated technical exchanges about transfer's frequencies, amounts, conditionality, complementary measures, and well as transfers methodologies (mobile banking, vouchers...).

These EU funded programs were important to develop and show case practical experiences of plurianual cash transfers. International and national operators involved in such experiences are in a position to engage in technical dialogue on targeting approaches and cash based social transfer modalities. However, two elements constrain the influence of such experiences on national programs. First, the institutionalization of the "cash" community of practice group has until been very limited, due to a mutual defiance between National institution and NGOs in Mauritania. Second, the idea of community based targeting guided by household categories characteristics rather than by predetermined local quotas<sup>7</sup>. This second difference is fundamental, for NGOs, it is the condition for the targeting process to be conjuncture-sensitive as well as to approach right-based principles, while for the Government institutions and the PNTS, it is criticized for being too sensitive to local manipulations, including elite capture.

Learning from such experiences could be captured and shared through a community of practice. A "cash group", originally lead by WFP was initiated with the 2011 EU funded experience. This group benefited from continuous financial support from the EU and was affiliated with the *Calp*<sup>8</sup>. Humanitarian actors, and in particular the "cash group", progressively moved from technical coordination among humanitarian actors to more actively prioritizing engagement with Social Protection dynamics. The MEF and Tadamoune joined the Cash group in September 2015, which renamed itself "cash and social protection working group", and adopted an advocacy strategy, of which one of the main objective was to institutionalize dialogue between its members, the Government institutions and donor agencies around cash transfers and social protection issues. Although the institutional anchorage of this group is limited<sup>9</sup>, and although it still is very focused on cash transfers related issues rather than on a broader social protection agenda, the trajectory of the cash working group as well as its engagement in technical dialogue around the NSR demonstrate the role that its members are willing to play in support the implementation of the SNPS.

#### *CSA-WFP cash transfer program in Nouakchott*

As part of the *Emel* plan, in 2012, the Government of Mauritania decided to target poor households of Nouakchott with cash transfers. The MEF asked WFP and the CSA to establish a register of vulnerable households in Nouakchott that would be eligible to such transfers. Based on its EU funded pilot experience of cash transfers in urban context, WFP developed a specific targeting strategy for this operation.

#### The targeting process was supported by the following institutional framework:

- Oversight of a steering committee, chaired by the CSA, and with MEF, WFP, and urban authorities' membership.

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<sup>7</sup> While local quotas are used to establish the NRS, see section 5.

<sup>8</sup> [www.cashlearning.org](http://www.cashlearning.org)

<sup>9</sup> It was originally created as a technical working group of the food security emergency coordination group, itself weakly institutionalized. It is not formally connected with the SNPS governing bodies or any other national coordination structure.

- Technical committee, chaired by the ONS, in charge of providing updated demographic information and of establishing quotas per targeting zone (see below for methodological details).
- Supervision committee, responsible for the targeting process supervision at local (Moughataa) level, and chaired by a CSA representative with local authorities' membership.

The targeting process was based on the following methodological approach:

- (1) 10,000 households were initially targeted. Quotas of households to be targeted in 45 targeting zones. Each administrative subdivision (*moughatas*) included from 2 to 8 targeting zones. Quotas per targeting zones were determined by vulnerability index combining calculated as a weighted combination of food and non-food poverty indices calculated using 2008 EPVM<sup>10</sup> data and demographic estimates by the National Office of Statistics (ONS).
- (2) Community-based targeting of eligible households, using had-hoc targeting committee. The targeting process was guided by a list of criteria primarily focusing on food-consumption (cf. Table 1.a).
- (3) Recording of complaints following the community based targeting process.
- (4) Administration of a verification survey administrated through the ONS, collecting socio-economic information on all pre-targeted households (Table 2.b), and allowing for a ranking of eligible household according to a composite index.
- (5) In response to a request by the Wally of Nouakchott the Steering committee decided to increase the initial list to be by 2000 households, following the same process. This allowed managing the complaints recorded after the first round.

**Table 2: Criteria for CBT and variable for the verification survey**

<p>a. Criteria for the community based targeting process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Households that don't eat every day.</li> <li>• Households that accept meal residues from neighbor households.</li> <li>• Households regularly consuming only a meal a day.</li> <li>• Households receiving Zakhat or other forms of community support.</li> <li>• Households with children with clear signs of undernutrition.</li> <li>• Destitute households with invalid members or young children.</li> <li>• Women headed households without regular income.</li> <li>• Households living in precarious housing (shelter, tent) without access to water and electricity</li> </ul>	<p>b. Categories of variables recorded through the verification survey:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic information: household composition, head of household, presence of vulnerable groups.</li> <li>• Housing and sanitation.</li> <li>• Household income sources.</li> <li>• Household food consumption.</li> <li>• Coping strategies and assistance received.</li> </ul>
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The major differences with that method developed by WFP for urban context and the HEA base method described above and mostly used in rural contexts are (1) that all Moughata of Nouakchott were covered, which eliminated the need for the intervention of local authorities in the selection of priority geographic zones for the intervention ; and (2) number of household targeted by zones were primarily determined through administratively determined quotas,

<sup>10</sup> Household Poverty and Living Conditions Survey

rather than determined as the result of a community based targeting process guided by targeting criteria.

The “register” of vulnerable household established through this approach was used for successive cash transfers operations in Nouakchott (2012, 2013, and 2014). The analysis of registered households revealed high vulnerability among targeted household, validating the accuracy of the method.

However, despite the complaint handling system and the readmission of 2000 households, there was limited information about exclusion errors. The initial cash distributions went very well, however, the CSA reported accumulating complaints non-registered households and social tension after 3 years of distribution. Cash transfers in Nouakchott neighborhoods are now stopped.

## **5. Elaboration of the National Social register**

As mentioned above, the SNPS formulation process (2011) and the IMF political support (2012) have played a critical role to imitate the policy dialogue around the idea of a National Social register. The CSA-WFP experience in Nouakchott in 2012 demonstrated the feasibility of the concept at the scale of the Nouakchott urban area. On the basis of this Nouakchott experience, the principle to roll out the concept nationwide had been agreed by the GoM.

The actual operationalization of the National Social Register concept was then associated with the PNTS, implemented with the WB financial and technical support.

### *Methodological development*

Technical dialogue started in 2014. The World Bank proposed a methodological framework to establish a NSR, combining the following steps:

1. Calibration of the NSR based on available poverty (EPVM 2014) and demographic (RGPH 2013) data.
2. Community based targeting of households to be registered in the NSR, guided by local quotas based on poverty and demographic data.
3. Socio-economic data collection on all households registered in the NSR.
4. Verification of the quality of the data.
5. Ordering of the households registered in the NSR based on the calculation of a composite poverty index (PMT – Proxy Mean Test).

The strategy to use a community based targeting process has been adopted in all other countries of the region, and household level socio-economic data collection is a standard approach promoted by the World Bank in all countries where NSR development are supported.

Based on this framework, policy and technical discussions were held through the SNPS committees. Benefiting from its experience in Nouakchott, WFP played a very active role commenting the initial draft of the NSR manual developed by the PNTS team. NGOs were invited to comment on the draft manual through the cash group. Since most national social transfer programs are not targeted, ONG and UN experiences have been critical to strengthen the initial Register manual.

A pilot phase of the NSR process occurred in 2015 and led to the formulation of a revised NSR manual in 2016. The main steps of the NSR elaboration process are represented in Figure 2. An important element that needs clarification to potential user programs is that the ordering of NSR households through the PMT is a *Tekavoul* requirement rather than a procedure of the NSR itself.

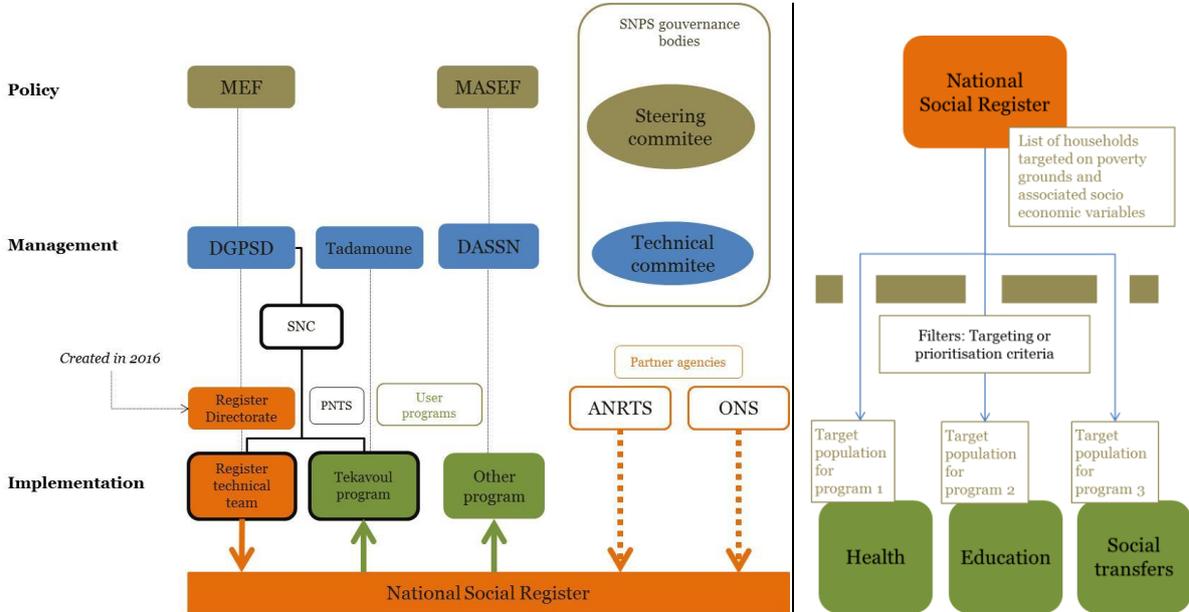
**Figure 2: Key steps of the NSR elaboration process**



*Institutional setup*

The National Register was initiated as the strategic component of the PNTS. Since 2016, a direction of the NSR has been created, working under the DGSPD of the MEF. Key partner agencies for the NSR directorates are the ANRTS (national identity cards and numbers), and well as the ONS (statistical analysis and socio-economic household data collection). The first user of the NSR is the *Tekavoul* program, the operational component of the PNTS. First social transfers using the NSR as a targeting instrument took place in December 2016. The register will be accessible to other social programs, for which targeting their beneficiary population within the NSR list is relevant. Each user program could use its own filter to identity its target beneficiaries in the register.

**Figure 3: Institutional setup of the NSR**



NB: All members of the SNPS steering and technical are not represented in the diagram

### *Roll out plan*

The roll out of the NSR started in 2016. *Moughatas* with the higher number of poor households estimated on poverty and demographic statistics were priorities. The Registration process was completed in the *Moughata* of M'bout in October 2017. 5 additional *Moughatas* are to be completed in 2017 and the plan is to reach national scale by 2020.

### *Stocktaking and refinement*

Compared to the methodological development period, more limited external consultations took place during the pilot phase (2015) and the initial steps of the roll out phase (2016). The PNTS focused on moving forward with implementation and perhaps gave lower priority to consultation, while WFP was busy with other priorities (WFP country office was restructured in 2015 and the management team rotated in 2016). The cash group pursued technical dialogue during that period, but with more limited WFP contribution than during the NSR manual elaboration period (2014).

Now that the NSR roll out is moving forward, opportunities for external consultations are reopening. A stocktaking exercise, disseminated to external stakeholders, took place after the roll out of the NSR in M'bout *Moughata*. The dissemination workshop generated questions primarily around quality and representativeness of the community based targeting committee and associated process, as well as on limitations of the NSR process to identify and address potential exclusion errors. This consultation noticeably led to reduce the size of targeting areas<sup>11</sup>, as well as test ideas to address exclusion errors such as setting up a green-line. A similar process is being implemented to share lessons from the first social transfer round that took place in December 2016. The NSR strategic interest being to maximize its number of users, it appears quite open to keep adapt the process as roll out is progressing.

### *Growing understanding of and interest in the NSR potential*

Since the adoption of the SNPS (2013) and the launch of the PNTS (2014), the understanding of the NSR potential has significantly evolved in Mauritania. For example, a national primary health care program, supported by the World Bank, is being developed with the intention to become a NSR user.

WFP interest and engagement in technical dialogue with the NSR declined after the pilot phase in 2014, but was renewed since 2016, following a recommendation the evaluation of its country portfolio in 2015. Supporting the development of a shock responsive social safety net system in Mauritania has now become a strategic priority for WFP in Mauritania. WFP is keen to test using the NSR as a targeting tool for seasonal transfers or asset building activities. Moreover WFP sees the NSR as a potential instrument for rapid response targeting in case of food security and nutrition crisis.

Further indicators of these evolutions are for example that the cash group, initially very focused on transfers' modalities is now more clearly engaging in technical dialogue with the NSR. ECHO and its operational partners are seeing the potential of the NSR as a unified targeting tool which could facilitate complementarities between seasonal or emergency response and pluriennial social protection programs. An assessment of the overlap between the populations

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<sup>11</sup> from 10 down to 5 km radius areas.

registered in the NSR and populations identified through an HEA-based targeting process used by ECHO partners is planned by the *cash group* in 2017.

There is a growing understanding that use of the NSR and mobilization of targeting criteria derived from the HEA framework are not mutually exclusive.

## **6. Lessons, opportunities and challenges ahead**

### ***Coordination and leadership***

As reported in this review, significant progresses have been made in terms of strategic alignment since 2012. The relevance of targeted social safety nets, combining social protection measures with seasonal or reactive transfers to most vulnerable populations, targeted through a unified system is clearly acknowledged by the GoM and underlined in the SCAPP. However, turning such policy commitments into programmatic changes will require considerable leadership and coordination capacities.

Since 2012, several coordination mechanisms related to social protection and emergency response have been activated:

- **2012:** Activation of Nutrition (UNICEF/WFP lead) and Food Security (FAO/UNICEF lead) Sectorial Groups (GS-N and GS-FS) and under the humanitarian coordination architecture.
- **2012:** Initiation of the “cash group”, with WFP and ACF leadership, and NGO membership.
- **2013:** Creation of the steering (CP-SNPS) and technical (CT-SNPS) committee of the National Social Protection strategy chaired by the MEF and co-chaired by the MASEF.
- **2013:** Creation of the Sectorial Group “Rural Development and food security” (GS-DRSA), chaired by the Ministry of Rural Development, and supported by FAO.

Functionality and institutionalization of these coordination mechanisms vary. GS-N and GS-FS, although not formally activated as clusters, have mostly been used as coordination mechanisms for international humanitarian actors. They have regularly been used from 2012 to 2015 with OCHA support. They have lost momentum and are mostly used to convey seasonal food Security and Nutrition vulnerability analysis workshops. The GS-DRSA has never been very active, and its functionality has been affected by the split of Agriculture and Livestock ministries in 2015. Political and technical platforms associated to the SNPS have been active since 2013, although dependent on the PNTS mobilization capacity. However, NGOs representation in these forums is restricted, major actors - such as CSA - participation has been limited, and the dynamism of these fora has been very much dependent on UNICEF during the SNPS adoption process and the WB since the initiation of the PNTS. The “cash group” institutionalization is very limited, despite irregular participation of the *Tekavoul* program since 2015.

The MEF leadership and coordination, supported by UNICEF and the WB has enabled considerable progress with the SNPS implementation. However, engagement of the CSA (Food Security Commissariat) in the policy and technical dialogue related to the development and implementation of targeted social transfers is limited. Moreover, existing coordination mechanisms are not allowing for sufficient technical dialogue between NGO (both national and international) and national institutions. Moreover, UNICEF is concerned about the

implementation of the SNPS been largely concentrated on cash based safety net implementation while the strategy encompasses a much broader set of social protection instruments.

### ***Moving from a growing understanding of the NSR potential to an effective use***

Until late 2016, the NSR was still in being developed, and potential use by other partners was a potential perspective rather than an actual operational option. The availability of the NSR in M'bout and 5 additional *Moughatas* in 2017 opens new opportunities. Such opportunities becoming real, potential users are seeking reassurance on whether the NSR would actually be fit for their targeting purposes. Key questions are the following:

1. *Are target group of programs other than Tekavoul actually registered in the NSR?*

This is a multifaceted question as factors involved are multiple and of different nature.

- The NSR target groups have been defined on **poverty** grounds, while target groups of Food Security and nutrition interventions are usually targeted on other grounds, such as **vulnerability** criteria. In theory, there is a strong correlation between poverty and vulnerability indexes. But in practice, the NSR may not necessarily include all households targeted through other methods. For example, HEA based methods are considering context specific vulnerability measures which may lead to distorted correlation between the NSR and HEA based methods across livelihood zones.
- **Calibration of the register:** The Register was calibrated to cover the 100,000 poor households to be covered by the National Safety Net program (*Tekavoul*), complemented by a “buffer” of 50,000 households. Both the *Tekavoul* clients and the households registered in the buffer are considered included in the National Register, and as such eligible to other potential user programs. The size of the buffer is a critical element of the extent to which the National register will be adapted to potential user requirement and consultation related to the sizing of this buffer have been limited. However, until now, sizing of this buffer hasn't really involved other potential users.
- **Vulnerability based criteria** are conceived to be conjuncture sensitive. For example they include food consumption proxy which are by nature sensitive to food security inter and intra-annual variations.
- The NSR is based on an application of equity principles at national scale, implying the use of quotas defined through administrative methods and community participation is limited to identifying priority households given predetermined **quotas**. HEA based methods use **targeting criteria** based methods. This approach relies on an assumption that targeting approaches should apply right-based principles at community level and limit – at least locally – the influence of resources constraints. The two approaches have different justifications which are not questioned here, but in practice, they may lead to quite different targeting outcomes.
- The **quality of the community-based targeting process** is critical, and more so that local quotas are fixed administratively and that there may be limitations with the NSR ability to identify and address potential exclusions errors.
- **Regular updating of the NSR** is identified as apriority. Given rapid demographic changes, impacts of potential shocks, rural urban migration and other vectors of social-economic changes, required updating efforts are difficult to appreciate.

## *2. Are variables required to perform potential users targeting available in the NSR?*

In principle, this is a much more straightforward issue: basically, the data collected on household registered in the NSR needs to cover a spectrum of variable that covers the needs of its potential users for targeting purpose. There are however technical issues:

- The NSR variable list cannot change too often and such decision must be made as early as possible in the NSR development process.
- New variables will add to the initial list, which will then become longer. Lengthy questionnaires may impact on the quality of data.
- Potential users may need variables dependent on the conjuncture (e.g. food consumption proxy) or with relatively rapid changes (e.g. number of under-five children).

These are all legitimate question, which, to be addressed need strategic commitment from the NSR and potential users, as well close technical and operational cooperation. However, it is difficult to conceive that all issues can be addressed ex-ante, and actual use of the NSR by potential users, at least at small scale, is the most likely way to resolve them.

These interrogations relayed by potential users illustrate the double challenge ahead of the NSR: building trust in the NSR and enhancing the match with potential user program requirements is the objective as much as the potential outcome of actual engagement of user programs. Indeed, user pressure is likely to be important for the NSR to actually respond to related issues. Hence, strategic engagement of potential users, even at small scale is likely to be important to improve NSR gradually turn it into a tool adapted to targeting larger scale operations in the future.

### ***Clarifying the limits of the NSR***

There is a consensus that the NSR can be turned into an effective too for seasonal response targeting (provided above mentioned issues) can be fixed. However, its potential as a single targeting too for large scale emergency response is much more debatable. First because the buffer might not be appropriately calibrated to cover any kind of emergencies, and secondly because vulnerability to large scale emergencies is likely to be only partially correlated to poverty indicators and proxies used to select NSR targets. Hence using the NRS for large scale emergency response targeting might led to important exclusion errors. Such limitations are understood by most parties, but it could be useful to formalize them.

### ***Thinking through complementarities among social transfers programs***

Unifying social transfers targeting systems is not the only potential benefit associated with the NSR. Greater coherence and operational coordination between programs is the main target. The rational is to aim at delivering packages of services that both respond to objectives of single programs and are coherent with coordinated sectoral and inter-sectoral policy objectives. The ultimate scenario would be that the NSR can be used as a system that allow tracking enrolment of each registered household in each program so that program design and household targeting decisions can be adapted to benefits perceived by each household client of each program. According to the World Bank social protection expert, technical difficulties associated with tracking individual clients of each program experienced in Latin America make this goal difficult to reach.

However, the potential use of a single targeting system for a variety of programs pursuing complementary objectives remains a major opportunity to better think through complementarities and coherence across programs. Seasonal or emergency response programs should then be able to adapt their program design (geographic and individual targeting criteria, size frequencies and number of the transfers) to the presence and design of pluriennial social transfers. This strategic planning exercise should become one of the elements of an annual food and nutrition security response plan.

The reverse is also true and pluri-annual social protection programs could aim at, in the long run, adapting their design to presence or absence of predictable seasonal or emergency response mechanisms.

Overall assessment of efficiency, effectiveness and impact could be jointly organized at sectorial or inter-sectorial level.

### ***Materializing potential efficiency and effectiveness gains***

Annual targeting processes are resource intensive and targeting efficiency gains are one of the important promises of the use of the NSR for seasonal or emergency response. But other efficiency and effectiveness gains can also be envisioned. Obviously, if targeting processes are shortened, seasonal or emergency responses, often running late for various reasons<sup>12</sup> (funding, operational constraints) could be implemented at more optimal times of the seasonal calendar. For cash transfers programs, it is possible to think of joint transfer channels, conceived to serve multiple programs. Setting up such systems would require important operational coordination efforts, but could generate additional benefits.

### ***Working on other elements of an adaptive social protection system***

A unified targeting system for preventive and transformative social protection programs and reactive safety net would be a critical step forward; however, other elements are required to build affective complementarities:

#### *Preparedness and contingency planning*

Effective seasonal and emergency responses require appropriate contingency planning. The country is neither equipped with a food and nutrition contingency plan, nor with an annual response plan. The ECOWAS/CILSS Regional Agency for Agriculture and Alimentation is planning to support member countries to prepare such contingency plans in 2018. Thinking through programmatic complementarities between the different safety net programs (see above) would be a step forward toward the preparation of an annual response plan. There are opportunities from coordinated efforts with the RIMRAP (an EU funded program) to support the Country in developing such plans.

#### *Early warning system*

Activating and calibrating a seasonal or emergency response required timely, accurate, and independent information. The functionality of the national early warning system is very dependent on WFP, UNICEF and FEWSNET support. Needs for technical capacity building of

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<sup>12</sup> This is particularly true for post-harvest livelihoods for which the lean seasons starts earlier.

OSA to play a stronger leadership role and to strengthen independent of the national EWS have been clearly identified (World Bank 2015 and earlier analyses).

### *Financing mechanisms*

Flexible emergency funding financing mechanisms is another required element to build effective complementarities between permanent safety nets and emergency responses. Mauritania is one the first country signatory of an ARC (African Risk Capacity) agreement and already benefited from an assurance payout in 2015. This generates opportunities for coordination with the CSA on contingency planning and targeting as required by ARC. The WB and WFP can also play an important role to lead other actors to coordinate their efforts for more effective and predictable emergency responses financing mechanism (such as Saudi Arabia and Japan).

### *Linkages with productive measures*

This review particularly focuses on complementarities between pluri-annual safety nest such as the Tekavoul program and season or emergency responses. Similar complementarities in targeting strategies can be envisaged with asset creation measures. Pilots can be envisaged within existing programs. However institutionalization is likely to be associated with additional coordination challenges, as related national institutions (e.g. Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Livestock) and not involved in the SNPS or in the NSR technical and policy forums.

### ***Conclusive remarks: dynamic of WFP-WB collaboration***

The collaboration between the WB and WFP related to two domains:

- *Development of NSR:* The WB was largely autonomous to support the development of the NSR by the PNTS. However, the 2012 WFP-CSA experience in Nouakchott was important for different reasons. First, the CSA-WFP experience could be used as a concrete representation of the NSR potential, which was very useful to build political adhesion. Second, building on its experience, WFP played an important technical advisory role to the early stage of the NSR development process. And third, WFP is now among the most committed partners planning to pilot the NSR for targeting purposes.
- *Social protection technical and policy dialogue:* While the WB worked very closely with the MEF and the MASEF since 2013, WFP benefits from close relationships with the CSA and other actors of the food security sector (including the cash group). WFP ability to bridge these two groups of actors was essential in 2013 - 2014 when the PNTS program was initiated, especially since NGOS were excluded from the SNPS coordination bodies. However, due to operational priorities, WFP strategic involvement in the SNPS as well as in the cash-group declined in 2015. At the same time, the WB concentrated its efforts in supporting the PNTS early stages implementation. 2016 marked a rebound in the intensity of the WB and WFP strategic collaboration on technical and policy dialogue issues. With the NSR becoming available, the PNTS getting more actively engaged with other issues related to building a shock responsive social safety nets, such as EWS, contingency planning, seasonal response planning, for which WFP has a clear comparative advantage and established partnerships.

The WFP/WB strategic collaboration played an important role in the PNTS implementation, and the current strategic visions are synergetic. However, the pace of such strategic collaborations is difficult to maintain. Various issues are at play such as: (1) Short term operational issue and personalities: WFP focusing on sorting out operational difficulties in 2015, while WB was focusing on PNTS implementation support. (2) The ability to autonomously pursue their priorities: while the PNTS funding is secured until 2020, WFP is increasingly facing difficulties to finance its program of work since 2014. Such an uneven position naturally tends to put the WB in a driving seat.

## **7. Ways forward**

### ***Political and policy dialogue to strengthen national governance and accountability systems***

The SNPS and the PNTS have been envisioned as multispectral strategies and programs. Actual materialization of this vision requires further engagement of lines ministries that may become potential users of the NSR. If strengthening national food and nutrition crises prevention and management systems requires building targeted and predictable safety nets, engagement with the CSA needs to be much stronger. The WFP certainly has a specific role to play in strengthening partnerships with the CSA. This could start with reinvesting in capacity building of the OSA (leadership capacity, transparency of data collection and analysis processes, methodological developments), developing annual response planning procedures, building CSA coordination capacities, and developing stronger partnership for cash based targeted transfers.

### ***NSR to engage in sustained technical dialogue with potential users***

The roll out of the NSR and the possibilities to use it as a targeting system in the future regenerate questions on whether the NSR would actually be fit for potential users targeting purposes. Several of these questions are listed in this review. Building trust of potential users and responding to their needs are key requirements for the NSR vision to be materialized in the future. The capacity of the NSR to progressively establish a sustained technical dialogue with potential users will be determinant.

### ***Moving forward with operational collaborations***

A study of the extent of the overlap between populations registered in the NSR and population identified through HEA based methodologies is planned for 2017. Similar studies, using varied methodologies have been implemented in other countries of the region and have informed further technical dialogue between equivalent of the NSR and potential users. Such studies are certainly useful. However, piloting actual use of the NSR as targeting systems by other programs than *Tekavoul* would also generate useful and complementary feedback. Moreover, it would generate complementary lessons on operational coordination challenges with the *Tekavoul* programs. It seems critical to learn such lessons in “normal” years if the NSR is to start to be used as an information platform for emergency response in next crisis years.

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