

Interview with Mr. Etienne Poda, National Alliance Against Hunger of Burkina Faso



1- How did Burkina Faso address the 2008 soaring food prices? Was it felt more deeply in the cities or in the rural areas? Which groups were most hit by the crisis? Can these groups look forward to an improvement of their lot in 2009 or would you say that their plight will get even worse?

Burkina Faso was hit by the food crisis like all other countries in the sub-region. The Government responded with tax relief measures targeting imported food products, mainly rice, milk and dairy products. This caused a reduction of border duties and VAT levied on staple foods. Unfortunately, the trading sector failed to abide by this fiscal approach. The price of a 50kg bag of imported rice went from FCFA 12,000 to more than FCFA 20,000 on retail markets, an increase by more than 60%. The price of imported milk powder went from FCFA 2,500 per kg to more than FCFA 3,500 per kg, an increase of more than 40%. There was no enforcement, at trader level, of the tax relief measures which were meant to mitigate the food price increase at consumer level. The Government did not interfere with the commercial sector. Some households have stopped consuming milk and dairy products.

The crisis was felt in urban areas much more than in the countryside, since imported foodstuffs are found on urban markets.

Locally produced foodstuffs did not undergo significant price increases. What must be kept in mind is that a large part of the population, including in the countryside, has access to food only through the "African solidarity" assistance

provided by city-dwelling relatives drawing a salary. As a consequence, the food crisis impacted all of the population.

As the rainy season was good and the harvest was accordingly bountiful, we think there is distinct hope of an improvement in the food situation, provided the Government effectively curbs speculation on food products in the trading sector.

2. Could you briefly describe the main actions undertaken by Burkina Faso's National Alliance in 2008? Would you have a specific, successful experience which you would want to share with other Alliances ?

The National Alliance, through its member organizations, carried on with its advocacy activities on behalf of the destitute. It took part in fora and ad hoc meetings on the food crisis which the Government or Civil Society organizations had convened. OCADES Caritas Burkina (Organisation catholique pour le développement et la solidarité), which is Burkina Faso's Caritas branch, organized along with its partners free distributions of seed and fertilizer for destitute and input-deprived populations, so as to enable them to take part in the current harvest. Many households, as a result, were able to grow food and to shield themselves against food insecurity.

The Government of Burkina Faso also implemented this policy, handing out seeds and subsidizing fertilizer purchases for staple crop producers.

3. What should be done to strenghten Burkina's National Alliance in terms of its influence and impact?

In order to strenghten Burkina Faso's National Alliance in terms of its influence and impact, I would say that efforts need to focus on capacity building among Alliance members in the fields of advocacy and communication. For improved efficiency, what is more needed, beyond the usual training workshops, is for the National Alliance to be endowed with substantial data collection and analysis capacities, focused on access to food and the food situation in Burkina Faso's rural and urban areas. Briefly put, there is a necessity to create and operate a dedicated database so as to reinforce advocacy activities by adequately taking into

account the actual needs of the destitute, which bear upon improved food production and improved access to food resources. The National Alliance should have the necessary means to order studies or impact evaluations about the Government's food programmes, thus putting itself in a position to put forward tangible proposals for more efficient programmes and policies.

4- Do you have any suggestions to bolster communication and interaction among National Alliances, and with the International Alliance?

As of today, communication among National Alliances, and with the International Alliance, is very weak. We communicate very little, and meet only sparingly, mainly in international fora, even though such interaction is central to the sharing of experiences and the implementation of a common strategy of resource mobilization at national level or at international donor level. In that respect, the new IAAH web site could be a powerful vehicle for the National Alliances, which could put it to use sharing documents and information, as well as taking a direct part in the discussion forums which will be implemented in 2009 in electronic format.