MID-TERM EVALUATION PRO-ARIDES

PHASE 1

FINAL REPORT

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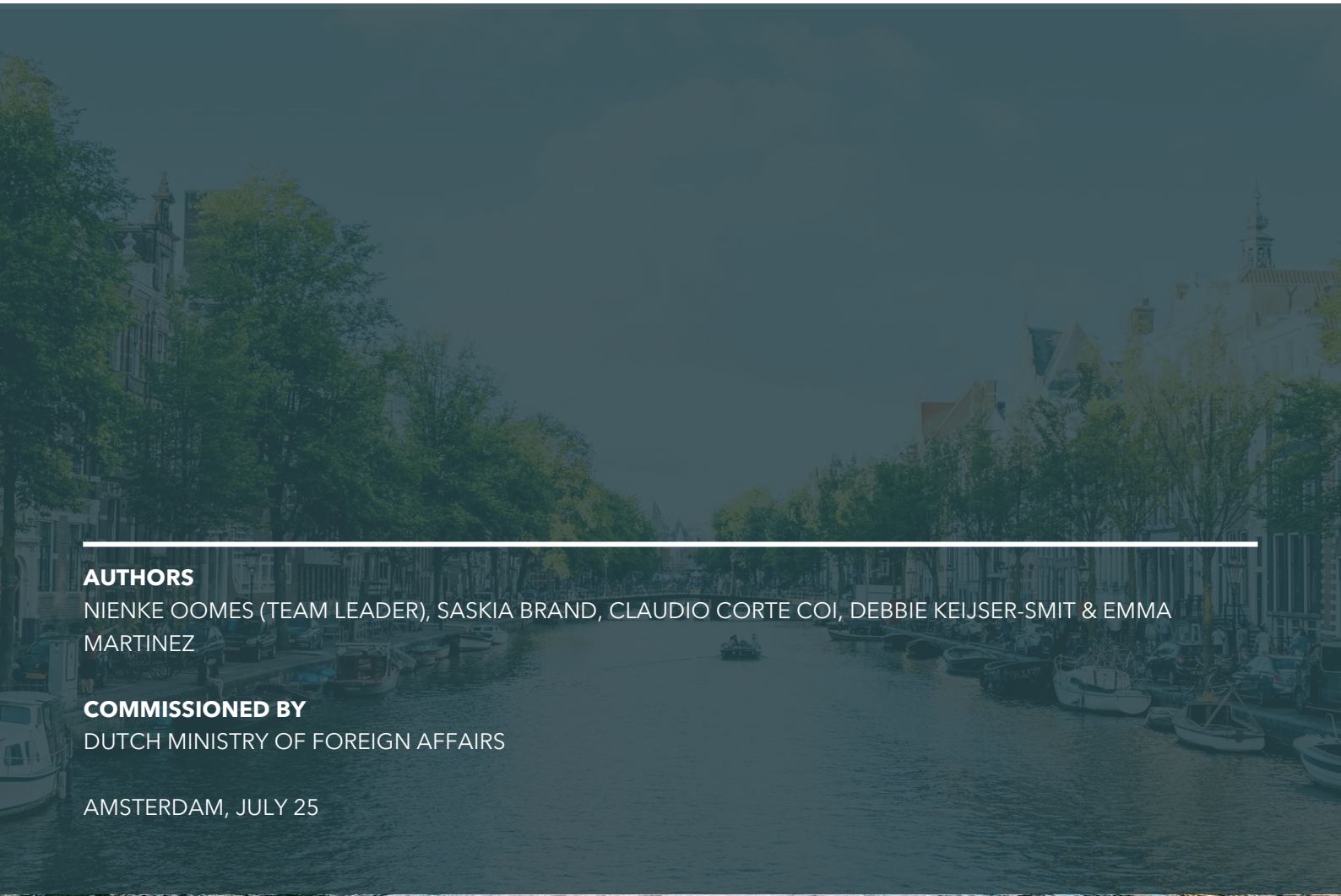
MDF



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Executive Summary

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) commissioned SEO Amsterdam Economics and MDF Training & Consultancy to carry out the mid-term evaluation of Pro-ARIDES. Pro-ARIDES is a development programme financially supported by the MFA and the Danish Cooperation, which aims to address critical challenges in the Sudano-Sahelian region by enhancing resilience, food security, and household incomes among farming and agro-pastoral communities. It also works to strengthen local governance, enabling decentralised institutions to deliver more effective services. In addition, the programme promotes the sustainable management of natural resources to support peace and equitable access, while fostering inclusive economic development–particularly for women, youth, and marginalised groups (transhumant pastoralists and internally displaced persons). The objective of this mid-term evaluation is to assess the programme's performance and potential for scale-up, draw key lessons, and inform decisions on its continuation. Our assessment focused on five OECD-DAC evaluation criteria: effectiveness, relevance, coherence, sustainability, and efficiency. In addition, we evaluated the programme's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system.

Conclusions per OECD-DAC criterion

Effectiveness

- During its first phase, Pro-ARIDES has delivered strong results. It largely met its outputs targets and showed positive progress on outcome indicators.
- The results achieved thus far are notable, particularly given the challenging context of ongoing conflict and security risks.
- The programme is generally well received by both stakeholders and target groups.
- It is currently not possible to rigorously assess the contribution of the interventions to the outcomes, due to the absence of a comparison group and the lack of systematic qualitative monitoring. However, qualitative data collected by the evaluation team in selected municipalities in the three countries did provide suggestive evidence that the programme causally contributed to various outcomes.
- Interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the three countries showed signs of positive programme contributions, specifically:
  - Women's vegetable gardening showed promising potential to positively influence production, women's income and nutrition.
  - VSLAs have contributed to increased savings and social cohesion (although funding available through VSLAs is limited).
  - Activities related to peaceful conflict resolution helped stabilising an environment with increasing conflicts due to several external circumstances.
  - Support to village land tenure bodies facilitated the development of local agreements about land rights.
  - The articulation of women's economic participation with training on better spousal communication appears to have been particularly effective in empowering women, especially regarding their inclusion outside the house.
  - Regarding governance, Pro-ARIDES has contributed to improved transparency, accountability, local tax collection, and public investment, though attribution is not always easy to distinguish from other programmes.
- Nevertheless, there are areas where the programme has encountered more difficulties and results are mixed, such as nutrition, forest protection and reforestation, financial inclusion and local authority investment rates.

- Women's participation shows progress, while youth engagement is uneven across countries.

Relevance

- Pro-ARIDES is valued by stakeholders and target groups for its integrated, locally grounded approach and strong institutional partnerships, particularly in a context of declining donor presence in the Sahel.
- The programme addresses critical challenges such as food insecurity, low household resilience, land conflicts, and weak local governance—issues well-documented in both internal reports and external sources.
- The programme demonstrates flexibility in responding to insecurity, with measures in place to adapt operations; however, stronger inclusion of pastoralist communities (including herders passing in the region during seasonal transhumance) is needed to support peacebuilding and equitable development.

Coherence

- Internal coherence:
  - The integrated approach works well and can be further strengthened in Phase 2.
  - A regional or multi-country approach offers benefits related to economies of scale and possibilities for cross-country learning, but the current heavy top-down regional management structure has in practice limited these benefits.
  - The division of labour between consortium partners does not optimally use the strengths of each partner, with multiple cooperation partners and local partners feeling underutilised.
- External coherence:
  - Pro-ARIDES partly overlaps with other programmes, but also adds value.
  - The programme's size, systemic approach and focus on social cohesion and conflicts were perceived by some as adding value to other programmes.
  - Pro-ARIDES coordinated well with other SNV projects and programmes but less so with programmes from other organisations

Sustainability

- Significant security concerns and political instability pose substantial risks to the sustainability of results.
- However, the programme has demonstrated strong flexibility in this regard, including through various mitigation strategies.
- Factors that positively contribute to sustainability include the efforts aimed at strengthening community institutions and community-based financial systems, and working with local and national partners to achieve institutional embeddedness.
- However, there are additional risks to sustainability arising from weaknesses in programme implementation (e.g. poor quality and maintenance of certain investments, insufficient access to water), combined with beneficiary-level constraints (e.g. low literacy levels) .

Efficiency

- There is room to improve cost efficiency in Pro-ARIDES, as administrative and non-allocable costs remain relatively high, and although activity-related spending has steadily increased after a slow start, further gains in efficiency are still needed.
- Drawing robust conclusions on cost per beneficiary remains difficult without access to underlying data and clearer beneficiary definitions.
- As the programme enters its second phase, Pro-ARIDES should prioritise areas where progress has been most evident and sustained results are most achievable, and focusing on consolidating its most promising activities rather than expanding into new areas or launching additional interventions. A country-level analysis of the

results achieved should inform on which combination of activities is fits best each country (as well as municipality, and household type). While this evaluation gives clear indications of which activities are most promising and most complementary with those of others, the Pro-ARIDES steering group itself is best placed to identify where to consolidate.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

- While the Theory of Change (ToC) provides a good basis for the MEL framework, the MEL system needs substantial redesigning and strengthening to improve accountability, steering, and learning.
- The MEL system contains a large number of output and outcome indicators, some of which need to be more clearly defined (to resolve ambiguities and misinterpretations) and some of which are superfluous, as they are neither useful for accountability nor learning.
- There are various issues with the set-up of the data collection and monitoring system for activities and outputs, such as inconsistencies among countries, information scattered among multiple files, disconnect between activity databases and household databases. A lot of data also appear to be aggregated manually, which could lead to inaccurate counting of beneficiaries and outputs.
- Pastoralist communities lack visibility in the data collection, as two out of three beneficiary databases do not specify the type of household.
- Monitoring of outcome indicators does not allow to have a clear picture of the programme's contribution, due to the lack of a counterfactual. While the household survey does contain questions on pro-ARIDES contribution towards specific outcomes, our fieldwork indicated that beneficiaries often do not know the distinction between the support given by Pro-ARIDES and other programmes. Therefore these questions might not provide an accurate picture of the programme's contribution, and should rather be used as a second-best option. The Niger impact study is in principle more appropriate to assess contribution, although the impact study was not yet carried out at the time of the evaluation.
- The MEL system is not geared towards learning, due to the focus on quantitative indicators and little explanation on how change came about and why something did or did not work.
- The programme limited stakeholder inclusion in MEL, especially of local communities and public institutions.
- However, output and outcome indicators are not well defined and sometimes difficult to interpret.

Recommendations

Given the importance of this programme for the region, and the progress made so far, we recommend to continue the programme with a second phase, provided that our key recommendations are incorporated:

1. **Maintain the integrated programme approach, but concentrate activities in a smaller number of areas.** One option is to reorganise the geographic distribution of activities with more focus on areas where security concerns are not a major obstacle. Another option is to make a more strategic choice around the combination of activities that contribute most to the desired systemic change per stakeholder (households, including pastoralist communities, and organisations) and the level of effort needed per municipality. This requires improving the MEL system to enable better monitoring and reporting of strategic delivery at the municipal, and where possible, beneficiary, level (see next recommendation).
2. **Dedicate more resources towards strengthening the MEL system, so as to make it more user friendly and more suitable for longer-term impact monitoring, rigorous endline evaluation, and strategic learning and steering.** The current MEL system is a good first attempt, but urgently needs strengthening, including by developing an Excel-based beneficiary-linked database for territorial analysis; better defining and refining output and outcome indicators; harmonising data collection tools across countries (systematically tracking

household exposure); establishing a robust 2025 baseline and control group as a basis for the 2030 endline; and creating a monitoring-into-action loop to support adaptive management and learning.

3. **Make programme management less hierarchical and more inclusive for better use of existing capacity and more openness to learning and constructive self-improvement**. Efficiency and effectiveness can both be enhanced by making better use of existing expertise of consortium partners; creating more space for collaborative dialogue and joint learning activities with partners; promoting innovation through new tools and methods; and strengthening gender balance in management by hiring more women to enhance gender awareness and provide a demonstration effect.
4. **Simplify reporting and promote inclusion** by making reports concise and outcome-focused, highlighting impact on gender, youth, and pastoralists, and involving local actors in data collection and monitoring.
5. **Improve contextual relevance and coherence** by better engaging pastoralist communities in programme design, aligning with other initiatives, and positioning national institutions as strategic partners in both implementation and monitoring.
6. **Improve contractual and financial administration** by streamlining subcontracting, aligning budget cycles with contract terms, decentralising disbursements for efficiency, and ensuring timely fund availability at MFIs through context-adapted approaches and action research.

List of abbreviations

AAP	Farming and agro-pastoral [households], from the French Agricole, (Agro-) Pastoral
CEAP	Agro-Pastoral School Fields
CEM	Field School Market Gardeners
CT	Local Authority
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States Family Farm
EGIS	Equity, Gender, Inclusion, and Conflict Sensitivity
FO	Farmers Organisation
IGA	Income-generating activities
KIT	the Royal Tropical Institute
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MFI	Microfinance Institution
NRM	Natural Resource Management
PGLR	Accountable Local Governance Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PMU	Programme Management Unit
Pro-ARIDES	Programme Agroalimentaire pour la Résilience Intégrée et le Développement Economique du Sahel
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
ToC	Theory of Change
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WO	Women's Organisation
WUR	Wageningen University & Research
YO	Youth Organisation

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1 Introduction

This introduction explains Pro-ARIDES' background and the purpose of this mid-term evaluation. It also provides an overview of the intervention logic of the programme.

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) commissioned SEO Amsterdam Economics and MDF Training and Consultancy to carry out the mid-term evaluation of Pro-ARIDES, a programme financially supported by the MFA and the Danish Cooperation. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the programme, its Theory of Change, and outlines the purpose and methodology of this evaluation. The main findings are presented across Chapters 2 to 7, covering the programme's effectiveness (Chapter 2), relevance (Chapter 3), coherence (Chapter 4), sustainability (Chapter 5), efficiency (Chapter 6), and its Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 concludes the report with overall conclusions and actionable recommendations to inform the design and implementation of the second phase of Pro-ARIDES.

1.1 Pro-ARIDES background

The *Programme Agroalimentaire pour la Résilience Intégrée et le Développement Economique du Sahel* (Pro-ARIDES) is a programme which aims at addressing pressing challenges in the Sudano-Sahelian region.[1] Since its launch in January 2021, the initiative has focused on enhancing resilience, food security, and incomes for farming and agro-pastoral households through strengthening local governance to enable decentralised institutions to deliver better services. Moreover, the programme strives to promote the sustainable management of natural resources to foster peace and equitable access, alongside inclusive economic development, particularly for women, youth, and marginalised groups.

Pro-ARIDES is supported by a total budget of €105.4 million, with €100 million financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and €5.4 million by the Danish Cooperation. The programme is implemented by a consortium led by SNV, in collaboration with CARE Netherlands, Wageningen University & Research (WUR), and the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), and follows from the earlier MFA funded DryDev (Drylands Development) implemented between 2013 – 2019. Although both programmes do indeed share similar overarching goals of enhancing food security in the Sahel, they differ in several key aspects. Notably, Pro-ARIDES features a longer implementation period and a more targeted geographic focus within the Sahel region, specifically in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Furthermore, it adopts a broader intervention approach, emphasising local economic growth, systemic change and decentralised institutional development. This contrasts with DryDev's approach, which primarily supported smallholder farmers in transitioning from subsistence farming and emergency aid to sustainable rural development in both the Sahel and the Horn of Africa.

Pro-ARIDES activities are divided into two five-year phases, adopting a phased systematic approach to achieve its goals:

1. **Phase 1 (2021–2025**): Pilot and test solutions while strengthening local governance and community capacities. This phase focuses on laying the groundwork for scaling efforts towards systemic transformation

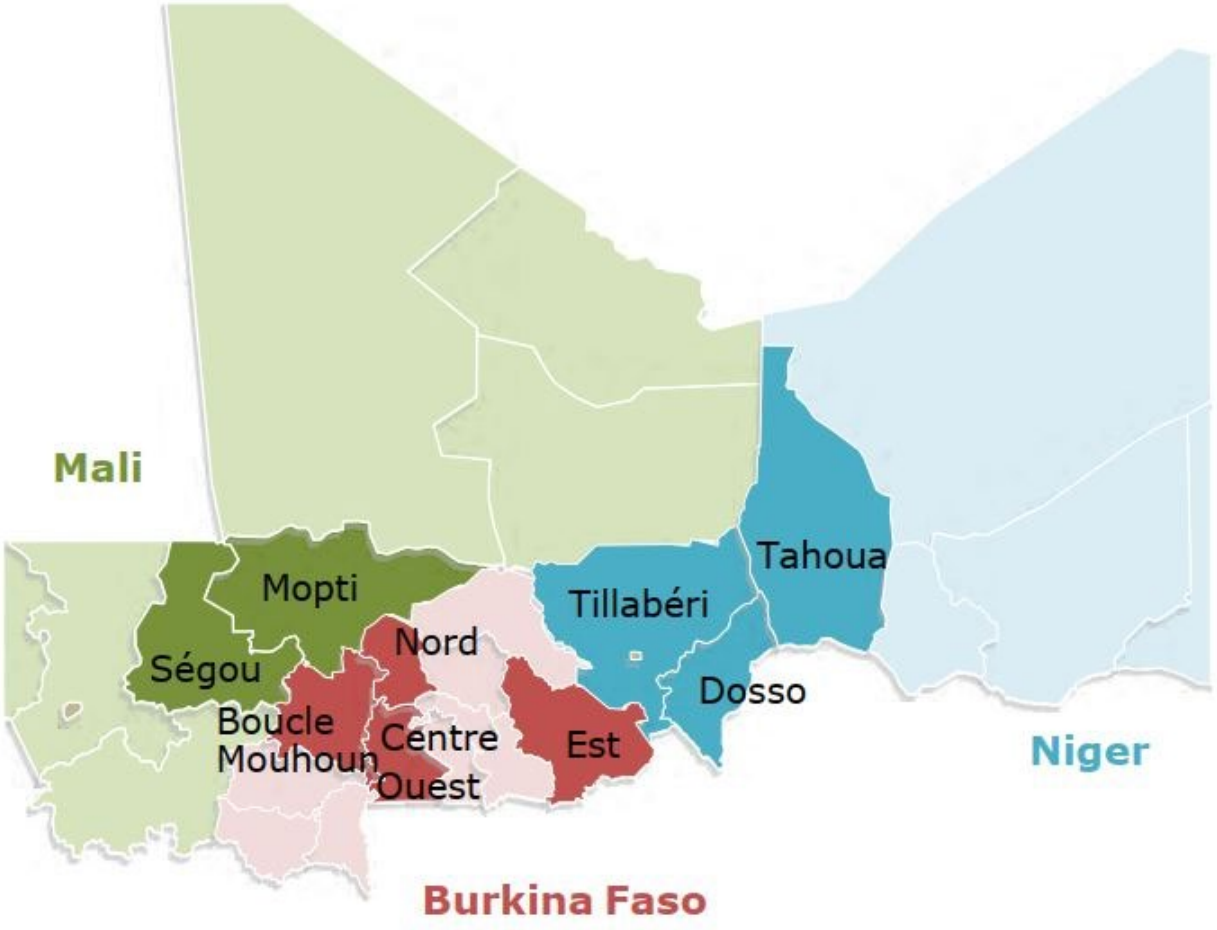
[1] Pro-ARIDES 2023 Annual Report

2. **Phase 2 (2026–2030)**: Scale up successful interventions and embed them into policies and institutional frameworks, ensuring sustainability.

The programme targets the most vulnerable regions in the Sudano-Sahelian zone, characterised by low rainfall, fragile ecosystems, and significant socio-economic challenges including poverty, displacement, and food insecurity. Pro-ARIDES builds on lessons of DryDev by emphasising community empowerment, integrated resource management, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Promoting resilience and economic development in the Sudano-Sahelian region is highly relevant due to several critical challenges. These include climate vulnerability, characterised by erratic rainfall and severe droughts adversely impacting agricultural productivity; socio-political instability, marked by conflict and displacement; and resource degradation, intensifying competition over scarce land and water resources.

Pro-ARIDES aims to address these challenges by focusing on climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable resource use, and inclusive governance mechanisms. The regional focus is designed for coherence across Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, while leveraging shared cultural, ecological, and economic characteristics to foster scalable impacts. The intervention areas are displayed below.

Figure 1.1 Geographic Clustering of Intervention Areas Reflecting Regional Strategy

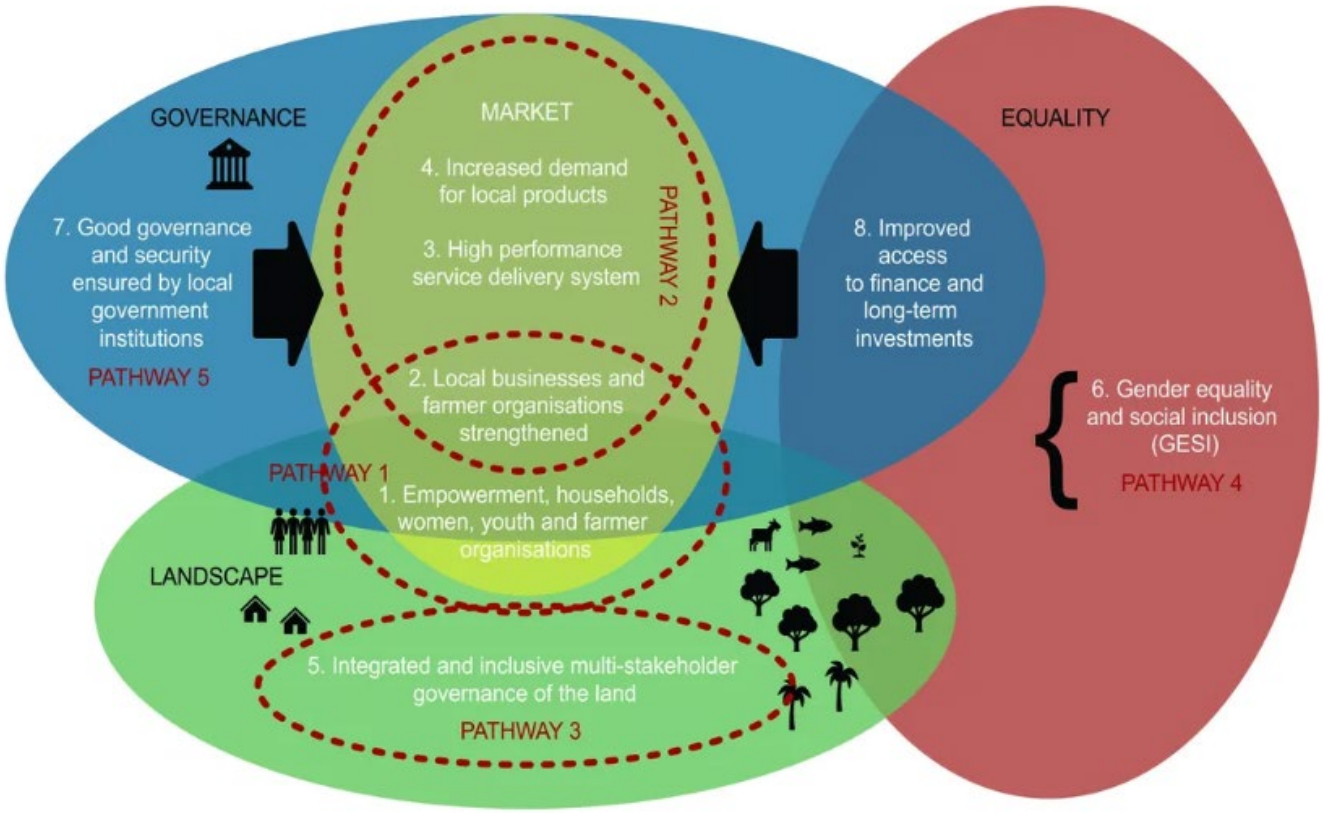


Source: Pro-ARIDES

1.2 Theory of Change

Pro-ARIDES operates through five interconnected pathways, each designed to drive systemic transformation. The programme's Theory of Change (ToC), illustrated in Figure 1.2, outlines eight key systemic challenges that these pathways address. A detailed description of each pathway follows below.

Figure 1.2 Pro-ARIDES Theory of Change



Source: Pro-ARIDES

Pathway 1 focuses on building resilient food systems. This pathway aims to enhance farm productivity and improve herd management by promoting climate-smart agricultural practices that are both adaptive and sustainable. It also supports better household nutrition through diversified diets rooted in sustainable food production. Furthermore, by encouraging agroecological methods, Pathway 1 strengthens the resilience of farming communities against the impacts of climate change, ensuring long-term food security and environmental sustainability.

Pathway 2 focuses on economic empowerment. This pathway seeks to create market linkages and income-generating opportunities, particularly for women, youth and marginalised groups, to foster inclusive economic growth. It aims to strengthen local businesses and value chains, while improving access to financial services that support entrepreneurship and resilience. In addition, Pathway 2 promotes the development of employment

opportunities beyond agriculture, helping communities diversify their livelihoods and build sustainable economic foundations.

Pathway 3 focuses on sustainable resource management. This pathway aims to support peaceful and collective approaches to land and water use, fostering collaboration within and across communities. It promotes sustainable practices that prevent resource degradation and help manage potential conflicts over natural assets. In addition, Pathway 3 encourages initiatives such as reforestation, soil restoration, and water conservation to enhance ecosystem health and ensure the long-term availability of vital resources.

Pathway 4 focuses on social inclusion and equality. This pathway aims to ensure that gender, youth, and marginalised groups are meaningfully included in decision-making processes at all levels. It empowers communities to advocate for fair and equitable access to resources and opportunities, fostering a more inclusive development approach. Additionally, Pathway 4 supports the growth of leadership among women and youth organisations, as well as marginalised groups, strengthening their ability to influence change and drive community-led progress.

Pathway 5 focuses on institutional strengthening. This pathway seeks to build the capacity of local governments to deliver services more effectively and responsively. It emphasises the restoration of the social contract between communities and local authorities, fostering trust, accountability, and collaboration. By developing participatory governance frameworks, pathway 5 promotes inclusive and sustainable development that reflects the needs and priorities of the communities it serves.

1.3 Purpose and methodology of the evaluation

The purpose of this mid-term evaluation is to assess Pro-ARIDES' results and scalability, draw lessons, and provide inputs for the decision on continuing the programme. As stated in the Terms of Reference, the purpose of this mid-term evaluation is threefold: (1) provide information on the results achieved so far and how this relates to the programme's effectiveness, relevance, coherence, efficiency and sustainability; (2) draw lessons and formulate recommendations for the second phase of the programme; and (3) assess the chances of successful scaling of results in the second phase of the programme.

SEO and MDF evaluated the programme along the lines of the OECD-DAC criteria and used a mixed-methods approach, ensuring robust findings through systematic triangulation of diverse data sources. The evaluation team integrated both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive assessment. While the evaluation focused on effectiveness, it also addressed other key evaluation questions. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, the team systematically triangulated and cross-validated information from multiple sources, thereby strengthening the overall robustness of the analysis.

The research methods consisted of the following:

- **Extensive desk research** of Pro-ARIDES programme documents, annual reports, national reports, financial and administrative documents, and numerous other relevant documents.
- 15-20 **in-depth interviews** with programme-level stakeholders: consortium partners, donors, development partners, MFA and embassy representatives.
- **Data analysis** of output and outcome data (both at aggregated and country level).
- In-depth **analysis of the MEL system** and a **MEL workshop** with consortium partner representatives and a member of the MEL team from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

- **Field work in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**
  - Semi-structured interviews with farmer organisations (including agro-pastoral farmers), SMEs, municipalities, land rights committees, MFIs, research institutes, implementing agencies, national SNV and CARE staff, embassies and the lead ministries in each country (in total 32 in Burkina Faso, 48 in Mali, 20 in Niger). All interviews were based on interview guides developed by the evaluation team.
  - Focus group discussions (FGDs) with households, Women's and Youth Organisations (19 in Burkina Faso, 18 in Mali, 4 in Niger). All FGDs were based on FGD-guides developed by the evaluation team.
  - Observations of SMEs in Mali and Burkina Faso.

The methodology comprised a combination of Outcome Harvesting (OH) and Contribution Analysis (CA). While initially, the plan was to use a combination of Contribution Analysis and Process Tracing, the latter was replaced with OH during the inception phase. The reason for this change in methodology was that the evaluation team found out during inception that there was very limited MEL information at the intermediate outcome level– most indicators were either at the level of activities (for example, training conducted) or at the level of long-term impact (for example, increased incomes). It was therefore decided to use the interviews and FGDs during fieldwork to collect more information on changes observed at outcome level (OH) and stakeholder views on how these changes came about (CA).

Rigorously combining OH and CA proved difficult in practice. On the one hand the evaluation instruments (interview guides and FGD guides) were adapted to include both OH-type questions about observed changes in outcomes (what changed, how, when, where, who was involved and what do the changes mean) and CA-type questions (probing stakeholders for their views on the programme's contribution to the changes). However, two problems emerged during the fieldwork: (1) the interviews and FGDs ended up being very long, because there were so many different outcomes to assess: and (2) it proved too difficult for most stakeholders to assess the contributions of Pro-ARIDES to the observed changed in outcomes, because of numerous other factors and interventions that affected those outcomes. A lesson learned from this evaluation is therefore that rigorous application of CA is possibly only for a limited set of interventions, for which the (changes in) outcomes are already clearly measured. more time and resources are required to implement a combination of OH and CA. This having said, our fieldwork did result in some interesting observations regarding unexpected outcomes that were not clear from the monitoring system, e.g. the impact of savings groups and spousal communication, which largely seemed attributable to Pro-ARIDES.

Limitations

- Data collection across the programme countries was conducted under challenging conditions, requiring adjustments to the fieldwork in each context due to security concerns. In Mali and Burkina Faso, two targeted municipalities became inaccessible and had to be substituted following directives from local authorities. In Burkina Faso, obtaining authorisation caused a two-day delay. In Niger, all interviews were confined to mayors' offices, limiting opportunities for onsite observation.
- In Niger data collection was limited to five days, as this was meant to be supplemented by data from the impact study. While the results shown by this fieldwork are congruent with the results of the two other countries, this means that caution should be taken when generalising these data.
- None of the consultants were able to engage with (nomadic) pastoral households, as these communities reside in the most remote and least accessible areas.
- Questions related to contribution analysis often could not be reliably answered by the target groups, who were frequently uncertain about which organisation had delivered the services they received.

2 Effectiveness

During its first phase, Pro-ARIDES achieved most of its objectives, which is impressive given the difficult security context. However, output and outcome indicators are not well defined and sometimes difficult to interpret.

Evaluation Question (EQ) 1 - Has Pro-ARIDES achieved its intermediate objectives for the different pathways as defined in the Theory of Change, and what explains these results?

The assessment of effectiveness is a central focus of this evaluation. The main question above is answered concisely for all pathways combined in section 2.1 and in more detail for each pathway in Sections 2.2 to 2.6. For each pathway, we integrated the programme-level findings—based on Pro-ARIDES' output and outcome data, interviews with stakeholders—and, where possible, the findings from the fieldwork. Section 2.6 addresses the remaining effectiveness questions.

2.1 Overarching effectiveness findings

The Pro-ARIDES programme is generally well received and has achieved notable results. This is particularly impressive given the challenging context of ongoing conflict and security risks. During the fieldwork conducted by the evaluation team in selected municipalities in the three countries, beneficiaries and other stakeholders generally expressed strong appreciation for the programme and a clear desire for its continuation.

As a whole, Pro-ARIDES met most of its output targets and showed positive progress on outcome indicators. Figure 2.1 shows that Pro-ARIDES, on average, met most of its output targets in 2023 and 2024.[2] While output indicators in 2024 slightly decreased relative to 2023, this can potentially be explained by increased risks in the municipalities targeted by Pro-ARIDES, in line with the overall deteriorating security climate.[3] Nonetheless, Figure 2.2 demonstrates that positive progress was made on outcome indicators (available for 2023 only), especially for pathways two, three and five. These results are particularly encouraging given the challenging operational environment, as further discussed in Chapter 3 on Relevance.

However, it was often difficult to assess the contribution of the programme towards these outcomes. Assessing contribution proved challenging, due to methodological shortcomings in the MEL system, the duration of fieldwork, and the fact that beneficiaries were often unaware of which specific programme (whether pro-ARIDES or others) had provided the assistance. Nonetheless, we assessed the contribution of the programme to each outcome and presented the results in Appendix B. Overall, the evidence of contribution was quite limited, especially for pathways 3, 4, and 5. Where fieldwork findings did provide suggestive evidence of a causal link between the activities of Pro-ARIDES and the observed outcomes, we note this explicitly in the text of Sections 2.2-2.6.

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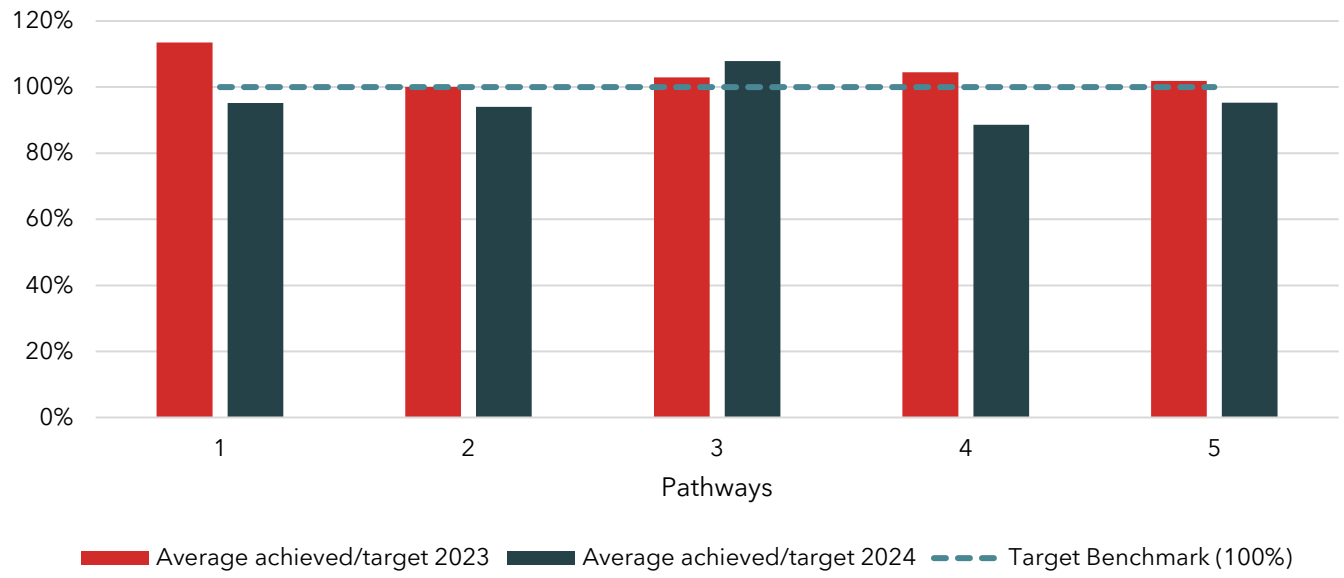
2 For 2022, targets and achievement values have been found to be the same, thus one column has only been added for such.

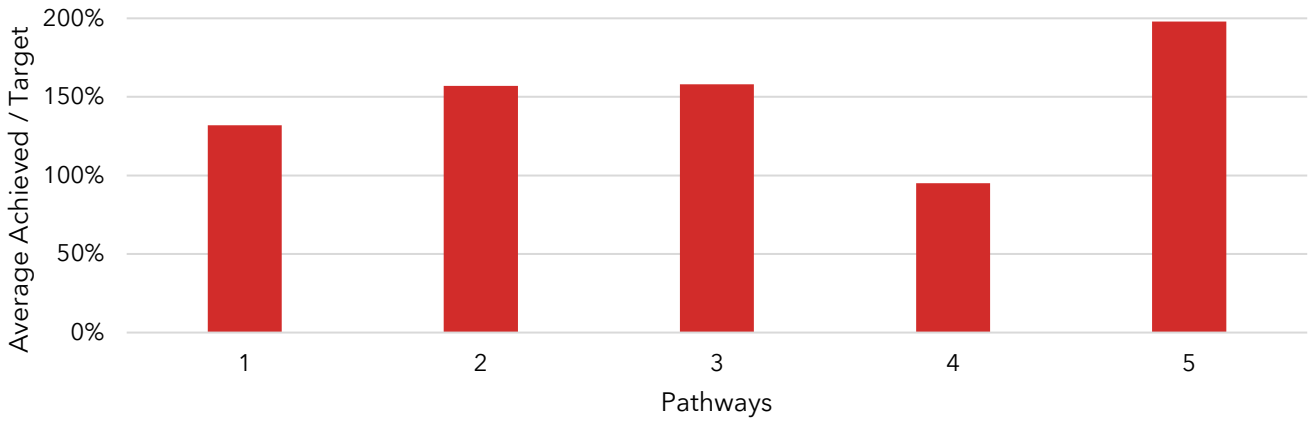
3 As highlighted in the 2024 Annual Report, the proportion of low-risk municipalities declined from 55 percent to 45 percent, while the share of municipalities categorised as moderate risk rose from 21 percent to 25 percent, and those deemed significant risk increased from 17 percent to 22 percent.

Figure 2.1 Most output targets were achieved, but the target achievement ratio declined somewhat in 2024.[4]



Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data.

Figure 2.2 All pathways exceeded their targets, except pathway 4, which showed slight underperformance. Pathway 5 stands out with outcomes significantly above target levels



Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data

While the programme has made encouraging progress during its first phase, there is a need for consolidation during the second phase. Desk research showed that Pro-ARIDES engages in a wide array of activities across numerous geographical locations. However, this breadth was not always viewed positively by interviewees (see Section 2.6). The pilot phase over the past five years allowed for experimentation with a diverse set of approaches,

[4] While it is not possible to attribute the decline to a single cause, given the high volatility across many indicators, a potential contributing factor, as noted in the 2024 Annual Report, is the deterioration of the overall security situation compared to 2023, which adversely affected the implementation of activities.

based on the assumption that impact would gradually materialise. Looking ahead, a more focused and strategic approach will be essential to ensure sustainable impact in the next phase, given the programme's limited resources and the need to follow up on the approaches introduced among previously targeted populations and stakeholders

2.2 Pathway 1: Household

EQ1a - Has Pro-ARIDES (PA) achieved its intermediate objectives for the pathway 1 (household level) as defined in the Theory of Change, and what explains these results?

Box 2.1 Main findings Pathway 1

- The majority of output and outcome indicators under pathway 1 were achieved or came close to achieved so far; however, there was a drop in achieved outputs across all three countries.
- Households have acquired and applied new knowledge related to climate resilience, diversification, and more efficient farming techniques, contributing to improvements in production and overall resilience.
- Activities with women's vegetable gardening showed promising potential to positively influence production, women's income and nutrition.
- Pro-ARIDES's proximity-based approach appears to have fostered local expertise, while there are signs that support and capacity-building efforts have improved performance of farmers' organisations.
- Results in the area of nutrition have thus far been mixed.

In 2024, the overall output performance for Pathway 1 was lower than in 2023. As shown in Table 2.1, a significant portion of output achievement rates fell below targets in 2024. We hereby describe programme's achievements along the main output indicators.

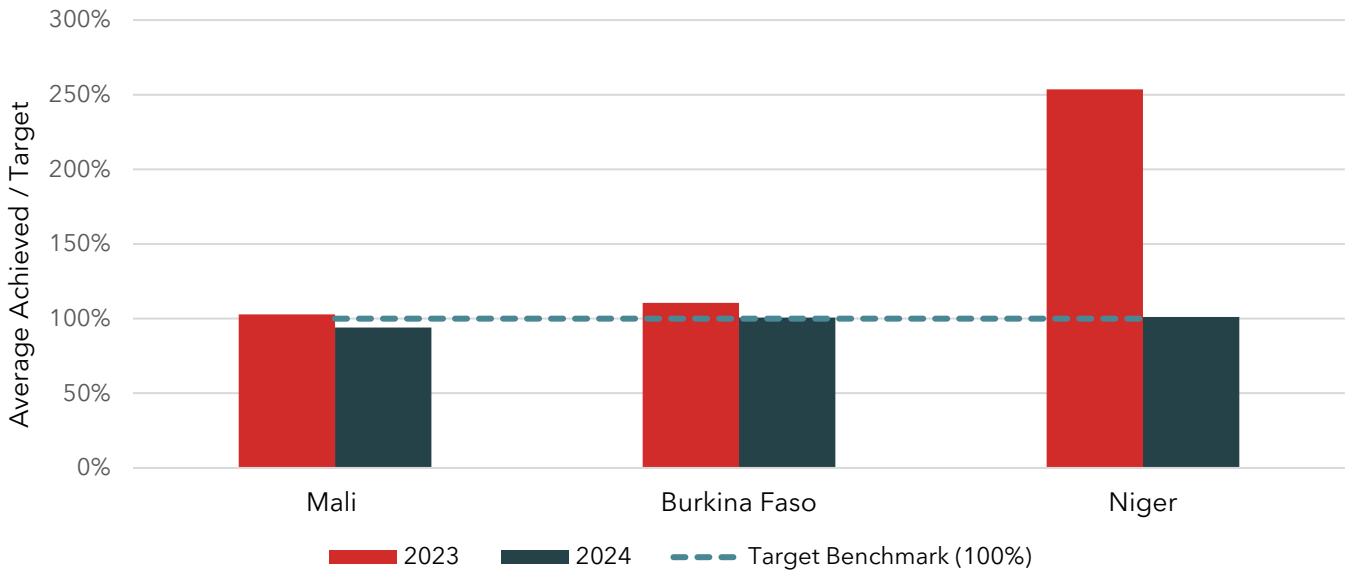
Indicators related to household support through diversification and nutrition activities have performed strongly. As fieldwork findings suggest, households obtained and applied new knowledge on climate resilience, diversification and more efficient farming techniques, which were associated with improvements in both production and resilience. Reported techniques included the production of organic fertilizer and bio-pesticides, the production and use of improved seed varieties, soil restoration and conservation practices (anti-erosion measures, firebreaks, reforestation). The introduction of new crops with shorter production appears to have enabled farmers to extend harvesting periods. Across all three countries farmers (men and women) reported gains in productivity (allowing for surplus sales), reduced cost (through locally produced inputs), and increased climate resilience (more robust varieties, soil restauration). In Mali, investments in mechanisation equipment were seen as highly effective, reportedly allowing farmers to produce more. In Burkina Faso, diversification included successful new ways of transformation of primary products.

Dietary interventions showed positive results, with both training sessions on nutrition and the promotion of culinary recipes meeting their targets. Fieldwork findings, however, pointed to mixed results at the outcome level in the area of improved nutrition. There were some indications of new nutritional knowledge and increased awareness of the importance of nutrition, but 'new recipes' have thus far been met with moderate interest. Some (international) stakeholders suggested that the programme should pay more attention to nutrition, as an alternative (demand-based) channel through which to improve food security (as opposed to supply-based training). During our fieldwork, however, some local stakeholders noted that possibilities to improvement nutrition are limited by low household incomes (especially in relation to large families), and cooking habits (overcooking of vegetables, little use of vegetables, focus on starch and meet, use of oil and salt).

The number of household gardens established in 2024 surpassed targets. Fieldwork findings suggest that vegetable gardening by women could potentially have considerable impact, given its influence on production, women's income, and improved nutrition. However, it was effective only in some parts (notably in Niger), but the overall results appear to have been negatively influenced by lack of water, incomplete fencing, and the limited scale of the gardens (in Mali 1.5 hectare per village on average). Reported improvements in (child) nutrition ranged from marginal in Mali, to moderate in Niger, and more substantial in Burkina Faso. In Mali, the limited access to water was partly attributed to gaps in knowledge around irrigation and maintenance within target groups. It implies that gardening can take place only during the 3 months of the rainy season, instead of year-round.

Output performance somewhat declined across all three countries in 2024, with Niger showing the sharpest drop. Mali and Burkina Faso display similar patterns across both 2023 and 2024, whereas Niger's spike in 2023 performance is largely attributed to a 1,351 percent achievement rate on the indicator measuring the number of AAP households (m/f) supported through diversification activities, a figure that dropped to 85 percent in 2024 (explained by a highly substantial increase in targets). However, it should be noted that for this specific indicator, some households are likely double-counted, having also been reported under the nutrition-related metric. The decrease in achievement rate can be attributed to a substantial upward revision of the target value. This adjustment stemmed from underestimated initial targets during the planning stage and was further influenced by high household demand for this type of equipment. In Burkina Faso, all pathway 1 indicators reached 100 percent of their targets, with the number of household gardens established even slightly overperforming. In contrast, although Mali experienced a notable decline in the achievement rate for this indicator and in the number of trainings delivered on climate-resilient tools, it recorded increases in achievement rates for training sessions on nutrition activities and the introduction of culinary recipes to households, effectively balancing the broad overall performance.

Figure 2.3 While overall outputs declined across countries as a whole, Niger's drop was more pronounced due to an exceptionally high average achieved output level in 2023 [5]



Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data.

[5] Mali experienced a delayed start in implementation due to turnover of the project coordinator (twice) and possibly other factors. Effective implementation began in the second quarter of 2022

Note: Averages were calculated annually by first summing the total achieved outputs and the total targeted outputs for each output indicator within a country (these values are based directly off Pro-ARIDES' reported values per year). These totals were then used to calculate the achievement rate per indicator. After determining the achievement rate for each indicator, an average was calculated across all indicators to produce a single annual average per country. Finally, these country-level averages were combined to generate an overall average for each year. Indicators with missing baseline data were excluded from the calculation of averages (relevant for pathways 3-5).

Table 2.1 Results in terms of outputs are mixed, with the strongest results in introducing crops for diversifying production

Indicator[6]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
# Household garden established	2,286	7,167	169%	6,654	75%	105%
# AAP households (m/f) supported through diversification/nutrition activities	6,586	37,127	109%	51,010	106%	107%
# Climate change-resilient technologies/practices promoted/introduced	17	56	110%	56	88%	88%
# Crops introduced for production diversification	30	47	174%	52	111%	111%
# AAP households (m/f) supported through diversification activities	1,970	54,361	157%	63,401	96%	116%
# AAP households participating in training activities on climate-resilient production	14,713	41,789	113%	51,970	91%	100%
# Training on practices related to increasing production	31	45	105%	49	98%	98%
# Training sessions held on nutrition activities	205	65	60%	109	100%	100%
# Culinary recipes promoted/introduced to households	12	44	68%	65	100%	100%
# Training on the use of climate change-resilient tools	17	46	92%	49	84%	84%
# Community (trainer) facilitators engaged in nutrition activities	918	732	92%	1,339	99%	98%
Average			**113%**		**95%**	

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data.

Note: In the graph above—and in those that follow—blue indicates outputs that exceeded their targets (≥100%), yellow represents outputs that achieved between 75% and 99% of their target, and red highlights outputs that fell below 75%

6 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

of their target. The colour choices were made with colourblind accessibility in mind, to ensure the information is clear and distinguishable for all viewers.

The majority of outcome indicators under pathway 1 achieved or came close to achieving their 2023[7] percentage targets. Outcome indicator 1.1 was the lowest performing indicator, as it did not reach either its absolute or percentage targets, though it came marginally close, particularly in percentage terms. In particular, indicator 1.4 stands out for exceeding both its percentage and absolute targets, while indicators 1.2 and 1.3 met percentage targets. Results for indicator 1.3 can be supported by fieldwork findings which suggest that households acquired new knowledge on climate resilience, diversification and more efficient farming techniques, indicating potential increases in production.

Table 2.2 In terms of outcomes, households and organisations showed improvements in production, nutrition, and performance in 2023[8]

N°	Performance Indicator Outcomes	Unit Measurement	Baseline 2021	Programme 2023 Target	Achieved 2023	Achieved/target 2023
1.1	# and % of AAP households (m/f) having diversified production, including market gardening	% Household	32	42	40	97%
		# Household	15,735	29,126	22,965	79%
1.2	# and % of AAP households (m/f) having improved their diet[9]	% Household	28	38	46	119%
		# Household	14,699	28,975	25,835	90%
1.3	# and % of AAP (m/f) households that have increased their production	% Household	-	10	20	198%
		# Household	-	14,096	11,956	85%
1.4	# of FOs/WOs/YOs that have improved their performance[10]	% FOs/WOs/YOs	3	23	62	271%
		# FOs/WOs/YOs	64	475	572	120%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data. Outcome data for 2024 were not collected.

Disclaimer: these are changes in outcomes, not only attributed to the programme (add this for all outcome graphs – improve, check already added)

Interpretation of outcome indicators related to production and nutrition reflects only specific levels of improvements and might lead to overestimation of increased production. First, all indicators mention an "increase", "diversification" or "improvement", but they actually report on the *level* rather than the *change*. The change is then the difference between the levels in 2023 and 2021. Second, the definitions of indicators 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 presents some interpretation issues.

7 The 2023 outcome data was the most recent outcome data available for this evaluation.

8 Outcome data from 2024 has not been included, as this data is collected biennially, with the most recent collection conducted in 2023.

9 The indicator measures whether households consume more than 5 different types of food.

10 Based on a self assessment by the FOs/WOs/YOs about their performance in terms of (1) internal organisation (governance aspects, resource management), (2) services or goods provided (access to financial products, production factors, product processing and marketing, defending members' interests and rights) and (3) external relations (representation, support negotiation, control of the value chain). Source: PSEA guide.

- Indicator 1.1 has a definition of "diversified production" that only reflects a specific level of diversification. In fact, it assumes that households have a diversified crop production if they produce more than 6 crop types.[11][12] As a result, an hypothetical increase from 1 crop type to 6 crop types is not marked as an "diversified production", whereas an increase from 6 crop types to 7 is.
- Indicator 1.2 has a definition of improvement in diet that only reflects a specific type of improvement. In fact, it assumes that household have a "good" diet if they consume more than 5 types of food. As a result, an increase from 1 type of food to 5 types of food is not marked as an "improved diet", whereas an increase from 5 types of food to 6 is.
- Indicator 1.3 might lead to total overestimation of the increase in production. This indicator was initially supposed to be measured via difference between 2023 values and 2021 values of production for the same household; however, the programme had to change approach in 2023 as they could not survey some of the households surveyed in the baseline, due to security issues in some areas. As a result, the survey in 2023 directly asked whether the households improved their production for a specific crop or livestock, thanks to the programme. Further, the household is considered to have improved their production if production of at least one crop or livestock has increased, which might lead to total overestimation of the increase in production.

Fieldwork findings suggest that the programme's proximity approach has contributed to strengthening local capacities to respond in the long term to farmers' needs for support. In the communes visited, there was evidence of improved capacity related to the expertise of extension workers (in collaboration with formal extension officers), seed producers, plant health officers, animal health officers, and the village relays (one man and one woman per village). The latter have proved to be important experimental laboratories and knowledge bases for the innovations brought about by the programme.

No changes were reported regarding herd management, and the links between crop farming and livestock farming remained under-exploited during the first stage of the programme. Although livestock-related support was provided to some farmers (e.g. vaccination training, provision of incubators and breeding equipment), there was room to increase synergies between activities aimed at crop farming and those aimed at livestock farming in the areas visited by the evaluation team.

Fieldwork also provided indications that the capacity building and support provided contributed to improved performance in the management and delivery of services by farmer organisations (FOs) thanks to the capacity-building and support received. Strengthened governance has facilitated their access to funding and improved their role in supporting farming households and negotiating with external partners. According to stakeholders, farmers' organisations apply more transparent and participative governance practices such as rigorous record-keeping, regular meetings and the implementation of internal control mechanisms. A limiting factor is the low literacy level of the target groups.

2.3 Pathway 2: Market

EQ1b - Has Pro-ARIDES achieved its intermediate objectives for the pathway 2 (market level, value chain) as defined in the Theory of Change, and what explains these results?

11 This indicator does not include production of milk and meat.

12 As a justification for the choice of six crops, a consortium partner reported that the choice of a threshold of 6 was chosen after "the baseline highlight[ed] local practices of systematic crop association in the three target countries"

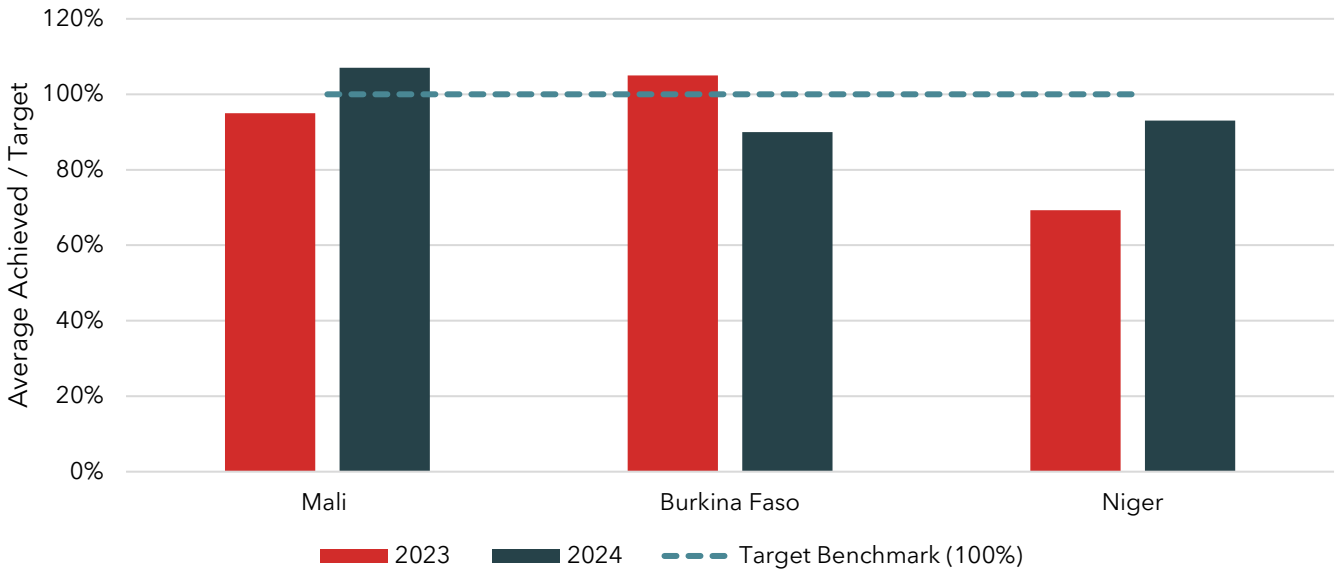
Box 2.2 Main findings Pathway 2

- The programme showed mixed results in terms of output and outcome achievement in pathway 2, with financial inclusion lagging behind.
- There are signs that Pro-ARIDES supported greater access to economic opportunities for AAP households, SMEs, and traders, although certain constraints are still faced.
- Entrepreneurs appeared to benefit from improved access to credit through connections with MFIs.
- There are indications that the creation of VSLAs has contributed to increased savings and social cohesion, but funding available through VSLAs is limited.

Several key output indicators showed mixed progress in 2024. The number of functional digital and multi-actor platforms supported met their respective targets in both 2023 and 2024. While targets for climate-adapted technologies were not fully reached in 2024, they did show year on year improvement. However, several areas showed a decline in achievement rate in 2024, despite increases in absolute values. Both capacity building for organisations and payment and transaction systems accessible via smartphone fell significantly short of targets, in terms of achieved between 2022 and 2024.

While Burkina Faso saw a decline in its overall average output achievement rate, both Mali and Niger demonstrated improvements–though Niger continued to fall short of its targets. In Mali, the number of MFI programme partners offering accessible finance doubled (from 3 to 6). As highlighted in the 2024 Annual Report , access to markets and financial services was enhanced through participation in three trade fairs, engagement of agricultural stakeholders in B2B workshops, and the disbursement of FCFA 16 million in loans via seven AVECs. However, despite this increase, support for capacity building in areas such as marketing and distribution declined in achievement rate, attributed to an overestimation during the planning phase. In Niger, the rise in achieved output indicators reflects a combination of the completion of new activities and tangible progress on those already underway. Meanwhile, Burkina Faso's decline can be attributed to lower average achievement rates (although still surpassing targets) of both promotional fairs/B2B meetings supported, as well as a reduction in SMEs and FOs providing services to AAP households supported for capacity building in service delivery meeting households needs, both explained by an increase in targets following strong achievement rates in 2023.

Figure 2.4 Outputs in Mali and Burkina Faso were, on average, close to their targeted benchmark, while outputs in Niger showed a strong improvement in 2024, although the average remained below target.



Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data

Fieldwork suggests that access to economic opportunities for AAP households, SMEs, traders, and other economic actors has improved as a result of programme interventions, although certain constraints persist. This dynamic appears to have been supported by several complementary levers: the modernisation of processing equipment and the increase in production capacity (equipped production units, new packaging and preservation tools, production equipment, etc.), as well as promotional actions such as active participation in fairs, the organisation of local consumption days, marketing and packaging tools. For instance, the output indicator related to promotional fairs/B2B meetings supported by Pro-ARIDES recorded a cumulative achievement rate of 107 percent between 2022 and 2024. This indicator showed a particular strong achievement rate in Burkina Faso, where the country's ambitions were revised upwards. In Niger, the achievement rate was 63 percent following an increase in the target from 2 to 4, whereas in Mali the achievement rate exactly met the target. In addition, support for the gradual professionalisation of the players through targeted training in hygiene, business management and diversification of several product ranges (soumbala, couscous enriched with moringa, maize flour, biscuits) has reportedly contributed to raising the visibility of local products in both domestic and international markets. However, the inadequate quality or failure of certain equipment limits the ability of beneficiaries to produce properly or offer quality services, which affects business continuity.

In several municipalities there were signs that entrepreneurs were linked to MFIs which suggest improved credit access (in combination with a contribution from Pro-ARIDES). The output indicator regarding MFI programme partners providing accessible financial products to AAP households, OF's, and SMEs corroborates these findings with a cumulative achievement rate of 96 percent between 2022 and 2024. Although the programme negotiated special terms for its target groups, interest rates are high (especially in Mali and Niger), and the terms were improved for the duration of the programme only. Delays in Pro-ARIDES contribution reportedly caused financial difficulties for certain entrepreneurs, who had to start reimbursing their credit before they could make investments. The programme's financing procedures manual requires SMEs to enter contracts with real companies, with tax clearance, short-listed by Pro-ARIDES field agents, to build what are, after all, very simple infrastructures, well within the reach of local craftsmen, provided they are supplied with standard plans. The manual entrusts Pro-

ARIDES field agents with the task of analysing the bids received from contractors and compiling supporting documents for the work they have carried out. This procedure unnecessarily burdens the work of the field teams, increases the cost of the infrastructure and causes major delays in the completion of the works.

Table 2.3 In terms of outputs, results are mixed, however Pro-ARIDES is consistently underperforming on capacity building in thematic areas

Indicator[13]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target in 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target in 2024	Achieved 2022-24
# Local providers supplying climate-adapted technologies and inputs meeting household needs	825	793	75%	1,127	98%	91%
# FOs/WOs/YOs supported for capacity building in thematic areas (marketing, distribution)	71	655	55%	643	59%	55%
# Functional digital/multi-actor platforms supported or newly created[14]	0	6	120%	9	100%	100%
# Promotional fairs / B2B meetings supported by Pro-ARIDES	7	17	131%	21	95%	107%
# Organisations that participated in promotional fairs	63	189	81%	352	119%	102%
# SMEs supported for capacity building in marketing and distribution	53	233	99%	606	96%	97%
# SMEs and FOs providing services to AAP households supported for capacity building in service delivery meeting household needs	66	831	143%	1,169	99%	113%
# MFI programme partners providing accessible financial products to AAP households, FOs, and SMEs	0	24	96%	17	113%	96%
# AAP households (m/f) supported through AGR schemes outside of agricultural operations	1670	12561	57%	22208	87%	87%
# Payment and transaction systems accessible via smartphones	0	1	100%	2	67%	67%
Average			**96%**		**93%**	

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

13 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

14 Unclear to the evaluation team how this relates to households/SMEs/organisations. Also the interpretation appears to be different per country.

Programme outcomes in 2023 show notable overperformance in income diversification, but major shortfalls in financial inclusion. Households diversifying income sources proved to be the only indicator which exceeded targets in both percentage and absolute terms. While the number of SME's improving their performance and resilience increased in numerical terms, this indicator still fell short in terms of percentage achievement. Conversely, for indicator 2.2, the proportion of households reporting increased net income doubled, yet the absolute number did not meet the target. Households obtaining financial support from financial institutions supported by the programme declined substantially, especially in terms of percentage. As mentioned in the Pro-ARIDES 2023 Annual Report this is largely attributed to the withdrawal of certain MFIs from intervention areas - particularly in Mali - and the elevated risks associated with providing credit in an insecure context.

Table 2.4 In terms of outcomes, households showed greater income source diversification, however percentage decreases are observed in household access to financial services

N°	Performance Indicator Outcomes	Unit Measurement	Baseline 2021	Programme 2023 Target	Achieved 2023	Achieved/target 2023
2.1	# and % of SMEs that have improved their performance and resilience[15]	% SME	–	20	15	73%
		# SME	–	57	116	204%
2.2	# and % of AAP households (m/f) with increased net income	% Household	–	10	23	228%
		# Household	–	14,096	11,978	85%
2.3	# and % of households (m/f) having diversified their sources of income	% Household	26	31	90	287%
		# Household	12,874	19,922	53,619	269%
2.4	# and % of households (m/f) having obtained financial services/products from financial institutions supported by the programme	% Household	11	16	10	59%
		# Household	5,015	12,063	5,749	48%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data.

Note: As in pathway 1, indicators mention an "increase", "diversification" or "improvement", but they actually report on the *level* rather than the *change*. The change is then the difference between the levels in 2023 and 2021. Outcome data for 2024 were not collected.

The establishment of many savings groups (VSLAs) led to increased saving and social cohesion but funding available through the VSLAs is limited (amounts distributed hover around €15), and in some cases, there was poor selection of income-generating activities (IGAs) (e.g., in the case of a VSLA in Gomponsom, Burkina Faso, sheep were purchased collectively, which created issues around the responsibility of care for the sheep).

15 Measured via SME surveys through a series of subindicators related to: years of operation; property and personnel; financing (credits and loans); customers; volumes and sales; type and origin technical support received. Source: PSEA Guide

2.4 Pathway 3: Landscape

EQ1c - Has Pro-ARIDES achieved its intermediate objectives for the pathway 3 (landscape level) as defined in the Theory of Change, and what explains these results?

Box 2.3 Main findings on Pathway 3

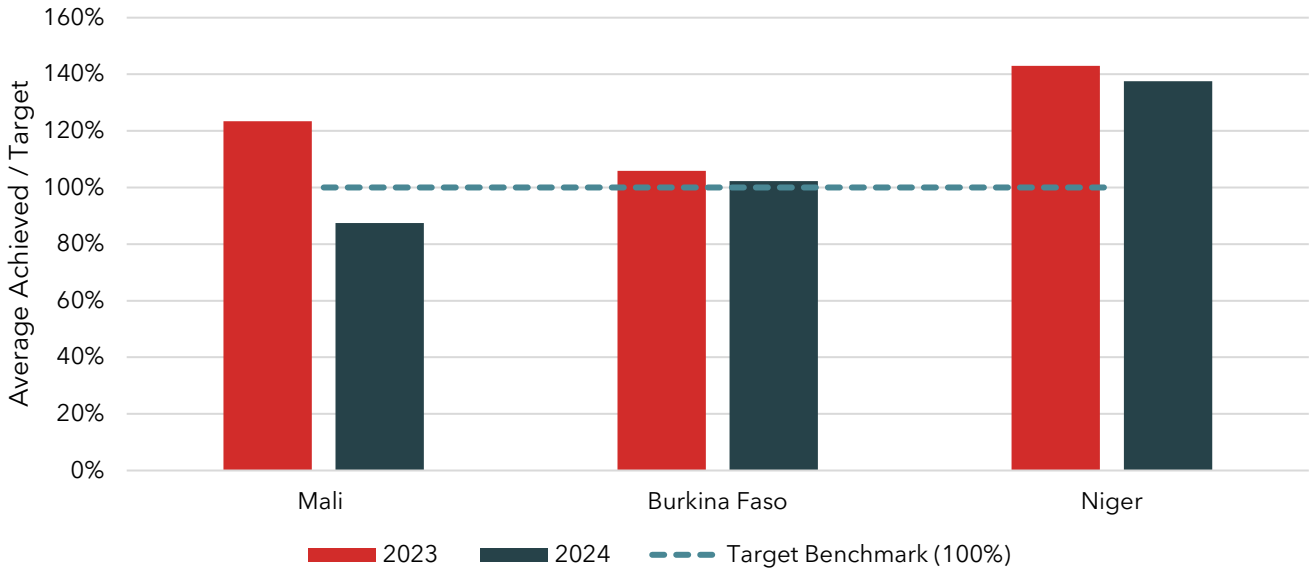
- While outputs and outcomes for Pathway 3 showed mixed results, the overall trajectory remains positive. Positive outcomes were observed regarding climate-resilient technologies and land rights, whereas outcomes were less positive in terms of land conflict resolution.
- Nevertheless, in an environment of increased conflicts due to several external circumstances, Pro-ARIDES did contribute to peaceful conflict resolution.
- Pro-ARIDES also contributed to increased land security by support to village land tenure bodies, which facilitated the development of local agreements about land rights.
- Women and youth engaged in VSLAs or market gardening cooperatives are beginning to play a more visible role in community resource management bodies.
- Progress in forest protection and reforestation efforts has been mixed.

Between 2022 to 2024, only three out of ten output indicators met or exceeded their respective targets, although many came close. The output indicators which surpassed targets include the land area covered by climate change resilient technologies, the number of communes completed their cadastral plans and the number of NRM organisations trained on their mandate and responsibilities. In contrast, the number of types of training on the use of tools and mechanisms for securing natural resources remains notably, reaching only 64 percent of the target.

Shifts in a few key indicators, particularly in Mali and Niger, shaped country-level output trends between 2023 and 2024. In 2023, Mali reported a high overall percentage of achieved outputs, largely driven by strong performance in expanding land area covered by climate change-resilient technologies (at 663 percent, due to the success of the activity generating keen interest among households).[16] However, in 2024, average achievement rate related to this measure dropped sharply, to a 73 percent achievement rate, due to a significant increase in its target. It is to be said, however, that this same indicator overshadowed the fact that other indicators in 2023 measured 0 targets or achievements, with the activity on cadastral plan completion by communes not being carried out.[17] Although at an aggregate level Niger did not show significant change in output performance between 2023 and 2024, this apparent balance was the result of significant variations across two individual indicator achievement rates effectively balancing each other out. In particular, land area covered by climate change-resilient technologies rose from 79 percent to 612 percent in 2024 (due to interest among the population), while support to households through natural resource security activities dropped from 631 percent to just 9 percent. Although a large part of this decrease can be explained due to a highly significant increase in targets, the absolute value achieved did indeed drop in 2024.[18] Though other indicators fluctuated, these two represent the most pronounced changes.

16 No further information on the performance was provided to the evaluation team.
17 No further information was provided to the evaluation team regarding why the activity was not carried out.
18 No further explanation on the performance was provided to the evaluation team.

Figure 2.5 Performance in 2023 showed all three countries exceeding their targets, with Niger standing out well above the benchmark. By 2024, however, Burkina Faso and Niger continued to perform above target, while Mali fell below the benchmark



Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data

Table 2.5 In terms of outputs, results are mixed. Pro-ARIDES consistently meets its targets on land area adapting resilient techniques, cadastral plans and #NRM trained. Pro-ARIDES consistently underperforms regarding Training on the use of tools/mechanisms for securing natural resources.

Indicator[19]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Land area covered by climate change-resilient technologies[20]	2,348	19,397	181%	25,094	135%	148%
# Farm and livestock management services, including nutrition, available for households	5	15	125%	18	82%	82%
# Communes that have completed their cadastral plan (Mail SCAT "Schéma d'Aménagement du Terroir") (Niger PIA: Plan d'Investissement Annuel SAF: Schéma d'Aménagement Foncier)	15	38	109%	20	100%	109%
# Communes that have developed natural resource management plans	0	12	100%	34	81%	81%
# Communes that have established or supported the	21	60	88%	68	96%	96%

19 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

20 It has been identified that this output indicator measures the same as outcome indicator 3.1.

revitalisation of their land tenure structure						
# Local land management institutions, including NRM, trained in planning, decision-making, accountability, and internal management	227	566	92%	514	151%	92%
# NRM organisations trained on their mandate and responsibilities	554	303	107%	506	179%	100%
# Organisations/institutions strengthened in the use of tools/mechanisms for securing natural resources	554	545	89%	380	110%	91%
# Types of training on the use of tools/mechanisms for securing natural resources[21]	11	21	64%	18	58%	64%
# Households supported through natural resource security activities	1,344	38,203	74%	33,347	86%	79%
Average			**103%**		**108%**	

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data

While progress across performance indicators has been mixed, several outcome areas significantly exceeded their targets in 2023. Achievements related to climate-resilient land use, household adoption of adaptive practices, and secure land tenure surpassed targets by considerable margins. Moreover, AAP households with secure land rights also stood out for overcoming its targets significantly in 2023. However, this might mask differences in right between men and women: although men increasingly grant land to women's collectives (e.g., through usage agreements), few improvements were noticed in individual land access for women (except in Niger). In general, there is no long-term security for women's access to land. In Mali and Niger, the support to land rights committees was difficult to distinguish from other programmes. There is an opportunity to extend the market gardening areas for women and young people now that the villages are in favour of these allocations, in exchange for the programme responding to the strong demands of the villages in terms of motorisation of production and literacy.

However, the outcome indicator related to communes with natural resource agreements for agro-sylvo-pastoral management did not meet its targets, similar to the percentage of conflicts resolved peacefully.[22] As highlighted in the 2023 Annual Report, this negative outcome reflects not only a rise in the number of conflicts (due to several external circumstances, such as more isolated governments and terrorism being on the rise) but also the extended timelines required to resolve them. The increase in conflicts in terms of the management of natural resources and related conflicts can potentially be attributed to several interrelated factors identified across the three countries, as emphasised in the 2023 Annual Report. These include the competition over scarce resources, internal tensions in the management of these resources, and disputes among different actors. The most conflict prone resources include agricultural fields (especially boundary disputes), pasture areas (due to livestock trespassing on cultivated land), water points for animal watering, and issues related to land transactions. Specifically for agro-sylvo-pastoral areas, although local natural resource management conventions exist, some villages or individuals do not respect these conventions and advocate for a local surveillance system. In this environment of increasing conflicts,

21 Reporting the actual number of trainings conducted would offer more meaningful insight than simply counting the types. Moreover, given its overlap with the subsequent output indicator, this indicator may be redundant.

22 The decreasing % could be due to the increasing number of conflicts. However, we did not receive data on the number of peacefully resolved conflicts, thus we do not know whether the number of resolutions increased.

the programme's strengthening of municipal and village land tenure bodies, resulted in local agreements on land use and more peaceful conflict resolution. To sustain these results, however, more training or coaching is necessary, and the financial sustainability of the bodies must be ensured.

Outcomes are mixed in terms of collaboration and agreements over natural resource management. Several villages or groups of villages often collaborate to develop conventions around specific resources; however, some villages or individuals fail to comply with these conventions and instead call for the establishment of a local surveillance system. The management of resources is becoming more inclusive, with young people and women who are members of a VSLA or market gardening cooperatives are beginning to play a more visible role in community resource management bodies. Their participation in village meetings and awareness-raising sessions on land governance and water management is gradually increasing, paving the way for collective responsibility for preserving and developing local resources. However, the programme showed mixed results related to forest protection and reforestation: in Burkina Faso and Niger there are signs of the protection of important forest and grazing areas. Reforestation operations in Mali were timid and met with little success in the areas visited.

Table 2.6 Regarding outcomes, while targets were exceeded for climate resilience and land security rights, those related to peaceful conflict resolution and resource governance fell short

N°	Performance Indicator Outcomes	Unit Measurement	Baseline 2021	Programme 2023 Target	Achieved 2023	Achieved/target 2023
3.1	Area of land covered by climate change resilient technologies	Hectares	39,870	53,384	103,265	193%
3.2	# and % of households that have increased application of climate-resilient technologies/practices	% Household	17	32	86	268%
		# Household	9,179	30,323	49,126	162%
3.3	# and % of AAP households with secure land rights[23]	% Household	31	36	92	251%
		# Household	18,755	25,803	54,615	212%
3.4	% of conflicts over the use of natural resources resolved peacefully per year[24]	% of conflicts over the use of natural resources resolved peacefully per year	62	50	37	74%
		# Conflicts resolved peacefully	–	-	94	-
3.5	# and % of communes with at least one local natural resource management agreement for agro-sylvo-pastoral areas	% Communes with agreement	55	72	53	74%
		# Communes with agreement	40	51	37	73%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data

23 This is a perception-based indicator measured through a household survey question which asks "to what extent do you think your rights to use this land are guaranteed?"; if the respondent indicates that they are at least "fairly certain" that their land rights are guaranteed, then this counts as household where land rights are guaranteed.

24 "Percentage of cases [over total conflict cases] where, through a process of discussion with stakeholders, an action plan is agreed and implemented that will peacefully resolve a conflict concerning land use or access, or the benefits derived from it.", measured through an evaluation to be completed by platform representatives. Source: PSEA Guide.

2.5 Pathway 4: Equality

EQ1d - Has Pro-ARIDES achieved its intermediate objectives for the pathway 4 (equality) as defined in the Theory of Change, and what explains these results?

Box 2.4 Main findings Pathway 4

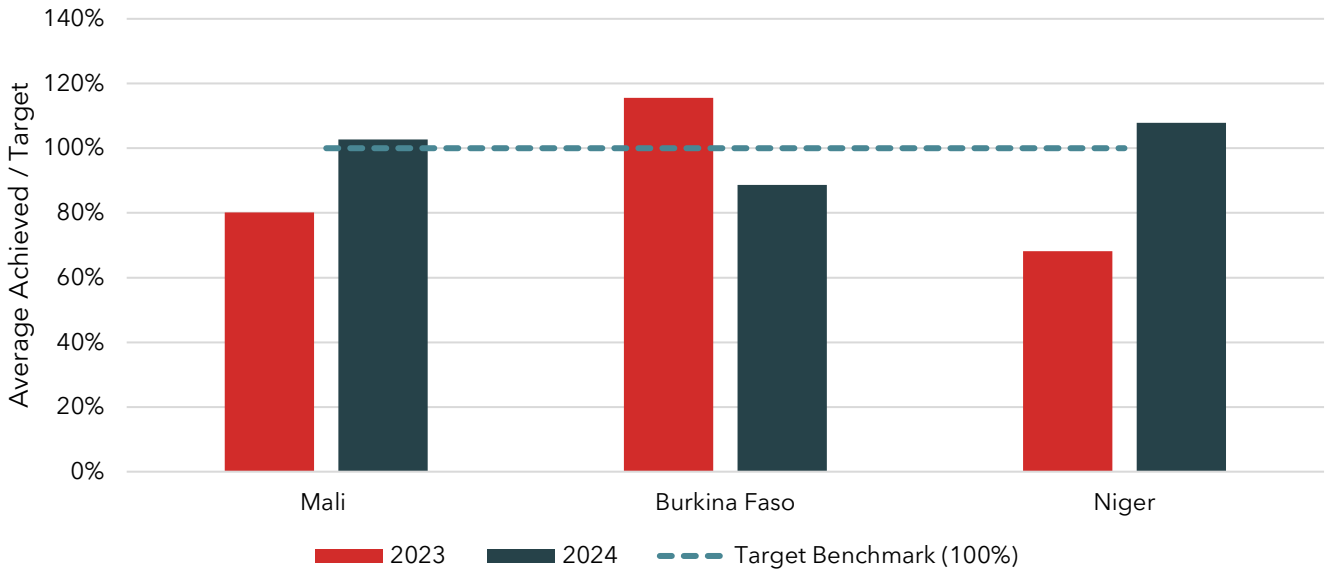
- Results on pathway 4 are overall mixed. While women and youth participate more in FOs/WOs/YOs/SMEs/communal bodies, their decision making within the household still lags behind.
- Women and youth are well represented in bodies set up by the programme, appearing to strengthen their presence in decision making processes.
- There are signs that the programme strengthened the capacity of women and young people to integrate and boost local economic structures.
- The articulation of women's economic participation with training on better spousal communication appears to have been particularly effective in empowering women.
- While youth vocational training was provided in Burkina Faso and Niger, it was not always linked to natural resource management.

Regarding outputs, all output indicators exceeded or came relatively close to meeting targets, except for the number of autonomous collective actions organized by organisations. More concretely, progress on the number of autonomous collective actions organised by YOs and FOs reached only 59 percent of its 2022 through 2024 target. The number of tools promoted for gender equality within households slightly declined in absolute values. Meanwhile, strengthened organisational capacity in EGIS remained below target for second consecutive year, however in absolute values this output increased substantially (from 23 to 60). This can be explained by the fact that, as after 2023, the programme accounted for only those organisations in line with EGIS.

Nevertheless, Pro-ARIDES demonstrated year-on-year improvement in the achievement rates of other indicators under pathway 4. In fact, the output indicator related to households sensitised to marital dialogue on inclusive decision-making within the household reaching 80 percent of its 2022-2024 targets, with fieldwork findings suggesting that the articulation of women's economic participation with training on better spousal communication appears to have been particularly effective in empowering women. In all three countries, the fieldwork yielded some anecdotal evidence that this training was well received and appeared to be leading to greater participation of women in decision making. For example, interviewees reported that spouses discussed (agricultural) investments and women were allowed greater mobility. If it could be confirmed through more rigorous methods that the programme contributed to this (e.g. relative to a comparison group), this could be seen as a major achievement of the programme.

Variations in pathway 4 outputs across countries can largely be explained to the initiation or improved recording of output activities in 2024. In Mali, the observed increase is primarily attributed to the initiation of outputs achieved in 2024, whereas in Niger, the rise can be partly explained by improvements in data recording practices. However, the decline observed in Burkina Faso is linked to a reduction in the achievement rate of the number of organisations receiving capacity building support in management, service delivery, and decision-making influence. In contrast, this same indicator contributed to Niger's overall improvement in 2024, supported by strengthened capacities of organisations in EGIS, and in mediation, multi-stakeholder dialogue, NRM, and inclusive decision-making, all of which had lower targets.

Figure 2.6 Niger showed the strongest year on year improvement, rising from well below target in 2023. Whereas, Burkina Faso showed a modest increase in achieved outputs, and Mali recorded a decline



Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data

There are signs that the programme strengthened the capacity of women and young people to integrate and boost local economic structures. While no hard evidence could be provided, it is likely that capacities strengthened due to wide range of support provided: training in business management, assistance in formalising groups, contacts with microfinance institutions, and support for access to inputs and productive equipment. The VSLAs have played a central role in this dynamic. As well as stimulating local savings, they seem to have encouraged the emergence of an entrepreneurial culture, particularly among women. The creation of joint funds gives indications to have facilitated the finance of income-generating activities (IGAs). These initiatives appear to have helped to strengthen women's financial autonomy and improve their position in local economic circuits as well as in the household. Some young people who have set up businesses have reportedly had increased access to resources and financial means to launch their businesses.

While youth vocational training was provided in Burkina Faso and Niger, it was not always linked to natural resource management. In Burkina Faso, some issues were reported related to poor conditions and low-quality kits. In Mali there appears to have been no vocational training supported by the programme.

Table 2.7 In terms of outputs, results were mixed, however Pro-ARIDES consistently met its target related capacity building for organisations and OF/OJ/OP

Indicator[25]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
# Households sensitised to marital dialogue on inclusive decision-making within the household	627	16,999	67%	29,333	90%	80%
# Organisations supported to strengthen their capacities in mediation, multi-stakeholder dialogue, NRM, and inclusive decision-making	588	557	90%	836	105%	105%
# Number of autonomous collective actions organised by JO and FO	0	11	275%	34	59%	59%
#FOs/WOs/YOs supported for capacity building in (internal) management, service delivery, and influencing decisions	0	901	145%	750	103%	123%
# FOs/WOs/YOs and public organisations whose capacities in EGIS (Equity, Gender, Inclusion, and Conflict Sensitivity) have been strengthened	149	486	78%	702	96%	96%
# Tools promoted for gender promotion within households[26]	2	7	117%	4	80%	117%
Average			**104%**		**89%**	

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

In terms of pathway 4 outcomes, Pro-ARIDES performed below target overall. Performance for both outcome indicators 4.1 and 4.2, fell short of targets in both percentage terms and absolute figures. However, indicator 4.3 in terms of percentage terms showed strong overperformance, with a 260 percent achievement rate.

25 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

26 More insightful would be: e.g. # of households reached by the tools, or actively engaging with the tools

Table 2.8 Outcome data: The programme underperformed on all PW4 outcome indicators, expect for the percentage of women and youth participating in planned consultation frameworks

N°	Performance Indicator Outcomes	Unit Measurement	Reference 2021	Contribution Programme 2023 Target	Contribution Programme 2023 Achieved	Achieved/target 2023
4.1	# and % of FOs/WOs/YOs/SMEs/ communal bodies in which women and young people hold at least one key position[27]	% FOs/WOs/YOs	61	76	63	83%
		# FOs/WOs/YOs	1,350	1,658	1,372	83%
4.2	# of women and young people involved in household decision-making (on production management, consumption, income and/or marketing of agricultural products)	% Household	3	18	6	34%
		# Household	1,486	22,629	3,318	15%
4.3	% of women/young people who participate in communal consultation frameworks/citizen consultations	% participation in planned consultation frameworks	12	32	84	260%
		# participation in planned consultation frameworks[28]	–	-	222,246	–

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics

Interpreting the outcome indicators related to equality presents several challenges.

- First, many of the indicators aggregate two distinct groups–women and young people–into a single metric, which obscures important differences in participation between them. For instance, high participation by young men may mask low engagement by young women, or vice versa.
- Additionally, individuals who fall into both categories (e.g. young women) or who participate in multiple consultations could be double counted, further complicating interpretation and comparability across sites or over time.
- The interpretation of the totals in denominators is often unclear. For example, for the indicator "# and % of FOs/WOs/YOs/SMEs/communal bodies in which women and young people hold at least one key position" it is not clear whether totals include all such organisations in the country, or only on those that engaged with Pro-ARIDES. Similarly, for the indicator "% of women/young people who participate in communal consultation frameworks/citizen consultations," it is unclear whether the denominator refers to the total number of women/young people in the target area, those eligible to participate, or those invited. Without these clarifications, the meaning and significance of the reported percentages remain ambiguous. Moreover, the

27 As mentioned in the "PSEA guide", "Key positions may vary according to organisation and structure, but are recognised by all members as positions of power and responsibility (e.g. director, chief, (vice)president, secretary, treasurer, religious or traditional leader)".

28 This number seems high, especially given the fact that outcome indicator 5.2 *# and % of local authorities that have organised citizens' consultations at least once a year* declined in the same period (see Section 2.6).

reported ratios could be measured and interpreted in different ways by different country teams, or indeed by different individuals within country teams.

Additionally, Pro-ARIDES staffing does not reflect its desired repartition in target groups, which might hinder the effectiveness of some activities. For example, staff members are predominantly male and 35 or above, however this is to some extent compensated by the village relays, who are 50 percent female. In this context, opportunities for deeper engagement remain. For instance, when introducing technologies intended to benefit women, explanations on these technologies could be directed to the women themselves (possibly by women), rather than to their husbands.

Fieldwork findings showed that women and youth are well represented in bodies set up by the programme, thereby strengthening their presence in decision-making processes. In all three countries there is the emergence of a new class of young people and women capable of making their voices heard within public institutions to ensure that their interests are considered or to obtain benefits for their members.

There are signs that the programme strengthened the capacity of women and young people to integrate and boost local economic structures. While no hard evidence could be provided, it is likely that capacities strengthened due to wide range of support provided: training in business management, assistance in formalising groups, contacts with microfinance institutions, and support for access to inputs and productive equipment. The VSLAs have played a central role in this dynamic. As well as stimulating local savings, they have encouraged the emergence of an entrepreneurial culture, particularly among women. The creation of joint funds has made it possible to finance income-generating activities (IGAs). These initiatives have helped to strengthen women's financial autonomy and improve their position in local economic circuits as well as in the household. Some young people who have set up businesses have had increased access to resources and financial means to launch their businesses.

While youth vocational training was provided in Burkina Faso and Niger, it was not always linked to natural resource management. In Burkina Faso, some issues were reported related to poor conditions and low-quality kits. In Mali there appears to have been no vocational training supported by the programme.

2.6 Pathway 5: Governance

EQ1e - Has Pro-ARIDES achieved its intermediate objectives for the pathway 5 (governance) as defined in the Theory of Change, and what explains these results?

Box 2.5 Main findings Pathway 5

- Output and outcome indicators showed fairly positive results in Pathway 5.
- Fieldwork findings suggest that Pro-ARIDES has contributed to improved transparency, accountability, local tax collection, and public investment, though attribution is not always easy to distinguish from other programmes.
- Leaders in some municipalities appear to have become more sensitive to infrastructure quality and more capable of monitoring.
- No increase in local authority investment rates was observed.

Slightly under half of output indicators met or surpassed their targets in 2024, while the remaining indicators did not stay substantially away from their respective targets. While many output indicators came close to

meeting their 2022–2024 targets, a few remained further behind. Notably, these include the number of communes and territorial communities trained in monitoring and evaluation tools to assess the impact of actions and investments on territories, as well as the number of plans developed for resource mobilisation through local taxation. The lower value for the former is explained in the below. In the case of the latter, the shortfall is attributed to Burkina Faso, where the country's ambitions for this indicator were scaled back to zero in 2024.[29]

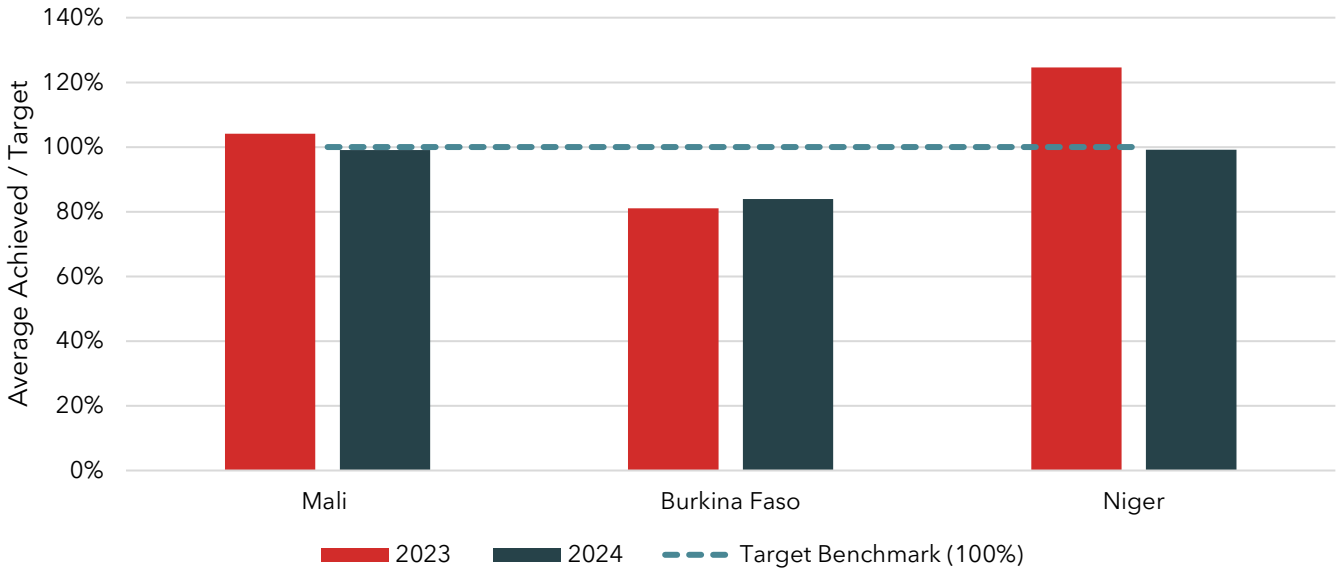
Additionally, the communal councils supported on accountability and transparency in public affairs management reached an achievement rate of 86 percent, with Niger and Mali meeting targets, and Burkina Faso falling slightly below. Furthermore, as seen in outcome 5.1 (Table 2.10 below), the achievement rate for this outcome indicator proves to be significantly high. As fieldwork findings suggest improvements were recorded in terms of transparency, accountability, local tax collection, and public investments, but PA's contribution is not always easy to distinguish from other programmes (e.g. the PGLR programme in Mali, run by SNV). In some municipalities local tax collection reportedly increased, because of transparency, improved service delivery (strengthening tax citizenship), training on participatory budgeting, awareness efforts, and electronic payment options (functional in Burkina Faso, but not yet in Mali). In Niger, accountability sessions were held, during which the communal authorities presented their budget achievements and investments made in their entities.

In 2024, both Mali and Niger saw declines in average output achievement rate, yet remaining near target levels, while Burkina Faso stayed well below targets despite gradual improvements. In Burkina Faso, although achievements remained below target, a slight increase in achievement rates can be attributed to lower target levels in 2024. The actual number of training sessions held around CEAP remained the same as in 2023, yet the reduced targets led to higher achievement rates. A similar pattern was observed in the training of communes on using monitoring and evaluation tools to assess the effects of actions and investments on their territories.

In Mali, the cumulative achievement rate between 2022 and 2024 for the output indicator related to communes or territorial communities trained in monitoring and evaluation tools to measure the effects of actions and investments on territories was 56 percent. This can be explained as only 15 communes in the Ségou region received support to establish an M&E system for tracking investments in the programme's implementation areas. Burkina Faso also recorded a cumulative low achievement of 46 percent, as in 2023, 6 communes were reached out of a targeted 13. This target was then revised downwards in 2024 to maintain the plan at 6 instead of 13. Niger managed to meet targets regarding this indicator. Fieldwork findings suggested that leaders in some municipalities became more sensitive to infrastructure quality and more capable of monitoring, while citizen oversight pressured contractors to deliver better results (e.g., redoing work, cancelling contracts) (Burkina Faso, Niger).

29 No further explanation on the performance was provided to the evaluation team.

Figure 2.7 Mali and Niger overperformed against the 100 percent target in 2023, however by 2024, achievement rates declined in both countries. Burkina Faso remained below benchmark levels for the second consecutive year



Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data

Table 2.9 In terms of output data: Pro-ARIDES performed well in both years on indicators related to Champs Ecole Agro-Pastoral (CEAP), and significantly improved its performance on the last 2 indicators

Indicator[30]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
# CEAP/CEM established	181	181	168%	383	115%	120%
# Training sessions held around CEAP	14	55	112%	51	106%	112%
# Organisations participating in training activities on climate-resilient production	0	449	88%	778	86%	86%
# Community (trainer) facilitators engaged in CEAP activities	191	283	111%	537	103%	103%
# Facilitators supporting grassroots OPs in the operationalisation of their services	0	987	127%	1,023	100%	100%
# Communal councils supported on accountability and transparency in public affairs mng	26	58	114%	61	86%	86%
# Types of training on improving planning for	10	9	100%	7	88%	100%

30 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

communes/territorial communities (CT)						
#Communes/territorial communities supported in mobilizing additional funds	48	51	109%	60	94%	94%
# Communes supported to improve the planning process	27	58	105%	69	93%	93%
#Communes/territorial communities trained in monitoring and evaluation tools to measure the effects of actions and investments	0	6	20%	40	77%	77%
# Plans developed for resource mobilisation through local taxation	18	49	68%	47	100%	68%
Average			**102%**		**95%**	

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data

All outcomes comfortably exceeded their targets, with the exception of local authorities conducting annual citizens' consultations, which fell short. Asides from outcome 5.2, all remaining outcome indicators exceeded their targets. Outcome 5.1 considerably exceeded targets as supported by fieldwork findings which suggest that improvements were recorded in terms of transparency and accountability. Regarding indicator 5.2 remaining below target, as noted in the Pro-ARIDES 2023 Annual Report this can be explained due to complex scenarios in the respective countries. In Niger, this situation is notably influenced by the aftermath of the Coup d'État, including sanctions imposed by ECOWAS and UEMOA, as well as threats of military intervention to restore democracy. Additionally, three municipalities were replaced due to security concerns. A similar pattern was observed in Burkina Faso, where three municipalities were also changed for the same reason.

Table 2.10 Pro-ARIDES exceeded all pathway 5 outcome indicators in 2023, except for one. The number and percentage of local authorities organising citizen consultations at least once per year did not meet its targets in 2023

N°	Performance Indicator Outcomes	Unit Measurement	Baseline 2021	Programme 2023 Target	Achieved 2023	Achieved/target 2023
5.1	# and % of municipalities that have strengthened accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs	% communes	–	20	58	290%
		# communes	–	14	42	294%
5.2	# and % of local authorities that have organised citizens' consultations at least once a year[31]	% citizen consultations	84	88	75	85%
		# citizen consultations	59	63	55	88%
5.3	# and % of households that are satisfied with the products and services provided by FOs/WOs/YOs/SME	% Household	7	37	98	265%
		# Household	148	764	2,165	283%
5.4		% Household	14	44	93	212%

31 According to the PSEA guide "Citizen consultations are participatory and open to all citizens in the commune. Citizen consultations can address issues like: public service provision, accountability and feedback on communal budgets and policies, conflict resolution, coherence between public and private actors."

	# and % of households reporting satisfaction with agricultural services provided by decentralised / deconcentrated services	# Household	5,941	48,227	55,499	115%
5.5	Number of communes having mobilised additional funds of at least 5% of their annual budget for sustainable local development	Commune	–	21	32	150%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on Pro-ARIDES data

Indicator 5.3 might underestimate the level of satisfaction, as it is based on a quite restrictive definition of "satisfaction". In fact, households would need to be satisfied with all services provided by FOs/WOs/YOs/SME for the indicator to count them as satisfied. The indicator is measured through a question in the household survey. In that question "A total of eleven (11) services are listed in the possible responses. For each service, satisfaction is measured on a five-point Likert scale". "A household is considered to be satisfied with the products and services provided by the PO/FO/JO/SME if and only if the respondent reports being satisfied or very satisfied with each of the 11 services used by the household". [32]

There is no evidence of increased investment rates by local authorities in services, governance bodies (for natural resource management, conflict resolution, etc.), infrastructure, and value chains accessible to AAP households, women, and youth, nor of conflict-sensitive local policymaking.

2.7 Other effectiveness questions

EQ2 - *What has been the plausible contribution of PA' interventions to the observed changes? What other factors and/or actors have contributed to these changes or hindered potential changes?*

The programme's contribution to observed changes is difficult to quantify due to methodological shortcomings in the MEL system. First, the output data reflect a fragmented pattern of small-scale activity delivery, a clear causal linkage between specific activities and observed outcomes. For example, it is not even possible within the current MEL system to get a clear list of activities and outcomes by municipality, let alone by beneficiary. This makes it infeasible within the current MEL system to draw causal inferences about attribution of results to the programme. Second, the current MEL system lacks the capacity to rigorously assess outcome-level contributions relative to a counterfactual, such as a benchmark or control group. While WUR designed an impact study to provide such a quasi-experimental analysis, which was envisaged to take place in Niger in 2024 or early 2025, this impact study was delayed. The minutes of the Steering Committee meeting of 28 October 2024 reported that the Steering Committee concluded to move forward with the impact study in 2025Q1. However, implementation of these impact study has not taken place yet, and Pro-ARIDES mentioned this was delayed due to "several factors". As a result, these impact data were not collected on time to be included in our evaluation.

Attribution challenges are compounded by overlapping initiatives and limited stakeholder clarity. During our in-country interviews conducted in cooperation with our national consultants, stakeholders often struggled to distinguish Pro-ARIDES' specific contributions from those of other programmes, particularly in governance and land

[32] Source: "Mode de calcul des indicateurs"

rights, where more prominent initiatives were active. This overlap diluted the visibility of Pro-ARIDES' impact. Only a rigorous impact assessment that monitors and controls for the presence of other initiatives (at least at the municipality level, if not the beneficiary level) can credibly evaluate Pro-ARIDES' distinct role by disentangling it from the broader development landscape. Until such a rigorous assessment is conducted, which we now recommended for the endline evaluation, any attempts to attribute results to the programme remain speculative.

As a result, evidence in support for contribution was limited (see details per outcome in Appendix B). We assessed contribution of Pro-ARIDES to each outcome in Appendix B. Overall, the evidence of contribution was limited, especially for pathways 3, 4, and 5. Plausible contributions of the programme are mainly in the increase and diversification of production. Other contributions, although with weaker evidence, are the increased use of climate resilient approaches, improved gender relations within the household, strengthened participation of women and youth in decision making bodies, improved land rights for women, youth, and IDPs (though limited in scale), improved service delivery by farmers organisations, strengthened SMEs with better access to the market and credit, and improved NRM mechanisms and structures.

EQ3 - What elements of PA' approaches were effective in contributing to the observed changes, and what are areas for improvement?

The following factors contributed to the effectiveness of the programme:

1. **Strong and competent country teams with effective local engagement.**
   Country teams across Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger were consistently described as committed and competent, with strong involvement of national civil society organisations and research institutions. Fieldwork highlighted their understanding of the integrated approach—particularly in Burkina Faso and Niger—and their strong relationships with local stakeholders, including use of the 'approche de proximité'.
2. **Integration of activities from various pathways, allowing results to strengthen each other.**
   By linking and layering interventions across different pathways, the programme enabled results to reinforce one another, enhancing overall impact and coherence across sectors (see Coherence section for more detail).
3. **Flexibility and good adaptability to the security situation in the three countries.**
   The programme demonstrated a high degree of responsiveness to the evolving security context in all three countries, adjusting implementation approaches as needed to maintain relevance and continuity of activities (see Relevance section for more detail).

There are also several areas of improvement:

1. **While all pathways showed signs of positive change, activities have been too scattered, and a more focused, unified strategy is needed to achieve systematic impact.**
   The programme's broad thematic scope and sectoral fragmentation have weakened strategic clarity and coherence. Fieldwork and stakeholder interviews underscored the challenges of attributing and evaluating impact, largely due to a proliferation of disconnected approaches, including landscape management, value chain development, and tax collection. A more focused strategy, with stronger emphasis on synergies between activities, could help to concentrate efforts and make more effective use of available resources. While improving internal coordination remains essential, strategic alignment with other programmes could also enhance complementarity and reduce duplication. However, SNV Niger noted that such external collaboration is often constrained by shifting agendas and issues of timing. In Mali, a concrete step toward reducing fragmentation could be the delegation of Pathway 5 to the SNV-led PGLR programme, supporting more streamlined and coherent implementation.

2. **Coordination and content collaboration can be improved.**
   Although coordination mechanisms like planning and reporting structures are in place, they do not sufficiently support in-depth content collaboration. Both field observations and internal reflections indicated that competition among country teams and limited integration of perspectives hampered the development of shared insights. The absence of collaborative synthesis has restricted collective learning and weakened programme coherence. Strengthening content-focused coordination and fostering more intentional, synergistic collaboration across teams and pathways are essential steps towards achieving more systematic and sustainable impact.

EQ4 - To what extent and through which activities and interventions is Pro-ARIDES expected to achieve its systems transformation objectives?

The programme has the potential to contribute to transformative change with regard to empowering households, provided that all types of households and actors continue to be targeted and benefit more from the integrated approach. To fully harness this potential, it is essential to maintain targeted support to all groups – including marginalised groups such as pastoralist communities, as well as women and youth - and ensure they benefit consistently from the integrated approach. This calls for a strategic concentration of efforts in selected areas where impact can be deepened. Additionally, there is a need for more systematic follow-up with the same beneficiaries over time to reinforce outcomes, track progress, and adapt interventions based on evolving needs and contexts.

For economic strengthening it is important that credit facilities become even more accessible. Improving access to credit is essential for economic resilience among targeted households. Making credit facilities more accessible could involve more flexible lending conditions, such as lower interest rates in specific cases, longer maturities or more flexibility with repayments and ensuring that financial support is synchronised with Pro-ARIDES' contributions. In addition, further support to VSLAs could help them access higher levels of funding, enabling more substantial economic opportunities for their members. Consortium partners representatives also mentioned that "funds managed by Pro-ARIDES (PME and FIL), […] have the potential to enhance access to MFI loan[s]".

With respect to inclusion, it is important to sustainably improve the rights but also durable access to resources. To ensure genuine inclusion, it is critical to move beyond representation towards lasting access to resources for women, youth, and other vulnerable groups. While notable progress has been made in securing their participation in decision-making processes, greater efforts are needed to guarantee their durable rights, especially concerning land tenure and access to key productive resources.

It is less likely that the programme can achieve general improved governance. Given the very large number of themes, activities and broad geographic scope of the programme, current programme resources might not be enough to achieve the desired impacts: as a result, the ambition to broadly enhance governance and service delivery across municipalities may not be realistic. Instead, the programme could achieve greater effectiveness by narrowing its focus to specific areas such as land rights, natural resource management (NRM), and agricultural extension, where more targeted interventions could yield measurable outcomes.

3 Relevance

Pro-ARIDES is widely regarded as relevant and appreciated by the stakeholders and target groups met for its integrated, locally embedded approach and its continued presence in a region marked by donor withdrawal. While the programme demonstrates flexibility and conflict sensitivity, challenges remain in ensuring the meaningful inclusion of youth, women, and pastoralist communities.

EQ5 - To what extent and in what ways is Pro-ARIDES relevant for its defined target groups? To what extent are the programme activities and interventions taking into account the needs of specific target groups (women, youth) as defined in the me objectives?

Pro-ARIDES is relevant and well appreciated by its stakeholders and target groups in terms of its objectives, its integrated and locally embedded approach, and its strong institutional ties. Fieldwork findings suggest that that institutional stakeholders, farmers organisations, the women's and youth organisations, entrepreneurs and AAP households are keen for its continuation.

Pro-ARIDES' significance is reinforced by the broader context of donor withdrawal from the region. In an environment where many donors are withholding funding from the Sahel, Pro-ARIDES' continued efforts in the region are all the more significant.

The intervention areas under pathway 1-3 are relevant for households in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. The programme's document review, supported by external sources such as the World Bank, and the Food Security Information Network, indicate that households face persistent challenges related to nutrition, household income and land rights.[33] Pro-ARIDES documents underscore strong and violent tensions due to natural resources, which are growing more severe under the pressure of climate change. At the same time, a low productivity agricultural sector continues to undermine widespread food and nutrition security, while household resilience also remains low, leaving large segments of the population vulnerable to external shocks.

With respect to pathway 4, the programme places notable emphasis on women but there is still room for improvement. There are signs of progress in terms of improved spousal relations, women's inclusion in household decision making, and for both women and youth enhanced participation in village and municipal decision-making bodies and farmers' organisations, as well as enhanced economic participation. A key limitation is that the current reporting methodology does not allow for an aggregated assessment of the programme's impact on women and youth (see MEL section). That said, household beneficiary database figures suggest women are relatively well represented: 52 percent of beneficiaries in Burkina Faso were female, compared to 51 percent in Niger, and 49 percent in Mali. However, it is important to note that these databases have indeed shown certain limitations in reliability (see MEL section).

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[33] World Bank. "Enhancing Food and Nutrition Security in the Sahel and Horn of Africa." World Bank, 4 Jan. 2024, www.worldbank.org/en/results/2024/01/04/enhancing-food-and-nutrition-security-in-the-sahel-and-horn-of-afe-africa. Food Security Information Network (FSIN). "*Regional Report on Food and Nutrition Security for West Africa and the Sahel 2024*", 2024.

Pathway 5 is recognised as relevant, but requires further development to maximise its impact. While improvements were evident across Pathway 5 targets, enhancing the programme's relevance requires efforts to focus efforts within the pathway to the areas addressed by the programme, as well as clearly differentiate it from other initiatives and to substantiate its value through evidence of increased investment by local authorities in services, governance structures, infrastructures and value chains. Given these challenges, it could also be considered whether pursuing Pathway 5 at all is justified, particularly if resources might be better allocated to more relevant or clearly impactful pathways.

Regarding youth inclusion, the findings are mixed. Fieldwork in Mali showed that youth-targeted activities were limited, whereas in Burkina Faso, these efforts were more visible and considered successful. One consortium partner acknowledged that youth had received less intentional focus during programme design; however, this concern was not echoed by other stakeholders. Furthermore, the available beneficiary data did not confirm this gap, largely due to inconsistent data collection on youth across the three countries, which prevents meaningful aggregation or comparison. As a result, the extent of the programme's engagement with youth remains difficult to assess systematically.

Including pastoral households remains a challenge for the programme. According to the 2023 Annual Report, pastoral households represent approximately 5 percent of all beneficiary households, aligning with estimates of the overall proportion of nomadic pastoralists in the general population in these three countries. Nevertheless, pastoralists were notably underrepresented in (baseline) household surveys, with the programme implementing corrections in the 2023 performance survey to increase inclusion for this group.[34] This discrepancy is largely due to their mobility and the remote, often insecure areas in which they reside, complicating their consistent engagement in programme activities and their inclusion in standard data collection practices. Effectively addressing this challenge will require tailored strategies that accommodate pastoralists' distinct living patterns and needs, ensuring their meaningful inclusion in the programme's design, implementation, and monitoring processes.

EQ6 - To what extent and in what ways is Pro-ARIDES conflict sensitive in its activities and interventions?

Pro-ARIDES demonstrates flexibility and adaptability in response to the evolving security situation across the countries. Interviewees described the programme as proactive, with contingency plans in place to shift activities between communes as needed. Fieldwork confirmed that Pro-ARIDES can adapt to the security context by moving locations of activities and adjusting operations. These measures include adjusting travel routes and times, using motorcycles for mobility, and convening target groups in secure locations. The programme's emphasis on social contract, inclusion, and strengthening local institutions inherently reflects a conflict sensitive approach.

However, the program does not yet sufficiently include pastoralist communities, who are important for peacebuilding efforts. As mentioned earlier, the evaluation team could not easily gather evidence on the inclusion of pastoralist groups, as their presence in the areas visited by the evaluation team was limited, and monitoring of type of households was not done consistently in all countries (see MEL section), although partly due to security issues involving pastoral communities. Nevertheless, as one consortium partner noted, the region's ongoing conflicts highlight the need for stronger community peacebuilding efforts to reinforce the social fabric. Pastoralists, in particular, feel excluded from development interventions, contributing to their dissatisfaction with the government. Additionally, their remote locations also limit their access to essential services, making their inclusion in locally driven

[34] The evaluation team was also not able to meet pastoralists communities during the field work, as they were not present in the communes visited.

solutions essential. Yet, these communities remain underrepresented in the current programme, partly due to their mobile lifestyles, mostly in insecure areas, posing challenges for engagement through conventional programme structures. Pastoralist communities could be given greater emphasis in Phase 2 by leveraging SNV's long term experience in working with these communities.

4 Coherence

A regional or multi-country approach offers economies of scale and possibilities for cross-country learning, but the current heavy top-down regional management structure has in practice limited these benefits. There is a division of labour within the consortium, but the capacity and expertise of consortium partners and local partners is currently underutilised. In addition, Pro-ARIDES could further increase its value added to other development programmes.

4.1 Internal coherence

EQ7 - To what extent is Pro-ARIDES effectively implementing an integrated approach? To what extent and in what ways are the different pathways in the Theory of Change reinforcing each other?

Pro-ARIDES implements an integrated approach across pathways, with different pathways strengthening each other. Although it is not easy to put a coherent picture of the activities together due to scattered information (see also MEL section), interviews suggested that teams have a good understanding of pathways and interventions. In principle, the ToC and different pathways are complementary and aimed at achieving systemic change (the final objective is to increase resilience, food security and income through local economic development). Fieldwork findings also showed evidence of how activities strengthen each other. For example, the results regarding improved spousal communication were strengthened by the economic participation in women, which gave them a bigger say in household expenditure and investment choices. Likewise, the programme's support to SMEs in terms of improved performance enabled their access to credit and the work on market access further enhanced their performance. It is critical, however that, in line with the original programme setup, Pro-ARIDES works towards a concentration of efforts in phase 2, as the desired impact cannot be achieved in all intervention areas with the funds available (as mentioned in the Effectiveness section). This needs to be supported by a database that allows for the tracking (and targeting) of combined activities per household, stakeholder or location (see also MEL chapter).

EQ8 - What is the added value of the regional approach of Pro-ARIDES compared to what is or can be achieved in each of the countries separately?

A regional approach in principle has benefits related to economies of scale and possibilities for cross-country learning. SNV country teams in particular see the regional approach as providing economies of scale (e.g. thematic experts need to be hired only once instead of three times), cross-country learning, and stronger quality assurance. Interviewees also reported that the regional approach in principle enables knowledge-sharing and harmonisation of best practices across similar Sahelian contexts. Various stakeholders suggested that the programme could have been better managed as three separate country programmes (or one multi-country programme). This was justified due to the differing national contexts and programme designs, as well as the ability of thematic groups to operate across borders without the need for a regional structure, which was seen as complex and costly. Additionally, it was also mentioned that effectiveness was also impacted by management structures, as countries often felt controlled by regional offices, thus creating an extra layer that added bureaucracy and limited autonomy. While it was pointed out that the regional approach offered potential for greater impact through economies of scale and standardisation

(particularly in MEL), it was also emphasised that this is not yet fully leveraged. Nonetheless, fieldwork findings suggest that SNV country teams would not prefer to manage Pro-ARIDES as a stand-alone country programme.

A regional approach could also offer advantages in terms of developing joint MEL frameworks with comparable data and tools, but these benefits have not yet materialised. Review of the baseline and performance survey analysis confirmed that the regional approach partly facilitates a consistent quantitative analysis and *outcome* calculations, and allows for comparability across countries (though it may miss some country-specific progress). However potential benefits from MEL standardisation are not yet fully realized and many inconsistencies exist, as indicated by review of data collection files related to beneficiaries, activities, and outputs (and confirmed in various interviews). This is described further in the MEL chapter. In addition, one consortium partner mentioned that country-specific ToCs are more practical for contextualised results. The regional structure should not prevent developing more refined country-specific ToCs starting from the overall programme ToC.

However, the heavy top-down regional management structure has in practice partly limited the benefits of the regional approach. Multiple interviewees mentioned that the management style is currently too hierarchical, and that this top-down management style has limited country autonomy, also regarding thematic areas (as mentioned also in the next question). While SNV correctly observed that, in the programme management structure, there is no hierarchical link between the programme management unit and the national coordination bodies, in practice the relationship between regional programme management and country offices was still perceived by many stakeholders as too hierarchical. Some country office representatives noted that they feel 'controlled' by the regional office, which they saw as creating an extra layer that sometimes unnecessarily adds bureaucracy and limits autonomy. While some interviewees acknowledged that a hierarchical management style is sometimes needed in this part of the world in order to be effective, others observed that it has gone too far in that the working relationship does not feel 'inclusive'. For example, several stakeholders noted that they did not feel that (self-)criticism was welcomed during meetings, even if this was meant as constructive criticism aimed at learning and improvement, as a result of which some stakeholders had stopped offering such criticism.[35] These stakeholders therefore doubted the effectiveness of the hierarchical management style, and suggested that a more circular and inclusive style is needed for effective cross-country learning, including on thematic areas (e.g. thematic leaders should be given more freedom to propose improvements to thematic activities; and country offices should be encouraged to suggest improvements to national activities, including suggestions to consolidate activities during the second phase).

EQ9 - What is the added value/contribution of each of the consortium partners in achieving the programme's objectives?

There is a fairly clear division of labour between the four consortium partners. SNV is consortium lead and has the vast majority of the budget (around 70 percent). It leads the regional programme management unit in Niger and has three country offices that in turn report to the regional SNV office. CARE also has three large country offices, and has particular expertise in local governance, gender inclusion, and financial inclusion (while SNV has allegedly more expertise in energy, water, and agriculture). WUR and KIT are knowledge institutions based in the Netherlands that have a relatively small role in this programme, which is largely limited to being responsible for the research agenda, in particular the 'Action Research' component. While WUR and KIT have similar roles, a difference is that WUR coordinates with national research institutes in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, focusing on agronomy and NRM; while KIT works with research-specialised NGOs, focusing on governance and inclusive finance. In both cased, KIT and

35 There were even allegations that critical remarks were removed from meeting minutes, but the evaluation team was not able to confirm this observation.

WUR have institutional partnership agreements. KIT and WUR reported to be working well together on a common research agenda using a unified methodology and planning (although separate budgeting). SNV and CARE on the other hand, appear to working together less well, with both parties reporting dissatisfaction with the other party's management and communication styles.[36]

The division of labour has not fully reflected the strengths of each consortium partner, with some consortium feeling sidelined. Representatives of all three consortium partners other than SNV all noted that they feel underutilised or even 'sidelined', and that the programme makes insufficient use of each partner's comparative advantages. All three would have liked to play a larger role, not only in terms of budget share (which was negotiated during the proposal stage) but also in terms of their responsibilities in the programme, which they feel could be enhanced given their expertise and capacity, which they currently feel is underutilised. Both WUR and KIT noted that they would have like to lead in the MEL area, on which both of them have strong expertise, but initial involvement in the design and implementation of the MEL system remained modest. They mentioned that SNV has so far led with a siloed approach, preventing effective integration of knowledge and expertise, with several partners reporting feeling 'excluded,' i.e., not sufficiently consulted or constructive self-criticism not being treated seriously. While this may in part be the result of the complex consortium structure (with e.g. CARE being a confederation), a more inclusive management style could help to resolve such issues. Several consortium partners also noted that programme management was untransparent, with limited and irregular information being provided to consortium partners on real-time MEL and financial data. Several interviewees also mentioned that more cooperation from embassies would be beneficial, although high staff rotation within embassies sometimes makes it harder for them to have deep contextual knowledge.

EQ10 - How effective is the cooperation between the different consortium partners and local implementing partners and what can be improved?

Cooperation between consortium partners and local partners is characterised by underutilisation of local partners. Several interviewees mentioned that both SNV's local staff and CARE's local staff can be more effectively used, and that the programme should involve the existing local expertise more, rather than hiring local external consultants, also for reasons of sustainability. In general, a lot of work appears to have been outsourced to individual local consultants, rather than working with existing SNV and CARE country offices, other local implementing partners, national farmer organisations (e.g. for data collection) and municipalities (e.g. for monitoring).[37] Two different consortium partners mentioned that local office staff felt not only underutilised but also 'undervalued', given their limited engagement within the consortium. One issue mentioned by consortium partners was limited or late communication by SNV, but SNV noted that consortium partners are also sometimes late with delivering, for example, their financial reports. Some management and implementation procedures imposed by SNV were also perceived as heavy or not sufficiently country-specific by partners and implementing agents. Since only limited

[36] For example, CARE representatives considered SNV's management too hierarchical and not sufficiently inclusive and transparent, with CARE staff members feeling not feeling treated as full-fledged consortium partner. SNV reported that the complex organisation of CARE (CARE International being a confederation of 18 CARE national members) contributed to coordination and communication difficulties and delays. This is because SNV's consortium partner is CARE Netherlands, while in the field the local CARE offices are managed by CARE USA (Burkina, Niger) and CARE UK (Mali).

[37] Eg. in Mali there has been an issue with the national farmers organisation, who was meant to be a strategic partner (benefiting sustainability) and was replaced by an NGO in the first year of implementation: according to SNV this was because they were not delivering, but according to the organisation this was because of unclear communication from SNV.

specific examples were given, we recommend SNV Netherlands to further assess what is behind these concerns, and to work together with consortium partners to address these concerns.

The programme's work with local research institutes appears to have been somewhat less effective and efficient, and could potentially be scaled down. According to interviewees, the online-focused training approach for local research institutes was initially very challenging for the national academic research institutes, which were used to a more traditional approach. Together with limited internet and electricity, this led to slower-than-expected progress, with capacity development starting almost from zero. required building capacity from a low baseline. Moreover, multiple stakeholders described cooperation between the programme's country offices and the national research institutes as challenging. Interviewee reported that efforts to link research with implementation were challenging, as national academic professors sometimes viewed themselves as superior to implementing staff from SNV and CARE. However, efforts to connect these groups and bridge their cultural differences could potentially contribute to new relationships that might endure in the future (see also the chapter on Sustainability). In this regard, reporting lines could usefully be reviewed, given that multiple consortium partners considered it inefficient to have local research partners report to KIT and WUR staff who are abased in the Netherlands, while the work is mostly conducted in-country.[38] While SNV considered the division of labour between KIT-WUR and local research partners as effective and efficient, they also noted that local research institutes in practice collaborate with SNV and CARE on developing and implementing the research agenda.[39] Given the limited and indirect traction of this research agenda, and the more urgent need to improve the MEL system, one could consider reducing the roles of KIT and WUR in the research area, which could potentially free up resources for them to be more actively involved in improving the MEL system (see chapter on MEL).

4.2 External coherence

EQ11 - To what extent are Pro-ARIDES' strategies aligned with relevant regional and national policies?

Pro-ARIDES strategies are aligned with regional strategies and national policies. Interviews and fieldwork show that Pro-ARIDES aligned with regional strategies (e.g., resilience, food security, governance) and national policies by working through consultation frameworks and collaborating with local governments. It has integrated national priorities into implementation while sustaining a broader regional vision.

EQ12 - To what extent is Pro-ARIDES complementary to other regional/national programmes? What is the perceived added value of Pro-ARIDES compared to other development programmes active in the region/respective countries?

Pro-ARIDES partly overlaps with other programmes. There was wide agreement from interviewees that the programme partly overlaps with similar programmes in the region, however our field work indicated that more research is needed to assess to what extent. While many reported that they are working hard to ensure synergy with other parties, SNV in Niger stated that this is often hindered by changing agendas of other parties and issues of timing. In terms of overlaps that could be reduced, the programme could leave the work of PW5 in Mali to SNV's Accountable Local Governance Programme (PGLR+).

38 Regional managements also noted coordination challenges between local and Netherlands based teams, while adding that on some occasions steering committee members are new to their roles and insufficiently informed.

39 KIT and WUR primarily focus on support functions, such as introducing new insights, familiarising researchers with innovative research approaches, and facilitating peer review by international experts from WUR and KIT. Local research institutes, in collaboration with CARE, SNV and other implementation partners, set the action research agenda, plan and implement research and report on research results.

Nevertheless, the programme's size, systemic approach and focus on social cohesion and conflicts were perceived by some as adding value to other programmes. One consortium partner described the programme as adopting a "unique" multi-sectoral approach, linking key resilience components. While likely not "unique", various documents (e.g. programme document and annual reports) also underline the systemic change nature of the programme, as mentioned at the beginning of the internal coherence section. Other interviewees mentioned that the programme, also thanks to its size, focuses and integrates different elements such as social cohesion, gender, youth, climate change, local conflicts (see also relevance section on conflict sensitivity), and addresses gaps in governance and knowledge-sharing.

EQ13 - How does Pro-ARIDES cooperate/coordinate with other regional/national development programmes/organisations/institutions?

Although at the start, Pro-ARIDES mapped other SNV programmes, this did not translate into leveraging synergies at a later stage. Field work indicated that Pro-ARIDES mapped efforts by other programmes at the start of the programme. Afterwards, one partner mentioned that Pro-ARIDES coordinates with other SNV programmes through knowledge exchange forums and participation in regional consultation platforms. Nevertheless, the evaluation team did not find clear evidence regarding what the programme has done concretely to establish synergies, neither with SNV programmes, nor with programmes from other organisations. For example, field work in Mali indicated that there was very little communication between SNV projects (e.g. PGLR+, that partly overlaps with pathway 5 of Pro-ARIDES); there was also no mention of collaboration with MODHEM+ in Burkina Faso. In general, establishing synergies with other programmes would require conscious investment of time and resources by both Pro-ARIDES and external parties.

5 Sustainability

Significant security concerns pose substantial risks to sustainability, but the programme has demonstrated strong flexibility in this regard, including through various mitigation strategies. Several other risks to sustainability remain.

EQ14 - To what extent, and at which levels (central/decentral), have institutional linkages been established, and how are they contributing– or likely to contribute–to the sustainability and lasting impact of Pro-ARIDES? What formal mechanisms or agreements are in place to ensure that these linkages are maintained beyond the programme lifecycle, and how are local capacities being built to support long-term continuation?

Institutional embeddedness at the local and national level is well-established and contributes significantly to sustainability. The programme collaborates intensively with local authorities, technical services, local research institutes and farmer organisations, as well as with well-established NGOs in the three countries. This collaboration is well appreciated at all levels (local, regional, and national). Moreover, the proximity-based approach reinforces local capacity.

Limited formal mechanisms or agreements are in place to ensure that linkages are maintained beyond the programme lifecycle. While limited information is available about such agreements, we do know that various formal agreements were signed with the programme's partners, which contributes to the sustainability of these partnerships. However, it is too early to say whether these partnerships will extend beyond the duration of the programme. This having said, it is clear that various new linkages were established, for example between local research institutes and NGOs and local SNV offices. To the extent that these prove useful to both parties, they are likely to continue.

There are positive signs that strengthened community institutions will continue to deliver impact. The extent to which this is likely to happen depends on the extent to which capacity-building efforts have left these institutions equipped with tools, knowledge, and autonomy to serve their populations beyond the programme. Based on our fieldwork, we found that this is especially the case for seed producers and trained animal and plant health persons, who can sell their services to the population. In addition, our fieldwork provided evidence that community relays and local farmer organisations are strongly motivated to carry on the work.

Activities aimed at strengthening community-based financial systems also positively contribute to sustainability. In particular, VSLAs and financial education linked to microfinance institutions (MFIs promote a savings culture, improve access to credit, and strengthen household resilience, particularly by supporting small enterprises and fostering gender equity.

Some other activities will also likely prove to be sustainable. The most promising in this regard are land registration, the new agricultural and nutrition practices, seed production, or plant and animal health services. This is because they have a business case, farmers have taken ownership of them, and have recognised their importance.

EQ15 - How likely are security and political risks to compromise the sustainability of programme results, and what specific mitigation strategies are in place to address these risks? In what ways has the programme design incorporated flexibility to adapt to evolving security and political conditions, ensuring resilience in achieving long-term outcomes?

The heightened security and political risks in the three countries significantly undermine the sustainability of programme results. Numerous stakeholders confirmed that security issues restrict operational access, disrupt local engagement, and weaken institutional ownership. Interviewees also agreed that the unstable political environments and ongoing insecurity jeopardize long-term financing and community-driven continuity, making sustained impact very challenging.

Despite these significant security challenges, the programme has demonstrated strong flexibility and adaptive capacity, including through mitigation strategies. For example, country teams adapted their intervention strategies by changing locations when this was imposed by the security situation; working with internally displaced people (including people from previously targeted areas); and by adapting schedules and operations to ensure continuity, while ensuring the safety of staff and target groups. The proximity approach has also been an appropriate mitigation strategy, as this has allowed people from within the communities to continue the work in areas that Pro-ARIDES staff could not reach for security reasons.

However, several weaknesses in programme implementation and steering pose additional risks to sustainability. In particular:

- **Infrastructure and resource limitations**: limited access to water, low-quality equipment, and lack of maintenance resources hinder the sustainability of physical investments such as tree nurseries, gardens, and irrigation systems.
- **Poor maintenance of certain investments**: insufficient maintenance of certain infrastructure and equipment, such as boreholes and wire fences, can lead to their deterioration in the absence maintenance mechanisms and training for their users.
- **Delivery of training courses without durable materials.** For example, many training courses were delivered without participant workbooks or other durable materials adapted to the final beneficiaries that could have been used to support the continued implementation of the subjects learned (notably in Mali).
- **Lack of systematic analysis of change indicators:** such indicators are important to identify geographical disparities and resistance to change, with a better integration of action research and implementation.

Finally, several constraints in the environment could compromise the sustainability of results. These include, in particular, the very low literacy rate among households in the intervention areas, and the low motivation of young people to get involved in activities at the level of local governance and agricultural practices (risk of abandoning resilient practices).

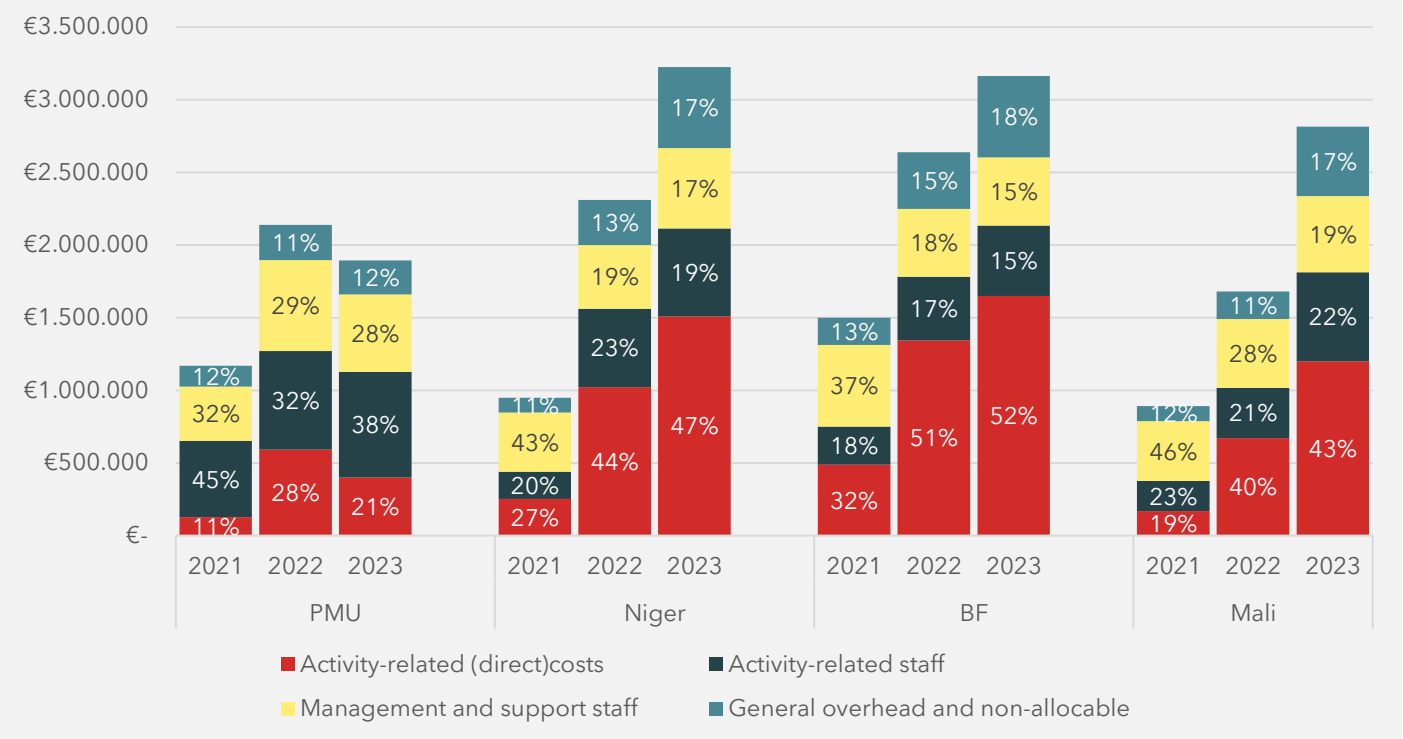
6 Efficiency

There is room to improve cost efficiency, as Pro-ARIDES' administrative and non-allocable costs remain relatively high. Going forward, the programme should focus on consolidating promising activities rather than upscaling, with a reassessment of scalability planned for the end of Phase 2.

EQ16 - To what extent are the administrative costs of Pro-ARIDES reasonable in relation to the actual implementation costs? Can this be further optimized and if so, how?

The administrative costs of Pro-ARIDES are relatively high, with non-allocable costs taking a relatively large share of total costs. The evaluation team analysed financial reports provided by Pro-ARIDES and grouped costs into four categories (see Figure 6.1 for the categories). The analysis shows that overhead and programme management costs range between 30 and 40 percent in all countries, after a first year where they surpassed 40 percent. The programme had in fact a slow start in terms of expenditures related to activities, which was below 30 percent in 2021. In 2022 and 2023, the costs for activities were above 40 percent in all countries, and in Burkina it surpassed 50 percent. In general, costs of the PMU in Niger seem also relatively high, accounting for more than 20 percent of the total costs. Moreover, the share of costs marked as non-allocable is relatively high (almost 20 percent in some countries for some years), raising questions on how this share of the budget was spent, since salaries of programme managers, support staff, as well as equipment and office costs are already accounted for in the third category (yellow).

Figure 6.1 The costs of overhead and general management decrease range between 30 and 40 percent in all countries after the first year

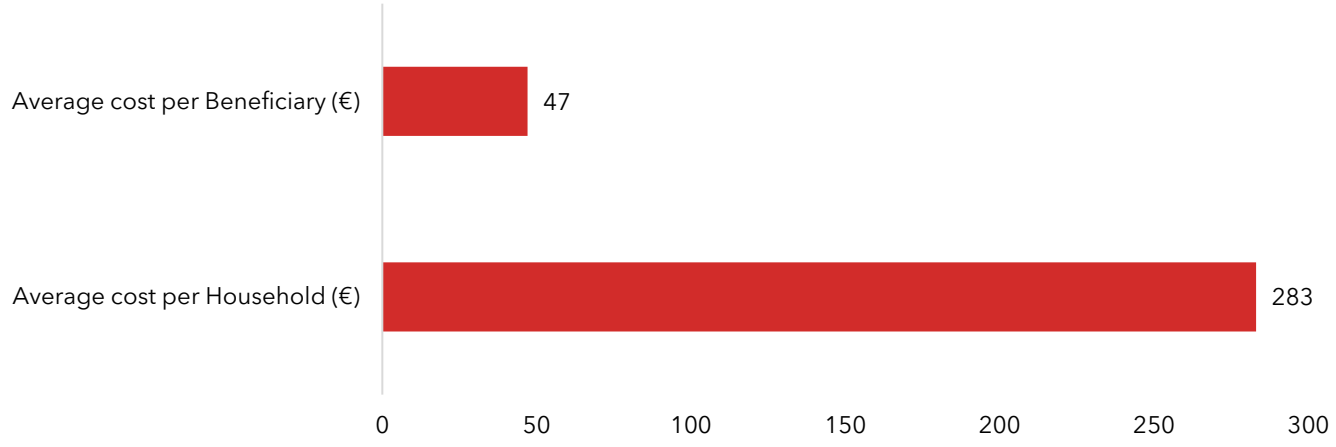


Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on financial reports provided by Pro-ARIDES. Note: activities include direct activities, local travel and local NGOs; Activity-related staff includes cost of local staff, consultants as well as M&E and activities related to local staff (e.g safety training); Management and support staff includes programme managers and advisors, support staff such as HR, and general equipment cost (vehicles, equipment and office cost); general overhead and non-allocable includes costs that are not specifically allocated to any of the previous cost centres.

EQ 17 - What are the average costs per beneficiary reached, as well as per result achieved? Where possible and relevant compared to (what is known of) similar interventions in the region of other INGOs, IFAD and/or World Bank.

Figure 6.2 below reflects Pro-ARIDES' own estimations of the average cost per beneficiary reached by the programme. This calculation is based on the total programme expenditures over the period 2021-2024 (EUR 40,355,985), combined with figures on the total of households reached (142,677) and the total population reached (866,904). The evaluation team was able to verify the average number of households reached using the draft 2024 Annual Report. However, when calculating total expenditures, estimates based on previous annual reports and budget data yielded differing—but consistently higher—figures than those reported by the programme, resulting in a higher average cost per household. Due to these differing figures, the evaluation team did not deem it appropriate to report a specific value regarding total expenditures. Likewise, the average cost per beneficiary could not be validated, as the necessary underlying data was not made available. Moreover, the definition of 'beneficiary reached' and 'household reached' is problematic, with likely double counting of beneficiaries, as explained in the chapter on MEL. For more accurate interpretation, it would be important to clarify whether these figures refer to solely direct beneficiaries or also indirect beneficiaries. Such clarification would support a more precise and reliable measurement process. It is therefore not prudent to validate the assumptions made or benchmark these costs against comparable programmes.

Figure 6.2 The average cost per beneficiary over the period 2021-2024 amounted to EUR 47, while the average cost per household reached is EUR 283



Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics, based on data provided by Pro-ARIDES

EQ 18 - To what extent can the results of Pro-ARIDES so far be seen as a scaling basis for a) the second phase of the programme; b) other interventions/programmes?

While we recommend that the programme continues with a second phase, this should be done only under the condition that it *consolidates* its most promising activities, rather than *upscaling* to new activities or areas. Although the project was designed to experiment various approaches in the first phase and scale up the most successful ones in the second phase, the evaluation team believes that the project's resources do not currently allow for *upscaling* – intended as expansion of activities or areas - and that the current state of implementation rather calls for consolidation of those activities that have been so far most promising (see also other sections of this report). It remains critical, however, to ensure that target groups continue to receive a coherent package of services, in order to maximise the benefits of the integrated approach and sustain momentum along selected intervention paths. This could include, for example, follow-up coaching after initial training sessions. As for upscaling to other interventions or programmes, it seems premature to recommend which (combination of) interventions have the biggest potential for upscaling and sustainable impact. This is because change is only beginning to happen now at the level of intermediate outcomes, and monitoring has not been done in a way that allows to attribute change to specific interventions. We would recommend assessing the potential for upscaling again towards the end of the second phase, by analysing which combination of activities proved to be most relevant and successful in each country (i.e. successful combination of activities may be country dependent). This will require that the monitoring system is adapted to closely monitor implementation and the evolutions on the ground.

7 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

While the Theory of Change provides a good basis for the MEL framework, the MEL system needs substantial redesigning to improve accountability, steering, and learning.

EQ19 - Accountability: To what extent is the set-up of the monitoring and evaluation framework and process of Pro-ARIDES equipped to generate substantiated outcome and impact results over time?

EQ20 - Steering: To what extent does the MEL framework provide timely and actionable data to support realtime decision-making and strategic steering of the programme?

The Theory of Change (ToC) provides a good basis for the MEL framework, with results chains and indicators for each of the five different pathways. The ToC is structured along five pathways, and each pathway has its own intervention logic. The ToC was developed over time in coordination with all consortium partners and country offices, is deemed useful by all consortium partners, and appears to guide their interventions. While there is still room for further improvement of the ToC (e.g. by developing country-level ToCs adjusted to specific country contexts, while clearly articulating assumptions and causal linkages), most stakeholders are in favour of keeping the ToC as the basis of the programme.

The MEL system contains a very large number of output and outcome indicators. Specifically:

- 21 outcome indicators were designed and selected at programme level and are aligned with the five ToC pathways.
- 49 output indicators were developed in 2022 and were not part of the initial results framework; each output has different indicators, which are linked to different pathways; as a result some outputs are linked to more than one pathway.
- 3 systemic indicators that relate to 8 systemic challenges.

A number of these indicators are not necessarily useful to inform on the progress of the programme. One example of output indicators that the evaluation team (as well as many programme stakeholders) did not find useful is the number of recipes shared (see pathway 1 in the Effectiveness section). The majority of MEL stakeholders agree that the programme would need fewer, more targeted indicators. Moreover, indicators across different levels are not clearly linked, making it difficult to verify causal links in the ToC. Often, the level of the indicators chosen does not correspond to the level indicated: for example, several output indicators describe activities. Despite improvements, some partners mentioned that the current reporting system remains heavily output focused, with insufficient emphasis on qualitative reporting and outcome level analysis.[40] However, the evaluation team is of the opinion that a useful outcome level analysis would require a counterfactual (we further expand on this point on EQ26 on the Niger impact study).

[40] Some consortium partners interviewed also mentioned that SNV management focused primarily on outputs for an extended period, initially resisting advice to shift attention toward outcomes and impact. While KIT claimed they had proposed taking on a stronger role in this area, SNV preferred to manage it internally.

Furthermore, there are various issues with the set-up of the data collection system, which might lead to inaccurate counting and prevents the delivery of activities in a strategic way. While the programme has in principle a clear data collection procedure and data validation, there are multiple issues in the set-up that undermine data quality regarding the beneficiary databases, potentially leading to inaccurate counting of beneficiaries, activities and outputs. In some cases, this even undermines credibility among consortium partners.[41] While this mid-term evaluation is not an audit, the evaluation team verified the weaknesses in the data to the extent possible, through in-depth assessments of the available documents and data files; numerous discussions and exchanges with the Pro-ARIDES MEL team; and a MEL workshop with multiple MEL stakeholders.[42]

The evaluation team identified at least five main issues with the MEL data:

1. **Data collection procedures are often unclear, inefficient, and inconsistent across countries.** Excel-based household databases were designed to keep track of project beneficiaries and to serve as a sampling base for the household surveys. While the three countries agreed on minimal data to be included in the beneficiary database, each database was shaped according to each country's needs and understanding. This has resulted in different procedures and templates used by the three country teams for the beneficiary databases. For example, only the Mali beneficiary database seems to include the type of households served (agricultural, agropastoral or pastoral)- it is therefore unclear how disaggregated data by household type are being calculated in Niger and Burkina. Furthermore, in the Mali database the households are assigned a unique identifier (although "reconstructed" by the programme and thus prone to errors, rather than taken from an external identification number); in Niger the household's identification is based on telephone numbers, which are missing for some households; and in Burkina Faso it is only assigned to households in certain municipalities..
2. **Activities cannot be automatically linked to beneficiaries, potentially resulting in incorrect counting of beneficiaries.** Activity data are collected in "fiches" where rows for each beneficiary are *individual*-based, (as opposed to household-based), without automated links to the household databases. Village relays manually fill the activity fiches, which are then checked by supervisors.[43] However, the lack of automated links, unique identifiers for households and the fact that multiple people share the same name makes it impossible to correctly verify how many households were beneficiaries of a given activity. The household databases in Mali and Niger do contain one column for activities received, but these activities are reported as open field text, often combining more than one activity in the same column; the same activity is also reported differently for different households.
3. **It is not clear how numbers for the activity are aggregated, but this appears to be done manually**. At the local level, the programme manually fills in "fiches" for each of the beneficiary during a specific activity. While in Burkina Faso these activity data are then transferred to digital activity databases (excel files), the evaluation team did not find evidence that the same happens in Mali and Niger.
4. **The programme does not make use of the full potentialities of digital tools.** Even in cases where digital tools are utilized (e.g. excel sheets, ODK software for data collection), the programme does not seem to make use of the full potentiality of these tools to aggregate data. For example, as mentioned earlier, data are scattered through different files, often without links among them; activities in the household databases are written as open text in the same column; and data aggregation is not always carried out automatically through formulas.

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41 For example, one consortium partner mentioned that there is overestimation of project beneficiaries, and that it is not clear to them how some numbers are obtained.

42 Representatives of the consortium partners and a representative of the MEL team from the Danish MFA.

43 In some cases, the household type in the fiches is not specified, further preventing the strategic deployment of activities mentioned in (1).

5. **(Output) targets are adjusted annually, partly based on values achieved in previous years.** While adjusting targets to more achievable figures is a sign of strategic adjustment, it might hide areas for improvement, therevy hindering the identification of lessons learned.

While output and activity data are aggregated on a quarterly basis, the set-up of the MEL system is suboptimal for real-time steering. In addition to the aforementioned issues, further issues exist with calculating output indicators. Activity progress is collected by fields agents under SNV/CARE supervision and monitored through excel-based dashboards, managed by the regional office and completed by the country offices quarterly. The file then reports on the number of activities planned and executed for each output indicator. Output indicators contain some qualitative narrative, although this is not specific enough to understand challenges and identify lessons learned. Output indicators are further reported yearly in the annual reports. The dashboards should add up to the figures reported annually, however the link between data collection and quarterly monitoring files is not clear: as mentioned in the issues above, the system is set up in such a way that counting can only be done manually, which does not facilitate accuracy. Interviews with representatives from consortium partners indicate that this process is unclear to many of the partners involved, casting doubt on the quality, usability and comparability of the reported numbers As a result, the set-up of the system seriously weakens the ability for real-time steering and decision making. We recommend that these systems are streamlined by making use of modern tools and exploiting automated monthly data collection (see recommendations). Another issue is the lack of gender-disaggregated data for outputs.

While monitoring of outcome indicators does not allow to have a clear picture of the programme's contribution, this was integrated since 2023 with qualitative analysis of activities contribution. Outcome indicators are collected every two years mostly through household surveys - based on the standardized Rural Household Multi-indicator Survey (RHoMIS) – and SME surveys and reported in a detailed way in the "Etude de reference" and "Etude de performance". Outcome data analysis is done by an external survey company in Burkina Faso. The data cleaning and analysis is carried out professionally through R codes, in a standardized way for the three countries, and the codes feed automatically into the "Etude de baseline" and "Etude de performance" reports.[44],[45] The "Guide de Planification, Suivi, Evaluation et Apprentissage (PSEA)" as well as the "Mode de calcul des indicateurs" clarify how survey questions translate into outcome indicators. One major drawback of the including outcomes in the monitoring system with no counterfactual (no control group in the survey) is that the system does not allow to understand the programme contribution, but simply compares the situation between different years (regardless of whether the programme had any influence on it). Collecting data on outcomes would be more useful in an "impact study" setting, where data are compared with a control group (see also evaluation question #25 on the Niger impact study). Nevertheless, quantitative surveys were in 2023 also complemented by qualitative reports ("rapport synthese de l'enquete qualitative") based on focus group discussions in different types of *communes*, which aim to provide an interpretation of how programme activities have contributed to observed outcomes.

Moreover, reporting and framing of some output and outcome indicators is confusing and points to misleading interpretations. Regarding *outputs*, the programme reports numbers differently based on the different types of indicators. For indicators related to households (e.g. # of household supported), the programme uses annual targets and reports on annual achieved values; total cumulative figures (or targets) would then be the sum of the annual (target) values. For indicators related to activities, however, the programme reports annual cumulative

44 Alhough the structure of the files were not optimal and it was hard to verify how indicators were calculated, the evaluation team was able to verify how most of the indicators were calculated.

45 These reports are very dense of information. It needs to be clarified that they should be treated more as a database, and further analysed adding interpretation from qualitative insights before drawing conclusions.

values, and sometimes report only values of activities that are different than activities carried out in previous years (and with different beneficiaries), with the aim to avoid double-counting on activities and households. Regarding *outcomes*, what the MEL files refer to as "contribution" of the programme, is usually simply the change between 2023 and 2021 values, as mentioned earlier, without any sort of attribution or contribution study. Further, the program reports on both # and %, but it is not clear what the % refer to, nor why sometimes targets on % are met, while targets on the # of households are not met. The framing and definition of certain indicators is also misleading: e.g. an indicator called "# and % of households that improved their diet", reports on *levels* for 2021 and 2023, rather than changes. While we acknowledge the effort of the programme to avoid double counting and measure contribution, these monitoring files are set up in a way that does not allow for clarity and transparency.

EQ21 - Learning: To what extent is Pro-ARIDES learning from its achievements and capable of adjusting its strategies when results do not meet the expectations?

Because of the focus on quantitative indicators, it is difficult to know 'why' something did or did not work, making it harder to know how to adjust strategies. Annual reports contain very few lessons learned about what did not work; as a result, it is hard to identify areas for improvement. The "Recueil des narratifs qualificatifs des résultats du programme" report qualitative information in terms of success stories, but these are mostly anecdotal and do not focus on what could be improved. On top of this, Annual reports are long and very difficult to read, as information is scattered, activity focused, and the scope of changes is rarely addressed. Nevertheless, one consortium partner mentioned that Pro-ARIDES is slowly integrating qualitative information into reporting, as advocated by another consortium partner since the beginning of the programme, to better understand the programme's impact and contributions. For example, Annual Report 2024 was much more concise and streamliend, focusing on programme's contribution to observed results.

As a result, there is little use of MEL findings for strategic adjustments. While there is some use of collected data by coordination teams and stakeholders to refine implementation (e.g., in governance meetings and country-specific planning) there is no structured use of MEL findings for strategic adjustments besides for formal planning moments. Moreover, stakeholders widely agreed that no/limited data feedback loops with households exists, beyond field agents and partners, to ground adaptation in local realities.

EQ22 - To what extent is Pro-ARIDES able to learn from and adapt to changing circumstances in the context?

The programme has formal avenues in principle aimed at learning and adaptation; however, it is not always clear what these different avenues aimed to achieve in practice. Document review and programme staff involved in MEL showed that the programme organises annual regional review and planning workshops, involving stakeholders and household representatives. These serve in principle as reflection and adaptation platforms. Although annual learning workshops are held in each country, it is unclear what exactly these workshops achieve, apart from annual planning and adjustments based on security situation. One consortium partner even mentioned that in the first years they focused more on implementation, while the focus started shifting only recently towards learning.

As a result, multiple stakeholders deem the current approach insufficient, and in some cases even restricting content discussions. Partners struggle to find consensus on what aspects are not working. As outlined in the Coherence section, many partners reported that even when issues are raised, they are often excluded from action points unless they align with the programme's existing comfort zone. These partners reported that content

discussions are constrained, with meeting minutes limited to pre-set topics, leaving little space for responsive adjustments.

EQ23 - Learning: To what extent has the action research in Pro-ARIDES generated useful evidence/proved practices to inform the programme's strategies? And to what extent have these practices been successfully integrated in the programme's strategies/implementation?

Consortium partners recognise action research as a key component of the MEL system. Action research is positioned within knowledge management to consolidate and reflect on learning across activities. Many workshop participants noted action research, together with learning sessions and survey provide important inputs for programme refinement. Nevertheless, the findings from each source are not systematically combined (i.e. no integrated evidence base).

Partners agree that it is not always easy to translate research into impact, although the programme is on the right path to do so. While each activity includes field-level descriptions, and positive examples of action research for adaptive management exist (e.g. in the tax area), there has been no systematic evaluation of whether recommendations have led to tangible changes. To date, implementation has mostly relied on the programme's own interpretation of insights. However, one consortium partner mentioned that the previous model of producing technical notes has shifted toward generating outputs that directly inform programme adjustments, by discussing recommendations from the researcher into adaptive management: in this way researchers are "forced" to think about actionable recommendations (jointly with the practitioners).

EQ24 - Impact on systems change: How well does the MEL framework track progress toward long-term systems transformation, such as governance improvements or climate resilience?

The MEL system is being adapted to track systems change. While the programme document mentioned the 8 areas of systemic change, these were initially not directly linked to pathways and outcome indicators. However, the program staff involved in MEL reported that the eight systemic changes are now being integrated into the implementation of activities. Each country prioritised 6 systemic change areas out of the 8. These systemic changes are classified by dimension, namely (1) conditions and policies, (2) relationships, and (3) Mentalities/behaviours. These dimensions are being developed into methodologies and tools, and monitoring is ongoing. The evaluation team linked these areas to the results framework (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 The eight areas of systemic change were linked ex-post to trajectory and outcome indicators

Area of change	Pathway	Corresponding outcome indicator
1. Emancipation of agricultural and (agro-) pastoral households (including women and young people) and empowerment of farmers' and women's organisations	1	Outcome: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4
2. Improved performance of the service delivery system	1, 2, 5	Outcome: 1.4, 2.4, 5.3
3. Seizing growth opportunities and diversifying demand for local products (increased demand for local food products)	2	Outcome: 2.1
4. Emergence of viable local businesses and farmers' and women's organisations and young performers	2	Outcome: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3
5. Concerted and inclusive multi-stakeholder governance of terroir and territory	3	Outcome: 3.3, 3.4, 3.5
6. Gender mainstreaming and social inclusion (EGIS)	4	Outcome: 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
7. Assurance of good governance by local government institutions (local authorities) strengthened and inclusive	5	Outcome: 5.1, 5.2, 5.4
8. Better access of organisations to long-term financing and investment.	5	Outcome: 5.5

Source: SEO and MDF, based on documents and inputs from the pro-ARIDES MEL staff.

EQ25 - Impact on systems change: What is the perceived added value of the set-up of the scientific impact study (in Niger) next to the regular programme monitoring and evaluation of Pro-ARIDES? To what extent is/will this impact study be able to quantify/attribute the impact of Pro-ARIDES?

A rigorous, quasi-experimental impact study is very important, as it has the potential to causally assess the contribution of Pro-ARIDES (unlike the regular monitoring of outcomes). The evaluation team reviewed the questionnaire of the Niger impact study and made various suggestions for improvement, as not all questions were well adapted to the ToC and the local context. Due to various delays, the final sampling plan nor the results of the study were available by the time of writing this report; consequently, the arguments made in this paragraph are mostly theoretical. As mentioned earlier, the regular monitoring of outcomes is for several indicators currently not conducive for measuring the contribution of Pro-ARIDES to the observed outcomes, and as such adds little value to the monitoring of outputs (which are directly attributable to the programme).[46]

It is important to take into account the various caveats on what an impact study in the field can actually measure, as well as ethical considerations that need to be accounted for. For example, there are often problems with spillovers between treatment and control group: e.g. households that received trainings on diversification of production and diet might pass on the knowledge to neighbouring households. This might give rise to a "false negative" i.e. assessing the programme as having no significant contribution, even when there is, or to underestimate the impact of the programme. To minimise this effect, one option is to choose treatments and control groups from different municipalities in the same province, where possible. It is therefore always good practice to complement a quantitative impact assessment study with qualitative assessments and checking linkages in the Theory of Change. However, while conducting an impact study in conflict areas also has complications, it might help mitigating complications already encountered in the survey for outcome monitoring: specifically, when it is not

[46] For some indicators (e.g. #1.3 and #2.2) the performance survey included questions on the contribution of the project to the observed changes at HH level, and the consortium reported that the findings of the survey were then complemented by FGD

possible to survey the same households between baseline and midline (or endline), the impact study allows to change the composition of the two groups, and still being able to measure the average treatment effect, if the definition of the two groups does not change and provided that random sampling within the original treatment and control populations is maintained. Moreover, ethical considerations exist when surveying households who are not beneficiaries of the programme. These can be mitigated by (1) clearly explaining the purpose of the survey and the role of the control group: participants should understand that their involvement does not guarantee access to the intervention; (2) stressing that participation is fully voluntary and that individuals can opt out without any repercussions; (3) involving both an ethical committee and community leaders, who can help design ethically-sensitive methods.

EQ26 - Systems and processes: Is the MEL framework efficient in its processes, ensuring stakeholder inclusion and maintaining high standards of data quality and reliability?

The consortium management structure somewhat limited stakeholder inclusions, especially of local communities. The consortium reported that consortium partners have been involved in the design and implementation of the MEL system since the start of the programme. For example, outcome indicators and surveys were jointly developed, and a MEL group composed of consortium partners was established in the early years of the programme.[47] However, besides the issues and challenges described above regarding data quality and reliability, several consortium partners reported challenges in the inclusion of different perspectives (as mentioned in the Coherence section). Furthermore, on the ground staff have not been used at their full potential in MEL. While some partners lamented insufficient capacity of MEL in SNV (also due to high rotation of local staff, partly an issue within SNV), they could have themselves been more actively participating in discussions. Many stakeholders were also of the opinion that the fact that the MEL consultant was based in Europe limited engagement with field-level activities thereby hindering real-time follow up and validation. Another important point is the limited inclusion of local stakeholders, such as farmers organisations in Mali. While they were meant to be strategic partners of the programmes, SNV replaced them with NGOs after the first year.[48] The evaluation team thus recommend that these institutions be involved in data collection - and municipalities be involved in monitoring – in the next Pro-ARIDES phase, to increase ownership, accountability, and ultimately sustainability of the programme's results.

47 Morevoer, WUR holds primary responsibility for the impact study, and CARE leads monitoring efforts for trajectory 5.

48 There is no agreement on why this happened. While SNV claimed that these local institutions were not delivering what promised, local institutions mentioned that there was no clear communication from SNV about their involvement.

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Key conclusions by OECD-DAC criterion

Effectiveness:

- During its first phase, Pro-ARIDES achieved most of its objectives.
- The results achieved thus far are notable given the challenging context of ongoing conflict and security risks.
- The programme is generally well received by both stakeholders and target groups, as far as they could have been reached for consultation.
- However, output and outcome indicators are not well defined and sometimes difficult to interpret.
- It is currently not possible to rigorously assess the contribution of the interventions to the outcomes, due to the absence of a comparison group and the lack of systematic qualitative monitoring.
- Consolidation of efforts is necessary through a more focused approach.

Relevance:

- Pro-ARIDES is valued by stakeholders and target groups for its integrated, locally grounded approach and strong institutional partnerships, particularly in a context of declining donor presence in the Sahel.
- The programme addresses critical challenges such as food insecurity, low household resilience, land conflicts, and weak local governance—issues well-documented in both internal reports and external sources.
- While women's participation shows progress, youth engagement is uneven across countries, and pastoralist communities remain significantly underrepresented in the data collection, as well as potentially in activities.
- The programme demonstrates flexibility in responding to insecurity, with measures in place to adapt operations; however, stronger inclusion of pastoralists is needed to support peacebuilding and equitable development.

Coherence:

- Internal coherence:
  - The integrated approach works well and can be further strengthened in Phase 2.
  - A regional or multi-country approach offers benefits related to economies of scale and possibilities for cross-country learning, but the current heavy top-down regional management structure has in practice limited these benefits.
  - The division of labour between consortium partners does not optimally use the strengths of each partner, with multiple cooperation partners and local partners feeling underutilised.
- External coherence:
  - Pro-ARIDES partly overlaps with other programmes, but also adds value.
  - The programme's size, systemic approach and focus on social cohesion and conflicts were perceived by some as adding value to other programmes.
  - Pro-ARIDES coordinated well with other SNV projects and programmes but less so with programmes from other organisations

Sustainability:

- Significant security concerns and political instability pose substantial risks to the sustainability of results.
- However, the programme has demonstrated strong flexibility in this regard, including through various mitigation strategies.

- Factors that positively contribute to sustainability include the efforts aimed at strengthening community institutions and community-based financial systems, and working with local and national partners to achieve institutional embeddedness.
- However, several weaknesses in programme implementation, combined with other beneficiary-level constraints, pose additional risks to sustainability.

Efficiency

- There is room to improve cost efficiency in Pro-ARIDES, as administrative and non-allocable costs remain relatively high, and although activity-related spending has steadily increased after a slow start, further gains in efficiency are still needed.
- Drawing robust conclusions on cost per beneficiary remains difficult without access to underlying data and clearer beneficiary definitions.
- As the programme enters its second phase, Pro-ARIDES should prioritise areas where progress has been most evident and sustained results are most achievable, focusing on consolidating its most promising activities rather than expanding into new areas or launching additional interventions.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

- While the Theory of Change (ToC) provides a good basis for the MEL framework, the MEL system needs substantial redesigning to improve accountability, steering, and learning.
- The MEL system contains a large number of output and outcome indicators, some of which are not useful for accountability and learning.
- There are various issues with the set-up of the data collection and monitoring system for activities and outputs, such as inconsistencies among countries, information scattered among multiple files, disconnect between activity databases and household databases, different methods to aggregate outputs based on the type of outputs, as well as a lot of data apparently aggregated manually, which might lead to inaccurate counting of beneficiaries and outputs.
- Monitoring of outcome indicators does not allow to have a clear picture of the programme's contribution, due to the lack of a counterfactual. While the household survey does contain questions on pro-ARIDES contribution towards specific outcomes, our fieldwork indicated that beneficiaries often do not know the distinction between the support given by Pro-ARIDES and other programmes. Therefore these questions might not provide an accurate picture of the programme's contribution, and should rather be used as a second-best option. The Niger impact study is in principle more appropriate to assess contribution, although the evaluation team could not verify how this study was carried out.
- The MEL system is not geared towards learning, due to the focus on quantitative indicators and little explanation on how change came about and why something did or did not work, which would have helped inform the design of the second phase of the programme. Adjusting targets downward, might also mask issues and hinder the identification of lessons learned.
- The programme limited stakeholder inclusion in MEL, especially of local communities and public institutions.

8.2 Recommendations for Phase 2

Given the importance of this programme for the region, and the progress made so far, we recommend to continue the programme with a second phase, provided our key recommendations are incorporated. It is important to continue this programme precisely given the difficult security context and given the fact that various other donors are withdrawing, which enhances the relevance and additionality of this programme. This having said, there are a number of areas where the programme needs to make substantial improvements. The table below summarises our recommendations.

Table 8.1 We have six key recommendations for areas to be improved in the second phase of the programme.

#	Recommendation	OECD-DAC criteria
1	**Maintain the integrated programme approach, but concentrate activities in a smaller number of areas** • Conduct a 'value for money' analysis to help prioritise resource allocation, so as to ensure that funds are directed towards those activities with greater impact and higher long-term sustainability, subject to data availability • Make a strategic choice around the combination of activities that contribute most to the desired systemic change per stakeholder (households, including pastoralist communities, and organisations) and the level of effort needed per municipality, so as to optimise the mix of activities provided at the municipality level; this choice should be made before service delivery and in line with the assumption and linkages within the Theory of Change. • The above requires that the MEL system is improved (set up in such a way that strategic service delivery per municipality - and if possible, per beneficiary- can be properly monitored and reported on; see also next recommendation). • Adjust the geographical scope of the activities, by focusing activities in areas where security concerns do not pose major threats.	All
2	**Simplify (reduce number of indicators) and refocus the MEL system to make it more user friendly, more suitable for longer-term impact monitoring, rigorous endline evaluation, and strategic learning and steering** • Engage a third party or existing consortium partners (WUR, KIT) to streamline and redesign the entire MEL system. On the one hand, the system should be simpler (fewer indicators), more user friendly, and more strategic (giving people incentives to use it for adaptive management and learning, rather than seeing it as a burden). On the other hand, the system should be more rigorous, with a focus on (a) detecting indications of long-term sustainable change, and (b) benchmarking this observed change relative to a benchmark or control group (see further points below). • Maintain the existing ToC, but review and update it regularly to reflect contextual shifts, and adapt implementation strategies accordingly. Ideally, the high-level overall ToC would be maintained for the programme as a whole, but more detailed country-specific sub-ToCs could be developed and adjusted to specific country contexts, while clearly articulating assumptions and causal linkages. • Develop a new MEL database which clearly links beneficiaries to services received, allows for a territorial analysis (i.e. the concentration of efforts per municipality or other geographic unit), and which makes use of Excel functionalities to facilitate accumulations and reduce human error. • Simplify and improve indicators: reduce redundant and unclear output indicators, and make the remaining indicators more 'SMART', country-specific where needed, better aligned with	MEL

	appropriate results levels; make sure that the definition of each indicator is clear and consistent, to improve transparency and accountability. • Improve the collection of monitoring data by (a) developing and consistently applying user-friendly data templates that are consistent among the three countries; (b) use unique identifiers in household-based data files to avoid inaccurate counting of beneficiaries; and (c) monitor more systematically which households are beneficiaries of which activity (so as to control for household involvement/exposure to different Pro-ARIDES interventions when trying to attribute household-level results to Pro-ARIDES interventions) (see also Recommendation 3). Make sure that the functionalities of MS Excel are used to streamline data collection and reporting, with the aim to maximise transparency and reduce errors. • Design and measure a new 2025 baseline for both the Pro-ARIDES treatment group and a comparable 'control group', which can be compared in the future to a 2029 endline (and potentially a 2027 midline). This could potentially be based on the Niger impact study, but should be done for all three countries and the survey and sampling plan should be carefully designed, accounting for local contexts and ethical considerations (see EQ 7 in the MEL chapter). Additional intermediate outcome monitoring could still be done for treatment municipalities, but only for short-term outcomes which are more directly linked to the programme. • Integrate more qualitative indicators (especially for outputs and medium-term outcomes) to better capture nuanced outcomes and lessons. The quarterly file on activity-outcome monitoring as well as the qualitative reports from FGDs carried out along the household and SME surveys already include some qualitative narratives that could usefully be expanded to capture lessons learned • Establish a monitoring-into-action loop to ensure that findings are used for adaptive management and learning.	
3	**Make programme management less hierarchical and more inclusive for better use of existing capacity and more openness to learning and self-improvement** • Make substantial changes to regional programme management, by significantly altering its current top-down hierarchical management style. • Conduct further research to assess the concerns of consortium partners regarding management and coordination, and work together with all consortium partners to address these concerns. • Make programme management more inclusive and open to learning, by creating more open space for substantive and collaborative discussion of content and collective learning with partners and stakeholders, thereby creating an environment that is open to constructive criticism (as opposed to the current environment, where people do not feel free to offer self-criticism or take own initiative). Openness to learning also includes being more open to innovation (e.g. better use of digital tools, mapping, visualisations of results, data apps). • More effectively use the existing capacity and expertise of local staff members at SNV and CARE country offices, thereby reducing over-reliance on individual national consultants. • Make better use of the existing expertise of consortium partners. For example, the excellent MEL expertise of WUR and KIT could be used to significantly revamp the MEL system and help implement the MEL recommendations noted above. • Improve the gender balance within Pro-ARIDES, particularly its management. Hiring more women as part of programme management could not only have an important demonstration effect, but could also help enhance gender awareness.	Internal Coherence, MEL, Effectiveness
4	**Simplify reporting and emphasise inclusion** • Improve annual reporting: make it more concise, place outcomes/outputs at the beginning of each section in a table, rather than text, and separate summary from detailed analysis. Report on the meaning and scope of change.	Relevance, MEL, Sustainability

	• Improve reporting on gender, youth and pastoralist communities. For example, introduce dedicated sections and aggregated analysis to better assess the programme's impact on these groups. • Consider involving local farmers organisations in data collection and municipalities in monitoring. This will help to ensure buy-in and ownership and can contribute to local capacity building and sustainability.	
5	**Improve contextual relevance and coherence** • Actively involve pastoralist communities in programme design and delivery to increase relevance and reduce risk of conflict. • Dedicate resources to align and create synergies with other programmes. • Contribute to the localisation agenda by allowing national institutions (municipalities, farmers organisations, etc.) a role as strategic partners, rather than beneficiaries, both in the implementation of the programme and in the monitoring (co-designing indicators and data collection instruments, aligning data collection with the partners' processes, involving them in quality assurance and data analysis).	Relevance, Coherence
6	**Improve contractual and financial administration** • Improve efficiencies in (sub)contracting, currently done separately by each consortium partner • Ensure continuity of the activity budget for subcontractors, for example aligning the budget cycle with the contract term (e.g., March–March) • Centralisation can be inefficient – recommendation: more decentralised and effective disbursement of transport cost to participants in trainings (Mali) • Explore mechanisms to ensure funds are available at MFIs at the moment credit is disbursed. Burkina Faso's approach could serve as a model for Mali and Niger. This process could be developed as an area for action research, aiming to identify the optimal timing that balances MFI liquidity needs with borrowers' capacity to repay.	Efficiency

Appendix A Outputs per country

Table A.1 Pathway 1 Outputs - Mali

Indicators[49]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Household garden established	314	5,742	185%	4,019	70%	110%
AAP households (m/f) supported through diversification/nutrition activities	314	11,583	89%	28,195	100%	97%
Training sessions held on nutrition activities	0	4	20%	20	100%	100%
Culinary recipes promoted/introduced to households	0	4	20%	20	100%	100%
Climate change-resilient technologies/practices promoted/introduced	5	19	190%	18	90%	95%
Crops introduced for production diversification	9	13	108%	17	142%	142%
AAP households (m/f) supported through diversification activities	314	11,583	89%	28,195	100%	97%
Training on the use of climate change-resilient tools	8	13	108%	11	55%	65%
AAP households participating in training activities on climate-resilient production	408	11,583	89%	28,195	100%	97%
Training on practices related to increasing production	6	11	138%	10	100%	110%
Community (trainer) facilitators engaged in nutrition activities	430	406	94%	362	89%	95%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

[49] The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.2 Pathway 2 Outputs – Mali

Indicators[50]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Local providers supplying climate-adapted technologies and inputs meeting household needs	0	2	67%	50	111%	108%
OP/OF/OJ supported for capacity building in thematic areas (marketing, distribution)	0	124	78%	132	29%	29%
Functional digital/multi-actor platforms supported or newly created	0	4	100%	6	100%	100%
Promotional fairs / B2B meetings supported by Pro-ARIDES	3	7	100%	8	100%	100%
Organizations that participated in promotional fairs	51	166	95%	286	119%	108%
SMEs supported for capacity building in marketing and distribution	43	75	132%	109	96%	106%
SMEs and OPs providing services to AAP households supported for capacity building in service delivery meeting household needs	0	49	86%	272	109%	105%
MFI programme partners providing accessible financial products to AAP households, OPs, and SMEs	0	3	100%	6	200%	200%
Payment and transaction systems accessible via smartphones	0	0	-	1	100%	100%
# AAP households (m/f) supported through AGR schemes outside of agricultural operations	0	235	100%	5000	100%	100%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

50 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.3 Pathway 3 Outputs – Mali

Indicators[51]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Land area covered by climate change-resilient technologies	516	3,976	663%	3,674	73%	134%
Farm and livestock management services, including nutrition, available for households	0	0	-	3	75%	75%
Communes that have completed their cadastral plan (Mali SCAT "Schema d'Aménagement du Terroir") (Niger: PIA: Plan d'Investissement Annuel SAF: Schema d'Aménagement Foncier, which is not at the regional level / PDC / PDE)	0	0	-	0	-	-
Communes that have developed natural resource management plans	0	2	-	17	100%	100%
Communes that have established or supported the revitalization of their land tenure structure	0	27	100%	27	100%	100%
Local land management institutions, including NRM, trained in planning, decision-making, accountability, and internal management	0	262	80%	164	109%	80%
NRM organizations trained on their mandate and responsibilities	327	31	103%	47	78%	100%
Organizations/institutions strengthened in the use of tools/mechanisms for securing natural resources	327	262	80%	164	109%	100%
Types of training on the use of tools/mechanisms for securing natural resources	1	7	70%	11	110%	110%
Households supported through natural resource security activities	50	6,865	137%	5,924	118%	128%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

[51] The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.4 Pathway 4 Outputs – Mali

Indicators[52]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Households sensitized to marital dialogue on inclusive decision-making within the household	0	5,742	115%	9,714	75%	86%
Organizations supported to strengthen their capacities in mediation, multi-stakeholder dialogue, NRM, and inclusive decision-making	327	262	80%	175	117%	100%
Number of autonomous collective actions organized by OJ and OF	0	0	0%	15	125%	125%
OF, OJ, and OP supported for capacity building in (internal) management, service delivery, and influencing decisions	0	143	93%	245	100%	100%
OP/OF/OJ and public organizations whose capacities in EGIS (Equity, Gender, Inclusion, and Conflict Sensitivity) have been strengthened	120	143	93%	245	100%	100%
Tools promoted for gender promotion within households	2	3	100%	1	100%	100%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

52 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.5 Pathway 5 Outputs – Mali

Indicators[53]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
CEAP/CEM established	32	77	257%	155	115%	134%
Training sessions held around CEAP	6	11	138%	11	138%	138%
Organizations participating in training activities on climate-resilient production	0	159	80%	344	98%	98%
Community (trainer) facilitators engaged in CEAP activities	42	181	102%	313	106%	106%
Facilitators supporting grassroots OPs in the operationalization of their services	0	0	-	31	78%	78%
Communal councils supported on accountability and transparency in public affairs management	0	17	170%	27	100%	100%
Types of training on improving planning for communes/territorial communities (CT)	5	5	100%	5	100%	100%
Communes/territorial communities supported in mobilizing additional funds	27	27	100%	27	100%	100%
Communes supported to improve the planning process	27	27	100%	27	100%	100%
Communes/territorial communities trained in monitoring and evaluation tools to measure the effects of actions and investments on territories	0	0	-	15	56%	56%
Plans developed for resource mobilization through local taxation	0	27	100%	27	100%	100%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

53 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.6 Pathway 1 Outputs – Burkina Faso

Indicators[54]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Household garden established	970	500	100%	2,171	109%	105%
AAP households (m/f) supported through diversification/nutrition activities	1,051	22,514	111%	17,683	100%	106%
Training sessions held on nutrition activities	180	43	102%	43	100%	100%
Culinary recipes promoted/introduced to households	12	10	100%	10	100%	100%
Climate change-resilient technologies/practices promoted/introduced	9	11	100%	12	100%	100%
Crops introduced for production diversification	10	9	180%	10	100%	100%
AAP households (m/f) supported through diversification activities	961	22,514	111%	17,683	100%	106%
Training on the use of climate change-resilient tools	9	12	100%	12	100%	100%
AAP households participating in training activities on climate-resilient production	9,841	22,514	111%	17,683	100%	105%
Training on practices related to increasing production	14	9	100%	14	100%	100%
Community (trainer) facilitators engaged in nutrition activities	252	84	100%	644	100%	100%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

54 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.7 Pathway 2 Outputs – Burkina Faso

Indicators[55]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Local providers supplying climate-adapted technologies and inputs meeting household needs	825	734	100%	803	100%	100%
OP/OF/OJ supported for capacity building in thematic areas (marketing, distribution)	41	320	97%	397	91%	91%
Functional digital/multi-actor platforms supported or newly created	0	0	-	1	100%	100%
Promotional fairs / B2B meetings supported by ProARIDES	2	10	250%	10	100%	138%
Organizations that participated in promotional fairs	12	23	55%	40	100%	80%
SMEs supported for capacity building in marketing and distribution	0	53	55%	431	107%	97%
SMEs and OPs providing services to AAP households supported for capacity building in service delivery meeting household needs	66	673	180%	727	93%	120%
MFI programme partners providing accessible financial products to AAP households, OPs, and SMEs	0	18	100%	7	117%	100%
Payment and transaction systems accessible via smartphones	0	0	-	0	0%	0%
# AAP households (m/f) supported through AGR schemes outside of agricultural operations	1670	2784	14%	10693	100%	47%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

55 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.8 Pathway 3 Outputs – Burkina Faso

Indicators[56]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Land area covered by climate change-resilient technologies	658	12,777	189%	15,914	125%	146%
Farm and livestock management services, including nutrition, available for households	5	6	120%	6	100%	100%
Communes that have completed their cadastral plan	15	15	100%	0	-	100%
Communes that have developed natural resource management plans	0	8	80%	1	20%	80%
Communes that have established or supported the revitalization of their land tenure structure	21	21	100%	24	100%	100%
Local land management institutions, including NRM, trained in planning, decision-making, accountability, and internal management	227	240	106%	298	199%	131%
NRM organizations trained on their mandate and responsibilities	227	240	106%	379	253%	167%
Organizations/institutions strengthened in the use of tools/mechanisms for securing natural resources	227	240	106%	164	109%	106%
Types of training on the use of tools/mechanisms for securing natural resources	10	12	100%	2	17%	100%
Households supported through natural resource security activities	1,294	23,129	51%	26,827	100%	70%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

56 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.9 Pathway 4 Outputs – Burkina Faso

Indicators[57]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Target 2024	Achieved 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Households sensitized to marital dialogue on inclusive decision-making within the household	0	11,257	56%	18,940	18,940	77%
Organizations supported to strengthen their capacities in mediation, multi-stakeholder dialogue, NRM, and inclusive decision-making	227	240	106%	617	617	100%
Number of autonomous collective actions organized by OJ and OF	0	11	-	36	18	50%
OF, OJ, and OP supported for capacity building in (internal) management, service delivery, and influencing decisions	0	723	219%	436	397	166%
OP/OF/OJ and public organizations whose capacities in EGIS (Equity, Gender, Inclusion, and Conflict Sensitivity) have been strengthened	0	320	97%	436	397	91%
Tools promoted for gender promotion within households	0	1	100%	1	1	100%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

57 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.10 Pathway 5 Outputs – Burkina Faso

Indicators[58]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Target 2024	Achieved 2024	Achieved 2022-24
CEAP/CEM established	68	38	100%	64	40	86%
Training sessions held around CEAP	8	8	26%	8	8	26%
Organizations participating in training activities on climate-resilient production	0	270	96%	380	355	93%
Community (trainer) facilitators engaged in CEAP activities	68	38	100%	64	40	100%
Facilitators supporting grassroots OPs in the operationalization of their services	0	928	126%	928	928	100%
Communal councils supported on accountability and transparency in public affairs management	13	21	100%	24	14	88%
Types of training on improving planning for communes/territorial communities (CT)	0	2	100%	1	0	100%
Communes/territorial communities supported in mobilizing additional funds	0	4	-	14	14	100%
Communes supported to improve the planning process	0	25	100%	24	19	100%
Communes/territorial communities trained in monitoring and evaluation tools to measure the effects of actions and investments on territories	0	6	46%	6	6	46%
Plans developed for resource mobilization through local taxation	0	4	16%	0	0	16%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

58 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.11 Pathway 1 Outputs – Niger

Indicators[59]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Household garden established	1,002	925	143%	464	42%	87%
AAP households (m/f) supported through diversification/nutrition activities	5,221	3,030	361%	5,132	244%	164%
Training sessions held on nutrition activities	25	18	39%	46	100%	100%
Culinary recipes promoted/introduced to households	0	30	86%	35	100%	100%
Climate change-resilient technologies/practices promoted/introduced	3	26	87%	56	88%	88%
Crops introduced for production diversification	11	25	250%	25	100%	100%
AAP households (m/f) supported through diversification activities	695	20,264	1351%	17,523	85%	170%
Training on the use of climate change-resilient tools	0	21	81%	26	100%	100%
AAP households participating in training activities on climate-resilient production	4,464	7,692	211%	6,092	53%	93%
Training on practices related to increasing production	11	25	96%	25	96%	96%
Community (trainer) facilitators engaged in nutrition activities	236	242	86%	333	111%	99%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

59 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.12 Pathway 2 Outputs – Niger

Indicators[60]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Local providers supplying climate-adapted technologies and inputs meeting household needs	825	59	18%	274	91%	80%
OP/OF/OJ supported for capacity building in thematic areas (marketing, distribution)	30	211	30%	114	57%	30%
Functional digital/multi-actor platforms supported or newly created	0	2	200%	2	100%	100%
Promotional fairs / B2B meetings supported by ProARIDES	2		0%	3	75%	63%
Organizations that participated in promotional fairs	0		0%	26	173%	87%
SMEs supported for capacity building in marketing and distribution	10	105	128%	66	56%	87%
SMEs and OPs providing services to AAP households supported for capacity building in service delivery meeting household needs	0	109	72%	180	119%	96%
MFI programme partners providing accessible financial products to AAP households, OPs, and SMEs	0	3	75%	4	67%	67%
Payment and transaction systems accessible via smartphones	0	1	100%	1	100%	100%
# AAP households (m/f) supported through AGR schemes outside of agricultural operations	0	9542	636%	6515	66%	142%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

60 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.13 Pathway 3 Outputs – Niger

Indicators[61]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Land area covered by climate change-resilient technologies	1,174	2,644	79%	5,506	612%	172%
Farm and livestock management services, including nutrition, available for households	0	9	129%	9	75%	75%
Communes that have completed their cadastral plan (Mali SCAT "Schema d'Aménagement du Terroir") (Niger: PIA: Plan d'Investissement Annuel SAF: Schema d'Aménagement Foncier, which is not at the regional level / PDC / PDE)	0	23	115%	20	100%	115%
Communes that have developed natural resource management plans	0	2	100%	16	80%	80%
Communes that have established or supported the revitalization of their land tenure structure	0	12	60%	17	85%	85%
Local land management institutions, including NRM, trained in planning, decision-making, accountability, and internal management	0	64	107%	52	130%	107%
NRM organizations trained on their mandate and responsibilities	0	32	114%	80	111%	111%
Organizations/institutions strengthened in the use of tools/mechanisms for securing natural resources	0	43	77%	52	118%	93%
Types of training on the use of tools/mechanisms for securing natural resources	0	2	18%	5	56%	45%
Households supported through natural resource security activities	0	8,209	631%	596	9%	106%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

[61] The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.14 Pathway 4 Outputs – Niger

Indicators[62]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
Households sensitized to marital dialogue on inclusive decision-making within the household	627	-	0%	679	97%	86%
Organizations supported to strengthen their capacities in mediation, multi-stakeholder dialogue, NRM, and inclusive decision-making	34	55	81%	44	138%	81%
Number of autonomous collective actions organized by OJ and OF	2	2	-	1	10%	90%
OF, OJ, and OP supported for capacity building in (internal) management, service delivery, and influencing decisions	0	35	25%	108	216%	78%
OP/OF/OJ and public organizations whose capacities in EGIS (Equity, Gender, Inclusion, and Conflict Sensitivity) have been strengthened	29	23	17%	60	120%	43%
Tools promoted for gender promotion within households	0	3	150%	2	67%	100%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

62 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Table A.15 Pathway 5 Outputs – Niger

Indicators[63]	Achieved 2022	Achieved 2023	Achieved/ target 2023	Achieved 2024	Achieved/ target 2024	Achieved 2022-24
CEAP/CEM established	81	66	165%	188	140%	131%
Training sessions held around CEAP	0	13	130%	32	100%	100%
Organizations participating in training activities on climate-resilient production	0	20	67%	79	46%	46%
Community (trainer) facilitators engaged in CEAP activities	81	64	160%	184	115%	115%
Facilitators supporting grassroots OPs in the operationalization of their services	0	59	134%	64	107%	107%
Communal councils supported on accountability and transparency in public affairs management	13	20	100%	20	100%	100%
Types of training on improving planning for communes/territorial communities (CT)	5	2	100%	2	100%	100%
Communes/territorial communities supported in mobilizing additional funds	21	20	100%	19	83%	91%
Communes supported to improve the planning process	0	6	200%	23	100%	100%
Communes/territorial communities trained in monitoring and evaluation tools to measure the effects of actions and investments on territories	0	6	35%	19	100%	100%
Plans developed for resource mobilization through local taxation	18	18	90%	20	100%	100%

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on Pro-ARIDES data

63 The data for these outputs follow the programme's reporting methodology: for training related indicators, it represents the non-cumulative count of distinct training types.

Appendix B Contribution tables

The tables below present all outcomes by pathway, along with their corresponding scores for observed change and assessed contribution.

- The change in outcome reflects performance against targets. A score of 1 indicates negative change, 2 means the target was broadly met in either absolute or percentage terms, 3 indicates the target was met in both, whereas 4 means targets were exceeded in both. If the target was exceeded in only one dimension, but the average exceeded 150 percent, it was still scored as 4.
- The contribution score reflects the extent to which Pro-ARIDES is considered to have contributed to the reported change in each outcome. Contribution scores range from 0 (no contribution) to 4 (crucial contribution, where all observed change is attributed to Pro-ARIDES).
- The contribution evidence strength score indicates the robustness of the supporting evidence, ranging from 0 (no evidence) to 4 (four or more examples in multiple countries).

Table B.1 Contribution Scores – Pathway 1

Outcome	Change in Outcome	Estimated Contribution Score	Contribution Evidence Strength	Sources of evidence – comments
# and % of AAP households (m/f) having diversified production, including market gardening	2	2	2	Although outcomes regarding this indicator did not meet targets (marginally), fieldwork findings suggest that Pro-ARIDES contributed to households acquiring new knowledge on climate resilience, diversification and more efficient farming techniques, indicating potential increases in production. Reported techniques included the production of organic fertilizer and bio-pesticides, the production and use of improved seed varieties, soil restoration and conservation practices (anti-erosion measures, firebreaks, reforestation). Fieldwork findings confirmed that Pro-ARIDES contributed to introducing new crops in all three countries (including new ways of transformation of primary products in Burkina), but the contribution to the total improvement in diversification is not clear.
# and % of AAP households (m/f) having improved their diet	2	2	2	While the outcome for improved diets surpassed targets in percentage terms, it narrowly fell short when measured in absolute values. Fieldwork findings suggest mixed contribution results at the outcome level. There were some indications of contributions to new nutritional knowledge and increased awareness of the importance of nutrition, but 'new recipes', for instance, were thus far met with moderate interest. Also, some local stakeholders noted that possibilities to improvement nutrition were limited by low household incomes, as well as cooking habits. Thus, while there are signs of increased awareness, the programme's overall influence on actual dietary improvements appears to be modest.

# and % of AAP (m/f) households that have increased their production	3	3	3	For this outcome indicator, percentage targets were significantly exceeded, whereas absolute values came close to meeting targets. Fieldwork findings suggest that Pro-ARIDES contributed to households obtaining and applying new knowledge on climate resilience, diversification and more efficient farming techniques, which were associated with improvements in both production and resilience. Across all three countries farmers (men and women) reported gains in productivity (allowing for surplus sales), reduced cost (through locally produced inputs), and increased climate resilience (more robust varieties, soil restauration). Furthermore, in Mali, investments in mechanisation equipment were seen as highly effective, reportedly allowing farmers to produce more.
# of FOs/WOs/YOs that have improved their performance	4	2	2	Outcome targets were exceeded in both percentage and absolute values. This was corroborated by fieldwork findings, which provided indications that the programme contributed to the capacity building and support which improved performance in the management and delivery of services by FOs thanks to the capacity-building and support received. Strengthened governance has also contributed to facilitating their access to funding and improved their role in supporting farming households and negotiating with external partners. However, although these are indications to contributions by Pro-ARIDES, there is not a clear contribution on improvement on FOs/WOs/YOs performance.
# and % of AAP households (m/f) having diversified production, including market gardening	2	2	2	Although outcomes regarding this indicator did not meet targets (marginally), fieldwork findings suggest that Pro-ARIDES contributed to households acquiring new knowledge on climate resilience, diversification and more efficient farming techniques, indicating potential increases in production. Reported techniques included the production of organic fertilizer and bio-pesticides, the production and use of improved seed varieties, soil restoration and conservation practices (anti-erosion measures, firebreaks, reforestation). Fieldwork findings confirmed that Pro-ARIDES contributed to introducing new crops in all three countries (including new ways of transformation of primary products in Burkina), but the contribution to the total improvement in diversification is not clear.

Table B.2 Contribution Scores – Pathway 2

Outcome	Change in Outcome	Estimated Contribution Score	Contribution Evidence Strength	Sources of evidence – comments
# and % of SMEs that have improved their performance and resilience	3	3	3	Overall, outcome indicators targets were substantially exceeded, with the exception of a percentage and absolute value which nonetheless also came relatively close to meeting their respective targets. As fieldwork suggests Pro-ARIDES contributed to access to economic opportunities for both SMEs and households, as well as other economic actors being improved, resulting in enhanced SMEs performance and increased household income and diversified income sources across the three countries. This dynamic appears to have been supported by several complementary levers: the modernisation of processing equipment and the increase in production capacity (equipped production units, new packaging and preservation tools, production equipment, etc.), as well as promotional actions such as active participation in fairs, the organisation of local consumption days, marketing and packaging tools. Taken together, these measures have enabled the programme to make a substantial contribution to improved economic outcomes
# and % of AAP households (m/f) with increased net income	3			
# and % of households (m/f) having diversified their sources of income	4			
# and % of households (m/f) having obtained financial services/products from financial institutions supported by the programme	1	1	1	In several municipalities there were signs that entrepreneurs were linked to MFIs which suggest improved credit access (in combination with a contribution from Pro-ARIDES). However, outcome indicators did not meet their targets by a significant amount, signalling how although the programme negotiated special terms for its target groups, interest rates are high (especially in Mali and Niger), and the terms were improved for the duration of the programme only. Delays in Pro-ARIDES contribution reportedly caused financial difficulties for certain entrepreneurs, who had to start reimbursing their credit before they could make investments, thus justifying the low contribution score.

Table B.3 Contribution Scores – Pathway 3

Outcome	Change in Outcome	Estimated Contribution Score	Contribution Evidence Strength	Sources of evidence – comments
Area of land covered by climate change resilient technologies	4	3	2	Both these outcome indicators exceeded targets substantially. Fieldwork showed contribution of the programme to increasing area of land covered by climate-resilient technologies and application of such practices, especially in Burkina Faso and Niger, but less so in Mali. Fieldwork findings showed that this happened also through programme contribution by transferring knowledge on climate resilience in the three countries.
# and % of households that have increased application of climate-resilient technologies/practices	4			
# and % of AAP households with secure land rights	4	1	1	Even if outcomes related to AAP households with secure land rights overcame its targets in 2023, fieldwork findings show how this might mask differences in rights between men and women. Although men increasingly grant land to women's collectives (ex., through usage agreements), few contributed improvements were noticed in individual land access for women (except in Niger). In general, there is no long-term security for women's access to land. In Mali and Niger, the support to land rights committees was difficult to distinguish from other programmes. These observations thus essentially explain the low contribution score for the programme on this outcome indicator.
% of conflicts over the use of natural resources resolved peacefully per year	1	2	2	The percentage of conflicts resolved peacefully was below target. However, fieldwork findings suggest the programme seems to have an initial positive contribution. In an environment of increasing conflicts, the programme's contribution to strengthening of municipal and village land tenure bodies, resulted in local agreements on land use and more peaceful conflict resolution. Nonetheless, given the persistent internal conflicts at national and

				regional levels, which limit the extent to which local efforts can fully succeed, the overall contribution is considered limited
# and % of communes with at least one local natural resource management agreement for agro-sylvo-pastoral areas	1	2	1	Despite the outcome being below target, there are indications of Pro-ARIDES' positive contribution towards such. Fieldwork findings suggest that several villages or groups of villages often collaborate to develop conventions around specific resources; however, some villages or individuals fail to comply with these conventions and instead call for the establishment of a local surveillance system. The programme showed mixed results related to forest protection and reforestation: in Burkina Faso and Niger there are signs of the protection of important forest and grazing areas. Reforestation operations in Mali were timid and met with little success in the areas visited.

Table B.4 Contribution Scores – Pathway 4

Outcome	Change in Outcome	Estimated Contribution Score	Contribution Evidence Strength	Sources of evidence – comments
# and % of FOs/WOs/YOs/SMEs/communal bodies in which women and young people hold at least one key position	2	3	1	Though outcome indicators fell below targets (although not by a large margin), fieldwork findings showed that women and youth are well represented in bodies set up by the programme across the three countries. However further details on the evidence on the contribution would strengthen the respective score.
# of women and young people involved in household decision-making (on production management, consumption, income and/or marketing of agricultural products)	1	3	2	Although the outcome indicator was well below target, fieldwork findings suggest that the programme contributed to the articulation of women's economic participation with training on better spousal communication, which appears to have been particularly effective in empowering women. In all three countries, the fieldwork yielded some anecdotal evidence that this training was well received and appeared to be leading to greater participation of women in decision making. For example, interviewees reported that spouses discussed (agricultural) investments and women were allowed greater mobility. If it could be confirmed through more rigorous methods that the programme contributed to this (e.g. relative to a comparison group), this could be seen as a major achievement of the programme.
% of women/young people who participate in communal consultation frameworks/citizen consultations	3	0	0	Although the target was exceeded by 260% in percentage terms, no absolute value was available. Furthermore, no additional fieldwork findings were provided evidencing programme contribution for this outcome indicator.

Table B.5 Contribution Scores – Pathway 5

Outcome	Change in Outcome	Estimated Contribution Score	Contribution Evidence Strength	Sources of evidence – comments
# and % of municipalities that have strengthened accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs	4	1	2	The outcome indicator surpassed targets significantly, as was confirmed by the fieldwork findings which suggest improvements were recorded in terms of transparency, accountability, local tax collection, and public investments. However, Pro-ARIDES' specific contribution is difficult to isolate from the effects of other initiatives (e.g. the PGLR programme in Mali, run by SNV), which explains the relatively low contribution score. In some municipalities local tax collection reportedly increased, because of transparency, improved service delivery (strengthening tax citizenship), training on participatory budgeting, awareness efforts, and electronic payment options (functional in Burkina Faso, but not yet in Mali). In Niger, accountability sessions were held, during which the communal authorities presented their budget achievements and investments made in their entities.
# and % of local authorities that have organised citizens' consultations at least once a year	2	0	0	The outcome indicator fell slightly short of its target, and in addition, the evaluation team did not find evidence in support of contribution to this outcome. Moreover, there was competition from other projects in Burkina Faso and Mali.
# and % of households that are satisfied with the products and services provided by FOs/WOs/YOs/SME	4	3	2	Targets for the outcome indicator were notably surpassed, as can be evidenced by fieldwork which indicate that there was clear evidence that Pro-ARIDES contributed to better services being provided by FOs and better functioning of WOs and SMEs. YOs have not been clearly mentioned by anyone, but youth participation in decision-making bodies has increased. For all of this (except perhaps for the participation of women and youth in municipal bodies, which is regulated by law) the project contribution was clear.

# and % of households reporting satisfaction with agricultural services provided by decentralised / deconcentrated services	4	0	0	Although the outcome indicator considerably outperformed targets, the evaluation team could find no evidence of contribution to services provided by decentralised services, nor contribution to such outcome.
Number of communes having mobilised additional funds of at least 5% of their annual budget for sustainable local development	4	0	0	The outcome indicator exceeded established targets, however the evaluation team could find no evidence of Pro-ARIDES' contribution to increased investment rates by local authorities in services, governance bodies (for natural resource management, conflict resolution, etc.), infrastructure, and value chains accessible to AAP households, women, and youth, nor of conflict-sensitive local policymaking.

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