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NIGER STRATEGIC RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT

Final Report

APRIL 2016



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Strategic Resilience Assessment Report

Mercy Corps Niger, February 2016

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Executive Summary

Niger is a country with a wealth of human and natural resources in a difficult environment. Standing on the edge of the Sahara desert, Niger is reliant on livestock rearing, agriculture and mining in the face of increasing shocks and stresses. Food insecurity persists in Niger in spite of the billions of dollars of international aid received over the last 40 years. To inform the development of a new strategy to help the country tackle these challenges, Mercy Corps conducted a Strategic Resilience Assessment.

Mercy Corps carries out Strategic Resilience Assessments (STRESS) to provide an evidence base to improve its programs. STRESS is a methodology designed to analyze resilience for strategic development and program design over the long term. It helps to increase understanding of the dynamic social, ecological and economic systems in which communities are embedded. The STRESS is a structured process to analyze how these systems, as well as geographic and social factors, determine vulnerability to shocks and stresses, and identify specific resilience capacities. In Niger the structure considered food security at the core of the analysis. The process included a scoping workshop, a review of various items of secondary literature, primary research within communities, key informants, experts and a series of workshops with the Mercy Corps team and their partners.

Mercy Corps defines resilience as the capacity of communities in complex socio-ecological systems to learn, cope, adapt and transform in the face of shocks and stresses. Absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities are all forms of resilience capacity. Absorptive capacity helps people, households and systems to prepare for or recover from shocks and constraints more effectively; adaptive capacity mitigates the presence, nature and impacts of shocks and stresses, while transformative capacity unblocks the broader constraints in the system at a fundamental level, enhancing absorption and adaptation.



Theory of Change

The STRESS examined sources of vulnerability based on the three elements of food security: availability, access and utilization.¹ The process developed a theory of change for food security, resulting in three well-being goals:

- › Improved health and nutrition enable vulnerable groups to better utilize food
- › Increased production and income provide better access to food
- › Improved pro-poor agricultural and livestock policies and improved production techniques increase the availability of food for vulnerable groups.

In order to achieve these goals, there must be changes in the social and economic institutions that enable individuals, households and communities to manage shocks and stresses. These institutions include not only state capacity, but also citizens' organizations and producer organizations, which can represent the interests of the people, generate economies of scale for economic activities and advocate for improvements in infrastructure and services in the public and private sectors. At the same time, it is important for individuals and collective groups to have increased agency and take responsibility for their own development, as well as develop the attitudes and organizational capacities needed to achieve their objectives. Improvements in economically and ecologically sustainable livelihood strategies

1. Stability, often mentioned as a fourth pillar to food security, was identified as one of the final resilience capacities.

(such as employment; small, medium and large enterprises; agriculture and livestock farming geared towards regional markets; and migration) increase resilience among people who are vulnerable to shocks and stresses. Finally, citizens' organizations require state investment in basic economic infrastructure and social protection to support other efforts.



STRESS conclusions

The STRESS process analyzed the agropastoral system in Niger, placing particular emphasis on the vulnerability of men, women and adolescents who depend on this system for their food security. In general, there is a high level of malnutrition in all regions, but it is lower in Niamey and Agadez. In practice, the majority of people working in the agropastoral system depend on the market for purchasing food products to cover more than half of their food needs. The entire agropastoral system is changing: pastoralists are becoming agropastoralists or wage workers, people living in rural areas are moving to the towns and cities, and soil fertility is decreasing while human fertility remains the highest in the world. Adaptations in rain-fed agriculture are not keeping pace, but there are significant improvements in terms of both small- and large-scale irrigation, particularly for vegetables with a high market value. Niger has a comparative advantage in livestock farming, and a vast market in neighboring countries offering potential for expansion. There are also possibilities for expanding value-added industries through processing agriculture and livestock products.

Moreover, migrant workers continue to make a significant contribution to revenues throughout the country.

Niger faces a range of challenges, shocks and stresses to which a large proportion of the population is vulnerable. Drought is a regular occurrence and climate change is making the rains even less reliable and temperatures higher. Internal and international conflicts reduce people's capacity to earn their

living, particularly in areas that combine agriculture and livestock farming, and on the borders with Nigeria and Mali, where ideological conflict spreads into Niger. The restrictions placed on women and girls reduce their access to markets, their means of production and their education. Furthermore, high levels of early marriage and pregnancy perpetuate the vicious circle of food insecurity from generation to generation.



Photo Credit: Niger/ S. Sheridan 2014

This and many other shocks and stresses make it difficult to put existing resilience strategies into practice. The STRESS process identified eight capacities that Niger should develop further to help vulnerable people manage shocks and stresses. First, two transformative capacities are improving women’s capacity to influence and make decisions from local to national levels, and strengthening stability and social cohesion. These capacities must extend from the local up to the national level and strengthening them would increase the capacity of vulnerable people throughout the country.

Five other capacities would help vulnerable people to adapt:

- › Improved access to financial services
- › Improved productivity and access to regional markets for agropastoralists and pastoralists
- › Better access to rural and urban employment for vulnerable groups
- › Improved access to productive systems for managing natural resources
- › Better access to basic social services to strengthen human capital (such as education, health and social protection)



Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2014

An important aspect of these resilience capacities is the specific pathways to achieving them, which build certain qualities and characteristics into the system that increase resilience in the Niger context.

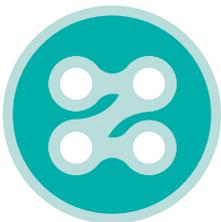
In all cases, traditional assistance strategies involving the state and civil society are of course useful, but social change on the scale required demands increased capacity among organizations representing citizen groups and producers to articulate and defend their members’ interests.

Finally, absorptive capacity is supported by improved access to social protection and disaster risk-reduction programs for vulnerable groups in order to preserve their productive assets in the face of multiple shocks and stresses. Indeed, although shocks and stresses are always present, the fact that vulnerable people can secure assistance to deal with them without resorting to negative coping strategies allows the whole country to increase its resilience capacity.

This analysis implies that Mercy Corps programs must emphasize governance and strengthening organizations, rather than simply mastering technical approaches. Promoting employment and business development offers the strongest potential for bridging the gap in agricultural production and livestock farming. At the same time, improving the level of human capital could release enormous potential for development, particularly among women and youth. For this process to work, it is essential to support women’s and youth’s organizations at the national level to guide the difficult cultural changes that are already underway. Finally, there needs to be a change of approach in agriculture and livestock farming. It is time to recognize that increasing the productivity of rain-fed millet will have little impact on food security. Agricultural programs should instead recognize the importance of expanded markets and the potential of irrigation, and emphasize Niger’s comparative advantage in the livestock sector.



Photo Credit: Sanjay Gurung 2016



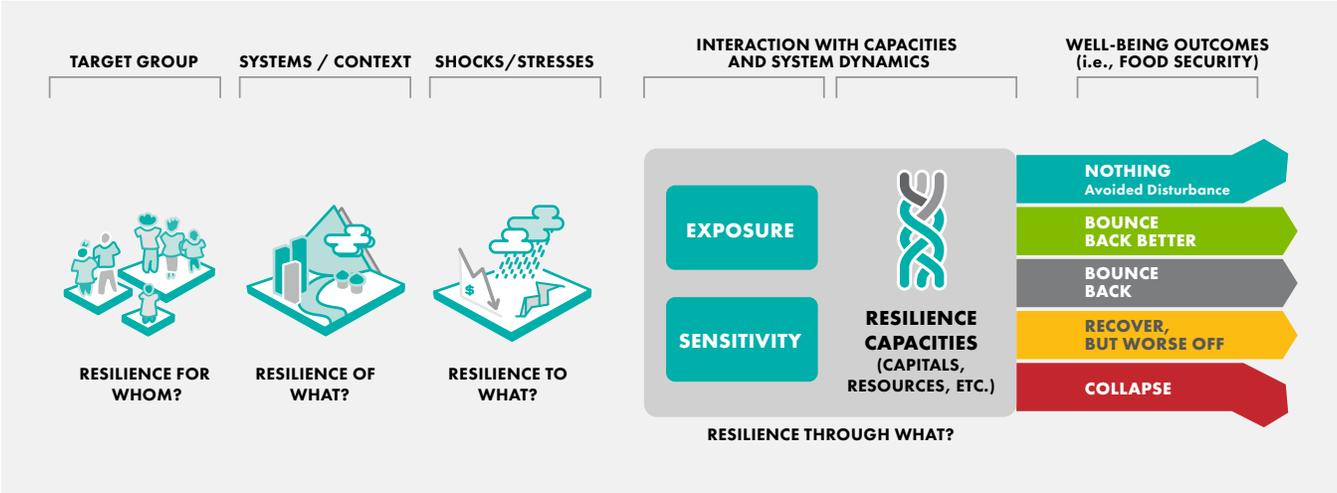
SECTION I: **INTRODUCTION**



Mercy Corps began operations in Niger in 2005 in response to a major food crisis. With a current portfolio in Niger of around US\$ 39 million, over 850,000 people have benefited from ten years of programs. Mercy Corps works in partnership with the state, the private sector and Nigerien communities to contribute to sustainable socioeconomic development for agropastoralists and pastoralists. We improve food security, nutrition, agriculture and livestock productivity while strengthening livelihoods and natural resource management. Our programs seek to address the underlying obstacles that inhibit development through incorporating good governance, financial inclusion and gender equality.

With an estimated Human Development Index of 0.348, Niger is ranked 188th out of 188 countries according to the 2015 Global Human Development Report. Poverty affects 59.5% of the total population and 63.9% of the rural population. Food insecurity affects almost two million people in Niger each year, and almost one child in two under the age of five suffers from chronic malnutrition. In reality, the rate of chronic malnutrition varies from 42% for the country as a whole to 45.2% in rural areas, while the rate of global acute malnutrition is 14.8% in total and 15.7% in rural areas.²

As Mercy Corps has been working in Niger for ten years, we have seen significant progress as well as some important opportunities. The context is a dynamic one – pastoralism as a primary livelihood strategy is decreasing in favor of sedentary agricultural production, drought has emerged as a significant obstacle to development, and the increase in international conflicts presents real threats to social cohesion and to vital import/export markets. Long-term gains in sustainable food security cannot ignore these challenges.



MERCY CORPS' STRESS FRAMEWORK (ADAPTED FROM THE RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED BY TANGO.)

Mercy Corps developed a new country strategy to help the country tackle these challenges. A Strategic Resilience Assessment (STRESS) was carried out to provide an evidence base for the strategy development. STRESS is a methodology designed to use a resilience-lens to long-term strategy development. It is an in-depth process to deepen understanding of the dynamic social, ecological and economic systems in which communities are embedded, in order to build a resilience-based theory of change for a particular context.

2. SMART surveys data cited by Illa Almajir, Moctar Karimou and Tassiou Moussa, Rapport revue de littérature sur les systèmes agropastoraux du Niger dans le cadre de l'analyse Stress, Mercy Corps, September 2015.



Photo Credit: Sanjay Gurung 2016

SECTION II:
METHODOLOGY



1. STRESS process

The Mercy Corps team conducted a kick-off meeting to define the process in August 2015, which resulted in proposed responses to the *four guiding resilience questions*: resilience of what, resilience for whom, resilience to what and resilience through what? The meeting established the priorities and scope of the assessment.

Once this had been clarified, the STRESS methodology consisted of four phases:

Scope – National kick-off meeting with the Mercy Corps team and numerous partners,* which provided a contextual understanding of the main systems and established and validated the assessment priorities by identifying knowledge gaps and supposed resilience capacities identified in the systems mapping process.

Inform – an approach incorporating several methods to gather the quantitative and qualitative information needed for an informed analysis. The tasks included a literature review,³ field-level data collection with focus group in villages and interviews with key local informants, and interviews with high level subject-matter experts.

Analyze –the information gathered is summarized and analyzed through a structured process, with a national results analysis meeting for Mercy Corps and partners.

Strategize – development of a Theory of Change that includes the building blocks needed for resilience.

Food insecurity lies at the heart of Niger’s development challenges. As such, the STRESS process for Niger structured responses to the four resilience questions within the food security framework: access, availability and utilization.

2. The four guiding resilience questions

The team’s⁴ responses to the four resilience questions are below.



Resilience of what?

The assessment covered all regions in Niger except Niamey: **Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tillabéry, Tahoua and Zinder.** Interlocking social, ecological and economic systems in which communities play a key role feature in all the regions.



The specific systems this assessment studied are as follows:

The agropastoral system

Pastoralism and agropastoralism are the two main livelihood strategies in Niger, involving about 83% of the population.⁵ While approximately 66% of livestock is farmed in a sedentary system in Niger,⁶ traditional pastoral practices persist, particularly in the north of the country. In recent decades, the system has been threatened by serious

*Full STRESS workshop partner list is available in the Annex at the end of this document.

3. Almajir, Illa, Moctar Karimou, Tassiou Moussa, Rapport Revue De Littérature Sur Les Systèmes Agropastoraux Du Niger Dans Le Cadre De L'analyse Stress, Mercy Corps, September 2015; Koné, Moctar, and Mounkaila Souley, Niger Strategic Resilience Assessment: Markets Systems, Mercy Corps Niger, 23 September 2015; Rabiou, Ibrahim Elhadji, and Mariama Aboubacar, Strategic Resilience Assessment Mercy Corps Niger Systèmes Sociaux/ Revue De Littérature, September 2015.
4. Building the capacity of the team is an additional objective of the STRESS process. The assessment team consisted of Mercy Corps staff from across the Niger programs as well as technical experts from Headquarters. Mercy Corps also identified a set of key government, peer agency, research institution, donor and civil society partners who were deliberately implicated throughout the assessment process.
5. Ministry of Agriculture, 3N Initiative: Les Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens, Republic of Niger, August 2011.
6. Dieter Geesing and Hassane Djibo, Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles: Niger, December 2001 and livestock data updated in August 2006; Ministry of Water and Sanitation, Stratégie Nationale de l'Hydraulique Pastorale, Provisional Report, Republic of Niger, October 2013.

droughts, the degradation of pastures, population growth, changes in rainfall and government policies in favor of intensive production. Within this overall system, economic, social and ecological sub-systems were considered.

Market systems

This term refers to the general market environment for agricultural and pastoral inputs and key products, including commercial products. Since Niger has important trading relationships with neighboring countries, particularly Nigeria and Benin, this analysis explored market-related elements for consideration at the national and international level.

Social systems

The assessment examined the state of relationships, links and power relations between men, women, boys and girls, household members, communities and groups of communities. This includes a description of the basic governance systems at the community, regional and national level. It also explores the traditional cultural practices that have hindered significant development gains.

Ecological systems

Communities depend heavily on natural resources and the ecosystem services provided by the environment. However, these advantages are changing rapidly as the population increases and as a result of climate change and changes in livelihood strategies. The assessment explored these dynamic conditions and the impact on communities.

Agropastoral zones run from east to west in the south of the country. While they cover only 16% of the country, it is where the majority of the population lives.⁷ This assessment also includes the lower Agadez region, in the Sahara-Sahel and Saharan areas.



Resilience for whom?

In general terms, the assessment sought to inform a strategy that aims to increase the availability, access and utilization of food for all members of society. However, the assessment targeted several sub-groups that are particularly vulnerable and/or who play a major role in resilience, namely: pastoralists, agropastoralists, women, children (particularly under age five) and adolescents (aged 10 to 19).



Resilience to what?

The team identified 13 primary shocks and stresses out of around 40 that affect these groups in the target regions of Niger. These shocks and stresses are:

- › Conflicts over natural resources
- › Gender-based violence in households⁸
- › The drying up of water points and lowering of the water table
- › Erratic, dispersed rainfall
- › Cyclical drought
- › Loss of pasture and viable agricultural land
- › Locust infestations
- › Animal disease outbreaks
- › Epidemics
- › Volatility in grain and livestock prices
- › Sharp seasonal increases in the price of animal feed
- › An increase in international conflicts
- › Border closures between Niger and neighboring countries

7. Illa Almajir, Moctar Karimou and Tassiou Moussa, Rapport revue de littérature sur les systèmes agropastoraux du Niger dans le cadre de l'analyse Stress, Mercy Corps, September 2015.

8. Definition: practices and abuses that are committed based on socially assigned (gender) differences between males and females. Mercy Corps, Gender Procedures Policy in Action.



Resilience through what?

One of the key results of the STRESS process is identifying the key resilience capacities needed to manage the shocks and stresses identified above. Mercy Corps defines three key types of capacity: absorptive capacity, adaptive capacity and transformative capacity. Absorptive refers to the ability to minimize sensitivity to shocks and stresses. Adaptive refers to the ability to proactively modify conditions and practices in anticipation or as a reaction to shocks and stresses. Transformative capacity creates the conditions to facilitate systemic change over the long-term.

3. Key research questions

The team posed three crucial research questions to inform the development of a new country strategy:

- › How can Mercy Corps best support the agropastoralist system as it evolves for long-term food security under changing climate and ecological conditions?
- › What transformative capacities need to be developed to break the cycle of chronic food insecurity?
- › How do domestic and international conflict affect Niger and how can Mercy Corps respond?

4. Information sources

The assessment used four information sources:

- › Primary data from 30 focus group discussions in all the target regions (10 groups of women, 10 groups of men and 10 groups of adolescents)⁹
- › Interviews with 19 key informants at the departmental level, particularly employees from government technical services.
- › Interviews with 17 experts in the fields of climate change, agriculture and livestock, producer organizations, development of civil society, food security, environmental protection, gender-based issues and conflict.
- › Various secondary sources and data.

5. Difficulties and limitations

This STRESS process presented a number of challenges. First, this was the first national level process attempted. This increased the tension between analyzing overall trends and local variations. Each statement in this analysis can be qualified by differences across geography and groups, so the assessment attempts to balance this tension to produce the most useful Theory of Change.

Secondly, because of the size of the country, a study that included both primary research and interaction between staff and external informants was both costly and complicated. The transport and communications infrastructure, did not make the task any easier. In order to conduct discussions with focus groups and interviews with key informants, for example, the teams had to drive the equivalent of half the circumference of the earth, at a cost that was three times higher than the budget forecast. These logistical complications added to the time needed to complete the assessment.

⁹ Details of the primary survey are [available online](#).



Photo Credit: Sanjay Gurung 2016

SECTION III: **THEORY OF CHANGE**

The basic ideas for the STRESS Theory of Change in Niger were developed during a workshop involving Mercy Corps staff and partners in December 2015. This analysis was combined with the results from the primary research and secondary sources to produce a Theory of Change, which is summarized in the graph below. The Theory of Change describes the progress Niger needs to make in the next decade to improve the food security situation for the target groups. The full Theory of Change can be found [online](#).



Overall goal:

Vulnerable groups in agropastoral zones in Niger benefit from improved food security.

This goal is achieved through three specific well-being objectives, which reflect the three elements of food security:

- › Improved health and nutrition enable vulnerable groups to better utilize food
- › Increased production and income provide better access to food
- › Improved pro-poor agricultural and livestock policies and improved production techniques increase the availability of food for vulnerable groups.

A systems-level transformation needs to take place at the same time for these objectives to be achieved:

Social and economic institutions (formal and informal) support the ability of individuals, households and communities to manage shocks and stresses more effectively.

In order to achieve these well-being outcomes, Niger needs to develop several resilience capacities and vulnerable people must be capable of exercising them. Three interim results are observed where capacities are applied successfully:

- › Vulnerable groups use their increased personal and organizational power to make economic, social and political decisions
- › Economically and ecologically sustainable livelihood strategies are more productive in the face of shocks and stresses
- › Citizens and producer organizations hold government accountable for providing basic economic infrastructure and social protection

The first and third results require transformative capacity – they describe the behavioral and governance changes needed for a wide range of other capacities – including access to other absorptive and adaptive capacities. The first means overcoming the common belief that government and civil society are responsible for solving problems. Increasing personal responsibility and power in terms of creating and strengthening organizations can resolve economic, social and political problems. The second requires adaptive capacity. In other terms, this is progress in regards to livelihoods that increase the capacity of vulnerable people to manage and adapt to shocks and stresses (either in agriculture, livestock farming, employment or business). The third result also requires

transformative capacity – civil society organizations need to play their part in challenging the state. This means demanding that the state provide the basic economic infrastructure needed for all and the social protection measures needed to maintain the resilience of vulnerable people in response to shocks and stresses. Provided they are carefully targeted and based on real information, social protection measures of this kind can help people to avoid negative coping strategies, which weaken their capacity to manage shocks and stresses in the medium and long-term.

These interim results result from eight resilience capacities that need to be established. These are:

Transformative capacity:

- › Increased ability for women to influence and make decisions from local to national level
- › Improved stability and social cohesion

Adaptive capacity:

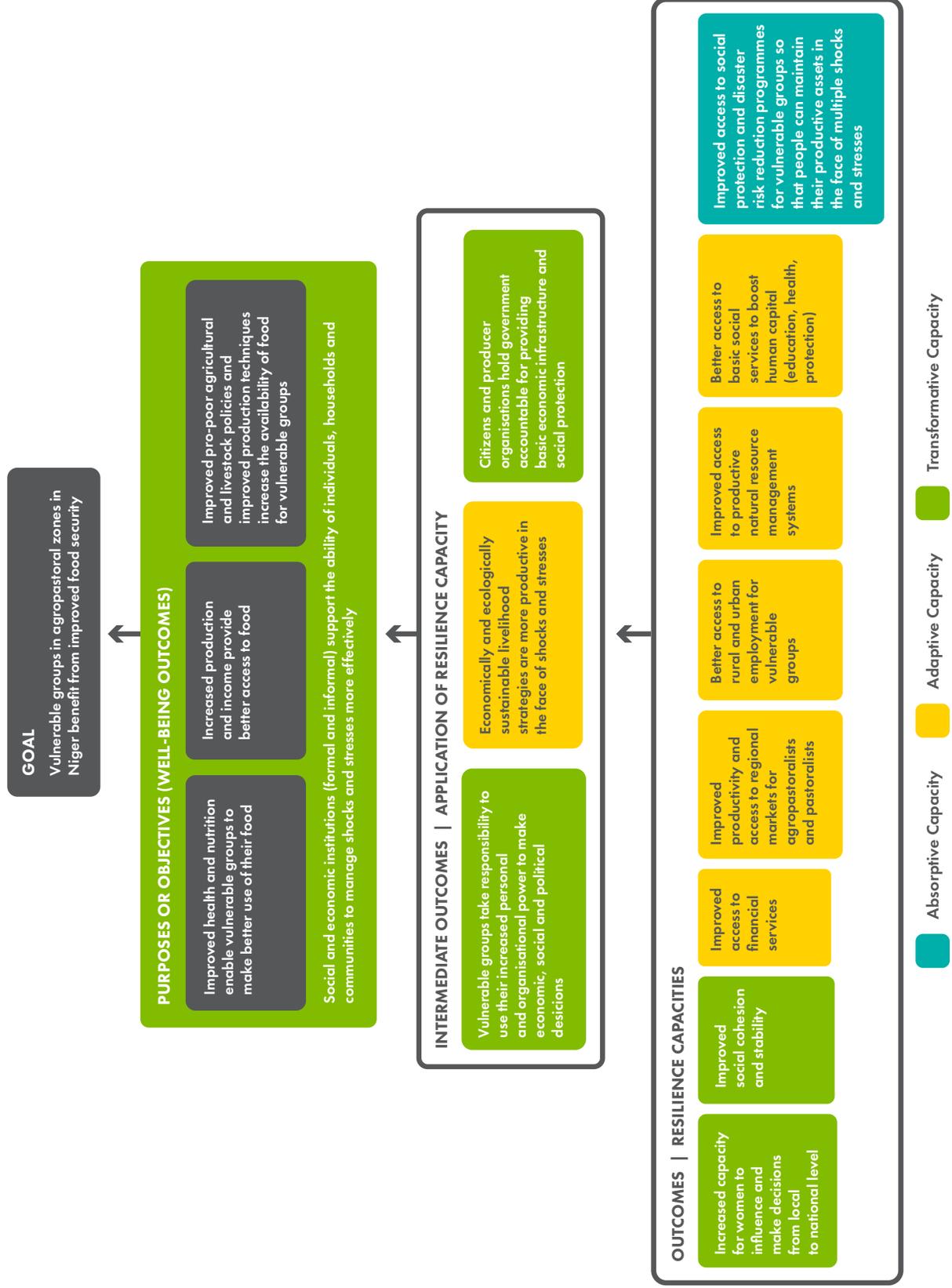
- › Improved access to financial services
- › Improved productivity and access to regional markets for agropastoralists and pastoralists
- › Better access to rural and urban employment for vulnerable groups
- › Improved access to productive systems for natural resource management
- › Better access to basic social services to strengthen human capital (such as education, health and social protection)

Absorptive capacity:

- › Improved access to social protection and disaster risk-reduction programs for vulnerable groups in order to preserve their productive assets in the face of multiples shocks and stresses

Layers of sub-capacities interact to create these resilience capacities. A complete graphic with detailed descriptions is available.

Niger STRESS Theory of Change



This is a simplified version of the Theory of Change. [See the full version here.](#)



Photo Credit: Sanjay Gurung 2016

SECTION IV: **STRESS CONCLUSIONS**

1. Food security context

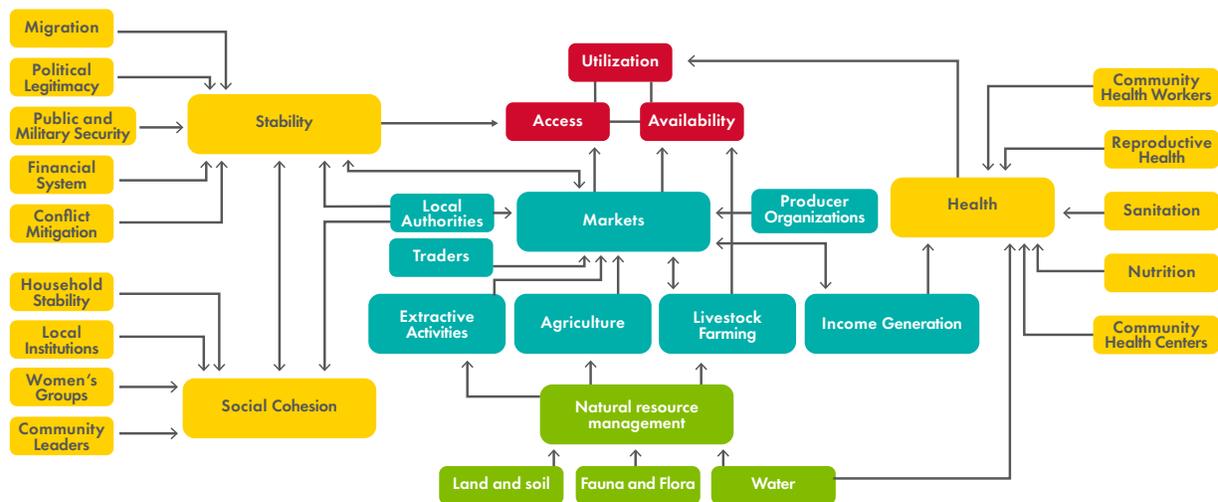
Food security depends on three elements:

- › Food availability,
- › Access to food,
- › The capacity to utilize the food available (referring to the biological ability of the body to make use of and benefit from nutrients)

These elements interact in complex ways via ecological, economic and social systems to determine who benefits from food security and who does not, and which shocks and stresses may affect these issues.

The map below represents these interactions in relation to food security in Niger.¹⁰

SIMPLIFIED SYSTEMS MAP OF NIGER'S FOOD SECURITY CONTEXT



The map shows that food security depends on healthy ecological systems, in particular water (rain, surface waters and ground water), healthy soils and bio-diverse ecosystems. These ecological elements support the four main livelihoods identified in the economic system:

1. Agriculture: millet, sorghum, cowpea and vegetables
2. Livestock farming: the second-largest export after uranium
3. Extraction of natural resources: gathering seeds and wild plants for food and medicinal herbs, logging, cutting/harvesting straw, gold mining, etc.
4. Small businesses and paid employment.

The markets are particularly important, especially in terms of supporting availability and access.

Ecological and economic system functions are guided and constrained by the social system. The economic system depends on the stability of the social system, which is supported by several local and national institutions. Social cohesion relies on healthy local institutions (including healthy faith-based, cultural and state organizations, but

10. This analysis was carried out in October 2015 by the Mercy Corps Core Team, representatives of Mercy Corps' Technical Support Unit and local partners at the time of the Scoping Workshop. This map is a simplified version of the one produced during the workshop to make it easier to understand for readers of this report. The complete map can be found [online](#).

also a common cultural understanding of roles and rules). Human capital is based on well functioning support systems such as health care and education. The system as a whole is governed by laws, regulations and the infrastructure established and implemented by the state and the private sector.

Availability

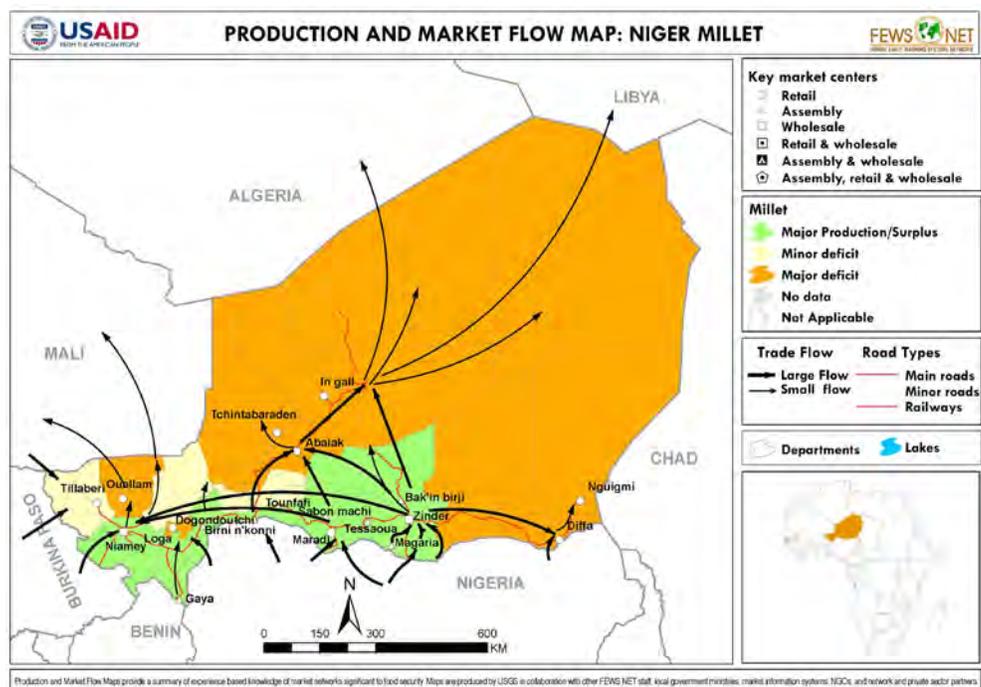
The vast majority of food produced in Niger is in four forms: livestock, millet, sorghum and cowpea. Millet is the main subsistence food in Niger and represents 76% of total cereals production. Sorghum is mainly cultivated in the southern regions of Niger, representing 22% of cereals production.¹¹

As the map of production and trade movements shows, cereals production is concentrated in the southern regions and distributed to markets throughout the country. Millet is imported from Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali.

According to the Nutrition Country Profile for Niger produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the food situation in Niger meets the requirements of global standards and the country even produced enough to be able to export cereals and oil products during the 1960s. A series of droughts in the 1970s (particularly in 1973-74) led to serious and recurring food crises, made worse by population growth and desertification. Following a decade of improved food security, another major drought from 1983 to 1985 led to a shortage of cereals and a decline in livestock numbers. As these shortages have become more frequent and more serious – with the most recent food crises from 2001 to 2003, 2004 to 2005 and another in 2012 – around 30% of the population currently suffers from food insecurity. Food imports (namely rice, palm oil, sugar, dairy products and wheat flour) have become a necessity in Niger to respond to the country’s food requirements, and now represent 33% of Niger’s spending on imports. Imports of agricultural and food products exceed exports by 25 billion FCA francs and are responsible for a 28% deficit in the country’s trade balance. Niger’s main agricultural exports (in terms of daily caloric requirements) are oil products, cereals and vegetable oils, which have decreased significantly over the last three decades.¹²

Harvests generally take place in October-November and since there is only one season, production during this period is crucial for food availability.

Cereals production is supplemented by off-season production of a wide range of vegetables for consumption and sale. This relies on small-scale irrigation and the use of humid soils. Access to off-season production may be an essential factor in determining who has better food security.



PRODUCTION AND MARKET FLOWS FOR MILLET, FEWSNET

11. Department of Agriculture and Environmental Services (AES), Agriculture, Rural Development and Irrigation Unit, Africa Region (AFTAI), *Évaluation des risques du secteur agricole au Niger: de la réaction aux crises à la gestion des risques à long terme*, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2013; High Commission for the 3N Initiative, *Prioritaires Résilience du Niger*, February 2015.

12. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Nutrition Country Profile: Niger*, 2009.

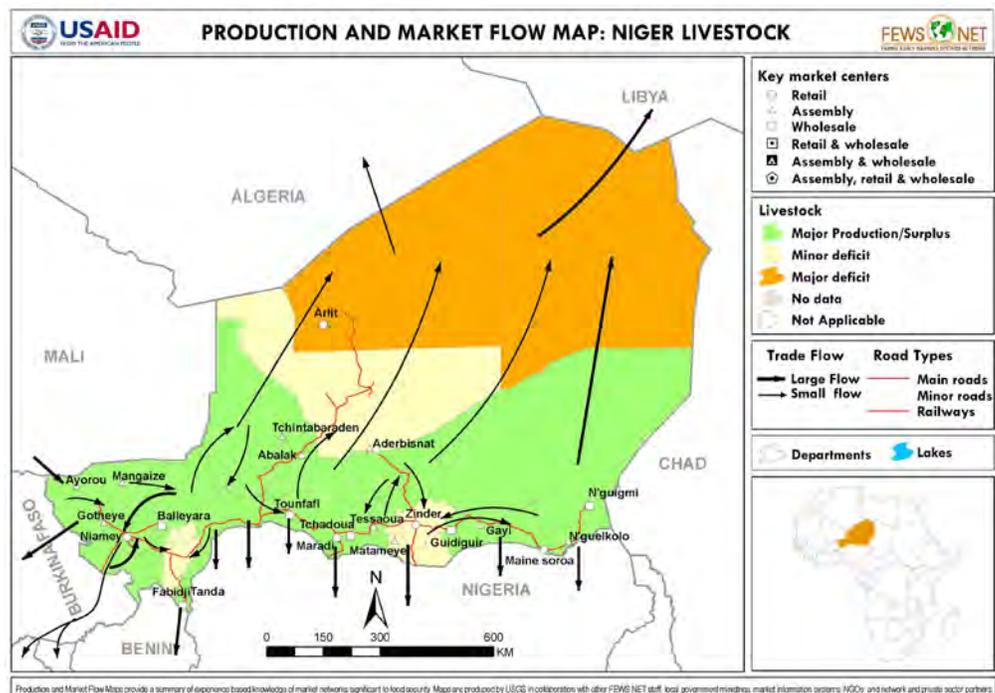
The area of land used for cultivating grains more than tripled between 1960 and 2012, which increased total production. As the population grew, however, the area of cultivated land per person fell during the same period, from 1 hectare/person to 0.6 hectare/person.¹³ The increase in production has essentially been achieved by extending the cultivated areas to more and more marginal land and reducing the period when land is left fallow. As a result, the quality of land and the yields obtained have deteriorated continually.¹⁴



CULTIVATING CROPS IN LIVESTOCK CORRIDORS

Livestock is the other main agricultural product used for food and consists mainly of cattle, goats, sheep and poultry. Although it should be noted that figures are difficult to verify, there are currently around 36 million livestock across all regions of Niger. In the south, they tend to be raised on mixed farms alongside crops, while in the north, above the isohyet of 300 mm of rainfall, livestock dominates except in areas of small-scale irrigation. Livestock fattening and dairy production are intensifying, especially in the south-west.

Indeed, the mobility of livestock is essential. Studies shows that transhumance systems are more productive and resilient than others in these difficult environments and are more productive than extensive livestock farming in sedentary areas.¹⁵ Recently, livestock production has increasingly moved into the agropastoral zone (and the agropastoral zone has spread into the pastoral zone). It is estimated that approximately two-thirds of cattle are now found in the agropastoral zone.¹⁶ Niger is a net exporter of livestock, mainly trading with Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso and Libya, as indicated in the production and market flows map.¹⁷ Most livestock exports consist of live animals rather than products derived from upstream and downstream activities in the value chain.¹⁸



PRODUCTION AND MARKET FLOWS FOR LIVESTOCK, FEWSNET

13. Author's calculation based on figures from the High Commission for the 3N Initiative, op. cit.; Trading Economics, Niger Population 1960-2016, 2016, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/niger/population>

14. Almajir, et al.

15. Peter Gubbels, Expert Interview, November 2015; L'Institut de recherches et d'applications des méthodes de développement (IRAM), Hydraulique et sécurisation des systèmes pastoraux au Sahel: appui à la gestion locale, August 2005.

16. Geesing and Djibo, op. cit.; Ministry of Water and Sanitation, op. cit.

17. Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET), Production And Market Flow Map: Niger Livestock

18. Mercy Corps, Niger Development Food Aid Program Sawki, Niamey, 15 August 2012; FAO, Nutrition Country Profile: Niger, op. cit.

Owning cattle is a key factor in food security, since for most households, the ability to sell livestock in response to numerous shocks and stresses is a key resilience capacity. Few people classed as very poor own livestock and the poor have only a few animals, with the result that multiple shocks will often exhaust a household’s means of production.

There are close and complex relationships between crop farmers and livestock farmers (including pastoralists or those who also raise livestock), which often extend over several generations. Usually, these relationships involve trading cereals and field residues for meat and manure. The level of exchange between meat and cereals varies according to meteorological conditions and these changes have a significant influence on the food security



A key factor for livestock keeping is the availability of water for livestock to drink. According to a 2006 study, “Since the 1950s, the network of traditional wells and artesian springs – estimated at around 1,500 in the pastoral zone – has been supplemented by cement wells (around 350) and deep-bore wells, some of which have been fitted with pumps... The real problem, however, is the uneven distribution of watering holes relative to the drilling potential of a particular zone. Moreover, the legal status of watering holes is often unclear and they are frequently seized, or users are unable to cover their maintenance costs.”²¹

Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2014

of both groups. These relationships are also changing: agropastoralists now often clear their fields completely and pastoralists are increasingly producing crops as well. Since the droughts between 1974 and 1984, the profile of pastoralists has changed: several have abandoned pastoralism in the pure sense or have become agropastoralists, and the practice of looking after cattle owned by city dwellers in exchange for payment has increased. The result is increasing inequality among pastoralists and a reduction in the number of people involved in pure pastoralism.¹⁹ According to Catley’s analysis, pastoralists can be placed in four categories:

- › Traditional pastoralists: good access to rangeland, poor access to markets
- › Commercial pastoralists: good access to rangeland, good access to markets
- › Intensifying livestock producers: poor access to rangeland, good access to markets²⁰
- › Pastoralists moving out of livestock keeping: poor access to rangeland, poor access to markets

Household category	Proportion of income used to purchase food in an average year ²²
Very poor	75-80%
Poor	50%
Average and affluent	25%

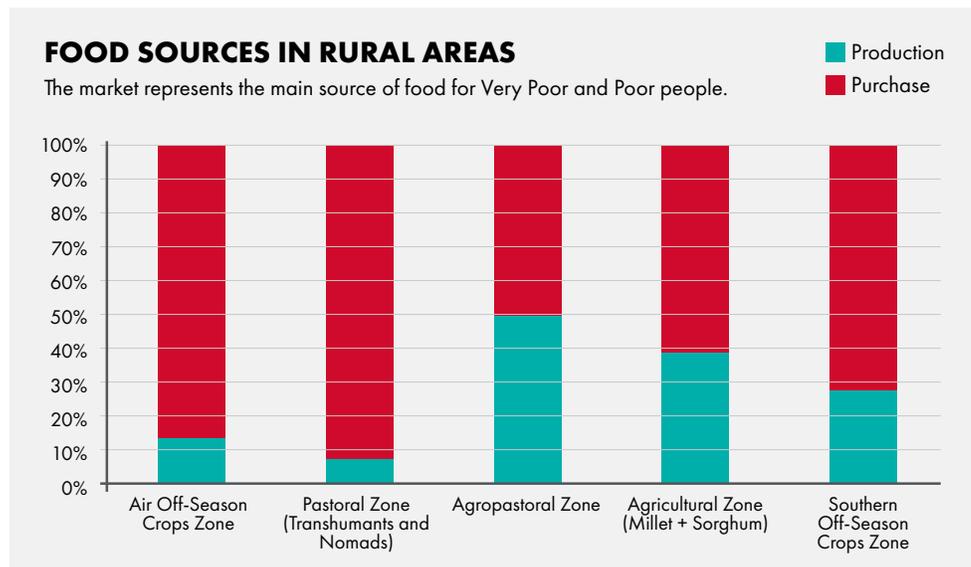
19. Interviews with Amanaya Irrichid, Yacouba Hama Abdou and Peter Gubbels; focus groups in Garoua and Rijja Chehou, October and November 2015.
 20. Catley, A., Futures of Pastoralism in Africa (PowerPoint presentation to FSN Network, East Africa Regional Knowledge Sharing Meeting) (2012), cited by Andrew Bisson, Technical Discussion Paper – the future of pastoralism in Niger, Mercy Corps, January 2016.
 21. Geesing and Djibo, op. cit.
 22. Moctar Koné and Mounkaila Souley, Niger Strategic Resilience Assessment: Markets Systems, Mercy Corps Niger, 23 September 2015

Various interventions are required to support pastoralists in these four categories, particularly the fourth. The most worrying are pastoralists who are looking for a new livelihood in a difficult economic context.

Access

Almost two-thirds of the country's population are classified as poor or very poor. The majority of individuals are net consumers of food, which means that they purchase more food than they produce.

This suggests that most people are heavily dependent on the markets for their food security. In an average year, most households only produce five to six months' worth of food and have to buy, borrow or work to meet the rest of their needs.²³ These figures vary considerably from one region to another, as the following tables show for poor and very poor people in five areas of the country.²⁴



Source: Data from Household Economy Approach Profile

Although in general terms, the higher a region's rainfall, the easier it is to cultivate the land, there are numerous factors other than rain involved in determining food security. The table below, for example, shows that pastoralists buy more than 90% of the food they need at the market, but the malnutrition data for pastoral zones are often better than in better irrigated regions. The reason is that people living in areas of low rainfall are less dependent on rain to meet their needs and either practice transhumance or nomadism with their livestock, or use small-scale irrigation to produce vegetables for sale, as in Agadez. The highest vulnerability scores for climate shocks according to the USAID/FEWSNET analysis are mainly in Zinder, Maradi and Diffa, all areas that receive more rainfall and are less well served in terms of infrastructure than Agadez.²⁵

Food markets in Niger are well integrated with regional markets, particularly in Nigeria and Benin. Studies show that prices fluctuate together in markets throughout the region, especially during years of drought, when trade becomes even more important to spread the distribution of food more evenly across the region.²⁶

The primary data from the focus groups show that the following are the most common sources of non-agricultural revenue:

- › Small trade
- › Gathering wild products
- › Money and goods from migrant labor or emigration
- › Artisan crafts
- › Local employment
- › Gifts or loans from friends and family members
- › Cash or food in return for work

23. Dady Dan Bakoye, Evaluation de la Charte pour la Prévention et la gestion des crises alimentaires au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Niger, February 2015; High Commission for the 3N Initiative, op. cit.

24. Théodore Kaboré, Grandes tendances climatiques sur le Niger: évidences basées sur les données historiques et projetées, Mercy Corps Niger, October 2015.

25. USAID/FEWSNET, Niger Vulnerability Map, March 2014

26. Department of Agriculture and Environmental Services (AES), op. cit.; Jenny C. Aker, How Can We Avoid Another Food Crisis in Niger?, Center For Global Development, September 2008, www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/16679

All these activities are practiced by men, women and adolescents. Men and women tend to specialize in certain forms of work, for example women pick wild foods and men cut grass or timber to sell. Increasingly, women are looking for paid labor and emigrate to find work.²⁷

Employment options are limited in rural areas. It is common to work for other people in the community, generally doing agricultural tasks. In pastoral areas, most people receive payment for raising livestock for friends in the towns and cities. "Food for work" programs are sometimes available. Rural industry is very limited, although there is vast potential for processing agricultural products and creating jobs associated with processing.

There is a solid and growing group of organizations focusing on extending savings and loans. There are over 100 microfinance institutions and finance is seen as essential in increasing food security. Among these institutions, there are programs that focus on women and young people. Data gathered between 2007 and 2015 identify 15 major

microfinance institutions which state they lent \$45.4 million to 173,887 borrowers and received \$5.9 million in deposits from almost 400,000 clients. ASUSU SA is the largest micro-lender in the country, with over \$29.6 million in loans, followed by Taanadi, MECREF, Kokari and MCPEC.²⁸ However, only 4% of individuals have a bank account and there is a gap between the levels of credit available, from the very small amounts available in the tontines to larger sums, which are difficult to access, from the financial sector.

Because of a lack of local employment and market opportunities, migrant labor (the "exodus") is a major source of revenue for numerous households, particularly in Agadez, Tahoua, Maradi and Tillabéry.

"Having a relative abroad is a sign of 'wealth,' social and food security, a sign that you have support and somewhere to turn to in case of problems. That's why each family tries to have at least two emigrants (one abroad and the other in another part of Niger or one of the big cities)."

International Organization for Migration, 2009

The main destination countries for emigrants from Niger from 1995 to 2000 were Burkina Faso (27.8%), Côte d'Ivoire (26.2%), Nigeria (11.9%) and Guinea-Conakry (10.8%), followed by Ghana (5.2%), Togo (3.4%) and Benin (3%).²⁹ In recent years, the deterioration in public security in Libya has made the exodus of people from Niger more difficult, but it has increased the number of emigrants from other West African countries crossing the Agadez desert to emigrate to Europe. Insecurity in Nigeria has reduced opportunities for cross-border emigration from Diffa but other routes to Nigeria are not affected in the same way.³⁰

While some funds are sent through formal channels such as Western Union, most pass through informal hawala trust networks or are brought back by individuals when they return. As a result, it is difficult to get reliable figures. However, a household survey has estimated that average monthly payments equate to 40,000 CFA francs per emigrant (roughly \$68). The vast majority of funds are used to buy food and livestock,³¹ or goods that are brought home when they return.

Other West African countries generate more revenue associated with long-term emigration. Emigrants from Senegal, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo tend to emigrate further away, to Europe and the United States, and are able to send more money.³²

27. Focus group discussions, November 2015

28. Mix Market, Niger Market Profile, <http://www.mixmarket.org/mfi/country/Niger>.

29. International Organization for Migration (IOM), Migration in Niger: National profile 2009, p. 81.

30. Focus Groups, November 2015; Kevin Sieff, A smugglers' haven in the Sahara: The route to Europe for many African migrants passes through the underworld of Agadez, Niger, The Washington Post, 20 July 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/world/2015/07/20/a-remote-city-of-smugglers/>

31. Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET), Special Report: Niger Remittances Study Summary, December 2011.

32. International Organization for Migration, op. cit.

Utilization

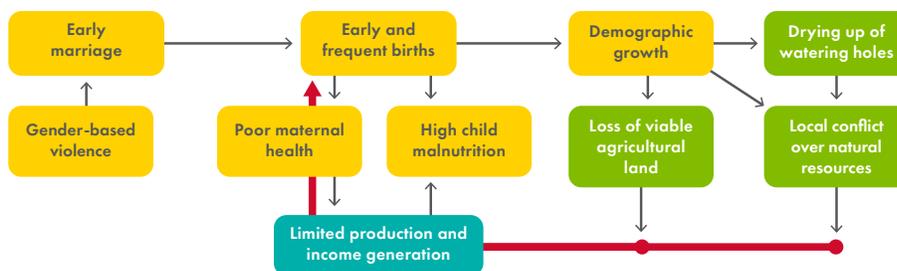
Poor nutrition practices, high disease rates, limited access to health, water and sanitation and a high fertility rate (7.6%)³³ lead to poor utilization of food resources. Use of modern contraceptives remains extremely low (5%). High fertility, resulting from the early age of first pregnancy and short intervals between births, also contributes

to under-nutrition among mothers and children. The median age of marriage is 15.5 years.³⁴ Data indicate that children born to mothers under the age of 18 have a 1.68 times higher risk of mortality, and spacing births less than 24 months apart increases the mortality risk by a factor of 1.52.³⁵ These practices contribute to a maternal mortality ratio estimated at 1,800 per 100,000 live births, one of the highest in the world.

The quality of health services remains inadequate because of the limited number of qualified health personnel, frequent shortages of drugs and equipment and a limited geographical reach.³⁶ For example, fewer than a quarter of births are assisted by qualified midwives. It is estimated that 50% of the population has no access to health services.³⁷ The focus groups indicated that since most shocks and stresses resulted in decreased income, access to health services became even harder when constraints on health were at their greatest. At the same time, the focus groups said that one of the consequences of shocks and stresses was psychosocial anxiety for men and women, because of the struggle to feed their families.³⁸ There are few psychosocial services, either formal or community-based.

Sub-optimal health practices at all levels, from food for newborns and young children to hygiene and sanitation, contribute to one of the highest child mortality rates in the world (160/1,000).³⁹ The main causes of child mortality are respiratory infections and diarrhea (which represent 25% and 20% of deaths) and

FEEDBACK LOOP: BIRTH SPACING AND LIMITED PRODUCTION & INCOME GENERATION



Major Trends in the Food Security Context

- › Pressure on land (demographic growth and desertification)
- › Reduction in the period land left fallow – poor soil fertility
- › Loss of pasture – the area of land sown with cereals tripled between 1960 and 2012 – and desertification
- › Seasonal shortage of animal feed
- › Inadequate watering holes
- › Conflicts over pasture and water
- › Inadequate infrastructure for production, storage, processing, communications and transport
- › Unpredictable rainfall
- › Population growth – 3.9% per year, the highest in the world
- › Transition from a pastoral to an agropastoral system since 1984
- › Worsening of international conflict

33. CIA World Factbook, October 2011.

34. Ministry of Population, Women and Child Protection Politique Nationale du Genre, Republic of Niger, May 2008.

35. Shea O. Rutstein, Further Evidence of the Effects of Preceding Birth Intervals on Neonatal, Infant, and Under-Five-Years Mortality and Nutritional Status in Developing Countries, Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Working Paper No. 41, 2008.

36. World Health Organization (WHO), 2006, <http://www.who.int/countries/ner/fr/>.

37. Mercy Corps, Niger Development Food Aid Program Sawki, op. cit.

38. Focus group discussions, November 2015

39. Mercy Corps, Niger Development Food Aid Program Sawki, op. cit.ization (WHO), op. cit.

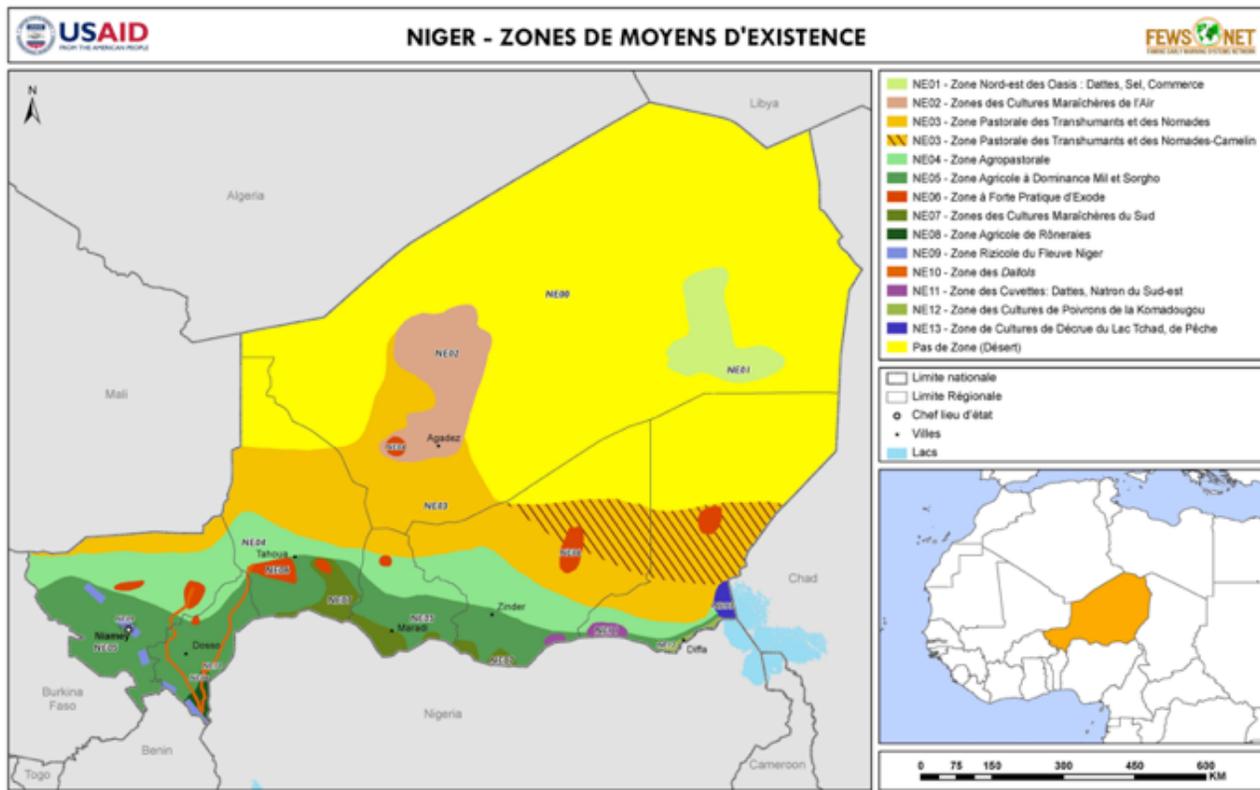
malaria (14%).⁴⁰ Just 8% of newborns under the age of six months are exclusively breastfed.⁴¹ Mediocre access to drinking water and sanitation also contribute to exposure to risks of infection and diseases, which aggravate their poor nutritional status. In reality, the construction and utilization of sanitation in rural areas is only 4%, while the utilization of improved water resources or effective treatment is only 39%.⁴²

Poor physical and mental health increases the difficulty for these people to benefit from available, accessible food.

2. Agropastoral system

There are significant variations in the agropastoral system throughout the country, with major implications in terms of building resilience.

The map below shows 13 livelihood zones, from the irrigated rice-growing region in the south-west to the desert in the north. Of these livelihood zones, those with the highest level of food insecurity in terms of production and shocks and stresses on the market are:



4 – Agropastoral Zone – Population: 2,684,996

6 – High Exodus Zone – Population: 1,281,416

3 – Transhumance and Nomadic Pastoral Zone – Population: 1,284,551

5 – Millet and Sorghum Cultivation Zone – Population: 7,552,232

These four zones account for a total of 12.2 million people, or around two thirds of the country's population.

40. World Health Organization

41. Mercy Corps, Niger Development Food Aid Program Sawki, op. cit.

42. UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2011: Adolescence – An Age of Opportunity, <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/fullreport.php>

3. Political environment and governance

The food security policy in Niger is subject to the “everyday emergency”⁴³ in which numerous people suffer from food insecurity every year and receive annual food distributions in different forms. High levels of malnutrition are recorded every year, with 40% of children under five chronically malnourished and 10% severely malnourished.⁴⁴

In 2012, the government of Niger launched a new strategy to break the cycle of chronic food insecurity and emergency interventions. The new strategy, known as the 3N Initiative: “Nigériens Nourish Nigériens” – is an integrated strategy that cuts across all ministries, coordinated by the President’s office. It sets out four pillars for action:

- › Pillar 1: Improve social protection for the most vulnerable communities and households
- › Pillar 2: Improve nutrition in vulnerable households
- › Pillar 3: Improve long-term agricultural and food productivity, income levels in vulnerable households and their access to food
- › Pillar 4: Improve the governance of nutritional and food security.⁴⁵

The 3N strategy identifies the priority areas to be implemented in numerous sectors.⁴⁶ On paper, the policy covers all the key elements: an integrated strategy, monitoring of all three factors (access, availability and utilization) and paying attention to shocks and stresses. In principle, therefore, the government’s food security policy has everything it should. But in reality, although there has not yet been enough time for the results to be significant,⁴⁷ there are already a number of problems. Firstly, the policy is reliant on state actions, with little for the private sector and producer organizations, who represent their own interests, to do.⁴⁸ It is difficult to see how Niger can respond to the major challenges of food security without a dramatic growth in private-sector activities, yet the government is not focusing on creating a conducive environment.

Secondly, the implementation role of the High Commission for the 3N Initiative is not clear: “The roles and responsibilities of the High Commission at the local level – region, department and commune – are not clearly defined or understood by staff, key technical ministries – the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Livestock Farming and Ministry of the Environment, local personnel or other key participants.”⁴⁹ At the same time, the decentralization policy that dates from 2004 seeks to transfer decision-making power and funding to local and regional authorities. The key informants and experts consulted indicated that the process had transferred power but not capacity to the authorities, with the result that the policy was only being partially implemented.⁵⁰ This suggests that the state will also face challenges in giving local authorities a greater sense of responsibility in terms of implementing the 3N strategy.

It remains to be seen whether the 3N strategy will produce more satisfactory results than the Rural Development Strategy it replaced, like all the other food security policies since the country’s independence. In any event, any state involvement in improving food security depends on adequate funding. The state’s finances are reliant on two sources which are beyond its control.

43. Peter Gubbels, *Ending the everyday emergency: Resilience and children in the Sahel*, Groundswell International for World Vision and Save the Children, members of the Sahel working group, July 2012.

44. Ministry of Agriculture, *op. cit.*

45. High Commission for the 3N Initiative, *op. cit.*

46. Other important government policies for food security are: Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES) 2005-2015; National Agricultural Investment Plan (PNIA 2011-2015); Sustainable Livestock Farming Development Plan 2012-2035; MDG1 Acceleration Framework; National Nutrition Policy; National Social Protection Policy; Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative (AGIR) in the Sahel and West Africa

47. The research carried out by STRESS did not identify any assessment of the 3N initiative and the experts interviewed said it was too early to reach any conclusions about the policy.

48. Africa Leadership Training and Capacity Building Program (Africa Lead), USAID, *Niger HC3N Assessment Institutional Mapping for I3N and Recommendations for Improved Implementation*, February 2013.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Interviews with key informants and experts, November 2015.

1. **Donors** – A significant share of the national budget is funded by government donors. Experience from other countries shows that a) changes in terms of international cooperation policies introduced by the governments concerned can have a rapid impact on the level of funding available and b) any inappropriate political change in Niger, such as a coup d'état, may precipitate drastic reductions in donor funding.
2. **Reliance on markets in the extractive industry** – Niger has exported uranium since the 1970s and oil since 2011, representing around 75% of its export revenues. The low price of uranium since 2007,⁵¹ and often the state's unfavorable contractual clauses, limit the state revenues available for other activities. Security problems in Arlit, where the main mine is located, create vulnerability associated with interrupting operations, which would immediately reduce public revenues.⁵²

Within this environment, there is a healthy network of organizations to support producers. Some of the most active are:

- › Réseau des chambres d'agriculture du Niger (Network of Chambers of Agriculture in Niger – RECA)
- › Fédération des coopératives maraîchères du Niger (Federation of Off-Season Crop Cooperatives in Niger – FCMNA-Niya)
- › Association pour la redynamisation de l'élevage au Niger (Association for Redynamizing Livestock Farming in Niger – AREN)
- › Fédération nationale des groupements interprofessionnels / filières bétail viande (National Federation of Interprofessional Groups / livestock and meat sections)
- › Syndicat national des commerçants de céréales du Niger (National Syndicate of Cereals Traders in Niger)
- › Fédération des unions de groupements paysans du Niger Mooriben (Federation of Farmers' Group Unions in Niger Mooriben – FUGPN Mooriben)

These organizations group local associations into syndicates up to a national or even international level. In addition to member services such as providing improved seeds, technical communications, collective marketing, etc., these networks also defend their members in public political arenas. The focus groups, key informants and experts all referred to the importance of these organizations to increase producers' power and facilitate their access to markets and broader forums.⁵³

4. Systemic constraints

Gender-determined access to productive resources and livelihoods strategies

Cultural norms prevent women from owning land, making important economic decisions, selling certain products, having control over their decisions around marriage and fertility and getting a sufficient level of education to improve the lives of their families. Men and adolescents are culturally obliged to participate in certain activities, such as seasonal migration and transhumance, which carry increased risks. Although there are laws and policies in place to prevent gender discrimination, the state often lacks the strength and capacity to implement them and citizens are not systematically informed that such laws exist.

The results of these cultural constraints mean that

- › While two thirds of boys go to primary school, only half of girls do.

51. Daniel Flynn and Geert De Clercq, Special Report: Areva and Niger's uranium fight, Arlit, Niger/Paris, Reuters Business News, 5 February 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-niger-areva-specialreport-idUSBREA140AA20140205>.

52. At the same time, it is important to note that at the time of the major rebellion in the north, these plants never closed their doors, although the theoretical risk remains.

53. Focus groups and interviews with Florence Bron-Saidatou, Nassirou Talatou and Tahirou Amza, October-November 2015; Africa Leadership Training and Capacity Building Program (Africa Lead), op. cit.

- › While only a quarter of men can read, only 12% of women can (and 5% of women in rural areas).⁵⁴
- › While a sixth of households run by men face severe or moderate food insecurity, a quarter of households run by women are in the same situation.⁵⁵

Governance constraints associated with production and marketing systems

The efforts of each producer (livestock and agriculture) are supported and limited by the quality of governance of production and marketing systems. Animal health and crop extension services, farmers' associations and their syndicates and federations, national policies on agriculture and livestock, funding of public technical services, mitigating the effects of conflict, etc. are all important for ensuring that these systems function adequately, but there are major weaknesses at every level. At the household level, for example, these weaknesses hinder producers' access to information and services in order to improve production; at a higher level, poor value-chain organization prevents products from Niger from being competitive on international markets. Good governance of these systems has an impact on everyone, but it is far from the individual influence of any one person.

Poor transport and processing infrastructure for agricultural and livestock products.

Profitable agriculture and livestock farming are supported by infrastructure that provides access to inputs and product marketing at moderate prices (roads, processing plants, energy, etc.). Opportunities to increase added value and rural and urban employment are numerous but not exploited. These jobs also make a significant contribution to ensuring access to food for rural families. Products from other neighboring countries, and over even more significant distances, dominate urban markets in Niger, which represents a loss of opportunities for domestic producers. Support for infrastructure improvement would reduce the costs of production and marketing and give producers more opportunities.

Inadequate formal financial systems

The production and sale of agricultural and livestock products are hindered by a lack of support for all actors involved in the agricultural and livestock value chain: producers, processors, suppliers of inputs and traders. At the same time, financial systems are often out of line with cultural norms, which prevents interest-based loans. Access is further limited by the poor territorial coverage of financial services outside the major urban centers. With less than 4% of the population of Niger formally banked, access to services is a major challenge in itself. Women's typical roles and some cultural norms affect women's capacity to participate in formal financial services (such as having less time to travel to a branch due to domestic workload, or having additional challenges to present collateral for a sizeable loan). A significant increase in the availability of adapted financial products would increase opportunities for producing, processing and marketing products.

5. System capacities

Niger currently faces a number of problematic areas. At the same time, there are numerous capacities the country can draw on to tackle them.

Social capital

Discussions with the focus groups emphasized on many occasions the strong links that exist between families, relations and friends within communities, between rural and urban areas and even beyond the national borders to other West African countries. People rely on solid networks to find work, borrow money, cope with illness, exchange goods and services and provide mutual emotional support. Some families maintain links with other families for the purpose of employing emigrants or agropastoral exchanges.

54. Ministry of Population, Women and Child Protection, op. cit.

55. Koné and Souley, op. cit.

Several traditional practices help to bring communities together around a common cause:

- › **Collective working traditions** – practices such as gayya or boogou bring people together through voluntary work on each other’s farms to cooperative on agricultural tasks, where the owner provides some food and/or drinks on agricultural tasks
- › **Relationships between agropastoralists and pastoralists** – customs around temporary loans of productive ruminants such as habbanaye, a group sharing of a male small ruminant for reproduction whereby people take turns to own the offspring and build up their herd, spread risk, strengthen social links between families and help people to re-establish flocks and herds. These relationships also create relationships between ethnic groups.
- › **Joking relationships** – this traditional form of bantering relationships between ethnic groups provides a culturally structured way of reducing tensions, particularly between pastoralists and agropastoralists.

Rural Code

Promulgated in 1993 after extensive public discussions, the current Rural Code clarifies questions linked to land use in the country. It established the system of Land Commissions, which create institutions at the local and national level; these have reduced land conflicts between agropastoralists, between agropastoralists and pastoralists, and between pastoralists. Starting in 2010, there were 145 communal Land Commissions out of a total of 265 existing communes.⁵⁶ The Rural Code created a participatory and inclusive process to deal with these problems. It also created a framework for the use of agricultural and rangeland, water and forests as well as fauna and fishing. The commissions are organized and supported by training and resources and function well in terms of mitigating conflict. This is not always the case, however, and more resources are needed to improve the effectiveness of the system.

3N Initiative

The “Nigériens Nourish Nigériens” initiative brings together the efforts and policies of numerous ministries with the aim of harmonizing the actions needed to reduce food insecurity in Niger. This initiative, adopted in 2012, is a model for West Africa in terms of incorporating food security considerations in numerous policies, strategies and budgets at the local and national level, despite challenges in its implementation.

Proximity of markets in Nigeria, Benin and Burkina Faso

While Niger often needs to import agricultural products, it has a comparative advantage in livestock production. Access to markets in neighboring countries, particularly Nigeria, helps stabilize a food system that is frequently shaken by production and market shocks. Demand in the region is generally sufficient to cover the total quantity produced by Niger.

Producer networks

Niger has emphasized the need for producer networks since its independence in 1960. Although initial efforts were managed top-down by government programs,⁵⁷ in recent decades producers have taken the initiative so that there are now numerous organizations and networks. These networks are crucial in terms of representing producers’ interests in the markets and in public policy.

Religious consensus

Niger is 99% Sunni Muslim and has been relatively free from the religious violence that affects other countries in the region. The focus groups emphasized the role of local mosques, marabouts and other religious leaders in constructing a community identity, settling local conflicts and providing spiritual and emotional support during difficult periods.

56. Association pour contribuer à l’Amélioration de la Gouvernance de la Terre, de l’Eau et des Ressources naturelles (AGTER), E-Sud Development, Association pour la Redynamisation de l’Elevage au Niger (AREN), and the LandNet West African network, Lessons Learned from Niger’s Rural Code, http://www.agter.org/bdf/en/thesaurus_dossiers/motcle-dossiers-20.html

57. Moussa Boureima, Les politiques agricoles au Niger, 1960 - 2015: 55 ans à la recherche de la sécurité alimentaire et de la réduction de la pauvreté, Niamey, Les Éditions Belle Afrique, 2006.



Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2016

SECTION V: **SHOCKS AND STRESSES**

1. Summary of the impact of risk on food security

The STRESS process identified 13 of the most important shocks and stresses for targeted vulnerable groups.

Production-related risks

Cyclical drought and erratic and scattered rainfall

Drought occurs once every two years, which places enormous pressure on resources (pastureland, water) and on the ability of households to meet their food requirements. The FAO has noted that drought affects an average of 1 to 1.2 million people per crisis and is responsible for 95% of victims of natural disasters.⁵⁸

Drought is a permanent fixture in Niger, and traditional production methods have historically been adapted accordingly. Aside from seasonal droughts, more long-term changes to rainfall exist that are independent from farming practices. Over the past century, historical data has revealed several distinct periods of drought and rainfall.

- › 1910 -1916: dry period
- › 1920 -1970: wet period, especially from 1950 to 1957
- › 1970 - 2003: dry period, especially from 1971 to 1976 and from 1980 to 1989, the longest drought of the century⁵⁹

Rainfall projections are not reliable, mainly because Niger is located in a transitional geographical area that lies between desert and wetter zones, which makes it a difficult country for which to create rainfall climatology models. It is evident that there will be a higher level of rainfall variability: irregular precipitation, a later start, an earlier end and an unequal geographical spread.⁶⁰ In addition, the movement of isohyets across the Sahel toward the south suggests an expansion of the dry areas.⁶¹

Consequently, climate scientists tend to rely more on temperature projections. Niger can expect temperatures, especially maximum temperatures, to rise, which suggests that evapotranspiration will increase. This has important implications for all activities that depend on surface water sources and soil humidity, as is the case for the majority of small-scale agriculture throughout the country.⁶²

AGRHYMET's principal component analysis reveals that the long droughts (the number of consecutive days without precipitation) and the late arrival of rainfall are the two main factors responsible for yield losses and crop failures in Niger.⁶³

Loss of pastureland and viable farmland

The loss of pastureland and viable farmland is the result of numerous factors – the rise in the fragmentation of pasturelands is due to the increase in agricultural production, drought and soil degradation, which are exacerbated and in some cases caused by poor farming practices.

58. Bockel, Louis, Marie Thoreux, Shelly Sayagh, A Review of Risk Management Tools and Policies in Niger's Rural Sector: Policy Brief, The Food And Agricultural Organization of The United Nations, FAO, October 2008.

59. Ministry of Livestock, Rappel Des Crises Pastorales Et Mécanismes De Prevention Et De Gestion Au Niger, Republic of Niger

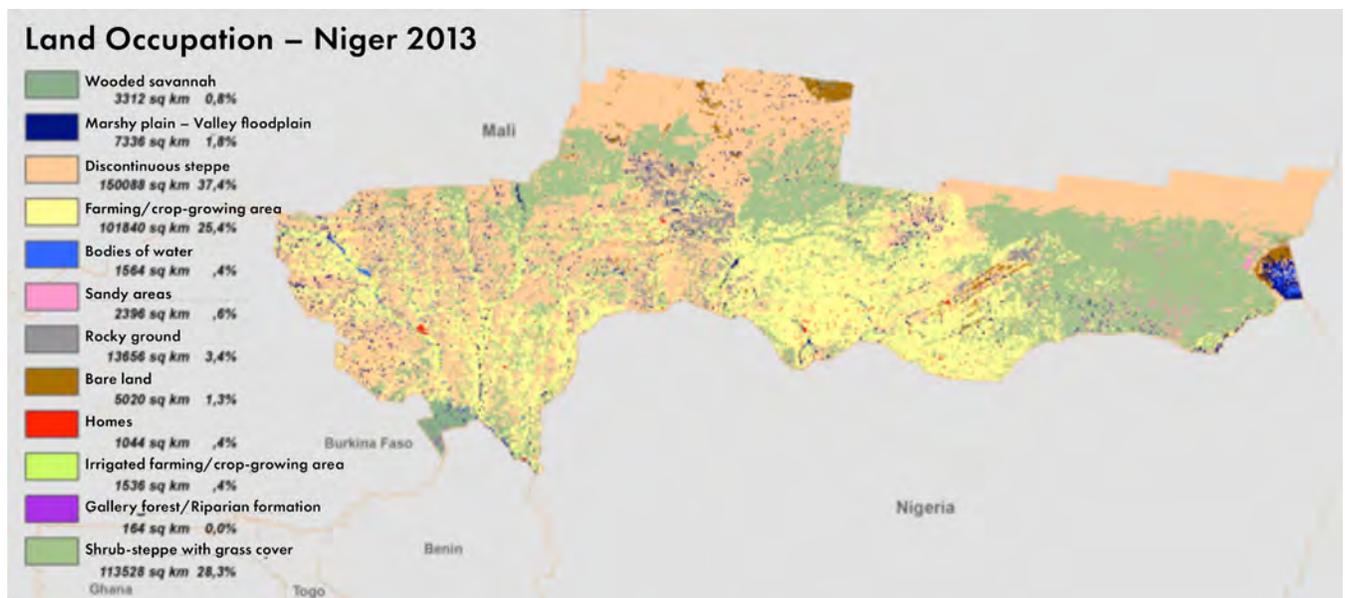
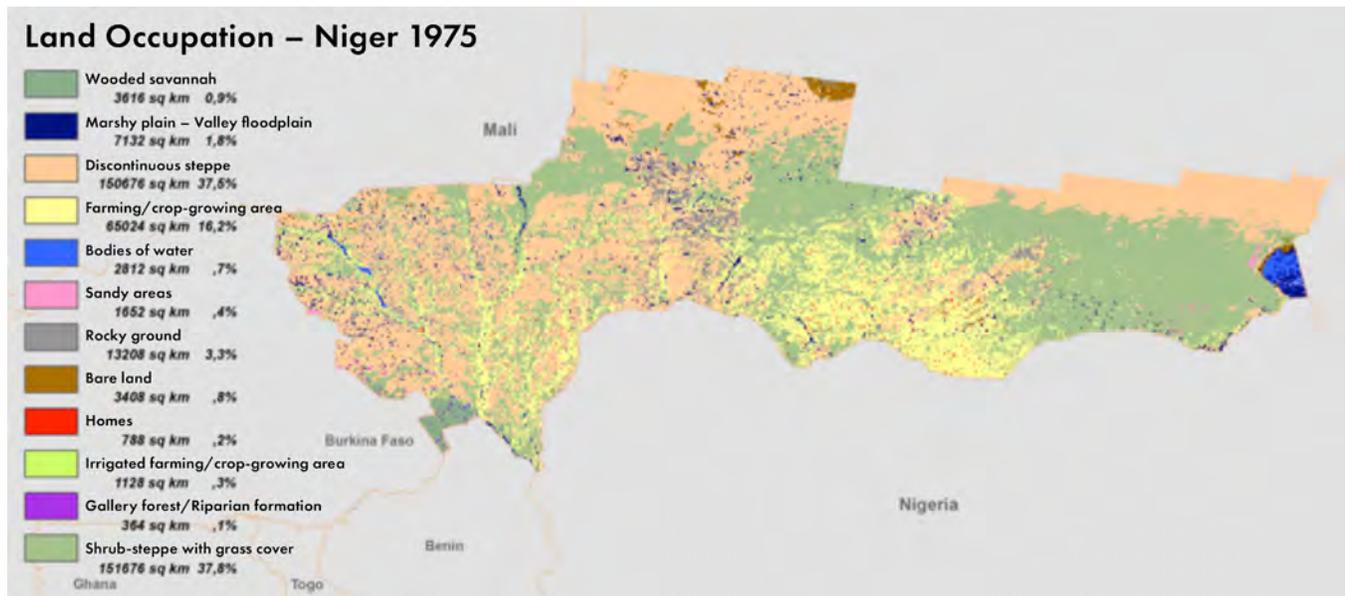
60. Pierre Ozer, Catherine Bodart, Bernard Tychon, Analyse climatique de la région de Gouré, Niger oriental: récentes modifications et impacts environnementaux, Cybergeog: European Journal of Geography, Environnement, Nature, Paysage, document 308, 2005, <http://cybergeog.revues.org/3338>

61. Ministry of Livestock, op.cit.

62. Ozer et al, op.cit.

63. Agricultural and Environmental Services Department (AES), op.cit.

The maps below show the increased spread of crops (yellow) and the reduction in pastureland (green) between 1975 and 2013.⁶⁴



The figures below show the changes in two zones of great importance for livestock production and crops, with a reduction in shrub-steppe and an increase in crop-growing areas.⁶⁵

	1975	2000	2013
Shrub-steppe	37.8%	37.8%	28.3%
Crop-growing areas	16.2%	23.1%	25.4%

64. Benoit Sarr, Changement climatique et stratégies d'adaptation au Niger, Centre Régional Agrhyet/CILSS, Niamey, January 2016.

65. Ibid.

Drying-up of watering points and deepening of the water table

Major water points dry up from periods of sustained drought and populations' continued need for groundwater, which lowers the water table. Data is thin as regards the drying-up of watering holes and the reduction of the water table, but focus groups, key informants and experts are all in agreement that these are serious, long-term trends. These two factors affect small-scale irrigation as well as the mobility of livestock, which, in turn, reduces productivity. The reduction of the water table also limits groundwater irrigation options, a strategy that is employed by several other countries but which raises serious sustainability questions if not applied with care.

Locust infestations

The "curse of the rains" occurs at a serious level every three years on average, devastating crops and other sources of vegetation. The FAO estimates that, when a locust infestation occurs in a particular district, it destroys between 10 and 30% of crops (thereby adding to the damage caused by drought). While the consequences for crop production are direct and immediate, the consequences for livestock production are indirect and distinct due to the depletion of rangeland.

Since 1978, Niger has experienced a dozen major locust infestations, with the majority occurring in the Saharan zone, where there is little production. In the south, the infestations are more localized; their effect on the resident population is serious, but not extensive like other shocks and stresses. As far as the agropastoral regions are concerned, only the infestation of 1988 affected more than a few thousand hectares (700,000 to 800,000 ha).⁶⁶

Animal disease outbreaks

Diseases break out annually among small and large ruminants, as well as poultry. Pasteurellosis and Newcastle disease (which affects poultry) are particularly problematic. As far as the most reported diseases⁶⁷ are concerned, figures show that there are 413 epidemics per year. Livestock farmers' knowledge is limited, as is the ability of national veterinary services to deliver animal health care.⁶⁸ Annual average vaccination rates equated to 77% for cattle, 61% for small ruminants and 25% for camels during the 2011-14 period.⁶⁹

Market-related risks

Extreme fluctuations in grain and livestock prices

Annual and seasonal fluctuations in grain and livestock prices make it difficult for those who must purchase these foods to access them. Thanks to integrated regional markets, food is usually available, but annual price hikes, especially during lean periods, cause problems for food security. These fluctuations are the normal variations that emerge through supply and demand, and for that reason they cannot be regarded as true shocks. According to a World Bank study, crop prices vary in a regular manner every year. Over the past two decades, 2007 was the only year in which grain price variation fluctuated more than usual. Thus, while the very poorest people must find strategies to adapt to this situation, it is not an abnormal shock.⁷⁰

Sudden seasonal rises in animal feed prices

Significant seasonal rises in animal feed do lead to real shortfalls. For over a decade, at least four out of seven regions in Niger have recorded fodder shortfalls of 30,000 metric tons per year.⁷¹ Niger lacks the necessary raw materials to produce animal feed, and consequently, it has to be imported from neighboring countries, such as Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso and Ghana, among others.

66. Department of Agriculture and Environmental Services (AES), op. cit.

67. Ibid., p. 20

68. Ibid., p. 20

69. Statistics Division of the Ministry of Livestock, PIP 3: Sécurisation des systèmes de productions animales

70. Department of Agriculture and Environmental Services (AES), op. cit., p. 34-5

71. Koné and Souley, op. cit.

Closure of borders between Niger and neighboring countries

The prices of food and key inputs such as oil and animal feed fluctuate. Key exports originating from Niger, such as fish and livestock, are also affected. Taking into account Niger's heavy reliance on neighboring countries for food, oil, veterinary medicine and other products, border closures constitute a significant threat to food security. Recent cases include the boycott of the Cotonou port authority in Benin by Nigerien traders, and the closure of the Burkina Faso border. Trade was interrupted, but these cases only lasted a short time. Longer closures have been caused by civil conflicts, such as in Nigeria and Mali, where armed struggles have prevented trade between the countries and caused serious food security problems for people living in the vicinity. The duplication of trade routes and links in the region do limit the effects on neighboring communities, however.

Risks related to social cohesion

Exacerbation of international conflicts

Since the beginning of 2013, the violence carried out in the north of Nigeria by the Boko Haram extremist group has pushed 98,000 Nigerians over the border into the southern region of Diffa in Niger.⁷² The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) noted that almost 60,000 Nigeriens were internally displaced from dozens of villages in 2015 due to Boko Haram attacks, which has added to the pressure from the Nigerian refugees. Diffa has been the theater of various attacks and loss of human lives. Social cohesion is increasingly deteriorating within communities with a rise in suspicion given difficulties identifying Boko Haram combatants. Boko Haram seems to have bases in Diffa and potentially dormant bases in Zinder. Military interventions either by the regional coalition (Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria) or by the Nigerien Armed Forces against Boko Haram have been unable to completely put an end to the attacks. The government's declaration of a state of emergency has exacerbated vulnerability and food insecurity of households with the prohibition of sales of peppers and fish, which constitute the primary livelihoods for communities in the region. The conflict has reduced the ability to plant crops and to travel with livestock, and has hindered cross-border trade. Focus group discussions in Mainesoura in the Diffa region revealed enormous pressures of fear and stress for men, women and youth, as well as concerns about young men no longer being able to go on exode due to the instability, which provides an income source on which families depend to help offset production losses from heavy desertification and droughts.

Elsewhere in the country, the presence of armed groups (al-Murabitun, Ansa Ardine, AQMI, etc.) in north Mali has pushed refugees into the Tillabery region. Instability in Libya has further favored trafficking of arms, illegal substances and an upsurge in general banditry in the regions of Agadez and the north of Mali in the desert areas.

Local disputes over natural resources

These are land disputes between a) pastoralists and agropastoralists, b) groups of pastoralists and, more recently, c) among agropastoralist families. Disputes over natural resources are on the rise due to increasingly severe droughts and the continual fragmentation of traditional pastoral careers. Between pastoralists and agropastoralists, discord is especially prevalent in the area that stretches from the north of Tillabéri to the north of Abala, in the Filingue strip, in Tahoua, Abalak, Baleyara and toward Zinder. For the most part, they arise during the period that spans from the initial rainfall to the end of the harvest, i.e. generally around July and then again in September and October, because that is when nomadic movement occurs after the rains stop in the north.⁷³ Among pastoralists, disputes are primarily related to the management of waterholes and pastureland, while among agropastoralists, family land disputes related to inheritance – specifically how land is divided up among several heirs – are most prevalent.

72. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Bulletin Humanitaire Niger, November 2015, <http://www.unocha.org/niger>

73. Amanaya Irrichid, interview with the renowned expert, November 2015

74. Interview with Mme Kako Fatima, December 2015; Mercy Corps, Manuel des Procédures de Mercy Corps en Matière de Genre.

Gender-based violence within households

Often hidden from general view, this is a major cause of stress among women. Gender-based violence often stems from economic and ecological difficulties (when times are hard, gender-based violence increases). The concept not only incorporates physical violence, but also psychological, economic and sexual violence.⁷⁴ For example, as men control access to the fields, gender-based violence sometimes affects women's ability to grow crops. With the decline in crop-growing hectares per person, key informants have indicated that, at times, women do not even receive a section of land to farm. Sometimes, they look for work elsewhere so as to bring in an income. At the same time, while Nigerien Law allows men and women to inherit and purchase equally, this is unusual given customary practice.⁷⁵

Epidemics

These are repeated annual outbreaks of cholera, meningitis and other illnesses of varying gravity and reach. While these epidemics tend to be rare and highly localized, some illnesses such as malaria are more widespread. In 2013, 1.4 million confirmed cases of malaria⁷⁶ were recorded, and that figure may be a significant underestimation of the real number.

A focus group discussion on management strategies for shocks and stresses revealed common flowcharts, as can be seen as can be seen in the image at right.

This flowchart emerged in response to practically all examples of shocks and stresses. It is notable that almost all shocks brought about declines in crop/livestock production – even human illnesses and border closures – due to a shortage of labor or inputs. Production downturns led to reductions in income, due to either a lack of products to sell

or the need to allocate money to different areas in order to cope with the shock, such as medication, transport, inputs, etc. Consequently, the state of health of those affected declined because of a lack of money and production; people no longer had the means to maintain a healthy diet, buy medicine or even get themselves to medical centers. On numerous occasions, the focus groups brought up the psycho-social consequences of stress, as well as the worry of having to manage problems, and the potential obstacle this can represent to individuals in terms of taking the initiative and making decisions. Several groups of men revealed that they felt anxious about being incapable of providing for their families' needs.



COMMON CYCLE OF VULNERABILITY

2. Impact of shocks and stresses on food security

Vulnerability characteristics

Generally, vulnerable people exhibit certain key characteristics. The more a person displays the following characteristics, the more vulnerable they are likely to be to all types of shocks and stresses:

- › Few animals to sell
- › Lack of access to off-season market production

75. Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children, op. cit.; Interviews with key informants, November 2015.

76. World Health Organization (WHO), op. cit.

- › Lack of ability to purchase food when prices are low
- › Insufficient quantity of land for crops
- › Lack of a household member capable of looking for work, either locally or via an exodus
- › Lack of labor for working the fields or for tending to the animals
- › Subject to violent conflict
- › Single parent (especially true for women), widowed or disabled

Geographical vulnerability

There is considerably variability in geographical vulnerability across the country. Simply based on malnutrition rates, the following table provides an idea of variability per region.⁷⁷

Malnutrition rates are a useful indicator: however, taking into account the complex nature of food security, it is still quite an approximate measure of vulnerability as a whole. In addition, the differences within regions suggest that it is important to carry out a more precise analysis. It should be noted that the two regions with the best results – Agadez and Niamey – are the least dependent on agriculture. This suggests that the battle against food insecurity must take into account crucial aspects like employment, trade, irrigated production and pastoralism.

In-depth studies have been carried out on departments and communes that are the most vulnerable to shocks and stresses. However, these studies came up with quite different results and show that vulnerability is a complicated phenomenon, that several Nigerien regions suffer from tough problems and that there are no quick ways of targeting programs. A summary of these two important studies is available [online](#).

Average rate of chronic malnutrition among children under 5 years old, 2010-2014

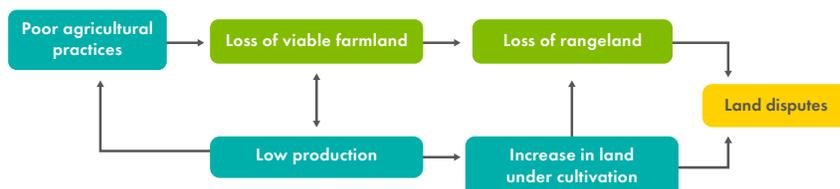
Maradi	56.7
Zinder	54.4
Diffa	47
Tahoua	41
Dosso	41
Tillabéry	37
Agadez	31.6
Niamey	18.8

Impact on availability

Given Niger’s dependence on crop and livestock production, shocks and stresses categorized under “production-related risks” have a significant effect on overall food availability. Other shocks and stresses are less likely to directly affect production, with the exception of a few isolated local cases. Market-related risks can reduce the availability of food during short time periods and in small areas, but considering that Nigerien markets are integrated into regional markets, traders respond to price signals and find ways to meet demand.

The exception here is the decline in production caused by civil conflict, especially in Diffa. This prevents three components of food security from functioning correctly: trade is interrupted while subsistence farmers from elsewhere cannot attend the markets, production drops because of the dangers associated with going out into the fields, and consumption drops, causing health to deteriorate.

Production risks are all interlinked. The long-term trend of declining production and disappearing pastureland stems



77. Author’s calculation, based on data from the SMART studies cited by the High Commission for the 3N Initiative, op. cit

from a high rate of population growth, limited employment opportunities outside the sphere of agriculture, climate change and poor land use management. All of this leads to soil degradation and a drop in pastoral mobility. Agricultural productivity, already the lowest in the region, continues to decrease.⁷⁸ Cereals, legumes and livestock production methods have not advanced with the times, while the expansion of off-season gardening has increased the availability of vegetables all year round.

Other production-related shocks, such as the appearance of locusts and animal diseases, tend to be more local events and have serious consequences for the local people involved. The markets have a tendency to fill in the gaps in availability in such cases, even though access is, of course, problematic.⁷⁹

The focus groups stated that in response to production-related shocks, they use the following strategies to cope:

- › Sale of livestock
- › Focus on activities that generate more income
- › Paid jobs
- › Emigration
- › Food donations, and acceptance of food and goods in return for work

For households with few animals, limited access to markets, few people to send out looking for work and poor social networks, there are not many options available when it comes to managing these shocks. Traditionally, it was men and male teenagers who looked for paid jobs and who emigrated, although that is changing, because women and female adolescents are now looking at those options in order to make ends meet. Emigration can be dangerous, especially when crossing the Sahara to reach Libya. However, in some



Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2014

places, it has become a rite of passage for young men. For families where the men wish to emigrate, the women and girls are left to manage the traditional household duties and productive activities, without any decision-making powers or the possibility of leaving (as mobility is often necessary in order to find work). Adolescents in the focus groups pointed to a huge range of income-generating activities they use to fulfill the needs of the household.

Impact on access

Declines in production have a real effect on access to food when the products are earmarked for sale, as is the case with numerous crops (especially cowpeas and off-season vegetables) and with livestock. However, the main access problems stem from market-related risks. Seasonal fluctuations in the price of grain and livestock

78. Peter Gubbels, op. cit.; Almajir et al., op. cit.

79. Department of Agriculture and Environmental Services (AES), op. cit.

occur in any agricultural system, and there is very little proof that these fluctuations have worsened over the years. That said, for 60% of Nigerien residents who are already experiencing food insecurity, these fluctuations cause problems every year, induce stress and make the accumulation of assets more difficult. People therefore use the same strategies listed above for managing this stress.

These fluctuations turn into shocks when they become extreme in nature, either because of production shortfalls or border closures, or when they come in tandem with other shocks or stresses.

Access to food varies, of course, depending on the group. For the poor and extremely poor whose personal food production lasts only for a few months of the year, these price variations can have a major effect on their food security, as the malnutrition data suggests. Men, women and adolescents all suffer from limited access. Pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under the age of five are particularly affected by limited access, given their sensitive nutritional requirements.



Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2014

The current conflict in Diffa obviously affects all of these groups. However, there is a particular impact on male adolescents: for a good number of them, the visible constraints on continuing productive economic activities - such as livestock farming, agriculture, trade and other small business activities - may open them up to additional risk of recruitment by Boko Haram. While Mercy Corps' research in northern Nigeria about why youth join Boko Haram points out that lack of employment is not enough to propel young men and women to join this extremist organization, it creates a delicate situation that Boko Haram is adept at exploiting.⁸⁰ There has been some indications that Boko Haram has promised money and women to attract new recruits.⁸¹ Further research is needed to understand the appeal of Boko Haram among Nigerien youth and which regions are at highest risk (some background research suggested Zinder is a recruiting ground). The longer the region remains unstable, the more food insecurity becomes a serious problem and the more attractive the extremist option begins to appear.

Elsewhere in the country, the presence of armed groups (al-Murabitun, Ansa Ardine, AQMI, etc.) in north Mali has pushed refugees into the Tillabery region. Instability in Libya has further favored trafficking of arms, illegal substances and an upsurge in general banditry in the regions of Agadez and the north of Mali in the desert areas.

Impact on utilization

Utilization refers to the biological ability to make use of and benefit from nutrients, supported by sufficient, diverse diets and good food preparation, feeding and hygiene practices. The focus groups indicated that each shock had an impact on general health, and in numerous cases, reduced individuals' ability to utilize the food they had. All shocks led to reductions in production and income, and several strategies used by individuals had an overall impact on their health:

- › Switch to less costly and lower-quality food
- › Reduce the number of meals per day

80. Motivations and Empty Promises: Voices of Former Boko Haram Combatants and Nigerian Youth, Mercy Corps, April 2016.

81. Personal message based on humanitarian coordination meetings, Theodore Kabore, Mercy Corps.

- › Drop in visits to medical centers due to a lack of income
- › Reduction in purchases of medicine in the event of illness

The generally mediocre state of sanitation across the entire country has created a situation where communicable diseases spread easily, while the persistence of parasites reduces the nutritional value of the food consumed. Simultaneously, endemic diseases are compromising residents' health.

“Shocks cause us to suffer, due to the effort that we have to put in, especially the psychological effort,”

–TILLIA, FEMALE FOCUS GROUP.

At the same time, half of the country's children suffer from malnutrition during the first few years of their lives. This has significant long-term consequences for the health of a large section of the population: a downturn in productivity, substantial vulnerability in terms of illnesses, and an increase in the risk of giving birth to babies suffering from malnutrition, thereby passing on the problem to the next generation.

An increase in anxiety levels – related to individuals asking themselves how they are going to manage their problems – also emerged from the focus groups. Men and women expressed this differently – women worried more about what they were going to do, while men talked about their failure to provide for their families. The two groups both thought



Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2014



Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2014

that it would have an impact on their ability to cope with shocks. The adolescents shared their concerns and tried their best to contribute to the household by finding jobs as laborers, by participating in activities that generate income, or by emigrating. Everyone pointed out the importance of having the support of family and friends. Nobody brought up the existence of professional services that allow people to manage the psycho-social consequences.

Not many of the focus group participants stated that gender-based violence affected food security, but those that did agreed that domestic violence had the effect of interrupting productive household activities, due to either injuries sustained or the emotional strain suffered. The focus groups pointed out that sometimes men would not buy food at the market because of the violence, or women would refuse to cook the food, to the extent that the family would not eat for a certain time. Everyone reported an increase in anxiety within each household. Several expert interviews noted a strong correlation between increase in vulnerability or poverty and violence in the household.



Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2014

SECTION VI:
RESILIENCE CAPACITIES



Ensuring food security when confronted with shocks and stresses requires individuals, households and communities to access several different resources while implementing appropriate strategies that enable them to absorb the risk and adapt. These capacities are linked to a wider, positive environment of social inclusion, supportive relationships and good governance, and to a transformative capacity for resilience.

The STRESS process identified eight essential capacities that Niger needs to develop in order to strengthen resilience to shocks and stresses with which its people are confronted. These capacities do not equate to programs to be implemented, and they are not specifically for the public, private or civil sectors. Rather, they are capacities necessary for Niger to improve the overall state of food security of vulnerable groups.

1. Increased capacity for women to influence and make decisions from local to national level

Half of the adult population's ability to contribute to sustainable development solutions is restricted because of women's reduced access to productive resources, mobility and decision-making. The State has pinpointed the central issues and drawn up some excellent policies in this area in order to mobilize these resources and defend the human rights of every Nigerien. A number of NGO and government programs also stress the importance of financing women's productive activities. Programs that involve men and male adolescents in this transformative process are equally effective. Gaining better access to land, financial services and education, training and organizational skills are all fundamental to developing women's productive capacity.

Nevertheless, historical experiences elsewhere suggest that an increase in income is not sufficient for women to be in a position to influence and make more decisions about their lives, families and the future of their country. Strengthening organizations – at the grass-roots level as well as the national level – that lead open discussions on delicate cultural and developmental issues is essential. These debates help to shape the institutions that concern all citizens while recognizing their differences in terms of talents and priorities.

Networks such as the Coordination of NGOs and Nigerien Women's Associations (CONGAFEN), which fights for women's rights, and the Women's Network for Peace (REFEPA), which works to prevent and manage conflict, can be powerful tools in the quest to advance human rights in Niger.

2. Improved social cohesion and stability

The basis for any improvement to food security is social cohesion and stability at local and national levels. Stability is the result of a variety of practices that provide citizens with the impression that their political, economic and social systems are fair. Among these practices are:

- › Meaningful public participation in important decisions, including that of young people
- › Fair elections
- › Continual ethnic diversity at government and state level
- › Public investment in all regions
- › Creation and open participation of citizen organizations through which people can share their viewpoints on public policy

- › Retention and enhancement of institutions working to reduce and alleviate conflict, such as land use commissions and local faith-based organizations
- › Strong job market, especially for young people
- › Effective coordination and recognition between state, religious and cultural authorities on questions of conflict, gender, finance, etc.

Without stability, all of the capacities listed above are threatened.

3. Improved access to financial services

The three components of food security – availability, access and utilization – depend on having sufficient financial resources to meet growing needs. The problem is that access to financial services, which help to increase productivity, develop businesses and build up personal savings, is currently insufficient.

Additional support for this sector and the involvement of producer organizations able to generate economies of scale for the market can expand the opportunities available. As things stand, people working in livestock fattening make up 40% of microfinance institutions' customer base.⁸² The diversification of this activity into agricultural processing and services providing inputs to agriculture and to the livestock market would increase income, provide jobs, and boost farmers' and pastoralists' productivity.

VSLAs - Village Savings and Loans Associations - play an important role, but unless the amounts and number of loanees increase significantly, their impact will remain limited. Tontines and other local mechanisms, while important for social cohesion, will not be able to generate sufficient capital to be able to change the current food insecurity situation.

Insurance for crops and livestock represents an additional service in this market. Microinsurance can either use mutual-support mechanisms or spread the risk via national or regional insurance products.⁸³ Index insurance constitutes one option: insurance payments depend on certain meteorological observations being above or below a predefined threshold.⁸⁴

Innovations in telephone technology are significantly reducing the cost of banking operations worldwide, and are now having the same effect in Niger. Innovative financial institutions must be in a position to use these systems to expand access to financial services.

Producer organizations could potentially expand the financial services they offer to their members considerably, in the form of credit, savings and insurance. These bodies could represent the interests of their members when dealing with financial institutions, create economies of scale to mobilize finance coming from outside the country, and tailor financial products to members' needs. Organizations such as the Federation of Nigerien Market Gardening Cooperatives (FCMN-Niya) and International Solidarity for Development and Investment (SIDI) have experimented with these approaches with some success, and there is growing experience in the field in Niger.⁸⁵ Private companies can also provide financial services and advice to producers, either in partnership with producer organizations or directly.



82. Bockel, et al., op. cit.

83. Ibid.

84. The International Finance Corporation, The World Bank Group, Implication du secteur privé pour renforcer la résilience de l'agriculture du Niger au changement climatique : évaluation du marché de l'assurance agricole, RMSI, March 2015.

85. Nassirou Talatou and Tahirou Amza, Expert Interview, November 2015.

Warrantage (an inventory credit system) and grain banks have also demonstrated great potential in terms of protecting farmers from price fluctuations and extending credit to rural areas. Warrantage, common in Europe in the 19th century, has been adapted and practiced in Niger since 1999. With this system, farmers use their products as a guarantee to obtain credit from a bank rather than sell their crops immediately. For it to succeed, three key elements must be in place: a farmers' association that works well, a local bank or another financial institution, and a secure storage facility.⁸⁶ These practices are well known and their expansion could lead to the development of the rural finance sector. All of the country's microfinance institutions offer warrantage products, which represented approximately 8% of their portfolio value in 2009. The repayment rate is higher than 97%, but only 5.3% of rural households took advantage of the system in 2004 (versus 3% in 2001), which indicates that there is room to expand.⁸⁷

4. Improved productivity and access to regional markets for agropastoralists and pastoralists

Decades of population growth coupled with a dearth of noteworthy innovative developments in production methods have caused a decline in soil fertility, deforestation, the loss of pastureland and the continuation of conflicts over water and land. Agropastoralists have extended to pastoral areas, often planting in transhumance migration corridors.⁸⁸

Since the key factor for livestock in Niger is mobility, improved range management plans agreed upon by all stakeholders would boost production and reduce conflict. A proper distribution, in both space and time, of watering holes and pastureland along the migration corridors is essential for livestock production and sustainable management. Strengthened pastoralist organizations, the involvement of all stakeholders, good maintenance and improvement of watering points, and well demarcated corridors would all enhance the entire system. Improvements to the animal health infrastructure and to the markets would boost productivity, and would make Nigerien livestock more attractive on international markets.

As far as crops are concerned, several decades of investment aimed at improving agricultural productivity have produced disappointing results.⁸⁹ Certainly, improved seeds and methods are important, but they are unlikely to notably increase food security for the poor and extremely poor without a radical change of approach. As the vast majority of Nigeriens depend on agriculture to varying degrees, it is crucial to promote agroecological approaches, including environmental protection, social organization, the construction of natural, human and social capital, market integration, and resource redundancy and diversity.⁹⁰ Furthermore, isolated efforts that promote just one or two aspects without taking into account the damage to the environment – precisely, to land and water – will not be sufficient.

Focusing on improving rain-fed production of millet will be of very little marginal value, and the same can be said of integrated agroecological techniques. The attention given to the optimal use of crops along the length of rivers, Dallols and koris (small streams) is more promising.

86. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Warrantage au Niger pour doper les revenus agricoles, Rome, 12 April 2010, <http://www.fao.org/news/story/fr/item/41195/icode/>

87. Emilio Hernandez, FAO/AGS, Warrantage in Niger: Adaptation for a developing country, 20 September 2012, <http://www.ruralfinanceandinvestment.org/node/830>

88. By law, each region must organize two consultation processes with all stakeholders twice a year – one during the planting season and one at harvest time – so as to set the date for the release of land for grazing (La Libération des Terres), i.e. the date after which pastoralists can move into agricultural zones. Governors set different dates for each region each year, in accordance with local conditions. The legal framework of improved governance was strengthened considerably in 1993, with the adoption of the current Rural Code, which establishes land use commissions and processes for managing and alleviating conflict. However, the northern boundary of the human migration strip marked out by the Law of 1961 has never been altered, despite the migration of isohyets toward the south and the continuing desertification from the Sahara.

89. "In fact, only 6% of producers use improved seeds, 11% use fertilizer and less than 3% employ modern soil preparation techniques." High Commission for the 3N Initiative, *Prioritaires Résilience du Niger*, February 2015.

90. *Resilience components of agroecological farming systems*, Groundswell (SHARP)

There are considerable resources available that can contribute to this process. Practical knowledge (technical and social) of these methods is important, and there is a solid network of producer organizations that can support both agropastoralists to learn about these methods, as well as technical assistance service providers to understand what agropastoralists really want to know and are capable of doing. At the same time, there are numerous resources that can be used to target female agropastoralists in particular, who traditionally have greater difficulty gaining access to technical assistance, financing and markets than their male counterparts. Several national producer networks include numerous women among their members; in fact, 40% of FMYN-Niya and AREN members are women.⁹¹

These organizations can also play an important role when it comes to making the case for improvements to critical market infrastructure. When these efforts are unified with those of influential actors in the private sector, the general market environment can be improved. Roads, railroads, a reduction in the administrative problems traders face on the road, and a fiscal framework that is favorable to cross-border trade are all types of interventions that would enable the increase of sales outlets for producers and traders.

However, these efforts are weakened by communities that do not take initiative, and by development partners' practices. NGOs, for example, have a narrow focus on technical solutions and often forget that improving food security requires real social change – changes to individuals' practices and the way in which they are organized and access information. Social change of this type requires both improved citizen organizations in villages and at national level, but also a change of approach on the part of development partners, which need to move from implementing technical solutions to facilitating citizen organizations in order to achieve their goals.

Regional trade in particular exhibits strong potential in terms of increasing the value of agriculture and livestock farming. Fostering contacts and trade networks in Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, facilitating cross-border financial transactions, and improving infrastructure are potential initiatives that could help to make the most of this large market. Again, it is agroindustry and producer organizations which ensure both the demand for and the organizational infrastructure for these efforts.

5. Better access to rural and urban employment for vulnerable groups

Income from employment has perhaps the greatest potential to improve food security. The potential productivity gains from agriculture are limited in the short term. Employment, be it local or via emigration, has long been part of the Nigerien food security strategy. In line with global trends, food security in urban zones is higher than in rural areas. In fact, urban zones offer a greater number of markets and more employment opportunities, as well as greater trade, than rural areas, even when the high rates of unemployment and underemployment in African cities are taken into account. Of course, an increase in income does not guarantee an improvement in food security. However, the chances of Niger improving the situation solely in the agricultural and livestock farming sectors are minimal. The public and civil sectors have an important role to play, keeping an eye on the labor market and workers' rights so that they are protected.

The expansion of rural and urban activity would improve employment opportunities for skilled and unskilled individuals. The combination of a more solid financial sector and improved infrastructure (roads, markets, communications), as well as better commercial development services, would multiply opportunities not only for entrepreneurs but also for people looking for a regular wage.

Niger must adopt overall economic development strategies that create conditions to stimulate private sector growth and subsequently generate jobs. It would involve a mix of infrastructure, policy coordination and market

91. Talatou and Amza, op. cit.; Koné and Souley, op. cit.

development. The development of apprenticeship programs may provide a way for businesses to find skilled workers, but also for young people to learn professions that are not available in the traditional school system.

Emigration is a strategy often used by communities in distress. The reduction of costs and risks associated with emigration – transport, harassment en route and difficulties with finding work upon arrival – will increase the usefulness of emigration for individuals. There is room to extend this over the long term, looking to the experience of other West African countries as a guide. Long-term emigration can have consequences for social cohesion when emigrants return to their homeland. However, a more stable job, far from the shocks and stresses of Niger, may also build resilience in the relevant households and communities.

6. Improved access to productive systems for natural resource management

Improving natural resource management is closely tied to a more productive agricultural and livestock sector. There are several important issues to be addressed. First, cultural change is necessary in the ways in which NGOs, the UN and other development partners work with communities. Communities and individuals must assume responsibility for their own development and organizations that support them must play more of a facilitating role. These organizations must build a relationship of support (more than of execution) with communities, focusing on local priorities and responsibilities.

The Rural Code is an important issue for natural resource management, especially for managing multiple conflicts related to land. However, the Code is poorly understood and not well used in some regions. One of the most important parts – the Land Commission system – works successfully where it is used. If it is to function better, the system requires an increased transfer of resources to the local level where conflict has occurred, as well as better training for all institutions involved in its functioning. The process of opening up land for grazing (“la libération de la terre”) must be open and fair each year. Dialogue must continue to include all concerned parties in every region, and pastoralists and agropastoralists must view these decisions as equitable.

Supporting this process means pursuing investments that adequately support livestock farming with water supplies, rangeland and mobility rights. A large part of this process involves government investment in infrastructure and the application of laws and regulations. At the same time, producer organizations can do many things themselves by a) maintaining existing infrastructure and b) taking on an advocacy role at the local, regional and national levels. The creation and implementation of range management plans with the participation of all parties is the foundation of securing investments.

Traditional institutions and value systems that promote social cohesion, such as collective labor, established relationships between farmers and herders, habbanaye, joking relationships between ethnic groups, and so on continue to strengthen social capital and are therefore valuable assets. As the agropastoral system has changed, these institutions have come under pressure. Efforts to maintain them will facilitate transitions within the agropastoral system and support individuals affected by shocks and stresses.

“Our parents never knew the daba and hiler, but we have been forced to become sedentary farmers,”

– OLD FULA FROM DIFFA,
78 YEARS OLD.

Similarly, there is considerable room for expansion in developing water resources with both low and high cost water capture projects. From the household to the national level, there are technologies available to collect rain and surface water for domestic and agricultural use. For small-scale technologies, social organization is probably just as important as financial resources for water collection. For large-scale projects, such as the Kandadji dam and

the Bilma spring, producer organizations can work with the ministries to ensure that these projects are conceived in a way that benefits the greatest number of producers, including women and youth, and so that they create jobs, in addition to the water to be used for production. Irrigation with underground water is the most problematic. The drop in water tables suggests that the promotion of pumping underground water is, at best, a short-term solution and untenable in the long run. India's experience, where this practice has been promoted for decades, suggests that all gains are fleeting at best and include many social costs that it would probably be best to avoid.

7. Improved access to basic social services to strengthen human capital (education, health, social protection)

Niger's vast surface area and low population density make the creation of stable infrastructure in health and education services difficult. Consequently, Niger lags behind other countries in the region in terms of educational level and health status. These problems limit people's ability to develop and implement sufficient food security strategies. Niger ranks below Mali, Senegal and Burkina Faso for maximum distance between students and their school and has the lowest school attendance rate. Niger lags behind other African countries for health coverage, with individuals paying one-third the cost of health care.⁹²

This situation results in low educational and literacy levels, especially among women. Health status is not optimal to meet the challenge of living in a difficult environment. Health and education infrastructure must be improved. At the

same time, many community solutions may be available to deal with these questions locally, if people organize them. Campaigns aimed at increasing education for girls and women, locally organized literacy courses (especially for women), community health programs as well as community counseling programs may improve the infrastructure.

In the area of sanitation, it is important for households to improve their sanitary, health and nutritional practices. Gains in production and revenue are reduced by the poor capacity to use the available food. Although public sanitary infrastructure is useful, in reality, communities must manage their own toilets and potable water supplies in the short term. External organizations, such as the government, civil society and the private sector may assist, but the responsibility and initiative must come from the communities themselves.

At the same time, couples must recognize the importance of family planning and reduce premature pregnancies. To support this effort, couples need access to affordable contraception, and development organizations must be a part of a long-term cultural transition to stabilize population growth.



Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2014

92. Deon Filmer, *If You Build It, Will They Come? School Availability and School Enrollment in 21 Poor Countries*, World Bank Publications, 2004, p. 5, 16.

8. Improved access to social protection and disaster risk reduction programs for vulnerable groups to preserve productive assets in the event of multiple shocks and stresses

Many adaptive strategies used by vulnerable people are, in reality, negative strategies. The sale of livestock is a significant strategy that works well when there are sufficient animals and when the sale does not deplete a household's herd. Exodus is a key element of most households' food security strategy, but when it affects the ability to manage a business or move with animals, it simply transfers risk from one activity to another.

The right to social protection is guaranteed in the 2012 constitution, specifically, justice and social solidarity, the right to medical services and assistance, the protection of senior citizens, and the protection of people with disabilities. Solid social protection programs and disaster risk reduction can help people conserve their productive assets when crises occur and reestablish themselves more quickly. Niger currently has an excellent institutional Early Warning System for shocks, specifically for those that are climate and market-related, that provides frequent and detailed reports. However, the warnings do not easily reach the potential users on the ground and, inversely, information from farmers and pastoralists does not easily return to the higher levels of the system. Improving the function of these critical assets will assist millions of people to anticipate and prepare for shocks before they occur.

There are also excellent practices for managing seasonal price fluctuations, primarily warrantage and grain banks. However, the value of these systems is often weakened by free distribution of food by the government or NGOs. Targeted government programs that purchase food from grain banks and through warrantage, and which support or in some cases subsidize the creation of grain banks, could use existing markets to reward local production and reduce uncertainty for local households.

The creation of crop and/or livestock insurance or micro-insurance spreads risk and assists households to manage shocks during bad years. The private sector's involvement is essential in generating the necessary capital and incentives for sustainability. While these programs may be difficult to manage when a large number of producers are subject to the same negative event, other countries' experience could be used to implement such a system.

In the case of civil conflict, the Land Commissions system has an essential role in mitigating conflict before it becomes too advanced. Concerning the effects of international conflict that has spilled over into Niger, however, it is much more difficult to manage violence stemming from ideological differences. Nevertheless, there are emergency programs aimed at helping families who are displaced or whose means of production are threatened. Human rights training for security forces may reduce the tension between those forces and individuals, and programs may help young people to find an alternative to recruitment by Boko Haram and thereby reduce the associated negative impacts. Coalitions of peacemaking organizations may also reinforce the message that there is little to be gained and much to be lost through violence.

For social protection programs to be efficient, transparent and targeted, end users and public organizations must be organized to monitor these programs and maintain their objectives. Government institutions are already in place, and many programs are well financed (at least during critical years). However, they continue to encounter difficulties in transparently targeting those in need. Public expenditures for social protection and health as a percentage of GDP were 4.2% in sub-Saharan Africa in 2010-2011, while Niger dedicated only 2.91%, and ranks in the bottom third of African countries.⁹³ Networks within civil society, such as ROASSN (Network of Healthcare Organizations and Associations in Niger) may play an essential role in monitoring these programs and helping them to succeed.

93. International Labor Organization, World Social Protection Report 2014/15: Building Economic Recovery, Inclusive Development and Social Justice, 2014.



Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2014

SECTION VII: **PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS**

1. Recommendations for strengthening resilience in food security programs

This analysis of resilience describes the capacities that Niger must develop to increase and maintain food security. These are not Mercy Corps' or other NGO's capacities, although Mercy Corps must develop programs that contribute to strengthening some of these capacities. To do this, there are many implications for Mercy Corps' programs.

Focus on governance and organization – In all development sectors of Niger, there are development partners or technical solutions. However, after decades of intervention and billions of CFAs spent on humanitarian and development assistance, Niger remains one of the countries with the highest level of food insecurity in the world. Although technical solutions are important, the most important is the social change that occurs when people organize themselves to meet their own needs and promote their own interests. That is why supporting organizations, including youth groups, women's groups, livestock farmers, or anyone involved in a specific sector is essential for several reasons: a) to ensure that the people truly want the intervention, b) to increase the chances of success, since people will support success, and c) to increase the chances of sustainability, since people are organized in the first place to support a cause and are often not dependent on funds from outside donors. Although the government has an essential role in protecting stability, the creation and maintenance of physical infrastructure and the creation of supportive policies, it is important to overcome the current mentality that implies the government is responsible for everything and that individuals are just beneficiaries of government services.

Promote jobs and businesses – Niger will obtain a large part of its food security from agriculture and livestock for many years to come. However, the transition to a more diversified economy has already begun and constitutes a huge potential to increase food security in the short term. Job growth is a complex undertaking: skills, finances, infrastructure and markets must all work together to make the economy grow. However, this task can be accomplished on small, medium and large scales. Economic growth with guarantees for workers' rights and environmental protection will facilitate the transition from agriculture to rural and urban jobs. This transition is already taking place and must accelerate if we want to have an impact on food insecurity.

Human capital – The combination of limited roles for women and the lack of possibilities for youth weaken Niger's human resources potential. Experience shows that all of society benefits greatly when women's health and education are improved. Reduction in the birth rate gives women the freedom to increase their economic contribution and to give birth to healthy children. Many types of interventions can help: assisting women to generate more income, increase their participation in decision making at the local and national levels, and support them to organize locally to solve local conflicts, initiate sanitation projects, or increase the basic level of education. These types of supporting interventions with national women's organizations are essential to begin this process and to guide difficult cultural changes that are already taking place. In any case, this has to move forward much more rapidly to reduce food insecurity. Types of support could be financial but also includes making sure women have quality participating in meetings and events, contributing to management roles where possible, and development of support programs for young women to acquire skills and build networks.

Change the approach to agriculture and livestock production – After several decades of excellent agricultural programs for vulnerable groups, it is time to recognize that the increase in productivity of rain fed millet has had little impact on food security in the short or medium term. Agricultural programs must recognize the potential for irrigation, from small to large scale, using all available surface water resources. At the same time, these programs must underline Niger's comparative advantage in livestock production and improve animal health services and production infrastructure as well as commercialization and implementation of range management plans. As we stated above, support for pastoral organizations increases pastoralists' ability to promote their interests and take on responsibility for their own progress.

2. Required capacities for Mercy Corps

The present analysis suggests several areas where Mercy Corps personnel should enhance their capacity and experience.

Understanding social change

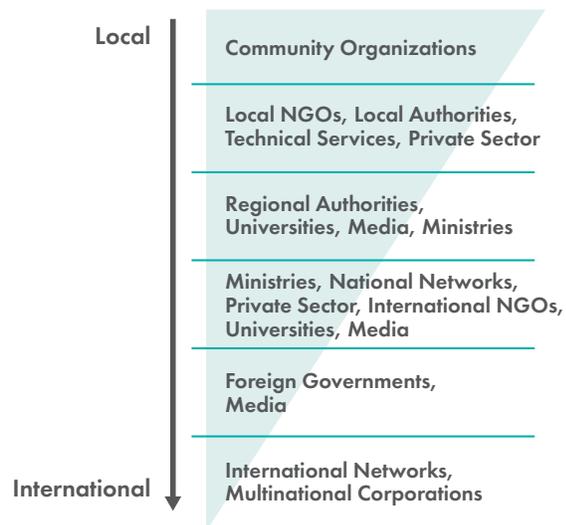
A systems approach encourages going beyond the technical aspects to understand the larger social, economic and environmental forces that influence results. For example, the many excellent technical solutions to agricultural challenges have not resolved Niger's problems after decades of effort by intelligent and devoted people and involved communities. Sustainable development solutions are actually the product of deep social change. And so successful development work requires a deeper understanding of how societies change and how to promote that..

There are many conceptual frameworks for understanding social change, but a simple one is the following. Successful change initiatives do the following:

- › **Create a supporting organizational infrastructure** – strengthen organizations, networks and organizational leadership from the local to the national and international levels that focus on the problems
- › **Mobilize resources** – attract volunteers, make contacts in important institutions such as government departments and media, raise funds and in-kind donations
- › **Change agendas** – transform the way of thinking about a problem to make solutions more apparent. For NGOs in Niger, our approach to intervention must be changed to counteract the widespread mentality of expectation of assistance. Agreements should be signed with communities for their contributions when outside support is provided. An evaluation must be made by each actor/NGO to ensure that benefits are owned and to progressively transfer responsibility for the investments to these communities.
- › **Take advantage of opportunities** – when unplanned opportunities arise, use them to help your program grow; for example, using a drought to draw attention to the importance of long-term solutions.

At the same time, it is important to understand that it is rare for the actions of one or two organizations, even when they come from important ministries, to result in major changes. In reality, social change is usually the result of a complex interaction between public, private and non-governmental organizations at many levels. Knowing the major actors in a specific problem, those who can influence them, and how to act is an investment in success. A good understanding of governance includes realizing that technical solutions alone rarely succeed and that governance implies much more than simply the government.

The diagram on the right presents examples of different organizations at different social levels that may be involved in making successful social change. Not all changes require all levels or all types. And Mercy Corps doesn't need to work at all of them, but it is important when putting together a program strategy to have an analysis that understands who has influence over what.



Partnerships

In considering a successful development project as an example of social change, it becomes clear that such success is difficult to achieve without good partnerships with other organizations. No organization can be competent in all areas, so—as this analysis shows—to bring about the desired change it is important to find other organizations with the best skills. In addition, sustainable development work often requires that beneficiaries themselves create some of the institutions bringing about change and ensuring its continuation. Women’s groups, producer organizations, village organizations, traders’ organizations, etc., all represent their own interests. These groups are important not only because they are motivated to work and maintain the gains achieved, but because they provide a voice for their members, which outside organizations cannot. They speak as their members, and not just for them.

The big questions that organizations work on require large coalitions of organizations – technical, member, donor, government and others – because these questions are truly difficult to answer and involve many different issues. Learning to work in coalitions is a precious skill that will allow an organization to make progress in its mission. Different organizations have different styles, agendas, skill levels, languages and cultures, and the processes used must take these differences into account.

The skills required are related more to facilitation than to execution. Even in working with local communities, the emphasis must be on facilitating:

- › Procedures for determining priorities,
- › Development of local management,
- › Support for community organizations,
- › Regional and national networks,
- › Locating technical and financial resources.

These activities can work at all levels – local, regional, national and even international.

Advocacy

This systems analysis shows that one part of the solution to most of Niger’s current problems requires change in governance, whether at the local, regional or national level. Having done analysis, the solution may require that organizations become more efficient in influencing other actors, at whatever level they may be. These actors may come from the public or private sectors or may be NGOs. No matter who is involved, determining who needs to be influenced and how is essential for success. Advocacy is a long-term effort and rarely achieves direct results. Understanding advocacy’s incremental success may help to provide support and show how to adapt as programs progress.

3. Areas that require deeper understanding

The STRESS process has revealed several areas in which a deeper understanding is needed in the future to develop strategies and programs.

Agricultural and livestock policy

While workshops and data sources have revealed a wealth of information on current policies, a more complex understanding of a) how effective these policies are, b) who develops them and how they are influenced, and c) what gaps exist, is necessary to better understand how to improve food security.

Social services

Which communities are poorly served by social services and why? How does the level of access to various services affect their food security?

Local and regional markets

Taking into account the increased dependence of poor and very poor households on purchasing food to meet their needs and the importance of importing food from neighboring countries, how do shocks/stresses affect the principal local/regional markets? Given that the main constraints identified are the mediocre transportation system and agricultural/livestock processing infrastructure, it would be very useful to gain a better, more detailed picture of the overall context. For example, the location of processing facilities near high production areas and the transaction costs of imported and exported goods including taxes and tariffs.

Employment and finance

In general the best ways to expand employment and finance are critical areas that need to be further explored. This is an enormously complicated area that vexes policy makers the world over, yet it is so important to improving food security that we need to understand it better. Job creation and finance are two separate realms, but the end result – more income from employment for vulnerable groups – is similar so they are grouped here for brevity.

Approaches to influencing food policies and systems

The STRESS analysis indicates that food systems are affected by national policy, agricultural and pastoral practices, shocks and stresses including climate change, regional markets, and many other aggravating factors. Deciding which institutions are most influential and what approach to take to influence them is a long-term learning project that will make all other work more effective.

Building coalitions connecting grassroots with policy makers

No analysis or skill can substitute for the creation of organizations in which individuals represent themselves as well as their own interests. These may include livestock producers, off-season farmers, women, young people, traders or any other group. These groups have both the motivation and the legitimacy to work together to find solutions to their problems. Mercy Corps can be an essential ally in helping them achieve their objectives, but more understanding is required how best to support coalitions and how Nigerien organisations can influence policymaking.

Conflict and social cohesion

How does social cohesion affect the ability to manage shocks and stresses generated by conflicts, such as those associated with Boko Haram, and what effect does conflict have on social cohesion? Which populations are most vulnerable to recruitment by Boko Haram (youth, Kanuri populations, refugees?) and what resilience capacities and/or what strategies exist that will allow communities to absorb, adapt and transform?

The Niger STRESS process examined the complex relationships between social, economic and ecological factors and food security. Four out of five Nigeriens are involved in agriculture and livestock production, but more than half count on the market to meet most of their food needs. Jobs and businesses are usually not sufficient for filling gaps in food requirements and consequently, the country has experienced frequent food emergencies. Almost half of children younger than five years old are undernourished and the acute malnutrition rate regularly reaches the critical level. Since Niger is hemmed in by the edge of the Sahara, conditions are difficult and options are limited for improving the current situation.



Photo Credit: S. Sheridan 2014

SECTION VIII: **CONCLUSION**

Niger faces a number of shocks and stresses that affect food security. Frequent droughts, very little rain, highly variable food prices, animal disease, conflict and gender based violence test people's ability to maintain their food security. Systemic constraints make these challenges difficult to manage: weaknesses in the transportation, communications, market and finance infrastructure, weakness in governmental and civil society organizational structures and gender discrimination. The poor level of healthcare and education creates a vicious cycle that is difficult to break and makes overcoming shock and stresses even harder. In this context, vulnerable people diversify their livelihoods as much as possible. Most combine agricultural and livestock farming, small businesses, jobs and migration, and rely on their social networks when times are hard. Unfortunately, in many cases, their social networks face the same challenges and systemic constraints.



The STRESS process has identified absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities that Niger must strengthen to break this cycle of chronic food insecurity. The improved capacity for women to influence and control decisions from local to national levels as well as improvement in social cohesion and stability create conditions for people to be able to use their creativity and find the means to increase their individual capacities. Adaptive capacities

require increased economic opportunity through an improved financial services system and an expanded job market. These require increased commercial opportunities and enhanced agricultural and livestock productivity, improved natural resources management and increased human capital through investments in education, health and social protection. Finally, support to vulnerable people to allow them to maintain their productive assets when threatened by shocks and stresses can protect their ability to recover more quickly after disasters.

In conclusion, there are no newly discovered technologies or technical solutions that can resolve this situation. This analysis showed that unlocking transformative capacity is fundamental to enable progress across all sectors. In reality, progress must come from increased individual and collective responsibility for development, and from concentrating on the larger constraints and governance problems that currently prevent Niger from advancing.

Unlocking transformative capacity is fundamental to enable progress across all sectors.

IX. Appendices

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Experts Consulted

1. **Peter Gubbels**, Groundswell International, Sahel Working Group, 23 November 2015
2. **Isaaka Lona**, AGRHYMET, 18 November 2015
3. **Martial Traore**, AGRHYMET, 7 December 2015
4. **Yacouba Hama Abdou**, National Technical Coordinator, FEWSNET, 25 November 2015
5. **Madeleine**, High Commissioner for the 3N Initiative, 24 November 2015
6. **Elhadji Ide Djermakoye**, National Coordinator of Protecso-Niger, Africa Platform for Social Protection, 23 November 2015
7. **Amal Redwan**, Knowledge Management Coordinator, SAREL (Sahel Resilience Learning), 27 November 2015
8. **Djibril Sadou**, SIMA, 19 November 2015
9. **Bill Rastetter**, Country Representative, CRS, 23 November 2015
10. **Ms. Kako Fatima**, Women for Peace Network, Coordination of Non-Governmental Organizations and Women's Organizations of Niger (CONGAFEN), Ministry of Justice, 1 December 2015
11. **Amanaya Irrichid**, Boubacar Moussa, Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, 19 November 2015
12. **Hali Adamou**, Head Office for the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children, 25 November 2015
13. **Dr. Sayo Amadou**, Country Director Niger, Veterinarians Without Borders, 20 November 2015
14. **Nassirou Talatou**, Tahirou Amza, Program Manager, Director, the Federation of Truck Farmer Cooperatives in Niger (FCMN-Niya), 1 December 2015
15. **Florence Bron-Saidatou**, Chamber of Agricultural Network (RECA), 1 December 2015

List of Key Informants

1. **Abdoulwahab Salifou**, Director, Department of Territorial Management and Community Development Plan/Gothey, 18-19 November 2015
2. **Secretary General of the Gothey prefecture**, 18 November 2015
3. **Alhouza Idi Maliki**, Department of the Environment, Public Health and Sustainable Development /Gothey, 18 November 2015
4. **Adamou Kalidou**, Director, Department of Livestock /Gothey and Department of Agriculture/Gothey, 18 November 2015
5. **Alphari Mohamed Boubacar**, Agriculture Agent, Department of Agriculture/Bermo, 16 November 2015
6. **Elh Madougou Maidouka**, Director/ Department of Livestock/ Mirriah, 16 November 2015
7. **Moutaei Nouhou**, Deputy Director, Department of Livestock/ Mirriah, 18 November 2015
8. **Magagi Chémaou**, Director, Department of Agriculture/ Mirriah, 18 November 2015
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11. **Boureima Sidikou**, Department of Livestock/Loga, 17 November 2015
12. **Lilia Souleymane**, Director, Department of Water/Mainé Soroa, 19 November 2015
13. **Soumaila Sido**, Director, Director, Department of Territorial Management and Community Development Plan/Loga, 17 November 2015
14. **Tawan Ittiwane**, CSI Chief (Center for Integrated Health)/Tillia, 16 November 2015
15. **Dr. Ahmed Moustapha**, Director, Department of Livestock / Tahoua, 19 November 2015
16. **Katiella Mai Dodo**, Director, Department of Livestock /Diffa, 18 November 2015
17. **Mamadou Moustapha**, Director, Department of Agriculture/ Mirriah/Diffa, 18 November 2015

STRESS Workshop Partners

AGRHYMET

Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Catastrophes et Crises Alimentaires

FEWSNET

Groupement des Aides Privés

Haut Commissariat à l'Initiative 3N

Institut National de Statistiques

Ministère du Commerce et de la Promotion du Secteur Privé - Système d'Information sur les Marchés Agricoles

Ministère de l'Elevage

Ministère de la Population, de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant

NASA

Protesco / Africa Platform for Social Protection

REGIS-ER (NCBA CLUSA)

ROASSN

SAREL: Sahel Resilience Learning

USAID Office of Food for Peace

Université Abdou Moumouni

Links to Additional STRESS Outputs

1. **Complete map of systems** – Analysis of economic, social and ecological systems performed at the Scoping workshop can be found [online](#).
2. **Reference terms** for the Focus Groups can be found [online](#).
3. **Niger STRESS hazards map** – The map showing interactions of shocks and stress and some systemic constraints can be found [online](#).
4. **Vulnerability maps** – Two in-depth studies of vulnerability by region can be found [online](#).

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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