Cooperation between the Niger and FAO dates back to the 1960s when the country joined FAO and it was further strengthened with the establishment of an FAO Representation in Niamey in 1978. Early interventions focused on food security and sustainable agriculture and rural development, including a focus on improved planning and institutional development and strengthening of producers organizations. More recently, the focus has shifted to include emergency support and resilience building for vulnerable communities facing chronic food insecurity.

**Matching FAO’s expertise to Niger’s development priorities**

FAO assistance in the Niger is shaped by the 2013-2016 FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF), which is centred on three priority areas:

- Strengthening vulnerable populations’ resilience to food and nutrition and insecurity shocks, building their capacity in sustainable management of natural resources, and enabling them to anticipate risks and face food and nutrition crisis
- Increasing, diversifying and promoting agricultural, pastoral, forestry and fishery production, through the modernization and diversification of the production systems, as well as the promotion of best practices for increased rural income
- Creating an enabling political and institutional environment for agriculture development and achieving food and nutrition security, through the development of an appropriate legal framework and capacity building within public and private institutions

Jointly developed with the Government and other partners, the CPF reflects relevant priorities in key national development policies, including the Economic and Social Development Plan 2012-2015, the Investment Plan for the 3N Initiative (Nigeriens nourish Nigeriens), as well as the sectoral policies including the National Population Policy (PNP), the National Nutrition Policy (PNN), the National Gender Policy (PNG) and the National Social Protection Policy (PNPS). The CPF is fully aligned with the UN Development Assistance Framework for the Niger and contributes to FAO’s regional and global priorities.

**Award-winning practices: agricultural input shops and microfinance schemes**

The Niger is prone to recurrent food crises, which compound the challenges faced by an already food-insecure population. The causes include rapid population growth and high food prices as well as climatic and environmental factors.

To increase agricultural production and strengthen food security, FAO implemented a five-year multipartner project focusing on access to quality fertilizers and financial and advisory services. Between 2008 and 2013, a vast network of 264 agro-input shops was opened and 100 warehouses were built for storing harvest produce. The initiative reached 100 000 smallholder farmers in over a half of the country’s agricultural villages. In addition to fertilizers and seeds, the input shops offer plant protection and other advisory services.

Farmers were introduced to new agricultural techniques for increased productivity and they received training in joint fertilizer ordering, management of agro-input shops, book-keeping and business management. The results were immediately evident, with significant increases reported for sorghum and millet yields.

Another major component of the initiative was the promotion of innovative micro-finance schemes, including two key mechanisms: i) an inventory credit system referred to as warrantage, where farmers stock part of their harvest to obtain credit from a bank; and ii) a 653 000 euro fund, which was set up by the project as a guarantee for loans requested by eligible farmers. As a result, eight farmer federations were able to access credit for agro-business activities, and the national Union of Producer Federations (GATANCI) was created. The initiative also resulted in 375 farmers field schools, 750 demonstration sessions and 100 warrantage warehouses, benefiting almost 7 500 farmers.

The project won first prize in the EXPO 2015 competition for Best Sustainable Development Practices – category: Quantitative and Qualitative Enhancement of Crop Products.

**Project: Intensification of agriculture by strengthening a network of cooperative input shops (IARBIC). Implemented by FAO in collaboration with the Niger’s Ministry of Agriculture and other development partners. Funded by: Belgium, EU, Luxembourg, Spain and the Niger.**