



Gender-sensitive income-generating activities in the Niger

Promoting the central importance of the economic and social roles of women in the context of the Rome-based Agencies Resilience Initiative

Context

In the Niger, rural populations, especially women and children, are particularly affected by poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition. This is compounded by recurrent crises, climate change, conflict and insecurity, economic shocks, and the poor level of basic services and the governance of common resources. Furthermore, the loss of farmland due to desertification and rapid population growth has led to farming of marginal areas and rapid depletion of natural resources. Persistent disparities between men and women, especially in terms of literacy and a lack of access to basic services and markets, along with inequity in land and property rights, constitute obstacles to development (FAO, 2019a).

According to the Global Report on Food Crises 2023, approximately 18 percent of the population of the Niger, representing 4.4 million Nigeriens across some 20 departments, lives in a food crisis (FSIN, 2023). The number of people living with acute food insecurity is on the rise due to escalating violence, conflicts, the internal displacement of populations, high food prices and deteriorating weather conditions in 2021 and 2022, in addition to floods and cyclical droughts, the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and the impacts of the war in Ukraine.

The security situation in this area of the Sahel remains critical with many areas affected by conflict, in particular the Liptako-Gourma, the Lake Chad basin and the Maradi region. Agriculture is severely affected and increased conflict often impedes access to agricultural land, forcing farmers to reduce the areas for cultivation or to abandon certain crops (FAO, 2019a).

The food and nutrition situation in the Niger is increasingly worrying. The results of the national nutrition survey in November 2021 showed that the prevalence of global acute malnutrition in children under five years of age was 12.5 percent (15.1 percent for boys and 11.8 percent for girls), which remains above the World Health Organization's 10 percent threshold (FAO, 2022).

Between 2017 and 2023, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), worked in the Niger to

Key fact



Geographical coverage

Republic of the Niger, Maradi and Zinder regions



United Nations. 2018. Niger. In: *United Nations Geospatial*. New York. [Cited 11 May 2023].
<https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/niger>



Target beneficiaries

- 10 intervention sites across 56 villages, approximately 60 515 beneficiaries.
- 408 community organizations received training and mentoring to reinforce their capacities.

implement an innovative programme funded by the Government of Canada to co-create activities between the three agencies. This programme sought to strengthen resilience for improved food security and nutrition, based on close cooperation between the offices of the United Nations Rome-based Agencies (RBAs), in the Niger, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Somalia. This collaboration drew on the experience, added value and tools of each agency to support some of the most vulnerable communities through integrated, contextualized assistance measures, with a focus on gender and nutrition.

The goal of this good practice is to present the commitment of the three RBAs in promoting the central role of women in the Niger, showcasing FAO's activities on:

- nutrition and family practices;
- capacity development and training of women's organizations;
- strengthening of women's leadership; and
- technical assistance for the processing, preservation, and marketing of agricultural products.





The programme

The RBA resilience initiative sought to strengthen resilience by helping people to face and survive conflict, while contributing more broadly to their economic development. In this context, **the development of income-generating activities was an important development factor for communities in the Niger.**

In the Niger, this joint programme was carried out in collaboration with the government in two municipalities: Chadakori (Maradi region) and Dogo (Zinder region). These municipalities had been identified in line with the government's initiative called "Nigériens Nourishing Nigériens", which aims to create programmatic, thematic and geographic synergies among stakeholders to improve the resilience of vulnerable communities through government-owned and community-led responses.

The RBA programme in the Niger had the following main objectives:

- respond to immediate food needs;
- sustainably increase food security; and
- strengthen the resilience of families exposed to food insecurity.

In order to enable women and women's groups to gain in autonomy within their communities, the programme had to overcome several challenges linked to: literacy, training on management of a commercial activity, access to credit and cash advances to start an activity, access to energy, and the enhancement of women's leadership in society.

To this end, measures and actions implemented were defined in the target communities through participatory planning. These measures sought to protect and enhance people's food sources and livelihoods by restoring and supporting their production assets, improving links with markets while building their technical and commercial capacities.

Key elements of collaboration among the RBAs

An analysis of field activities as well as testimonials and feedback, revealed that the collaboration between the United Nations RBAs and the Government of the Niger was successful due to the following main factors:

Joint planning and programming:

- The design and planning of activities to be implemented in the joint areas of intervention were based on WFP's "Three-Pronged Approach" for resilience-building, an advisory process that puts populations and partners at the heart of the planning process.
- The definition of a shared vision and objectives allowed to determine the roles and responsibilities of each agency in the programme's operational and strategic implementation.

The establishment of an inter-agency coordination team at national level:

- The selection of a national coordinator jointly funded by the three agencies made it possible to pool efforts and expertise, to report on the implementation process to a coordination centre, and to facilitate communication between agencies for the programming of activities.

The complementarity and harmonization of activities:

The RBAs harmonized their interventions to combine their respective efforts:

- WFP targeted populations most exposed to food insecurity through its food assistance programmes for asset creation.
- Once the natural resource base was restored, FAO supported farmer field schools through training in climate-resilient agricultural practices to boost production, increase incomes and support livelihoods diversification. This complemented IFAD's investments in linking farmers to markets and enabled WFP to provide more support to farmers through local procurements.
- IFAD also played a key role in strengthening local producer organizations, promoting greater access to rural financial services, and improving community governance of scarce natural resources.
- Communication between agencies, based on a synergy of actions, has improved the impact of programmes in the field. This entailed a joint intervention with well-targeted action times and pooling of resources, so that activity packages are consistent in developing the capacity of beneficiaries.

A programmatic approach facilitating community participation in programme implementation:

Guaranteeing the effective participation of populations, especially women and youth, in the activities implemented by each agency required:

- Facilitating a system of peer exchange and training within the Dimitra Clubs set up by FAO in all the villages involved. This enabled women and youth to learn about the issues at stake in the proposed activities, to dialogue with other members of the community and to commit to carrying out the proposed activities.
- Strengthening women's capacity in analysis, synthesis, and public speaking, which helped them find their voice, take part in decision-making processes at the local level, and consequently to strengthen their individual and collective leadership within their households and society.
- Enabling agents of the various RBAs to better coordinate their efforts with the Dimitra Clubs and thereby increase the level of community participation in interactions with the populations targeted by the interventions.

The generation of solid data through impact assessments:

- FAO's resilience index measurement and analysis (RIMA) model was used to measure the impact of interventions on household resilience and thus help monitor and assess activities in the field. Monitoring and evaluation processes enabled an analysis of the impact of the actions carried out as well as the amendment of certain interventions that did not yield the expected results. The information compiled was used to improve the coordination process and joint interventions.

To continue strengthening the collaboration between agencies in the future, it would be important to:

- develop communication on actions carried out by each agency and coordination at the regional level to carry out joint actions in the field;
- strengthen the implementation of common methodological approaches to improve the impact of the programme on the targeted communities;
- harmonize the choice of beneficiaries during the design and implementation of actions to increase capacity strengthening.



Organisation des Nations Unies
pour l'alimentation
et l'agriculture

Programme des agences des Nations Unies basées à Rome (RBA) sur la résilience

Village de Kouroungoussaou - Région de Maradi

- Kit de transformation d'arachide et des céréales
- AGR individuelles et collectives
- Mise en place de l'Association Village
d'Epargne et de Crédit (AVEC)

fafo

Financement : Canada



Conjointement mise en oeuvre avec





Methodological approach

Local capacity development was guaranteed by the variety of approaches implemented:

- The identification of women's organizations took place in Chadakori, starting with the identification of all existing (old and newly created) women's groups in the intervention area. **This study helped gather information on the organizational and financial situation of women's groups, detect their capacity strengths and weaknesses, and design a capacity development plan.** Thus ten groups received training in processing of millet and peanuts as well small livestock breeding of goats and chickens (FAO, 2019a).
- **Gender-sensitive planning and management mechanisms** were implemented at community level during the first year of the programme through the creation of Dimitra Clubs and the reinforcement or creation of community management committees with a balanced composition of female and male members (FAO, 2018).
- With regard to **nutrition**, a communication plan on essential family practices was developed and implemented; nutrition awareness and education campaigns for students and teachers were conducted; knowledge-building campaigns on locally available micronutrient-rich foods, malnutrition prevention and culinary techniques were offered to actors in the target communities; and, lastly, advisory support was provided to community workers and government healthcare workers on nutrition (FAO, 2018).
- **Technical and capacity development assistance acknowledging the specific needs of men and women**, both in technical areas as well as general, non-technical skills (interpersonal, emotional, leadership and communication skills, etc.) was provided through:
 - training of women's organizations (credit, oil extraction, microenterprises) (FAO, 2019a);
 - strengthening of target groups, mainly through the Dimitra Clubs approach, related to organizational, analytical and solution-seeking capacities, expression and participation in decision-making and local development, as well as women's leadership, all of which entailed considerable involvement by women and youth (FAO, 2019a); and



- training on the storage, preservation, sustainable processing, and marketing of agricultural products.

- **Access to income-generating activities and productive investments**

was facilitated through support and funding. This initiative led to the improvement of various activities, including:

- production and marketing of sugar cane;
- production and marketing of moringa;
- fattening of cows, sheep, and goats;
- extraction of sesame and peanut oil;
- production and marketing of tree seedlings, etc.

- Several actions to foster the **economic empowerment and leadership of women and youth** were carried out including:

- raising awareness of existing funding opportunities;
- promoting collective and individual income-generating activities in the context of microenterprises;
- facilitating access to productive investments;
- study trips and the exchange of experiences;
- increasing support through the Dimitra Clubs;
- participating in trade fairs for locally processed products; and
- establishing more than 400 gender-sensitive farmers' organizations, with growing female leadership with women as chairpersons of cooperatives and mixed unions (FAO, 2022).

Capacity development of local partners: the case of peanut oil extraction

In the municipality of Chadakori (Madari), women's oil extraction organizations were supported through capacity development activities to make them more productive and competitive in their market, specifically through:

- entrepreneurial training on community organizations and business plans, thanks to training modules based on a participatory and inclusive approach, with the aim of fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and encouraging participants to start a business at the local level; and
- the allocation of more modern and efficient equipment and materials: the distributed machine kits consisted

of a peanut shelling machine, a peanut paste mill, a gas roaster, a peanut cleaner and a motorized oil extractor.

To maximize, pool and render the use of these machines profitable, farmers' organizations were encouraged to form a union (GSC Taimakon Manoma, 2021).

With support of the oil extraction equipment, **27 women's groups embarked on the agrifood processing of peanuts as well as the production of couscous, spaghetti and soap**. In total, the intervention reached 455 women compared to 200 as initially planned (FAO, 2021).

Dimitra Clubs share technical knowledge gained through the programme

The FAO's Dimitra Clubs approach facilitates an empowerment process whereby men and women of all ages come together in a safe space for dialogue and action, to identify and analyse their problems and concerns before implementing endogenous solutions through collective actions using their own resources.

In the regions of Maradi and Zinder, **300 Dimitra Clubs** (with approximately 900 members, 60 percent being women) **were established by the joint programme in 66 villages.**

In every village, the clubs compiled a list of actions carried out by the programme and positioned themselves to facilitate the carrying out of activities and reproduce the results on a large scale. At their own initiative, human and financial resources were mobilized to enable each member to take ownership of the knowledge conveyed by the programme. This appropriation is seen, even by the beneficiary communities, as ensuring the sustainability of the programme's actions and achievements.

The Dimitra Clubs decided to transfer knowledge on how to make compost. They therefore took the initiative to invite the 20 people trained during the programme to explain the process of building pits and composting techniques for the benefit of the entire community. As a result, 20 tonnes of compost were produced in the space of two weeks in 25 villages. Composting has many advantages associated with improving soil fertility, quality and biodiversity, and reducing ecological risks. Learning this technique is therefore crucial to improving agricultural productivity while also protecting the environment.

Thanks to the momentum facilitated by the clubs and collaboration with community radio stations, this knowledge transfer transcended the borders of the villages and municipalities targeted by the programme.

Through special broadcasts, radio stations conveyed the information to all surrounding villages, which sparked enthusiasm among communities not yet been reached by the programme.





Results and impacts

Management of Dimitra Clubs strengthens the leadership of women and helps ensure the sustainability of community-wide activities.

Throughout the programme, the actions carried out helped reinforcing the capacity of women and men of all ages in two separate areas that contribute to resilience and empowerment, namely the:

- Improvement of intra-community dialogue, involvement and participation in decision-making processes; and
- Development of income-generating activities through training, exchange visits, provision of equipment, and institutional strengthening of organizations.

Among the most significant results and impacts, it should be noted that:

- Participatory and gender-sensitive community planning and management mechanisms proved that **management of the Dimitra clubs strengthens women's leadership and helps ensure the sustainability of community-wide activities** (FAO, 2018).
- Gender-sensitive capacity development of the target groups enabled the creation of a **platform for open discussion about women's leadership**. In total, two awareness-raising and training sessions were organized for 784 women paving the way for their empowerment (FAO, 2019a).
- **Training on storage, preservation and processing of agricultural products** benefited 329 women grouped together in farmers' organizations. Topics included good practices such as improved grain storage techniques; advantages and disadvantages of different storage locations; precautions to be taken before storing grain; and demonstrating how to exhibit piles of goods in a store (FAO, 2021).



© FAO/Moumouni Agali

Sustainability, replicability and upscaling

The sustainability and replicability of these practices can be ensured if several conditions are met, such as:

- **Women's literacy:** women's power of action is strengthened when they can read and write. This paves the way to improving women's resilience by enabling them to control the planning of their business activities and the preparation of their budget forecasts and final accounts for good business management (FAO, 2019b).
- **Female leadership:** involvement in governance mechanisms strengthens the role of women in the social life of their communities (FAO, 2019b).
- **Strengthened agricultural and rural entrepreneurship:** training women's groups in business management helps them better manage their financial resources, while developing their business activity. The establishment of a village savings and loans association within groups helps improve social cohesion and women's empowerment (FAO, 2019b).
- **Reduced women's workload in the fields:** increasing women's empowerment goes also through their increased capacity to carry out other activities, such as market gardening, and their diversified sources of income. Technological solutions such as the creation of an irrigation system or the installation of a solar energy source are technological solutions that can help women optimize their time and reduce the arduous nature of most of their tasks (FAO, 2019b).
- **Facilitated access to loans and setting up working capital:** to be competitive in the market, it is important to offer women's groups access to funds that support the financing and development of their business activities (FAO, 2019b).
- **A community involvement approach:** The Dimitra Clubs provide a gateway to launch and accelerate other activities and develop community self-confidence, especially among women and youth.



Key learnings

The RBA programme strengthened the resilience of livelihoods for targeted households by:

- facilitating access to production factors;
- improving women's education through training activities; and
- facilitating access to, and use of food.

Facilitating access to income-generating activities and productive investments helped **build productive and processing capacities and increase household income.**

Building target groups' capacities in terms of gender and women's leadership helped participants gain an improved **understanding of gender inequalities** and identify local initiatives to tackle social differences and address such inequalities at household, community, municipal and country levels.

Training on storage, preservation and processing of agricultural products **accelerated the capacity development of farmers' organizations** in terms of storing and cereal preservation techniques as well as competitive market strategies.

Testimonies

“Thanks to the implementation of the resilience building programme, we have learned a lot of things and benefited from several types of support. We have set up a women’s group through which we conduct income-generating activities supported by literacy courses to combat ignorance. We have built a grain bank using our own funds. [...] In conducting the income-generating activities, we have been very well trained in developing and implementing a business plan. We know how to source from suppliers, how to organize the sales process and finally, how to deal with any potential loss. Through our income-generating activities, we have established a community-wide fund to help our children go to school. For example, our group took care of a schoolboy who was the victim of an accident and had him admitted to Maradi Hospital for treatment. [...] We are always willing to help all the students of Kouroungoussaou deal with all their ups and downs.”

Nana Fadimata Sanoussi

President of the extraction union in the municipality of Kouroungoussaou in the region of Maradi, works within a group of women setting up income-generating activities

“Not only did composting save me 18 000 CFA francs, which is what the chemical fertilizer cost that I used before, but the compost has also increased my field’s fertility.”

Rabi Yaou

Member of the Dimitra Club in the village of Dare in the municipality of Chadakori (Maradi)

“At first, I didn’t plan on getting involved. But in the end, I made a compost pit and used the product on part of my half-hectare field. When I compared the part of the field on which I used compost and the other part without compost, I really regretted it, because the results are incomparable.”

Baraka Soulé

A Dimitra Club member, Maradi region





References

FAO. 2018. *Strengthening the resilience of livelihoods in protracted crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Niger and Somalia*. Annual report. Rome.

FAO. 2019a. *Strengthening the resilience of livelihoods in protracted crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Niger and Somalia*. Annual report. Rome.

FAO. 2019b. *Analyse de la valeur ajoutée de l'intervention conjointe des RBAs sur l'égalité de genre et l'autonomisation des femmes, la nutrition et la restauration des terres pour les ménages pauvres au Niger: leçons apprises et plan d'action pour améliorer la collaboration, l'engagement sur les initiatives conjointes de dialogue politique*. Internal document. Rome.

FAO. 2021. *Strengthening the resilience of livelihoods in protracted crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Niger and Somalia*. Annual report. Rome.

FAO. 2022. *Strengthening the resilience of livelihoods in protracted crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Niger and Somalia*. Annual report. Rome.

FSIN and GNAFC (Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises). 2023. *Global Report on Food Crises 2023*. Rome. <https://www.fsinplatform.org/global-report-food-crises-2023>

GSC Taimakon Manoma. 2021. *Mise en œuvre de la convention-pa/061/2020 relative au suivi et accompagnement des bénéficiaires des activités génératrices de revenus, des investissements productifs individuels et des activités des commissions foncières de base installées dans les villages d'intervention du programme RBA dans la commune de Chadakori*. Final report. Internal document.

Partners

Resource partner

- Government of Canada

Technical partners

- FAO
- IFAD
- WFP
- NGO AREN Association for the Revitalization of Livestock Farming in the Niger
- NGO GSC Taimakon Manoma
- NGO IDB Grassroots Development Initiative
- NGO World Vision Niger
- NGO AEDL Education Action for Local Development
- NGO APEBA

Acknowledgment

This publication was prepared by FAO and written by Thomas Richard under the coordination of Lucia Palombi and Frédérique Matras, with contributions from Maazou Ranaou, Agali Moumouni, Banaou Djibo, Bagoudou Maidagi, Fourera AbdouMani, Salifou Abdou, Ali Abdoulaye, Christiane Monsieur, Sarougi Garba, Edouard Issiakou Judicael, Etienne Juvanon Du Vachat, Emmanuel Moncada, Boubacar Harouna, Raffaella Policastro, Idrissa Issaabarchi and Amadou Abdoulaye.

We would especially like to thank IFAD and WFP for their collaboration throughout this project.

Canada

From 2017 to 2023, with support from the Government of Canada, the United Nations Rome-based agencies FAO, IFAD and WFP implemented a joint pilot initiative to increase resilience in food security and nutrition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Niger and Somalia. The aim of this joint pilot programme was to achieve humanitarian and development objectives by addressing immediate food needs, while sustainably improving food security in areas affected by prolonged and recurrent crises, with a particular focus on vulnerable women and children.

Contact

FAO Representation in the Niger

FAO-NE@fao.org

fao.org/niger

Niamey, the Niger

Knowledge Platform on Emergencies and Resilience

KORE@fao.org

fao.org/in-action/kore

Rome, Italy

**Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations**

This product, developed by the Knowledge Platform on Emergencies and Resilience (KORE) in FAO's Office of Emergencies and Resilience, is available on its [portal](#). KORE provides normative and methodological guidance and supports the generation of learning, documentation of good practices and dissemination of evidence-based knowledge to inform strategic and programmatic decision-making.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on the maps featured in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of FAO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers and boundaries. Dashed lines on maps represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement.

© FAO, 2024
CC8853EN/1/01.24

Some rights reserved. This work is available under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence.

