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U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (DCHA)
OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (OFDA)

NIGER – Drought and Locusts

Situation Report #1, Fiscal Year (FY) 2005

July 1, 2005

BACKGROUND

The combined effects of drought and desert locust infestation in 2004 negatively impacted Niger’s pasture and cereal production, resulting in a food security crisis in the agro-pastoral and pastoral zones. In an average year, children in communities in pastoral and agro-pastoral zones routinely face levels of acute malnutrition that approach emergency thresholds. During the April to August lean season, high annual global acute malnutrition in children under five years of age and chronic malnutrition—reported at 61 percent by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) in Maradi and Zinder regions—are evidence of the chronic food insecurity in these areas. Combined with conditions that contribute to chronic food insecurity, drought and locust infestation have led to levels of malnutrition and mortality that exceed internationally accepted thresholds for emergency conditions in a number of communities in Niger’s pastoral and agro-pastoral areas.

For the 2004 agricultural season, the Government of Niger (GON) estimated a cereal deficit of 223,500 metric tons (MT) and a pasture deficit of 4.6 million MT. A joint assessment mission of the GON, U.N. World Food Program (WFP), USAID’s Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET), and Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) in March 2005 concluded that 2.5 million people—approximately 20 percent of Niger’s population—are food insecure and require food assistance until August 2005. In addition, livestock—the basis of rural livelihoods in the agro-pastoral and pastoral zones—is also at risk due to the lack of pasture and animal feed and the scarcity of veterinary services. Poor agricultural production has resulted in limited cereal availability and an increase in cereal prices, further compounding food insecurity for households in the affected areas.

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE		SOURCE
Total Population in Need of Food Assistance	2.5 million	GON/WFP/ FEWS NET/CILSS Assessment Mission – March 2005
Cereal Deficit	223,500 MT	GON Ministry of Agricultural Development – November 2004
Pasture Deficit	4.6 million MT	GON Ministry of Agricultural Development – November 2004

Total FY 2005 USAID/OFDA Assistance to Niger\$1,632,224
Total FY 2005 U.S. Government (USG) Humanitarian Assistance to Niger.....\$1,632,224

CURRENT SITUATION

Growing food insecurity in pastoral and agro-pastoral zones. Although crop losses due to locusts were less than originally predicted, the combined impact of locusts and drought resulted in localized losses of nearly 100 percent in some pocket areas of the agro-pastoral zone. The GON estimated that the 2004 cereal production was 15 percent less than the five year average and that almost 40 percent of the country’s 10,000 villages suffered losses to agricultural production. According to the FEWS NET June 2005 Emergency Report, the most food insecure areas are in the agro-pastoral regions of Maradi and Tillaberi and the pastoral regions of Tahoua and Zinder.

Access to food for poor households has become increasingly difficult as prices of staple food items began to increase in February—earlier than usual in the agricultural season. According to FEWS NET, poor cereal production in Niger and low availability in neighboring countries resulted in significant increases in prices for all types of grains, including millet, sorghum,

and maize. For example, in February, the price of millet was 46 percent higher than at the same time in 2004, according to FEWS NET.

USAID/OFDA humanitarian assessment. From June 14 to 22, USAID/OFDA West Africa Regional and Food Security advisors, accompanied by the Niger FEWS NET representative, traveled throughout Zinder Region to examine acute and chronic factors contributing to the humanitarian crisis. The team observed that, as a result of the worsening conditions, reliance on wild foods to supplement the diet is increasing in agro-pastoral zones. Some families have resorted to scavenging ant hills to retrieve grains left over by insects. The team also noted that many households in agro-pastoral villages took part in the rural exodus from villages to towns in search of food and income, taking children out of school.

Deteriorating livestock conditions. The GON estimated that nearly 40 percent of the country’s fodder was lost in

2004, endangering the survival of livestock—a key asset for rural households and a critical determinant of household food security. The USAID/OFDA team reported that the health of animals is extremely poor due to the lack of fodder and limited access to veterinary services. In addition, the team noted that animal deaths are likely to increase until pasture regenerates in August, if there is a good rainy season.

Market prices for livestock have significantly decreased as pastoral and agro-pastoral households try to sell their undernourished animals in order to earn income to buy cereals. The USAID/OFDA team found that the value of animals has dropped to less than half of their value at this time last year. According to FEWS NET, given agro-pastoral households' reliance on livestock for their livelihoods, the dramatic drop in livestock prices has reduced their purchasing power and increased their vulnerability.

In addition, FEWS NET reported in February that natural resources, including natural forage and water resources in seasonal lakes and ponds, were depleted between November and February, further compounding household food insecurity. The deterioration of livestock conditions, in conjunction with the depletion of natural resources, is resulting in increased tensions between pastoralists and farmers.

Emergency levels of malnutrition. Although malnutrition is a chronic problem in Niger, recent surveys indicate a significant deterioration in children's nutritional status. A nutritional survey of children between 6 and 59 months of age conducted by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) and Epicentre in April 2005 concluded that one child in five is acutely malnourished in Maradi and Tahoua regions. In Tahoua, MSF found a global acute malnutrition rate (GAM) of 19.5 percent and a severe acute malnutrition rate (SAM) of 2.9 percent. In Maradi, the GAM rate was 19.3 percent, with a SAM rate of 2.4 percent. According to the U.N. World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, GAM is classified as critical above 15 percent.

MSF reported treating more than 6,000 children under five suffering from severe malnutrition in MSF therapeutic feeding centers since the beginning of 2005, compared to half that number during the same period in 2004. In addition, the mortality rate in children under five years of age (U5M) was 2.2 and 2.4 deaths per 10,000 people per day in Maradi and Tahoua, respectively. The emergency threshold for U5M is 2 deaths per 10,000 people per day, according to WHO.

Following visits to two villages in Zinder Region, the USAID/OFDA team concluded that lack of water and sanitation is a major contributor to child malnutrition. The team found that all households lacked a latrine and the primary sources of drinking water for most households were shallow wells or surface water. In addition, use of health care services is poor—even when

available—as a large percentage of mothers reported using traditional charms or pills bought from ambulant vendors before seeking care at the nearest health center.

The 2005 agricultural season. Based on interviews in villages in Zinder Region, the USAID/OFDA team found that nearly all households have access to seeds through different mechanisms—purchase in the market, trade of seed for work, or loan from relatives. In addition, some farmers have received seeds from a GON free distribution program. In general, one of the largest issues faced by Niger's agricultural sector is seed quality. The USAID/OFDA team found that seed quality is problematic as farmers are often planting poor quality unimproved seeds that are not optimally adapted to Niger's climatic and agricultural conditions.

The USAID/OFDA Food Security Advisor reported that the start of the rainy season has allowed farmers to plant in villages visited in the southern agriculture zone of Zinder, where many fields have been cultivated with millet and the prospect for the harvest is favorable should the rains continue. However, in some agro-pastoral villages, farmers planted after the first rainfall in May, but lost their seeds due to a dry period after the early rains. These agro-pastoral farmers have limited capacity to buy seeds and noted concern about accessing additional seeds for the rest of the agricultural season.

GON Response. On November 25, 2004, the GON issued an appeal for food assistance and animal inputs. In March 2005, the GON launched a program to sell cereals at subsidized prices. Under this program, the GON plans to sell approximately 67,000 MT, representing 30 percent of the cereal deficit, from its existing cereal stocks until July. In addition, the GON plans to provide 20,000 MT of cereal in the form of loans to be repaid after the next harvest. The GON reported plans to develop 14,000 hectares of irrigated land to augment national grain reserves in the coming year. The project will include 2,000 hectares in each of the country's regions. The GON hopes that this project will produce 84,000 MT in grain per annum.

Current locust situation. On June 15, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that the current locust situation is less alarming than last year's locust infestations in Sahelian West Africa. However, locust activities are still occurring in various places of the spring and summer breeding areas. In Niger, small-scale locust breeding began during May in the center of the country. The GON's Crop Protection Department is currently conducting ground control operations near Tanout, Zinder Region, against small hopper bands that started to form at the end of May, according to FAO.

USG HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

On October 19, 2004, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires John Davison issued a disaster declaration due to the combined effects of the drought and locusts affecting Niger. To date in FY 2005, USAID/OFDA has provided more than

\$1.6 million in emergency humanitarian assistance. In response to the disaster declaration, USAID/OFDA provided \$50,000 to FAO to implement agricultural relief and recovery programs countrywide, including the provision of livestock feed support and agricultural inputs for dry season gardening activities. In response to agricultural and food security needs, USAID/OFDA is committing nearly \$500,000 to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to support a seed vouchers and fairs program targeting 24,000 families in Ouallam and Tillaberi departments, Tillaberi Region, and Tanout Department, Zinder Region. This program is complemented by funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Marisla Foundation. To address ongoing health and nutrition concerns, USAID/OFDA is providing more than \$1 million to World Vision to establish supplementary feeding clinics and community therapeutic feeding centers in Mirriah and Goure departments, Zinder Region, and Dakoro and Guidan departments, Maradi Region.

To date in FY 2005, USAID's Office of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) has provided a total of 8,350 MT of P.L. Title II development food assistance, valued at more than \$4.6 million through Africare, CARE, CRS, and Helen Keller. Although the primary objective of USAID/FFP's development assistance program is to reduce structural food insecurity in Niger, this food assistance is also serving to reduce the vulnerability of populations affected by drought and locusts in 2004 in the agro-pastoral and pastoral zones.

U.S. GOVERNMENT HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO NIGER

<i>Implementing Partner</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Amount</i>
USAID/OFDA ASSISTANCE¹			
CRS	Food Security/Agriculture	Tillaberi and Zinder	\$494,513
FAO	Food Security/Agriculture	Countrywide	\$50,000
World Vision	Nutrition	Maradi and Zinder	\$1,087,711
TOTAL USAID/OFDA			\$1,632,224
TOTAL USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO NIGER IN FY 2005²			\$1,632,224
TOTAL USG HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO NIGER IN FY 2005			\$1,632,224

¹ USAID/OFDA funding represents committed and/or obligated amount as of July 1, 2005.

² This total does not reflect USAID/FFP development food assistance, valued at more than \$4.6 million.



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USAID/OFDA bulletins appear on the USAID web site at http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/.