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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 – Food Insecurity

Situation Report #2, Fiscal Year (FY) 2005

August 2, 2005

Note: The last situation report was dated July 1, 2005.

BACKGROUND

In 2004, an early end to the rains and localized desert locust damage to crops and pasture lands adversely impacted Niger’s pasture and cereal production, resulting in a food security crisis in the agro-pastoral and pastoral zones. According to USAID’s Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET), the current emergency is not a famine threatening the entire country, but rather is the result of Niger’s chronic food insecurity. Niger’s vulnerability to humanitarian crises is due to several structural factors, such as widespread poverty, precarious food security, desertification, inadequate provision of water and sanitation services, and meager health coverage. Combined with these factors, the late-season 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, FEWS NET, U.N. World Food Program (WFP), 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 through September 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 access 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\$2,176,050
Total FY 2005 U.S. Government (USG) Humanitarian Assistance to Niger.....\$13,476,050

CURRENT SITUATION

Critical food insecurity in pocket areas of the pastoral and agro-pastoral zones. On July 10, the GON’s Early Warning System (*Système d’Alerte Précoce – SAP*) reported that the food security situation is of concern in 56 out of 106 vulnerable zones monitored on a monthly basis. The SAP classified the country’s zones on a continuum from “extremely critical” to “relatively calm.” Based on reports covering the month of May, 12 zones were classified as “extremely critical” using the following criteria: reduction in number of meals per day; consumption of roots, wild berries, and leaves; sale of female cattle, belongings, and production tools; and migration of entire families in almost all villages in the zone. The 12 zones were located in Diffa and N’Guigmi departments in Diffa Region; Tahoua, Illéla, and Keita departments in Tahoua Region; and Matamèye Department in Zinder Region. In addition, 14 zones in the Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tillaberi, Tahoua, and Zinder regions were classified as “critical” based on

similar conditions as the previous category, but not generalized to the entire zone.

Food security analysis. According to the FEWS NET June Monthly Food Security Update, poor cereal production in Niger and unusually high cereal prices in neighboring countries have resulted in significant increases in prices for all types of grains, including millet, sorghum, and maize. Prices of millet and sorghum are between 75 and 80 percent above the last five year’s average, according to FEWS NET. As a result, access to food for vulnerable households has become increasingly difficult as prices of cereals have steadily increased since January 2005—earlier than usual in the agricultural season.

In addition to high cereal prices, deteriorating livestock conditions have deprived rural households of a key source of income, reducing purchasing power and increasing vulnerability. The loss of nearly 40 percent of

the country's fodder in 2004 endangered the health and survival of livestock. Market prices for livestock have significantly decreased as pastoral and agro-pastoral households try to sell undernourished animals for income to buy cereals. Given agro-pastoral households' reliance on livestock for their livelihoods, the dramatic drop in livestock prices has adversely impacted terms of trade.

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 households' traditional coping strategies, such as increased reliance on wild foods, were being stretched to the limits. During interviews with the USAID/OFDA team, women from the village of Tamalolo, Tanout Department, reported spending an entire day collecting a one-day family ration of *anza*, one of the main wild foods. The team also noted larger than usual population movements from agro-pastoral villages to cities and neighboring Nigeria in search of food and income.

Emergency levels of malnutrition. In an average year, children in pastoral and agro-pastoral zones routinely face levels of acute malnutrition that approach emergency thresholds. However, 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 parts of 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.

In January 2005, a Helen Keller International and WFP survey employing the same methodology in Maradi and Zinder regions found similar malnutrition rates—GAM of 13.4 percent, SAM of 2.7 in Zinder, and SAM of 2.2 percent in Maradi. These rates are also consistent with surveys conducted by World Vision in the same regions in 2003 and 2004—years of above-average harvests in Niger. However, the high malnutrition levels this year were reported earlier than usual and the number of admissions was higher than normal for the time of the year. MSF reported treating more than 12,000 children under five suffering from severe malnutrition in MSF therapeutic feeding centers since the beginning of 2005, compared to a quarter 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.

The USAID/OFDA assessment team and FEWS NET reports indicated that, in addition to food access issues, other factors are contributing to increased malnutrition rates in the agro-pastoral and pastoral areas. These include lack of potable water, poor sanitation conditions, unavailable and/or inaccessible health care services, and poor child health practices, such as early weaning. For example, following visits to two villages in Zinder Region in June, the USAID/OFDA 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, 84 percent of mothers interviewed by the USAID/OFDA team stop exclusive breastfeeding within one month of birth—rather than the recommended six months of breastfeeding—and introduce water or food.

The 2005 agricultural season. According to FEWS NET, the current rainy season that began in June is progressing well in Niger, allowing farmers to plant early. The GON estimates that 92 percent of the area expected to be under cultivation had been planted by the end of June, compared to the average 77 percent for that time of the year. Favorable and sustained rains are improving pastures, which is helping to stabilize animal conditions and improve agro-pastoral households' terms of trade. The maize harvest in neighboring coastal countries, such as Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, and Cote d'Ivoire, is underway. Supplies of imported maize from those countries have begun to arrive in Niger, which will result in lower cereal prices.

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 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.

GON Response. On November 25, 2004, the GON issued an appeal for food assistance and animal inputs. Since November, the GON has provided 42,000 MT from its existing cereal stocks and cash reserves through the sale of cereals at subsidized prices, seed distributions, cereal banks, fodder banks, as well as food-for-work and cash-for-work programs. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that in mid-July the GON announced plans to conduct targeted free food distributions of approximately 20,000 MT in the most critical areas. In addition, the GON plans to provide 20,000 MT of cereal in the form of loans to be repaid after the next harvest in October.

International Response. According to OCHA's July 29 Humanitarian Report No. 2, during the week of August 1, the U.N. and its partners plan to issue a revised Flash

Appeal in response to the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Niger. The revised inter-agency Flash Appeal will target 32,000 severely malnourished children and 160,000 moderately malnourished children. The appeal will also focus on increasing access to primary health care, rehabilitating polluted boreholes, protecting livestock, and providing seeds. On July 29, 2005, WFP announced plans to increase the budget for the WFP Emergency Operation (EMOP) appeal for Niger to target an estimated 2.5 million beneficiaries, a significant increase from WFP's original target of 400,000 people. Funding levels for this increase in programming had not yet been released at the time of publication of this situation report. The revised EMOP focuses primarily on providing direct distribution of food commodities to families of children in therapeutic and supplementary feeding centers. The arrival of these commodities after the October harvest could potentially have an adverse impact on the Nigerian agricultural markets.

Over the past weeks, a number of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have arrived in Niger. These organizations are becoming operational and are expected to achieve capacity within two weeks. These organizations are supported by the contributions pledged during the past month from European countries, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. To date, donors pledges total more than \$41 million, which include \$22 million in food assistance and more than \$13 million in assistance from the United States—almost half of which was committed by the end of May 2005.

Current locust situation. According to USAID's Assistance for Emergency Locust/Grasshopper Abatement (AELGA) project, solitary adult locusts and hoppers were reported in several locations in the grassland areas north of Tanout Department, central Niger, between July 10 and 20. The situation was relatively calm in the other outbreak areas surveyed. Control operations were not required during this period. AELGA forecasted that, given favorable rains during the past weeks, localized breeding could occur in Niger's primary breeding areas. AELGA recommended that efforts be made to prevent hopper and adult concentrations in the grassland areas.

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 nearly \$2.2 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 committed nearly \$500,000 to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to support a seed vouchers and fairs program targeting 24,000 families in Ouallam and Tillabéri

departments, Tillabéri 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. In addition, USAID/OFDA funded the airlift of 251 MT of fortified food for the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) emergency nutrition programs at a cost of more than \$544,000.

In response to WFP's EMOP for Niger, USAID's Office of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) is contributing 4,320 MT of P.L. Title II emergency food assistance, valued at approximately \$2.9 million. In addition, in FY 2005, USAID/FFP has provided a total of 12,230 MT of P.L. Title II development food assistance, valued at more than \$7.4 million. This assistance is provided through a six-year development program that began in FY 2000 and is implemented by Africare, CARE, CRS, and Helen Keller International in the most food insecure areas of Niger. The program targets highly food insecure populations in the agro-pastoral and pastoral areas and focuses on reducing structural food insecurity in Niger through long-term agricultural productivity and health and nutrition interventions.

USAID has announced an additional \$1 million for an emergency nutrition program to be finalized in the coming days.

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
UNICEF	Airlift of 251 MT of fortified food for emergency nutrition programs	Countrywide	\$543,826
World Vision	Nutrition	Maradi and Zinder	\$1,087,711
TOTAL USAID/OFDA			\$2,176,050
USAID/FFP ASSISTANCE			
Consortium comprised of Africare, Catholic Relief Services, CARE, and Helen Keller International	12,230 MT of P.L. 480 Title II Development Food Assistance	Agadez, Dosso, Tahoua, and Zinder	\$7,400,000
WFP	4,320 MT of P.L. 480 Title II Emergency Food Assistance	Countrywide	\$2,900,000
TOTAL USAID/FFP			\$10,300,000
Other USAID ASSISTANCE			
	Emergency nutrition		\$1,000,000
TOTAL OTHER USAID			\$1,000,000
TOTAL USG HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO NIGER IN FY 2005			\$13,476,050

¹ USAID/OFDA funding represents committed and/or obligated amount as of August 2, 2005.



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