

WFP - Niger

Fighting Hunger and Building Healthy Communities

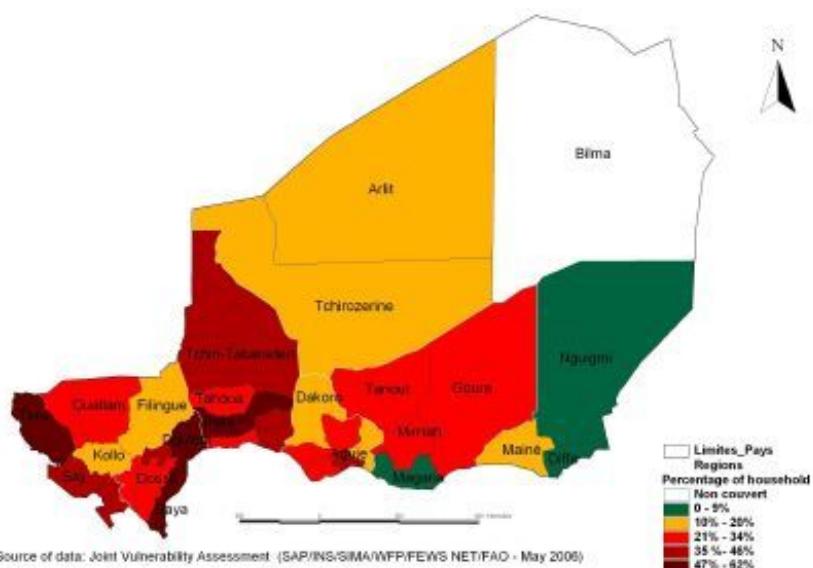
Background

Niger is the least developed country in the world. Over 70 percent of the population of approximately 13 million live below the poverty line. More than 80 percent rely on subsistence farming and cattle raising, but only 15 percent of land is suitable for farming. In 2004, drought and the worst locust infestation in 15 years resulted in exceptionally poor harvests in this already food-poor nation.

In 2005, Niger suffered a severe food security crisis aggravated by the drought and locust invasions. Chronic poverty and malnutrition, poor agricultural practices, and few income-earning opportunities exhausted many households' limited capacity to cope. The reduced food supply, combined with record prices for staple foods - prices of basic commodities tripled - left millions struggling to feed themselves and their families. Over 3.6 million people faced crisis conditions, with more than 2.6 million of them in need of urgent food assistance.

During the height of this crisis, the World Food Program (WFP) helped provide food to nearly 3 million of the most vulnerable people. Over 250,000 children were treated for malnutrition in 500 therapeutic feeding centers, and more than 200,000 of their siblings were given "protection rations" to keep families from sharing therapeutic food among other children.

Percentage of food insecure (severe+moderate) households by department



Current Operations

Nearly a year after the height of the crisis in 2005 that destroyed the livelihoods of millions, the effects are still being felt. Following the conclusion of Emergency Operations in March, 2006, WFP launched a two-year Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation to help address Niger's deep-rooted structural problems while continuing to support the needs of those struggling to regain their livelihoods after last year's crisis.

The first priority of the WFP's Relief and Recovery Operation is to address the most critical aspect of underdevelopment in Niger: child malnutrition. More than 15 percent of children

under five suffer from acute malnutrition. Of the more than 2.1 million people WFP is targeting in Niger in 2006, more than 80 percent are children. The full operation, which runs through September 2007, will provide food for 2.9 million Nigeriens.

Supplemental Feeding

Working with international partners and local NGOs, WFP provided critical food aid for more than 800,000 children in Niger through 500 nutrition centers around the country. To ensure that severely malnourished children receive their life-saving therapeutic food, it isn't divided among siblings, WFP distributes a 'protection ration' to families with a child receiving therapeutic treatment. This package is enough to provide three additional children with food for two months. Provided adequate funding, WFP will also provide rations to all children under three in areas with high malnutrition rates during the annual lean season that runs from July through September.

School Feeding

School attendance rates in Niger are among the worst in the world. Less than 20 percent of



Nigeriens are literate. Providing a nutritious meal to children at school encourages enrollment and attendance, providing an important key to a better future – an education. WFP and UNICEF are working in collaboration to deliver an "Essential Package" to support school feeding programs. The joint partnership is focused on developing a package of cost-effective interventions to improve the health and nutrition of school-age children.

In Niger, the agencies aim to increase enrollment and retention rates, particularly among girls, and reduce educational gaps between urban and rural areas, and boys and girls. This year, WFP has provided healthy meals in school to over 57,000 children. Mothers of daughters who attend at least 80 percent of classes receive an additional take-home ration to further encourage attendance among girls. In 2006, the WFP/UNICEF Essential Package will also provide deworming services, potable water, and sanitary latrines for students.

WFP/Marten Specht

Food for Work/Food for Training

Through its Food for Work Programs, WFP helps foster long-term development while fighting short-term hunger by providing food as payment for work on projects to improve their communities and local infrastructure, such as building roads or bridges. In addition to instilling a sense of accomplishment and pride, these programs help families make the best use of limited resources and promote self-reliance.

Food for Work programs also discourage men from leaving the area in search of work. By providing viable opportunities within Niger, men are given the chance to remain with their families and tend to their own fields, decreasing the workload of women.

Similarly, Food for Training provides food for those in training programs that teach important skills or educate about health and nutritional issues. In 2006, more than 122,000 Nigeriens will receive food aid through Food for Work and Food for Training programs.

Cereal Banks

To help prevent future emergencies from escalating to crisis levels, WFP is also working to replenish cereal banks in food insecure villages. In addition to helping communities fight short term hunger during the lean season, cereal banks help stabilize local market prices, preventing food from becoming unaffordable.

Food for Work Activities

- Land recovery
- Reforestation
- Irrigation projects

Food for Training Activities

- Child nutrition
- Hygiene
- Agricultural and livestock practices

General Distributions

As the lean season approaches, WFP is preparing to meet the increased needs of families. As food supplies decrease and market prices go up, families that rely on subsistence farming are forced to sell what they can to meet costs. During the lean season, July through September, WFP will provide free general distributions at the village level to reach the most vulnerable families.

Families that received general food distributions report that it enables them to avoid harvesting their crops prematurely to combat short-term hunger, thereby reducing the chance they would lapse into hunger the following season. In two rounds of distributions during the lean months, WFP will distribute enough food to feed 700,000 people.

Looking Ahead

No country in the Sahel faces a more difficult lean season than Niger, where last year's crisis left a deep scar, pushing thousands of the poorest further into poverty. While WFP has worked with the government to improve household food security through Food for Work projects and the restocking of village cereal banks, concerns remain that many of the poorest will again find themselves in need of urgent assistance should food prices rocket upwards. Public, private and governmental support is essential to prevent Niger from sliding into a crisis of last year's magnitude.