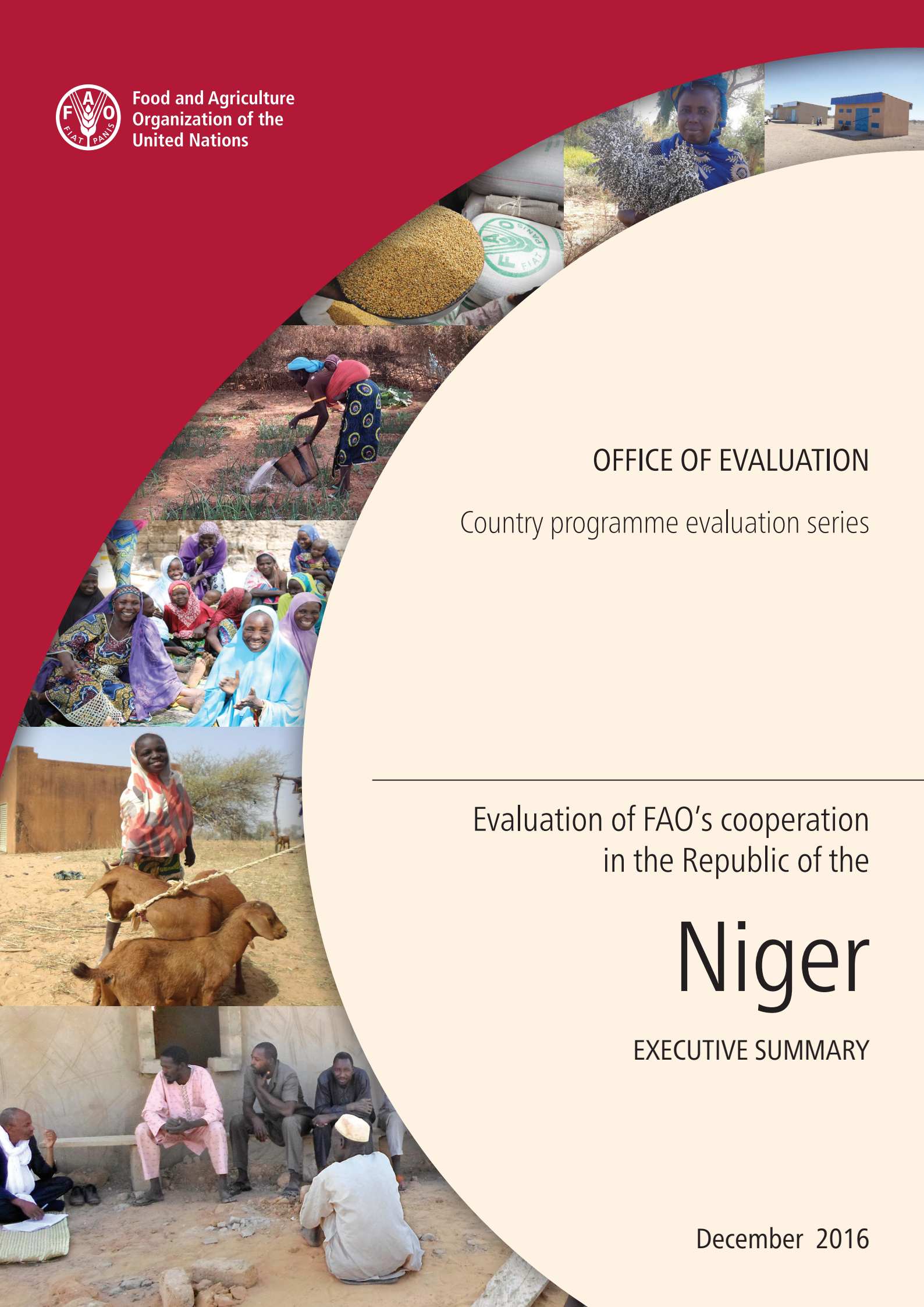




Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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OFFICE OF EVALUATION

Country programme evaluation series

Evaluation of FAO's cooperation
in the Republic of the

Niger

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

December 2016

COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION SERIES

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in the Republic of the Niger**

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Introduction

- ES1 The Office of Evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is conducting a series of Country Programme Evaluations. The main purpose of these evaluations is to better orient FAO's programme to the specific needs of the country, and to make the best use of FAO's comparative advantages. Furthermore, the Country Programme Evaluations aim to enhance the impact of FAO's contributions at the country level to achieve the Global Goals of its members, namely: i) the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; ii) the elimination of poverty and the driving forward of economic and social progress for all; and iii) the sustainable management and utilization of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations. The results of the evaluation will facilitate the formulation of the new Country Programming Framework (CPF) of Niger.
- ES2 The evaluation was conducted by a team of four independent consultants and two members of the Office of Evaluation. The expertise of the team members covered the key areas of FAO's work in Niger, namely rural development, climate change, livestock and pastoralism, nutrition and gender.
- ES3 The investigation phase took place between November 2015 and January 2016. During this phase the team met with over 300 people at the central and decentralized levels, belonging to national institutions, civil society organizations, farmers' organizations and their federations, donors, United Nations agencies and other international development agencies. The evaluation team conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants, and focus groups with beneficiaries of a selected number of projects in five regions of Niger (out of eight), including Tahoua, Zinder, Maradi, Dosso and Tillaberi.
- ES4 Niger is among the poorest countries in the world according to the Human Development Index, with a low educational rate (the adult illiteracy rate is 71%) and limited health coverage. The country has one of the highest population growth rates in the world (3.9%) resulting in significant pressure on natural resources (RGP/H, 2012). Even during years of agricultural surplus, a significant portion of the population experiences food insecurity. During the period covered by the evaluation, acute malnutrition remained high – above the 10% warning threshold and often near the World Health Organization's 15% emergency threshold. The prevalence of chronic malnutrition has regularly exceeded the 40% critical threshold.
- ES5 Agriculture occupies a prominent place in the national economy, representing over 45% of gross domestic product in 2010. The livestock sub-sector is very important and involves 87% of the active population. The agricultural sector in Niger is characterised by small family farms that develop diversification strategies to cope with increasing risks, the most critical being the frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events.

Main findings

- ES6 The Country Programme Evaluations address two main aspects: i) the relevance of the overall programme and the strategic positioning of FAO in the country; and ii) FAO's contributions to the priority areas identified in the CPF. In the case of Niger, the priority areas defined in the CPF in cooperation with the Government of Niger were: 1) Strengthening vulnerable populations' resilience to food and nutrition insecurity; 2) Increasing, diversifying and promoting agricultural, pastoral, forestry and fishery production; and 3) Capacity development of institutions in the rural sector. This summary presents the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation.

Relevance and strategic positioning

- ES7 Over the period evaluated, the institutional and political context was marked by the transition to a new government beginning in April 2011, including a reinforced commitment

to food and nutrition security. This led to the development of the 3N¹ Initiative 2011-2015, a national strategy focused on food security and nutrition. FAO's programme is well aligned with this initiative.

- ES8 The multi-sectoral nature of the 3N Initiative has facilitated the emergence of themes such as nutrition and social protection, and should help to involve the technical ministries in these cross-cutting sectors. FAO has an important role to play in this process. Regarding nutrition, FAO has strengthened its country team, participated in coordination meetings and organized various workshops to facilitate the adoption of nutrition-sensitive approaches by actors in the food security and rural development sectors. In the area of social protection, FAO's role in Niger has not yet been clearly defined.
- ES9 In a context of protracted crises such as Niger, there is a need to better link emergency and development interventions to have a stronger impact on beneficiaries' resilience and achieve more sustainable results. In this area, FAO in Niger has a potential comparative advantage as it implements humanitarian actions in response to crises, while continuing to be a key partner in Nigerien rural development. Despite having capacities in both areas and the integration of the Emergency Unit into the Representation in 2013, FAO's ability to provide integrated emergency and development approaches has not been sufficiently realized.
- ES10 Although several of FAO's proposed interventions in Niger included a large component on climate change adaptation, the visibility of its contribution in this area has been limited. The country office has no expertise dedicated to this theme which could enable FAO to increase its contribution and visibility.
- ES11 During the period evaluated, the United Nations agencies collaborated positively through a series of joint initiatives. FAO participated in the development of the approach *Communes de Convergence*, adopted in 2013, which is a flagship initiative of the United Nations in Niger and represents the operationalization of the 3N multi-sectorial initiative at municipal level. United Nations agencies are aiming through this approach to increasingly plan together at municipal level and implement interventions to strengthen resilience in 35 municipalities. At the time of the evaluation, the adoption of this approach had mainly resulted in a geographical convergence, but not yet produced real synergies.
- ES12 FAO has implemented its interventions mainly through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and farmers' organizations. Although implementing partners rated positively the quality of their collaboration with FAO, several issues were noted. The relations established with implementing partners, formalized by Letters of Agreement, are often of short duration and concern very specific activities. FAO's modalities to engage with implementing partners do not include mechanisms for taking into account their opinions, proposals and knowledge of the context. For instance, FAO does not sufficiently utilize implementing partners' capacities in areas such as gender or nutrition.
- ES13 Experiences of joint projects with the World Food Programme (WFP), where the two agencies have implemented their interventions through the same partner, have shown very positive results and improved synergies on the ground.
- ES14 Niger is a focus country for FAO which benefits from several interventions led by headquarters and the Regional Office for Africa. It is also thanks to this support that FAO's programme in Niger could benefit from a plurality of innovative experiences. However, the attention placed by the Organization on Niger could result in a multiplication of initiatives that as a whole do not strengthen the capacity of the country office. The approach adopted under Strategic Objective 1 and the related Regional Initiative offers a positive example of an effort to strengthen the country team. SO1 contributed to establishing and funding the posts of a Policy Officer and a Nutritionist. These are two key cross-cutting areas for FAO's work in Niger, and the creation of these posts was crucial to strengthening the country office. The Zero Hunger Initiative also provided support for capacity building in the area of resource mobilization.

1 Les Nigériens nourrissent les Nigériens (i3N)

ES15 The evaluation team met several partners who observed that although FAO has an important role to play in Niger, the Organization is not sufficiently active in resource mobilisation. Despite the existing opportunities at country level for resource mobilisation, FAO experienced some difficulties in positioning itself.

Strengthening vulnerable populations' resilience to food and nutrition insecurity

ES16 Interviews conducted during the evaluation show that the term "resilience" is very present in the discussions of state and non-state actors, but without a real consensus on its meaning. Indeed, actors label with this term very different interventions. Some actors use the term resilience for activities in support to production, others identify as resilience actions with a social character and some others label with this term interventions in response to crisis. The discussion for the development of the new action plan 2016-2020 of the 3N initiative, as well, emphasized that this term is understood in very different ways according to the actors and the sectors. It also highlighted the need for a clearer differentiation between interventions to prevent and reduce chronic vulnerability on the one hand and emergency responses on the other hand for achieving the intended objectives.² The formulation of the new CPF should take into consideration this distinction.

ES17 The food security sector in Niger is characterised by the presence of a multiplicity of actors and institutions, as well as several coordination groups. It is thus difficult for FAO to maintain an effective presence in each of these groups due to the limited availability of staff. As a consequence, FAO's participation appears diluted as compared with other agencies. FAO effectively played its role as facilitator of the Food Security Cluster in Niamey and in the regions where FAO is present with a sub-national office.

ES18 Activities that were intended to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations included the distribution of quality certified seeds for crop production; distribution of animals, animal feed and veterinary drugs; distribution of vegetable seeds; and support to small-scale irrigation.

ES19 The distributions of crop and vegetable seeds were carried out by FAO each year as part of the crisis responses. However, these distributions could also be rethought for responding to chronic vulnerability by targeting the same households over a longer period of time. This shift would be possible only with the ability to mobilize multi-year funds. This will enable the provision of predictable multi-year support to vulnerable households guiding the interventions toward a social protection approach. This change would enable FAO to better plan its interventions by avoiding delays in distributions, investing more time in targeting, improving monitoring of results and establishing longer term collaborations with implementing partners.

ES20 Among the resilience interventions, animal distributions had the most lasting effects. The positive impacts of animal distributions conveyed by beneficiaries included increased income from animal sales, improvement of the social status of vulnerable women and increased availability of milk for children. The animals also represent a form of household savings. In general, FAO's support to pastoralism and the livestock sector consisted of emergency actions. The promotion of linkages between emergency and development activities would have enhanced the sustainability of interventions and increased the impact on the resilience of vulnerable communities.

ES21 In order to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations, there is a need to intervene in parallel in several spheres of their lives. As such, FAO is promoting in different countries, including Niger, the *Caisses de Résilience*, an integrated approach with three components: technical, financial and social. The past achievements of FAO in Niger are evident in each of the three areas. However, FAO's resilience interventions did not always have this integrated nature: in most cases the three components were implemented separately, in different areas or by targeting different beneficiaries.

ES22 Although FAO is well positioned institutionally regarding nutrition, at the operational level additional efforts are needed. FAO often included nutrition education activities in

² Action Plan of the 3N Initiative 2016-2020 p. 11.

its interventions, but these actions frequently targeted a limited number of beneficiaries; were not coordinated with those carried out by other agencies and actors; and were implemented by partners who in some cases did not have enough experience in this area. Moreover, the resources allocated to nutrition were too marginal to have a measurable impact.

Increasing, diversifying and promoting agricultural, pastoral, forestry and fishery production

ES23 In Niger, FAO was successful in introducing innovations and new approaches and facilitating their adoption. This was possible thanks to the existence of multi-year development projects, such as *Intrants* and the *Intensification de l'Agriculture par le Renforcement des Boutiques d'Intrants Coopératives* (IARBIC), which made funds available over a sufficient period of time. These projects largely involved national partners (especially farmers' organizations and the Ministry of Agriculture), which is a significant contributing factor to the uptake of innovations as well as their sustainability. In addition, in close cooperation with IARBIC, FAO implemented a project on *Capitalization of good practices* that documented and disseminated experiences such as warrantage, input shops, microdose and farmer field schools (FFS). Another important factor contributing to the success of these projects was the quality and dynamism of the people involved.

ES24 The dissemination of the FFS approach as a mechanism for transmitting innovations and best practices was an example of this success. The FFS are currently used by a number of programmes and projects of other development partners, and the Ministry of Agriculture is developing a practical guide for FFS facilitators. In 2013, FAO tried to introduce through a pilot project the pastoral field schools, an approach very relevant in the context of Niger. However, this initiative has not led to visible results due to the relatively small scale of the pilot and the lack of follow-up.

ES25 FAO supported the seed production system and improved the availability of agricultural inputs at local level. The Organization contributed to the development of the national seed law, and its efforts in training and networking actors along the seed chain contributed to strengthening the national seed system. Through projects such as *Intrants* and IARBIC, FAO contributed to developing the network of input shops, which improved the availability of fertilizers at local level. The sustainability of these systems could be enhanced by including private actors in FAO's intervention strategy, in order to support the commercialization of agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizers and animal feed).

ES26 Over the evaluated period, FAO supported vulnerable households through vegetable seed distributions. FAO's investment in creating or rehabilitating irrigated areas (through the construction of wells or other irrigation systems) was more limited. This was also the case with regard to extending modern irrigation techniques (e.g. drip irrigation schemes). The country team recently hired an irrigation expert who could help to increase FAO's involvement in this area, which is central to the new Action Plan of the 3N initiative and a key element of addressing the challenges of climate change.

ES27 Overall, attention to post-harvest activities (such as processing and marketing) has been limited. A relevant initiative for improving farmers' access to markets is the *Purchase from Africans for Africa* initiative promoted by FAO in partnership with WFP. In Niger, FAO helped to adapt this approach to the country's rural context and to connect WFP with farmers' organizations. However, FAO could not fully participate at operational level due to limited financial resources and staff availability.

Capacity development of institutions in the rural sector

ES28 FAO has provided support to the 3N Initiative since the beginning, mainly through technical support for the development of its investment plan and the funding of four national experts to support the High Commission of the 3N Initiative. The close relationship FAO has established with national institutions, including the High Commission and the technical ministries involved in the rural sector, is a comparative advantage of the Organization.

- ES29 For each strategic priority of the 3N Initiative, a steering committee was set up with a coordination role; FAO led the technical and financial partners group's participation in the steering committee for Strategic Priority 1: Increasing production. Overall, the 3N Initiative coordination mechanisms were not very dynamic. As a consequence of the weakness of the coordination mechanism on Strategic Priority 1, there was a lack of discussion fora on issues related to rural development.
- ES30 FAO contributed to the improved integration of nutrition into national policies and programmes. The presence of a nutrition expert at the Representation enabled FAO to facilitate the development of a national multi-sector policy on nutrition (PNSN), which includes the prevention dimensions driven by the rural development sectors (agriculture and livestock). The workshops organized by the regional programme on *Capacity development for integrating nutrition into food security programming* were highly relevant and responded to existing partners' needs. However, the utilization by partners of the information provided through these workshops remains low. The sustainability of these types of interventions could be enhanced through the increased involvement of national universities and training centres.
- ES31 Niger is among the countries that will benefit from the FAO-European Union partnership programme *Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation*. This facility aims to enhance the capacities of governments and regional organizations to improve food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture policies, and to better implement them. In Niger, the programme is providing policy assistance and capacity development support through an international expert on nutrition and an international policy officer who will be based at the High Commission. The programme will also allow FAO and the European Union to better support the government in this area.
- ES32 In the area of statistics, *CountryStat* helped to improve the availability and accessibility of agricultural statistics. Despite the relevance of the project and the results obtained, ownership by national institutions remains limited.
- ES33 FAO worked closely with farmers' organizations and has consistently provided support to strengthen their capacities and tailor interventions to their needs. Relevant interventions included the establishment of a guaranty fund through the IARBIC project that facilitates access to credit for farmers' organizations; and the initiative *Coopéquité*, which facilitated the participation of farmers' organizations in decision-making processes, and particularly in the development of the *Loi d'Orientation Agricole*. While the unions and federations of farmers' organizations are dynamic at the central level, they remain weak at the local level and capacity development actions must continue.

Gender

- ES34 The integration of gender into FAO's initiatives is mainly done through the inclusion of women among the beneficiaries. Gender sensitive analyses, which are necessary to define how to better take into account gender issues in the intervention strategies, are not conducted during the design phase of projects.
- ES35 There are several past achievements of projects which addressed gender equality issues, such as IARBIC, *Capitalization of good practices* and most recently *Coopequité*. These interventions conducted training on gender equity with farmers' organizations and their federations, and with government technical services. Another achievement was the promotion of innovations such as *warrantage*, which enabled small producers and especially women to improve their livelihoods.
- ES36 As part of its efforts on improving gender equity, FAO promoted the *Dimitra listeners' clubs*. Today, there are nearly 1 000 functional community listeners' clubs. Female and male members of the clubs unanimously recognized that this initiative brought positive changes to their communities, including increased social cohesion, greater participation of women in decision-making processes at the community level, and in some cases a reduction of women's workload due to the increased participation of men in tasks that are commonly carried out by women. In order to make these changes sustainable, it is necessary to

ensure that the underlying causes of inequality are highlighted and addressed. The Dimitra approach is receiving increasing recognition from other FAO programs, as well as technical and financial partners (including the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility), for its role in community mobilization and gender empowerment; the approach also supports other projects in the area of gender equality.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Niger - a focus country for FAO

ES37 Niger is among the world's poorest countries (according to the Human Development Index) in which food and nutrition security remain key challenges. The country is committed to addressing these challenges, which are considered a national priority. Niger is one of FAO's focus countries and is therefore included in several regional and international initiatives. Presently, the FAO Representation does not have sufficient capacity and resources to support the country in addressing these challenges. The limited capacity within the Representation in terms of resource mobilization, project design and operations management limits FAO's ability to play the technical reference role that the partners expect of it.

Conclusion 2: Support to the 3N Initiative

ES38 FAO understood the institutional change marked by the adoption of the 3N strategy and provided support at the institutional level. FAO also contributed to the conceptualization of the approach *Communes de convergence*, which constitutes a concrete commitment of the United Nations agencies (and other partners) to the operationalization of the 3N initiative. This commitment is driven by the agencies' will to create synergies and harmonize their interventions on the ground. The *Communes de convergence* initiative enjoys strong visibility and offers an opportunity to showcase the Organization's competencies. This should facilitate the mobilization of additional resources to enable FAO's increased participation in the operationalization of this approach.

Conclusion 3: Contribution to stakeholder coordination in the food security and rural development sectors

ES39 FAO contributed effectively to the facilitation of the food security cluster; however, the Organization's contribution in other coordination groups was less substantial. FAO was not able to guarantee a consistent presence at a senior level for taking positions and making decisions. An active presence in coordination groups is needed for ensuring visibility. It also contributes to partners' perceptions of the Organization. FAO has a role to play in revitalizing discussion fora on rural development issues as part of the 3N Initiative.

Conclusion 4: Emerging areas of work: nutrition and social protection

ES40 Nutrition and social protection are emerging areas in Niger. In the field of nutrition, FAO has positioned itself among the various actors at national level. Additional efforts are needed to ensure the integration of nutrition into FAO's interventions on the ground, and for facilitating the involvement of rural sector partners in this area. In the social protection sector, which is of increasing importance to Niger, FAO has not yet defined its role and added value in relation to the other actors intervening.

Conclusion 5: A wealth of experience

ES41 In Niger, the Organization developed and disseminated good practices and innovations via long-term development projects. Although FAO's wealth of experience is recognized by national development partners, it is not as well known by others (for instance humanitarian actors and some donors). This reflects upon FAO's image, as well as its ability to mobilize funds and establish balanced partnerships. FAO has not sufficiently translated the achievements of its development projects into integrated approaches for strengthening resilience.

Conclusion 6: Livestock and pastoralism - a key sector in Niger

ES42 FAO's support to livestock production and pastoralism, key sectors for the national economy and for people's resilience, were mainly limited to emergencies. Although these interventions were relevant and produced positive results, significant investments in more

strategic projects and improved synergies between emergency and development actions are needed to ensure sustainability, increase impact and enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities. Although the pastoral field school approach is very relevant to the context of Niger, its dissemination was limited.

Conclusion 7: Partnerships

ES43 In Niger, FAO did not have a strategy to engage with implementing partners. Its collaborations with NGOs were of short duration and related to specific activities. Intervention results could be improved through longer term partnerships based on the solicitation of partners' views and proposals as part of an ongoing dialogue throughout the project cycle. During some response activities, FAO and WFP used the same implementing partner; this proved to be a good strategy that produced positive results and facilitated synergies on the ground.

Conclusion 8: Gender mainstreaming in the FAO programme

ES44 Several FAO projects have addressed gender inequalities in agriculture, and some initiatives specifically targeted women. However, despite the achievements, gender mainstreaming in project or programme formulation was not systematic. Gender analyses are not conducted in the project design phase. In addition, the capacity of the country team in this area needs to be strengthened.

Recommendations

ES45 Based on the main findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were developed.

Recommendation 1: Niger - a focus country for FAO

ES46 As Niger is one of FAO's focus countries, the Organization should strengthen the country office's capacities in resource mobilization, programme development and operations management. This investment could enable FAO Niger to increase the resources available at country level, and to fulfil the Organization's mandate in the country. During the implementation of global and regional initiatives and projects, FAO headquarters and the regional office should maximize synergies and support the creation of posts in cross-cutting areas (such as gender or support to farmers' organizations), rather than establishing focal points for individual projects.

ES47 The first recommendation, which concerns the strengthening of the country office, is a prerequisite for the implementation of the other recommendations below. Niger is a complex context involving a multiplicity of humanitarian and development actors. It receives significant donor attention, which should translate into resource mobilization opportunities. The country office should therefore take advantage of these opportunities to better support the country. To this end, it is essential to strengthen capacity in resource mobilization, project design and operations management. In some countries, these functions are supported by the Deputy Representative. At present, the organizational chart of the FAO Niger office does not include this post.

Recommendation 2: Support to the 3N Initiative

ES48 **2a:** The new CPF should be aligned with the priority areas of the new Action Plan of the 3N Initiative. In particular, it should make a distinction between chronic vulnerability, which should be addressed through long term development interventions or actions in line with a social protection approach, and vulnerability to shocks, requiring an emergency response. The mobilization of multi-year funds should be prioritized to develop interventions consistent with this approach.

ES49 **2b:** The new CPF should take into account the *Communes de Convergence* initiative. FAO should continue to support the High Commission at the institutional level while strengthening its contribution to operationalizing the 3N Initiative on the ground. The *Communes de Convergence* initiative benefits from good visibility. In order to mobilize additional resources, the Organization should improve communications on resilience interventions that can be

implemented at municipal level. The *Communes de Convergence* initiative should expand beyond the United Nations approach. FAO should promote more involvement from technical ministries of the rural sector; continue, in collaboration with the other United Nations agencies, to support the 3N Initiative in reinforcing coordination mechanisms at the local level; and encourage the participation of other development actors.

Recommendation 3: Contribution to stakeholder coordination in the food security and rural development sectors

ES50 FAO should increase its contribution to coordination on rural development issues. The Organization should help to mobilize its rural development partners and to increase their participation in the 3N Initiative's coordination mechanisms. FAO should ensure an active and continued participation in coordination fora on food security at the national level. Finally, FAO should continue supporting coordination efforts at the decentralized level.

Recommendation 4: Emerging areas of work: nutrition and social protection

ES51 FAO should consolidate its strategic positioning in the nutrition sector. The presence of a nutrition expert on the team is important for representing FAO in coordination fora and working groups. The nutrition expert should be involved in the development of food security and rural development projects, as well as with the next CPF. FAO should continue encouraging technical ministries in the rural sector to integrate nutrition into their policies and programmes. In addition, FAO should try to mobilize funding specifically dedicated to the implementation of nutrition interventions at the field level. In the area of social protection, FAO must define its strategic positioning in consultation with partners, as well as how its strategic positioning will translate into operational activities and take its place among the various actors in defending its added value and the role it intends to play. Social protection should be included in the new CPF.

Recommendation 5: A wealth of experience

ES52 FAO should utilize the achievements of its development programme in Niger to provide integrated approaches for strengthening resilience; continue promoting good practices and disseminating lessons learned; and maintain a constant dialogue with donors present in Niger for promoting the Organization's competencies.

Recommendation 6: Livestock and pastoralism – a key sector in Niger

ES53 FAO should invest more in the livestock and pastoral sector through a better integration of its emergency and development activities. FAO should further support the policies and strategies of national institutions in areas such as animal health, securing pastoral land tenure and pastoral mobility, and promoting innovative livestock production chains. Moreover, FAO should reintroduce the pastoral field school approach, considering its relevance to the national context.

Recommendation 7: Partnerships

ES54 FAO should revise the way in which it selects its implementing partners and improve cooperation with them. It needs to engage with partners in a more strategic way by developing multi-year collaborations, and evaluating their performance and capacity needs. In the nutrition sector, FAO should work through implementing partners that have competencies in nutrition and are present in the geographical areas of the interventions. When possible and particularly in the municipalities covered by the *Communes de Convergence* initiative, FAO should support the creation of synergies with partners already involved in the implementation of WFP's initiatives. FAO should ensure that implementing partners have the necessary capacities on gender and take advantage of these capacities.

Recommendation 8: Gender mainstreaming in the FAO programme

ES55 FAO should ensure gender mainstreaming at all stages of the project design and implementation process, and consider disseminating its gender policy and strategies within the Representation and to implementing partners. To ensure the adoption of a gender approach in its interventions, FAO should strengthen the capacities of the country team, for example through training. It could also create synergies with existing national structures to benefit from their capacity in this area.



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