

# Niger

## Executive Summary

Niger is classified as both a least developed and a low-income, food-deficit country, and was ranked last in the UNDP Human Development Index in 2006 for the second year running. Niger has malnutrition rates in line with those seen in conflict situations, with 10 percent of the children under five suffering from acute malnutrition and 50 percent of the children - more than one million - suffering from chronic malnutrition. Social indicators are also low: life expectancy at birth is only 44.7 years and the child mortality rate is 20 percent, suggesting that one in five children will never reach the age of five. Poor school attendance, especially among girls, contributes to Niger's 71 percent illiteracy rate.



The country has an estimated population of 12.6 million, which is largely concentrated in a narrow band of arable land along its southern border. Rural subsistence agriculture and livestock raising dominate the economy. The country suffers from chronic food insecurity during the lean season before the harvest, a situation that is exacerbated by the frequent onset of natural disasters. The population growth of 3.3 percent per year is one of the highest in the world, with the country's population and its food needs doubling every 20 years.

In early 2006, the country was still recovering from the shock of the 2005 food crisis, which had weakened livelihood systems of a large part of the rural population and had caused severe nutritional problems in children. While the 2005 harvest was relatively good, many households' debt could barely be covered by the harvest received. Many households were forced to sell assets, animals, harvested food and land to survive the 2005 lean season. Some areas received little or no harvest in late 2005.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) nutritional survey of October/November 2005 indicated that rates of global acute malnutrition surpassed the "critical" threshold with a national average of 15.3 percent.

In March 2006, World Food Programme (WFP) requested \$5.5 million in CERF funds for the immediate purchase of commodities for malnourished children as well as food insecure families before the onset of the 2006 lean season.

**Table 1: Agencies that received funds in 2006**

<b>Total amount of humanitarian funding required by WFP – 2006</b>	■ \$25,068,426 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Total amount of CERF funding received by window (rapid response)</b>	■ \$5,503,823

<sup>1</sup> WFP 2006 requirements as listed in 2006 West Africa CAP revision 28 March 2006.

<b>Total amount of CERF funding for direct UN/IOM implementation and total amount forwarded to implementing partners</b>	■ \$570,736		
<b>Total number of beneficiaries for CERF funding</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>0 - 5 years</b>	140,574	139,527	280,100
<b>5 - 18 years</b>	33,754	33,443	67,197
<b>18+ years</b>	46,526	48,598	95,124
<b>Total</b>	<b>220,854</b>	<b>221,568</b>	<b>442,421</b>
<b>Geographic areas of implementation</b>	■ All regions of Niger		

### ***Decision-making***

In mid-March 2006, WFP approached the Niger Humanitarian Coordinator to discuss the possibility of applying for CERF funds. The Humanitarian Coordinator then consulted with the UN Country Team and the Government of Niger for an overview of requirements in all sectors and the prioritization process. After these consultations, the UN Country Team decided to request only CERF funding for food commodities. This decision was based on the urgent needs in the country, as described in the recent joint food security and nutritional assessments and considered the lack of funding and stocks for both WFP and the National Food Security Mechanism.

After the 2005 crisis, the most pressing needs facing Niger in the short term were malnutrition and food insecurity. This was not difficult for the UN Country Team to assess, thanks to the UNICEF/CDC nutritional survey of October/November 2005 as well as WFP's Emergency Food Security Assessment conducted in September/October 2005.

The UN Country Team considered the funding levels of the different UN agencies, based on their requirements as expressed in the 2006 West Africa Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP).

### ***Implementation***

All nutritional activities are coordinated through the Ministry of Health's Nutrition Division. As per WFP and UNICEF's global Memorandum of Understanding, UNICEF is responsible for the provision of therapeutic food for severely malnourished children while WFP provides commodities for the treatment of moderately malnourished children.

Additionally in 2006, in view of the emergency levels of malnutrition in Niger, WFP and UNICEF collaborated on a blanket supplementary feeding programme to prevent more children from becoming malnourished during the lean season. This activity targeted children from 6 to 59 months in the most remote areas of Tahoua, Zinder and Maradi regions, the regions with the highest rates of malnutrition. WFP and UNICEF coordinated their pipeline for this activity; UNICEF provided 2,000 metric tons of Unimix and WFP provided the remaining needs of 13,250 metric tons of fortified supplementary foods consisting of corn-soya blend, vegetable oil and sugar.

WFP partnered for all nutritional activities with international and local NGOs with an expertise in nutrition.

WFP and UNICEF's close collaboration on nutritional activities was instrumental in coordinating the large-scale nutritional activities that were ongoing in the country since the 2005 crisis. The role of NGOs was also key. Prior to the 2005 food crisis, the only NGO treating malnutrition in Niger was Medecines sans Frontieres (MSF) France. Other NGOs were focusing on prevention activities. In contrast, in 2006, WFP had 24 NGO partners for nutritional activities in 914 centers.

Regarding the targeted free food distributions, the distributions were implemented by the regional committees of the National Food Security Mechanism. The distributions in general were implemented as planned; however as this was the first time, the regional committees had distributed WFP commodities there was a bit of a learning curve.

Annex 1 indicates all the nutritional partners who distributed CERF commodities and the amount of CERF funding they received. In total, for the 4,383 metric tons of CERF commodities distributed for nutrition activities, \$480,214 of CERF funds were given to NGO partners.

For the targeted free food distributions, the 3,120 metric tons of CERF commodities were distributed by the regional committees of the National Food Security Mechanism. For this tonnage, \$90,522 of CERF funds were given to the National Food Security Mechanism.

## Results

The CERF funds were used to procure 3,611 metric ton of corn-soya blend, 280 metric ton of sugar and 209 metric ton of vegetable oil for nutritional activities as well as 3,403 metric ton of sorghum for targeted free food distributions.

For nutritional activities, these commodities were distributed as supplementary feeding for malnourished children as well as for the blanket supplementary feeding activity as described above. In 2006, WFP also provided a protection ration for the families of malnourished children in outpatient treatment to ensure that the treatment ration for the malnourished child was not shared with other children in the household. A discharge ration, which provides food for the family of the child upon recovery and discharge from treatment, was also implemented in 2006 and was found to be effective in shortening recovery times of children in treatment as well as reducing the rate of re-admission. Through these nutritional activities, 4,383 metric tons were distributed to 259,141 beneficiaries.

Through the targeted free food distributions, 3,120 metric tons were distributed to 183,281 beneficiaries.

Activities	0 - 5		5 - 18		+18		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Nutrition	117,262	117,102	5,152	5,105	7,102	7,418	259,141
Targeted Distribution	23,312	22,425	28,602	28,338	39,424	41,180	183,281
<b>Total</b>	<b>140,574</b>	<b>139,527</b>	<b>33,754</b>	<b>33,443</b>	<b>46,526</b>	<b>48,598</b>	<b>442,422</b>

As this was one of the first CERF grants, there were some delays in the process, notably in the finalization of the Letter of Understanding. The CERF request was submitted by the Humanitarian Coordinator to OCHA on 27 March 2006. The funds were disbursed on 16 May 2006 and after procurement and shipping, the commodities arrived in Niger in September 2006.

The commodities did arrive in time for the final distributions of the lean season initiatives such as blanket supplementary feeding, discharge ration and targeted free food distributions. The commodities were also used for other nutritional activities such as supplementary feeding for malnourished children.

A schedule, to ensure regular monitoring of activities (during and post-distribution) by WFP food aid monitors, was in place each month in Niamey and the sub-offices. Data was collected through WFP and NGO partners monitoring activities and reports. UNICEF provided regular monitoring of programme statistics (admission, default and recovery rates) at nutritional centres on the impact of treatment.

UNICEF also conducted an evaluation of the blanket supplementary feeding activity and the Government commissioned an external evaluation of the targeted free food distributions.

In February 2007, WFP conducted a mid-term evaluation of its Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) 10509.0. The evaluation found that the PRRO was largely successful in meeting planned targets, which would not have been possible without adequate funding and the presence of capable implementing partners.

CERF funding allowed WFP to respond to humanitarian needs at a crucial point in the recovery of the country and contributed to a stabilisation of the food security and nutritional situation.

Given the sensitive situation with the Government, there was not much media attention sought or given to the 2006 response.

### ***Lessons learned***

During the 2005 food crisis, a lack of consensus on the gravity of the food security situation and numbers of people affected resulted in a delayed response. In contrast, in 2006, joint Government/UN/donor assessments allowed a smooth formulation and implementation of the 2006 lean season plan of action. This is a major lesson learned in coordination and one that was again applied in 2007.

As noted above, there were some delays in the finalization of the Letter of Understanding for CERF funds. This is understandable considering that this was one of the first CERF grants and part of the learning process.

### ***CERF in Action***

The 2005 food crisis severely eroded the capacity of Nigerien households to survive further shocks. In May 2006, a joint Government/UN/donor food security assessment was conducted based on a statistics analysis of the three dimensions of food security: availability, access and utilization of food. The results of the study indicated that 1.8 million people were severely food insecure and through the National Food Security Mechanism (NFSM), a plan of action was developed to reach these vulnerable households.

The CERF funds of \$5.5 million were used to procure 3,611 metric tons of corn-soya blend, 280 metric tons of sugar and 209 metric tons of vegetable oil for nutritional activities as well as 3,403 metric tons of sorghum for targeted free food distributions.

Through the plan of action of the National Food Security Mechanism, targeted free food distributions were implemented in food insecure areas from August to October 2006, with WFP reaching 321,000 beneficiaries and the Government another 319,000. Sorghum purchased with CERF funds covered 57 percent of WFP's 321,000 beneficiaries – a total of 183,281 persons.

For nutritional activities, CERF commodities were used for supplementary feeding activities for malnourished children, a discharge ration for the families of malnourished children and a blanket supplementary feeding activity for children under three in areas where malnutrition rates were highest, in an effort to tackle the problem before lasting damage was inflicted on the most vulnerable. In total through these activities, 4,383 metric tons of commodities purchased with CERF funds were provided to 259,141 beneficiaries.

The efforts of the Government, WFP, UNICEF and NGO partners paid off. In a dramatic example of what can be achieved through active partnerships and a well-funded operation, Niger's global acute malnutrition rate was slashed from 15.3 per cent to 10.3 per cent in just one year. All humanitarian actors agree that the improvement in rates of acute malnutrition is the result of and dependent upon the intensive and countrywide interventions.

Preventing malnutrition is fundamental, but is also a tremendous long-term challenge in a context with very limited natural resources, an adverse climate, limited social services and no social safety nets. Although it will take many years to have a sustained impact on malnutrition in Niger, WFP and its partners are gradually restoring hope for the future.

### ***A personal story***

Fatouma, a widow, holds her two-year old granddaughter in her arms as she explains that 2005 was the worst lean season in her village since 1984. To make ends meet during the lean season, Fatouma usually makes small cakes to sell along the road that runs through the middle of the village. She also participates in savings groups with other women. Each week, all the women give one woman in the group five francs, with the recipient changing every week. Under this savings scheme, every few weeks each woman receives a relatively large sum of money. These coping mechanisms however were not enough to feed Fatouma and her family during the food crisis but fortunately, Fatouma's village benefited from the general distributions implemented by WFP and the Government in 2005.

During the 2006 lean season, WFP supported the village's cereal bank. Fatouma says that when the family's cereal stocks ran out, she was able to purchase cereals from the bank at moderate prices. Towards the end of the lean season when all resources were exhausted, she was able to purchase cereal on credit, which she will now be able to reimburse with the new harvest. Fatouma says she is glad the cereal bank was there for her and her family when they needed it.

## Annex 1- Implementing Partners for Nutritional Activities

Partner	CERF Tonnage Distributed	CERF funds received
<i>Action Contre la Faim</i>	30	1,564
<i>AMURT</i>	25	3,305
<i>CARE</i>	1,505	210,686
<i>CADEV</i>	12	751
<i>Catholic Relief Services</i>	103	11,027
<i>CONCERN</i>	43	1,987
<i>French Red Cross</i>	87	4,373
<i>GOAL</i>	22	-
<i>Heller Keller International</i>	131	-
<i>Human Appeal International</i>	41	1,584
<i>International Relief and Development</i>	2	162
<i>Islamic Relief</i>	2	89
<i>Medecins sans Frontieres France</i>	27	-
<i>Medecins sans Frontieres Spain</i>	4	-
<i>Medecins sans Frontieres Switzerland</i>	146	-
<i>Save the Children</i>	78	-
<i>VALPRO</i>	342	50,334
<i>World Vision</i>	1,783	194,352
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,383</b>	<b>480,214</b>

Note: The rate of USD per ton distributed is different for each partner based on the budget they have prepared and their other funding sources. Some NGO partners (GOAL, Helen Keller International, etc.) did not request any associated costs