

The market responded to the push in demand by price increases. It responded to limited regional supply by selling/delivering to locations in which, not only higher prices prevailed, but to where transport costs were lower (in this case not necessarily in Niger). This is the efficient working of a perfect market not a market failure as often mistakenly stated.

To a degree, the die was already cast by the time the NGOs made their purchases but they did, nevertheless (albeit small in scale) contribute to the negative impact on the Nigerien cereal market.

If managed properly, local purchase can benefit local production, producer and consumer prices, markets and can better provide locally acceptable food but buying must be preceded by careful assessment of both local and regional markets. The mechanisms and modalities for local purchase need to be addressed in order to avoid market disruption and its consequent negative impact on those who rely on the market.

The Niger 2005 experience should be considered as a case study for the subject of local purchases. Given that the situation is currently evolving and the full impact of local purchases (as well as other interventions) not yet fully known, further study is recommended.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion A. The slow-onset **crisis** began as early as the winter of 2003/4¹¹⁴ when locust infestation decimated pastureland, resulted in widespread large and small ruminant losses and significantly reduced the traditional supply of livestock products to the rural poor.

Recommendation A. Given the importance of the livestock sector, the EWS' of Niger are undoubtedly too narrowly focused on agricultural production. In consideration of the high prevalence of structural acute child malnutrition, it is recommended that EWS' be expanded to include: milk yields and income from livestock along with child nutritional indicators.

Conclusion B. It appears that regional cereal availability was over-estimated in 2004/5 and that stakeholders failed to consider the food security situation in neighbouring countries and how this might impact on Niger. This is significant given the regional magnitude of locust damage, followed by localised rainfall deficits in 2004.¹¹⁵

Recommendation B. Given the historic dependence on regional cereal imports into Niger, EWS' should be strengthened by incorporating regional trade and cereal market analysis.

Conclusion C. While Partner EWS' do feed into GoN systems, they lack cohesion and an adequate information interface with them for their greatest effectiveness.

¹¹⁴ Although it could be argued that the crisis started some three to four decades ago.

¹¹⁵ In its February 2005 Food Security Update, FEWS Net did mention food and forage shortages in Mali and Burkina Faso as well as limited grain transfers from 'other countries' but the implications of such were not highlighted, given the situation in Niger and its low strategic grain reserves.

Recommendation C. Partners need to align their EWS' jointly and with those of GoN as well as developing a workable interface with the latter. The Partners need to assist GoN SAP to absorb and analyse data (and add anthropometric data) emanating from the former's field work. This will require software development for which funding is available.

Conclusion D. Rewards for off-farm wage labour are poor both within and beyond Niger's borders¹¹⁶ and they fail to enable remittances adequate enough to compensate for poor on-farm incomes and particularly for crop failures.

Recommendation D. Existing development programmes should be expanded with emphasis on sustainable non-farm livelihoods within Niger's borders and with the flexibility for further temporary expansion during times of crisis.

Conclusion E. GoN and the donor community agreed to avoid direct food distributions which would seem to be correct according to their agreed Food Security Strategy although many players disagree. Free food aid intervention always presents considerable risks to the stability of the market and, by consequence, to national food security.

Some serious donors have been involved in the development of this strategy for twenty years and, at a national level, it has been largely successful. It failed in 2005 for the reasons discussed in this report and very much because buffer stocks had been allowed to fall to a dangerously low level. The donors lacked the flexibility to identify/correct this in time and, most importantly, to bring supplies from outside the region when it became clear that there would be a net food deficit in theatre.

Recommendation E. Partners should continue to work within GoN policy frameworks while, at the same time, ensuring that they are 'close enough' to Government in order to advocate for change when this is necessitated.

Conclusion F. It can be argued that, had the strategic grain reserves been sufficiently stocked or had the GoN appeal to replenish them been successful, GoN's market assistance programme¹¹⁷ could have been adequate – especially if animal feed were included.

Recommendation F. While not encouraging a 'go it alone' policy, Partners should enable location of strategic grain reserves closer to (and with management¹¹⁸ by) local communities by expanding their existing cereal bank programmes.

Conclusion G. Existing Partner cereal banks¹¹⁹ are inadequate to offset the effects of minimal crop failure or even the 'normal' practice of early selling and pre-harvest borrowing.

¹¹⁶ Even in richer Nigeria, labour rates as low as US \$1.50 per day are common.

¹¹⁷ Including cereal subsidy.

¹¹⁸ Here some training in storage management is clearly needed.

¹¹⁹ Holding one to two months' supply of grain.

Recommendation G. Cereal banks need to have a stockholding of three to five months, a figure recommended by various communities, women suggestions tending to be at the higher and men at the lower end of the scale.

Conclusion H. Debt, incurred largely by pre-harvest food borrowing¹²⁰ with post-harvest repayment in kind at pre-harvest financial values equating to an up to threefold physical repayment¹²¹, presents the rural poor with an overwhelming debt burden from which it is increasingly difficult to escape.

Recommendation H. It is recommended that cereal bank construction is accelerated and stocked up to the levels¹²² suggested by respondents to this study, not by free donation but by FFW.

This has been discussed with WFP who indicate that it would be acceptable if that body is successful in winning increased food resources following forthcoming evaluation and analysis of its 2005 interventions.

The Team would suggest a system in which FFW¹²³ would be paid at the normal rate¹²⁴ plus the same rate paid into the cereal bank for moderated sale at the beginning of the hungry season. This is not a ‘cure-all’ nor is it sustainable over more than the medium term and it still requires the initial FFW worker to find the cash for pre-harvest purchase but it has the possibility of removing the debt burden at an early date¹²⁵. It can also present the community with a new start. The administration of such an exercise is not underestimated but it does present an idea amongst a dearth of other possibilities.

Conclusion I. Discourse between GoN, WFP and Partners failed to benefit from the latter’s comparative advantage in exposure to the condition of their communities. Even as the severity of the situation became more apparent, there appears to have been a lack of a concerted effort to capitalise on the advocacy leverage points of each of the various stakeholders which might have tempered the effects of confused analysis and prevented its misdirected mediatisation.

Recommendation I. In order to achieve better coordination with and influence on GoN at both the central and local level, it is recommended that Partners should develop closer working relations with GoN which could imply NGO staff working within GoN structures but at least ensuring cohesion in each other’s policies and use of information. In the latter respect, Partners should aim to facilitate GoN’s capacity to handle information provided by them.

Conclusion J. Interviews with mothers at nutritional centres did not evidence that any effective nutritional education was being imparted although, with the training of Traditional

¹²⁰ Of typically one to three (100 kg) sacks of grain.

¹²¹ Three times three sacks of grain amounts to 900 kg which represents almost the total harvest of many farmers!

¹²² Three to five months’ needs.

¹²³ To include store construction.

¹²⁴ Currently in the order of 2.5 kg cereal/working person/day.

¹²⁵ The FFW component paid directly to farmers should be sufficient to cover farmers outstanding debts but it is recognized that Food Aid grain is unlikely to be accepted by creditors on a par with local produce. It can, however, cover the food lost to the household through current repayment.

Health Workers (THW), knowledge has been planted in some villages. CARE's MMD participants interviewed did show good general knowledge and attitude but their numbers were too few to be of significant influence.

Recommendation J. The Team considers that, in addition to THW training, a better educational strategy would be some form of training for village chiefs who command considerable respect in their communities but often have only very basic education and little exposure to non-traditional methods.¹²⁶

Conclusion K. It is not surprising that, in light of the lack of coordination and thus of cohesion between them, the Partners failed to bring advocacy to bear on stakeholders as the crisis developed.

Recommendation K. As an initial step, Partners should explore possibilities for joint development programming¹²⁷ since clear opportunities exist for them to share ideas, establish best practices and develop common systems with regard to supplementary feeding programmes, FFW activities, group savings/loans and cereal banks to facilitate their uncomplicated replication. The next step must be to establish a joint advocacy facility.

Conclusion L. It was surprising that some of the Partners were running supplementary feeding centres despite not having a comparative advantage in the sector. On the other hand, CARE, not known for its comparative advantage in supplementary feeding, did show that it could support the efforts of those NGOs which do have such advantage (SCUK and, by implication, MSF) by taking over some of the pressure on their general food distribution interventions.

Recommendation L. In improving their coordination, the Partners need to identify their comparative advantages and to specialise accordingly. The difficulties in gaining comprehensive coverage with single sector interventions in such a vast country is not, however, underestimated.

Conclusion M. While there was no evidence of intervention overlap, the Team found examples of non-coverage of vulnerable villages. It was not possible for the Team to quantify the scale or location of such gaps but, equally, the Partners (and other agencies) had been unable to establish a system to obtain this information.

Recommendation M. A further Partner coordination effort needs to be put into achieving overall coverage in identified areas. In recognition of the fact that NGOs cannot do everything, the Partners need to be brutally honest with themselves, intervene with excellence, encourage replication and highlight the gaps to other agencies.

Conclusion N. All indicators show that the NGO's, UN agencies and GoN knew that there was an impending food **crisis** in 2005. The warning systems were, therefore, relatively

¹²⁶ Training, for example in the methods of need assessment and aid distribution could ease future response while training in the role of 'change agent', could motivate and provide them with some of the skills needed to stimulate village development programmes.

¹²⁷ Although CARE and CRS, in a consortium with Africare and HKI, have made a start in implementing a large food security programme which includes FFW, agriculture, natural resources management and health components.

good but it was the reaction to them which is the issue. Given that the initial problem was a slow-onset food **crisis**, against which the severity should have been mitigated, it is concluded that the Partners' response, albeit correct, was late and under-scale.

Recommendation N. Partners need to scale-up those relevant activities (FFW, CFW, clean water etc.) which might be quickly and flexibly expanded when the indicators call for a greater response.

Conclusion O. Given that the eventual problem was an unforeseen rapid-onset, media-driven, severe food deficit **emergency**, one has to conclude that the response of the Partners was both relevant and correct. While Save the Children responded to support MSF, the other Partners quite correctly worked within GoN/WFP frameworks. Unfortunately, GoN and WFP used outdated targeting information and consequently missed a significant number of vulnerable people.

Recommendation O. It would be advantageous if the entire NGO community contributed and participated in national EWS and emergency preparedness. All could benefit from training using the diverse expertise and experience of the different agencies.

Conclusion P. Measurement of malnutrition rates has been poor and needs to be addressed by NGOs themselves since it is not the work of GoN SAP, who are responsible for more macro- measurements. It is acknowledged that SAP indicators at the macro level still need improvement.

Recommendation P. An anthropometric surveying capacity needs to be developed either by individual Partners or by delegation of this function to one or more specialised NGOs who can harmonise the targeting process and ensure its equity. Partners need to help GoN SAP to modify their indicators so that their information can be more accurate in the future.

Conclusion Q. With the exception of Save the Children, the agency's monitoring and analysis of developing food security situations and initiation of decision-making processes tends to be at the country office¹²⁸ level. There are no designated analysts either in country or in fact at their higher institutional levels. Government (GoN SAP) and International Agency (WFP, FEWS-Net) respondents volunteered their non-identification of the developing 2004/5 regional net food deficit and accordingly their non-realisation of the need for early importation of food supplies from outside the region. There is, thus, clearly a need for a market specialist in the Government and International Institution sectors and an analytical capacity in the NGO sector.

Recommendation Q. This report has emphasised the need for proper inter-NGO coordination in Niger. Its initial focus could be in the establishment of a joint monitoring/analytical facility with a secretariat based in one of the larger (or specialist) NGOs. At the higher institutional level, the NGOs need better global tracking capabilities in order to pre-empt poor analysis and undue sensationalism.

¹²⁸ Although CARE's Emergency Response Unit in Geneva did pick up on the events leading to the **emergency** through their monitoring of Alert Net.

Conclusion R. In final conclusion, the Team would state that this was an emergency which should not have happened but is likely to happen again¹²⁹ unless measures are taken to mitigate against the occurrence of another convergence of causal factors.

Recommendation R. This report has suggested some (not very original) ideas but the time is now right for the Partners to sit together, learn the lessons and ‘brainstorm’ new ideas.

¹²⁹ In October 2005, there were already signs that some of the causal factors were in play (e.g. cereal prices had not fallen to ‘normal’ October levels, Nigerian (and other neighbour) traders were already very active in the market, some trader stock-building was evident, some farmers were ‘forward selling’ their crops ‘on the stalk’ and some of the rural poor were beginning to harvest and store ‘famine foods’. In November 2005, the BBC was again reporting the Niger food situation without any in-depth analysis of the problem.