

1. Executive summary

1.1 The June-September 2005 Food Emergency in Niger occurred as a result of a convergence of contributory factors¹; some of which were foreseeable and some of which could not have been predicted until it was too late to respond in a timely and adequate manner. These included:

- a. Government removal of food price controls in 2002 with associated commercial activity in the market (eg. withholding stocks²);
- b. Some localised harvest failures in 2003;
- c. Regional desert locust infestation which arrived in Niger in early 2004 and decimated pastures;
- d. Substantial livestock losses due to locust damaged pastureland and thus deficiencies in livestock products from the diets of the rural poor. It is assumed that this dietary deficit particularly affected young children;
- e. Regional 2004 harvest deficits on localised bases;
- f. Inadequate in-country food security reserves;
- g. Imposition³ of value added taxes on imported food;
- h. Government policy disallowed free food distribution⁴ until July 2005;
- i. Closure ('officially') of neighbouring country borders for cereal stock exports to Niger; and
- j. Structural poverty on a national basis with limited possibilities for migrant workers to support their families with other than meagre remittances.

1.2 The problem was aggravated by denationalisation on the world stage in a manner which confused two fundamentally separate issues:

- a. Localised crop failures and regional deficits; and
- b. Chronic malnutrition along with structural acute child malnutrition⁵ and a high incidence of malaria, communicable and water-borne diseases, all of which are closely linked.

1.3 Institutional intervention in the market⁶ publicised by media attention are considered to have been the cause of dramatic June/July 2005 food price escalations normally unrelated to a harvest deficit of only 9% of the 1999-2003 five year average⁷. The Partners, WFP and GoN, who were not party to the cause of the **emergency** and who, up to that point, had been attempting to address localised pockets of food insecurity, albeit with inadequate funding, were thus drawn

¹ Another real life natural disaster was depicted in a film, 'The Perfect Storm', wherein the convergence of a number of normally separate meteorological factors led to the overlaying of two cyclones with catastrophic consequences for shipping.

² Albeit slowly and in relatively small quantities

³ Never applied and later removed (with the exception of sugar) but which, nevertheless, did have effects on the market.

⁴ But did allow subsidised food sales

⁵ Which is of a cyclical nature.

⁶ Including local purchase.

⁷ **Source:** Ministry of Agriculture (GoN) and WFP

into a situation in which they had to respond on a far larger scale, on a far wider front and within a far shorter time-scale than was reasonable.

This report argues that, had the **crisis** been properly analysed by those who sensationalised it, had been sensibly presented and an earlier appropriate response initiated, the necessity for the scope of the consequent **emergency** response would have been reduced.

Relevance

1.4 Given the situation on the ground following foreign media attention to Niger's problems in early June 2005, the Team considers that the four subject Partners of this study made very relevant and timely responses albeit that, due to the lead-time to bring food into the country from overseas⁸, their effects were rather too late to gain optimum impact:

Save the Children (UK) responded to a request by MSF to relieve their workload. Mobilisation was rapid and enabled MSF to concentrate on nutritional/health complications.

CARE had increased its household vulnerability monitoring of its development programme populations and was lobbying the PM's office towards mitigation⁹ of the effects of the food **crisis**.

CARE, CRS and World Vision had already increased their existing FFW interventions earlier in 2005 and expedited funding proposals and logistics preparations when the situation deteriorated.

Coverage

1.5 The subject of coverage has to be seen against a background of widespread need, the vastness of the affected regions, the complexities of good targeting, time constraints and limited resources (food and staff) which governed distribution capacity.

1.6 According to GoN¹⁰, 26% of the Niger population was vulnerable and, according to figures supplied by the four Partner NGOs¹¹ in November 2005, the latter met 29% of their needs while 37% of the vulnerable received something and 9.6% of the total population received one or more distributions from the Partners. CCA only considered 16% of the Maradi population to be vulnerable while the Partners consider that they distributed to 63% of that vulnerable population.

1.7 Two levels of targeting have been considered by this study:

- a. those directed by WFP/CCA and for which the Partners were contractually obliged to satisfy; and

⁸ Two months is not an unusually long lead-time to source, procure and transport grain from India to land-locked Niger. It has to be remembered that it was the donors who were late to respond not WFP who, without funds, can do nothing.

⁹ Free food distribution and improved targeting.

¹⁰ **Source:** CCA, June 2005

¹¹ See **Annexe O**.

- b. those not directed by WFP/CCA but which involved vulnerable communities not officially recognised as such and therefore marginalised except in the cases which the Partners addressed separately.

While the Partners did make contact with a significant part (about 10%) of the population and largely met their contractual obligations¹² to WFP in the first round of distributions, the Team found a significant number of communities which did not benefit from the second round. The Team also found examples of *ménages*¹³ which were not covered in targeted households and this led to some discrepancies in received assistance.

With regard to targeting of the officially unrecognised vulnerable (1.7.b above), the Team considers that, while Partners did try to give attention to these, considerable numbers were not targeted by anyone at all because their location/scale was not known¹⁴. Even if it had been known, the capacity of the NGOs to implement and that of GoN/WFP to purchase/transport were inadequate in the given time-frame.

Connectiveness

1.8 Coordination - the Team noted that the Partners were reactive with regard to interagency coordination and, accordingly, the lack of an effective NGO forum in Niger is a serious weakness in their effective programming. Opportunities were thus lost for recognition of comparative advantages between the Partners¹⁵, establishing joint advocacy positions and for peer training prior to emergency actions.

Coordination of Partners' food distributions by GoN/WFP¹⁶ is considered to have been poor and is an issue addressed in this report with regard to closer working relationships, particularly with GoN.

1.9 Coherence - Coordination is a *sine qua non* to coherence and, consequent to the lack of the former, Partners' own policies and methods were neither known nor aligned. There were, therefore, significant differences between Partners in the areas of, *inter alia*: targeting, distribution and cereal bank management policies.

¹² And, in cases, returned unused food to WFP.

¹³ Households within the overall household.

¹⁴ It must be remembered that village targeting and population figures for free food distribution were defined by GoN/WFP based on SAP information and that the indicators for this information need to be more accurate in the future.

¹⁵ In the light of organisational comparative advantage, CARE's decision to initiate supplementary feeding activities is questionable.

¹⁶ GoN and United Nations initiated parallel coordination structures but, at the Central level, these were primarily devoted to information exchange. GoN coordination structures met each Thursday for a general meeting at the PM's office where the most important decisions were made with inadequate Partner input. WFP monitored distributions at a Local level but coordination at this level is considered to have been minimal.

Efficiency

1.10 The achievement of the Partners' approximate 10% coverage of Niger's population in two months attests to their hard work and their level of efficiency. The Team did note a number of areas in which work could have been achieved more efficiently and/or with higher quality:

- a. During early 2005, when Partners were aware of the problems and before emergency operations started in earnest, time could have been better utilised to:
 - Strengthen NGO cooperation and joint planning;
 - Explore avenues of advocacy towards GoN, donors and the media with regard to problem analysis and presentation, correct response, vulnerability intelligence and targeting; and
 - Train staff in appropriate emergency response procedures such as crowd control, eligibility criteria, beneficiary identification and beneficiary proof of identity.
- b. When emergency response commenced, some Partners sent short-term expatriates without language skills and some without useful technical skills;
- c. Improved communications could have improved the quality and efficiency of the response. Examples were found of the non-transmission of essential information¹⁷ between sub-offices and onwards to remote sites in the field due to inadequate radio facilities.

Effectiveness

1.11 The Team consider that the response of the agencies was effective in achieving the purposes for which they intervened in each of the two phases. While their response in the **crisis phase** was slow, their response in the **emergency phase** was very fast and limited only by delivery of WFP food.

1.12 Some Partners are already involved with cereal banks but stock levels (up to two months' coverage) are inadequate to meet real requirements. The Team considers that, if there had been a wider coverage of more substantial cereal banks¹⁸ at the community level, the ease and effectiveness of emergency intervention would have been significantly improved due to increased communities' capacity to withstand initial shocks.

Impact

1.13 The Partners' response, through no fault of their own, came 'too little, too late'. In the case of chronic malnutrition, it could be said that it "came ten years too late".¹⁹ In the case of

¹⁷ Such as distribution times, dates and quantities.

¹⁸ Holding stocks of three to five months' supply.

¹⁹ **Source:** 2005 speech by the Prime Minister of Niger.

acute malnutrition, and due to the long lead-time involved in bringing food from overseas, relief did not arrive in time too avoid considerable suffering²⁰.

1.14 Those people who were marginalised²¹ in the targeting process either:

- a. Benefited from the traditional ‘sharing’ and ‘borrowing’²² which prevails at the community level but which dilutes individual benefit; or
- b. Borrowed on a more commercial basis with debt repayment now due at up to three times the physical quantity borrowed. This has placed many households in serious debt²³ from which it will be difficult to escape in the short- to medium-term.

1.15 The impact of the Partners’ intervention, in terms of bulk food intervention therefore, has to be considered as short-term and insufficient. In terms of Save the Children’s intervention²⁴ in child supplementary feeding and support to MSF, however, the impact would appear to have been significant in those limited areas in which it worked. Albeit over a short time period and with harvest arrival, the Team found no evidence of returns of ‘cured’ children to Feeding Centres and this must attest to the impact of all the supplementary feeding interventions.

1.16 With regard to the impact of local purchases (see section **5f.(ii)** below) while that of the partners was minimal, the subject is a serious one and the Partners need to be very vigilant on the subject.

Conclusions

1.17 The 2005 Niger food crisis happened against a background of:

- a. Donors’ long-term lack of geo-political interest in Niger which has never benefited from adequate development assistance to address its severe structural problems manifested by, *inter alia*, chronic malnutrition, cyclical acute malnutrition, inadequate livelihoods, diminishing natural resource base and consequent rapid desert encroachment;
- b. Poor donor response to warnings issued by SAP which, itself, needs to be widened and its indicator base deepened;
- c. High population growth in relation to poor agricultural production;
- d. Discouraging prospects for the rural poor such that relief efforts and many development interventions are mere palliatives;

²⁰ Manifested in the widespread resort of the victims to wild food at unprecedented levels.

²¹ Numerically considerable, not calculated by the Team and not known by the agencies.

²² With no chargeable interest.

²³ Reflecting the (up to) triple escalation of prices before and during the ‘hungry season’.

²⁴ In which Save the Children mobilised to relieve the pressure from MSF child malnutrition intervention in selected locations.

- e. An inability of the people to absorb the shock of what started as localised food deficits in 2004 but escalated into widespread net food shortages by mid- 2005; and
- f. Poor alternative livelihood possibilities both within and beyond the country's borders²⁵.

1.18 Against a background of regional food deficits, buying of Nigerien grain by its neighbours and 'official' border closures against re-export by them, it became no longer commercially viable to haul foodstuff to this (remote) country when it could be off-loaded to its neighbours to the south without incurring further transport costs. The same could be said within country. The result was significant net food deficits across Niger and consequent (*inter alia*) inflationary pressure on food prices.

1.19 Given that rations are designed to bridge the gap between affected people's requirements and their own food sources, and in the light of market opportunities, availability of local production, off-farm income sources and other coping strategies, the Team considers that affected populations were fundamentally in need of general rations during the **emergency**. The issue of targeted nutritional support for the severely malnourished, while necessary, was a separate issue which should have been better addressed years previously.

1.20 A key finding of this evaluation is the lack of coordination within and between key stakeholders while a second is the fact that that the **emergency** was something which should not have happened but did because the response was undermined by poor analysis of the problems by those who sensationalised it. The two issues are linked.

Recommendations

1.21 While it is easy for an evaluator to be 'clever after the event'²⁶ (but indeed many of the humanitarian community interviewed still considered the **emergency** to have been a classical famine), coordinated thinking by stakeholders (both on the ground and back at headquarters) would help to avoid the repetition of a situation in which, too late, a response was driven by a confused media. It would also provide a joint message for advocacy purposes.

1.22 In order to address the problems at a level within their capacity, the Partners should:

- a. Address chronic malnutrition through long-term commitment to improving health, water, sanitation and food production issues. In this regard, the Team recommends that Save the Children remains in the country, expands its activities for the foreseeable future and draws upon its well proven experience of working within Government structures²⁷;
- b. Increase the capacity of the rural population to withstand harvest deficit shocks through the construction and stocking of food banks at the community level. This can be

²⁵ With wages as low as US \$1.50 per day in, for example, Nigeria.

²⁶ Hindsight is the most precise science known to man.

²⁷ *Viz.* Ethiopia

achieved through considerable expansion of existing FFW or CFW activities²⁸ in a system whereby participants are paid at existing rates of remuneration while, at the same time, meeting individual payments with equivalent rates of food²⁹ destined for storage within participants' own communities³⁰.

- c. Recognise each NGOs' comparative advantages, specialise accordingly and coordinate coverage;
- d. Adopt strategies for extended (comprehensive) geographic coverage;
- e. Through joint NGO training, prepare NGO staff in the practices of targeting, mass distribution techniques and monitoring;
- f. Work more closely with GoN early warning systems at both local and central levels in ensuring that data collected by Partners is compatible with GoN' own database and analysis systems;
- g. In conjunction with GoN, modify and expand SAP indicators in order to make them more accurate and to make them more effective in identifying vulnerable people;
- h. Assist the rural population to relieve its structural debt problems through the FFW/CFW interventions described in **b)** above as well as addressing longer-term non-farm livelihoods through such interventions as training in skills which can be marketed with greater remuneration both within Niger and beyond its borders;
- i. Continue to address degradation of the natural resource base and increased food production through commercialised livestock exploitation and the introduction of improved agricultural practices such as crop diversification, drip irrigation and remote crop feeding³¹;
- j. In recognition of the linkage between water-borne disease and malnutrition, ensure potable water supply in areas of intervention;
- k. In recognition of the linkage between malaria, malnutrition and high child mortality, ensure expansion of interventions which address the disease.

²⁸ With the exception of Save the Children.

²⁹ It is recognised that WFP is currently unavailed of sufficient food to support such an intervention but this may change by the end of 2005 subject to their forthcoming analyses and presents an advocacy opportunity to the partners.

³⁰ Local tastes and the acceptability Genetically Modified Foods are issues which must be addressed here.

³¹ All of which imply heavy capital investment and high level technology inputs but, without such, it is the Team's opinion that significant food production in Niger is doomed.