

Cash transfers in Niger: the manna, the norms and the suspicions

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“It solves problems at the household level but creates them at the village level!” (Mayor of Tébaram, in Issaley¹)

“The White Man’s money belongs to the whole village. So everyone must be allowed to benefit from these handouts.” (A.D. Tébaram, in Issaley)

“There’s no shortage of abuse, especially when it comes to enjoying the help provided by projects or the state. So bringing everyone together under the palaver tree only makes for more cheating. People have lost their dignity and their sense of honour because of the many forms of support they have grown accustomed to. That’s why they are forever scheming to be always among the beneficiaries.” (Y.D., Simiri, in Issaka)²

Introduction

Cash transfers (CT) are a particularly fascinating case for the social anthropology of development and, more generally, for research on development, for three reasons: (a) because they are going through a period of considerable expansion, both in the intermediary countries and in the poorest countries, and are the latest ‘fashion’ in the world of humanitarian action, social action and development; (b) because they are going through a period of implementation on a vast scale in Niger, which has provided us with an exceptional situation for natural experimentation and for monitoring the implementation of an innovative method of intervention; (c) because the peculiarities of the CT system (the distribution of a new ‘product’ by importing a system of new norms: see below), despite the undeniable benefits, concentrate or exacerbate the main ambiguities, contradictions, difficulties and inappropriateness of current interventions by development agencies (regardless of the good intentions of their staff and the positive outcomes achieved) when they are set against the many local rationales at various levels.³

We should start by clearing up any misunderstanding: our intention is not in any way to put either CTs or the work of development agencies in general on trial. We do not subscribe to an ‘anti-development’ ideology. All public policies (and interventions in

¹ Issaley, N. “Le cash transfer à Olléléwa : de la fabrique des “vulnérables” à la gestion locale de l’aide”, *Etudes et Travaux du LASDEL*, n° 108, 2013 (all issues of *Etudes et Travaux du LASDEL* can be downloaded free of charge from the LASDEL website: www.lasdel.net).

² Oumarou, I. “Les transferts monétaires dans la commune de Roumbou” *Etudes et Travaux du LASDEL*, n° 107, 2013.

³ The research in question was undertaken by LASDEL and funded by French cooperation in Niger and the NGOs ASB and Concern. This is the translation of a paper published in French in 2013: Olivier de Sardan, J.P. “*Les transferts monétaires au Niger : la manne et les soupçons. Synthèse des recherches menées par le LASDEL*”, n° 108

development are only a particular form of public policy – steered from outside the country) experience ambiguities, contradictions, difficulties and inappropriate elements. Discrepancies between a policy on paper (or in terms of its logical framework and procedure manuals) and a policy in the field exist everywhere: they constitute what is known as the “implementation gap”.⁴ Every intervention system (every public policy) is subject to local forms of reinterpretation, diversion or fragmentation, and is exposed to abuses caused by the interaction of different rationales that frequently diverge and sometimes come into conflict, and underlie the behaviour of the various strategic groups (or stakeholders) brought face to face during its implementation.

However, just how big, significant or apparent these discrepancies are depends on the situation. They are particularly important in the present context, on three different levels.

1. Generally speaking, these discrepancies are especially pronounced in the case of development and humanitarian interventions because of the usual practice of applying standardized intervention methods in a given country that have their origin in completely different contexts (this is the case with CTs, which were first pioneered in Latin America and then in Eastern Europe). These discrepancies become even more pronounced when the methods of intervention are more complex and presuppose the creation of institutional structures and new procedures (which is equally true of CTs). Admittedly, for the promoters of CTs it is a matter of simplification and improved efficiency in comparison with old forms of intervention (such as the distribution of food or the food for work scheme); however, for the local population it means a new set of rules that are imposed from outside, difficult to understand and completely at odds with the local context.

2. Apart from these general reasons for the discrepancies, there are other, more specific causes, peculiar to the Nigerien context, which further exacerbate them.

(a) In Niger, CTs are injected into a rural social context where a ‘rentier culture’ already exists and where ‘assistentialism’ is in operation; in other words, where strategies for capturing ‘development resources’ are highly developed at all levels (farmers and chiefs, voters and mayors, investigators and project workers, etc.).

(b) Nigerien villages are deeply divided and fragmented and characterized by conflicts of varying degrees of latency and by contradictions that lie more or less below the surface. They constitute, therefore, prime “spaces of suspicion” and these suspicions are inevitably fanned where money is involved.

(c) The various forms of local authority (chiefs, mayors, local government workers) are frequently challenged, their patronage and corruption are notorious, and the various local modes of governance face great difficulties in delivering satisfactory services to users.⁵

3. Lastly, other, specific causes of discrepancies come into play, this time linked to the very nature of the system of intervention (the CTs) and, more precisely, to the type of product (money) and the ways in which it is distributed (the importation of complex and diverse rules and procedures).

(a) Money is a powerful ‘driver of suspicion’, while the quest for cash is a central preoccupation for most rural actors, not only for reasons of food insecurity, but equally for social reasons (ceremonies, travel etc.), to the extent that it has become possible to talk of the

⁴ Cf. Bierschenk, T. & Olivier de Sardan, J. P. “Ethnographies of Public Services in Africa: An Emerging Research Paradigm”, in *States at Work. Dynamics of African Bureaucracies*, Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan (eds) Leyden: Brill, 2014. The analysis of the ‘problem of gaps’ is at the heart of the anthropology of development and, more generally, of the anthropology of public policy.

⁵ Cf. Olivier de Sardan, J.P. 2011 “Local powers and the co-delivery of public goods in Niger”, *IDS Bulletin*, 42 (2): 32-42.

“over-monetization” of the Nigerien countryside. Its distribution in the guise of ‘manna’ (a gift from heaven) by development agencies on the basis of procedures that are supposed to be impersonal is far removed from the traditional local forms of financial help, which are very personal (charity, philanthropy, loans, help from neighbours).

(b) This bureaucratic distribution of manna from abroad operates through the introduction of a complete set of new ‘rules’ imposed by the development agencies (the targeting of the most ‘vulnerable’, the payments reserved for women, the village general assemblies, the complaints committees, the household surveys etc.). Clearly, there is a high risk of ‘circumvention’ through recourse to either local rules already in place or to improvised rules, often to the advantage of particular actors. Comparisons between this imported institutional engineering and the representations and norms of the intermediaries and recipients is the focus of our study, which reveals just how wide the gap is.

Many local fieldworkers and NGO personnel are no doubt already aware of most of the problems we identify, especially those surrounding targeting operations. Hence, for them, our reports are not exactly ‘scoops’, but they do, in our opinion, offer two advantages: first, rather than remaining confined to doubts, rumours or impressions, they enable these different problems to be documented in a manner that is serious, substantiated and indisputable, via a comparative, multi-site approach. Second, the reports allow the problems to be brought out into the open and debated in public instead of being swept under the carpet or remaining mired in the newspeak of projects and administrations.⁶

We shall examine the following four points: the methodology and the problems encountered; a short history of cash transfers in Niger; the individual stages of the CT process and the problems arising at each stage; and, finally, the central paradox of CTs: the imposition of external and incoherent rules.

The methodology and the problems encountered

The method of investigation

In accordance with LASDEL practice, we adopted a qualitative approach: residence at the locations investigated, observations, case studies, and individual, semi-structured and informal interviews with actors belonging to various ‘strategic groups’ (beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, men, women, auxiliary CT workers from the villages, chiefs, NGO workers, local politicians, NGO and MFI (microfinance institutions) officials, members of sub-regional committees etc.).

The reports are based on a large number of interviews (445 formal and numerous informal interviews) conducted in 21 villages by a total of eight investigators (two LASDEL researchers with PhDs in anthropology, a PhD student who is a LASDEL researcher, two PhD students who are research assistants at LASDEL, and three research assistants with master’s degrees). All of them work in the local languages, have a proven track record and are thoroughly trained in the use of qualitative methods. Prior to the investigation proper, research issues were refined at the end of a working session with CT NGO agents. Several team meetings allowed the results to be compared as they emerged. A preliminary collaborative

⁶ The non-emergence and, accordingly, non-discussion of these problems in institutional public spaces devoted to CTs is striking: the discussion agendas of workshop on the “Lessons learnt about cash transfer programmes” held in Niamey 5-6 December 2012 and a regional workshop on “Learning about cash transfer programmes” held recently in Dakar (12-14 March 2013) did not include the reservations of the local populations about targeting and its circumvention.

investigation in the field (ECRIS),⁷ which took place in Simiri, in the Department of Ouallam, enabled the lines of research to be developed.

The problems identified, and which are exemplified by the quotations, came up time and time again in our interviews, and in all five locations. In other words, *the quotations in our reports are not marginal comments or exceptional cases, but a reflection of the convergent observations of the large numbers of people we interviewed.* It should also be pointed out that we encountered other ‘problems’, but did not record them, precisely because they seemed to us to be marginal, or were not sufficiently documented through our data (like the setting up of *ad hoc* – NGO or MFI – structures by NGO actors in the field in order to capture the ‘manna’ constituted by the CTs). The degree of prominence given to the quotations in this article, which may surprise the reader, is not fortuitous, but seems to us an indispensable way of ‘providing evidence’ by giving space to the direct testimonies of the actors involved. This is the specific nature of the qualitative approach supported by LASDEL. It must enter into detail and it must give access to sources.

Five municipalities were studied across the country: Olléléwa, in the Department of Tanout (by Nana Issaley, assisted by Sanoussi Idi); Tébaram, in the Department of Tahoua (by Oumarou Hamani, assisted by Oumarou Gambo); Loga, in the Department of Loga (by Younoussi Issa, assisted by Mohamed Moussa); Roumbou, in the Department of Dakoro (by Issaka Oumarou); and Simiri, in the Department of Ouallam (by Hannatou Adamou).

The CT operations taken into account on the five sites

Commune	Donor	NGO North	NGO local	MFI	Targeting	Dates	Amounts (XOF)	No. of Benefic
Loga	WFP		Kaydia	Capital finance	Widows, elderly with no support, disabled	June 12 July 12 August 12 September 2012	4,640× no. pers. h’hold 4,640× no. pers. h’hold 4,300× no. pers. h’hold 4,640× no. pers. h’hold	30,177 persons
Roumbou	WFP	Enfance Sans Frontière		MECREF	Women from vulnerable households	June 12 July 12 Sept 12 Sept 12	4,640× no. pers. h’hold 4,640× no. pers. h’hold 4,300× no. pers. h’hold 4,640× no. pers. h’hold	252 households
Tébaram (Tahoua)	European Union	Concern	Concern	Asusu	Women from vulnerable households	July 12 August 12 August 12 Sept 13	30,000 35,000 35,000 25,000	195 households
Olléléwa	British Red Cross				All heads of households present	Oct 2005	70,000 sedentary people and 120,000 nomads	

id.	ASB				Migrants (Zinder, Agadez) disabled, vulnerable women	May 12 June 12 August 12 Sept 12	32,500 32,500 40,000 32,500	1,226 households
id.	Irish Red Cross ECHO	French Red Cross		Yarda	Women from vulnerable households	2012	25,000 25,000 30,000	

⁷ For a presentation of the ECRIS framework, cf. Bierschenk, T. & Olivier de Sardan, J.P. “ECRIS: rapid collective inquiry for the identification of conflicts and strategic groups ...”, *Human Organization*, 56 (2), 1997, pp. 238-244.

id	State (PACRC)				Disaster victims	January 13	26,660	42 households
id.	WFP		Karkara	Yarda	Women from vulnerable households	Oct 11 Nov 11	25,000 25,000	
Simiri	OFDA		Karkara	Asusu	Widows without support, elderly, disabled, flood victims	Sept. 2011 Sept. 2011 Oct. 2011 Nov. 2011 Dec. 2011	40,000 60,000 40,000 40,000 90,000	492 households
id.	OFDA Oxfam DFID SIDA		Karkara	Asusu	Widows without support, elderly, disabled	Sept. 2012 Oct. 2012 Nov. 2012 Dec. 2012	32,500 32,500 32,500 50,000	439 households
id.	BM		social safety nets	accountant prefecture	Vulnerable women	Between Jan. 2010 and June 2011	10,000/months x 18 months	226 households

Some difficulties and limitations concerning our research

Our survey came up against five kinds of difficulties:

1) It was carried out in December 2012 and January 2013, hence we were not able to observe directly the targeting processes and distribution operations, which mostly happen during the winter months (June-September).

2) Given the depth and complexity of the subject, the time allocated for the fieldwork (one month), analysis and writing up (one month) turned out to be far too short for developing or treating certain points.

3) In particular, we had neither the time nor the funding to conduct separate surveys on each kind of CT, its own history, and its micro-procedures (and even less of both to offer an exhaustive description of the CTs in Niger). We are obviously aware of the fact that important differences exist between NGOs and procedures. However, our approach was to carry out our investigations on CTs from the recipient end, which is precisely where different CTs coexist, get mixed together and often mixed up (in the eyes of the recipients). Our investigators found it very difficult to distinguish between particular types of CT, and even harder to differentiate between the surveying and targeting procedures used for each type. This confusion is in itself a relevant fact.

4) Our investigations were limited to five sites. However this was a methodological choice. We prefer to conduct intensive in-depth surveys rather than opting for a larger number of rapid superficial ones. This is a prerequisite for obtaining the kind of results we have provided here. The five sites were selected in very different regions with a wide range of CT stakeholders. It could well be objected that these five sites are not 'representative' statistically and that other sites might have yielded different results. However, the range of CTs encountered on our five sites and the convergence of the responses collected in the 21 villages surveyed prompt us to draw the opposite conclusion.

5) The people we interviewed were often reluctant to express their views on this subject. This is worth further investigation (cf. *infra*).

Available reports highlight a lack of feedback

The reports on and evaluations of CTs in Niger that were available at the time of our research (late 2012) prompt three broad conclusions:

- CTs help to diminish the effects of food crises and support resilience: this much seems self-evident to us (the considerable sums distributed by CTs throughout the country are obviously useful for the households that benefit from them), and we do not question this (we will not, therefore, dwell on the matter).
- The money received from CTs is not necessarily used to buy food: this fact has already been well documented and, unsurprisingly, our data confirm it while at the same time highlighting certain aspects that usually go unreported (cf. *infra* the pooling of resources and “the chief’s share”).
- The effects of CTs on the reduction of child malnutrition are rather inconclusive: we have not done any work in this area.

On another note, the fact that women in receipt of CTs for emergency food aid usually hand over the sums received to their husbands has already been mentioned in the literature on various occasions, but only obliquely. It is strongly emphasized in our study.

As for the rest, there is a clear contrast, which may seem surprising, between the results and analyses of our study and all the other reports and evaluations available, which neglect most of the distortions and unintended or adverse effects we report and the differences between the thinking at local level and the (external) rationale governing CTs. The testimonies included in the above-mentioned reports and evaluations have come mainly from the beneficiaries themselves (or from local dignitaries), who all declare themselves to be “very satisfied” and offer profuse thanks to the operators. The questioning by the local people of the targeting of the CTs or the part played by chiefs in the process is not highlighted at all in the reports; this is in stark contrast to the picture painted by our own fieldwork.

In this respect, two hypotheses can be formulated, which, in fact, converge, and remain to be documented:

(a) The present systems of monitoring and evaluation, widely used by donors, NGOs and local politicians, are based almost exclusively on questionnaires and/or focus groups,⁸ and are aimed at the beneficiaries and the authorities. They take no account of the views of non-beneficiaries, involve only very short visits to each site and are not really independent. They do not allow the difficulties to be reported.

(b) In order for the CTs to continue, it is in the interest of the various actors involved (beneficiaries, chiefs, mayors, NGOs, MFIs and consultants) not to notice, reveal or highlight the problems, even if they are more or less familiar with the nature of these problems (we could even refer here to ‘conflicts of interest’). This shows just how important this distribution of money is locally (for the local population) as is the funding itself (for the NGOs, the MFIs and the consultants), an importance that appears to be confirmed by the reluctance to comment that we encountered in the field.

⁸ Much could be said about the very considerable distortions and bias that vitiate the standard questionnaire surveys in Niger, in terms of the questionnaires themselves (generally far too long and often ill adapted to local contexts), in terms of the investigators (badly paid, poorly trained and lacking motivation) and in terms of the respondents (anxious to give the ‘right answers’ that will allow ‘projects’ to continue), and also about the limitations of the ‘focus groups’ (spaces where the social control is strong, especially in front of investigators from outside the village). This is also true of ‘post-distribution monitoring’.

Deep mistrust

The fact that money is involved, the strength of the suspicions that potentially attach to its distribution and the scale of the ‘abuses’ or ‘errors’ during the implementation of CT operations (especially in relation to targeting) no doubt explain the unusual degree of mistrust the LASDEL researchers encountered with as they went about their investigations.

This mistrust begins at village level. The proverb that was quoted to us is testimony to this: “the belly is not made to hold pasta and *fura* alone”⁹ (in Oumarou). In other words, certain things are best kept to oneself (in one’s belly). In the chiefs’ camp, silence is also the rule. “Equating our activities to state inspections or to project activities, some village chiefs tended to influence and/or control our movements” (Oumarou). Alluding to the asking of too many awkward questions beyond the brief of our investigations, the village chief in Maïgochi Jackou commented: “They don’t stop hounding us. We’ll be vomiting everything we’ve eaten.” (in Oumarou)

However, we also came up against a refusal to answer questions among the sub-contracted institutions (NGOs and MFIs).

At the WFP (World Food Programme) office in Maradi, in spite of his assignment, the researcher was not allowed to talk to the officer dealing with CTs. The official in charge of the MECREF in Maradi refused to answer a question about the unexplained variance of a distributed sum. (Cf. Oumarou op. cit.)

In Olléléwa, the Karkara agent denied any involvement by his NGO in a CT operation (funded by the WFP) although everyone on the spot asserted that it really had been carried out by Karkara. However, only two payments out of four have been made, and many rumours are circulating about the reasons as to why the last two payments have not been made. (Cf. Issaley op.cit.).

Obviously, these cases of reluctance or refusal to reply are, for us, data in themselves: they testify to the controversial side of the subject being investigated, which generates unease among all the frontline stakeholders involved, i.e. both the local populations and the NGO workers.

Beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries

Among the various strategic groups on which we carried out our investigations, the ‘non-beneficiaries’ featured alongside the ‘beneficiaries’. This surprised some of the NGOs’ CT officials, who think that the viewpoint of beneficiaries alone is relevant, and that the criticisms expressed by non-beneficiaries are of little interest, since they are ‘normal’.

However, the report reveals a surprising convergence of views between both groups on the strategic question of targeting, the outcomes of which are mostly attributed to personal interventions and the targeting itself is perceived as a threat to the already fragile cohesion of villages. Moreover, it would be a mistake to attribute the comments of non-beneficiaries purely to the disappointment of being ‘bad losers’. Their criticisms make sense and they offer analyses of CTs that deserve to be taken seriously.

Finally, focusing exclusively on the beneficiaries, which happens in most evaluations, is in contradiction to the ‘community’ approach championed by CTs and only reinforces the divisiveness of which they are accused.

⁹*Fura*, which is made from millet diluted with milk, is the staple diet in rural areas.

Research is not evaluation

The reports produced by LASDEL are neither an impact assessment (which would be very complicated and costly to carry out with any rigour – for example, in the form of the “randomized control trials” promoted by J-Pal¹⁰) nor an evaluation of interventions by particular NGOs, but the product of *an intensive field study of the conditions of CT implementation at village level, of local actors’ perceptions of these conditions, of the strategies they deploy and of the multiple rationales that compete with one another at the time.*

The surveys carried out represent, in all, the equivalent of nine months in the field for one person with the analyses and writing-up being the equivalent of roughly another nine months. Whichever way you look at it, no programme evaluation comes anywhere near this kind of investment in terms of personnel and methodology. This means there is a big difference between research and consultancy.¹¹ A second difference is our complete independence in relation to our partners. A third difference is that we have in no way tried to award marks (good or bad) or offered a full assessment of CTs, which we are not equipped to do.

In any case, the positive aspects of CTs are well known and they are well publicized in the routine evaluations: unconditional aid delivered to large numbers of vulnerable households, facilitating or enabling their survival or resilience. Our own research, in contrast, focussed on other aspects, which are usually absent from evaluations and reveal a range of unintended or adverse effects triggered by CTs, and the mixed perceptions local populations have of them.

We do not wish on any account to adopt a position in a debate ‘for’ or ‘against’ CTs.¹² All other types of aid also have their unintended or adverse effects, and there is no miraculous form of intervention that is spared such effects. However, analysing on a solid, empirical basis and bringing out into the open the ‘problems’ encountered by each type of intervention – something we have always done at LASDEL – regardless of the form of public action, is an indispensable step in providing a solution.

A short historical overview of CTs in Niger

The first experiment was conducted in 2005 by the British Red Cross,¹³ with the help of the Nigerien Red Cross, in the Department of Tanout and involved 88 villages and three nomadic groups. Villages were selected on the basis of a food deficit in excess of 70 percent (according to data from the Nigerien early-warning and disaster prevention organization SAP). In theory, all of the households in these villages were included, on the basis of a prior

¹⁰ Of course, there are other – less demanding methodologically and less expensive – methods which are also based on the comparison of a sample of recipient villages and a sample of non-recipient ones (cf. “difference-in-differences strategy”, used in Niger: Aker & Nene “Cash transfers, nutrition and household well-being in Niger”, Tufts University and Concern, 2012). Like randomized control trials, they depend on the administration of questionnaires (which, as we pointed out above, entail numerous distortions) and ignore the non-beneficiaries in the recipient villages.

¹¹ For an analysis of the differences between research and consultancy in Africa, cf. Olivier de Sardan, 2012 “Promoting research in a context where consulting dominates: the experience of the LASDEL research laboratory in Niger and Benin”, in Lame (de) & Mazzochetti (eds) *African junctions under the neo-liberal paradigm*, Tervuren: Royal Museum for Central Africa.

¹² It should be noted that such a debate has never found its way into the public arena or the ‘specialist arena’ in Niger, and that this is typical more generally of public policies in many African countries, which are negotiated directly between the government and international institutions.

¹³ However, it should also be noted that the same year in Guidan Roumji, Arab-Islamic institutions distributed as much as XOF 10,000 per household through ‘marabouts’ – Islamic clerks (Issa, Y. “La crise alimentaire à Guidan Roumji 2004-2005”, *Etudes et Travaux du LASDEL*, n° 65).

census and the distribution of one card per family. However, as far as the actual amounts were concerned, while one report¹⁴ mentions a single payment of XOF 120,000 given to 5,713 households, other sources refer to two different amounts: a sum of XOF 70,000, given initially to herder-farming households in the villages and to three groups of cattle breeders living in camps; then, on foot of complaints from other groups of breeders, a sum of XOF 120,000 distributed to the latter and to other breeders (cf. Issaley, op. cit.).¹⁵

This experiment was considered a positive one, insofar as the sums received really were used to buy food, clothing or cattle, or else to repay debts, and no opposition was voiced to the fact that it was the women who received the money (although one village auxiliary worker involved in the project later declared that most of the women immediately handed over the money to their husbands).¹⁶

However, because of “administrative problems”, distribution of the payments, which had been planned for the month of August, i.e. during the lean season, on the basis of there being a gap of 40 days before the harvest,¹⁷ did not in fact begin until late October, one month after the harvest. This made a big difference to households since it was no longer a matter of responding to a food emergency.

One unexpected result of this operation was picked up,¹⁸ namely the – at least partial – ‘pooling’ of the sums received in four villages: to buy a donkey and cart for the purpose of medical evacuations; to build lodgings for a schoolteacher; to build a school; and, finally, to give help to a neighbouring village that was not selected to receive CTs.

One thing should be made clear at the outset: the manner in which this operation was conducted differed in one key respect from most of the 2013 CT operations which we investigated in that there was no ‘targeting’ based on a household’s living standards. In other words, all the households in the village were included (similar to the free distribution of food that took place on a huge scale during the same crisis). A host of problems linked to targeting were therefore avoided.

CTs then went through a period of expansion in Niger from 2010 onwards with multiple schemes and operators and the generation of multiple chains of sub-contracting activities: donors (World Bank, ECHO, WFP), NGOs from the northern hemisphere to manage the operations (ESF, ASB, Concern, the British, French and Irish Red Cross organizations etc.), local NGOs providing services for raising awareness, targeting and surveys (Karkara, Kaydya, AREN, the Nigerien Red Cross etc.), MFIs (for distribution proper) and, finally, the local recruitment of investigators, key informants, guides, committee members.

In addition, whereas the CT system operated by the British Red Cross and the vast majority of other post-2010 CT systems are designed to help populations to cope with an economic food crisis (production shortages, an unusual rise in cereal prices, a particularly difficult lean season) through emergency aid with a fixed time limit (about four months),

¹⁴ Cf. “Final Monitoring Report of the First Direct Cash Transfer Project in the Sahel: An Innovative Response by the British Red Cross to the 2005 Food Crisis in Tanout”, Bureau for Applied Research in Anthropology at the University of Arizona, 2006.

¹⁵ The breeders of the first three groups were all Tuareg while the breeders who protested were Fulani. An interesting aspect of this episode is that the protesters came to petition the project’s local office, having already carried out a survey of Fulani households and their economic status – a clear testimony to the fact that proactive aid-attracting strategies and the practical expertise to benefit from them were already very widespread among rural communities.

¹⁶ Id., p. 22

¹⁷ XOF 120,000 bought 40 days’ worth of grain, at a cost of XOF 3,000 per day, in sufficient quantities to feed a family of seven.

¹⁸ Id, p. 43.

another system of CTs exists in Niger. This system, which was developed by the World Bank in 2010, is called the “social safety net” project and, rather than providing sporadic aid, aims instead to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable households. Accordingly, it is a permanent process. Following an experimental phase in the Tahoua and Tillabéri regions, a scaling up of this project (to the entire country) was decided for 2013.¹⁹

We shall not enter into the general debates about cash transfers at global level, their philosophies and the various forms they take, such as ‘cash for work’ (work – usually of a collective nature – is required in return for money) and ‘conditional cash transfers’ (participation in certain activities is demanded: school attendance, preventive medical consultations etc.).²⁰ Instead, we focused on the recent explosion of non-conditional cash transfers in Niger (where ‘cash for work’ has, in fact, been practised by a variety of programmes for a considerable time), which covers three main types of CT, all targeting very vulnerable households, but without imposing conditions or demanding anything in return. Each type is conceived as a tool for meeting a specific objective: (a) medium-term support for the resilience of vulnerable families in the case of the ‘social safety net’ project; (b) emergency help for vulnerable families in times of food crises, in the case of the majority of CTs; (c) aid for disaster victims, in the case of a handful of CTs. However, other objectives are found behind these three main objectives. These may be short or long term in nature and embedded to varying degrees with a view to halting migration, preventing child malnutrition, promoting the cause of women, fighting poverty, drafting social policy etc.

One of the main outcomes of our study is that, from the perspective of local populations, the various forms of CT and the various targeting procedures they deploy are all mixed together in an undifferentiated whole, regardless of the objectives and protocols of their promoters, and appear not as tools for a particular task but as forming, as it were, one vast project. Depending on the region, regardless of their nature, the same terms are applied to the CTs in the Hausa and Zarma languages: *Annasara nooru* or *kuddin Nasara* (the White Man’s money), *nooru yaamo* or *kuddin banza* (free money, with no obligations), *gaakasiney nooru* or *kuddin taymako* (aid money), *bonbatu nooru* (preservation money), *nooru yeyno* (fresh money, in other words ‘without effort’, as opposed to *sungey nooro*, sweat money), *Irkoy nooyon nooru* or *rabo* (money given by God), *sargey nooru* (alms money), *kuddin gazaji* (“tired people’s” money). Sometimes the NGO generic term is used: *porze nooru*, *kuddin froze* (project money) and sometimes the name of the NGO in question is used: *Oxfam nooru*, *Karkara nooru*, *kuddin Karkara* or *kuddin Konsern* (Oxfam money, Karkara money, Concern money). Sometimes other expressions become associated with particular features of the schemes involved: *tiketizo nooru* (ticket money) or *takarda* (paper).

Although it is the NGOs that usually manage CTs, it should be noted that the Nigerien state (which is also involved in the World Bank’s ‘social safety net’ project) has itself sometimes engaged in CT operations (for the assistance of flood victims), particularly through the regional and sub-regional committees for the prevention and management of food crises, which also play a secondary role in the interventions of NGOs carrying out CTs. With regard to local authorities, these are largely ignored and overtaken by the wave of CTs in the country.

¹⁹ An analysis was undertaken for the Tahoua region during the experimental phase: Hamani, O. “Les Pratiques Familiales Essentielles (PFE) au Niger. Socio-anthropologie d’une intervention à base communautaire”, *Etudes et Travaux du LASDEL*, n°104, 2012. It already bore witness to a significant gap between the measures and objectives of this CT operation and the expectations of the local populations and the strategies of the dignitaries.

²⁰ It is common knowledge that it was the experiments with conditional CTs undertaken on a massive scale in Latin America and in conditions completely different from those obtaining in Niger that served as a reference. For the case of Brazil, cf. Rasella, Aquino, Santos, Paes-Sousa & Barreto “Effect of a conditional cash transfer programme on childhood mortality: a nationwide analysis of Brazilian municipalities”, *The Lancet*, 2013.

The stages of the CT process and their respective problems

Three important stages can be distinguished: targeting, distribution and the use made of the sums received. The targeting is the element that causes the most problems by far. Distribution, for its part, happens without impediment. As for the use of CTs, they bear witness both to anticipated effects (in terms of resilience and urgency) and unanticipated ones (reallocations, redistribution and ‘ill-advised’ expenditure).

1. Targeting

There are three levels of targeting

(1) The targeting of communes is usually carried out by the SAP’s regional committee²¹ in collaboration with the donor organization in charge of the operation.

(2) The targeting of villages within the selected communes is usually carried out by the NGO on the basis of the degrees of vulnerability established by the SAP’s sub-regional committee, using the data supplied by the agricultural service. We have little information on how this happens in practice. However, the strategy adopted by Concern in Tahoua (which compiled its own lists) points to a certain distrust of the lists provided by the sub-regional committee, which is suspected of systematically “favouring” particular villages.²²

“Last year [2012] we decided to ignore this list since it was perfectly clear to us that certain villages remained vulnerable.” (NGO worker, in Hamani²³)

Whatever the facts, from the point of view of the local populations the choice of certain villages to the detriment of others appears essentially arbitrary, a matter of ‘luck’ or also of favouritism (the influence of chiefs or local politicians).

(3) The focus of the LASDEL team’s investigations was the targeting of the most vulnerable households within in the selected villages. Indeed, this is the most complex and sensitive process among the selective CT systems, and the one that attracts the most suspicion, dissatisfaction and criticism.

The majority of CTs target the most vulnerable households²⁴ on the basis of a combination of surveys (conducted by paid workers recruited by the NGO) and of so-called ‘community’ choices (made by CT auxiliary workers from the villages who are designated by the village general assembly).

The very principle of a selection process internal to the village is the element that constitutes a problem for many villagers. There are deep misunderstandings concerning the objectives of CTs (and the strategies of the NGOs and donors that manage the system), on the one hand, and the perceptions of the local populations, on the other. These misunderstandings have two underlying causes: (a) the introduction of a threshold effect; (b) suspicions of bias in the selection process.

²¹ The SAP (*système d’alerte précoce*, i.e. early-warning system) is now called *Système d’alerte précoce et de prévention des risques et catastrophes* (System for the Early Warning and Prevention of Risks and Disasters).

²² For a description of the poor conditions in which agricultural extension workers produce data for the SAP, cf. Ali Bako, “La crise alimentaire à Olléléwa 2004-2005”, *Etudes et Travaux du LASDEL*, n° 64, 2006.

²³ Hamani, O. “Le cash transfer à Tébara (Tahoua). Les perceptions ambivalentes autour d’une innovation importée” *Etudes et Travaux du LASDEL*, n° 106, 2013.

²⁴ Other categories are sometimes recipients of CTs: immigrants who live in a town temporarily (called ‘internally displaced persons’ in the NGO jargon), flood victims, disabled persons etc. The problems created by the attempts to compile the list of beneficiaries are, therefore, different.

The introduction of a very unwelcome threshold effect

In villages where the standard of living and consumption patterns are very similar, in spite of economic inequalities, selection introduces a threshold effect which is seen as being completely arbitrary. This is true, first, in terms of selection between villages, which is seen as systematically unfair: What differentiates a ‘chosen’ village from an ‘excluded’ one? It is equally true in the case of selection between households within the same village. Little or nothing differentiates the last household on the ‘chosen’ list from the first household on the ‘rejected’ list. In this finely graded continuum of ranking households from a socio-economic point of view, differences are very slight, and to require boundaries to be drawn or barriers to be placed between households classified as ‘very vulnerable’ and households classified as ‘vulnerable’ makes little sense, especially when, as often happens, the selection barrier cuts right through one or other of these categories in accordance with ‘quotas’ that are fixed for each village by the NGO without there being any explanation or transparency in the matter.

Selection as an object of suspicion

“When they provide aid, they always show *banbanci* (bias) in making the choice towards the people they want to give it to.” (Non-beneficiary from Olléléwa, in Issaley op. cit.)

“I’m not going to put myself forward for another term. Even when food is being distributed, people are very suspicious; the distribution of money makes them worse. They think that we politicians are always on the make and I find that very upsetting.” (Local politician from the commune of Olléléwa, in Issaley op. cit.).

These two quotations are evidence of the many suspicions aroused – sometimes unfairly, often with good reason – among the local populations by the targeting procedures however fine-tuned they may be technically from the NGO’s perspective.²⁵ We shall be developing this question at greater length below and, to obtain a better understanding of the difficulties and ‘abuses’ encountered by these targeting procedures in the field, we shall also undertake a stage-by-stage analysis.

Several different stages can indeed be identified: the general assembly; the mobilization of village auxiliary workers; the compilation of an initial ‘long’ list; the follow-up surveys of the households based on this list; and the publication of the finalized short list.

Before we examine the stages, we must first provide a brief presentation of the survey methods used.

The survey methods

The HEA (Household Economic Analysis) method is the most widely used. However, other forms of survey (of ‘vulnerability’) arise, for example that used by the Bozari consultancy company for ‘social safety net’ CTs.

In all cases they consist of quick (often rushed) surveys of the household’s socio-economic situation, which are conducted by paid workers, who are assisted to varying degrees by village auxiliary workers. The surveys have been the subject of numerous criticisms by local public servants and frontline NGO workers for their shoddiness and superficiality.

The first problem that arises in their implementation concerns the amount of time allocated to them, which, in the view of some fieldworkers, is clearly too short.

²⁵ A “review of good practice” devoted to CTs states “Targeting encourages local communities and the elites that govern them to manipulate the lists of beneficiaries through favouritism or bribes” (cf. Harvey & Bailey “Revue des bonnes pratiques: programme de transfert monétaire dans les situations d’urgence”, HPN-ODI, 2011). However, the only measures proposed are technical (anti-fraud cards and vouchers, finger-printing or iris-scanning) and are implemented after the compilation of the lists while the main problem in Niger concerns the actual compilation of the lists.

“The HEA method is a good one if the time allocated is long enough to do a good job. But the problem is that we are always given very little time to do the work. Usually, we get two weeks to come up with the lists using HEA, so we can never produce anything worthwhile.” (NGO worker, Olléléwa, in Issaley op. cit.)

“When there are too many experts, it means there are too many things to do. The big problem is that our partners want everything to be done quickly: to act quickly and to get fast results as well.” (NGO worker, Olléléwa, in Issaley op. cit.)

Another problem concerns the competence and conscientiousness of the paid investigators recruited by the NGO.

“For an HEA survey covering three communes, ESF Maradi recruited ten investigators per commune, supplemented by five local individuals (local politicians or other), whose role was to represent the commune in the targeting process. But the two days of training planned for these investigators was replaced by a short briefing session.” (Cf. Oumarou op. cit.)

“Instead of the planned four days of door-to-door surveys (social safety nets): ‘The surveys were done in a day and a half under the palaver tree and brought together all the heads of households in Gatawan and its hamlets’ (village chief, in Adamou). That implies that each of the two investigators (students) administered five-page questionnaires to 50 family heads in a single day!!” (Cf. Adamou²⁶)

“49 beneficiaries who were needed to make the list complete were chosen using the household economy analysis (HEA) approach, based on the socio-economic profile of households. But the method was not applied in its entirety on the ground. In fact, the creation of two groups of key informants, with each group proposing a list of vulnerable households and the two lists then being compared so that only the names appearing on both lists were retained, didn’t happen in the case of Simiri where names were put forward in a general assembly.” (Adamou op. cit.)

Beyond the surveys, the typical targeting process is underpinned by a particularly complex imported structure.

The general assemblies of the local populations (GA)

These may convene first at town-hall level (in the main town of the commune) to inform residents about the planned CT programme and in the presence of selected village chiefs.

“We gathered at the town hall. Even the village chiefs were there. The project workers – there were three of them – told us that they were going to visit each village to take down the names of people. To do that, everyone had to be brought together before the village chiefs.” (Town councillor, in Oumarou op. cit.).

This announcement of a future CT programme is profoundly ambiguous. While it is necessary from a participation point of view for informing and involving the populations in question, it is also the signal for the development of various strategies for ‘organizing’ the list of beneficiaries.

“The whole business reeks of bias, because the local authority and traditional leaders were informed in advance of the mission’s visit. They insisted on being told the purpose of the mission. When the mission members arrived, you got the feeling that everything had been arranged in advance. But we don’t have the choice, You have to include them, otherwise they’re likely to throw a spanner in the works.” (Member of the sub-regional committee, in Oumarou op. cit.)

GAs are then organized at village level, and sometimes at district level, to inform, but also to: (a) decide on the criteria for classifying the population into four categories according to their standard of living; (b) to establish and/or approve a ‘long’ list of the most vulnerable

²⁶ Adamou, H. 2013 “Les transferts monétaires dans la commune rurale de Simiri (département de Ouallam) : entre diversités méthodologiques et gestion locale du CT”, Niamey: LASDEL report.

households; and, finally, (c) to appoint what could be termed ‘CT village auxiliaries’, who will work alongside NGO workers, either to compile the long list that is subsequently validated by the GA or to collaborate on rapid surveys of the households on the long list so that the final short list can be produced. These ‘village auxiliaries’ can have different names, depending on the operators involved (similarly, their profiles and their duties can vary slightly): i.e. key informants, focus groups, selection committees, targeting committees, monitoring committees etc. Chiefs are not allowed to sit on these committees, however, the reality is sometimes different (cf. Issa).

We identified two problems at the level of these GAs.

On the one hand, the hamlets or villages ‘attached’ to the ‘official’ village are often not invited to attend and this marks the beginning of their exclusion from the CT mechanism. An administrative village (one where the chief resides) very often includes a string of satellite villages.

On the other hand, the ‘long’ list of vulnerable households is not the subject of a real debate in GAs. Various strategies are adopted, for example the inclusion of all of the households in the village on the ‘vulnerable’ list and the shouting out of relatives’ names which no one will dare to contradict.

“During the GA, no one protests, even when the name of someone rich or close to the chief is shouted.” (Issaley op. cit.)

“The *yan lega*²⁷ shout out very loudly the names of their close relatives and other family members. *Munahuci da pulaaku* (hypocrisy and Fulani good manners) prevent anyone from opposing the designation of beneficiaries at a GA.” (X, beneficiary from Baboulwa, in Issaley op. cit.)

Indeed, *contrary to the ‘democratic’ expectations of the NGOs, for which a GA should be an arena for public debate and transparency, a village GA is more often than not a space for social control*, where taking the floor to contradict a speaker, denounce a cheating neighbour or, to go even further, and publicly criticize the chief, and in front of strangers into the bargain, is seen as unseemly behaviour, and is widely stigmatized.²⁸ Obviously, this contrast between the GAs which the development institutions dream of and the GAs as they take place in ‘real’ villages predates CTs, and has been in evidence for a long time in all forms of ‘participatory’ development. Be that as it may, it is still a major cause of distortion in the CT targeting process.

“When all the heads of households have to be assembled so that they can be interviewed outside their respective households, it’s perfectly normal for some of them to hide part of their wealth so as to be classified as vulnerable. And usually we do not denounce one another in front of strangers, especially when it’s an elderly person who does such things.” (M.I., Gatawan, in Adamou op. cit.)

A rule that is sometimes introduced locally in connection with GAs is that only those present can be entered on the long list. This can mean the beginning of a process of exclusion of the most vulnerable, who are not always in a position to take part in such a GA.

In fact, however, the key issue at these GAs is the selection of village auxiliary workers. They are a truly important link in the chain when it comes to the selection process:

²⁷*Lega* is a local neologism which comes from ‘*les gars*’ (the boys) and refers to the young men in the village.

²⁸ We are, of course, describing a general tendency, and exceptions may well exist involving outspoken opponents or unconventional personalities who express their opinions publicly. Sometimes, too, the expression of disagreement can derive from a form of discrimination or xenophobia: “At the village level in Sabarou, people opposed the allocation of cash to two households which they described as non-native.” (Oumarou op. cit.)

in some cases they compile the ‘long’ list, but their main task consists in helping to draw up the ‘short’ list.

The village auxiliaries workers for CTs

These casual informants and NGO collaborators carrying out the targeting, which results from the general assembly, are sometimes referred to in Hausa as *idon gari*, “the eyes of the village” (cf. Oumarou op.cit.). They may also constitute the selection committee for the NGO in question. They are sometimes chosen at the village’s general assembly and sometimes at neighbourhood meetings. However, more often than not, the choice is made by the village or neighbourhood chief to the advantage of those close to him. Despite increases in the number of checking procedures at various other stages in the CT process (computerized lists, the introduction of personalized cards for beneficiaries, recourse to MFIs on a competitive bidding basis, mechanisms for providing official witnesses, signatures and reports at the distribution stage), this is its ‘weak link’.

“Usually, it’s the village chief who does the designating.” (Oumarou op. cit.)

“The neighbourhood chiefs propose their own people, depending on the job requirements. In most cases, the individuals put forward are not at the village assembly. The neighbourhood chiefs use them for their own ends.” (Female teacher from Tebaram, in Hamani op. cit.)

“The key informants in the village are people who are connected with the village or neighbourhood chief. They are involved in most NGO activities or with associations engaged in village projects. It’s a closed circuit.” (I.M.S. in Hamani op. cit.)

This state of affairs should not come as a surprise. As Hamani has noted (2013): “Sidelineing the village chiefs, as recommended by those engaged in development, seems to me to be too utopian in social contexts where, through the combined effects of family ties (the inhabitants are nearly all descended from the same ancestor) and marriage alliances, village chiefs have connections with virtually everybody. The smaller the village, the truer this assertion becomes.”

In some cases the investigators and the ‘key informants’ withdraw to somewhere quiet during the GA to compile the list of very vulnerable households (*talaka talak*) which they will then propose to the GA.

It is claimed that the village auxiliaries include their friends or relatives quite systematically among the households to be targeted.

“There were three of us who’d been taken to one side by the investigators. The approach we took was that if such and such an informant mentioned some households he was close to, we stopped him so that someone else could mention his own. That’s how we approached things.” (A., Maïgochi Jackou, in Oumarou op. cit.)

In other cases, the opposite approach is taken: to avoid such risks or accusations and prevent the creation of divisions within the village, the list put forward does not exclude anyone at all.

“In the village of Dadin Kowa, so that informants were not exposed to criticism, all heads of households in the village were mentioned and included in the count.” (Oumarou op. cit.)

The complaints committee

At the same time as the selection committee is formed, the NGOs ask the GA to form a ‘committee of Elders’ or a ‘complaints committee’, which is supposed to provide a way of appealing and monitoring the process.

“The project workers asked for three people whose task it was to give the names of poor individuals. Then the workers asked for the names of another three elderly persons. But no

one could see the point of these three elderly persons because they didn't do anything. All of us who were present thought it was a simple formality that had to be gone through (*acika ka idodi'nayki*) or some bureaucratic procedure to complement a list (*acika buro*).” (A. Y, Maïgochi Saboua, in Oumarou op. cit.).

In fact, none of these committees ever existed in any real sense in any of the cases studied.

“Just like the committee of Elders for the ‘social safety nets’, the members of monitoring committees do not know what their roles are. In addition, the beneficiaries are ignorant of their existence (...) they are only for show.” (Adamou op. cit.)

In some cases, they were not even set up.

“By deliberately failing or simply forgetting to set up this important link in the chain [the complaints committee] (even as a formality), the cash transfer operators in Loga have opened the door to all sorts of criticism.” (Issa, op.cit)

Hence, according to our investigations, these complaints committees, which, from the standpoint of the promoters of CTs, are supposed to fulfil a fundamental role as the community watchdog ensuring that the selection criteria are respected and that potential abuses are combated, are a total failure. Even when such a committee formally exists, there is a strong latent – and sometimes explicit – pressure on victims to suffer in silence. Leaving aside the fact that it would almost certainly fail to be upheld, lodging a complaint would have a very high social cost.

“I didn't ask for explanations or who I should complain to, because I know that even if I complain, I won't win my case.” (Female non-beneficiary, in Issaley, op.cit)

Another constraint on the public expression of frustration and accusations is the fear that it might drive away the NGO, and put to an end the supply of ‘manna’ from abroad. Thus beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries share a common interest in keeping quiet about abuses in the targeting process as the latter always hope to be included the next time around.

“I am happy for the other women, because at least there have been beneficiaries in the village. That's better than if the village got nothing out of the project. I hope that it will benefit from the great project again and that I can be targeted.” (Female non-beneficiary, in Adamou, op.cit.)

People from outside the villages and not connected with NGOs can, however, receive expressions of dissatisfaction during private conversations (not in official settings or through questionnaires). That was what happened in the case of the LASDEL investigators.

Surveying of households on the long list

The census of households, which enables them to be ‘written’ (*rubutu*) on the short list, relies on two methods.

Door-to-door observation

This is the method that NGO workers and the technical services consider to be the most reliable (however, it is also the most tiring for them). It consists in observing on each farm what might be called the “outward signs of high vulnerability” so that the long list can be compiled or the short list produced from it: i.e. the type of dwelling, the state of the barns, animal tracks etc., according to the criteria proposed by the NGO (HEA), complemented, where possible, by the criteria that emerged during the village GA. This survey is aimed at eliminating households that are “not sufficiently vulnerable” on the basis of these criteria and therefore has the feel of a police enquiry about it, which raises objections.

“The key informants go from door to door to collect information on the households. They do not ask the members of the household any questions. It is just a case of looking around, which enables the household to be codified.” (C.Y., member of the sub-regional committee, in Hamani op.cit)

“When we arrive at the farm, we look at the animals ..., the number of animals. And it’s easy, you just count the number of stakes ... We prefer to ask the key informant because if we ask the head of the household, he’ll tell us that the animals don’t belong to him.” (C.Y., DDP/AT/DC worker, in Hamani op.cit.)

Hence, this method is the object of numerous criticisms (expressed in private) on the part of non-beneficiaries. “The example they refer to most, is the existence of an animal or anything that points to the existence of one (excrement, stakes) on a farm. However, as they see it, many families keep animals on their farms that belong to other people” (Oumarou).²⁹ An NGO official remarked to us ironically that it was a case of differentiating between households with two-legged chickens and those where the chickens had only one leg.

On a more general level, the “very vulnerable” category, translated by NGO workers as *talaka talak* or *alfukaru bi*, is not really a local category: it is ‘suggested’ by NGO workers and criticized by the local populations.

“M., one of the key informants, told investigators that if what they mean by ‘very poor’ is a person who doesn’t even have a chicken, then there aren’t more than four in the entire village. And even then, those people who don’t even have a chicken were not at the GA, and that’s why they were never counted.” (I. A. Roubou, in Oumarou op. cit.)

The summons

Summoning the heads of households on the long list to the house of the village or neighbourhood chief and asking them questions about their possessions is certainly a less reliable method, however it is a much easier one.

“When the last census was done, we didn’t knock on any doors. Everyone just came all together to the neighbourhood chief and then went in one at a time.” (A.B., key informant from Tebaram, in Hamani op. cit.)

Sometimes, the operation is simplified even more:

“They came back two days later to collect the information on the surveyed households. It was during the busy period of work in the fields and there was practically no one at home. It was I who gave them this information. But they only took information on eight households that were beneficiaries.” (Village chief of Dadin Kowa, in Oumarou op. cit.)

Opportunistic strategies

The surveys do not merely specify and verify the standard of living of the households on the long list, they also define their size, which is an important factor when the sums distributed vary according to the size of the household. This opens the door to aggregation strategies:

“Inflating the size of a household, for example, gives that household the chance of benefiting from significant sums of money, if it is selected as a beneficiary. An incorrect or inflated household size is a feature of the situations constantly observed in the field.” (Oumarou op. cit.)³⁰

²⁹ “If living in a straw hut is a sign of poverty in the case of a Hausa household, the same will not apply to the Fulani or Tuareg, even if they are sedentary. By the same token, one cannot describe a Tuareg or Fulani household as non-vulnerable because there is an animal on the farm. The significance of the animal is not exclusively economic, making it an asset to be sold off. The ties that link it to its owner are symbolic and sometimes sentimental. People who are well-off, sometimes belonging to other communities, will give them their cattle to mind.” (Oumarou op.cit)

³⁰ Oumarou rightly observes that this strategy plays on the confusion between the household or home (*iyali*), which has now become the unit of production and consumption, and the wider family structure (the big farm), which was a single unit of

“By including his two sons, who are in the village [and have their own homes] in the count, the household [of X] consists of 13 members. It’s on this basis that his household was assessed since it was the size indicated on the ration card that was used as a pay slip for the cash. But because this household is composed of other households, A. divides into three the XOF 55,680 that his wife collects for him, and gives a share to each of his two children, who are both heads of households.” (Case study by A.M., in Oumarou op. cit.)

Conversely, when payments are based on one lump sum per household, strategies for splitting the households are used.

“Cash transfers are based on family books. In the hope of increasing their chances, some families explode into smaller units. After populations had experienced the 2011 programme, with the announcement of the one for 2012, the town hall was flooded with requests for new family books, especially by the populations of the villages targeted for cash transfers. So, to get round the problem, the mayor ruled that no further family books would be issued after the announcement of an aid programme.” (Adamou op. cit.)

Suspicious about the conscientiousness of the surveys

Both the village auxiliaries and the NGO workers carrying out the monitoring surveys are regularly suspected of ‘favours’.

“In all cases, you always find census takers who are not very honest.” (Mayor, in Hamani op. cit.)

“Really ... feelings come into play sometimes with the key informants.” (Village chief, Tébaram, in Hamani op. cit.)

They are the target of numerous accusations.

“A neighbourhood chief in Tébaram quoted this proverb with reference to the targeting workers: ‘The cock advises the hens to be wary of the cat, even when he’s going on a pilgrimage’. Mistrust is required of the hens (the villagers) when they come face to face with the NGO workers (the cat).” (cf. Hamani op. cit.)

Other factors can also raise questions about the reliability of the surveys:

“In the villages of Roumbou 1, Maïgochi Jackou and Maïgochi Saboua, once the investigators had obtained a long enough list of vulnerable households (50 to 60 households), they concluded the exercise.” (Oumarou op. cit.)

“The time devoted to the census is very short, the timing of the targeting is sometimes unfortunate. In 2011, it was conducted during the rainy season. At this time of the year, a large proportion of the population have already returned to the farming areas.” (Mayor of Tébaram, in Hamani op. cit.)

The finalized short list

“The final choice of beneficiaries is still a stage that always leaves the villagers puzzled because they don’t know how it works.” (Issaley op. cit.)

This lack of transparency obviously fuels suspicion even more. Indeed, the final choice is made at NGO level in accordance with criteria that are not made public.

“In Sabon Mâchi we had to deal with a lot of problems because the list for an entire neighbourhood had to be done all over again; instead of the poor, we were given the names of people who were quite well off.” (in Oumarou op. cit.)

The objections are directed at the number of households selected per village, on the one hand, and at the individuals chosen within the same village, on the other.

production and consumption in the past (*gida*) (on this splitting phenomenon, cf. Raynaut, C. 1972 *Structures normatives et relations électives. Etude d'une communauté villageoise haoussa*, Paris: Mouton.)

The number of households per village

In fact, it appears that the basis for this final selection is a quota per village. But how these quotas are arrived at remains a complete mystery to us (and to the local populations).³¹

“No one knows why a particular number has been decided on for a particular village.”
(Issaley op. cit.)

The number of households selected in each village is the object of comparisons in conversations, which expose numerous inequalities that no one can explain.

The table presented below provides an illustration of these inequalities in the case of the Roumbou site:

Villages investigated	Population figures for the villages investigated	Number of beneficiaries per village investigated
Dadin Kowa	343	8
MaïgochiJackou	463	8
MaïgochiSaboua	864	7
Roumbou	705	8

We find a similar picture for the Olléléwa site: the village of Olléléwa, which is much smaller than the others (especially Sabon Kafi) had 42 beneficiaries, Sabon Kafi had 30, Kaki Fada 18, Adani 10, Boubaram 10 and Guidan Bagala 10.

“This was the complaint of one village chief: ‘Dan Jaoudi was allocated 16 beneficiaries, whereas my village, which has twice the population of Dan Jaoudi, only had eight beneficiaries.’” (in Oumarou op. cit.)

The households selected in each village

Those fortunate enough to be chosen for the CTs frequently include individuals regarded as well off and/or close to the village chiefs.

“The beneficiaries are the chief’s *wakili* or those close to him (...) their friends and relatives may often be old but often they are not destitute as they have children who are wealthy traders or high up in the government.” (Issaley)

“There are many cases where vulnerable individuals have been omitted and other individuals who are not necessarily vulnerable were targeted. For example, village chiefs and members of committees have been selected. Our interviews include extensive criticisms of the targeting.” (Issa op. cit.)

Because of this, individuals who have fallen by the wayside between the long list approved by the GA and the short list automatically feel that they have fallen victim to interference.

“When the workers had finished reading out the names from the list of vulnerable households, some women really took it out on us. They accused us of excluding them and of favouring people we knew. Their protests even led to the investigators wanting to tear up the first lot of slips because they thought there was favouritism.” (A.C., key informant Maïgochi, in Oumarou op. cit.)

“Most of the accusations are levelled at the ‘key informants’ and neighbourhood chiefs.”
(Hamani op. cit.)

³¹ “In 2012, Concern outsourced the management of the targeting of beneficiaries to a private company. As a first step, Concern entered into a contract with CESAFA, a consultancy firm based in Niamey. To target the vulnerable households, the firm made do with the list of taxpayers instead of using the door-to-door procedure, which would have enabled a better assessment of the criteria applied in defining a household’s vulnerability. Given that it had complete autonomy in the targeting operation, CESAFA did not see fit to involve Concern workers, who, after all, had acquired a wide experience in this area.” (Hamani op. cit.)

“My name and my wife’s name were written down. But neither of us was among the beneficiaries. Not only that, but of the eight beneficiaries from Dadin Kowa, only one family is from Yamatawa. Even with this family, it’s because they are the in-laws of one of the key informants when the targeting was being done. Perhaps it’s because we people from Yamatawa are the chief’s opponents. The chief himself, his older brother and one of his two wives have benefited from these CTs.” (H.M., in Oumarou op. cit.)

Obviously, allowances have to be made for technical problems and errors.

“The investigators made a lot of mistakes when they recorded the data. This was reflected in the allocation of rations that were smaller than households expected.” (Oumarou op. cit.).

“In Y’s case, the project workers were said to have given him his uncle’s ration.” (Oumarou op. cit.)

However, blaming technical problems does not convince everyone:

“When the first cash transfer was paid, I clearly heard my name being read out over the radio as one of the people targeted. On the day the photos were taken, I was informed that my name did not appear on the list. They made the excuse that it was the computer in Tahoua that runs off the names, whereas we know for certain that everything happens at Concern in Tebaram. They are always blaming the power supply or the computer which wipes out some names.” (M.K., beneficiary, in Hamani op. cit.).

There can indeed be other discrepancies between the finalized short list and the beneficiaries of payments (for example, when the cards for recipients are produced, which, in Concern’s case, have photographs).

2. The distribution of payments

The actual act of distributing the money is a ceremony that does not give rise to any objections in itself and, unlike the earlier stages in the process, is a more consensual ritual. Besides: “during the distribution process, the members of the distribution committee (if there is one) give the audience ‘lessons in morality’, urging the non-beneficiaries not to accuse or condemn anyone and to remain hopeful of being included in the next round” (Issaley). Such exhortations are aimed at easing the tensions caused by targeting. The non-beneficiaries will be beneficiaries at a later date and, in any case, fate decides who is chosen. What we see at work here is the double rationale predominant among populations vis-à-vis CTs, i.e. one that is both ‘*egalitarian*’ (everyone will have their share one day) and ‘*fatalistic*’ (it is all a matter of luck).

During this ritual, other lessons in ‘morality’ are also dispensed, this time by the NGO workers, who issue emphatic advice on the use of the money. This is somewhat inconsistent with the official non-conditionality of CTs, which is largely how they are justified in the debates on the tools of humanitarian aid.³²

“The messages conveyed through the officials responsible for the distribution of the money during the payment operations were centred on three topics: the buying of food for the whole family, the ban on paying out for loincloths or animals, and the ban on giving anything to village chiefs.” (Oumarou op. cit.)

“You tell us to spend money on cowpea, rice, millet and sorghum. But you tell us this money hasn’t been given to us to spend on animals.” (R.A., beneficiary, Dadin Kowa, in Oumarou op. cit.)

³² On the subject of conditions, it may be noted that, if they do not wish to be excluded from the list, female beneficiaries of Concern CTs are obliged to attend awareness-raising classes (on hygiene, sanitation, malnutrition, using health centres, hand-washing etc.) given by the NGO’s community workers. (The threat of exclusion is never carried out in reality, however.)

In principle (NGO official rules), only women beneficiaries can receive the money. However, as was the case in Tébaram (cf. Hamani) and Simiri (cf. Adamou op. cit.), proxies are sometimes authorized to receive it on their behalf (local practical rules).

3. Use of the allocated sums

Three types of use can be identified: reallocation, immediate redistribution, spending on food and other items

3.1. *The reallocation of the sums received by the women*

Reallocation takes place within families or on a 'community' basis.

Internal reallocation

This involves, first and foremost, the handing over of the sum received by the wife to her husband. In cases involving polygamous households, the husbands generally designate the 'first' wife (*uwal gida*) as the recipient of the cash. The latter may then delegate the task to one of her co-spouses. Irrespective of this, the spouse is merely an intermediary and the money goes back to the husband. The NGO workers are perfectly aware of this as it is general practice.

"It's our money that the project gives them and tells them to hand it over to us." (C. village of Adankole, in Issaley op.cit.)

"Putting money in the hands of the women is a waste! And if you play the biting game, you have to go back to the hyena." (D. village chief of Seloum, in Issaley op.cit.)

It is important to remember the local normative context for the management of resources within households (which are manifestly ignored or underestimated by the designers of the CT system in Niger): the women have their own resources which they manage independently but it is the responsibility of the husband to buy food and clothes and to cover medical expenses.

Thus the distribution of money intended for food for the entire household to the women (at the expense of the men) can fuel tension between men and women.

"For the 'cash transfer' from PACRC, the men refused to allow their wives to be registered because, they say, they [the wives] will say that it is for them and not for the husbands." (Issaley)

"Hey you too! The village women and the money? They don't give it to us; they buy goats and, in many cases, they take these goats to their parents' houses so that we do not sell them. [...]. My wife, when she got [money], she did not give me a cent, and me too, when I was flush, I refused to give her any. I just bought provisions for the house." (Beneficiary in Guézawa, in Issaley op.cit.).

Hence, exceptional cases exist whereby a wife refuses to hand over the money she receives to her husband (or her parents-in-law, if the husband is away, and/or her co-wives). This is a source of conflict which people generally try to hush up (cf. case of M.A. in Dadin Kowa, in Oumarou, or the case of H. in Issaley).

"In some cases, despite the recommendations made during the village assemblies that they should hand over the money to the husbands, they refused to give it to them, preferring to buy animals rather than provisions. Some cases were reported to us involving disputes between husbands and wives regarding the use of the money and these sometimes resulted in physical violence towards the woman." (Issa op.cit.)

The fact that, in general, the sums received are handed over to the husbands does not mean, however, that the women are entirely dispossessed in symbolic terms: like the

awareness briefings organized by the NGOs, the fact that the CTs are paid the women lends the money a certain ‘collective’ status (“for the good of the household”) and reduces the eventual temptation for the husbands to use it for strictly personal spending (e.g. taking a co-spouse or gambling).

“For the first instalment, I refused to give [it] to my husband. I was afraid that if I gave him this money he would take a second wife. [...]. During the second phase, I decided myself to give him the money and for the third I gave him XOF 20,000 and kept 10,000.” (Z.S., beneficiary in Kaki Fada, in Issaley op.cit.)

In some cases, the husband may allow the wife to manage the money on behalf of the family. If not, he may give her a small amount “for her own needs”.

“It’s their aid and they give it to us. If she gives it to me, I give her her bonus.” (Beneficiary in Sabon Kafi, in Issaley op.cit.)

“Cases exists involving households, in which the woman keeps one instalment and the husband keeps the next one. There are also rare cases of households, in which the husband shares the money with his wife or wives.” (Issaley op.cit.)

He may also give a little ‘pocket money’ to the household members. Sometimes also, when several related households have been artificially amalgamated into one large household so that they can obtain a larger sum of money, the head of the family divides the money between the actual households.

Finally, it is important to note that due to the presence of facilitators on the ground, the long-term significance of the scheme (monthly to long term distributions), and the payment of part of the distributed sums into tontines (microcredit schemes) and women’s mutual funds, the CTs for the World Bank ‘social safety nets’ project appear to have been significantly more successful in that the women keep and manage the money they receive themselves.

“The social safety nets project reversed the roles in our village. Before, it was the men who managed the households, but today, this is a role allocated to the women. They have demonstrated that they can play this management role as well as men, if not better than them. I think this is a good thing. Moreover, they no longer need us to dress themselves and dress the children or to take care of them.” (Y.A., husband of a beneficiary, in Adamou op.cit.)

Community reallocation: pooling

In response to the risk of discontent among the non-beneficiaries and with the aim of reinforcing the community solidarity under threat from the CTs, ‘pooling’ schemes were sometimes organized. This was generally done on the initiative of a chief immediately after the departure of the NGO and MFI officials. The CT operators do not, in fact, approve of this practice:

“During each operation, we remind them that the transferred sum belongs solely to the household or targeted individual. Under no circumstances should it be pooled or redistributed as this would not enable the household to meet its monthly food requirements.” (Karkara official, in Adamou op.cit.)

Nonetheless, the money is sometimes retrieved from the beneficiaries, in the majority of cases for equal distribution to all of the village households – either directly in the form of cash or provisions purchased with the pooled funds. However, it may also be used to cover general expenses (payment of tax).

“In the village of Fonikoiria, all of the money was pooled and took two forms. The first involved each of the first three instalments (June, July and August); the money was pooled and used to pay for provisions which were shared among all the households in the village. The fourth instalment was used to pay the village tax.” (Issa op.cit.)

“In Simiri, for the first and second distributions, the village chief forced the beneficiaries to pool all of their money. And 48 hours later, the pooled sums were distributed between all of the households in the village (339). However, prior to redistributing the money, the chief withdrew 200,000 francs for 20 village officials (15 teachers and five clerks) and to pay the tax arrears of the heads of the households that were not up to date. This explains the variation in the redistributed sums: 10,000, 12,000, 18,000 etc.” (Adamou op.cit.)

“In Danbazi too, all of the money was pooled and included the four distribution operations. However, unlike in Fonikoira, the money was pooled for direct redistribution among all of the households.” (Issa op.cit.)

Pooling can also be partial and take the form of a contribution to an objective approved by the entire community.

“In Sabon Gari, the beneficiaries of the cash transfer contributed XOF 100,000 for repairs to the Lollo Yondi integrated health centre.” (Adamou op.cit.)

However, pooling obviously triggered a degree of opposition among the official beneficiaries of the CTs.

“The money was collected from almost all the women for redistribution in the village. People say that the village chief decided to do it. Only XOF 1,000 was handed back to each woman. The rest of the money was collected and then shared. They said it was so that everyone would get some of it. I don’t think that this was good. People should be left with their money and each one can decide to give some to whoever they like.” (Elderly inhabitant of Danbazi, in Issa op.cit.).

“In Olléléwa, the CT operations are not subject to pooling. Although the Red Cross³³ highlights the existence of ‘pooling’ activities for public projects (schools, mosques etc.) [during the CT of 2005], this was denied by our informants. A single incidence of pooling was attempted during the distribution of provisions by Maigari de Guézawa’s son, however he realized that the beneficiaries were opposed to this solution.” (Issaley op.cit.).

“The committee members decided that on their own. They withdrew XOF 1,000 from the money for each beneficiary during the first payment [to distribute to non-beneficiaries]. They intended to continue doing this. However, the people said that they did not agree with it. And, faced with the anger this provoked in the district, they became afraid and stopped. So these are the reasons why this did not continue.” (Inhabitant of Alfagney, in Issa op.cit.).

Pooling necessitates sufficient authority on the part of the chief to obtain the – possibly reticent – consent of his beneficiary subjects. It is important to avoid public complaints at all costs as these could dissuade the NGO from continuing to provide CTs. Hence, when resolute opposition is expressed, pooling comes to an end.

3.2. Immediate redistribution

This takes three forms: (a) the ‘chiefs’ share’; (b) the ‘officials’ share’; (c) gifts to relatives

The ‘chiefs’ share’

Despite the fact that the NGO workers frequently convey the message that people should not give anything to the chiefs, the practice remains common. In some cases it is done on a voluntary basis, however in others it is required by the chief himself.

“Almost all the beneficiaries interviewed acknowledged having given the chiefs of their villages ‘something to pay for *cola*’. They do it because sometimes the chief requires them to do it. This is the case in Roumbou and Dadin Kowa (...), for example : ‘Our chief is a hyena! He is the most vulnerable person and biggest beneficiary. From the first instalment,

³³ Final Monitoring Report of the First Direct Cash Transfer Project in the Sahel: An Innovative Response by the British Red Cross to the 2005 Food Crisis in Tanout. By the Bureau for Applied Research in Anthropology at The University of Arizona December 2006.

we gave him XOC 10,000, from the second we gave XOF 9,000 and he received XOF 7,000 from the third. When we didn't give him something quickly from the fourth, he sent a child to us to tell us he hadn't seen us. This was a way of telling us we hadn't given him anything. We sent him XOF 5,000 and he sent it back because it wasn't much. We kept our money and he says that the next time he will not include our names." (T., beneficiary, Roubou, in Oumarou op.cit.).

"The village chief arranges it so that each woman must give him something based on the sum she received. If the woman feels that the sum requested by the chief is high, she reduces it. Those who receive high sums give him XOF 5,000 each." (Z. I, beneficiary, Dadin Kowa, in Oumarou op.cit.)

"The village chief leads us far away from the town hall before asking for his share." (Female beneficiary, in Oumarou op.cit.)

In contrast, in some places, the beneficiaries give contributions to the chief on an entirely voluntary basis.

"We give a little to the village chief. He does not ask but takes what he is given. I know that my husband gave him XOF 4,000 for the first operation, 2,000 for the second and I don't know how much for the last two." (Z.A., beneficiary, Maïgochi Jackou, in Oumarou op.cit.)

"In Olléléwa, for the ASB's CT, the beneficiaries decided to each contribute XOF 500 to the cantonal chief during the second phase in gratitude for his hospitality." (Issaley op.cit.)

A gesture of this kind is both a symbolic sign of respect towards the chief and an acknowledgement of the services he provides. As Oumarou stresses: "Those who contribute without being under any obligation whatsoever believe that the chiefs should be rewarded because they do what is needed to ensure that the payment process unfolds without problems. In addition, they are responsible for all foreigners who arrive in the village, including those who designate the beneficiaries of the cash (...) It is also necessary to contribute to the village chief because some beneficiaries believe that they were included as beneficiaries as this was what the village chief wanted. In addition, all aid that arrives in their village has to go through him. Therefore you must show consideration towards the village chief." (Oumarou op.cit.)

The 'officials' share'

Apart from a few exceptions, in the majority of cases the gestures involved are symbolic.

"For the French Red Cross cash transfers, the beneficiaries say they are grateful to the local volunteers from the Nigerien Red Cross. They think that the latter put forward their names and, by way of acknowledgement, they assign a small contribution to give to them." (Issaley op.cit.)

"On the occasion of the last distribution, each of the beneficiaries in Sabon Gari contributed XOF 5,000 to organize a lunch for the authorities and officials from the NGO Karkara. This lunch cost almost XOF 265,000." (Adamou op.cit.)

Gifts for relatives and friends

Small sums are allocated to the 'provider' of the venue for the distribution of the CTs, neighbours and relatives.

"For us, the amount does not matter but the gesture." (Non-beneficiary in Tébaram, in Hamani op.cit.)³⁴

"The amounts given are not high, of the order of between XOF 25 and 500 (...) the informants say they did not give more than XOF 2,000 of their money." (Issaley op.cit.)

³⁴However, exceptions may exist among people "*à la main dure*" (greedy): "There are people who disappear for two months after receiving the money." (Non-beneficiary, Hamani op.cit.)

“From the money I was given, I gave XOF 10,000 to my neighbours. There are five of them. I did not share it out myself. I gave the money to the oldest one and I asked her to share it with the others.” (Female beneficiary, Baderdey, in Issa op.cit.)

Sometimes the amounts distributed among family and friends are considerably higher, however, particularly when it comes to the immediate family:

“I received the money four times. I do not remember how much I got in total. But from the money I received, I remember that I gave XOF 25,000 to my three sons one time. And another time, I gave XOF 10,000 to one of my sons who has two wives. Then, one time I gave XOF 5,000 to another son who is monogamous. Then I gave XOF 10,000 to another of my unmarried sons so that he could pay for his trip to Nigeria. Then I gave my daughter XOF 500 for the small things she needs. After that, I gave XOF 100 here and XOF 200 there to my daughters-in-law who asked me for money on market day to pay for food.” (A.A, widow beneficiary, Loga, in Issa op.cit.).

“I shared a lot of the money. Once, I gave his son XOF 20,000. I gave my grandson XOF 5,000. I gave each of his four daughters XOF 1,000. I no longer remember what I gave my neighbours to pay for soap or salt. Apart from that I did not share any more. I collected the entire sums from the third and fourth distributions and paid them to my son so that he could have his vehicle repaired. Because he uses it to make the journeys necessary to feed us.” (G.A, widow beneficiary, in Issa op.cit.).

This analysis for Oumarou is applicable to all of the sites: “The money from the cash transfers contributed to maintaining solidarity through the redistribution of some of the money to relatives and neighbours who may or may not have come to congratulate the beneficiaries for having been one of the recipients of *kuddin gazaji* (the money for the ‘tired’).” Hence, this maintenance of proximity-based sociability through small gifts plays a positive role which somewhat alleviates the intensification of village divisions that our informants often accuse the CTs of generating.

3.3. Food and other expenditure

This is clearly the main area in which the beneficiaries rejoice in the existence of the CT and report on everything the distributed sums enabled them to do. It will come as no surprise to learn that there is no lack of testimonials on this topic in the five field reports, and in standard reports.

Unfortunately we did not have the time and resources to study the local economic benefits of the CT, which clearly exist but are difficult to evaluate.

In terms of combating food insecurity (hunger gaps and scarcity), the purchase of grain is the use of the CTs systematically recommended to the populations by the NGOs. In reality, however, various quantitative surveys reveal that the money is put to a variety of uses.

When the cash is distributed in the middle of the lean season prior to the harvest, the households naturally use the money to buy food, in particular grain, and sometimes also products that supplement their everyday fare (e.g. meat, seasonings).

The payment of debts to traders is another priority expense. However, such payments are usually made to enable the contracting of new loans and not to wipe out all debt (as the NGOs would prefer).

“I go directly to the village trader to pay off my debts. I buy provisions with the rest. If I have nothing left over, I get into debt again.” (Chief of Simiri village, in Adamou op.cit.)

The grain banks have the major advantage of enabling people to obtain grain at reasonable prices.³⁵ The ability to buy food also gives people a way of avoiding spending too

³⁵ The complementarity of the CTs and other instruments, such as grain banks (food aid CT) and tontines (‘social safety nets’) is clearly an important element.

much time doing paid agricultural work – something they always do at the expense of working on their own fields. Similarly, in some cases the migration of individuals and even families has been cancelled or deferred for the benefit of cultivating crops at home.

“The impact of the CT was very positive because the operations coincided with the lean season, hence precisely the time when people needed provisions. There were even people who came to thank the commune and the NGO and say that if they had not received this aid, they would not be able to cultivate their fields. Because, here, the men generally go away to look for food and the women leave for the fields. But this cash enabled the farmers to stay and work their fields. The people who received the CT did not do paid agricultural work.” (Vice Mayor, Roumbou, in Oumarou op.cit.)

“I do not know how to thank the people who helped us. Every year during winter, I am obliged to go and work in the fields of the people with means before I am able to work my field. But, thanks to the money my wife received, this year, I stayed to work my field.” (Inhabitant of Walykoira, in Issa op.cit.).

When the CTs are distributed after the harvest, something that is not unusual (despite the fact that it contradicts the stated aim of the CTs as a response to food crises), irrespective of what the campaigns say, it is obviously used for purposes other than the purchase of food.

For example, the two last instalments in Roumbou were paid in September when some producers had already harvested the green beans: ‘This resulted in the CT money being used to cover other needs, even among really vulnerable households.’” (Oumarou op.cit.)

In such cases, the CT money also enables repayment of debt or retrieval of lands that have been pawned (*tolmeyan* in Zarma, *jingina* in Hausa).

Healthcare spending is also an important item of expenditure. Obviously it varies considerably from one household to the next (cf. Issa), however, it is often facilitated by the CTs.

The CTs may also be used to cover various social expenses, which are sometimes as essential as subsistence expenditure in the strict sense, for example when the festival of Tabaski is approaching (sheep, clothes), during the Ramadan period (sugar, milk), or the case of a baptism or marriage.

“I will pay the dowry using this money. I am obliged to get him married because he cultivates the crops to feed me. If he is not married, I am afraid that he will go away and leave me.” (K.D, elderly woman, Loga, in Issa op.cit.).

The CTs also enable the purchase of animals for either fattening or for pulling carts, which, in turn, enables people to access other sources of income. Paradoxically, many NGO workers who allocate emergency relief CTs discourage this type of purchase (the targeting methods are also aimed at discouraging it as they make the possession of livestock a criterion of non-vulnerability and, accordingly one that excludes people from receiving CTs). This represents a contradiction between this type of CT which, in aiming to constitute a social support measure for the most disadvantaged (emergency relief), contradicts a local logic of IGA (income-generating activities) supported by other projects and other CTs, in particular the social safety nets (resilience support).

The question of migration

One of the objectives of the CTs is to provide a weapon against migration, in particular early migration and during the crop cultivation period. This objective would appear to have been fulfilled in part. However, paradoxically, the money obtained through the CTs may enable families to facilitate one of their members in migrating: departure involves a certain investment, in effect (travel costs etc.).

“Without this money it would not have been possible for my son to make his journey to Nigeria. Thankfully, I received this money. And thanks to this, I paid his travel costs. He goes to Lagos every year, stays there for several months and returns for the overwintering. In return, he pays for my clothes and those of his brothers and sisters.” (A.A. CT beneficiary, Loga, in Issa op.cit.)

In this regard, the local logics of migration are quite rational as, in addition to the purchase of clothing, the money earned by the migrants often enables households to get by during the lean season or to invest in the cold season.³⁶ Although some CT providers would prefer that they replace it, in the eyes of the families migration is complementary to the CT.

In this regard it would be interesting to see the extent to which the CTs provided to migrants in Zinder and Maradi to return home are not re-interpreted by the populations as an inducement to migration (i.e. migration in order to benefit from a kind of ‘rent’: departure for Zinder opens up the possibility of benefiting from repatriation through the CT).

Moreover, the majority of the migrants are young and not directly affected by the CTs (even if they belong to beneficiary households, they receive little or nothing from the head of the household): in other words, the CTs do not dissuade them from leaving (cf. Adamou op.cit.).

The imposition of external and heterogeneous rules: the central paradox of the CTs

External and imposed rules

The CTs in Niger are based on a series of ‘expert’ rules (formulated by experts outside the country) and based on the previous experience of institutions that have operated CT schemes in other countries. In a way, these rules function as ‘conditions’ which people must fulfil to benefit the targeted payments. Thus they are imposed on the local populations, which not only have difficulty in understanding them in some cases (even if the procedures planned by the experts are implemented scrupulously by the NGO workers – something that is far from always the case – the targeting procedures are highly opaque to them), but also frequently disagree with them and ‘circumvent’ them.

These imported and imposed rules are essentially based on the same “system of reference”,³⁷ in other words, they have the same ideological roots and the same general strategy which may be summarized as follows: to distribute in a meaningful way sums of money to very vulnerable families so as to enable them to overcome a food crisis (crisis CTs) or develop greater resilience (social safety net CTs). Hence, what is involved here is a new form of ‘social policy’ originating from the aid sector, which assumes a place alongside the other forms of aid (such as the distribution of food and sale of goods at reduced prices) and is intended to replace some of them, in part at least, both in the name of greater efficiency but also in the pursuit of other objectives, which are considered complementary: i.e. ensuring greater equality (by targeting the most vulnerable), promoting women (by designating them as the sole recipients of the CTs), curbing migration, fighting malnutrition etc.

The “mechanism” adopted by the different donors and operators translate these objectives into a number of major general common rules, which (apart from a few exceptions) can essentially be summed up as follows:

³⁶ It is important to note that there are two categories of migrants: long-term and seasonal migrants.

³⁷ Cf. Muller, P. 2000 “L’analyse cognitive des politiques publiques: vers une sociologie politique de l’action publique”, *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 50 (2): 189-207

- Without consulting the communities involved or the local authorities, the donor and NGOs decide on the duration, frequency and amount of the sums paid and the type of targeting used.
- Only certain communes and villages are involved.
- In the selected villages, only a minority of households are beneficiaries of the CTs (in the majority of cases, four categories are proposed to the villagers, to which they must allocate all of the village households,³⁸ and only those in the category defined as most vulnerable are eligible).
- The women are the beneficiaries of the CTs within the households.³⁹
- The NGO workers survey and monitor the beneficiaries with the help of local actors.
- Apart from some exceptional cases, the local actors playing a role in the process (chefs, village auxiliaries, elected representatives) are not paid for this work as it is considered as reflecting a commitment to the community.
- Institutional architecture is required: the holding of general assemblies, classification of the population in four categories, designation of key informants and various committees, surveys, public distribution events etc.
- A 'long' list is compiled by a general assembly or validated by it.
- A 'short' list of beneficiaries is compiled by the NGO.
- Monthly payments are made to these beneficiaries for a limited period.⁴⁰
- Extensive awareness-raising is usually carried out to ensure that the money is used to buy food and not for income-generating activities (in the case of emergency CTs).

Heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory rules

Based on this core of external and more or less shared 'macro rules', the 'micro rules' which govern the specific mechanisms of the CTs vary considerably and this undermines their credibility in a way. The targeting and distribution methods often contradict both each other and other development aid mechanisms.

Internal inconsistencies within the CTs

The CT operators vary considerably with respect to the concrete measures implemented, not only from one village to the next but also within one and the same village: despite various efforts at their coordination, which have not proved very effective, it is common for several operators to work in the same area.⁴¹

In effect each operator imposes its own norms without taking either those of the other operators or the rules governing previous interventions in the same location into account.

Thus the social safety nets project, which has now been extended to the entire country, is a separate entity in a way. It does not limit the payments to the lean season. They are made

³⁸ This technique originated from the MARP's 'toolbox'.

³⁹ Some exceptions exist: CT for the repatriation of migrants in the town, CT for flood victims.

⁴⁰ This may be a lump sum per beneficiary household or a sum calculated according to the number of persons belonging to a beneficiary household.

⁴¹ On the level of Niamey, in particular, coordination is steered by the OCHA and CCA; within the country some regional or sub-regional committees make attempts of this kind.

throughout the year and the sums allocated are different (XOF 10,000 as opposed to XOF 30,000-40,000 for the other CTs). The women are encouraged to put the money they receive into a tontine, which will enable them to invest in income-generating activities.

Regarding the ‘food crisis’ CTs, which promote instead the purchase of grain by the recipients and are all limited in duration, the parameters governing the distribution of money are nonetheless variable: i.e. the duration of the schemes (between one and four months), sums involved (XOF 10,000 to 120,000) and the months in which the payments are made (sometimes two payments in one month or a delayed payment, which is made after the harvest when the granaries are full).

The nature of the target populations also varies: in the vast majority of cases they constitute the most vulnerable households, however they sometimes also involve disaster victims (floods, fires), persons who have been displaced (for economic, but also political reasons – Lybie, Mali) or statutory categories related to the traditional target categories of the *zakkat* (Muslim tithe): i.e. the disabled, widows, orphans etc.

The targeting procedures also vary between lists compiled by the paid investigators and the NGOs and the lists compiled by the villagers, or the combination of the two. The classification criteria are supposed to be decided on by the villagers, however in many cases they are suggested by the NGO workers or combined with the NGOs’ or donors’ own criteria. It should be noted here that, as a cognitive operation, classification in four mutually exclusive categories is very much at odds with local conceptions, which tend to differentiate between two extremes with blurred boundaries (i.e. the wealthy, *arzakante* in Zarma and *masuhali* in Hausa; and the poor, *alfukaru* in Zarma, *talaka* in Hausa), between which the entire remainder of the population is located.

Finally, different options are adopted in relation to the CT recipient, in other words the person within each beneficiary household who receives the money during the public distribution event. While women are prioritized in the majority of cases, be it as part of the social safety nets programme or for the majority of the ‘food crisis’ CTs (in the case of polygamous households, the head of the household decides which wife will receive the money), in other cases, in contrast (CTs in the aftermath of disasters or CTs associated with the repatriation of displaced persons), the recipient is the head of the family and the selection procedures are different.

“One such example is the CTs provided by the Nigerien state’s Community Action Project for Climate Resilience (*Projet d’Actions Communautaires pour la Resilience Climatique*, PACRC) in the aftermath of a flood: in some cases the beneficiaries are selected by the mayor and in others the village chiefs or elected representatives are responsible for their selection.” (Cf. Issaley op.cit.)

Other choices made by the NGOs may appear arbitrary and create unjustified inequalities.

“Unlike the communal committee, whose members benefited from expenses, the work of the committees at neighbourhood and village level is voluntary in nature. This situation has not failed to generate discontent (...). ‘They gave us nothing for the work. However, we discovered that they gave something to the members of the big committee. So why not give us something too? Particularly because we did more work than they did’.” (Member of the targeting committee of Wanzamkoira, Loga neighbourhood, Issa op.cit.)

Finally, it is important to highlight the variations between the sums distributed and the frequency of the distribution, something that is difficult for the populations to understand. The variation in the sums distributed within one and the same CT operation is particularly difficult to understand.

“For the CT by the British Red Cross in 2005, the sums paid were XOF 120,000 for the nomads (in reality, cattle breeders) and XOF 70,000 for members of the sedentary population: ‘Some of the sedentary people refused to accept the money as those entitled to 70,000. They thought that we had embezzled the 50,000 because the nomads were given 120,000.’” (X, distributing official, in Issaley op.cit.)

“For the PACRC, the sum allocated was XOF 26,660, which was accompanied by a voucher for XOF 7,500 intended for the purchase of seasonings. However, in Olléléwa, millet was given (10 tia (i.e. 2.5 kg x 10) per beneficiary). In the view of our informants, this millet was provided by the chief in exchange for vouchers.” (Issaley op.cit.)

Of course, the sum sometimes varies due to the variations in the market price of grain. However, this mechanism is badly understood (in particular as grain is not the only product purchased with the money).

“For the ASB CT aimed at migrants (in Zinder and Agadez), the first two payments were XOF 32,500 for the citizens of Olléléwa. The third was increased to XOF 40,000 in view of the high price of grain on the local markets. The fourth payment was XOF 32,500.” (Issaley op.cit.)

What is happening here, in a way, is the changing of the rules in the course of the game, a process that paves the way for suspicion.

“The first version of the programme planned to allocate XOF 32,500 per month to each targeted vulnerable household. However, even before it was implemented, the WFP decided to allocate XOF 4,640 per household member to be multiplied by the number of persons in the household. The programme was supposed to be carried out over a period of four months with one payment per month. However, the first two payments were both made in September. Moreover, the sums, which were supposed to be the same for all operations, were reduced for the third operation: four different explanations were provided for this reduction.” (Cf. Oumarou op.cit.)

The inconsistencies between the CTs and other interventions

In addition to highlighting these ‘internal’ inconsistencies between the rules imported through the CT operations, it is important to note that throughout the country the CTs co-exist with other types of response to food crises and support for vulnerable families: e.g. ‘cash for work’, ‘food for work’, distribution of specific provisions, distribution of general provisions, warrantage, and, finally, the sale of goods at reduced prices. All of these systems obviously follow different sets of rules

The main contradiction, which is, in effect, the ‘mother’ of all of the others, is that which opposes the *principal of general free distribution* (and the sale of goods at reduced prices), to which the populations were accustomed from 2005 (and before), with the *principle of local selection*, which governs the vast majority of CTs.

Of course, the general free distribution schemes imply geographical targeting (the communes or villages considered as having been severely affected by a crisis), which is contested by the inhabitants of non-beneficiary areas⁴² based on arguments of both civic equality (“we all pay tax”) and general discourses on poverty (“the entire rural population of Niger is vulnerable”) – the latter are backed up by international statistics that present Niger as a particularly poor country or even the poorest in the world. However, the general free distribution schemes do not make any distinctions within the selected villages.

In contrast, many people perceive local selection (social targeting) within the villages as illegitimate or arbitrary in that the CTs make a radical (i.e. dichotomous) distinction between ‘the most vulnerable’ and the three other categories. In view of the ultimate practical

⁴² On this topic, regarding the distributions of 2005, see : “Analyse rétrospective de la crise alimentaire au Niger en 2005”, *Etudes et Travaux du LASDEL* n° 57, 2007.

differentiation between only two broad categories (i.e. the ‘beneficiaries’ who make up the fourth category and the ‘non-beneficiaries’ who make up the other three), the prior formal classification in four categories,⁴³ which the NGOs introduce to the village populations in asking them to define criteria for degrees of vulnerability and classify households based on them, is, in effect, purely rhetorical. This dichotomy, which is typical of the CTs in the eyes of the populations, is the only one that really counts: it is deeply contested by the villagers (and not without good reason).

This principle of local selection, which has been developed on a large scale through the CTs, was already used in the past, either on the basis of vulnerability criteria (distribution of provisions to poor families by the CCA - Nigerien food crisis task force - and WFP based on lists compiled by the town halls, status criteria (distribution to the beneficiaries of the *zakkat* by Arabo-Islamic associations), or medical criteria (distribution of protective rations to the mothers of malnourished children). In the latter case, a study carried out by the LASDEL described the ‘circumvention’ strategies used by the mothers, whose children were not selected for reasons which they deemed unjustified.⁴⁴ The fact that a selection process is considered illegitimate or arbitrary enables the justification of such circumvention.

Another contradiction contrasts the *principle of remuneration*, inherent in the ‘cash for work’ (and ‘food for work’) schemes, according to which payments are made in exchange for work, and the *principle of donation*, inherent in the CT schemes (and frequently associated with other products in the aid sector: e.g. distribution of provisions), according to which sums are paid without any obligations in return. The two systems co-exist in rural Nigeria, often in the same communes and even villages – make sense of that, if you can!

The normative pluralism of the aid

Assuming that a system of rules governing the access to a given type of aid (or public good) is a legal system, the CTs in Niger involve a proliferating ‘legal pluralism’, which already existed prior to their establishment and which they have intensified to the extent that no actor is capable of imposing regulation (and coherence) on the system, not even the state, whose role it is to do so. Several clusters of normative regulation coexist, are entangled and often contradict each other. Any eventual coordination depends purely and simply on the good will of the NGO managers and remains, therefore, random and fragile.

With regard to the populations, this normative pluralism, these contradictions and this lack of coherence merely boost the incentives for opportunistic behaviour and for ‘playing with’ the roles with a view to circumventing them.

The internal reorganization of the rules: local strategies

As we have seen, this legal pluralism with its incoherence also encourages the suspicions that arise from the comparisons which all of the people make: the differences between one CT and the other are attributed to the ‘manipulations’ of the NGOs and authorities. It also paves the way for different strategies on the part of the populations and, in particular, within the rural elites (particularly the chiefs, who are central to the CT mechanism and, less commonly, the elected representatives, who are quite marginalized). Hence,

⁴³ These four categories are translated into Hausa as: *masuhali*; *masudaa madaama*; *talakawa*; *talaka talak*; and into Zarma as: *arzakante*; *daamante*; *alfukaru*; *alfukaru bi*. This classification and the use of these terms were popularized by the NGO workers beyond the different local variants that exist in both languages.

⁴⁴ It is interesting to recall here that the children selected (as severely malnourished) were referred to in the villages as “the lucky children” because of the access they obtained to resources as a result. Cf. Koné, M. 2006, “La crise alimentaire de 2005 au Niger dans la région de Madarounfa et ses effets sur la malnutrition infantile : approche socio-anthropologique”, Niamey: *Etudes et Travaux du LASDEL*, n° 53.

numerous cases arise involving the ‘fabrication’ or ‘hijacking’ of the lists of beneficiaries by the village or neighbourhood chiefs and by village auxiliaries, who include or have included their next of kin or clients.

However, this kind of behaviour is not something that was triggered for the first time by the CTs. As evidenced by the case of the ‘demi-lunes fraud’ reported in Olleléwa (in relation to a cash for work scheme: cf. Issaley op.cit.), on the contrary, it was already quite widespread in rural Niger.⁴⁵

This manipulation of the lists by the chiefs and village auxiliaries is accompanied by various ‘levies’, including the ‘chief’s share’, which are sometimes requested and even demanded of beneficiaries immediately after the public distribution of the CTs and in violation of the NGOs’ instructions.

These collection strategies by the chiefs trigger ambivalent reactions among their subjects. On the one hand the former are condemned in sometimes violent terms (accusations of greed, being referred to as hyenas etc.), on the other, however, they are excused and their behaviour legitimized on the basis of the numerous expenses that must be borne by the chiefs in the exercise of their office and of the support they provide to the populations in various ways.

In any case, one rule of thumb applies: the rules imposed by the partners barely even satisfy those who benefit from the CTs; they are recomposed and transformed as much as possible, but on the quiet. There is no direct opposition or public expression of discontent (which would risk putting an end to the resource and compromising relations with the ‘projects’ which people are trying to attract), however, it is possible to list some elements, on which there is quasi latent unanimity in terms of opposition to the imposed rules as demonstrated by the associated circumvention strategies:

- The men should be recipients as they are responsible for food and are the heads of the families.
- Selective distribution divides the village. The CTs should be aimed at everyone or, if not, benefit all the village households in turn.
- The category of extreme vulnerability (*talaka talak*) and the criteria proposed by the NGOs are too restrictive.
- It is not possible to compare the different types of expenses which reflect the pressures faced by the households at the time of the CT distribution; if these pressures are taken into account, the distributed sums are insufficient.
- All those involved in the process and who devote time to it should be remunerated, particularly if they are not beneficiaries.

However, the villagers adapt to the donors’ requirements with a combination of fatalism and pragmatism so that they can continue to reap the benefits of their ‘manna’. The solutions widely adopted and implemented behind the backs of the NGOs involve either the improvization of new rules, which are better suited to the local context or interests of certain actors, or a return to existing social rules.

- In the majority of cases, the women give the sums they receive to their husbands and thereby revert to the habitual norm whereby it is the man who must provide the food for the household.

⁴⁵ It is also important to remember that before the CTs, the general distribution of provisions was already the object of various ‘*évaporations*’ whereby each administrative level withdrew ‘its share’.

- The differentiation (often perceived as a ‘division’) created by targeting the funds is sometimes overcome through pooling and the equal distribution of all or part of the sums received or their allocation for expenses of a local public nature.
- The received sums are the object of mini-redistribution processes within the family and its sociability networks and are not necessarily allocated for the purchase of food.
- The composition of the beneficiary lists opens the floodgates for multiple manoeuvres for the inclusion of family and, if necessary, the manipulation of household sizes.
- Various strategies target the indirect ‘remuneration’ of the unpaid actors involved in the process (chiefs, village auxiliaries).

It should also be noted that the CT mechanisms provide a small amount of flexibility for the expression of local categories, essentially on the level of the specific criteria for vulnerability. It has also been confirmed that even if the NGO officials push the adoption of essentially economic criteria, the populations tend to prioritize categories that constitute the habitual beneficiaries of the *zakkat*: widows and orphans, the disabled, the elderly etc. (cf. Issa op.cit.).

Contradictory logics of affect

Prompted by our data, we are venturing here into the sensitive area of shared relational feelings, in other words the borders between social anthropology and social psychology.

The advocates of the CTs (like all aid mechanisms) generally expect – implicitly at least – that the scheme will provide relief for the beneficiaries and earn their recognition. The interviews we held on this level generally testify to the fact that the CTs are successful in this regard. These expressions of satisfaction obviously feature prominently in the standard evaluations and reports.

However, it is also possible to observe various unexpected developments in relation to the processes at the root of these sentiments and in relation to the actors at whom they are directed.

The aid donors are generally unknown and the NGOs that lead the CT operations are credited with the generosity in their provision.

However, the recognition is mainly aimed at the actors rather than the institutions, and gratitude, sometimes accompanied by small sums of money, is targeted at actual individuals. The actors in question are those located on the interface between the populations and the CT mechanism. The chiefs, NGO workers and community assistants are often rewarded symbolically or materially.

In reality, however, contrary to appearances, the beneficiaries do not express gratitude to the actors involved in the implementation of the CT scheme *as representatives of the donor organizations* but *on a personal basis and for the role they were able to play in their selection* as beneficiaries of this manna from heaven. It is assumed, therefore, that the targets of the gratitude were involved in the selection processes in a way that benefited the fortunate recipients.

“These beneficiaries consider that it was they that arranged for them to be on the list. This accountability is materialized in the form of *godiya* (thanks), *adu’a* (prayers, wishes) and, in rare cases, small donations for *d’anabunasahi* (‘a little something for buying cola’).

Others target their gratitude at the mayor given that it is he who informed them.” (Issaley op.cit.)

“For the CTs from the French Red Cross, beneficiaries say they are grateful to the local volunteers from the Niger Red Cross. They think that it was they who nominated them and by way of acknowledgement they make a small contribution to give to them.” (Issaley op.cit.)

The chiefs are thanked primarily because, although the procedures are generally designed to exclude them from the selection process, they play a pivotal role in the CTs. First of all, they are the sole authority at village level (decentralization stopped at the level of the communes) and, in this capacity, they convene and chair the general assemblies, which are mostly held at their compounds, and the public distribution meetings; they receive the ‘foreigners’ (NGO and IMF managers and officials) and possibly provide them with guides. Hence, the conclusion that they make use of their interpersonal skills and authority to have the right to view the lists is a logical one.

The vast majority of non-beneficiaries also believe that the chiefs are involved in the process. However, in this case the sentiments are reversed and are in the register of suspicion and rancour.

“All aid is useful. But when it does not cover the majority of households, it always gives rise to accusations and frustration on the part of the non-beneficiaries, even if Maigari –the chief - was not involved in its targeting.” (A village chief, in Issaley op.cit.)

In general, the non-beneficiaries (in other words, the majority of the population in each village, and, of those, above all the people eliminated between the long and short lists) suspect that all beneficiary lists are the product of favours. This suspicion involves the same actors located on the interface between the populations and CT system. The village chiefs, who are the first to be thanked are also the first to be accused. The mayors are also targeted if they are involved in the process. The NGO workers and community auxiliaries are also under suspicion.

“The community assistants do not participate in the process of targeting the vulnerable households; but that does not shield them from the criticism made by those in the village who are not selected. ‘They say that we target our people.’” (Hamani op.cit.)

“During the ‘cash’, the Hañ e [non-Fulani] auxiliaries register their own and I think there was one Fulani among the investigators. He listed some Fulani people because the targeting is a matter of ‘yideyonki’ (heartfelt wishes).” (Y, Fulani cattle breeder, Issaley op.cit.)

The majority of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries share the same assessment, however; irrespective of the underlying motives (compassion, benevolence, family solidarity, village solidarity, clientelism), the final list is the production of various interventions. The complex mixture of criteria based on ‘external objectives’ (HEA surveys) and ‘community’ criteria (constitution of the lists), according to which the institutions operating the CTs aim to carry out the selection process in a way that cannot be contested, is greeted in the villages with suspicion and/or manoeuvres in response to this mixture. The targeting process is evaluated by the local populations using local criteria which are usually applied in their evaluation of local governance, political action and public action (in which “the widespread exchange of favours”⁴⁶ is standard). Everyone knows, in effect, that the official norms decreed from above (the state or development institutions) – and the NGO’s CT criteria are a typical case of parachuted official norms – are systematically ‘adapted’, ‘altered’ and circumvented as much as possible in the everyday practices of the actors. Paradoxically, it is

⁴⁶ Cf. Olivier de Sardan, J.P. 2004 “State bureaucracy and governance in West francophone Africa. Empirical diagnosis, historical perspective”, in Blundo & Le Meur (eds) *The governance of daily life in Africa. Ethnographic explorations of public and collective service*, Leiden: Brill

precisely the ‘community’ criteria that the CTs introduced to the process with a view to involving representatives of the populations that arouse the suspicions about it.⁴⁷ It will come as no surprise to learn, therefore, that some people express a preference for “external objective” criteria:

“For them, direct targeting by the donor itself is the best option. However, it would be necessary for the officials to be familiar with the reality of the households beforehand.” (Issaley op.cit.)

“The targeting of the social safety nets did not cause as much trouble as that carried out by the NGO Karkara. This is obviously due to the fact that the selection was made in Niamey where nobody knew anybody who could influence the results.” (Mayor of Simiri, in Adamou op.cit.).

However, the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, who are unanimous in their view that the selection is the result of intervention by the chiefs and other intermediaries, disagree on how they should judge these interventions: while the forsaken majority view them as unjust, the small minority of the ‘advantaged’ (paradoxically, the ‘vulnerable’ are considered as advantaged) consider them beneficial.

“They have a perception of the CTs ranging from fatalism and condemnation to envy.” (Issaley op.cit.)

And even when the selection is not attributed to the intervention of the chiefs or other actors, luck (or bad luck) is referred as an explanatory factor and not the criteria applied by the NGOs. Some people go as far as speaking of the ‘drawing of lots’ (*kaley-kaley* or *kozop-kozop*) by the NGOs.

“Even if they see themselves as truly vulnerable, all or almost all of the beneficiaries of the cash credit luck with their inclusion in the list of beneficiaries. In effect, many of them believe that there are people who are as vulnerable, if not more vulnerable, than they, who were not part of the programme because fortune did not favour them (...) They believe that fortune favoured them and that ‘*wanda Allah yacida*’ (‘he who God makes win’) is he who will receive. They also speak of ‘*rabo*’ (luck) as a factor that results in some people being nominated as beneficiaries and others not.” (Oumarou op.cit.)

“If I wasn’t chosen, it is just a question of luck and I hope that luck will smile on my during the big project.” (Non-beneficiary woman, Gatawan, in Adamou op.cit.)

Another reaction triggered by the selection principle is a condition imposed by the donors, which the majority of the population does not observe, and manifests in the reaction to the renewal of distributions within one and the same village: based on the NGOs’ vulnerability criteria, it is obvious that the same list of beneficiaries will be used from one month to the next or one year to the next. However, in the view of many local actors there should be a kind of rotation system that would enable other households to benefit from the ‘manna’ in turn.

“The village chiefs condemn the NGO workers’ anti-pooling discourse and feel that it is not desirable to give the aid to the same people across several phases. According to them, it would be best to reduce the sums paid so that everyone could benefit, to target each instalment at new beneficiaries or give them the money as they would know how to prevent there being injured parties.” (Issaley op.cit.)

⁴⁷ There is a common idea among the advocates of the CTs that the recourse to community control is the best way of combating unjustified inclusions in the beneficiary lists: “Errors of inclusion arise when persons who do not need aid or do not meet the programme criteria receive aid nonetheless (...). In most cases, the best way of preventing errors of this nature is to involve the local populations who are aware of who could claim financial aid and who does not need it.” (“Lignes directrices sur les programmes de transferts monétaires”, Mouvement international de la Croix Rouge et du Croissant rouge, 2008). Our study shows that the opposite is, in fact, the case.

However, the *pooling*, which is sometimes observed, provides the clearest example of how the logic of targeted external social assistance as adopted by the CT operators contrasts and even clashes with the logic of the solidarity based on proximity, as subscribed to by part of the population. The aim of pooling, in effect, is to subvert the differentiation (frequently referred to as ‘division’ by the people) introduced by the CT, through the ‘clandestine’ introduction of egalitarian redistribution.

However, the argument presented goes further. As stated by this woman from Danbazi, it suggests that, thanks to the pooling of the cash, each person will be able to help a neighbour in need in the future:

“It’s good to share the money with everyone. It’s good because today you benefit and tomorrow perhaps your neighbour will. So if it happens that you have given to him, he too will think of you when it’s his turn.” (in Issa op.cit.)

Thus pooling acts as a guarantee of local aid for the future (many people believe that the CT operations will not last and the villages involved will ultimately be left to their own devices). Pooling also has the advantage that it enables the avoidance of the numerous accusations and suspicions associated with the selection and targeting processes.

However, the objection could also be made that the traditional mechanisms of intra-village solidarity are blunt, that the inequalities in rural areas have deteriorated and that without the CTs a lot of poor people would be even poorer and caught in the ‘poverty trap’.

Nevertheless, some would point out that the CTs themselves aggravate the erosion of intra-village solidarity by driving the rural population to offload this aid function onto the ‘projects’ and various aid initiatives.

The debate is never-ending, and also recurrent among Nigerien leaders.

That said, as we have seen, pooling remains a secondary phenomenon which has also had its failures. Should selection be considered as a success on the part of the CT operators who, despite everything, managed to establish a certain degree of local legitimacy for external monetary aid targeted at the most vulnerable? Or should it be deplored as something that advances individualist strategies and promotes the decline of the traditional forms of village solidarity?

It may not be possible to provide an unequivocal or consensual response to this question, however, it is possible to identify the more general problem of “assistentialism” and aid dependency at work here (in terms of emotions, this phenomenon is sometimes accompanied by a feeling of embarrassment or ‘shame’, *haawi* in Zarma).

Conclusion

We would like to conclude with some brief comments on two issues: (a) some of the effects of the CTs on local institutions; (b) the question of assistentialism.

The CT and local institutions

Chieftaincies

We have seen that the link between the CTs and chieftaincies was evident. The chief was considered responsible for the lists and while this earned him the support of the beneficiaries, it also made him the target of resentment among the non-beneficiaries.

The disappointed village or district inhabitants cannot do anything, however, except hope that they will be chosen another time. The mere public expression of their discontent would be unwelcome.

In contrast, villages and hamlets which consider themselves as having been neglected or deliberately forgotten by the chief may have recourse to the ‘exit option’, the traditional means in Africa for subjects to show their opposition to the chief through scission.⁴⁸ As was observed in several locations, in situations characterized by existing tensions and local factions, the CTs can have the effect of accelerating (and sometimes causing) division.

“These situations of dissatisfaction are prompting increasing numbers of people to leave their village chief and transfer their allegiance to one they believe will nominate them when CT operations are carried out. In some cases, they elect a new chief (...). This new chief is endorsed by the cantonal chief who authorizes him to collect taxes from his ‘subjects’. He acts as and responds to the title of village chief.” (Issaley op.cit.)

“Over 60 heads of households left my list saying they no longer wanted to be with me because I do not include them when there is aid. They said they were going to elect their own village chief. They do not pay their tax to me at the moment.” (Village chief of Sabon Kafi, in Issaley op.cit.)

“Forgetting or omitting the inhabitants of hamlets in the targeting of the aid caused cases of conflict which culminated in scission.” (Issa op.cit.; cf. the two cases involving conflict of this nature in Loga.)

The nomadic cattle breeders, who are systematically excluded from the lists, sometimes under the pretext that they pay their tax elsewhere (the location of the nomadic chief – *chef de groupement* -, to whom they are attached administratively, which can be as much as 100 km away), sometimes adopt the opposite strategy of affiliating themselves with the chief’s sedentary village.

It should be noted that many people associate the payment of the tax with local citizenship and believe that the distribution of external aid should be based on this citizenship.

“These nomads think that paying the tax constitutes a right to the CTs and all of the aid, to which the sedentary groups have access. They believe that, as citizens, they also have a right to their share of this money as they too are *biβ eleydi* (sons of the country) (...). However, there are no open complaints and they admit that their fear of the local authorities fear prevents them from claiming what they consider to be their ‘due’. The Fulani speak of *kulollambe* (‘fear of the chiefs’).” (Issaley op.cit.)

Local authorities

The CT system reduces the mayors to the role of extras (the final beneficiary lists are submitted the town hall and they may be present during the distribution of the payments) and they all complain about this (with the exception of cases like Olléléwa, in which the chieftaincy and town hall are more or less amalgamated).

In other words, in these times of decentralization, the communes are bystanders to an ambitious and (very) costly social policy affecting some of their citizens without being given any say on any level.

The simple comparison of a commune’s budget and the sum of the CTs distributed in the same commune speaks for itself: in the commune of Tébaram XOF 185,500,000 was distributed in 2012 (to 1,484 households), that is five times the budget allocated to the commune for the same year. In the commune of Loga, XOF 562,822,000 was distributed in 2012, which is eight times the commune’s budget for that year.

⁴⁸ Cf. Kopytoff, I. (ed) 1986 *The African frontier: the reproduction of traditional African societies*, Indiana UP

Beyond communal action in the strict sense, local development is the great omission of the CTs and they are perceived as both a volatile and extra-territorial intervention as a result:

“If Concern were to close its doors today, the people would forget about it very quickly. In contrast, they will never forget CECI which runs more local development initiatives. The activities implemented by this project are visible in the village.” (Issoufou Riba, trader, in Hamani op.cit.)

Following our study, we suggested to the representatives of ECHO (EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department) and the NGOs represented at the presentation of our findings to bring together the mayors of the 40 or so communes of Niger, in which LASDEL has already carried out research on various topics and with whom we have already held discussion workshops on various previous reports, with a view to debating this report on the CTs, and to ask them to suggest the best ways of helping the most vulnerable families in their communes. This would be an interesting way of reintegrating the mayors into the system, developing strategies based on local realities and relying on the analyses of local experts rather than strategies based on predefined models derived from the evaluations of international experts. However, we did not receive up to now any response to our request.

The other official services

The sub-regional committee, which is chaired by the prefect, and the regional committee, which is chaired by the governor, simply act within the framework of their standard functions by facilitating the selection of the beneficiary municipalities and villages. The community development services, which are responsible for the coordination of external interventions, are constantly ignored and marginalized, and the involvement of the agricultural services is limited to the production of data for the NGOs.

Assistentialism?

This is a fundamental problem that pre-dates the CTs, however they provide even greater corroboration of its existence. In a context in which there is considerable dependency on external aid and the strategies used to attract this ‘rent’ are varied, well-developed and extend to the heart of the Nigerian rural arena, many people see the CT as an adjuvant to assistentialism.

“The CT is not good for fighting poverty. It teaches people that poverty can become a currency, a livelihood.” (Y, project worker, in Issaley op.cit.)

“The ‘*taymako*’ is not a good thing. It is embarrassing but we have no choice. The CT spoils people because the beneficiaries tend not to try and manage on their own.” (Dignitary, in Hamani op.cit.)

Many people see the ‘cash for work’ mechanism, which combines a principle of exchange (and not donation) and open access (and not selection),⁴⁹ as a more suitable one:

“Two thirds of the village benefit from the blessings of the cash for work. Women and men are involved without gender or age discrimination. All you need is the strength to work. In contrast, the cash transfer is highly selective.” (Chief of Kadri district, in Hamani op.cit.)

However, ‘cash for work’ is sometimes classified under the same ‘assistentialist’ heading.

⁴⁹ What is involved, in effect, is automatic targeting; the members of the richest families in the village have little or no motivation to do rather hard work for relatively small sums of money.

“There is a lack of management of the work carried out as a result of the ‘food for work’ and ‘cash for work’ projects as though the population is waiting for the arrival of another project to maintain the developments.” (Issaley op.cit.).

Moreover, it cannot be denied that, although the CT system involves aid, the considerable sums distributed have had positive effects for the tens of thousands of families involved, irrespective of whether they were actually very vulnerable or not. The fact must be faced that in view of the food crises arising in succession, external aid will clearly be necessary for a long time.

But are CTs the best form of aid for food emergencies and for resilience? Are they destined to last or are they a passing trend? Could they be reformed or combined with other forms of aid? What should be done about targeting? Even if they are implicit in its findings, these questions lie outside the framework of this report and we do not have any answers to them.

In our view, the main conclusion to be drawn from our research would appear to be the importance of the gaps between the objectives of the CTs and the procedures involved, on the one hand, and the practices and representations of the populations in areas in which CTs were carried out, on the other. They can clearly be seen as a form of ‘appropriation’ by the populations (or a part of them at least), however it is clearly not the kind of appropriation desired by the CT promoters in introducing this model of intervention in Niger.