

## **NIGER: UNCONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFERS IN TANOUT**

### **CONTEXT**

In 2004/5, the West African country of Niger was hit by a large-scale food crisis characterized by high rates of malnutrition, reduced household purchasing power, and elevated market prices. The acute food insecurity that Niger faced in 2004/5 had structural causes that were compounded by drought and locust infestation. The structural causes include widespread poverty, sub-regional speculation of cereal prices, rapid population growth, non-sustainable farming, and inadequate provision of water, sanitation, and health services. In addition, conflicts in the sub-region hindered labour migration that has long been a coping mechanism during the lean season. Further, Nigeriens suffer chronically from ill health and disease, with a majority of the population having little access to adequate health care, clean and sufficient drinking water, immunizations against preventable diseases and health education. Poor infant and child feeding practices, inadequate caloric consumption, lack of dietary variety, and the low status of women contribute to chronically high rates of wasting, stunting and micronutrient deficiency.

### **SITUATION ANALYSIS**

Assessment of local markets was part of the rapid assessment conducted by BRCS in August 2005. The assessment team found that foods that were normally available at market continued to be available for those with purchasing power. Additionally, teams found the local markets were very much alive, not typical subsistence markets as seen in other parts of Africa. Secondary data from SIMA for both grain and livestock supported findings from informal qualitative channels that indicated that local markets were viable and should sustain the impact of a regional cash distribution. This preliminary assessment is supported by findings outlined by market data presented in the Impact section, as the cash infusion appears to have had very little if any negative impact on markets.

The cash transfer project in Tanout was an appropriate response to the needs presented by community members during the rapid assessment, as well as to needs presented and justified by key monitoring agencies.

### **RESPONSE ANALYSIS**

By August 2005, there was widespread concern over food shortages and increasing malnutrition amongst children under five. The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) adopted varied interventions in different regions of the country to address the immediate food needs of vulnerable households, support livelihood security, and ensure productive capacity during the subsequent harvest period. In the administrative department of Tanout, the British, Swiss and Swedish Red Cross Societies, in affiliation with IFRC, the Nigerien Red Cross (NRC), and the University of Arizona, conducted an unconditional cash transfer program that delivered one-time cash grants to all

households in eighty-eight selected villages and three pastoral settlements. The project was one component of the emergency and recovery phase project portfolio of the IFRC Sahel Operation Food Crisis Response, which served Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Mauritania through September 2006.

## **RATIONALE FOR CHOOSING RESPONSE**

For the Tanout Cash Transfer Project, justification for its appropriateness is based upon secondary data from SAP, and original data collected during the initial needs assessments and a market assessment conducted in July and August 2005. These assessments, in conjunction with historic documentation of chronic food production deficits in the area, indicated that a cash transfer would help improve household food access, and potentially reduce reliance upon negative coping strategies. Documentation from past cash transfers suggested that in agricultural areas of chronic food shortage, such as Tanout, targeted households might use cash to purchase inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, and manpower.

## **PROGRAMME SUMMARY**

In August 2005, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies (IFRC), the local chapter of the Nigerien Red Cross (NRCS) and the British Red Cross (BRC) established an emergency program in Tanout. The BRC designed and implemented a cash transfer intervention, in conjunction with the Swiss Red Cross (SRC), the Swedish Red Cross (SwRC), the NRC, and with technical input from the University of Arizona (UA), the Cellule de Crise Alimentaire (CCA) and the Système d'Alerte Précoce (SAP) of the Niger Government. In October 2005, 88 agro-pastoral and 3 pastoral communities in the administrative department of Tanout, a total of 5,713 households, received one-time unconditional cash transfers of 120,000 CFA per household, or approximately 240 USD. Target villages were located within the department of Tanout and had at least a 70 percent Food Deficit Rating based on data from the Système d'Alerte Précoce (SAP). Cash was distributed to women in an effort to address their heightened vulnerability.

## **OBJECTIVES OF CASH PROGRAMME**

The objectives of the Tanout cash project were:

1. To increase food access in targeted households;
2. To increase household livelihood security (e.g. decreased reliance on negative coping strategies, increased value of livestock, increased number of income sources, etc.);
3. To increase community resiliency to respond to future food security shocks; and
4. To increase capacity of the local Red Cross branch office.

## **MONITORING SYSTEM**

To assess the appropriateness, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the project, a comprehensive mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, was used during each of four phases of monitoring. Household interviews, male/female focus groups, and registration of

geographic waypoints for households and village infrastructure were conducted during each of the four phases of data collection. Key informant interviews/discussions were conducted during Phase I, II and III of data collection. Anthropometric measurements for children under age 5 were collected during Phases II, III and IV. The four monitoring phases took place, respectively, from November 19 to December 6, 2005; January 15-29, 2006; May 5-19, 2006; and September 15-24, 2006. Market prices were collected twice monthly at 17 markets throughout Tanout.

Each monitoring phase represented different seasonal conditions. The timing of the monitoring phases was designed to capture seasonal lows at the end of the soudure and prior to the harvest and to capture heightened food security following the harvest. It is important to keep seasonal trends in mind when interpreting the data. Due to seasonal variations, Phase IV data collected in September 2006 represented the lowest degree of food security. By September, households had survived the soudure, or hungry season, but had not yet started to harvest. As of Phase I in November 2005, households had begun their early harvest and household stress was slightly reduced. Data collected in Phase II in January 2006 represented the highest point of household food security as household had finished the harvest and had their highest food stocks of the year. By Phase III in May, household food stocks had declined and households were faced with the upcoming soudure in June or July.

There were a number of lessons learned throughout the monitoring process. These include the necessity of collecting proper baseline data prior to the cash injection, carefully calculating the sample size appropriate for nutritional analysis, and maintaining stable questions and variables across phases of data collection.

## **PERCEIVED IMPACTS AND BENEFITS OF CTP**

Impact was measured using several key indicators related to project objectives. The analysis was designed to compare recipient households with non-recipient households and compared smaller factions within these groups as well.

Key findings include:

1. The primary use of the cash was to purchase food. In addition, many recipient households utilized the cash to repay debts. Following the distribution, 50 percent of recipient households reported immediately repaying their debts.
2. There were no significant differences in livestock holdings between cash recipient households and control households at any phase of monitoring. However, more recipient female-headed households (82%) reported any livestock holdings than non-recipient female-headed households (56%).
3. There were no significant differences in reliance on negative coping strategies between cash and control villages. Recipient households were slightly less likely to have sold livestock to purchase food than non-recipients. Qualitative data found that recipient households had substantially reduced the number of family members who had migrated to work since receiving the cash.

4. There was no difference observed in the number of meals eaten between household members in recipient and control villages.
5. The analysis found very limited food diversity throughout the year for all households, independent of livestock wealth. However, there was improved dietary diversity for recipient female-headed households, households in the lowest livestock wealth group, and agro-pastoralists households compared to similar households which were not recipients.
6. There was no significant impact of the cash program on local markets. Qualitative data indicate that grain and livestock were always available and quantitative data did not identify any significant price inflation due to the cash program. Instead, the cash transfer was reportedly a boost for traders and markets in local areas.
7. Many communities utilized a portion of the cash they received to improve community infrastructure, to increase the availability of basic services for community members, or to aid neighbouring communities in need. Communities purchased donkeys and carts to serve as ambulances, constructed homes for teachers, constructed schools, and shared cash with neighbouring communities.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

1. Concerns regarding male reaction to the distribution of cash to women proved to be unfounded in the targeted area; and
2. Cash was not spent on anti-social behaviour or towards unproductive means. This evaluation found that recipients spent cash very responsibly.
3. The process of distribution in the Department of Tanout also showed how integrating several components, including food distribution and other community interventions, with cash distribution programs can be a more appropriate response.
4. The frustration and alienation experienced by Fulani pastoral communities during the first cash project demonstrates the importance of cultural considerations.
5. The incorporation of village chiefs and community members in determining household and village status prior to cash distribution is essential to avoiding unintentional non-inclusion of true members of the community.
6. The Tanout experience demonstrates how essential it is to work with all partners, stakeholders, and other NGO's in the area.