

# Mid-Term Evaluation of the Hamzari Resilience Food Security Activity in Niger



**USAID**  
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**Projet Résilience Accrue au Sahel (RISE II) - USAID**

# HAMZARI

Site Maréchal

**TULANE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
TROPICAL MEDICINE**

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Hamzari visibility billboard, photo credit: Lauren Blum

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# ACRONYMS

<b>AEP</b>	Adduction d'eau Potable (drinking water supply system)
<b>ANC</b>	Antenatal Care
<b>AUSPE</b>	Association des Usagers du Service Public de l'Eau (Association of Public Water Service Users)
<b>BHA</b>	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
<b>BMI</b>	Body Mass Index
<b>CB</b>	Cereal Bank
<b>CFA</b>	Communauté Financière Africaine (African Financial Community)
<b>CG</b>	Care Groups
<b>CGPE</b>	Comité de Gestion de Point d'Eau (Water Point Management Committee)
<b>CHW</b>	Community Health Worker
<b>CLA</b>	Collaborating, Learning and Adapting
<b>CLTS</b>	Community Lead Total Sanitation
<b>COFOB</b>	Commission Foncière de Base (Rural Land Commission)
<b>COFOCOM</b>	Commissions Foncières Communales (Municipal Land Commissions)
<b>COP</b>	Chief of Party
<b>CPN</b>	Consultation Prénatale (Antenatal Care)
<b>CRA</b>	Regional Chamber of Agriculture
<b>CSA</b>	Climate Smart Agriculture
<b>CSB</b>	Corn Soy Blend
<b>CSI</b>	Centre de Santé Intégré (Integrated Health Center)
<b>CU2</b>	Children Under 2
<b>CU5</b>	Children Under 5
<b>CVD</b>	Comités Villageois de Développement (Village Development Committees)
<b>CVS</b>	Comite Villageois de Salubrité (Village Sanitation Committee)
<b>DCOP</b>	Deputy Chief of Party
<b>DHS</b>	Department of Hydraulics and Sanitation
<b>DOH</b>	Department of Health
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster And Risk Reduction
<b>DRS</b>	Défense et Restauration des Sols (Soil Defense and Restoration)
<b>EDC</b>	Education Development Center
<b>EEPs</b>	Economic Empowerment Packages
<b>EOs</b>	Evaluation Objectives
<b>ET</b>	Evaluation Team
<b>FAM</b>	Fertility Awareness Methods
<b>FESA</b>	Ferme Semencière Amaté (Amaté Seed Farm)
<b>FEWS</b>	Famine Early Warning System
<b>FFBS</b>	Farmer Field and Business Schools
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>FISAN</b>	Food And Nutritional Security Investment Fund

<b>FP</b>	Family Planning
<b>FPMH</b>	Forage équipé d'une Pompe à Motricité Humaine (Borehole with Human-Activated Pumps)
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>GDT</b>	Sustainable Land Management
<b>GIRE</b>	Gestion Integree des Ressources en Eau
<b>GNP</b>	Gross National Product
<b>GRN</b>	Gestion des Ressources Naturelles (Natural Resource Management)
<b>HH</b>	Households
<b>HQ</b>	Headquarters
<b>ICRISAT</b>	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
<b>IDI</b>	In-Depth Interview
<b>IFAENF</b>	Training In Literacy and Non-Formal Education
<b>IGA</b>	Income Generating Activity
<b>IP</b>	Implementing Partner
<b>IPV</b>	Inter-Partner Violence
<b>IRB</b>	Internal Review Board
<b>IUD</b>	Inter-Uterine Device
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interviews
<b>MA</b>	Maman ANJE
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring And Evaluation
<b>MEAL</b>	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Team
<b>MMD</b>	<b>Mata Masu Dubara</b>
<b>MiniAEPs</b>	Mini Adduction d'eau Potable (mini drinking water supply systems)
<b>MIYCF</b>	Maternal, Infant and Young Child Feeding
<b>ML</b>	Maman Lumière (Mother Leaders)
<b>MTE</b>	Mid-Term Evaluation
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NRM</b>	Natural Resource Management
<b>ODF</b>	Open Defecation Free
<b>OHADA</b>	Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa
<b>PDC</b>	Municipal Development Plans (Plans de Développement Communaux)
<b>PEA</b>	Poste d'eau Autonome (Autonomous Water Station)
<b>PI</b>	Principle Investigator
<b>PLW</b>	Pregnant And Lactating Women
<b>PO</b>	Producer Organizations
<b>PREP</b>	Pipeline Resource Estimate Proposals
<b>PSP</b>	Private Service Providers
<b>PWD</b>	Persons with Disabilities
<b>R&amp;I</b>	Refine and Implement
<b>RFA</b>	Request for Applications
<b>RFSA</b>	Resilience and Food Security Activity
<b>RMNCAH</b>	Reproductive maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health
<b>SBC</b>	Social and Behavioral Change

<b>SCAP/RU</b>	Community Early Warning and Emergency Response Systems
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SIM</b>	Système d'Information sur les Marchés
<b>SLM</b>	Sustainable Land Management
<b>SMART</b>	Specific Measurable Attainable Realistic Timely
<b>SP</b>	Sub-Purpose
<b>SPE</b>	Public Water Service
<b>SRH</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health
<b>TEV</b>	Terre Eau Vie (Land Water Life)
<b>ToT</b>	Trainer of Trainers
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USD</b>	United States Dollar
<b>VSLA</b>	Village Savings and Loan Association
<b>WASH</b>	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WFP</b>	United Nations World Food Programme
<b>WRA</b>	Women of Reproductive Age

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

In 2018, the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance<sup>1</sup> (BHA) issued an award to CARE International (CARE) to implement a Resilience and Food Security Activity (RFSA) in Niger. The project, named Hamzari, is implemented by a consortium of partners, including WaterAid, and local partners ANBEF, AREN, DEMI-E, and Karkara.

The original award of \$33 million USD was for a 5-year project, to end in late FY23. In 2023, BHA granted a two-year cost extension, bringing the total amount to \$39,854,693 and the end date to September 2025.

The project's **overarching goal** is to increase sustainable, equitable, and resilient food and nutrition security for vulnerable groups in the Maradi Region. Hamzari aims to directly impact 96,000 participants and 32,000 households in 325 targeted villages (out of 530 total) across three of the most vulnerable communes in Maradi Region (Chadakori, Guidan Sori, and Guidan Roundji).

Hamzari uses a multi-sectoral approach to deliver a package of interventions aimed at improving food and nutrition security, establishing diversified livelihoods, and empowering local structures and communities to sustain these improvements.

The project consists of four purposes:

- **Purpose 1:** Extreme Vulnerability Reduced for Vulnerable Women, Youth, and Marginalized Household Participants.
- **Purpose 2:** Improved Health and Nutritional Status for Children under Five, Adolescent Girls, and Women of Reproductive Age.
- **Purpose 3:** Improved access and use of equitable and sustainable WASH services for all community households
- **Purpose 4:** Improved Sustainable Diversified Livelihood Opportunities

Additionally, Hamzari has a cross-cutting focus on sectors such as gender and environmental compliance.

## METHODOLOGY

In January and February 2023, a mid-term evaluation (MTE) of Hamzari was conducted by Tulane University. The overall purpose of the MTE was to assess the quality of the RFSA implementation, achievements, and outcomes, and to identify problems and constraints to address in the remaining project period. The evaluation objectives (EOs) included:

1. Review quality of service delivery and systems in addressing chronic food insecurity.
2. Identify evidence of changes.
3. Evaluate the efficiency of the RFSA.
4. Assess the degree and benefits of coordination, collaboration, and convergence with external organizations.
5. Assess early evidence of sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> Formerly the Office of Food For Peace (FFP)



6. Determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions focused on cross-cutting themes for the activities.

Outputs of all EOs were designed to help guide mid-term adjustments in the program implementation and/or design and provide pathways of changes that would improve program outcomes and sustained impact.

The evaluation team (ET) constituted a five-member, multidisciplinary team of experts of Tulane faculty and staff, as well as national consultants and data collectors. Two co-leads led the team, one who also served as the subject area expert for health and nutrition, the other who focused on M&E, management, and overall coordination. The team was supported by three national subject area experts (Wash, Agriculture/livestock/livelihoods, resilience/governance/gender), as well as an experienced qualitative researcher to assist with field data collection and translation. Additional remote support was provided by the Principal Investigator (PI), project management staff, and an agriculture/livestock specialist consultant.

The evaluation employed a mix of qualitative methods, which was complemented by a document review and secondary quantitative data from program monitoring and baseline surveys. Fieldwork began with initial meetings and briefings in Maradi, followed by field data collection. The evaluation concluded with a validation workshop to present and discuss initial evaluation results with the IP, as well as a debriefing with the USAID mission.

## **FINDINGS**

Since the start of Hamzari in late 2018, despite setbacks and delays due to COVID-19 restrictions, the project had demonstrated progress on its strategic objectives, and activities are generally being well received by participants. However, the ET found that the RFSA's attempt to provide such a diverse set of interventions had impacted on the quality and coverage of activities, as well as the ability to establish a firm framework for sustainability.

The full report presents findings separately for each of the main activities (or groups of activities), with the activity-specific findings presented by each of the six EOs. Here, the findings are summarized for each of the EOs.

### ***EO1: Quality of service delivery and systems in addressing chronic food insecurity.***

Hamzari built on many existing structures already in the community, such as MMDs and cereal banks (CBs), some of which were functioning poorly at the start of the project (particularly the CBs). Other activities, such as Habbanayé, are built on existing traditions and former practices. This strategy allowed for a more efficient use of resources.

Across interventions, the ET observed several areas where the quality of interventions could be strengthened, including the capacity of community group members, supervision by technical staff, and the workload of the field agents.

Several activities were observed to be of good quality including (but not limited to) MMDs, Habbanayé and livestock fattening, food crop production and storage activities such as cereal banks (CBs) and market gardening, food ration distributions, screening of children for malnutrition, care groups, water point transformation and management, and restoration of pastoral land.

Other activities have not shown much uptake or impact, including (but not limited to) home gardens (in some areas), model husbands, SCAP/RU, use of improved latrines, and livestock fattening (due to short period of implementation).

### ***EO2: Evidence of Change.***

The MTE was able to identify some promising evidence of positive change associated with several activities/approaches. Some examples include improved financial capacity of women through participation in MMDs, improved access to safe drinking water via rehabilitated and well managed water points, firm understanding and uptake of several of agriculture and livestock activities, improved access to food during the lean season via cereal banks (CBs), increased use of pre-natal care and birthing services.

Other activities were not observed to be making an important impact, either because of the activity quality, or because of the late start of the activity. Some examples include livestock fattening, which had only begun a few weeks prior to the ET fieldwork in some areas and had not started at all in others, delays in sanitation marketing activities and lack of construction materials have limited the adoption of improved latrines, and delays in some SBC activities which may affect project targets.

Some activities showed promise, but low coverage limited their impacts. Safe Spaces, for example, is an innovative approach that showed promising results, but was limited to only 31 functioning spaces. Despite significant positive impacts from water source related interventions, coverage was far from complete, and many villages remained water insecure.

Deep rooted traditions and local interpretations of the precepts of Islam regarding the sexual division of labor in Niger mean that long-term efforts are needed to establish more egalitarian social norms. Activities such as husband schools and safe spaces appear to have had some positive impact on knowledge, and perhaps some initial shifts in perceptions. However, practices related to gender norms will require much longer than the duration of the project to shift.

### ***EO3: Efficiency of the RFSA.***

In the scope of this MTE, this EO focuses on aspects of human resources, staffing, and management; Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEAL); and activity targeting.

The institutional set-up of the project is complex involving a multitude of sectors targeting different types of project participants. This complex project requires a wide range of technical experts. The project has done a commendable job of setting up activities in 325 targeted villages (of 530 total) across three communes.

Overall, the MTE found that the project has an experienced team with strong technical capabilities, with a well-defined chain of command, and regular staff evaluations and incentives. However, the project has experienced high staff turnover, with some key positions remaining vacant during extended periods of time. Furthermore, approximately 80% of Hamzari staff are men, and among senior management and sector leads, there is only one woman. Field agents providing technical oversight of project activities often cover activities in more than 18 villages, making it difficult to closely monitor interventions in all project villages, which may impact the quality of activities and monitoring data.

The project has established an excellent system for data collection and management. However, the ET found that highly demanding workloads prevent the technical field agents, who generally exhibited strong technical knowledge, from providing adequate supervision over data collection and quality.

In terms of learning and communication, the ET observed a good collaboration with SCC, and Hamzari had produced excellent materials presenting case studies (success stories). However, these products are more focused on visibility of the project than on documentation of learning and best practices and lessons learned.

Implementation of many activities started late, in part due to the onset of COVID-19. Procurement and coordination challenges involving problematic government relations have also caused delays in activity implementation. Some activities had not been fully implemented at the time of the MTE and were far from meeting project targets. A late start has likely affected the creation of synergy essential to the impact envisioned by the project design, which proposes that the full package of activities is necessary to create a package that has lasting impact. However, the synergy of activities at the village level (layering and sequencing) has not been adequately examined or accounted for. The ET feels that this type of analysis is a learning opportunity and could provide valuable information for the project.

The targeting criteria at the village level for many activities seemed to be the pre-existence of certain groups (MMDs, cereal banks), and the targeting of more 'dynamic' and more engaged villages with additional activities (such as Habbanayé, certain WASH activities, etc.). This raises the concern that certain more performant villages may monopolize efforts even if they are not the most vulnerable/in need.

Marginalized and vulnerable women are a central project target. However, as described in several of the activity findings sections, the ET observed that the poorest and most vulnerable women and households are often not implicated in certain key activities, particularly when participation requires financial investment and payment.

***EO4: Coordination, collaboration, and convergence with external organizations.***

Coordination and collaboration with the government sector was found to have been successful in several areas but lacking overall. Collaboration with other partners, such as those from RISE II, was generally positive, though there were several areas where improvements could be made. Improved coordination with regional authorities and municipal structures will benefit activities such as CBs, water system management, and health interventions.

The partnership between Hamzari and the Rise II partner Kulawa is an opportunity for improved collaboration. Unfortunately, the Rise II health partner Kulawa started two years after the start of Hamzari, thus restricting overlap of the interventions. The ET learned that Kulawa health systems strengthening efforts do not necessarily focus on the Hamzari municipalities. Hamzari is very clear that their work is to increase demand for health and nutrition services in health structures, but it is not responsible for ensuring the quality of services provided by government health facilities. Promotion of the use of health services that are poor quality may discourage future use of such services.

While SCC provides a valuable platform for RISE II and RFSA partners to exchange lessons learned and improve collaboration, the ET learned that the scheduling of SCC meetings and agendas could benefit from more input from USAID-funded implementing partners.

***EO5: Sustainability.***

Though some activities show promise for sustainability, significant work remains to be done in several areas to ensure activities and their impacts last beyond the life of the project. Unfortunately, substantive discussions regarding sustainability did not start until Y5.

Considering the implementation of several activities has been delayed, several activities may merit continued implementation and support during the extension period to achieve a lasting impact (see recommendations). There are also certain activities that could be dropped during the extension- even if targets are not reached- so that efforts can be focused on priority activities. The selection of where to focus efforts during this period is also important- determining if focus should be given to dynamic, well-performing villages that have several activities already in progress, where the most impact can be made, or to villages that are less performing and have few functional activities so that they might feel some degree of improvement before the end of the project.

***EO6: Appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions focused on cross-cutting themes.***

This EO focuses on interventions and intervention design intended to improve gender equity in decision making, social-behavior change (SBC), and youth participation in interventions.

Nearly all interventions were found by the MTE to have a strong focus on gender equity and youth participation. The design of gender and youth activities was found to be generally appropriate and culturally relevant. Targeting and inclusion of women and youth in interventions has been largely successful and effective.

MMDs are inclusive of women and youth. It is one of the interventions implemented to truly improve gender equity at the community level. MMDs support women in developing IGAs, and this income gives them more power in contributing to the management of their households. MMDs give young people and especially women a little more power in the management of the daily activities of their households.

Hamzari's novel approach to the CBs, linking them to MMDs and ensuring that they are managed by women, has been transformative in the functioning of the CBs. Over 99% of the members of CBs supported by Hamzari are women.

However, addressing certain gender norms is complex. Perceptions and practices, particularly those related to gender norms, however, have been slow to change. The strong emphasis on preparing girls for marriage, rather than focusing on topics such as female leadership and agency, may be a missed opportunity.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The evaluation team presented the preliminary recommendations during a validation workshop attended by Hamzari staff at the end of the field data collection, providing an early learning opportunity. Additionally, during the analysis stage of the work, a set of preliminary findings and recommendations were prepared by the MTE and shared with Hamzari and BHA for their feedback, as well as in preparation for the sustainability workshop held in March 2023 to help inform the future development of the project during year 5 and the extension period.

The final recommendations that emerged from this MTE are presented at the end of this report.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background and Setting

Located in the Sahelian region of West Africa, Niger is a landlocked country mostly comprised of desert and considered one of the poorest countries in the world, with a poverty rate of 44.1 percent (USAID 2021). The majority of the 25 million population live in rural areas in the south and west of the country where agroecological conditions support farming of staple grains, especially millet and sorghum, and cash crops such as cowpeas and ground nuts. The agricultural sector employs about 80 percent of adults and contributes to about 47 percent of the gross national product (GNP) (Feed the Future 2018). Livestock including sheep, goat, and cattle, are traditionally considered critical to livelihoods, and Nigeriens also export cattle and small ruminants to southern neighbors in Nigeria.

For decades, desertification and recurrent and often severe drought have had adverse effects on agricultural subsistence activities and livestock raising, which are increasingly being impacted by climate change. Food access is constrained by declines in crop production caused by erratic and reduced rainfall, overuse of the land available in the agriculturally productive zones, and limited income generating opportunities, affecting the quantity and quality of household food consumption (FEWS 2019). Adding to food needs, Niger maintains the highest fertility rate (7.8) in the world; correspondingly, 70 percent of the population is under 30 years of age (Feed the Future 2018). High fertility along with low education and literacy rates (58 percent of men and 85 percent of women are illiterate) impact livelihoods, business opportunities, and general development efforts, with Niger reported to have the lowest Human Development index in the world (Feed the Future 2018; UNDP 2019). Difficult environmental conditions and poverty force Nigeriens to employ a range of coping mechanisms to survive, including seasonal migration of male members to southern countries in search of income during the dry season.

Since independence in 1960, Nigeriens have lived under seven constitutions and long periods of authoritarian, military rule, with a democratic, multi-party state first instituted in 1992. In addition to political volatility and violent upheaval of government leadership, desertification and recurrent drought, and persistent poverty, the country has been affected by other setbacks such as animal and crop disease, flooding, and insecurity caused by Boko Haram in the east and attacks by armed groups near the Malian and Nigerian border, all of which negatively impact livelihoods and crop production and food insecurity (FEWS 2019; PREP Narrative CARE 2022).

Comprised of a mix of ethnic groups engaged in subsistence farming and herding, with the main groups including Hausa, Djerma and Songhay, Tuareg, Fulani, and Kanuri Manga, Nigerien society reflects the independent histories and cultures of diverse ethnic groups living in a single state (FEWS 2019). Islam is the predominant religion across ethnic groups, and approximately 36 percent married women are involved in polygamous unions (INS and ICF international 2013). Women's median age of marriage is 16 years (INS and ICF international 2013).

The majority of Nigeriens are from the Hausa ethnic group, a patrilineal society in which strict gender roles foster male social and economic dominance (Renne, 2004; Umaru & Van Der Horst, 2018). In Hausa culture, men and women engage in agriculture and livestock raising to provide basic household needs while women are principally in charge of caring for family members, maintaining the household, and preparing and serving food. Gendered roles dictate that men control granaries and provide cereals and other staple foods to their wives to prepare meal foods; men are also the primary decision makers

regarding health care and key family decisions. Hausa women may engage in an informal economic sector involving trade, but the income they generate is often limited. The combination of female mobility restrictions, including restrictions on market access, and socioeconomic factors fosters female dependence on male heads of households. Efforts are being made to engage women in local community-based organizations often involving credit programs and income generating activities (IGAs) aimed to increase female access to financial resources and assets and address gender inequalities. Extreme poverty, limited livelihood opportunities, entrenched gender inequities, and ongoing environmental shocks create a confluence of factors that elevate household food insecurity in Hausa speaking regions (USAID 2017).

Niger reports some of the highest under-five child and infant mortality rates in the world (INS and ICF international 2013). Correspondingly, high prevalence of child stunting and wasting pose an ongoing problem, with 46 percent of children under five stunted and 11 percent wasted; child wasting increases during the lean period prior to the annual harvest (INS 2019; Feed the Future 2019). Poor infant and child feeding practices are pervasive, including low prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding (23 percent) and inadequate complementary feeding (9 percent of children 6-23 months received a minimally acceptable diet) (INS and ICF international 2013). Child malnutrition has been linked to limited access to high quality diverse foods, poor knowledge of the importance of a balanced diet, and lack of quality health services and is associated with low maternal education and household wealth status (FEWS 2019; USAID 2021). Limited access to potable water and poor environmental sanitation conditions and hygiene practices contribute to a vicious cycle of infectious disease and malnutrition (FEWS 2019).

In addition, poor maternal nutrition is highly prevalent, especially among adolescent girls whose rapid growth and dramatic physical changes increase demands for nutrients and energy, contributing to the intergenerational cycle of poverty and malnutrition<sup>2</sup>. Specifically, 16 percent of women 15-49 years of age are underweight (BMI < 18.5), while 31 percent of females 15-19 years of age are underweight<sup>3</sup>. The nutritional status of females before and during pregnancy is critical for the health and survival of the mother and her baby<sup>4</sup>. Data from Niger show that 75 percent of females start childbearing by 19 years and before reaching full maturity, raising the risk of stillbirths and neonatal and maternal mortality, and contributing to low birthweight and stunting in children<sup>5</sup>. Widespread micronutrient deficiencies involving iodine, vitamin A, and iron also affect the health of women of reproductive age<sup>6</sup>.

Despite being located in one of the most agriculturally productive areas of Niger, the Maradi region has a 53.8 percent prevalence of chronic malnutrition for children under 5, which is higher than the national average. A total of 12 percent of children between 6 and 59 months suffer from global acute malnutrition (GAM), while 3.9 percent have severe acute malnutrition (SAM). Along with the second highest fertility rate in the country, Maradi is ranked lowest in food consumption and dietary diversity scores.

Primary drivers of malnutrition and food insecurity in Maradi include 1) High Vulnerability to Shocks and Stresses and Chronic Extreme Poverty, 2) Poor Access, Availability, and Utilization of Nutritious Food, 3) Limited Access to Water and Poor WASH Behaviors, and 4) Lack of Livelihood Diversity, 5) Inadequate food habits driven by socio-cultural norms.

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<sup>2</sup> Das et al 2017; USAID 2021.

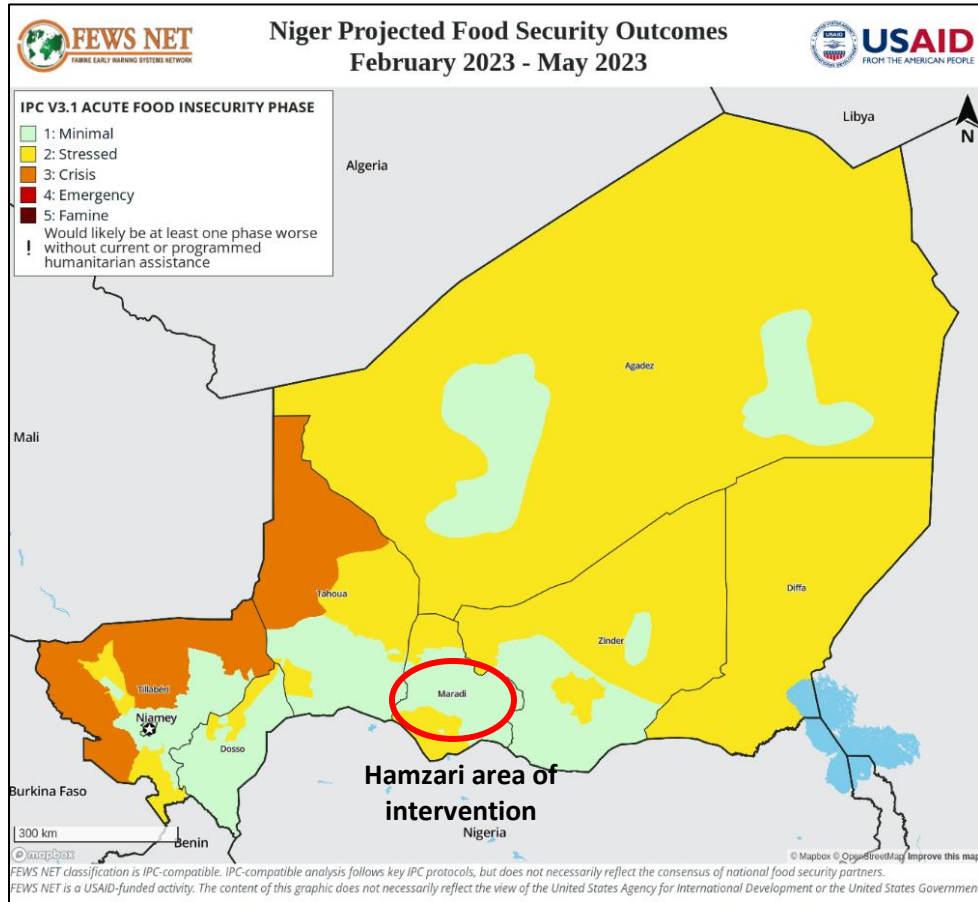
<sup>3</sup> INS and ICF International 2013

<sup>4</sup> Black et al., 2013; Han, Mulla, Beyene, Liao, & McDonald, 2011

<sup>5</sup> Bhutta et al. 2013; INS and ICF International 2013

<sup>6</sup> INS and ICF International 2013

**Figure 1: FEWS NET food security projections February-May 2023**



## 1.2. RFSA Purposes and Design

In 2018, the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance<sup>7</sup> (BHA) issued an award to CARE International (CARE) to implement a Resilience and Food Security Activity (RFSA) in Niger. The project, named Hamzari, is implemented by a consortium of partners, including WaterAid, and local partners ANBEF, AREN, DEMI-E, and Karkara.

The original award of \$33 million USD was for a 5-year project, to end in late 2023. However, in 2023, BHA granted a two-year costed extension to Hamzari, bringing the total amount to \$39,854,693 and the end date to September 2025.

The project's **overarching goal** is to increase sustainable, equitable, and resilient food and nutrition security for vulnerable groups in Maradi Region. Hamzari aims to directly impact 96,000 participants and 32,000 households in 325 targeted villages (out of 530 total) across three of the most vulnerable communes in Maradi Region (Chadakori, Guidan Sori, and Guidan Roundji).

*Hamzari* is designed around four main purposes, described below.

<sup>7</sup> Formerly the Office of Food For Peace (FFP)

### **Purpose 1: Extreme Vulnerability Reduced for Vulnerable Women, Youth, and Marginalized Household Participants**

Activities include the revitalization and establishment of **Mata Masu Dubara (MMD)** and VSLA credit groups to enhance savings, small loans, food commodity access, and IGAs for poor and extremely poor household members – especially targeting women and youth. In FY22, *Hamzari* aimed to target 1,500 MMD/VSLA comprised of more than 28,500 members of whom more than 80% are women. Members can benefit from credit services to cover different types of needs, involvement in IGAs, cereal distribution during the lean season, and access to financing for the next agricultural campaign. Members of landless and extremely poor households are eligible for training and assistance on non-farm and non-crop livelihoods (IGAs and employment). *Hamzari* uses the MMD/VSLA platform to promote health and nutrition messages and behaviors; hygiene and sanitation practices; and sustainable agricultural techniques. Activities in purpose 1 also aim to increase capacity to build resilience to shocks and stressors for women, youth, and marginal household participants through sharing of seasonal climate forecasts and the development of community disaster risk reduction (DRR) plans.

### **Purpose 2: Improved Health and Nutritional Status for Children under Five, Adolescent Girls, and Women of Reproductive Age**

*Hamzari* uses the **Care Group (CG)** model as the primary platform to facilitate social and behavior change through supported peer to peer knowledge sharing. The CGs support regular trainings and information sharing with mothers of young children about critical nutrition practices such as exclusive breastfeeding and optimal complementary feeding, reproductive health, and hygiene promotion. During CG sessions, mothers are also sensitized about the importance of accessing key health facility services including prenatal and post-natal consultations, childbirth assisted by skilled attendants, and use of modern contraception methods. CG members engage in key activities such as cooking demonstrations and participate in household visits where sexual and reproductive health (SRH) practices are discussed with women and their husbands. In addition, CG participants are taught about essential hygiene practices necessary for optimal health, including handwashing with soap at critical times; environmental sanitation; the need to keep children separated from feces; the use of improved water sources and optimal water storage; the creation of household handwashing stations (e.g., tippy taps); and the use of latrines with the proper disposal of feces.

**Distributions of rations** of Corn Soy Blend+ (CSB+) and vegetable oil to pregnant and lactating women and children under 2 years of age are being conducted to improve nutritional status of women and young children. In addition, **peer educators** have been trained to facilitate interactive exchanges with community members on SRH and family planning through gender platforms. *Hamzari* team members are also conducting community dialogues with youth to share information on SRH and FP. *Hamzari* aims to ensure that men are targeted to improve reproductive maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health (RMNCAH) practices, such as increased female access to SRH and FP interventions designed to promote healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies.

*Hamzari* is working with **Husband Schools** to identify model husbands to coach other school members on sensitive topics related to SRH and FP, as well as factors affecting women's and children's nutrition and well-being. **Model husbands** also serve as a bridge between health facility workers and community members to promote utilization of quality health care services.

### **Purpose 3: Improved access and use of equitable and sustainable WASH services for all community households**



*Hamzari*, along with WaterAid, works with key local government stakeholders to promote **community-led total sanitation (CLTS)** to reach the GoN goal of being open defecation free (ODF). The project offers subsidized and sustainable latrines to vulnerable households in ODF villages. As part of this effort, *Hamzari* and key partners have identified local masons to construct SAN PLAT latrines and facilitated establishment of community committees to monitor latrine construction. In addition, the project has provided **training and ensured ongoing coaching to young masons** to increase their capacity to build durable latrines, and additional training has been given to masons on latrine maintenance. **Sanitation marketing** focused on the construction, maintenance and emptying of prototype latrines.

*Hamzari* aims to create an enabling environment for the adoption of key hygiene behaviors. The project uses a variety of platforms to disseminate messages that align with government systems so that they continue after the end of the project. Efforts involve advocacy and improved coordination among government agencies such as the Department of Hydraulics and Sanitation (DHS) and the Department of Health (DOH).

The project aims to provide increased access to water among vulnerable populations and households through water point construction, rehabilitation, and management. As part of this effort, *Hamzari* provides technical advice and support to improve service delivery and **sustainable management of water points and resources**.

#### **Purpose 4: Improved Sustainable Diversified Livelihood Opportunities**

*Hamzari* implements **Farmer Field and Business Schools (FFBS)** to train women, youth, and vulnerable groups to acquire integrated farming and business skills necessary to transform agricultural activities into business-oriented livelihoods that attract and benefit from investment. As part of this effort, project staff train producers, producer groups and cooperatives on buyer specifications and contract performance. The project aims to increase farming and other sources of income by increasing the capacity of chronically vulnerable HHs to minimize losses from economic, environmental and health shocks, while enhancing their ability to maximize income streams. On-farm strategies aim to improve crop productivity and mitigate loss and risk; the project promotes post-harvest handling and storage technologies in locations where MMD/VSLAs are in place to finance storage and carry out marketing. *Hamzari* aims to enhance off-farm livelihoods by building foundational skills and providing employment or entrepreneurship assistance. To maximize impact and efficiency of improved livelihood activities, *Hamzari* targets a set of value chains identified through community-led market chain assessments which are shared with communities, government, and private sector players to generate awareness and create opportunities for dialogue regarding improvements. *Hamzari* also encourages **market gardening groups** to adopt organizational processes that strengthen gardening activities in a sustainable way.

## 2. Overview of Evaluation

In September 2022, Tulane University received an award to carry out the mid-term evaluation of Hamzari as part of a joint evaluation covering all three RFSAs currently being implemented in Niger.

### 2.1. MTE Purpose

The overall purpose of this Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) is to assess the quality of the RFSAs implementation, achievements, outcomes, and identify problems and constraints to address in the remaining project period.

The MTE aims to communicate lessons learned to date, and to inform program staff and partners for mid-term corrections to achieve the overall goal of the program. Outputs of all Evaluation Objectives (EOs) will help to recommend mid-term adjustments in the program implementation and/or design and provide pathways of changes that would improve program outcomes and sustained impact.

To achieve this purpose, the evaluation has identified six main objectives, described below. Scoping interviews and initial document review indicate that MTE objective 5 (sustainability) is of particular importance to informing the RFSAs on how to adapt their activities in the remaining implementation period in order to focus on those activities that will continue to have impact beyond the life of the project.

### 2.2. MTE Objectives

The specific objectives of the MTE are:

1. **Review quality of program<sup>8</sup> service delivery and systems in addressing chronic food insecurity**, taking into account contextual changes that may have occurred since the inception of the activities. Look at strengths and weaknesses of activity implementation; the quality of outputs in terms of the effects they are producing, their adherence to terms agreed upon with BHA, and their appropriateness and perceived value to target communities.
2. **Identify evidence of changes** (intended and unintended) associated with program activities, examine how the changes relate to progress toward program objectives including behavior change outcomes in targeted households as determined in the Activity SBC Strategies, and identify factors that appear to promote or hinder the behavior change toward desired objectives and post-implementation sustainability. Examine how the evidence of change (intended/unintended, negative, or positive) validates the theory of change or if pathways of change need to be revised/refined.
3. **Evaluate the efficiency of the RFSAs**, including (i) targeting of individuals (children under five; adolescent girls; women; youth; etc.), groups, and communities most vulnerable; (ii) the implementation and monitoring of Project cross-sectoral strategies including the gender and youth strategy and the SBC Strategy (iii) the program management and food distribution; (iv) the M&E system and CLA; (v) the human resources, accounting/financial and staff management.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that when the MTE SOW refers to a program or project, it is referring to the RFSAs.

This will help to identify strengths and weaknesses of the program (under each component) against stated outputs and outcomes to date.

4. **Assess the degree and benefits of coordination, collaboration, and convergence with external organizations** (Government; RISE II partners; UN agencies; other projects) that are critical to achieve project goals and purposes. This includes efficiency and effectiveness of project design, management and coordination mechanisms, including quality and usefulness of partnerships.
5. **Assess early evidence of sustainability** produced by the activity thereby determining the extent to which outcomes, systems, and services are designed and implemented to continue after the project ends.
6. **Determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions focused on cross-cutting themes for the activities.** This includes interventions designed and implemented to improve gender and equity in decision making and the adoption of priority behaviors by key audiences to achieve food security and nutrition outcomes, targeting youth to improve their access to, participation in project interventions and interventions that address causal pathways between behaviors and their determinants as described in the SBC Strategy.

As part of the Request for Proposals, a series of exemplary questions was provided for each of the EOs to serve as a guide to address each of the objectives. These questions informed the development of data collection tools as well as the analysis contributing to this report.

## 2.3. Methodology

### 2.3.1. Process Overview

The evaluation encompassed three phases, involving preparation, data collection, and analysis and report writing. Preparations began in September 2022 and included a review of the draft statement of work, team member selection, document review, protocol development, logistics planning, and instrument development. A steering committee comprised of the Tulane evaluation team (ET) and the RFSA COP and technical staff met weekly to discuss fieldwork preparations. The RFSA team shared project documentation and a matrix delineating ongoing activities carried out in Hamzari project communities.

The ET principal investigator carried out a scoping exercise in Niamey involving interviews with RFSA leadership to collect information to guide the evaluation design. In mid-December, the evaluation team shared the draft evaluation protocol and instruments for review by RFSA and BHA representatives.

The evaluation in Niger of the Hamzari project took place from January 12 - 24, 2023 and involved a briefing of activities, data collection, and a validation workshop. On February 10<sup>th</sup>, the ET leads held a debriefing presentation of the evaluation process and preliminary findings of the three MTEs at the USAID mission with BHA representatives. After leaving Niger, the ET carried out additional key informant interviews remotely with Hamzari staff. In addition, one of the local team members collected data to fill in gaps the evaluation team identified during preliminary data analysis.

The ET submitted a revised version of the validation workshop presentation in late February and held a meeting with Hamzari staff remotely to respond to additional queries prior to the BHA-led sustainability workshop. ET technical leads carried out data analysis and report writing focused on their area of expertise.

### 2.3.2. Study Design and Research Methods

The ET employed a mixed methods approach involving documentation review and qualitative data collection procedures. The team administered complementary open-ended and semi-structured qualitative methods to capture information from a breadth of respondents filling diverse roles in project implementation and collaboration to ensure data triangulation. ET members also used available quantitative data (e.g., ongoing monitoring data, annual reporting data, and secondary data) to answer the evaluation questions.

The evaluation began with a desk review of relevant project documents, including the Request for Applications (RFA), reports of the formative research conducted during the R&I year, annual and quarterly project reports, baseline studies, and the Pipeline Resource Estimate Proposals (PREP), to gain an understanding of the RFSA design, details of activities and key actors involved, status of ongoing implementation, contextual factors specific to the Hamzari RFSA areas, and the general food security situation. The desk review included an inventory of other reports and studies that could provide relevant information to the project themes or contextual information about Niger and the Maradi region.

An initial meeting took place with Hamzari project staff and ET members prior to data collection. During the meeting, the RFSA MEAL lead briefed the ET on the implementation of field activities, technical themes, and monitoring of activities. Prior to data collection, the ET held a training to review the evaluation objectives, design, and data collection methods with technical leads and local data collectors recruited in Maradi.

### 2.3.3. Sampling

The ET aimed to collect data in all three project municipalities. To increase efficiency, the ET planned to target villages with a range of interventions representing the different sectors in the project purposes. The matrix provided by the project delineating project activities guided the selection of evaluation villages. Insecurity prevented the ET from visiting villages close to the Nigeria border.

Data collected on field activities focused on twelve villages, with the ET generally visiting two villages in proximity per day and spending half-days in each village. Relative short distances from the regional capital of Maradi to project villages and passable roads allowed the ET to evaluate a large number of project sites. The ET informed project managers about the choice of MTE villages the day before the field visit. The ET also collected data in the municipal, departmental, and regional capitals with project actors and collaborators.

The evaluation design targeted a range of government officials, implementing partners, Hamzari staff, and project volunteers and participants to ensure data triangulation with data collected from 243 respondents (144 women, 99 men). The table below presents the number of data collection events by method, sector focus, and location. The ET collected data in the three RFSA municipalities with Hamzari coordinators, animators, collaborators, community volunteers, and participants; in Maradi with Hamzari staff, partners, and collaborators; and in Niamey with CARE personnel. As indicated, we administered additional key informant interviews remotely.

**Table 1: Evaluation respondents, methods used, sector focus, and location of interviews.**

Description of data collected		Total respondents
Methods	FG	173
	IDI	56
	KII	14
	Observation	27
	Total	270
Main Sector Focus	Agriculture and livelihoods	45
	WASH	60
	Field coordination and monitoring	3
	Gender and youth	14
	Knowledge and learning	1
	M&E	1
	Nutrition and health	89
	Political	2
	Program operations and technical management	1
	Governance and resilience	26
	Training	1
	Total	243*
Location	Chadakori (municipality)	52
	Guidan Roudji (municipality)	78
	Guidan Sori (municipality)	94
	Maradi (regional capital)	16
	Niamey (national capital)	3
	Total	243*
* Observations are not included in the counts		

### 2.3.1. Data Collection Procedures

The team applied key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. Interview guides and other tools can be found in the Annexes.

The ET carried out key informant interviews with RFSA leadership and technical experts including the COP; DCOP; sector leads overseeing activity development, implementation, and monitoring; and representatives of partner organizations or government agencies collaborating on-field activities. We collected information on the design of activities, status of implementation, and field actors involved. During interviews, the ET examined capacity strengthening, supervision structures, behavioral change strategies, and contextual factors that had occurred since the inception of activities, as well as collaboration and coordination with partners and stakeholders involved directly or indirectly and critical to achieving project goals. ET technical leads carried out key informant interviews in French or English, depending on the preference of the key informants.

Evaluation team members administered in-depth interviews with community members providing oversight and facilitating activities, field agents supervising interventions, and collaborators representing government sectors and other implementing partners. Topics explored included roles, training and

materials received, supervision and monitoring structures, and community participation. The ET examined perceptions of activities, challenges faced with implementation, recommendations for improvements, and perspectives on work roles. Team members also assessed coordination and information sharing with government and other collaborating actors. ET members conducted interviews in French or Hausa according to the informant's choice of language.

The ET employed indirect and direct observations. Indirect observations focused on village infrastructures, farming practices, water sources, sanitation and hygiene practices, livelihood activities, and community member interactions including gendered roles. During direct observations, the ET assessed RFSA interventions related to crop farming and gardening, WASH (e.g., water sources, handwashing, condition of latrines, cleanliness around households), food storage for cereal banks and culinary demonstrations, and conditions in government health facilities. The ET attempted to observe scheduled activities such as CG sessions and exchange visits and culinary demonstrations.

The ET led focus group discussions with villagers participating in activities (e.g. CGs, OPs, Safe Space participants, water management committees) to assess involvement, information received, perceptions of activities, changes in behaviors (intended and unintended), potential social or other consequences associated with activities, and initial signs of sustainability. The ET attempted to identify contextual factors that may affect achieving desired objectives and longer-term sustainability. The ET led focus group discussions in the local language, with data collectors serving as moderators and translators as needed.

### 2.3.1. Analysis

ET members took handwritten notes or entered information directly on the computer during data collection and audio recorded select interviews. Team members held daily briefing sessions to review daily findings and plan for subsequent data collection. These sessions involved a presentation by each technical lead and focused on activity strengths and missed opportunities. The validation workshop, held with the ET and Hamzari staff, presented an opportunity to share and discuss preliminary findings and recommendations.

Data analysis continued post-mission. The ET employed content analysis and data triangulation to validate results using a combination of data generated during field work, as well as information gathered through document review.

### 2.3.1. Ethics

The evaluation was vetted by Tulane's IRB. ET members obtained informed consent from all key informant and in-depth interview respondents and focus group participants before data collection. Consent forms can be found in the annexes.

## 2.4. Evaluation Team Composition

The evaluation team was made up of ten members, with seven conducting the in-country data collection. It should be noted that while the field team had specific technical focuses, each of the members had expertise in multiple sectors, so that all members contributed to some degree to the data collection and analysis across all technical areas.

The in-country data collection team consisted of:

- **Two co-team leads** (both Tulane Faculty/staff)
  - The first focused on overall coordination, administration, logistics, and communication.
  - The second co-team lead was responsible for overall research methodology, and also served as the subject area expert for health and nutrition.
- **Three national subject area expert consultants**, including:
  - a WASH expert.
  - an agriculture/livestock/livelihoods expert.
  - and a resilience/governance/gender expert.
- **One local data collection expert** to assist the team with field data collection and translation, and to provide input on contextual factors specific to the Maradi region.

The in-country ET was supported remotely by three additional members:

- **Principal Investigator (PI)** (Tulane Faculty). The PI provided strategic input to management issues and analysis. The PI also was responsible for the in-country scoping interviews during the inception phase of the evaluation.
- **Agriculture/livestock specialist** (consultant). This specialist supported the overall design of the agriculture and livestock portion of the evaluation, and also provided overall RFSA expertise.
- **Project Manager** (Tulane staff). Managed all administrative and financial aspects of the evaluation.

## 2.5. Limitations and Delimitations

The MTE had certain limitations, including:

- Not all activities/areas received equal focus during the data collection.
  - Time in the field was limited.
  - There were a large and diverse number of activities that Hamzari is implementing, making it challenging to cover all activities with sufficient depth (detailed information) and breadth (sample size).
  - In some cases, certain activities were found to be different from what was understood from the document review and planning workshop (either not well documented in general, or the implementation was different than the ET had initially understood). This required the ET to adapt the data collection in real time, although time was limited to make adaptations.
  - Security considerations excluded certain areas (those nearest the Nigeria border) from being included in the sample.
  - A focus was given to those activities considered cornerstone, and those identified during the planning as being of particular interest to the RFSA.
  - There were only a small number of villages with water points that were created/rehabilitated by the project, and the ET only was able to visit one of them.
- Qualitative data has certain limitations, including:
  - The sample may not be representative of the larger picture. While the ET attempted to reach saturation in data collection, there is still the possibility that the areas visited were not always fully representative of all areas of the RFSA's implementation. However, strong patterns across all technical domains emerged during data collection.
  - Qualitative data is vulnerable to subjective interpretation. To lessen this, results were discussed between team members, and triangulation was sought not only between data

sources but also between ET members. Additionally, a validation workshop as well as a review of the initial conclusions/recommendations allowed the ET to receive feedback from Hamzari staff on areas where potential subjective interpretation may have occurred.

- Social desirability bias on the part of respondents, which was evident on many occasions. Respondent bias is not a limitation specific to qualitative research, but often occurs during project evaluations.



## 3. FINDINGS

In this section, findings from the primary and secondary data collected by the MTE are presented. For each RFSA purpose, an overview of the sub-purposes and approaches under the purpose is given. Then findings are presented separately for specific activities (or groups of related activities) under each purpose. Activity sections begin with a description of the activity, and then findings are broken down by the six evaluation objectives (EOs) (some are presented holistically, however).

Following the purpose and activity-specific findings, additional sections present findings on key cross-cutting topics such as staffing and management, monitoring, and evaluation (M&E), theory of change, etc.). These additional sections serve to address aspects of the EO that are not activity or purpose specific, as well as to consolidate certain key themes that emerged across purposes.

### 3.1. Purpose 1- Resilience

P1 aims to reduce extreme vulnerability for vulnerable women, youth, and members of marginalized households. This purpose has two sub purposes:

**Sub Purpose 1.1:** Self-governing collectives and platforms increase social capital and resilience within, between and beyond communities.

**Sub Purpose 1.2:** Increased absorptive and adaptive capacity build resilience to shocks and stressors for women, youth, and marginal household participants.

The primary activity under P1 is the creation and revitalization of *Mata Masu Dubara* (MMD) and VSLA credit groups. MMD groups are at the center of all Hamzari project activities. Hamzari uses MMD/VSLA as the entry point for many of the activities implemented under all purposes, including promotion of health, nutrition, hygiene, and sanitation practices, sustainable farming techniques, land access, rainfed agriculture production, market gardening, food processing, and other activities. The social transformations towards which the project is working are largely implemented through MMDs.

Other activities under P1 include assistance to landless and extremely poor household members to receive training, and assistance to non-farm and non-farm livelihoods/IGAs and employment. Hamzari also aims to build the capacity of women, youth, and marginalized households to withstand shocks and stressors by sharing seasonal climate forecasts and developing community-based disaster risk reduction (DRR) plans.

It should be noted that there is strong overlap between P1 activities and activities under other purposes (particularly P4- agriculture and livelihoods). Additional information related to MMDs and CBs can be found under the sections of the relevant activities.

#### 3.1.1. Activity: MMD

The MMDs are women's groups, and at the core are essentially savings groups (though with expanded purposes/activities). MMDs are implemented in all the villages of intervention of the project, and there may be several MMD groups in a village. As of the end of FY22, Hamzari had created and/or revitalized 1,096 MMDs, reaching over 26,000 participants (86% of whom are women) against a target of 1,500 MMDs and 30,000 members over the life of the project.

MMDs generally have between 25 and 30 members, and are formalized with approvals, statutes, and internal regulations. Women form groups based on like-mindedness, and according to their similar levels of financial capacity to make weekly payments. The amount paid varies from 25 to 200 CFA. Payments are organized at the home of the president of the group (locally called "kungiya").

The main purpose of the MMDs is to help the members in the form of credit or social assistance. When a woman takes out a loan, she can draw two-thirds of her contributions, and she repays with a flat interest of 10%. When it is social assistance, the group decides on the terms of payment.

In addition to revitalizing existing MMDs, Hamzari has also worked to establish new MMDs in villages where they do not exist, and to set up networks of MMDs, organized around various activities such as cereal banks, food processing/transformation, market gardening, etc. The networking of MMDs also serves to strengthen cohesion between members.

#### *3.1.1.1. EO1: Quality*

The establishment or revitalization of groups in the villages of intervention is part of the overall dynamic of women's empowerment. Beyond the weekly contributions on which the groups operate, they have helped to strengthen women's capacities and cohesion.

The MMD model is carried out across the country with well documented success. However, one of the weaknesses of these structures is that they can be at times somewhat selective. Very poor women, who cannot regularly mobilize money, are less likely to be able to participate in MMD/VSLA activities. This characteristic of MMDs is not specific to Hamzari- it is well understood in Niger that the MMD's primary goal is not inclusion of the most vulnerable/poor women in their membership. However, the impacts of MMDs may spill over to other non-members. For example, women attending the MMD groups may get some loans and redistribute it to vulnerable women (relatives, friends, close neighbors) to help them dealing with their daily expenses, or cereal banks associated with MMDs may set more flexible conditions so that vulnerable non-MMD members may access their cereals.

#### *3.1.1.2. EO2: Evidence of Change*

The contribution of MMD groups is important in all the villages of the Hamzari project. They have significantly increased participant women's financial capacities. This has resulted in women's participation in the day-to-day management of households. According to one MMD president interviewed:

*The MMD group allowed us to be independent. Now we no longer reach out to men if we need to cover small expenses.*

An unintentional but positive impact of the MMDs observed by the ET is the creation of groups of girls and boys in some villages. This dynamic is important for the project. It links to the effects of MMD development and the positive changes they contribute to in villages.

#### *3.1.1.3. EO3: Efficiency*

MMDs must be inclusive, allowing the integration of all social categories in a village. In the project strategy, gender and youth are accounted for in the establishment of the groups. However, a weakness of MMDs in general (not specific to those supported by Hamzari) is that poor and extremely vulnerable

women are typically not members, so impacts on these groups are achieved only by spill-over and secondary effects.

#### *3.1.1.4. E04: Coordination/Collaboration*

MMDs are bridges through which multiple stakeholders can build on and change the conditions of women and communities in general. Their presence in the different villages offers the opportunity for development projects to have actors on which to rely. The activities of agriculture and market gardening that MMDs carry offer the framework for collaboration with the technical services of the State.

#### *3.1.1.5. E05: Sustainability*

MMD groups allow activities and impacts to persist over the long term. Women in the different villages have assimilated the approach and they benefit meaningfully. The creation of MMD/VSLA structures for vulnerable women and girls and boys are indicators that make it possible to say that these structures will be sustainable. According to one MMD member interviewed:

*What we want now is for our children to benefit from MMD. We saw the interest of being in the groups we also want them in turn that he discovers that.*

Another MMD member that participated in a focus group stated:

*The sums contributed allow them to access small credits to do small income-generating activities. Sometimes young people contribute and just wait for the approach of a party to share the money. This allows them to have enough to meet the expenses of the holidays.*

The ET also observed some cases where it was the villagers who organized themselves to create the MMD groupings themselves, which Hamzari indicates to have plans to support in the future.

Women's participation in these platforms gives them significant symbolic social capital. Also, the recognition of belonging to a project and being recognized as responsible will be significant in the sustainability of the platforms.

#### *3.1.1.6. E06: Cross-cutting themes*

MMDs are inclusive. It is one of the interventions implemented to truly improve gender equity at the community level. MMDs support women in developing IGAs, and this income gives them more power in contributing to the management of their households. MMDs give young people and especially women a little more power in the management of the daily activities of their households.

### **3.1.2. Activity: Cereal Banks (CBs)**

CBs are grain storage units to provide food to network members and the rest of the community during lean seasons. Hamzari links cereal banks to the MMD networks.

CBs are part of the fight against community food insecurity. Hamzari had established CB network committees and built their capacity. It has also supported all CB networks with a sum of 500,000 CFA (400,000 CFA for the purchase of an initial stock of food, which is planned only once over the duration of the five-year project, and 100,000 CFA for the purchase of pallets to facilitate storage).

During the lean season the members of the CB hold a general assembly to decide how much millet to sell, how much to sell to each household or villager, the frequency, and the moderate selling price. The moderate price is set according to the price of the millet measurement on the market. Through on-dialogue with Hamzari, CB members also make decisions on more favorable conditions.

**Figure 2: Sacks of grain stored in a cereal bank.**



Photo Credit: Abdoutan Harouna

According to the FY22 annual report, Hamzari had provided support to 77 cereal banks, with a total of 7,229 members (7,199 of which are women). 27 of these CBs were first provided support in FY21, and an additional 50 were provided support in FY22.

#### **3.1.2.1. EO1: Quality**

The CBs supported by Hamzari were observed to have generally functioned well to provide food to the communities during the lean season. The capacity-building provided to committee members allows them to better plan in the context of inventory management. The existence and functioning of CBs make women more resilient to food insecurity. Hamzari has built on existing (but generally weak) cereal bank structures. During one focus group conducted, a CB committee member stated:

*The network for the management of the cereal bank was set up two years ago. But you should know that long before the Hamzari project, each women's group had its own CB. It is in one member who keeps the cereal stock. The system that allowed to have the grain was based on weekly contributions over nine months, and the money is used to buy grain during harvests. The cereals are stored and then shared during the lean season between the members. This allowed members to have food during the lean season and work in our fields. Hamzari showed us how to handle this better. So, with Hamzari, there was an organization that allows us to sell at moderate prices and have money to renew the stock during the harvest.*

#### **3.1.2.2. EO2: Evidence of Change**

In addition to allowing the availability of food during the lean season, low-priced sales allow even those who are not members of the networks to access cereals at acceptable prices in some villages. This

strengthens solidarity and mutual aid - such as lending between women in groups. One CB member interviewed stated:

*Before, we distributed food among ourselves and then we waited for the harvest to start contributing in-kind or cash to build up a new stock. Hamzari taught us how to sell at moderate prices and how to help others get grain because of us. This allows us to have more money every year to buy even more grain. Before we only had a few bags stored at the president's house, now we have our own CB and more than 20 bags.*

#### **3.1.2.3. EO3: Efficiency**

In Hamzari's approach, new CBs were not established, but rather the project focused on supporting/revitalizing CBs that already existed in their intervention villages. This strategy allows for business continuity of CBs. In the villages with functional CBs, they have contributed to vulnerable people's access to food at affordable prices during the lean season- these benefits are available to the surrounding villages as well. In some villages where networks have more resources, solidarity systems have emerged to help people who do not have the financial capacity to buy food. Considering the success of the CB model implemented by Hamzari, it may be worthwhile to explore to include villages that do not have existing CBs (by establishing new CBs or expanding existing nearby ones), and to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalized can maximize their benefit from CB activities. Hamzari plans to showcase their MMD/women-managed CBs to promote the approach to municipal authorities and other development actors.

#### **3.1.2.4. EO4: Coordination/Collaboration**

The establishment of CBs is part of the State's strategy to strengthen the food security of communities. The municipalities are involved in the support and supervision of the management committees of the CB networks. However, collaboration in monitoring activities is not effective with the communal authorities and the decentralized technical services. This is part of the sustainability plan and Hamzari intends to engage in continuous dialogue with municipal authorities and other development agencies/projects to showcase the successful CB, and discuss issues such as replication in other areas, stock reinforcement, institutional monitoring, etc.

#### **3.1.2.5. EO5: Sustainability**

The objective of the CBs is to have food available and at a lower cost for the members and then for the villagers during the lean season. The anchoring of the activity to the networks guarantees a more permanent follow-up by the member groups of the network. The organizational framework created supports the sustainability of the CBs.

#### **3.1.2.6. EO6: Cross-cutting themes**

Like MMDs, the CB approach focuses on women's groups. Women and young people participate in the management of these structures. Over 99% of the members of CBs supported by Hamzari are women, focusing on those who have demonstrated good resource management capacity.

### 3.1.3. Activity: Habbanayé

“Habbanayé” is an approach that consists of initially buying animals and distributing them to a first group of participants who will then pass them to a second group after the animals give birth and the young are weaned. Habbanayé is an activity initiated and formerly practiced by certain communities in Niger. The approach has been adopted and improved over time by development projects, including Hamzari, within a much more elaborate framework with the involvement of female beneficiaries in the choice of the goat species, the purchase of kits at the level of the weekly markets in the area of intervention, the management committees set up and trained to monitor the activity, and the connection of vet auxiliaries trained with the women beneficiaries for providing care to these animals.

Hamzari began this activity in 2021, and by the end of FY22, Hamzari had reached 1,170 women, providing 1,775 goats (1,560 females and 195 males) and pertinent training. 370 kids were produced from the 585 goats provided by Hamzari in FY21. Planned continued monitoring will determine continued reproduction successes.

The choice of women to participate in the Habbanayé activity was made in village general assembly, where 26 extremely poor women were selected to participate, from which 13 direct beneficiaries and 13 indirect beneficiaries were selected for the first rotation.

The beneficiaries of the 1<sup>st</sup> group received 60,000 CFA to buy two female goats and one male goat. The purchases are made in the presence of a commune level livestock agent, a Hamzari agent, a representative of the financial institution, and a representative of the town hall.

Two funds are set up: the renewal fund and the care follow-up fund. The renewal fund serves to replace an animal in the case of loss, death, or theft, once confirmed by the monitoring committee. The care fund is used to take care of the medical monitoring of the animals.

Contributions are made to these two funds by the women participants (1st group and 2nd rotation group). For the first fund, all 26 women chosen will contribute 2,000 CFA per woman which may vary according to the villages and the capacity of the beneficiaries. For the second, women contribute 50 to 100 CFA each week. A breeding assistant is recruited, trained, and provided with equipment to monitor the animals. The auxiliary conducts trainings on the management of breeding and the choice of animals.

A committee is set up to monitor the management of goats, it is made up of villagers who are not participants.

#### 3.1.3.1. *EO1: Quality*

Habbanayé is an important intervention for communities. It is part of the reconstitution of the herd at community level. In many cases, it has allowed some women to have livestock capital, and more importantly, to initiate IGAs. When successful, access to animals and integration into existing or (more commonly) newly formed MMD/VSLA groups with other Habbanayé participants allows vulnerable women to feel valued in the village, gives them the confidence to fight and change their position.

The first rotations between direct and indirect beneficiaries have successfully taken place in several villages. This activity has allowed participating poor women to no longer be considered extremely poor in the eyes of the community, according to those interviewed.



### 3.1.3.2. EO2: Evidence of Change

The activity has had positive impacts on livelihoods and food security for many of the participants. One of the village agents described an Habbanayé participant:

*My parents' neighbor is a widow who lives alone with her children. I assure you, she has nothing. Her husband has passed away and she has many young children (...). She goes from house to house looking for pounding or shelling work to do for women. It is paid in kind or in cash. Then she goes to look for wood in the bush to sell. And her oldest child collects straw to sell to help his mother. He is not 15 years old the child there. She was lucky, her name came out among the beneficiaries of the goats. She had two female goats and a male goat. She fattened the male goat, she sold it to buy another. With the profit, she started a small condiment business. Thank God, one of the two goats has already given birth, it will rotate soon. Hamzari changed her life.*

Even if the number of women who have the same extent of changes may be limited, the project has been important in transforming the lives of some of the participants.

### 3.1.3.3. EO3: Efficiency

It is in village general assembly that the women beneficiaries were chosen- 26 women were chosen from each village benefiting from this support. The 13 direct beneficiaries receive the first set of goats, and after the first goat gives birth, the young goat is given to someone in the second set of 13 beneficiaries. It is agreed that once a woman receives the animals, she is forbidden to sell the females. She is allowed to sell the male after fattening it and buy another. The benefit will allow her to earn income from the sale of fattened male goat.

In theory, the activity is designed to focus on the poorest women in the communities. Indeed, Hamzari staff indicated that one of the roles the Habbanayé activity played in the overall theory of change was to provide a way for the poorest women to have some income, enabling them to integrate into community organizations such as MMDs, and community development dynamics. Hamzari works with the MMDs and the VSLAs, the latter (VSLA) bringing together vulnerable women who do not have the resources but who nevertheless wish to organize themselves according to their rhythm and their affinities (VSLA of the women beneficiaries of Habbanayé, VSLA of young girls, VSLA of young men, etc.). According to the Hamzari staff interviewed, the instruction given during targeting is to choose "*women who do not even have a hen*", so that the poorest and most vulnerable women would be chosen.

In practice, however, the ET observed that a disproportionate number of women receiving goats were already members of MMDs, and it was also observed that women holding positions in network committees were also prioritized to receive the first round of goats, rather than the poorest. In one focus group discussion held by the ET, and participant stated:

*[Habbanayé] is an operation that should target extremely poor and vulnerable women. However, there have been fairly wealthy women who have benefited from these goats.*

This finding is not meant to imply that vulnerable/extremely vulnerable women are not targeted with this activity. The ET cannot quantify possible errors of inclusion (targeting wealthy women), and such errors are likely to be highly reported by community members. Analysis conducted by Hamzari indicates that most (75%) of participating households are classified as vulnerable or extremely vulnerable. Additionally, Hamzari indicates that some non-vulnerable households may be included as Habbanayé participants, particularly in the first round, in order to reinforce the participatory community approach.

However, the frequently reported perception that the activity may not have been fairly targeted remains an issue that Hamzari may wish to explore/address.

#### *3.1.3.4. EO4: Coordination/Collaboration*

The Habbanayé approach creates the framework for collaboration between the project and other actors. In all municipalities, representatives of local authorities were part of the animal selection and purchasing committees. In addition, the technical service is involved in the sanitary care of the animals purchased. It is also the departmental head of breeding who has trained the breeding assistants recruited in the monitoring of animals.

#### *3.1.3.5. EO5: Sustainability*

The Habbanayé approach in principle is designed to be sustainable. The rotation of goats between 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> group beneficiaries and then from 2<sup>nd</sup> group of beneficiaries to other women in villages should ensure that all women benefit from these goats to rebuild their herds. Monitoring committees are set up, but the functionality of these committees is not effective. In some villages, the rotations are successful. However, in others the problems of theft, targeting, death mean that the rotations are not made, or are made with some delay.

## **3.2. Purpose 2 – Nutrition and Health**

Purpose 2 includes to sub-purposes:

**Sub-Purpose 2.1:** Improved optimal Maternal, Infant and Young Child Feeding (MIYCF) and Reproductive Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) practices

**Sub-Purpose 2.2:** Increased utilization of Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) and nutrition services

### **3.2.1. Activities: Care Groups (and associated interventions)**

Sub purposes 1 and 2 involve activities aimed to improve the health and nutritional status of children under 5, adolescent girls, and women of reproductive health (WRA) age and to increase utilization of reproductive health and maternal, neonatal and child health and nutrition services. Hamzari adopted the “first 1000 days” approach which includes a package of activities aimed at improved nutrition through exclusive breastfeeding, age-appropriate complementary feeding, promoting local, nutritious foods and accessing health services.



**Figure 3: Care group holding exchange meeting.**



*Photo credit: Lauren Blum*

The project employs a modified version of CGs, an international community-based approach with global standards, as the central platform to share information and expose WRA to activities promoting adoption of key health and nutrition behaviors. CGs are divided into two sub-groups; the first sub-group (support groups) targets women from early in pregnancy up to the time when their breastfeeding children reaches 6 months and is led by Maman ANJE (MA); the second sub-group guided by Maman Lumiere (ML) involves caregivers of children 6-23 months and focuses on complementary feeding. Each MA has an ML partner; when children in ANJE support groups reach 6 months, they and their caregivers graduate to the complementary feeding group. CG participants are eligible to receive food rations, under the Blanket Supplementary Feeding program, which aims to prevent a decline in the nutritional status of children and pregnant and lactating women. The food rations are supposed to be delivered every two months. Community health workers (CHWs), referred to as peer educators, provide oversight to the functioning of CGs; they are also responsible for routine screening of malnourished children and awareness raising.

MAs share messages designed to improve knowledge related to food intake during pregnancy and lactation and exclusive breastfeeding. ANJE support group participants are encouraged to partake in preventive health services such as four antenatal care (ANC) sessions, opt for facility delivery, and attend growth monitoring sessions, during which they can benefit from other critical preventive care such as vaccinations, iron supplements and receipt of impregnated bed nets. The MLs focus on

complementary child feeding and encourage women to attend growth monitoring visits. Both leaders share information on reproductive health, family planning, and hygiene practices.

**Figure 4: Culinary demonstration**



*Photo credit: Lauren Blum*

CG leaders are also tasked with leading culinary demonstrations using recipes involving locally available, nutrient dense foods to improve food diversity and the quality of food intake. The project encourages group members to establish granaries of agricultural products and home gardens to ensure that nutritious foods are available for culinary demonstrations and preparation of enriched foods at home. Both MAs and MLs carry out household visits to assess whether CG messages are being practiced. Designed to involve women from the same neighborhood, the CG platform is intended to strengthen linkages among women and peer learning. A recently introduced activity involves the establishment of MMD units involved in the transformation and sale of nutritious foods.

#### **3.2.1.1. E01 – Quality of Program Service Delivery**

Most CGs visited by the ET had been ongoing for over two years in Hamzari villages. Some MAs and MLs had been trained by Hamzari, while others reported that they had been trained by the predecessor project but had not yet received training promised by Hamzari. Of the 3,420 CG members, 648 women had received the entire capacity building package and were considered core experts, responsible for replicating the training with the larger group. In the future, Hamzari aims to use these core experts in health and nutrition issues to scale up the CG approach and to become professional promoters of the CG strategy.

CG leaders had received a kit of materials for culinary demonstrations, and all leaders and participants had received Hamzari *pagnes* (traditional female garb). Wearing the Hamzari *pagnes* gave informants a

sense of pride and affiliation with the project. Most MAs and MLs visited used visually pleasing aids with Hausa text to transmit messages, although the aids had been distributed in November 2022 shortly prior to the MTE. Not all CG leaders had a register, and during the MTE many were unable to share their 2023 action plans, although the ET did not investigate whether the CG plans had been included in the global MMD annual plans. In the MTE villages, CG participants appeared to attend scheduled meetings regularly. CG leaders and participants expressed appreciation for the information they were gaining and supportive CG environment.

The MTE identified aspects of the approach that are not standardized across communities, which may reflect a flexibility that CARE has tried to build into the application of CGs that encourages leaders to make adjustments according to the needs of participants. For instance, some sub-groups involved 10-15 participants, while others had far fewer members. The ET also identified differences regarding the age when children graduate from child feeding groups which may indicate the need to keep certain children showing signs of malnutrition in the sub-group longer until their nutritional status improves. Meeting frequency varied from one time a week to once a month, once again reflecting the autonomy of different sub-groups, and many groups were not comprised of women from the same neighborhood due to the fact that group composition is based on MMD group membership. The MTE also detected discrepancies in the frequency of household visits, which according to CG leaders ranged from daily to visits every two weeks. Deviation from a standard approach and repetition of the same messages over long periods raised questions about the quality of the intervention to motivate adoption of key behaviors. However, from another perspective, the observed deviation could be interpreted through a positive lens. Hamzari indicated that they are adapting the standard approach to the local context and needs of mothers in each community, and plans to document this approach and its results. To improve CG standards, Hamzari is holding exchange sessions so that stronger groups following CG norms work with groups that function less well.

As part of the project's efforts to encourage sustainable growth monitoring, Hamzari recently introduced community-based screening of children with the goal to equip child caregivers trained in 2021 with the capacity to detect malnourished children. The ET discovered some confusion regarding how screening information is to be used. In addition, some trained CG members had not received materials needed to carry out screening, although this may be due to the fact that only newer sub-groups established in 2021 will receive growth monitoring materials.

**Figure 5: Food granary for culinary demonstrations**



*Photo credit: Lauren Blum*

Some CG participants reported that they maintain food granaries managed by the MMDs for cooking demonstrations, while others did not. CGs are supposed to plan the demonstrations based on the food stocks available in the nutritional granary, which is comprised of agricultural produce collected after each harvest from participant households. The amount of food provided varies in quality and quantity according to the agricultural harvest and contributions, which are voluntary, from each household. However, ET observations of CG food granaries found that the stored foods were kept in closed bags in the same location as family food stores or cereal banks, raising questions about the viability of the process. In addition, gardening is encouraged in villages that have potential such as water availability and cultivable plots. However, the few gardens identified in MTE villages were either at the very initial phases or did not produce many vegetables. The combination of these factors required CG participants to contribute money (100 CFA) or foods for food demonstrations, which was not feasible for all women. In some villages, lack of food created challenges to holding culinary demonstrations once a week as scheduled, as the ET observed when we attempted to participate in a demonstration. Nutrition animators admitted that economic constraints cause barriers to hold the demonstrations, especially during the lean season. Some evaluation informants noted that the predecessor project had provided flour for demonstrations, a practice not followed by Hamzari and which therefore may disincentivize Hamzari CG participants from contributing household foods. While Hamzari project informants claimed to promote about 35 recipes, including eight recipes from the national recipe booklet used by the Directorate of Nutrition, along with locally developed recipes based on food combinations created by CG participants, the ET found that the repertoire of recipes followed during culinary demonstrations was limited. In addition, some participant informants stated that demonstrations can last more than two hours, and they often must return home before the porridge or puree was completed.

ANJE support groups and complementary feeding group participants received food rations, although in MTE villages food distribution occurred every three rather than two months. Most CG participants interviewed reported satisfaction with the food distribution process, but some had to travel long distances (over 3 kms) to obtain the foods. CG participants appreciated the food received, indicating that they are used to make porridge for their wellbeing and the health of their children.



Many CG leaders were unable to share their registers. Registers that the ET reviewed raised some concerns about data quality which is impacted by the ability of CG leaders, some of whom are illiterate, to record information. In addition, the ET found that CG participant health cards were not routinely consulted to obtain up-to-date information on ANC attendance and live births despite the fact that the health cards are supposed to be checked systematically in order for women to access CG services and to benefit from food rations. Due to high workloads, field agents in charge of data collection are often unable to verify the information in the CG registers and must call CG leaders to obtain monthly data or ask peer educators to send data by WhatsApp. Some CG leaders mentioned that poor telephone networks can impede the prompt transfer of data to nutrition animators, who are responsible for completing monthly project reports.

**Figure 6: Mill for food processing/transformation**



*Photo credit: Lauren Blum*

MMD food transformation units encountered by the ET had started shortly prior to the MTE. Groups comprised of 10-12 participants, with 10 groups having received formal training led by Hamzari and 10 groups had been oriented on activities by members of other food transformation units. Hamzari favors an approach involving the transfer of knowledge and experience among women involved in food transformation which can facilitate the establishment of broader networks of women involved in processing of local foods.

Hamzari has designed the activity to complement other activities implemented through the MMD networks and to boost synergy across the strategic objectives of the program. In an effort to strengthen the use of local products, the processing units visited by the ET were in villages with cereal banks maintained by MMD groups. As part of the effort to build synergy, Care Groups support the processing units through the promotion of the use of their locally produced food products, emphasizing the dosage of food rations adapted to the different categories of beneficiaries.

During the MTE, the ET found that some units had received food ingredients from Hamzari, while others had to raise money to initiate activities and faced problems maintaining adequate food stocks. Groups reported meeting weekly or bi-weekly to prepare and sell protein enriched food products such as flour, couscous, noodles, or biscuits; the nutritious foods are sold in small packages designed to increase

accessibility to community households, but some groups reported challenges packaging the foods. Processed foods are promoted among CG members, marketed in villages, or transported to larger towns by the project for sale. Procurement of time-saving technologies was granted in early 2023 and delivery for food processing started after the initiation of the activity, and some units had still not received the promised mills at the time of the MTE. Those who had received the mills had incurred big expenses with the installation. None of the mills visited by the ET were operational at the time of the MTE. In the future, Hamzari plans to explore the possibility of involving micro-enterprises committed to processing, marketing, and distributing quality food products with high nutritional value. More specifically, in collaboration with GRET, an NGO that provides technical assistance to local businesses in the production, distribution and promotion of fortified children's foods, Hamzari intends to explore the industrial production of Garin Yaara, a nutrient dense complementary children's food product.

Most peer educators interviewed had previous CHW experience. Some peer educators had received Hamzari training as recently as June 2022, while others had not been trained by the project. Peer educators mentioned providing oversight of CGs and screening children 6-59 months of age for malnutrition from every two weeks to once in three months and referring malnourished children to the nearest health center. During the MTE, the ET learned about several malnourished children identified during screening who were unable to travel to an integrated health center (CSI), or upon arrival in the CSI, health workers refused to treat them. One peer educator stated:

*We collaborate well with the health worker in our health hut, but the situation is not at all good with CSI staff. When we refer malnourished children, they refuse to take care of them. As a result, sometimes when we make referrals families have refused to travel to the CSI and treat their children at home.*

Peer educators also reported seeking out pregnant women during their first trimester and women who miss CG sessions, accompanying CG leaders during household visits, and helping with food distribution, as well as sensibilizing both men and women about female dietary intake, the importance of attending maternal, child and reproductive health services, and prevention of sexually based violence. Some also reported holding meetings (Club d'Ecoute) with adolescents to talk about SRH. Several peer educators reported being overworked and inadequate compensation, with some noting that Hamzari had promised more payment and that other CHW in the area are paid regularly. While most peer educators mentioned some remuneration, amounts and the regularity of payment varied, and sometimes involved small payments (2-4000 CFA) for participation in food distribution and screening, which may explain why some peer educators carry out more frequent screening. Others reported receiving larger sums of money after having worked for long periods. Hamzari acknowledged that collaboration with health services had been disrupted for a period of a few months due to a conflict related to the per diem rates applied by the program, they felt it had since been resolved, and collaboration with the health services had returned to being productive. Hamzari leadership is aware of the challenges associated with volunteerism, the basis for the approach which promotes villagers to contribute to community development. In response, efforts have been made to increase the motivation of peer educators. It is important to note that many peer educators interviewed had not received project notebooks or registers. Peer educators were not sharing monthly reports with the government health system. The ET found high turnover of peer educators.

Technical supervisors reported receiving extensive training by the project and maintained good knowledge related to P2 objectives and activities, although supervisors of other sectors and project coordinators demonstrated gaps in their understanding of health and nutrition interventions. Several animators indicated that they are overworked, although they were satisfied with their compensation.

SBC activities started in 2020 after the validation of the program's SBC strategy with the signing of contracts with community radios and the establishment of community mechanisms such as PEs, which constitute the first structure put in place. The program, in collaboration with BA, has set up a communication plan with a well-defined schedule and adapted to the local context. At the time of the MTE, radio broadcasts were underway, but many other SBC approaches, particularly involving interpersonal communication, had been significantly delayed.

### *3.2.1.2. EO2 – Evidence of Change*

CG leaders and participants and CHWs were familiar with the 1000-day period from conception to when the child reaches two years of age. CG leaders and participants were generally able to repeat nutrition-related messages conveyed during CGs, most often citing the importance of improved food intake during pregnancy, exclusive breastfeeding, complementary child feeding practices, and hygiene practices. The same informants were familiar with messages regarding the importance of attending ANC and facility deliveries and using modern family planning methods. Many mothers participated in other activities, particularly MMD, cereal banks and gardening.

The FY22 annual participant-based survey reported signs of gradual sociocultural transformations. For example, the survey found increases in the proportion of women in the intervention area making their own decisions about sexual relations, family planning use and utilization of reproductive health care services. The project also reported that more men are contributing to tasks traditionally assigned to women, and that more women have adequate time to care for their children. It is important to note that some of the information collected by the ET regarding gender roles raised concerns regarding social desirability bias.

Regarding unintended changes, the ET discovered that some women in the project area falsified information to be eligible to receive Hamzari food rations (see information related to EO3 below), underscoring the economic hardship in the project area.

### *3.2.1.3. EO3 – Efficiency*

Hamzari data indicate high coverage of P2 activities and effective targeting of WRA and male community members in all three of the Hamzari municipalities, with either CGs or husband schools functioning in all project villages. Data show that over 30,000 pregnant women and 32,000 children 0-59 months benefit from nutrition-specific activities, representing 90% and 87% of project targets, respectively, and that 66% of women were familiar with at least three key dietary recommendations. The FY22 annual report mentioned participation of 14,128 WRA in 677 cooking demonstrations, and that 3240 MLs carried out home visits to verify application of culinary recipes, hygiene practices during food preparation, and appropriate complementary feeding. The combination of culinary demonstrations and nutritional monitoring through home visits reached 15,567 children between the ages of 0 and 23 months, thus exceeding project targets. In addition, the FY22 report indicated that ANJE support groups reached 1,596 WRAs during home visits.

The ET noted increase utilization of ANC, facility deliveries, and family planning methods in health hut facilities visited, which health workers attributed to project sensibilization efforts. The Hamzari FY22 annual survey reported that 14,165 of women experiencing live births had attended at least four ANC visits and 64% of child caregivers used child health services, and that over 96% of WRA used reproductive health and family planning services. These results reflect efforts made by Hamzari and other organizations working in the same municipalities targeting a range of community members

including women, men, and adolescents through different platforms such as Husband Schools, CGs, Safe Spaces, and gender platforms on the availability of SRH/FP services and healthy sexual and reproductive health practices. It is worth noting that the ET identified confusion among some ANJE group participants regarding the timing of the first ANC visit and the ANC schedule. In addition, some MAs reported challenges identifying women in the early months of pregnancy, citing cultural tenets that encourage women to hide the pregnancy before it is visible. To identify persisting socio-cultural constraints and solutions, Hamzari has launched a process involving social analysis and action to ensure the adoption of certain positive practices.

Regarding family planning, the annual survey reported that close to 50% of WRA and 57% of men knew at least one modern family planning method, with 19% of WRA making decisions about sexual relations and contraceptive use. The ET found that most CG participants interviewed knew of modern family planning methods, with injections, pills, implants, and IUDs most frequently mentioned. Information sharing has also included messaging related to the risks associated with early and frequent pregnancy, along with the promotion of long-term contraceptives among married adolescents, although early pregnancy and high fertility persist in the area. Many CG participants mentioned that women still need to obtain spousal permission to use family planning, and that many men are opposed to contraceptive use. Delays in some SBC activities are likely affecting project targets; some MTE informants mentioned receiving information on family planning, nutrition, and hygiene on community radio.

Regarding food rations, in FY22 Hamzari reported distributing CSB+ and vegetable oil to 18,213 PLWs and 8,999 children under two years of age every two months over 1000 days or 30 months. During food distribution, sensibilization on health and nutrition also occurred, thus reinforcing messaging carried out during routine CG sessions. Food distribution is often done near to a health center, which may help to encourage women to visit the facility. In MTE villages, informants reported that food distribution generally occurs every three months, which is less often than planned. Hamzari project leadership reported that while operational constraints may cause delays in some food distributions, Hamzari shares food rations six times per year.

The project reports that disproportionately high numbers of pregnant women have received food rations. The ET gathered some information that may, at least in part, explain the high numbers. Specifically, one of the CSI head nurses reported that at the start of food distribution, an unprecedented number of women attended ANC sessions. In response, the CSI started mandating pregnancy testing; during one ANC session, only 15 of 66 women had a positive pregnancy test. The same head nurse reported that Hamzari peer educators were falsifying health cards to indicate that women were pregnant. He also conjectured that women may be encouraged to get pregnant so that they are eligible to receive Title II foods. The ET cautions against reaching such a conclusion in a context where women still have little control over their sexual activities and childbearing. Rather, falsifying pregnancy illuminates the economic constraints in the project area; the ET supports Hamzari's ongoing efforts to understand what is contributing to the high numbers of pregnant women.

CG leaders interviewed had been selected by community members during general assembly meetings, as stipulated by the project. However, many could not read or write or had minimal literacy skills, thus not meeting Hamzari selection criteria. The ET recognizes that low literacy, particularly among women, poses a major constraint which likely affects project reporting. To address this problem, in 2022 Hamzari leadership instituted a literacy program for all men and women participating in community management committees to improve literacy skills. Peer educators were also selected by community members during community assembly meetings and generally met project qualifications. Supervisors interviewed



oversaw 16-21 villages, carrying out visits at least one time a month when they try to attend CG sessions and review registers.

The project partners with 20 existing food transformation groups producing enriched foods that they sold from their households or in large markets with project assistance. Some but not all groups reported making enough money to replenish ingredients and to generate a small amount of capital.

In some instances, the ET found that interventions did not adequately take local conditions into consideration or adjust messaging to contextual factors. For example, food ingredients recommended for culinary recipes were often unaffordable and/or unavailable, children identified as malnourished were sometimes sent to distant health centers difficult for mothers to access and where treatment was not routinely provided, and gardening was promoted in places with poor water access. ET visits to health huts and CSIs often illuminated poor conditions such as poor hygiene, lack of a designated delivery room and/or key equipment such as delivery beds and mattresses, absence of latrines, stockouts of family planning methods, and insufficient plumpy nut. Inadequate stocks of plumpy nut prevented distribution or forced some facilities to reduce provision of sachets to malnourished children so that therapy does not meet international standards. Hamzari is participating in meetings with health partners to discuss how to ensure that adequate therapeutic supplies are available for malnourished children referred to health facilities for treatment. In some CSIs and health huts, traditional midwives assisted deliveries. In addition, some CSI health workers were unwilling to provide family planning methods to adolescents under 18 years, thus opposing government regulations. Although Hamzari has raised some of these issues with implementing partners involved in health care such as Kulawa, UNICEF and MSF, the ET recognizes that it is not Hamzari's job to continuously monitor and report on the availability and quality of supplies in health centers.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hamzari works to increase demand for health and nutrition services in health structures, but is not responsible for ensuring the quality of services provided by government health facilities.

**Figure 7: CSI delivery room**



*Photo credit: Lauren Blum*

#### **3.2.1.4. E04 – Coordination, Collaboration**

The ET noted that CGs could benefit from improved linkages with other project activities, particularly agricultural and WASH interventions, to enhance efforts to improve nutritional intake. Field technical staff overseeing other sectors and project coordinators often lacked comprehension of the health and nutrition activities, which may limit good collaboration across sectors.

CSI workers reported that at the outset Hamzari involved government health staff in project coordination meetings and presentations, but most CSI personnel interviewed during the MTE indicated that they were not implicated in project activities. They also expressed discontent that project peer educators, who as CHWs are part of the official health system, did not provide feedback regarding project activities, and that health center staff are not invited to participate in food distribution. Poor collaboration as perceived by CSI workers may impact provision of services to families with malnourished children accessing health care. While Hamzari staff reported that collaboration with government health services had been disrupted for several months due to a conflict related to the per diem rates applied by the program, from their perspective the situation had been resolved and collaboration with health services at the time of the evaluation was productive. Most CHWs interviewed did not share data generated through screening of malnourished children; the transfer of project data may enhance government perceptions of the usefulness of the partnership. Health workers interviewed expressed interest in strengthening collaboration, which could improve community linkages. Unfortunately, the chief medical officer in the Guidan Roumdji department, who could have provided additional information regarding how to improve project collaboration with the government health sector, was unable to meet the ET.

It is important to note that the ET identified one CSI where project field staff and community members collaborated well with the head nurse who routinely met and developed quarterly work plans with peer educators and model husbands. The same head nurse invited project MLs to carry out demonstrations

during health center growth monitoring sessions. In addition, collaboration with health hut staff, who retained lists of CG participants and participated in CG sessions and programming, appeared to be good.

Unfortunately, the Rise II health partner Kulawa started two years after the start of Hamzari, thus restricting overlap of the interventions. The ET learned that Kulawa health systems strengthening efforts do not necessarily focus on the Hamzari municipalities. ET findings underline the need for improved familiarity with project designs, activities, and goals to enhance the partnership so that Kulawa can engage in making needed improvements in the quality of health services in Hamzari area health facilities. In addition, Kulawa and Hamzari staff could work to identify ways to strengthen liaisons between facility and community-based activities that could improve utilization of health services, a critical step to long term sustainability. While SCC provides a valuable platform for RISE II and RFSA partners to exchange lessons learned and improve collaboration, the ET learned that the scheduling of SCC meetings and agendas could benefit from more input from USAID-funded implementing partners.

#### *3.2.1.5. E05 - Sustainability*

Community members involved in implementing interventions were aware that Hamzari is an activity with a specific time frame. The project has led nutrition-related, maternal and child health, and reproductive health and family planning training of CG leaders and peer educators which will benefit communities over time. CG participants showed good familiarity with key messages; project animators indicated that community members understand the importance of the health and nutrition activities and are proud to participate. MLs derived motivation by the fact they were selected by villagers, received positive recognition, and contributing to community development, and appeared willing to sacrifice time to implement interventions, with several ET informants indicating that they planned to continue after the end of the project. However, lack of standardization of CG activities across communities may interfere with continuity. Low literacy, a contextual constraint often necessitating that literate villagers take on multiple leadership roles, may also jeopardize sustainability.

While CG participants maintained knowledge gained through project activities, signs of behavioral change regarding improved intake of nutritious foods, as well as hygiene practices, were less evident. Gardening activities showed limited uptake, and food transformation started late, restricting the potential to increase the diversification of foods and preparation of nutritious recipes. Findings point to the need to further strengthen linkages between nutrition and agricultural activities that can better ensure sustained access to locally produced foods. Some transformation groups showed signs of increased capital which could allow them to expand activities and increase earnings over time.

Trends showed increase participation in health services, with some data suggesting that women may be gaining more autonomy to make health care decisions. However, the poor conditions observed in health facilities could impact on Hamzari's reputation and the sustainability of improvements in health care utilization. Distribution of food rations likely influenced health care utilization, particularly related to ANC and growth monitoring services. Some project animators reported that people in the project municipalities are accustomed to receiving food and other handouts; reliance on IP assistance, particularly food distribution, may interfere with villages willingness to appropriate activities. In addition, the ET identified some resistance on the part of community members, particularly men, to accept some project messages, particularly related to gender equity.

Sustainability of activities will require continued oversight at the community level. However, many peer educators expressed frustration for not receiving incentives from the project. In Niger, other implementing partners pay CHWs for their services, raising doubts about the continuation of unpaid

CHWs once the project ends, particularly since the peer educators have not established strong links with the CSIs. In general, long-term sustainability requires improved collaboration with government health workers at the community and municipality level, as well as better engagement of departmental and regional level health officials. An improved partnership with the RISE II partner Kulawa could help to reach project outcomes essential for sustainability.

#### *3.2.1.6. E06 - Cross-Cutting Themes*

Nutrition and health interventions primarily target WRA who are responsible for child feeding and household food preparation in the Nigerien context where rates of female and child undernutrition are high. The project fills the important role of sharing information with WRA and adolescent girls who generally have limited exposure to nutrition messaging. However, restricted household decision making related to food acquisition restricts the ability of women and girls to adopt priority behaviors and achieve improved nutrition intake as envisioned by the project, particularly given the late start and limited uptake of some accompanying activities, such as gardening and food transformation units.

In Niger, fertility rates are among the highest in the world, thus underscoring the importance of fertility awareness raising and building life skills among WRA and female youth to control their reproduction. While husband school interventions are designed to improve gender equity, the ET identified indications that many men are reluctant to change their roles as the dominant household decision makers. Improving female agency related to household decision-making around food acquisition and consumption and fertility likely needs to be accompanied by major changes in female socioeconomic status.

#### **3.2.2. Activity: Safe Spaces**

The Safe Space approach is designed to educate adolescent girls about nutrition, hygiene, and reproductive health issues and social factors critical to their future health and well-being, but traditionally taboo to discuss. The strategy aims to raise awareness about the potential consequences of life changing events such as early marriage and pregnancy and to provide youth with valuable information to help them make informed decisions related to sexual relations and reproductive health. The information conveyed can be transformative to young girls, who live in a context where early marriage and fertility rates are among the highest in the world, fistula associated with early pregnancy occurs, and school attendance among adolescent girls is alarmingly low.

**Figure 8: Safe Space participants**



*Photo credit: Lauren Blum*

The activity design includes separate sessions for girls according to two age groups. Groups meet twice a week in a secure space. Sessions are led by female mentors; qualifications include Hausa literacy and permanent residence in the community. Mentors also work with parents of youth participants to discourage traditional practices such as early and forced marriage and to encourage parents to talk to their children on topics related to sexual and reproductive health.

### **3.2.2.1. EO1 – Quality of Program Service Delivery**

Hamzari started implementing Safe Space activities over two years prior to the MTE following the project schedule. Mentors interviewed had participated in an initial three-day training, as well as refresher training in 2022, and were well informed. Coinciding with the official approach, mentors led sessions with two female groups including 10–13-year-olds (younger groups) and 14–16-year-olds (older groups), with topics adjusted to the age group. Mentors reported carrying out visits to participant households every two weeks to assess whether girls followed recommended practices and to raise awareness with parents. Household visits appeared to be systematic and served the important purpose of engaging parents. Mentors were also available to provide advice to adolescents regarding sensitive issues and to intervene when parents attempted to impose negative practices such as forced or early marriage on their daughters. Consulting a female mentor other than a parent on sensitive issues is a traditional approach well accepted in communities.

Girls' fathers provided permission for their daughters to participate. Participants reported attending two sessions weekly, which included 15 adolescents/youth in each age specific sub-group as prescribed by the project. Meetings were held in locations where privacy could be maintained. Mentioned themes covered during sessions commonly reported by adolescents included personal hygiene, the importance of maintaining a clean environment, showing respect towards parents and elders, and the dangers of forced and early marriage and pregnancy, with some adolescents mentioning that early marriage would force them to withdraw from school and prevent them from pursuing a career. Safe space participants also mentioned that mentors told them to distrust and avoid being alone with boys. Girls in the older group learned about menstrual hygiene management.

Girls valued the information gleaned during sessions, with some mentioning that the activity was preparing them to be good wives and mothers, which according to project staff, was a main activity focus. While adolescent informants uniformly reported a desire to marry, they also aimed to pursue a professional career. The ET asserts that the strong emphasis on preparing girls for marriage, rather than focusing on topics such as female leadership and agency, is a missed opportunity. In addition, there was little or no mention by adolescent informants of nutrition-related messages. Several Safe Space participants reported being told by community leadership that they would get either monetary or in-kind rewards for their participation, which they never received.

#### *3.2.2.2. E02 – Evidence of Change*

Safe Space participants exhibited familiarity regarding messages on hygiene and handwashing, fertility, and family planning methods, as well as awareness regarding the negative ramifications of forced and early marriage and pregnancy. Specifically, adolescent informants mentioned that early pregnancy can cause complications during childbirth, which could require a c-section, cause fistula, or lead to a long-term disability or death of the newborn child. Adolescent informants openly talked about reproductive health, which suggests that the project has been successful in reducing some of the *kumya* or shame traditionally attached to discussing female sexuality. Participants produced and reported wearing sanitary napkins, which allowed them to manage their periods so that girls could continue routine activities, including schooling, during menstruation. Many adolescents reported that they aimed to marry when they reach 18 years or later and to have children when they are physically mature, with some mentioning after the age of 20 years, which is older than the norm in the Maradi region.

#### *3.2.2.3. E03 – Efficiency*

At the time of the MTE, Safe Space coverage was limited, with only 31 spaces functioning. When girls graduate to the older group, they are replaced by a family member from the same household, thus limiting the numbers of families targeted at the village level. Mentors interviewed appeared to meet the project selection criterion, although some were illiterate.

#### *3.2.2.4. E04 – Coordination, Collaboration*

The MTE is not aware of collaboration with the public sector. Hamzari is partnering with GirlEngage, a USAID-funded project, to implement the Safe Space approach. Safe Space participants are indirectly connected to the CGs through Safe Space mentors also participating in CGs.

#### *3.2.2.5. E05 -- Sustainability*

Safe Space participants recounted important messages on sexuality and fertility, reproductive health, hygiene, and hygiene management during menstruation, all of which should help them take greater control of their reproduction and improve their health and wellbeing. Safe Space mentors recognized the importance of the activity and demonstrated an interest in continuing to play an advisory role to young females on issues related to marriage and reproductive health. Parents of adolescents have received important information about the dangers of forced and early marriage and pregnancy, which can guide them when making critical decisions about their sons and daughters. However, the ET discovered lack of acceptance of the approach by some community members, particularly men, which may interfere with the perpetuation of key messages.



Safe Spaces appeared to function somewhat independently and could benefit from stronger linkages with other activities and public structures which could serve to broaden community awareness and ensure the likelihood of sustainability. A major weakness of the approach is the lack of involvement of male adolescents and young men. In addition, some government health worker staff interviewed by the ET refused to give adolescent minors contraceptives, thus opposing government regulations. and undermining important messages conveyed by the project.

### *3.2.2.6. E06 -- Cross-Cutting Themes*

The ET considers Safe Spaces as a critical step to inform adolescents about important issues related to sexuality and reproductive health that will allow them to adopt priority behaviors to achieve improved social, health and reproductive health outcomes. The approach appropriately targets adolescent girls during the formative years when they are experiencing major physiological and mental changes in a context where the average age of marriage is 14 years and fertility rates are extremely high. Raising awareness about personal hygiene and nutrition is also critical to maintaining health and wellbeing during adolescence.

The ET views parental involvement as essential to decreasing negative social practices related to early and forced marriage and early pregnancy that can have long term negative consequences on the health and social welfare of young girls. There was little mention of messaging on the importance of dietary intake among adolescent girls, who have special nutritional needs; efforts to improve the nutritional status of female adolescents is particularly important in rural Niger where rates of early marriage and pregnancy are extremely high.

The ET believes that Hamzari missed an opportunity by designing the intervention to prepare young girls to be good wives and mothers, rather than focusing on improving female leadership and agency. In addition, encouraging girls to distance themselves from boys and young men, and the general omission of adolescent boys in the approach, appears to reinforce traditional gender norms and likely reduces the effectiveness of the approach to influence change. Coverage across the project and within villages appears to be low, which will also affect the overall impact.

### *3.2.3. Activity: Husband Schools*

Husband schools are designed to improve gender equity in household decision making and female access to health care services by reducing the negative effects of social norms. The approach is comprised of model husbands who are charged with sensibilizing male community members during meetings and household visits on issues related to maternal nutrition and health and reproductive health. They encourage other village men to participate in positive reproductive health practices; ensure that their wives can access health services such as ANC, assisted deliveries and growth monitoring; increase spousal communication regarding maternal and reproductive health; and assist their wives with household chores. As part of these efforts, they also advocate against sociocultural barriers negatively affecting the use of reproductive health services and improved intake of nutritional rich foods among adolescent girls and women. Another task is to participate in community development often related to sanitation or construction.

#### *3.2.3.1. E01 – Quality of Program Service Delivery*

The ET found that some model husbands received training from Hamzari, while others had been trained by the predecessor project years earlier and had not received formal project training by Hamzari.,

However, Hamzari organized orientations and on-the-job training sessions in villages where model husband schools were established among model husbands considered most effective in their roles by community members. In MTE villages, husband schools were comprised of 20-25 participants, as prescribed by the project. ET informants reported that they hold weekly meetings with other model husbands to plan activities; some groups required that each member routinely contribute money to support activities. In one MTE village, model husbands also met with the CSI head nurse to discuss ongoing activities and develop monthly workplans.

Most groups did not appear to have set schedules regarding awareness raising and how to best target male audiences, although some mentioned that they share information during general assembly meetings which are held regularly and largely attended by male members. Reported message sharing involved encouraging other male community members to permit their wives to attend ANC and growth monitoring sessions and facility deliveries and promoting village sanitation and an open defecation free environment. In addition, some model husbands were invited to participate in interactive debates on community radio “La voix du Gobir” in Guidan Roudmji with opinion leaders such as religious leaders, health workers and CG participants about health and reproductive health issues; listeners were invited to call in to give their opinions of the health subjects under discussion, which concentrated on key health messages conveyed by Hamzari. Hamzari staff reported that the interactive debates received widespread listenership. During the MTE, some model husband groups mentioned organizing clean up sessions and construction activities. A commonly reported constraint was that husband schools had not received materials promised by the project and lacked the appropriate equipment (e.g. wheelbarrows, shovels) to carry out community activities related to sanitation and construction.

### *3.2.3.2. EO2 – Evidence of Change*

Model husbands were generally familiar with messages relating to the importance for WRA to attend ANC and facility-based deliveries. Some reported improved spousal communication and more equitable decision making at the household level. Informants also mentioned assisting their wives with household chores such as obtaining water and accompanying women to health facilities. Given the lack of structure and supervision of awareness raising activities, and prevailing gendered roles, some model husband responses seemed highly unlikely and raised concerns about social desirability bias. Hamzari leadership recognizes that due to deep rooted traditions and local interpretations of the precepts of Islam regarding the sexual division of labor, long-term efforts are needed to establish more egalitarian social norms. This could involve investing in educational activities such as Safe Spaces targeting both young girls and boys should help to lay the foundation for more gender balanced division of household labor and decision making.

Several model husband informants mentioned that husband schools introduced regular cleanup sessions at the village level or cleaned specific sites such as health centers or cemeteries. Groups initiated construction projects designed to improve the living quarters of government health workers.

### *3.2.3.3. EO3 – Efficiency*

Hamzari has 130 husband schools operating in about one third of Hamzari target villages. While key informants indicated that the approach aims to create synergy with CGs, husband schools and CGs often did not overlap in the same villages. Schools entailed 20-25 members; lack of structure of activities made it difficult for the ET to ascertain numbers of community members model husbands targeted



regularly. However, members appeared to routinely transmit messages during general assembly meetings held bi-monthly in villages.

While the project aimed to identify men who allowed their wives to participate in health services, most model husbands interviewed by the ET reported that they had been selected by a predecessor project, although Hamzari leadership maintains that model husbands were selected and trained by Support for NGOs in the East and South (SongES), an NGO with expertise in the development of husband's schools in Niger, which entered a contract with Hamzari to identify and train members of husband's schools. Several of the ET informants had multiple wives and many children and did not seem ideal representatives of "model" husbands.

#### *3.2.3.4. E04 – Coordination, Collaboration*

Husband schools could benefit from better collaboration with other Hamzari activities, particularly with CGs in villages where activities overlap, which could serve to improve male-female dialogue and boost coordination of the interventions. The approach functioned better in villages where model husband groups worked closely with government health workers. In these instances, health center leadership provided oversight in the harmonization of health-related activities by ensuring better collaboration with CG leaders so that awareness raising themes were well coordinated.

#### *3.2.3.5. E05- Sustainability*

Many model husband informants reported that they are committed to continue activities, although the ET identified evidence that some informants may have overstated their involvement. Unfortunately, the ET was unable to spend long time periods in villages to observe the extent to which model husbands are engaged in activities. Others mentioned that improvements in the health of female villagers encouraged them to pursue activities. In addition, lack of monetary motivation and materials to carry out activities will likely have negative effects on sustainability. However, key informants reported that Hamzari is working to provide husband schools with certain supplies needed for local events designed to generate resources which can be used to continue community mobilization activities for reproductive health.

In addition, the ET learned that some male community members opposed certain messages, particularly related to improving gender equity at the household level and increasing female control over contraceptive use, which may create obstacles to sustainability. Husband schools which have regular contact with and receive oversight from government health workers are more likely to continue.

#### *3.2.3.6. E06: Cross-Cutting Themes*

The activity aims to involve men to impart messages designed to improve female access to health care services and gender equity, which is highly appropriate in rural settings where imbalanced power dynamics traditionally force women to seek male permission to participate in health services. The approach conveys important, contextually relevant messages that focus on the health needs of women and gender discrimination prevalent in the project area. However, some messages, such as ways to engage men in household chores, seem less feasible and inappropriate. The ET learned that some villagers, particularly men, did not agree with the approach and refused to participate.

Husband school awareness raising activities lacked the needed structure and frequency to be effective in instilling adoption of widespread change. Hamzari is working to expand communication platforms and

advocacy by engaging influential leaders such as religious leaders and traditional chiefs to encourage the application of healthy practices and behaviors promoted by the program.

### 3.3. Purpose 3 – WASH

Hamzari WASH activities are managed by WaterAid, which has a sub-contract with DEMI-E to oversee field interventions related to Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), hygiene and training on the management of water points at the community and municipality level. DEMI-E supervises WASH field animators who monitor activities in up to 25 project villages.

P3 has three sub-purposes:

- **Sub-Purpose 3.1:** Reduced disease due to fecal-oral transmission.
- **Sub-Purpose 3.2:** Improved hygiene among women, youth, and other vulnerable groups participants.
- **Sub-Purpose 3.3:** Increased access to water for women, youth, disabled, and vulnerable HHs.

#### 3.3.1. Activity: Sanitation

The project uses the Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach to achieve behavior change involving the abandonment of open defecation and the construction and use of sustainable latrines. CLTS is designed to use emotions and social drivers to motivate people to stop open defecation and build latrines. In some contexts/countries, the CLTS approach has been shown to have certain limitations that can impede uptake of the construction of durable latrines that meet WHO/UNICEF standards. Countries draw on experiences to develop strategies that meet their contextual needs.

Starting in 2010, Niger introduced an approach involving sanitation subsidies and marketing for the implementation of CLTS. Since then, most projects have employed strategies involving sanitation marketing of different latrine prototypes following a human-centered design, and some organizations continue to provide subsidies.

**Figure 9: Marketing of latrine prototype**



*Photo credit: Hamadou Boucari*

At the project outset, Hamzari had planned to implement CLTS with subsidies up to the time that a village was certified as open defecation free (ODF). During the project period, the Nigerien government decided to modify ODF certification from the village to the municipality level. Around the same time, the donor encouraged sanitation marketing for all RFSA projects, especially those that target most vulnerable populations. These changes occurred when villages and municipalities in the project area struggled to become ODF, even though they had access to some subsidies.

At the end of FY22, 157 villages (of the target of the life of the project of 257 villages) were certified ODF.

### **3.3.1.1. EO1 – Quality of Program Service Delivery**

As recommended by UNICEF and WHO as part of standards for sustainable development goals (SDGs), the project promotes the construction of prototype latrines in villages where open defecation is widespread. The project has attempted to adapt the CLTS approach so that it coincides with the shift in the national ODF certification strategy from the village to the municipality level. However, this has posed challenges, as many municipalities are not ODF certified. Currently, Hamzari implements CLTS in non-ODF and post-ODF certified villages, and is also gradually introducing other complementary approaches such as sanitation marketing (in its pilot phase), subsidies, etc.

While the project has trained some masons, at the time of the MTE, Hamzari struggled to identify and train adequate masons, as well as material suppliers. As a result, the project mostly works with masons trained and equipped by former projects, with the objective to have one trained mason available to meet latrine demand in a cluster of project villages. While the MTE prototype latrines were available in the office of the WASH manager in Maradi, the ET did not observe improved latrines in evaluation villages. Sanitation marketing of prototype latrines is currently underway, but the scope is still limited.

The team found latrines in most of the households visited; the majority were made of traditional materials, often without a slab. Latrines visited by the ET offered little or no privacy, lacking a roof and door (though this is culturally common in the area). In addition, the ET learned that many latrines had collapsed, often after the first rain. ET findings suggest that the sanitation approach is still in the early stages of having an impact, with households mainly using traditional latrines, and that CLTS lacks adequate technical support, leading to the further proliferation of unsustainable latrines. While the ET was unable to gather detailed information on latrine use, anecdotal evidence suggests that certain family members may refuse to use latrines due to sociocultural factors.

It is important to note that some project agents encountered during the evaluation were unsure of what the next steps in sanitation efforts were, and felt there had been limited progress in some cases. Staff turnover may have contributed to the lack of direction.

Hamzari indicated that they will be putting complementary approaches into place to support ATPC with 1) sanitation marketing and 2) household subsidies, including a scale-up of sanitation marketing next year.

#### *3.3.1.2. EO2 – Evidence of Change*

Project facilitators and latrine committee members maintain lists of household latrines, as part of ODF certification. Community members interviewed seemed to understand the importance of having, using and maintaining latrines properly. As indicated, many households had traditional latrines rather than improved latrines. Some respondents indicated that some community members had paid for traditional latrines, and that that subsequently collapsed, discouraging them from investing in future latrine construction (though the extent to which this happened is beyond the scope of the MTE). While less expensive, traditional latrines cost from 10-20,000 CFA, without including superstructure costs, which represents a lot of money to some villagers.

#### *3.3.1.3. EO3 – Efficiency*

CLTS is being implemented in all Hamzari intervention sites; in principle, activities target all households in project villages. In FY22, Hamzari reported that 157 of the targeted 257 villages are ODF certified, with 17,862 people having access to basic sanitation services. While the project reached 10,179 marginalized community members, which exceeds targets, large numbers of vulnerable households remain without latrines. The project trained 170 of the 300 targeted community members on the maintenance and emptying of latrines, and 15 young male masons were trained on latrine construction and marketing.

Latrine committee members were selected during general assemblies as planned by the project. Behavioral change messages supporting the CLTS approach related to hygiene and latrine use are disseminated through a variety of platforms, including WASH committees, MMD and CGs and during household visits carried out by MAs and MLs and latrine committee members. Information on hygiene is also shared in health facilities during ANC and growth monitoring sessions. The combination of these channels allows Hamzari to reach a large audience and a wide range of community members. While sensibilization efforts are important, delays in the training of masons and marketing of latrine prototypes, which is still in the initial stages, limits the coverage of the activity.

#### *3.3.1.4. E04 – Coordination, Collaboration*

The CLTS approach intrinsically involves government officials to function according to national standards. The ODF certification is made by the regional CLTS committee made up of technical service representatives involving hydraulics, sanitation, public health, planning and community development, and a pre-assessment is made by the departmental CLTS committee made up of the same ministries. Local masons are generally trained by technical services such as the Regional Directorate of Water Resources and the Regional Directorate of Public Health; Hamzari also hired consultants or sectoral project managers to lead training. Collaboration with regional technical services was good. However, departmental level technical staff had a different perspective due to an ongoing conflict in the department regarding the role of technical services, including health, WASH, and education, in project activities and per diems for the work of technical agents by the project.

#### *3.3.1.5. E05 - Sustainability*

Many villagers interviewed recognized the importance of having a household latrine and concepts around latrine maintenance. Social pressure derived from the CLTS approach, along with the possibility to be eligible to receive a subsidized latrine, likely plays an important role in the growing desire by villagers to have a latrine apparent during the MTE. Community members have been trained in important skills that will help sustainably maintain latrines. However, the ET did not see early evidence of increased uptake of durable latrines. In addition, some community members indicated that project subsidies were not adequate. Installing improved latrines is not a priority for marginalized households, but for communities to be ODF and maintain ODF status, poor community members must have latrines. These factors, combined with inadequate collaboration with departmental level technical services at the start of implementation (though improved since), may limit how sustainable the impacts are beyond the life of the project.

Another concern relates to latrine utilization. Evidence collected during the MTE suggests that women value the time they use to relieve themselves in the bush because it offers an opportunity to take a break from their daily household chores. In addition, trips to the bush are often done with other women, making it a social event. To better ensure the sustainability of an ODF environment, the project may need to tailor aspects of the behavioral change approach by targeting specific household members.

#### *3.3.1.6. E06 - Cross-Cutting Themes*

The CLTS approach targets all sectors of the population, including women and youth. National standards for WASH committee composition include quotas for women and youth, although the ET found that their participation on latrine committees was not always evident. The project involved women and youth in supervision of the construction and maintenance of latrines, including emptying techniques, and young male masons have been trained on marketing and construction of durable latrines.

### **3.3.2. Activity: Improved Hygiene**

Hygiene interventions concentrate on raising awareness about the importance of handwashing and hygiene including clean water and latrine use. The activity includes demonstrations on handwashing and sanitation activities.

### *3.3.2.1. EO1 – Quality of Program Service Delivery*

Hamzari assisted in the establishment of hygiene committees in villages certified as ODF; the ET found functioning committees in most ODF villages. Committee composition appeared to follow national standards and included women and youth according to the guidelines. Committee members were trained and provided equipment by the project to carry out activities.

Hygiene committee members lead awareness raising sessions on a range of sanitation and hygiene issues including the installation of handwashing devices and the importance of handwashing at critical times, maintaining clean water, the proper use and maintenance of latrines, and animal excrement management. Messages are designed to explain theories related to disease transmission and focus on health risks associated with the accumulation of human and other waste in villages. Information on maintaining a clean water chain focuses on water collection, transport, storage, as well as the hygienic use of water at home are transmitted. The ET did not observe water treatment information in the messaging, though the degree of need for this messaging was not explored by the ET information on treatment to maintain safe drinking water is given. Hygiene information is disseminated by different community structures and adapted according to the sector focus and activities, and messages are also diffused in schools and in village health structures. Community radio broadcasts supported by the project are used to sensitize community members through debates and the dissemination of testimonials. Repetition of the same messages conveyed by different community actors involved in varying sectors likely gives credibility to the messages and facilitates better appropriation. All community members met by the ET stated that they have taken part in awareness sessions on handwashing during critical times and the use of latrines.

The project organizes handwashing demonstration sessions in villages “triggered” or recertified as ODF. Demonstrations involve tippy taps, thus meeting USAID handwashing standards. However, the ET found that tippy taps are not employed for regular use. Rather, people use plastic teapots which are universally available in Nigerien homes to carry out the ablutions prior to daily prayers and washing hands. In most households with latrines visited, the ET observed plastic teapots near the latrines, but soap was generally not evident, except on a few occasions when the ET noted soap or ash next to the teapots or inside the latrines.

The activity also organizes routine clean-up days which are supposed to involve entire communities. There is generally no designated location to discharge the waste accumulated during village clean-ups, with the garbage collected typically assembled in street corners or burned.

### *3.3.2.2. EO2 – Evidence of Change*

Hygiene committee members exhibited knowledge on hygiene practices including use of latrines and the importance of handwashing with soap. Village members interviewed also showed familiarity with hygiene messages. All the villages visited reported organizing sanitation cleanup sessions on a weekly basis. However, the ET found that village environments were typically littered with plastic bags and other debris including animal excrement and generally unclean. Most family compounds visited by the ET also showed signs of uncleanliness; animals often spend the night in the family compound and are generally not separated by a physical barrier from the rest of the household.



### 3.3.2.3. *E03 – Efficiency*

Awareness raising on good hygiene is carried out in all ODF project villages and, coinciding with the project strategy, all households are targeted. Messages are disseminated using a variety of channels, such as through other WASH committees, during CG meetings and household visits carried out by MAs and MLs, in MMD groups, and in schools and health facilities, thus reaching a range of community members, including women and youth, who are targeted through the sub-purpose. The FY22 annual survey found that 69% of participants in ODF villages reported using at least three important hygiene or sanitation practices, and that 50 schools had elaborated a WASH plan. The project also reports that 54% of households had a handwashing device with soap. Community informants uniformly reported taking part in village sanitation sessions, with villagers claiming to sweep up to a kilometer outside of the village.

In some ODF certified villages, hygiene committees did not exist. When they do exist, villagers selected committee members during general assembly meetings.

### 3.3.2.4. *E04 – Coordination, Collaboration*

Hygiene committees encountered by the ET appeared to work with water committees, latrine committees, as well as Care Groups. At the institutional level, sanitation falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Hydraulics, while hygiene is followed by the Ministry of Public Health. Though the municipality is involved in sanitation and hygiene activities through the SMEA agent, the ET did not observe that their oversight was extensive. However, government technical services participate in demonstration sessions and reinforce awareness messages, especially during pre-assessment, assessment, and triggering for ODF certification on the entire WASH package.

### 3.3.2.5. *E05 – Sustainability*

Hygiene messages disseminated through a variety of channels have reached a large and diverse sector of the population. Personal hygiene is encouraged by Islam, which is strictly followed in project villages. In adherence with Islamic practices, handwashing is a regular, habitual norm, and has a strong foundation in the project villages. However, soap is frequently not used during handwashing, as observed during the MTE. More work needs to be devoted to instilling the importance of handwashing with soap for it to become a widespread, and sustainable, practice. Latrines visited by the ET were generally clean, indicating that information on the importance of latrine use and maintenance is being followed. Village cleanup sessions, which have a social element and require minimal materials, have become a routine activity in project villages.

The project relies on community engagement and committee members to ensure continuity of activities after the project. However, the ET views government involvement at the municipality level, which according to the ET is lacking, critical to long-term sustainability. The ET believes that for sustainability purposes, it is preferable to transfer this activity to municipal village capitals, pending a clearer national strategy on village hygiene.

### 3.3.2.6. *E06 -- Cross-Cutting Themes*

Hygiene and handwashing activities target all sectors of the population, with a focus on women and youth. Awareness raising activities use platforms that reach females and youth, such as CGs, MMD and schools. As stipulated by national norms, hygiene committees include women who in the Niger context

are recognized to place more importance on hygiene; the project also includes youth to participate in physical endeavors such as sweeping of public places and village cleanup sessions. In some villages, the ET found that young people help vulnerable and older village members to sweep and clean their concessions. The ET discovered that some hygiene committees use awareness raising sessions to address other cross-cutting themes related to climate change, such as how communities should prevent and control flooding.

### 3.3.3. Activity: Increased Access to Water

The activity involves the establishment and transformation of water points into larger systems and training of actors on their role and responsibilities according to national guidelines, particularly in relation to governance of water systems. The project has been instrumental in establishing an intermunicipal system to manage water points and ensuring that principles related to multi-usage water systems are followed. The project provides support to the council of the Goulbi Maradi sub-basin agency, and the SAGE Water Development and Management Plan in the commune of Guidan Roudji.

#### 3.3.3.1. *EO1 – Quality of Program Service Delivery*

Establishment of water point infrastructures is essential to Hamzari communities where villagers subsist on agriculture and pastoral activities but water, including drinking water, is scarce. Routine and adequate access to water is critical to the implementation of other Hamzari activities, particularly related to P4. Generally, water tables in Hamzari municipalities are not deep, facilitating installment of water points.

The ET found that water points installed by the project complied with national standards and regulations and maintained acceptable quality, although solar powered systems were only able to run for short time periods each day. Two water points visited maintained emergency equipment and a stock of water treatment products. Project actors overseeing activities appeared to have good technical skills; the trained field animators maintained solid theoretical knowledge and an understanding of the project principles related to WASH.

At the time of the MTE, many water points had been established or human-activated pumps had been transformed into complex, broader systems. The project transformed five boreholes into PEA and rehabilitated 24 boreholes, as planned. Despite these achievements, there remain further water access challenges in many areas. In several villages the ET visited (most where Hamzari had not intervened in water point infrastructure), over half of the population was located more than 500 meters from a water point, and it took them more than 30 minutes to fetch water, (excluding them from qualifying to meet joint WHO/UNICEF SDG6 indicators). The project is aware that water is insufficient to meet needs, but cited lack of adequate resources to construct sufficient water points to adequately serve project target populations. Some challenges in the maintenance of water points are linked to problems identifying people/companies with the capacity to meet the criteria to carry out the work, a prevailing problem in the Maradi and Zinder regions.

The selection of sites for the project's water points was made in consultation with municipal councils. Community management structures such as the Association of Public Water Service Users (AUSPE) and the Water Point Management Committees (CGPE) have been set up. The project trained water committee members according to government standards, with the responsibilities of members clearly defined. The composition of the committees (AUSPE and CGPE) respected government regulations in terms of numbers, roles, and female quotas; committees also involve young people. A constellation of



WASH committees provides joint monitoring of water points with oversight by project animators and village chiefs. The approach is designed to strengthen accountability and engagement by community members, and the ET found that the principle to pay for water is generally accepted. However, because water is chargeable, the poorest community members often draw water from wells that are not protected and have inferior, uncontrolled water quality, despite the work of Hamzari to educate the communities on the risks of water from unprotected wells and the benefits of paying for safe drinking water.

In regard to water management, the ET found that public water service (SPE) guidelines and municipal project management were not always respected in villages not covered by Hamzari's water point activities. For example, some human-activated pumps (FPMHs) were transformed into PEAs without changing the water management structure as a result, local water committees (CGPE) managed complex water systems consisting of a borehole and reservoir with fountains/taps which are supposed to be managed by a private agency and be under municipal project oversight. The consequence is that many villages with water points donated by individuals or charities did not respect water management principles. The ET identified informal committees comprised of young community members who manage water points independently and are not accountable to anyone. To address this, Hamzari has worked with the mayor's offices to help implement a recovery plan for the management system of these types of water points.

The municipal approach, a national directive, consists of signing management agreements between the municipality and each CGPE which manages the site and is supposed to deposit money generated from the water point into an account at the municipality level to ensure the sustainable operation of the system; this includes money for small repairs and a water and sanitation technician. For example, at the time of the MTE, 71 existing sites in Guidan Roudji had signed an agreement with the municipality, with the goal of forming a federation. Two or more municipalities can agree to have a single WASH technical agent (SMEA agent) to oversee WASH activities in collaboration with technical services. Hamzari has opted to implement an intermunicipal approach to share the costs and work of the SMEA agent, including the management of water points, in Guidan Sori and Guidan Roudji. One challenge to this approach is that the technical agent has a large workload.

The project works with the Association des Usages de l'Eau (AUE) and water committees to ensure accordance with new government regulations regarding management of multi-usage water systems (human consumption, agriculture, livestock, etc.); the approach, referred to as Gestion Integree des Ressources en Eau (GIRE), is operational in the Maradi region.

Regarding water quality, the project finances analysis of water systems twice a year by the regional hydraulics services. Hamzari municipalities are known to have poor water quality with high fluoride content, underlining the need to maintain regular monitoring of water. It is important to note that the ET discovered a borehole closed in a village due to water chemical quality, signifying that monitoring is ongoing. In the event of non-compliance with quality standards, the water is supposed to be treated by the technical services and a control frequency is imposed according to regulations. The costs are borne by water services (from the revenue from the sale of water). Hamzari has advocated that municipalities continue to ensure the water quality of CGPEs after the project ends, and the price of water was calibrated to take into account these expenses. In principle, the approach is appropriate if all stakeholders play their role, and the municipality assumes responsibility.

The management of FPMH was generally found to be satisfactory by the ET with only minor exceptions. During observations the ET found equipment for small repairs available in one human-powered pump site. In addition, adding diesel to pump generators was not systematic in one site observed.

### *3.3.3.2. E02 – Evidence of Change*

Installation and transformation of water points has contributed to the availability of safe water to thousands of villagers across project municipalities. The ET found that trained committee members overseeing village water points understood their roles. In all the sites visited, the ET noted that community members are well informed of water point activities, which facilitates appropriation and adherence to fundamental principles such as the importance of water quality and payment for water, although local management of some water points needs to be strengthened. The intermunicipal project water management approach in Guidan Roudji and Guidan Sori is generally functioning, although there are still sites to integrate. The approach is appreciated by project participants and appears to reinforce the spirit of solidarity and commitment to maintaining established water points.

### *3.3.3.3. E03 – Efficiency*

Even in communities where water points have been established, the ET found that water is often insufficient to meet community needs. As a result, communities must prioritize obtaining water for drinking, and while they may want to partake in other project activities that require water such as gardening, they cannot. Despite this, Hamzari reports that the water points established have facilitated access to potable water to 54,543 people in project areas, almost reaching the original project target.

Where Hamzari established water points, the project trained committee members identified at the village level on all aspects of water point implementation and management. Villagers selected committee members during general assembly meetings, thus coinciding with the project approach.

Regulations regarding payment for water risk limiting access to water points by poor community members.; and there was no clear strategy for the most vulnerable to obtain safe drinking water. Project field agents tasked with monitoring community water points reported being overburdened by the number of villages covered, thus impacting on the frequency and quality of supervisory visits. The municipality technician was also overextended and, as a result, unable to provide oversight as needed.

### *3.3.3.4. E04 – Coordination, Collaboration*

Hamzari has established positive collaboration with municipal and regional technical services. However, the project has faced challenges working with departmental level technical services, felt they needed to be better involved in project WASH activities. In addition, the ET encountered some challenges in identifying the roles and responsibilities of the local NGOs collaborating on the project activities and had difficulty in setting up meetings with some of the NGOs working under the project consortium. The project may benefit by continuing its efforts to work more closely with regional authorities and municipality structures to ensure coordination and coherence in the standardization of water point management by various actors, including the way that water systems offered by individuals or charities are managed.

### *3.3.3.5. E05 - Sustainability*

Community members exhibited an understanding of water point management principles which has encouraged the appropriation of civic responsibility and community participation. The fact that most villagers are willing to pay for water is a critical step towards ownership and sustainability of water points. The project reports that in FY22, the sale of water generated 26,000 USD from the eight PEA systems established by the project, which can be used in the future to maintain the operation of the

municipal and sanitation systems. However, to guarantee continuity of the systems, the project must ensure that all water sites are managed in accordance with government regulations and standards. As indicated, some water points installed by charity organizations still offer free water, thus jeopardizing the system. The longevity of the system will require greater involvement of decentralized technical services at different levels to oversee that government guidelines are followed. Municipality capacity needs strengthening to ensure adequate oversight of water points.

### *3.3.3.6. E06 - Cross-Cutting Themes*

In all the sites visited, the community water management structures took gender and youth into account by ensuring that women and young people have specific roles and responsibilities on local committees. However, the most vulnerable, a central target population of the purpose, are excluded from utilizing the established water services due to the fact that they are required to pay.

## **3.4. Purpose 4 – Agriculture and Livelihoods**

The purpose focuses on increasing and diversifying sustainable livestock, crop production, and income-generating activities to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable populations. Activities are expected to improve market conditions and provide access to effective information systems that will help vulnerable populations make their activities resilient and profitable. The purpose includes three sub-components which are:

### **Sub-Purpose 4.1: Increased diversified crop and livestock production among poor women, youth, and other vulnerable groups.**

This sub-component aims to increase and diversify livestock and crop production using agricultural extension and sustainable agricultural and livestock practices and technologies. Technologies and practices promoted include improved seeds and sustainable soil management practices using compost, manure, Zai, half-moons, and farmer-managed natural regeneration (FMNR). Under this sub-component, alternative local integrated pest management practices are promoted, and weather predictors and extension service advice are made available to guide decisions regarding technologies and cropping management practices.

### **Sub-Purpose 4.2: Increased income from off and non-farm opportunities for poor women, youth, and other vulnerable household participants.**

Through this sub-component, Hamzari aims to increase the economic, environmental, climate and health resilience capacities of communities with a particular focus on chronically vulnerable households by improving basic skills and providing support for employment or business creation. This involves establishing conditions for mutual profitability between project participants and the private sector through promising value chains. The sub-purpose also focuses on improving profitability of crops and livestock through the promotion of storage technologies and support of market information systems that will provide information to improve sales at appropriate times.

### **Sub-Purpose 4.3: Enhanced sustainable linkages with market systems for women, youth, and other vulnerable groups participants.**

Sub-purpose 4.3 aims to promote the availability of inclusive and resilient market systems for communities, particularly for women, youth, and vulnerable households. The project focuses on building the capacity of producers, producer groups and cooperatives through Farmers' Field and Business

Schools (FFBS), with a focus on improving decision-making and negotiations related to market transactions and contracts. Hamzari also intends to support producers in marketing techniques including aggregation, sorting and classification of products, packaging, and transportation, as well as connecting producers with buyers. To alleviate economic barriers, particularly for young people and women, the project identifies financial services capable of providing funds. These activities are supported by an awareness-raising, dialogue and advocacy framework that brings together stakeholders to discuss challenges and needed improvements.

FFBS use a learning-by-doing approach, placing farmers at the heart of learning and decision-making about new farming techniques. Through this approach, Hamzari aims to build capacity so that people at the community level can promote and implement activities beyond the project period. Participants are organized into groups that are trained to have the capabilities to intervene in all activities implemented by the project. Under Hamzari, 1,078 FFBS facilitators were created and trained. The strength of the model is that it integrates multiple approaches and cross-cutting aspects – including sustainable agricultural practices, market engagement, gender and equity, food and nutrition security, group empowerment, and monitoring, and evaluation – and is designed to strengthen the knowledge and competency of female farmers<sup>10</sup>.

### 3.4.1. Activity: Restoration of Pastoral Land (Gayya)

Restoration of pastoral land is undertaken in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) and designed to combat degradation of pastoral lands invaded by *Sida cordifolia*, a weed species found throughout Niger. Hamzari and WFP agreed on using two separate but complementary approaches to restore pastoral lands, with Hamzari employing an approach called Gayya, a Hausa term signifying collective work, while WFP is leading “food for assets” interventions making half-moons, and planting and sowing herbaceous plants. Traditionally, Gayya involves non-paid collective work in return for assistance that benefits an individual or a group of people. Hamzari has helped to establish and train management committees. Hamzari and WFP provide support for materials necessary for the uprooting/cutting of *Sidda cordiafolia*, and a small financial contribution to motivate workers to boost community mobilization. Hamzari also supported all the sites in synergy with Winrock USAID funded by TerresEauVie (TEV) and PAM to draw up development and management plans for the restored pasture lands. These plans are validated and signed by the stakeholders, in particular the local communities, the basic land commissions (COFOB), and the communal land commissions (COFOCOM).

#### 3.4.1.1. EO1 – Quality of Program Service Delivery

Restoration areas are managed by a committee in charge of operations and monitoring of activities, with support provided by local authorities. Reclaimed sites often have a state deed designed to prevent conflict regarding land use. Stakeholders are comprised of community representatives bordering the grazing areas; the COFOB (basic land commission); technical services overseeing livestock, environment, and community development; and the communal land commission COFOCOM. Stakeholders must sign a local agreement that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved. A Hamzari field officer is responsible for ensuring proper use of project money contributed for workers to have on-site meals during work and materials needed to establish anti-erosion structures and to cut and uproot

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.care.org/our-work/food-and-nutrition/agriculture/ffbs/>

*Sida Cordifolia* and to strengthen community organization in the management of the Gayya. The project supports monitoring and evaluation of the Gayya approach and associated work.

#### 3.4.1.2. E02 – Evidence of Change

Gayya has encouraged social cohesion by bringing communities from different villages together to work on collective restoration of pastoral land. Management committee members interviewed understood their roles and the nature of the agreements signed.

#### 3.4.1.3. E03 – Efficiency

Under the project, 770 hectares in 11 sites invaded by *Sida cordifolia* have been recovered. Eleven social agreements have been developed and signed; agreements are designed to ensure the productive intervention of Hamzari, and other actors involved in land restoration. An additional 684 hectares in six new sites to support Gayya in 2022-2023 have been identified and action plans for land restoration development activities and management have been established.

#### 3.4.1.4. E04 – Coordination, Collaboration

Gayya's activities are implemented in collaboration with a multitude of actors including WFP and Terre Eau Vie (TEV), as well as decentralized technical services, land commissions and communities. The restoration of pastoral lands falls within the strategic framework for sustainable land management (CS-GDT), which includes any activity involved in the sustainable management of agro-sylvo-pastoral lands. The framework constitutes a platform to coordinate in a harmonious and coherent manner the allocation of resources for the financing and amplification of SLM (Sustainable Land Management) actions by government bodies and development partners. The strategy document spells out the roles of all the key actors expected to be involved in land restoration activities.

Hamzari has set up a strong partnership scheme which involves key actors needed for the activity to succeed, with the role of each actor clearly defined as follows:

- WFP: Complementary actions to restore degraded grazing inter-community sites;
- AREN: Interventions designed to support Hamzari in pastoral land recovery activities;
- TEV: Land tenure security of restored inter-community sites and their official registration;
- Decentralized technical services: Defining legal, political and institutional limitations but also the monitoring of activities and the long-term preservation of land restoration achievements;
- Municipalities: Mobilizing communities, awareness raising;
- Communities and their leaders: Participation in the work and management of the recovered sites.

#### 3.4.1.5. E05: Sustainability

Land restoration is important to the sustainability of pastoral land and livestock activities. The sustainability of livestock farming in Niger, which is often pastoral, depends, among other things, on the availability of fodder on pastoral lands, thus underlining the relevance of the restoration activities undertaken by Hamzari and its partners. Large areas that were exploited by breeders have degraded and/or been invaded by plants not edible to animals. Restored lands not only present a source of food for animals, but also serve to reduce conflict linked to the scarcity of resources. The restoration of land is also an important element related to cultural and social identity.

Land deeds and agreements delineating different stakeholders' roles have been signed, thus helping to ensure land preservation by clarifying responsibilities of key actors in the future. The establishment of a management committee is designed to guarantee continued oversight and monitoring of the use of the restored land. Involvement of technical services in the management of restored areas is an asset for the preservation of the system in the future.

#### *3.4.1.6. EO6: Cross-cutting themes*

The activity mobilizes all social strata, including women and youth, who were involved from the start through MMDs, youth organizations, and gender platforms. Restoration of pastoral lands is an important way to mitigate the effects of climate change, conserve resources, and enhance the resilience of communities, particularly rural ones. The activity is reported as one of the primary ways to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2030). In the context of Niger which is experiencing enormous climatic challenges, the socio-economic and environmental importance of land restoration activities is well established.

### **3.4.2. Activity: Market gardening**

Hamzari promotes market gardening to help improve the income of farmers' groups. The activity includes the establishment of collective market gardening sites and training of participants on vegetable production techniques. The project also provides management training to farmers' organizations.

#### *3.4.2.1. EO1 – Quality of Program Service Delivery*

Hamzari has assisted market gardening groups acquire approvals at the municipality level to establish structures that comply with OHADA standards (the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa), thus allowing them to form a cooperative of legally recognized producers. Hamzari also helped to establish and train management committees of market gardening cooperatives on key administrative and financial issues. Hamzari has created an essential framework for learning about market gardening techniques through capacity building, participation, and the monitoring of producers. In addition, the project provided training on seedling production techniques.

To facilitate producers' access to water and minimize water-related costs, Hamzari built boreholes and equipped groups with solar run motorized pumps which allow them to draw water from the boreholes and strengthen the productive capacities of participants involved in market gardening. The solar pumps have several advantages, including that they are easy to use and portable, thus allowing participants to remove the pump when it is not in use and prevent theft which is a common problem in the project areas. The project also assisted groups to acquire essential equipment to carry out market gardening activities such as connection pipes and elbows, hoses, watering cans, shovels, rakes, wheelbarrows, hoes, and batteries.

Hamzari faced delays in the implementation of the intervention due to a) challenges identifying sites and setting up loan agreements in an area not historically dedicated to market gardening, b), the need for the landowners first had to harvest and clear all produce before groups could initiate market gardening activities, and c) not all community members have time for market gardening as they are growing their own crops (niebe, sorghum, etc.).

The fact that sites are used on a temporary basis prevents project participants from planting certain species, mainly woody species, which constitutes a significant shortfall in the improvement of group



incomes. Informants reported that the remoteness of certain sites discouraged participation of some community members. Market gardening sites visited by the ET were not protected with fencing which can expose them to theft or damage caused by grazing animals.

**Figure 10: Market gardening site**



*Photo credit: Maman Sanoussi Lawali Maman*

#### **3.4.2.2. E02 – Evidence of Change**

The ET detected a dynamic energy among participants working on the market gardening sites. A gradual increase in the number of participants involved in market gardening over the past two years confirms the interest generated through the activity. Discussions with participants revealed an understanding and appropriation of market gardening techniques; the marketing of vegetable produce has become a reality in certain sites, representing an important contribution to household income and food security according to ET informants and project reports. Management committees responsible for the marketing of produce are actively involved in negotiating sales with traders. In one site visited, 70% of vegetables produced were marketed, compared to 30% used for consumption.

#### **3.4.2.3. E03 – Efficiency**

Hamzari has assisted 16 market gardening groups acquire approvals from municipality officials. The project has helped to establish 31 boreholes for market gardening in nine villages and installed 40 solar pumps for irrigation with a flow rate of 3,600 liters per hour. The project has supported 739 producers, including 432 women, working in 28 ha. This involves capacity strengthening on key elements needed for market gardening activities, as well as training of 505 participants, including 326 women, on group organization and participant responsibilities. In addition, 90 people have been trained on seedling production techniques.

In regard to management committees, Hamzari identified committees already in place and trained them on the management of market gardening sites. Specifically, 48 management committee members, including 22 women, of market gardening cooperatives have been trained on administrative and financial issues.

Additional work has started on 11 new market gardening sites where boreholes with solar pump systems have been established and irrigation systems are set up.

#### *3.4.2.4. E04 – Coordination, Collaboration*

The Hamzari agricultural sector works with the WASH sector (P3) to ensure that adequate water systems for market gardening are in place. The Regional Chamber of Agriculture (CRA) and the Regional Directorate of the Agriculture Department are the technical partners for the implementation of market gardening activities. The CRA facilitated the training of 16 groups on the legal statutes and procedural rules to become a legally recognized cooperative, registration of members, operating conditions, and how to submit an application for approval at the municipality level. Technical services participated in community mobilization, ongoing supervision of producers, and monitoring of activities on the sites. They also facilitated the supply of inputs such as seeds for potatoes, cabbage, carrots, and phytosanitary products.

#### *3.4.2.5. E05: Sustainability*

Capacity building provided on market gardening producer techniques and oversight is essential for the continuation of the activity. In addition to the collective gardening sites, each participant has a private plot, where the farmer is encouraged to replicate the techniques and technologies promoted by the project.

Theft of equipment from the sites was reported as a widespread phenomenon, and while the project has taken steps with the support of technical services to strengthen the security of the market gardening sites, the problem persists. In addition, the ET learned that community members have not been trained on how to repair the solar pumps when there are breakdowns. This represents a real threat to market gardening operations, because without functioning water pumps, producers are likely to return to their former practices. In one of the sites visited, all the equipment (water tank, solar panel etc.) set up by a project that preceded Hamzari had been abandoned or was dilapidated mainly because the users were technically and financially unable to repair the equipment, illuminating the risk. To address this problem, Hamzari plans to identify youth from vocational training centers who can be trained on solar pump maintenance.

Gardening sites are loaned by residents and based on a 10 to 15-year agreement which can be renewed. The loan period makes it impossible to include certain more lucrative plant species, particularly fruit trees, in market gardening. The extensive investments made in the gardening sites are retained by the landowner after the end of the agreement. Transfer back to the landowner is a common practice in Niger, which suspends the communal income generation established by the cooperatives after the loan period.

#### *3.4.2.6. E06: Cross-cutting themes*

Market gardening groups are made up of men and women, and in almost all structures, the ET found that women were involved in activities at all levels. What did not emerge clearly from the MTE interviews and Hamzari documentation is the participation of young people in decision-making roles.



### 3.4.3. Activity: Homestead gardens

Homestead gardens are small cultivation beds generally established in household compounds, although the ET identified a few exceptions where people set up gardens around a water point to facilitate water access. Vegetable production aims to improve the nutritional food intake of household members.

**Figure 11: Homestead Garden**



*Photo credit: Maman Sanoussi Lawali Maman*

#### 3.4.3.1. E01 – Quality of Program Service Delivery

Homestead gardening production, which started two years prior to the MTE, is mostly intended to improve household food consumption through the establishment of small plots and is less focused on improving livelihoods. Homestead gardening participants received training in gardening management techniques involving setting up nurseries to reduce water consumption and loss. The project supported participants with basic materials such as watering cans, shovels, and rakes, but not seeds. Hamzari staff encouraged villagers to obtain seedlings from local nurseries or to acquire seeds from technical services. While the project promoted lettuce, cabbage, tomato, potato, onion and pepper, participants are free to add other plant species preferred for household consumption. Homestead gardens observed by the ET varied in size according to the space available in households.

The ET found low uptake of the activity in some areas, with several participants encountered during the MTE reporting that they were waiting for the project to provide seeds to start activities. This highlights

a misunderstanding of community members about the approach, which did not involve distribution of seeds. Other community members conveyed a lack of understanding of the logic underlining the intervention. In villages where homestead gardening is implemented, Hamzari is encouraging participants to also engage in collective market gardening. Several participants encountered by the ET indicated that they were in contact with market gardeners, from whom they learned about certain vegetable species and how to diversify homestead gardening production. Many informants reported that establishing connections with the market gardeners gave participants the belief that they could successfully maintain home gardens.

#### *3.4.3.2. EO2 – Evidence of Change*

Participants were generally familiar with homestead gardening techniques promoted by the project. Many ET informants claimed that homestead gardens have led to improvements in household food diversity, and for some, the activity has become a business. For example, the ET found that some participants are producing vegetable crop seedlings in nurseries which they sell in their communities.

#### *3.4.3.3. EO3 – Efficiency*

The project introduced homestead gardening in 204 villages spanning the three project municipalities, including 74 villages in Chadakori, 61 villages in Guidan Roudji, and 69 villages in Guidan Sori. The project reports that 3561 homestead gardens have been established. While the project design included villages that have easy access to water, the ET found that some villages with limited water sources were also targeted, limiting uptake. Hamzari reports that 90 nursery managers were trained across the three municipalities to oversee gardening activities and to facilitate the production and selling of seedlings.

#### *3.4.3.4. EO4 – Coordination, Collaboration*

The main collaboration is with agricultural technical services which support Hamzari in the supply of seeds. The activity is carried out with the aim of improving household nutrition, which falls under project P2. However, the ET was unable to identify significant links between the homestead gardening activity on the achievement of P2 interventions involving culinary demonstrations and household preparation of enriched foods, although some CG participants in MTE villages had started small gardens. However, as homestead gardens continue to expand, the availability of the products they grow for demonstrations, in the markets, and overall impacts on dietary diversity may begin to become more evident.

#### *3.4.3.5. EO5: Sustainability*

Homestead gardens are designed to introduce people to gardening by setting up small plots which can provide a regular source of nutritious foods. To reduce reliance on outside support, the project encourages villagers to obtain key inputs, such as seedlings and seeds (seeds can be acquired from agricultural technical services often free of charge), needed to ensure sustainability of the activity beyond the project period. Hamzari also encourages local production of seedlings, which can generate local income generating possibilities. However, the ET found low uptake of the activity, particularly in villages where participants misunderstood the approach (where Hamzari creates business opportunities for seedling producers, and access to the seedlings for the buyers), and instead were instead waiting for the project to provide seeds. Additionally, some project field agents interviewed reported that it is their presence that motivates participants to set up gardens, underlining that villagers may not be interested

in continuing homestead gardening after the end of the project. Another major problem that threatens sustainability is water scarcity, particularly in villages where access to drinking water remains a challenge. Unfortunately, we were unable to assess the extent to which homestead gardening participants have engaged in collective market gardening, an activity which shows promise for long-term sustainability.

#### *3.4.3.6. EO6: Cross-cutting themes*

The objective of the activity is to improve the accessibility, availability, and use of rich and diversified foods, with the aim of ameliorating nutritional intake in households, particularly among WRA and children under 5 years of age. Like market gardening, homestead gardens concern both men and women. In some villages, we encountered young people, generally newlyweds, who embraced the activity. In addition, young girls or boys are often assigned to transport water and maintain the gardens.

### **3.4.4. Activity: Value chains / Field crops**

For value chains, Hamzari targeted cowpea, groundnuts, and small ruminants. "Value chain" groups have been set up with about thirty members per group. Hamzari also promoted the production of improved seeds to increase yields, which is also critical to prevent ongoing land degradation and the effects of climate change in the region.

#### *3.4.4.1. EO1 – Quality of Program Service Delivery*

For rain-fed agriculture, Hamzari supports producers through capacity building and practical training of agricultural techniques, the use of agricultural seeds, the production of biopesticides, organic manuring, composting, zai, and assisted natural regeneration. Hamzari also works with actors within the value chains including agro-dealers on the purchase of seeds, PICS bags, and fertilizers, as well as how to make profitable returns in the sale of their products. The project provides these structures with funds for the purchase of agricultural equipment.

Through a communal field approach, the project created a framework for collective learning and the promotion of good agricultural techniques and practices for production of cereal crops. The approach was used for all categories of groups (FFBS, value chain, youth) to learn by taking part in field demonstrations following best practices. The activity involves agro-food processing, whereby women use produce harvested from the collective fields, or in some cases, buy cereals in the market to process. Through the processing of agriculture products, participants are better able to sell the agricultural products for a profit.

According to evaluations carried out by Hamzari, there has been a significant increase in productivity of certain crops. Thanks to program efforts, farmers have been able to identify and adopt improved crop varieties. As a result, communities have increased their knowledge of seed selections, thereby avoiding the need to select new seeds each year. While the project reported the availability of seeds on time, some delays in seed availability were mentioned by some Hamzari participants the ET encountered in the field.

Study results revealed positive trends in the appropriation of techniques and the acceptability of the promised improved seeds. Constraints identified in the approach included insufficient training in seed production techniques, quality control, and site security.

The project initially disseminated market information through a smart phone platform, but due to challenges, later changed the strategy to involve the CRA in collecting market information and disseminating market prices. People involved in collecting market information have been trained with the support of the CRA and through the Agricultural and Livestock SIM (Système d'Information sur les Marchés) which works with the CRA.

#### *3.4.4.2. EO2 – Evidence of Change*

Food crop production and storage activities have contributed significantly to strengthening the food security of communities through the availability of cereals during lean seasons and food shortages, periods which often correspond with increases in food prices. Through cereal banks, the activity offers the local supply of cereals below market values. The activity has inspired some men to set up cereal banks with the same mode of operation as women's cereal banks. The creation of "men's" banks called *Bankin ci gaban gari* (Village Development Bank), which is also supported by Hamzari, serves as an opportunity to integrate men in efforts to decrease food insecurity and to improve income generation.

#### *3.4.4.3. EO3 – Efficiency*

The project has supported 50 FFBS groups, 114 value chain groups, and 15 youth groups. Groups have received 7,261 kg of cowpea, groundnut millet, and sorghum for a total of 39,512 kg of R2 seeds produced.

Hamzari works with 50 cereal banks including 14 in Guidan Roudji, 21 in Chadakori and 15 in Guidan Sori managed by 7,044 MMD women. The project targeted villages with existing functional cereal banks, with banks strengthened by the project. According to the beneficiaries, the cereal banks are supplied in part by the agricultural production of the members, which establishes a link between the cereal banks and crop production and value chains. However, the implementation of food crop/value chain activities encountered some difficulties, mainly of a cultural nature in an environment where certain activities are reserved exclusively for men or women, particularly at the beginning of the project. One of the problems relates to the reticence of women to participate in certain decision-making generally reserved for men, such as decisions related to access to land where food crops are produced, a critical element to ensure the involvement of women in agricultural activities, and in turn, the functioning of the cereal banks. Formative research carried out during the R&I period had highlighted that gendered divisions of responsibilities confine women to tasks that generate little or no income, thus creating big disparities in female engagement in business endeavors compared to men. Lack of experience in income generation constituted challenges for the implementation of the activity, which the project has tried to overcome through awareness-raising and training among community members, as well as the involvement of local authorities and key opinion leaders in promotion activities.

#### *3.4.4.4. EO4 – Coordination, Collaboration*

Hamzari collaborates with the CRA and the SIM Agricultural and Livestock in training and dissemination of market information. AREN advises community members and trains producers on opportune times to make market sales to maximize cash income. For sharing weather information, the project uses a national alert system through vulnerability monitoring observatories (OSVs) and local early warning and emergency response systems (SCAP/RU). At the municipal and community level, the system is considered operational. However, project staff reported that feedback from the departmental level has involved long delays.



#### 3.4.4.5. E05: Sustainability

Hamzari has established a package of technical materials including guidelines on improved practices for the conservation and regeneration of natural resources, as well as innovative agricultural techniques designed to improve soil fertility and yields. The project has focused on introducing practical approaches to improve the skills of FFBS members, value chain groups and facilitators. Through the uptake of environmentally friendly techniques such as the production of biopesticides, organic manure and composting, the Hamzari project promotes sustainable agricultural practices. These approaches reduce reliance on chemicals while preserving soil and ecosystem health and improving the quality of produce.

Regarding the value chains targeted by Hamzari, the choice of cowpeas, groundnuts and small ruminants--livelihood activities which are already practiced by the local population--has a positive impact on sustainability. Specifically, the project has made efforts to capitalize on and enhance local knowledge, leverage available resources, stimulate the local economy, foster community buy-in, and diversify beneficiary incomes. Moreover, these activities have significantly contributed to the development of cereal bank activities through the improvement of agricultural production conditions and increased income of women members of MMD, thus strengthening the critical link between P1 and P4 envisioned by Hamzari. Cereal banks show a high degree of participant ownership and are one of the most promising activities regarding sustainability. The most successful cereal banks are run by women, allowing women to access staple foods at key times when their family stores are depleted, and market prices are high. The fact that two sources, individual production and buying in markets during periods of low prices, feeds the stocks increases the likelihood of sustainability. To strengthen the functioning of structures, committees have been set up to manage the funds, which will also better ensure long-term continuity of operations.

To improve sustainability, the project intends to connect the groups to farmer houses (FH) *maison de paysans*, an integrated, multifunctional set of infrastructures and services implemented by the state at the municipal level. This approach is designed to improve provision of support services and to promote the use of proven innovative technologies adapted to local contexts so that producers and agricultural enterprises can increase production and productivity. Hamzari has initiated discussions with the High Commission for the initiative "Nigeriens feed Nigeriens" which is the parent institution of the Premier Minister, to transform the governance of FH to MMD groups. However, it is not clear whether a connection with FHs will be sustainable because it relies on support from technical services offices that are not highly functional.

It is important to note that OSVs and SCAP/RU are limited in their work and often dependent on the project, signaling that it will be difficult for them to continue to function without project support.

#### 3.4.4.6. E06: Cross-cutting themes

Cereal banks initially only targeted women participating in MMDs, although at the time of the MTE men's groups had also been established. Interestingly, the project found that the most successful cereal banks are managed by women. Given the role of women in food preparation, the strategy can facilitate access to cereals for household consumption as needed; the activity is also likely to influence women's agency.

Young girls often participate in MMD groups, and in some cases, have positions of responsibility. It should be noted, however, that the project approach does not necessarily aim to involve young girls in the MMD groups. Rather, the project has developed or revitalized separate structures composed of girls.

### 3.4.5. Activity: Livestock (Fattening)

Sheep fattening is a breeding activity that involves the distribution of sheep and their resale for a better price after fattening. The activity involves MMD groups, with the objective of improving the income of participants who are chosen by group members. There are two categories of beneficiaries, direct and indirect beneficiaries. Direct beneficiaries are those who first receive the animals. After sale of the animals, other animals are bought for the next woman in line who is called an indirect beneficiary. Each beneficiary must give a cash contribution which constitutes a guarantee for the care or compensation in case of loss of the animal. Two male sheep worth 90,000 FCFA are given to each female beneficiary (direct participant), and after fattening and sale, the indirect beneficiary (participant) receives two sheep.

**Figure 12: Animals being fattened.**



*Photo credit: Maman Sanoussi Lawali Maman*

#### 3.4.5.1. EO1 – Quality of Program Service Delivery

Inspired by a traditional practice referred to as Habbanayé, this activity was readily appropriated by female MMD members. Unfortunately, the activity started late. At the time of the MTE, the activity had only begun three weeks prior in some villages, and had not yet started at all in others. Participants had to meet MMD membership standards, which involves regular payment and likely excludes most poor women.

Minimizing the costs related to animal purchase, maintenance, health, and fattening are key elements needed to sustain the activity over time. However, the approach which involves training participants in on the purchase of livestock, and the mass purchase of local animals in markets, can serve to raise market speculation and motivate livestock sellers to raise prices, thus increasing the risk of diminished profits from sales, although some profits would still be gained. For example, in one of the project municipalities, 10 villages were summoned to buy the animals in the market on the same day. It should be noted that Hamzari took certain measures to reduce the risk of increased livestock prices such as targeting markets outside the intervention area or staggering the acquisition of sheep by participants over several weeks.

Other constraints involve the high cost of animal feed, financing sheep acquisition, and animal theft which is a prevailing problem in the area. For this reason, involvement of different types of community

members, including men, who in the Maradi context traditionally play an important role in supporting their wives in the maintenance of livestock, in the activity processes needs to be effective in villages. While over a fourth (30 of a total of 105) of trained participants have been men, at the time of the MTE, the approach varied from one area to another, with men less involved in some villages. Another risk of limited male involvement is that if women are required to cover all expenses (illness of the animal, theft, etc.), they may get discouraged from pursuing the activity.

#### *3.4.5.2. E02 – Evidence of Change*

The activity has generated much interest in this type of breeding approach. However, changes in incomes are not yet perceptible due to the short period of implementation. People trained to oversee the activity demonstrated an understanding of what is needed to fatten the sheep, particularly in technical and health terms, especially the trained livestock auxiliaries.

#### *3.4.5.3. E03 – Efficiency*

The activity has involved 30 MMD groups including 874 members spanning over 30 villages, with one group per village. A total of 436 women received 872 sheep in 2022. The choice of groups is guided by a performance evaluation based on group ability to mobilize funds, regularity of members to participate in meetings, member literacy, management capacity, and social cohesion within the group. Groups determined to be better performing are selected to participate; other groups are not excluded but told that they must wait their turn to participate. While the approach prevents the most vulnerable community members from participating until they are MMD members, within selected MMDs, it is the most vulnerable members who benefit first.

Although these are internal decisions based on group social and economic objectives and dynamics related to group solidarity which are not influenced by Hamzari, the ET considered the targeting of more vulnerable members to be paradoxical: on the one hand, targeting favors the most vulnerable within groups, which is an appropriate approach. On the other hand, fattening, which involves feeding animals and ongoing care, requires extensive resources that make it difficult for vulnerable members to bear the necessary costs, thus making it less likely to generate the expected income from the sale of the animal. Pressure to succeed likely constitutes an enormous burden for those women who do not have adequate means. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the approach due to the late start of implementation, although the fact that participation requires significant financial means excludes the poorest women, who in the overall project design, Hamzari aims to target.

It is important to add that Hamzari judges that women could make a profit subsequent to sales based on the first rotations. Hamzari's goal is to reach over 5,000 women through this activity; data provided in the WeFY23 quarterly reports will provide more definitive information.

It is important to note that the sheep fattening activity does not specifically target vulnerable women, who are targeted for sheep raising through the Habbanayé activity (see P1). The ET considers limiting the activity to male sheep as another constraint, because male sheep are less available.

#### *3.4.5.4. E04 – Coordination, Collaboration*

The project collaborates with local veterinary services in the implementation of the activity. AREN is the technical implementing partner, supporting all technical aspects of animal breeding. AREN is involved in



the supervision and implementation of animal health activities such as Habbanayé, fattening, and veterinary care.

#### *3.4.5.5. E05: Sustainability*

Hamzari has made a considerable effort to train and equip livestock auxiliaries who are expected to provide services to beneficiaries and communities in support of livestock activities. The activities of Habbanayé and fattening present a means to create demand and give a more profitable scope of work to the trained auxiliaries. The availability of livestock auxiliaries to support local veterinary services is an important project contribution which will make the activity more sustainable. The short-term nature of fattening, which under normal circumstances does not exceed four months, bodes well for continuity. While profitability is key to sustainability, at the time of the MTE it was too early to judge whether participants were generating profits.

#### *3.4.5.6. E06: Cross-cutting themes*

The fact that the activity is reserved exclusively for MMD members may limit the success. While women traditionally raise sheep, the activity expectations, which involve ensuring that profits from sales are provided to the next beneficiary within a short period, are high. In the traditional system, men participate in the maintenance of household animals owned by women, but the program has kept their involvement at a minimum, with men assisting with some physical tasks, animal feeding and, in some cases, written accounting. The ET feels that improved male involvement may allow men to feel more considered in a matter concerning the household and thus help to obtain better results. The participation of men could be a way of recognizing the role of men in raising domestic animals while at the same time allowing women to benefit from their mutual partnership. At the same time, the ET recognizes that the appropriate balance can vary from one household to another, and that through social analysis and action (SAA), Hamzari is encouraging household dialogue to determine the right mix of male and female involvement in the activity within households.

### **3.5. Other Overarching Areas**

#### **3.5.1. Staffing, Management**

Hamzari staff have extensive and pertinent work experience and good technical capacity to lead key project domains. Technical leads exhibited a firm understanding of their focal areas, as well as comprehension of other key project domains and activities. Hamzari maintains a detailed and functional organigram of project staff. The project conducts an annual performance-based evaluation, which offers monetary incentives.

More than 80% of project staff are men, with only one woman in a management or sector leadership role. There has been extensive staff turnover, including key management and sector lead positions, throughout the duration of the project. Field agents providing technical oversight of project activities often cover activities in more than 18 villages, making it difficult to closely monitor interventions in all project villages, which may impact the quality of activities and monitoring data. While the project has enlisted activity assistant-trainees to support the overextended field agents, assistants are not provided with means to travel, which constitutes a major constraint for them to reach project sites. The ET often noted that project coordinators were poorly informed of various activity details. Field agents were

generally strong in their areas of focus and expertise, but they often conveyed a lesser understanding and/or knowledge of activities from other sectors.

### 3.5.2. Monitoring and Evaluation, KML

The project has established an excellent system for data collection and management using a smartphone application, which is easy to use, flexible and effective for ongoing data entry in project villages. Each Hamzari participant has an individual code. The detailed data provide the potential for extensive data analysis to understand participation in project activities. Data is centralized and stored online, allowing easy access to Hamzari staff stationed in and outside of Niger.

The ET found that highly demanding workloads prevent the technical field agents, who generally exhibited strong technical knowledge, from providing adequate supervision over data collection and quality. Due to workloads, field agents rely on calling community members to obtain some of the monthly data. This can pose challenges due to poor telephone network, quality, and lead to delays in data entry and report submission. Additionally, it was observed that there were still challenges in defining and understanding of all the information collected by the field agents, even in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the project despite the training and refresher sessions provided by the M&E Unit.

MEAL staff carry out analysis of individual and household participation in activities using routine and evaluation data. However, the synergy of activities at the village level, and where there is not, has not been adequately examined. This same analysis might also be possible at the individual level. The ET feels that this type of analysis is a learning opportunity, and could provide valuable information for the project. Project information collected is focused on quantitative data; activities could benefit from periodic assessments designed to understand the quality of intervention implementation.

In terms of learning and communication, the ET observed a good collaboration with SCC, and Hamzari had produced excellent materials presenting case studies (success stories). However, these products are more focused on visibility of the project than on documentation of learning and best practices and lessons learned. One challenge is that the learning and communication responsibilities are incumbent on one staff member (the strategic learning lead), rather than also sharing the responsibility with sector leads, which would allow the strategic learning staff to support them in the creating of learning products.

### 3.5.3. Implementation, Targeting, Coverage

The institutional set-up of the project is complex involving a multitude of sectors targeting different types of participants in project villages. Implementation of many activities started late, in part due to the onset of COVID-19. Procurement and coordination challenges involving problematic government relations have also caused delays in activity implementation. Some activities had not been fully implemented at the time of the MTE and were far from meeting project targets. For example, several SBC activities had yet to start (or at least yet to be scaled up) at the time of the evaluation. A late start has likely affected the creation of synergy essential to the impact envisioned by the project design, which proposes that the full package of activities is necessary to create a package that has lasting impact. In addition, substantive discussions regarding sustainability did not start until Y5.

The project has set up activities in 325 villages representing 61% of the villages in the three project target municipalities. At the end of FY22, the project had reached a total of approximately 91,000 direct

participants (against their goal of 96,000), including 66% women, with different types of support and services aimed at increasing their food security and resilience to shocks.

There was no concrete analysis of the layering of activities across the 325 villages to date, and the ET could not find a clear logic to the actual layering of activities among the villages. However, it was clear that there are villages with many activities, and others with few activities. The targeting criteria at the village level for many activities seemed to be the pre-existence of certain groups (MMDs, cereal banks), and the targeting of more 'dynamic' and more engaged villages with additional activities (such as Habbanayé, certain WASH activities, etc.). This raises the concern that certain more performant villages may monopolize efforts even if they are not the most vulnerable/in need.

Marginalized and vulnerable women are a central project target. However, as described in several of the activity findings sections, the ET observed that the poorest and most vulnerable women and households are often not implicated in certain key activities, particularly when participation requires financial investment and payment.

#### 3.5.4. Theory of Change

The Hamzari Theory of Change (ToC) has remained largely unchanged, although some adjustments have been made based on activity implementation. The detailed ToC, which includes all activities and displays key linkages required to create synergy in project interventions and widespread impact, is not visible in Hamzari offices. It is not clear how the theory, which the ET found is not understood by some field agents, is used to direct ongoing activities. Additionally, the ET did not find clear evidence that the ToC was used when making choices about the layering of activities in specific communities (see above).

#### 3.5.5. Planning for Y5 and Extension Period

Generally, RFSA are granted extension periods to focus on refining existing activities and focus on sustainability and exit. However, in the case of Hamzari, considering the implementation of several activities has been delayed, several activities may merit continued implementation and support during the extension period to achieve a lasting impact (see recommendations). There are also certain activities that could be dropped during the extension- even if targets are not reached- so that efforts can be focused on priority activities. The selection of where to focus efforts is also important- determining if focus should be given to dynamic, well-performing villages that have several activities already in progress, where the most impact can be made, or to villages that are less performing and have few functional activities so that they might feel some degree of improvement before the end of the project.

The recommendations section of this report contains several references to activities felt to be priority for continued roll-out and/or support to improved quality during the extension period, and others that were potential candidates to decrease efforts on. Additionally, a review of the existing layering of specific activities should be conducted to identify any villages that may benefit from additional activities during Y5 and the extension to maximize the synergistic impact of all activities.

Other activities may also be important to support that are not identified in the recommendations section below, though Hamzari should be cautious with its reasoning, and avoid working with the goal of simply checking a box of completed-towards-target.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that emerged from the MTE findings are presented below. Recommendations for each purpose are provided below, and further divided by activity in some cases. Then recommendations specific for Y5 and the extension period are given, which also include many of the recommendations coming out of the findings from the 'other overarching areas' section. Finally, recommendations for future RFSAs as well as recommendations specific to BHA are provided.

### PURPOSE 1

1. Identify extremely vulnerable and marginalized women and provide support so that they could eventually integrate into MMD network structures in their villages.
2. Revisit targeting of the Habbanayé approach so that the most vulnerable and marginalized populations are better reached.
3. Include home visits as part of efforts to target extremely vulnerable women. It is also important to strengthen field supervision. This will require providing support at the municipality level and decentralized technical services so that government officials can travel as needed to project villages.
4. Strengthen the capacity of community mechanisms in the monitoring of cereal banks and warrantage. Involve local authorities in monitoring cereal banks.
5. Have field agents dedicated to overseeing resilience activities. If not, supervision of resilience activities can be merged with agricultural and livelihood activities (P4).
6. Encourage local authorities to take charge of early warning system meetings.
7. In Y5 and the extension period, support to P1 activities should include:
  - a. the establishment, capacity building and support of MMD groups.
  - b. The Habbanayé approach must be strengthened by ensuring that vulnerable women are beneficiaries when targeting.
  - c. It is important that the municipalities play an important role in monitoring the activities to be able to continue the support and that the activities initiated by the project are integrated into the annual action plans of the municipalities.
  - d. Other activities may be identified in the sustainability workshop.

### PURPOSE 2

8. Consider phasing out activities that do not seem to have a big impact on targeted behaviors such as husband schools, though with the caveat that their role in improving men's attitudes towards care group participation and women's access to health care should be taken into account before they are phased out.
9. Focus on improving the quality of Care Groups, as well as the work of peer educators.
  - a. Build ML, MA and peer educator capacity through refresher training to ensure activities are implemented as planned and a standard approach is used across project villages;
  - b. Improve the frequency and quality of supervisory visits of activities to ensure that activities follow norms and the approach envisioned by the project is followed;
  - c. Ensure CG leaders and peer educators have the necessary materials needed to carry out their work (e.g. utensils, mats, flip charts, notebooks, registers, armbands, etc.) so that activities can be implemented according to the original project design;

- d. Meet promises regarding motivation made to peer educators and standardize compensation or develop other approaches to ensure that peer educators are motivated to continue their work during the extension period and beyond.
10. Try to establish a more standardized approach, which is systematically followed across sub-groups. The present approach, which encourages autonomy within groups is challenging for the CG leaders to execute in a quality fashion given their experience and educational backgrounds. We maintain that following a more standardized approach would improve the quality of the interventions and the overall impact.
  11. Continue and increase meetings between higher and lower performing CGs designed to facilitate the exchange of information and improve the quality and standardization of CG activities. Such peer learning can serve to increase understanding, local capacity, and confidence to carry out activities, while at the same time boosting affinity across villages.
  12. Improve integration with agricultural activities so that Care Groups have greater access to ingredients for cooking demonstrations and home preparation of recipes promoted by the project.
    - a. Assess the extent to which CG participants or their family members engage in agricultural activities to create synergy as envisaged by the project;
    - b. While some communal gardening was observed, consider developing more collective gardens involving Care Groups in locations with access to water points;
    - c. Promote the production of crops with high nutritional value to improve the nutrient quality of meals;
    - d. Consider using the CG structure to convey complementary agriculture-oriented messages about how agricultural practices and production can affect nutritional intake. For example, information on how farming practices change nutrients available in local crops can be shared;
    - e. Encourage MAs, MLs and CG participants to create credit groups which can generate funds to pay for ingredients for cooking demonstrations and home preparation.
  13. Clarify the roles of MAs and MLs in the conduct of routine assessments of children's nutritional status using the MUAC armband and how the data should be used. Ensure that CG leaders involved in community-based screening have all the materials needed and are able to record data collected.
  14. Work on improving the quality of data collected by the CG leaders. Specific examples include encouraging MLs to review CG participants' health carnets routinely and enter data in their notebooks immediately after CG sessions. While field animators are over extended, it would be preferable if they could review and collect monthly data directly from CG notebooks rather than collect data through phone conversations with CG leaders or Peer Educators.
  15. Try to share community-based data collected by the project, such as screening for malnourished children or ANC participation, with government workers, which could be an important contribution to the public health system.
  16. Establish better collaboration with leadership and personnel working in integrated health centers. Possible ways to better integrate health personnel into Hamzari activities are to hold regular meetings to inform them about the status of ongoing activities and/or include them in supervision visits. The project is going to have to make decisions about per diem, which is offered by other projects and is likely a critical point interfering with project relations with some CSI workers. The project should consider investigating why relations with some CSI leaders, as was found during the MTE, are working well, while others have negative feelings about the project and project activities.

17. Work with other health agencies working in the Hamzari municipalities such as UNICEF, Kulawa, MSF to ensure they provide adequate support to health facilities where the project refers patients. For example, in facilities where malnourished children are referred, collaborate with other implementing partners to ensure that they provide adequate supplies of plumpy nut to health facilities. Notify partners (e.g. Kulawa) about facilities where traditional midwives rather than skilled assistants are assisting deliveries or where basic delivery equipment such as beds and mattresses are not available.
18. Conduct formative research to understand the challenges food processing groups face in obtaining, processing, packaging, and selling foods, and in managing their operations profitably. Identify what support is needed to make food processing more lucrative and sustainable.

### *Safe Spaces*

19. Although Safe Spaces are innovative and shown to be successful in educating participant adolescent girls about health issues and social factors critical to their future health and well-being, the ET identified missed opportunities in the activity focus and implementation. Specific suggestions are as follows:
  - a. Rather than focusing on preparing girls for marriage and motherhood, the project could concentrate on strengthening female agency and leadership skills and preparing girls for careers and IGAs;
  - b. From a young age, encourage girls (and boys) to communicate and work together, rather than to distrust and segregate;
  - c. Address misconceptions related to the perception that monetary compensation would be provided to girl participants and/or mentors, an approach used by a predecessor project. Ensure that any messages introduced by the predecessor project that do not coincide with the Hamzari approach are clarified during refresher training or formative supervision.
20. Consider modifying the approach so that when girls graduate, they can be replaced by girls from households outside their own immediate family. By changing the approach, the project can improve activity coverage, which is relatively limited.
21. Maintain documentation on what aspects of the approach were and were not successful. Specifically:
  - a. Verify which messages were better and less well received by participants and why;
  - b. Describe ways to better engage parents;
  - c. Continue to collect case studies of instances where negative practices such as early or forced marriage were prevented due to project activities.

### **PURPOSE 3**

22. Improve involvement of municipal actors and departmental level technical staff in project WASH activities to better ensure long-term sustainability.
23. Ensure implementation of a minimum WASH package in healthcare centers that aligns with government standards. This should include:
  - a. Quality water available at least 6 hours a day and 5 days a week.
  - b. Latrines for staff and facility users separated according to gender.
  - c. Adequate management of biomedical waste according to national standards.
  - d. A handwashing device with soap and water.

### *Sanitation*

- 24.** Ensure that project field agents are well informed about next steps in sanitation efforts and have clear direction. Community members also need to be up to date on the current sanitation approach.
- 25.** Accelerate the execution of sanitation marketing to make up for delays caused by changes in the approach. This should involve acceleration of the marketing of prototype latrines.
- 26.** Ensure that adequate masons are trained and available in project village clusters and identify adequate suppliers so that sufficient latrine materials are available once sanitation marketing takes hold and demand increases. These efforts are critical to sustainability.
- 27.** Establish a firm formula for the identification of vulnerable households eligible to receive subsidies. Clarify the project approach to vulnerable households waiting for a subsidy and improve access of subsidies to vulnerable community members who qualify.
- 28.** Investigate whether cultural and social factors affect latrine use of certain household members and tailor SBC approaches to target community members appropriately.

### *Hygiene*

- 29.** Continue promoting handwashing using the plastic teacups ubiquitous in Niger. More work needs to be devoted to instilling the importance of handwashing with soap or other disinfectants for it to become a widespread, sustainable practice.
- 30.** Consider identifying common landfill sites, particularly in larger villages, that can be used for better solid waste management.
- 31.** Consider transferring this activity to municipal village capitals, pending a clearer national strategy on village hygiene.

### *Water*

- 32.** Transform the remaining 19 boreholes (FPMH) into multi-village mini water supply systems (PEA) before the end of FY23. This is essential to meet project plans to ensure that community populations' water needs are better met.
- 33.** Develop a strategy for the most vulnerable, a central target population of this purpose, to obtain safe drinking water.
- 34.** Ensure that national directives such as the principles of SPE guidelines and the integrated water resource management (GIRE) approach are followed. Revitalize all water point management committees so that they understand and have the capacity to adhere to national regulations and standards in the support of municipal water management. Continue supporting the role of the SMEA agent.
- 35.** Work more closely with regional authorities and municipality structures to ensure coordination and coherence in the standardization of water point management by various actors, including the way that water systems offered by individuals or charities are managed. Promote greater involvement of decentralized technical services at the departmental level to provide oversight of government regulations and standards. Strengthen municipality capacity to ensure adequate oversight of water points.
- 36.** Examine the possibility of allowing private delegates capable of building water infrastructures to invest in infrastructures through established contracts. At present, delegates are only involved in managing systems created by the state and partners.
- 37.** Revise schedules of project field agents tasked with monitoring community water points to improve the frequency and quality of supervisory visits, particularly during critical times such as



when the project is transforming water points and ensuring that water point management follows government standards.

#### **P4: AGRICULTURE AND LIVELIHOOD**

##### *Market Gardening Activities*

- 38.** Explore the possibility of acquiring market gardening sites for groups.
- 39.** Invest in hydraulic infrastructure to ensure the sustainability of market gardening activities, especially in areas where the activity was first introduced by the project.
- 40.** Increase training on market garden solar hydraulic pump repair, so that communities can resolve pump breakdowns. Focus training efforts on those Hamzari has already planned to implement in the youth vocational training centers.
- 41.** Secure existing sites to prevent theft and infiltration by livestock.
- 42.** Explore ways to better exploit recent community interest in the sale of seedlings. Consider promoting marketing and selling of seedlings to community members.

##### *Homestead Gardening*

- 43.** Raise awareness regarding the objective and importance of homestead gardens, which aim to diversify household consumption. It is important to note that using homestead gardening as a source of income can be positive if the money generated is used to buy foods that diversify household diets.
- 44.** Increase linkages between homestead gardening activities and nutrition interventions carried out in P2. This can involve ensuring that homestead gardening beneficiaries participate in CGs, CG members participate in gardening, and CG leaders share information on the importance of gardening during CG sessions.
- 45.** Carry out a rapid assessment to examine the acceptability of the approach and identify constraints that hinder participation in certain areas.

##### *Field Crops / Value Chains*

- 46.** Consider providing additional training to FFBS and livestock auxiliaries to establish a sustainable framework for the continuation of activities after the project.
- 47.** Strengthen seed production training modules on improved seed selection, production standards and seed qualities, and provide the training over a sufficient time period to enable the communities to acquire enough knowledge to carry out the activity in a sustainable manner.
- 48.** Involve technical services in the training process so that strong linkages with the groups will be created and collaboration sustained after the end of the project.
- 49.** Continue work to identify actors capable of supporting improved seed production and support them so that they are able to meet local demand and avoid seed stockouts.
- 50.** Strengthen the capacities of beneficiaries on the marketing of agricultural products.

##### *Animal Fattening*

- 51.** Carry out an evaluation of the profitability of the activity.
- 52.** Engage husbands in all steps and sensitize them on the need to support their wives to make the activity more successful.
- 53.** Diversity purchasing of sheep in local markets to avoid speculation by local sellers that can lead to an increase in prices.

## *Market Access*

54. Improve dissemination of market information offered by technical services and their access by the population.
55. Encourage that Hamzari participants can access and make use of other market information opportunities provided by implementing partners, e.g. platforms developed by Prodaf, etc.

## **DURING YEAR 5 AND THE EXTENSION PERIOD**

56. Identify activities that have less impact, or limited coverage, and start phasing them out at the community level. Possible activities include:
  - a. Husband Schools
  - b. SBC activities, especially those approaches that have not yet started
  - c. CLTS
57. Identify activities that show potential to have a more lasting impact. Consider focusing on interventions that produce tangible results (e.g. crop/livestock production, water points, use of health services) and that are likely to be sustained after the implementation period. work. Some activities to consider include:
  - a. Market gardening
  - b. Habbanaye
  - c. Rehabilitation and management of water points.
  - d. Cereal banks
  - e. Care Groups
  - f. Food transformation units
58. Focus on combinations of activities that create synergy to improve food security and resilience.
59. Improve the quality of interventions and ensure that activities are implemented as planned. Specifically:
  - a. Strengthen the capacity of community members (facilitators, community relays, etc.) in charge of implementing activities in project villages
  - b. Ensure that project promises are met; this will also help to strengthen the credibility of the project and the sustainability of the activities.
60. Improve collaboration with government representatives across all sectors (governance, agriculture, WASH, health, etc.). Long-term sustainability of Hamzari activities is not possible without adequate government involvement. Focus on more effectively involving government technical services and strengthening the capacity of decentralized structures.
61. Improve collaboration with other implementation partners working in the project municipalities (e.g. Rise II Agencies, UNICEF, MSF) which is central to improving the quality of interventions and ensuring sustainability. For instance, Hamzari could benefit from stronger collaboration with Kulawa, which is involved in the training of health facility midwives, an identified area of concern in Hamzari municipalities. UNICEF should be informed that there are inadequate stocks of plumpy nut in CSIs in Hamzari intervention areas and discussions need to take place about ways that this can be addressed so that malnourished children are treated according to official guidelines.
62. Include a budget for the translation of reports from English to French so that project staff and collaborating partners, including those in the government sector, can access project reports and summaries.
63. Make the project theory of change visible so that project staff are more likely to be aware of and follow it in their daily work.

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RFSAs**

- 64.** Capitalize on the R & I period by investing in quality research that will inform contextually appropriate and feasible activities and effective combinations of interventions.
- 65.** Develop sustainability plans from the project outset, making ongoing adjustments as needed during the implementation period.
- 66.** Recognize that government involvement is critical to long term sustainability.
  - a.** From the outset, involve government technical services in training, supervision and monitoring of activities;
  - b.** Ensure project data is shared with government technical services;
  - c.** Set up oversight bodies, such as steering committees and task forces, at the regional level which involve government representatives at different administrative levels;
  - d.** Ensure that oversight bodies participate in field visits which allow them to understand RFSa activities.
- 67.** During the R & I phase, start implementation of activities that are:
  - a.** known to produce results;
  - b.** considered as high priorities by targeted populations;
  - c.** known to take longer periods of time to execute and make an impact (e.g., WASH, agriculture, literacy);
  - d.** foundational for the implementation of other activities (e.g., water access, literacy, governance).
- 68.** Be strategic about the number of activities implemented and focus on the quality rather than quantity of interventions.
  - a.** Consider community limitations to participate in too many activities at one time;
  - b.** Focus on interventions that are high priorities for communities and produce tangible results (e.g. crop/livestock production, water points, etc.) and are likely to be sustained after the implementation period;
  - c.** Concentrate on combinations of activities that produce synergy to create change.
- 69.** Acknowledge that SBC Interventions that are designed to produce broad based social and cultural change are unlikely to take hold over a 4-5 year timeframe. Recognize that increased knowledge does not necessarily translate into behavioral change. Consider creating more innovative SBC approaches not strictly based on improving knowledge. Consider focusing SBC on a limited number of behaviors and focus on normative and other barriers with more modern strategic SBC approaches (nudging, etc.).
- 70.** During implementation, consider the importance of sequencing and layering of interventions. For instance, the success of some activities is dependent on other interventions (e.g., establishment of water points for improved agricultural systems, establishment of local governing structures to provide oversight of activities, etc.)

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR BHA/USAID**

- 71.** Discourage the perception that projects that include more activities are more likely to be funded.
- 72.** Through mechanisms such as SCC, work with other USAID sectors and donors to continue to improve collaboration across USAID funded RISE II partners, while also working to reduce perceptions of competition for potential future funding. Try to ensure that RISE II partners and RFSAs follow the same funding cycle.
- 73.** Ensure that lessons learned in Niger and in other country settings are adequately shared across RFSAs (e.g., mass deaths following distribution of small ruminants, best practices setting up

village development committees, challenges setting up WASH infrastructure, mills/moulin breaking down, etc.)