

Standard Project Report 2015

Reporting Period: 1 January - 31 December 2015

NIGER

Provision of Humanitarian Air Services in Niger

Project Number	200792
Project Category	Single Country Special Operation

Project Approval Date	05 Jan 2015
Planned Start Date	01 Jan 2015
Actual Start Date	01 Jan 2015
Project End Date	31 Dec 2016
Financial Closure Date	n.a.

Approved budget as 31 December 2015 in USD	
Capacity Dev.t and Augmentation	13,773,595
Direct Support Costs	1,499,375
Indirect Support Costs	1,069,108
Total Approved Budget	16,342,078

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COUNTRY BACKGROUND

Niger, a landlocked, low-income and food-deficit country, ranks last of 188 countries in the 2015 Human Development Index. The population of 19.1 million is predominantly rural; nominal per capita gross domestic product stands at USD 427, and 50.3 percent live on less than USD 1.90 per day. The population growth rate is 4 percent, with 50.4 percent under 15 years. Lack of infrastructure, limited coverage of basic social services, lack of safe water and sanitation, restricted production capacity, limited access to markets, gender disparities and the urban/ rural gap hinder development. Farming supports 80 percent of the population, but crop production is limited by poor rainfall, drought, crop diseases and land degradation.

School enrolment has risen since 2008, however, only 49.6 percent of children finish primary school. Three quarters of the population - and 85 percent of women - cannot read. It is estimated that 2.5 million people in Niger are in a state of chronic food insecurity.

Millions more fall into a state of transitory food insecurity during seasonal periods of constrained access to food, reflecting the limited resilience of poor households. There have been 10 food crises since 1967, four of them in the last 15 years. Prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM) among children aged 6-59 months is consistently above the World Health Organization (WHO) "serious" threshold of 10 percent. According to the June 2014 national nutritional survey, Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART), it was found that GAM rates among children under 5 had increased from 13.3 in 2013 to 14.8 percent in 2014. This was above the "serious" threshold of 10 percent, and equivalent to levels during the 2012 crisis year. Since 2007, the proportion of chronically malnourished children aged 6-59 months has remained above the 40 percent "critical" threshold.

Food insecurity and malnutrition remains one of the major development challenges in Niger and great efforts were implemented to measure the progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). All the objectives were not achieved by 2015, although improvements were noted in school enrolments, infant mortality rates, HIV/AIDs rates and access to improved water sources. Challenges within the reduction of poverty, gender disparities within schools and maternal health and mortality goals, continue. In 2014, Niger was recognized and received an award by FAO for having met the MDG 1 target of reducing hunger within the country. An alignment to the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda was carried out in 2015, showing WFP's contribution to the SDG 2 "Zero Hunger".

SUMMARY OF WFP ASSISTANCE

WFP supported the government in implementing a multi-sectorial, integrated community-based approach to building resilience, aiming to reduce the impact of seasonal stresses and prevent a peak in acute malnutrition and mortality via its Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO). Concerning the WFP programme, on the human resilience pillar, WFP offers an integrated response combining nutrition prevention and treatment activities, school feeding and associated programmes (such as school vegetable gardens and local milling and processing initiatives), local purchase to small producers and food assistance for asset (through food and cash modalities). The planning and prioritization relies on a participatory process and a three-pronged approach (national, subnational and community levels) amongst others relying on the seasonal Livelihood Programming (SLP) and Community Based Participatory Planning (CBPP). Seasonality is at the heart of the strategy, with different packages adapted to the season (unconditional assistance, combined with a nutritional component and awareness raising sessions on essential family practices, Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) screening and referral protocols during the lean season) versus a focus on asset creation in the pre-and post-harvest period.

WFP amongst other actors focus on strengthening the resilience system through planning, information management, vulnerability analysis and alarm systems and coordination. Among key capacity building efforts at the central level, the support to the government's "Dispositif national de prevention et de gestion des catastrophes et des crises alimentaires" (DNPGCCA), guides all humanitarian interventions in the country as well as supporting the development of the national capacity for local purchase of small producers. At the subnational and community level, the substantial support provided by WFP on participatory analysis and planning need to be continuously highlighted.

The Regional Emergency Operation (EMOP 200777) provided assistance to refugees and displaced populations (returnees and IDPs) as well as host communities affected by the violence in northern Nigeria. WFP provided Targeted Food Assistance (TFA) and Blanket Supplementary Feeding (BSF) to children 6-59 months and pregnant and lactating women (PLW).

The Regional EMOP 200438 supported Malian refugees and returnees in camps and hosting sites in areas of Niger which were already chronically food insecure. WFP provided Targeted Food Assistance (TFA), through food and voucher modalities and Blanket Supplementary Feeding (BSF) to children 6-23 months.

The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) special operation provided safe, efficient, and effective air transport services to UN agencies, NGOs and donors. This enabled the implementation and oversight of humanitarian activities in areas affected by insecurity and poor road infrastructure.

WFP implemented its programme under the government's leadership. The operation is in line with the government's Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES 2012-2015) and embraces the government's policies and priorities for education, nutrition and gender. WFP and other UN agencies strived to support the "Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens" (3N) Initiative, which is a national multi-sectorial coordination platform to promote long-term food and nutrition security. It is aligned with the Global Alliance for Resilience.

Special attention is put on strengthening UN Coordination beyond the alignment within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for 2014-2018 and the United Nations Strategic Response Plan. WFP played an important role setting up joint projects with Rome Based Agencies (RBA), UN Women, UNICEF, and the implementation of the United Nations initiatives including Nourishing Bodies, Nourishing Minds, the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) movement and the Renewed Efforts against Child Hunger and Under-nutrition (REACH).

Beneficiaries	Male	Female	Total
Number of children below 5 years of age	475,237	474,617	949,854
Number of children 5 to 18 years of age	253,579	195,932	449,511
Number of adults	260,343	252,310	512,653
Total number of beneficiaries in 2015	989,159	922,859	1,912,018
Total number of beneficiaries in 2014	923,094	855,669	1,778,763
Total number of beneficiaries in 2013	1,215,689	1,634,747	2,850,436

Distribution (mt)						
Project Type	Cereals	Oil	Pulses	Mix	Other	Total
Single Country PRRO	26,042	2,258	5,148	13,840	129	47,417
Regional EMOP	16,379	872	3,723	2,435	69	23,478
Distribution (mt)						
Project Type	Cereals	Oil	Pulses	Mix	Other	Total
Total food distributed in 2015	42,421	3,130	8,871	16,275	197	70,895
Total food distributed in 2014	37,512	2,792	7,795	15,383	187	63,669
Total food distributed in 2013	48,931	2,916	8,144	18,614	206	78,811

Operational SPR

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND RELEVANCE

In line with WFP's Strategic Results Framework, the objectives of the Special Operation 200792 in 2015 were to (i) provide access to affected populations through the provision of a safe, efficient and effective inter-agency air transport service to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, donor organizations and diplomatic missions in Niger, (ii) ensure the transport of light cargo, such as medical supplies, information and communication technology (ICT) equipment and (iii) carry out safe and timely medical and security evacuations upon request.

This Special Operation responded to the needs of the humanitarian community to implement life-saving activities throughout Niger, thereby contributing to WFP Strategic Objective 1 (Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies).

Vast distances as well as poor and undeveloped road infrastructure in Niger made overland travel to beneficiary populations impracticable. However, there were no safe and reliable air service providers in the country which met international standards to serve as an alternative. Furthermore, insecurity remained of grave concern in the country and the entire sub-region due to the crises in Libya, Mali and Nigeria. The UN Department of Safety and Security banned all road travel by UN agencies in the north and south-eastern regions of Niger following several mine incidents and ambushes. Road travel was extremely dangerous, especially in the northern part of the country and, when cleared, vehicle convoys were mandatory for humanitarian travels in certain areas. Taken together, these factors significantly increased the demand for a safe and reliable air service throughout the country. The entire humanitarian community relied on UNHAS to access people in need.

UNHAS witnessed an increase in the number of passengers and organizations requesting air services in Niger in 2015. Since the establishment of the state of emergency in the Diffa region by the government (February 2015), an increase in frequent air travel to the region by humanitarian organizations was noted. The Diffa region is the second most travelled destination after Zinder. The overall demand for UNHAS flights is expected to remain high as humanitarian partners are increasing their activities in several parts of the country. Rehabilitation work on the Maradi airstrip has now been completed and air traffic is set to resume in 2016.

RESULTS

'Story Worth Telling'

UNHAS operations played a key role in facilitating access to beneficiaries in remote and hard-to-reach locations. UNHAS remained flexible to respond to the humanitarian communities' needs and changing realities on the ground.

"I would like to thank UNHAS for its performances in Niger. Always efficient and ready to serve the humanitarian workers. UNHAS makes the task of NGOs in Niger much easier," said Sue Rosenfeld, Country Representative of the Nomad Foundation NGO, and a regular user of the UNHAS service.

"I wonder myself, how we were able to travel around the country before the arrival of your humanitarian flights" she added. UNHAS played a key part in relief and development efforts to strengthen community resilience in Niger.

Outputs

In 2015, the operational fleet of this project consisted of two 19-seater (Beechcraft 1900) operating out of Niamey with the ability to respond to air travel needs to the field. UNHAS remained the only key player in enabling more than 127 organizations to reach at least six destinations in Niger on a regular basis.

UNHAS operated regular flights from its main hub in Niamey to Agadez, Diffa, Tahoua and Zinder. Following special requests from the humanitarian community and government counterparts, one ad hoc flight and six special flights were conducted. The ad hoc flight was conducted for a joint mission composed of UNICEF, IOM and the Government of Niger to Dirkou on the 26th of November 2015. A partial cost recovery modality was applied to this ad hoc flight.

In addition, six special flights were conducted on a full cost-recovery basis. These flights were requested by government counterparts, donor representatives and the Humanitarian Coordinator for monitoring missions, transport of medical supplies and field visits to the Diffa region to evaluate the growing displacement of populations affected by the violence in northern Nigeria as well as other project sites within the country.

In January 2015, UNHAS Niger served 127 user organizations from NGOs, United Nations agencies and donor/diplomatic representatives. UNHAS transported over 1,000 passengers a month to the various destinations in Niger, and 2.8 mt of light humanitarian cargo on a monthly basis, falling short of projected cargo numbers. This is attributed to less demand for the Tahoua and Agadez flight routes. The transport of light cargo transport decreased compared to the previous years. In 2016, this indicator will be reduced down to 3.8 mt instead of 5 mt. Furthermore, UNHAS responded to 100 percent of the requests for evacuations and conducted a total of seven medical evacuations.

The UNHAS User Group Committee (UGC) met four times during the year as required by Niger's standard aviation operating procedures. The UGC defined the requirements and priorities in terms of air transport needs and also monitored the quality of services rendered. In addition, a Steering Committee constitution was approved during the second UGC meeting held on the 16th of June 2015. The Humanitarian Coordinator signed and implemented the Steering Committee in December 2015. The UGC meeting held December revised the flight schedule to reinsert flight routes to the Maradi airport for 2016, as it is now operational.

The utilization of the contracted minimum guaranteed hours exceeded the target, as the UGC requested the frequency of flights to be increased to meet their operational needs. Since the establishment of the state of emergency in Diffa and the deployment of additional organizations in the region, the demand for flight transportation has greatly increased. Some 1,020 passengers were transported within a period of one and half months to Diffa alone.

Output	Unit	Planned	Actual	% Actual vs. Planned
SO 1: Special Operations (Airops)				
Average cost per passenger transported (USD)	US\$	850	987	116.1%
Average no. of mt (food or NFI) transported monthly	mt	5	3	60.0%
Frequency of the users' groups meetings	no.	4	4	100.0%
Number of agencies and organizations using humanitarian air services	no.	110	127	115.5%
Percentage of requests for medical and security evacuations fulfilled	%	100	100	100.0%
Percentage utilization of the contracted hours of aircraft	%	120	153	127.5%

Outcomes

In 2015, Special Operation 200792 achieved its aim to ensure prompt access to beneficiaries in remote and inaccessible areas. UNHAS Niger was responsive to user requests and augmented the frequency of flights in order to meet the increased demand by the humanitarian community. Furthermore, the fleet composition maintained service reliability, enabled more flexibility and reduced operational costs. Overall, UNHAS provided safe, efficient, reliable and cost-effective passenger and cargo air services for the humanitarian community, with access to six destinations (Niamey, Tahoua, Agadez, Dirkou, Diffa and Zinder) and additional ones upon request.

One customer satisfaction survey was carried out between September and October 2015 measuring user satisfaction on UNHAS flights. Recommendations included increased seat capacity and the number of flight days; briefing on safety instructions to be made available in French; improving communication on flight changes and delays as well as baggage information. The UGC acknowledged that UNHAS provided a good service in 2015.

Sustainability, Capacity Development and Handover

Insecurity and poor infrastructure make land transportation impracticable for prompt implementation of humanitarian projects. Niger Airlines, a commercial airline based in Niamey commenced operations in the country in mid-2014. To date the airline has not undergone any recognized evaluations nor has it been cleared for use by humanitarian staff. Consequently, there is a continued need for a viable alternative to enable humanitarian organizations travel within the country to access project implementation sites.

WFP regularly conducts aviation trainings and assessment missions. In 2015, the following trainings and missions were carried out to develop and enhance capacity: Finance (Examen du cadre de financement du PAM); LMS course (January 2015); Introduction to WINGS (February 2015); IATA Dangerous Goods Regulations - Online course (September 2015); Fields Monitoring and Evaluation missions conducted by the Head of UNHAS Niger (February, November and December 2015); IATA Airline Customer Service Training (November 2015) and Senior Leadership Training - Refreshment course (December 2015).

Furthermore, WFP regularly evaluated operational and technical proficiencies of air operators, in order to have a positive impact on improved local carrier performance.

MANAGEMENT

Partnerships

The UGC, established under the co-leadership of the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator and WFP, played a strong role in the overall direction and management of UNHAS Niger in 2015. The terms of Reference for the UGC are limited to administrative matters and include decisions on destinations to be served and matters relating to the quality of the service. In addition to the UGC, the Steering Committee implemented in late December 2015 will focus on strategic and urgent political matters involving donors and stakeholders in 2016.

Similar to previous years, members included the representatives of United Nations agencies (OCHA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, UNFPA and WFP); donor representatives, including the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), Spain and the Swiss Cooperation; NGOs represented by Concern International, Medecins sans Frontiers (MSF-CH) and Save the Children (UK).

Lessons Learned

Since the implementation of the Performance Management Tool for UNHAS, all aspects of the service can now be measured. The tool can evaluate all the aspects of the effectiveness of UNHAS air service in meeting the needs of humanitarian organizations. UNHAS Niger was able to measure the cost efficiency of its operation and calculate the cost of carrying one passenger per kilometer per sector.

The overall operation was measured through this tool including the reliability of the fleet for in-country operations. In 2015, UNHAS Niger is deemed one of the best operations in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. It provided an effective service of 92.3 percent on average with an operational cost per passenger per kilometer of 0.81 USD.