



Quarterly Report January 1, 2014 – March 31, 2014

PACT II “Projet d’Assistance Ciblée aux Communautés de Tchirozerine”

Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)



Exposition des AGR à Toudou (Agadez) Réunion d’épargne VSLA d’Azamalan (Agadez)



Visite d’un jardin de pomme de terre à Goofat (Tchirozérine)

COUNTRY CONTACT	HEADQUARTERS CONTACT	PROJECT SUMMARY
Thierno Samba Diallo Niger Country Director Quartier Issa-Beri, Rue IB28 BP 10632, Niamey, Niger Telephone: +227-2073-9633 Email: tdiallo@ne.mercycorps.org	John Stephens Senior Program Officer Address: 45 SW Ankeny Street, Portland, OR 97204, USA Telephone: +1 503 896 5028 Email: jstephens@mercy Corps.org	Award No: AID-OFDA-G-13-00082 Start Date: June 1, 2013 End Date: May 31, 2014 Report Date: March 31, 2014 Total Award: US \$1,063,796

1. Executive Summary

Designed as a follow-on to the USAID/OFDA funded *Projet d'Assistance Ciblée aux Communautés de Tchirozerine* (PACT) program (2012-2013), PACT II continues to support the recovery of vulnerable households from successive years of crises in the Department of Tchirozerine in the Agadez region. The goal of the program is to consolidate initial recovery gains made in the food security and livelihoods situation of disaster-affected communities in the Tchirozerine Department, to prevent them from sliding back into extreme vulnerability.

During the reporting period, the project achieved the following key results:

- Support to farmers following their training on improved agricultural techniques;
- Curriculum design and preparation of the upcoming training on conservation techniques of agricultural products;
- Support to 524 micro-entrepreneurs who received the first tranche of funding for their businesses;
- Follow up assessment of 524 micro-entrepreneurs, and selection of 514 who were qualified to receive a second tranche;
- Training of 514 qualified micro-entrepreneurs on organizational and business management
- Distribution of a second tranche of funding to 514 micro-entrepreneurs;
- Assessment of 70 village savings and loan associations and development of sustainability plans for these 70 VSLA;
- Training and support to 96 VSLA;
- Training and support for 18 village agents, who serve as local trainers on VSLA methodology for new VSLA groups;
- Formation and training of 20 new VLSAs by the 18 village agents;
- Distribution of complimentary start-up kit materials for 46 VSLA.

2. Program Overview

The population of the Tchirozerine Department has suffered from the devastating effects of recurring food crises, natural disasters and regional instability in recent years. Continued support of vulnerable households in this region to meet their recovery needs in the next 12 months will prevent them from backsliding into more vulnerable conditions, and enable them to weather future shocks. Despite the relatively improved rainfall in 2012 in the country compared to previous years, the ability of communities to meet their household needs has been weakened by repeated crises and they remain unable to satisfy their needs and recover on their own. The *Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Catastrophes et Crises Alimentaires* (DNPGCCA)¹ preliminary findings reveal that an estimated 66 villages in the Tchirozerine Department will be unable to meet their needs and classified as vulnerable in 2014. To enable the population of Tchirozerine to recover from these repeated shocks, it proves crucial to consolidate gains from the initial PACT program, targeting some of the existing beneficiaries and extending to new beneficiaries in new villages in the Tchirozerine Department. Building on the achievements of the PACT program (2012-2013), PACT II is helping target vulnerable communities improve their food security, recover and maintain their household and productive assets, strengthen their economic prospects and promote a sustainable recovery, while reducing their vulnerability to future shocks; using a community-led, market driven approach.

PACT II includes a package of interventions designed to consolidate and extend initial recovery gains made in the food security and livelihoods situation of disaster-affected communities in Tchirozerine in order to prevent them from sliding back into extreme vulnerability, by achieving two main objectives: 1) enhancing crop production of horticultural producers, and 2) restoring livelihood activities of producers and micro-entrepreneurs.

¹ National body for the prevention and management of disasters and food crises

3. Security

The security situation was generally calm during the reporting period, but a few security incidents were recorded by partners working in the region. Thus, Mercy Corps took into account recommendations made during humanitarian coordination meetings, notably:

- Regular information sharing with the UN security focal point in Agadez (via OCHA) of any and all security incidents observed in Agadez or in the surrounding region;
- Sharing with the UN security focal point contact information for our security focal points and other relevant contacts;
- Establishment of a framework of security information sharing between all NGOs and UN agencies operating in the area.

4. Performance Summary

Award-Level Beneficiaries

Cumulative Period Targeted		Reporting Period Reached		Cumulative Period Reached	
Total	IDP	Total	IDP	Total	IDP
18,900 individuals (2,700 households)	0	21,630 individuals (3,090 households)	0	21,630 individuals (3,090 households)	0

Progress to Date

SECTOR #1 Agriculture and Food Security <i>Subsector: Improving Agricultural Production/Food Security</i>	<i>Objective: Producers enhance crop production</i>				
Geographic Area (s)	The Tchirozerine Department of the Agadez Region of the Republic of Niger				
Beneficiaries Targeted	18,900 individuals (2,700 households); 0 IDPs				
Beneficiaries Reached (Reporting Period)	1,519 individuals (217 households); 0 IDPs				
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)	18,949 individuals (2,707 households); 0 IDPs				
Subsector: Improving Agricultural Production/Food Security					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural input activities, by sex.	Male	Yes	675	10	126
	Female	Yes	2,025	207	2,581
Projected increase in the number of months of food self-sufficiency due to seed system activities/ agricultural input for beneficiary households.	N/A	Yes	50%	36%	36%*

*This indicator will be measured again in the final evaluation

During the reporting period, the PACT II program continued to support agro-pastoralist households in the Tchirozerine department through ongoing technical support, encouraging farmers to implement the improved agricultural practices that will contribute to increased production and thus will strengthen food security. Specifically, the program team conducted ongoing follow up visits to beneficiary farmers in the six villages of the Tabelot and Tchirozérine commune, to provide encouragement and additional technical advice, according to the needs of farmers in each of the target communities. During these visits, PACT II field agents informally discussed with participating farmers the techniques promoted during the trainings carried out last quarter. They found that most participant farmers were already implementing the improved techniques in their fields, and that they were promoting these techniques within their communities. For example, many of the techniques covered by the training were observed in individual or family gardens, including composting, use of mineral soil additives, and natural pest control methods, tobacco or pepper juice.

These visits were also an opportunity for the program team to monitor the relevance and the effectiveness of the training program as well as the impact of the voucher fairs for seeds and agricultural tools. The program staff visited around 150 farmers from 37 villages (out of 65 total beneficiary villages) in the four target communes: nine villages from Dabaga commune, 10 in Tabelot commune, nine in Tchirozérine and nine in Agadez. In general, those that were trained in agricultural techniques expressed an appreciation for the training themes, however, they also cited lessons learned such as the need to reduce the number of days spent in training (due to the difficulty of leaving income-generating activities and family for longer periods) and increase the number of monitoring visits. The program will take this into account in the following months as well as future programming.

Also during the reporting period, a curriculum was developed for the training of trainers on techniques of conservation and transformation of agricultural products. The training will focus on the Tablot commune for two main reasons: 1) the post-distribution monitoring survey and monitoring revealed that Tablot experiences some of the highest losses in agricultural products, which perish because beneficiaries are not able to sell all of their products, and do not apply conservation techniques; 2) this is the only commune where beneficiaries expressed the need and willingness to participate in agricultural product conservation. The themes of the training will be decided in the next quarter in collaboration with local technical agents of the Ministry of Agriculture. This training of trainers is anticipated to target 45 farmers, representing 15 villages. These individuals were selected by their communities and validated by Mercy Corps for their leadership qualities and their ability to retain new information and replicate trainings to benefit others within their communities.

SECTOR #2 Economic Recovery and Market Systems <i>Subsector: Livelihoods Restoration, Microfinance</i>	<i>Objective: Producers and micro-entrepreneurs restore their livelihood activities.</i>
Geographic Area (s)	The Tchirozerine Department of the Agadez Region of the Republic of Niger
Beneficiaries Targeted	9,800 individuals (1,400 households) (0 IDPs)
Beneficiaries Reached (Reporting Period)	21,630 individuals (3,090 households) (0 IDPs)
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)	21,630 individuals (3,090 households) (0 IDPs)
Subsector: Livelihoods Restoration	

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people assisted through livelihood restoration activities, by sex	Male	Yes	150	16	18
	Female	Yes	350	498	506
Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	N/A	Yes	50%	98%	98%
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through livelihoods restoration activities	N/A	Yes	\$75,000	\$42,567	\$77,865

Subsector: Microfinance

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people, by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to USAID/OFDA support	Male	Yes	420	244	244
	Female	Yes	980	2,314	2,314
Percentage of financial service accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	N/A	Yes	70%	N/A	0*
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through microfinance activities	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	N/A

*This indicator will be measured at the end of the program

During the reporting period, the PACT II program helped households in the target area restore their livelihoods activities by offering continued support and training to VSLA groups and by assisting micro-entrepreneurs restart their small businesses through customized support and the distribution of a second tranche of funding to those who demonstrated preliminary success and sustainable business plans.

Sub-sector: Microfinance

During the reporting period, PACT II trained 18 community volunteers (15 men, 3 women) on VSLA methodology and continued to support the existing and new VSLA groups in the target area.



Training of 18 village agents in Agadez

The 7-day training of village agents was held in Agadez, and covered the following themes:

- Organizational management, leadership, and governance;
- Legal status and bylaws of an association;
- Savings, solidarity funds, shares;
- Loans;
- Conflict resolution within a group and negotiation;
- Follow up and evaluation;
- Sharing of capital.

Each village agent was given a kit including a cashbox with three locks, a calculator, a ledger, and a VSLA training manual. Following this training, the village agents formed a total of 20 new VSLAs totaling 414 members from all three target communes, Agadez, Dabaga and Tchirozérine. With the support of Mercy Corps and program partner ASUSU CIIGABA, agreements were made between the members of new VSLAs and the village agents, who would receive a nominal fee in exchange for their support to the VSLA (between 50 and 200 FCFA per member/meeting). The agents have already started their training programs with their VSLAs, and all have completed at least two themes – organizational management/leadership/governance, and legal status and bylaws.

Table 3 : Newly formed VSLAs

Commune	Nbre de VSLA	Nbre bénéficiaires
Agadez	1	22
Dabaga	2	42
Tchirozérine	17	350
Total:	20	414



Village agent working with a VSLA in Tchintabisguine (Tchirozérine)

Also during the reporting period, Mercy Corps and partner ASUSU CIIGABA continued to support the 96 existing VSLA groups that were formed with the support of the PACT I and PACT II programs. A sustainability plan for each group was developed and carried out with the support of ASUSU. The more

established groups were also invited to video screenings that reviewed the VSLA methodology in order to reinforce their previous learning.

To date, the PACT II program has supported 116 VSLAs, with a total of 2,558 members (244 men and 2,314 women). The total amount saved by these groups is \$34,048 overall. Other specific results include:

- 526 members have received a loan;
- Loans have totaled \$8,333;
- 10 groups have implemented income generating activities and earned a total of \$1,675 in profits;
- 6 members in emergency situations have been supported with a total of \$71; and,
- 95 members have raised money to establish their group’s legal status, totaling \$601 in fees.

Sub-sector: Livelihoods Restoration

Last quarter, 524 micro-entrepreneurs received a first tranche of funding to recover their livelihoods activities, and the program continued to support these actors to ensure the success of their businesses. Monitoring showed that the majority of the small businesses (514 out of 524) had spent the first tranche according to their business plan, and thus qualified for a second disbursement. For many micro-entrepreneurs, the cash transfer did not cover 100% of their initial needs, but they were able to use other resources to ensure that they were following their business plans. Most micro-entrepreneurs were able to show immediate profits from their activities, which included artisan crafts, tailoring, small commerce, cosmetic products, dying, food processing etc. However, in some cases micro-entrepreneurs faced challenges in the face of changing market dynamics related to acquiring primary materials or market saturation. For example, some villagers who did not benefit from the program, but observed the success of those micro-entrepreneurs that did, and then attempted to start similar businesses, causing market saturation. In other cases, micro-entrepreneurs adapted or changed their business due to personal preferences. In total, 32 micro-entrepreneurs changed or adapt their business, primarily to respond to the changing market environment and personal reasons.

After the evaluation of micro-entrepreneurs carried out in February, Mercy Corps found that 514 of the original 524 qualified for the second tranche of funding. These individuals demonstrated that they were practicing at least 3 key elements of the training, and they showed that their business was sustainable by demonstrating profits.

Ten of the initial cohort of 524 micro-entrepreneurs were not selected for a second tranche of funding. While one individual was deceased, the other nine did not qualify because of one of the following reasons: they did not succeed in generating revenue or making their business viable (four beneficiaries), found employment elsewhere (one), or they had left the program area (four). The four businesses that, even with Mercy Corps support, were unable to manage a viable business represent less than 1% of all micro-entrepreneurs, with the majority (over 98%) having succeeded in the first two to four months to create viable businesses.

In collaboration with the regional authorities for the protection of women and children, 207 micro-entrepreneurs from Agadez and Tchirozerine were reached through outreach activities and informal trainings on the use of basic accounting tools including cash box ledgers, etc. Each of these beneficiaries also received ledger notebooks to use in their businesses. This activity was initiated in partnership with local authorities in response to field monitoring visits that noted the need to further build the capacity of participating micro-entrepreneurs in financial management tools.

Table 1 :Micro-entreprises qualifying for the second tranche

Communes	Villages	# of beneficiaries			Observations
		Men	Women	Total	

Agadez	Toudou	0	209	209	2 businesses failed, 3 migrated and 1 deceased
	ToudounBilla	5	17	22	
	Azamalan	0	8	8	
	Alkinin	0	9	9	
Sub-total 1		5	243	248	
Dabaga	Beital	0	8	8	
	Inakansam	0	17	17	
	Inatambar	0	10	10	
	Indoudou	0	6	6	
	Tachagort	0	10	10	
Sub-total 2		0	51	51	
Tchirozerine	Kampala	4	14	18	2 businesses failed, 2 migrated
	Tchiroville	4	158	162	
	Tifyaghyagh	0	9	9	
	Toumga I	3	5	8	
	Toumga II	0	18	18	
Sub-total 3		11	204	215	
Total		16	498	514	

A follow-on training was also organized this quarter, and 19 sessions reached the 514 micro-entrepreneurs continuing their businesses. This training reviewed many of the themes of the initial training program, including management of inputs and stock, management tools, budgeting, and organizational management. Each session was facilitated by local government technical agents or agents of the local NGO TAGAZ with the support of Mercy Corps.

Table 2: Total Value of Second Tranche Distributed

Commune	Nbre de micros entreprises	Montant (USD)
Agadez	248	\$20,915
Dabaga	51	\$4,541
Tchirozerine	215	\$17,111
Total	514	\$42,567



Follow up trainings of Micro-entrepreneurs (Agadez)

5. Monitoring & Evaluation

During the reporting period, monitoring has focused on the impact of the program on agricultural production, the start-up of micro-enterprises and the sustainability of VSLAs.

Sector 1: Agriculture and Food Security

An assessment of a sample size of 67 farmers was carried out in nine villages in order to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of agricultural trainings and voucher distributions by observing the success of different crops, estimate the increase in production and impact on household consumption and income.

Estimated Production of Different Crops

Crops	Area planted (m²)	Average Production (kg)	Yields (t/ha)	Estimated Yields for the area – FCMN-Niya(t/ha)
Carrot	128	698	54	20 - 30
Cabbage	147	733	50	08 -10
Squash	247	2116	86	25 - 40
Corn	141	268	19	9
Onion	659	3265	50	20 -30
Potato	904	523	6	20 -40
Tomato	250	1968	79	20 -50

For nearly all crops distributed by the project, yields surpassed the government estimated averages for the area. Yields of cabbage, squash and corn doubled thanks to the high quality of seed distributed and the use of improved techniques including composting, planting during the best season and integrated pest management.

We found that over 70% of crop production was sold for household income, and 30% was consumed. The majority of income made from the sale of these crops was used to buy staple foods, but households also spent money on other essentials such as fuel for motor-pumps for crop irrigation.

Overall, 90% of participating farmers attested to understanding and applying the training themes covered by the program, though only 50% of participants felt confident that they mastered the training on irrigation and repair of motor-pumps.

Sector 2: Economic Recovery and Market Systems

As described above, the evaluation of micro-entrepreneurs showed that 514 individuals were continuing their activities and had shown preliminary success and the capacity to manage a second tranche of funding. The major obstacle for entrepreneurs is that overall prices have increased for many primary goods, and we found that some beneficiaries were complementing the first tranche of funding with other resources in order to maintain adequate stocks. The assessment found that only 50% of micro-entrepreneurs have mastered all of the training themes on business management and sales techniques, so support to these businesses will continue throughout the project period to increase their ability to implement best practices and increase revenues.

6. Coordination

Mercy Corps continues to work closely with regional authorities, notably sub-regional early warning systems in Tchirozérine, the communal leaders, and agricultural extension services. We also participate in humanitarian coordination at the regional level with NGO and UN partners through the 3N initiative, meetings organized by OCHA and the food security cluster. This program has also benefited from a partnership with the national agronomy research institution of Niger (INRAN) to promote the best crop varieties and proven agricultural techniques. Finally, Mercy Corps continues to work in close collaboration with our partner ASUSU CIIGABA for the mentoring and support to VSLA groups.

7. Conclusion and Upcoming Activities

The PACT II program activities have progressed well over this quarter, notably with the agricultural monitoring and evaluation, the creation and training of 20 new VSLAs by 18 village agents and continued support for 96 existing groups, as well as the evaluation and second disbursement of funds to micro-entrepreneurs.

The following activities are planned for the next quarter:

- Training of trainers for 45 farmers from the Tabelot commune in agricultural product processing and conservation techniques, and the distribution of training materials including visual aids to be used by trainers in their communities;
- Organization of the restitution of the agricultural training on conservation and processing techniques in at least 15 villages in the Tabelot Commune;
- Continued monitoring and mentoring of VSLAs ;
- Monitoring and evaluation of the 514 micro-entrepreneurs who received the second tranche of funding;
- Program final evaluation will be planned and executed;
- Organization of four workshops with community beneficiaries in order to capture the successes, challenges and lessons learned in agriculture, VSLA and entrepreneurial programming from the beneficiary perspective;
- Filming of documentary on program activities, in order to communicate the successes, challenges and lessons from the PACT II program;
- The updating and execution of the program transition plan, including program, finance, logistics and administrative aspects.

The PACT II program will finish at the end of May, thus during the next quarter Mercy Corps will undertake preparations to ensure a smooth transition at the program closeout. Mercy Corps Niger will follow internal standards that include following the established transition plan, taking into account program, logistical, financial and administrative aspects of program closeout. From the beginning, the program created an exit strategy that would ensure the sustainability of program activities, by emphasizing the transfer of knowledge and building the capacity of local leaders, structures and beneficiary communities.