

FY14 Q4 Quarterly Report

July - September 2014

**“Espoir pour les Communautés de Ouallam, Tillabéri”
ECOUT Program**

2014-2015



A nursing mother with her child during nutrition sensitization at Sargane (left) and women heads of household during unconditional cash distribution at Dingazi (right)

COUNTRY CONTACT	HEADQUARTERS CONTACT	PROJECT SUMMARY
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I. Executive Summary

Since April 2014, Mercy Corps Niger is implementing an Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP) funded by USAID/Food For Peace entitled ECOUT¹. This program is designed to meet the immediate needs of communities affected by recurrent food crises and build local capacity to adapt to, and build their resilience to future stresses and shocks. The program will reach 56,000 of the most vulnerable individuals (8,000 households) in the two communes of Ouallam and Dingazi in the Ouallam department of Tillabéri region, one of the most food insecure regions in Niger.

During this reporting period (July – September), the program accomplished the following activities:

- 1,107 ha of degraded agricultural and grazing lands were rehabilitated in the Food For Work (FFW) sites within 36 villages through the construction of half-moons. This rehabilitation was consolidated by application of organic manure in half-moons, seeding of fodder or planting of trees;
- 493.3 tons of millet, 59.2 tons of cowpea, and 9,851 liters of vegetable oil were distributed through vouchers to 4,944 beneficiaries after FFW activities. The total amount of food distributed is 160,623,760 XOF (\$ 338,869);
- 321,100,000 XOF (\$677,426) of unconditional cash were distributed to 4,944 beneficiaries during two rounds, one in August and one in September;
- 45.3 tons of improved seeds and 48.5 tons of improved seeds, respectively for millet (HKP variety) and cowpea (KVX and TN578 varieties) were distributed to 4,944 households. The total amount of these distributions is 87,618,000 XOF (\$ 184,848);
- Diagnosis of early warning system (EWS) of Ouallam Department highlighted that five community-based early warning systems (CEWS) exist in Ouallam commune (3) and Dingazi commune (2). However, only four of these CEWS are functional. An early warning system strategy was elaborated to fill the gaps identified during this diagnosis;
- 62 community outreaches' workers validated by the health district, were identified in Ouallam commune (37 persons) and Dingazi commune (25 persons). They will served as nutrition focal points in their villages to implement ECOUT nutrition strategy elaborated and based on C4D for behavior change in hygiene and nutrition;
- 36 complaints committees were set up in the program villages and 50 members of these committees were trained on beneficiaries targeting via HEA (household economy approach) and on the roles and responsibilities of those committees;
- 2,838 complementary beneficiaries were identified in 20 villages previously covered by CRS programming during the lean season (June to September);

The program also undertook some monitoring and evaluation activities, including Distribution Monitoring, Post Distribution Monitoring of unconditional cash transfer, foodstuff and improved seeds distributions, and also training of the project officers on indicators tracking. To meet the gap of 3,056 households, Mercy Corps, in coordination with the sub-regional Committee for Disaster Prevention of Ouallam department (CSRPC), regional authorities and other humanitarian actors, organized a coordination meeting to map humanitarian actors' interventions and their duration within the area. At the end of this process, 2,838 complementary beneficiaries have been identified in 20 villages. Thus, ECOUT beneficiaries' number reached 7,782 households (54,474 persons) at the end of the lean season (September).

¹ *Espoir pour les Communautés de Ouallam, Tillabéri* in French

II. Program Overview

A huge number of the Nigerien population have been affected by severe food insecurity in the last decade, particularly in 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2012, after a combination of drought and flooding decimated crops and forage. In August 2013, the pattern of drought followed by floods repeated itself, with staple crops meeting with prolonged dry spells and early cessation of rains just as they entered a critical development period. The Ouallam department of Tillabéri region was one of the hardest hit, with 59 percent² of the population, the highest proportion in the country, moderately food insecure and immediately vulnerable to worsening conditions within the year.

The ECOUT program aims to assist 56,000 beneficiaries (8,000 households) for 18 months in the two communes of Ouallam and Dingazi, to meet their immediate needs and build their resilience to shocks and stresses. The program will support agro-pastoralists affected by food insecurity to improve their nutritional status, through purchase of nutritious food during the lean season using food vouchers as well as unconditional cash transfers. ECOUT will improve access to dairy products to diversify household diets through vouchers for training activities, enabling women and other members of the household to earn a goat and animal feed. The ECOUT program also aims at increasing the capacity and resources of agro-pastoralist populations that support resilience.

Specifically, the program will focus on FFW activities projects that rehabilitate pasture land and increase water efficiency. ECOUT will further contribute to the recovery and increased resilience of agricultural production in Ouallam department by providing farmers with training in climate-smart techniques, in return for which they will receive vouchers to purchase improved agricultural inputs. The beneficiaries of the program also will receive vouchers to purchase goats, have greater access to animal feeds, and benefit from training in animal husbandry, health and fodder management. Lastly, the ECOUT program will contribute to the strengthening of the GoN's early warning system (EWS) for food insecurity, focusing on building the capacity of community-based early warning committees to effectively identify imminent shocks and communicate up to commune-level bodies. Mercy Corps will put a special focus on ensuring that both objectives are nutrition-sensitive, incorporating nutrition messaging throughout program activities.

III. Program Activities

3.1. Program achievements during the reporting period

Description of Activities		Achievement			Quantitative and Qualitative Description
		Achieved	Ongoing	No	
<i>Outcome 1: Agro-pastoralist populations affected by food insecurity have reduced nutrient gap</i>					
Activity 1.1.1	8,000 households benefit from food for work activities, receiving food through voucher system	X			- 02 rounds of food distribution (corresponding to each 2-week FFW activities) to 4,944 beneficiaries. For the two rounds, the program has distributed the following quantities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 493.3 tons of millet; • 59.2 tons of cowpea ; • 9,851 liters of vegetable cooking oil. - The cost of the 2 rounds of distribution is US\$ 338,869 (160 623 760 FCFA).
Activity 1.1.2.	8,000 households benefit from		X		Selection of Capital Finance (microfinance institution) to transfer cash to 4,944 beneficiaries.

² Ibid

Description of Activities		Achievement			Quantitative and Qualitative Description
		Achieved	Ongoing	No	
	unconditional cash transfer (UCT)				<p>The selection was based on a competitive bidding process and based on their fair cost, their experience and past performance</p> <p>2 months of UCT are provided this quarter :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st round: 4,939 household have been reached with 5 households absent. The total amount distributed is 160 517 500 F CFA corresponding to the month of August; • 2nd round: 4,941 household have been reached with 3 households absent. The total amount distributed for this round is 160 582 500 F CFA corresponding to the month of September. <p>The last round of unconditional cash is planned for the next quarter (October)</p>
Activity 1.1.3	4,400 households benefit from vouchers to purchase goats (4,400 does, 600 bucks)		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7,339 households surveyed for data collection which will enable the selection of the 4,400 women based on objectives criteria for goats distribution - A public tender has been advertised for the selection of the vendors and is still ongoing - The distribution of goats is planned for the next quarter (November)
Activity 1.1.4	4,400 households benefit from one-month animal feed vouchers and vaccinations for their goats			X	MoUs will be signed with the local Livestock provider and private veterinary service provider during next quarter
Activity 1.1.5	4,400 households benefit from training in animal husbandry, animal health, fodder management, and nutrition/ hygiene around dairy production			X	Training needs will be identified, materials prepared, and training initiated in FY15 Q1.
Activity 1.1.6	Community-level nutrition messaging and behavior change activities related to ENA (essential nutrition actions) and household dairy consumption		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elaboration of a nutrition strategy for behavior change based on C4D - MoU signed with the health district of Ouallam - Dissemination of awareness messages during the other activities of the program: food distribution and unconditional cash transfer. The messages were related to the nutritional value of distributed food, the better use of UCT (food diversification, promotion of family health, access to health care)
<i>Outcome 2: Agro-pastoralist population affected by food insecurity have increased capacity and resources that support resilience</i>					
Activity	Land rehabilitation	X			- 1107 hectares of degraded land rehabilitated in

Description of Activities		Achievement			Quantitative and Qualitative Description
		Achieved	Ongoing	No	
2.1.1	and small infrastructures projects conducted under food for work activities				<p>36 villages of Dingazi and Ouallam communcorresponding to 346,476 half-moons constructed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 360 kg of fodder seeds (<i>Zornia glochidiata</i>, <i>Pennisetum pedicellatum</i>, <i>Brachiaria ramosa</i> and <i>Andropogon gayanus</i>) were used to seed the rehabilitated sites of Sargane Gollé, Sargane Bourra, Garbey Malo Koira, Fasaw, Koria Sabo, Bereyzedo and Goubeyze Bangou - Reforestation of Sargane Baba Windi site with <i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i> by the beneficiaries
Activity 2.1.2	8,000 households benefit from agricultural inputs, via voucher system	X			<p>4 agricultural input suppliers selected for seeds distribution through vouchers</p> <p>10 kg of millet seeds and 10 kg of cowpea seeds distributed to each household via vouchers: voucher of millet is equivalent to US\$ 11.6 and voucher of cowpea corresponds to US\$ 27.4</p> <p>45.26 tons of millet seeds are distributed to 4,526 households and 48.45 tons of cowpea seeds distributed to 4,845 households</p> <p>The total amount of seeds distribution activity is US\$ 184,848: US\$ 52,517 for millet and 132,331 for cowpea</p> <p>27 villages identified out of 56 based on the availability of water for irrigation: dam, stream, etc. Vegetable seeds will be distributed next quarter through voucher system</p>
Activity 2.1.3	8,000 households trained in climate-smart agricultural techniques		X		<p>Training needs have been identified, materials prepared. The main thematics are: harvest conservation, biological control of crops diseases, composting, etc. These trainings are planned to begin during the next quarter</p>
Activity 2.1.4	30 EWS structures benefit from training and capacity building support		X		<p>Meetings with the beneficiaries, with the existing early warning system at regional, departmental and communal levels and the other stakeholders</p> <p>Identification of the main gaps and needs of the existing system: needs of trainings in emergency management, lack of community early warning system (SCAP/RU) in 61 villages of 88.</p> <p>Elaboration of the early warning strategy of ECOUT</p> <p>The establishment of SCAP/RU and training will take place during the next quarter.</p>

Agricultural and grazing land rehabilitation under Food For Work activities

During this quarter, FFW activities were implemented during the month of July. These activities were monitored by the program field agents in partnership with the extension services agents. During this period each beneficiary dug 3 half-moons per day, corresponding to US\$2.60 per day of work. After each 15-day work period on site, Mercy Corps and the extension services performed a joint assessment to evaluate the rehabilitated lands before allowing food distributions that corresponded to 13 days of work (one day off per week is given to beneficiaries). At the end of this reporting period, 1,107 ha of pasture and agricultural lands have been rehabilitated through half-moons (346,476 constructed). The rehabilitation of these lands has been improved through organic manure supply in half-moons (cultivated lands), or through sowing with fodder seeds (sites of Sargane Gollé, Sargane Bourra, Garbey Malo Koira, Fasaw, Korja Sabo, Bereyzedo and Goubeyze Bangou) or through reforestation with *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* trees (Sargane Baba Windi).

Despite these results, the program did not achieve the outcome 3 as defined in the logical framework. Indeed, the program aimed to rehabilitate 2,170 ha of degraded lands through FFW activities. This difference is due to two main reasons:

- The duration of FFW activity: signing of the grant towards the end of May 2014 required the program to revise its strategy to meet communities' immediate needs. Thus, FFW activities have been conducted during one month while it was planned for 3 months;
- The number of beneficiaries: during this activity period, the program identified 4,944 beneficiaries while it was planned to reach 8,000 beneficiaries.

Food for work activities have been planned for the next dry season during the second year of the program (April-May 2015). This should achieve the expected results.



Constructed half-moons (left) and planting of *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* trees in half-moons at Sargane (right)

Food distributions through voucher system

- The distribution of food within the context of Food For Work (FFW) help beneficiaries to meet their needs during this lean season. The food assets distribution has been conducted in two phases (each 2-week), at midway of the FFW operation and at its end. The quantities distributed correspond to the needs of an average household of 7 persons during one month to meet energy requirements: 100 kg of cereal (millet), 12 kg of legume (cowpea) and 2 liters of vegetable cooking oil. These distributions were done on vouchers basis as planned by the ECOOUT program (see annex 1). The total amount of the voucher per beneficiary per month is 32,500 XOF (\$68) which allowed each beneficiary to buy these quantities of food. For the two distributions, the

main achievements are as follows: First distribution: 4,932 poor and very poor households received millet, 4,933 households received cowpea and 4,917 households received vegetable oil, which is a total of 246.6 tons of millet, 29.6 tons of cowpea and 4,917 liters of vegetable oil;

- Second distribution: 4,933 poor and very poor households received millet, 4,934 households received cowpea and 4,934 have received cooking oil, which is a total of 246.7 tons of millet, 29.6 tons of cowpea and 4,934 liters of vegetable oil.

Finally, for the two operations, the program has distributed 493.3 tons of millet, 59.2 tons of cowpea and 9,851 liters of vegetable oil. The first round of distribution cost 80,311,240 XOF (\$169,433) and the second round cost 80,312,520 XOF (\$169,436), thus a total of 160,623,760 XOF (\$338,869) (see more details in the report of distribution, annex 2). At the end of these operations 160 623 760 XOF (i.e \$338,869) were injected into the local economy because all food vendors are from Ouallam city.



Beneficiary's fingerprint taking after she received food (left) and women transporting distributed food items (right)

Unconditional cash transfer to the beneficiaries

In the past quarterly report, we reported that three months of unconditional cash transfers (UCT) will take place between August and October, rather the initially planned three months of FFW activities and one month of UCT. The transition to a cash-based approach needed to be made in July/ August at the start of the rainy season, to allow beneficiaries to fully engage in their production activities while continuing to support their immediate food needs until harvest. This aligns with the Government of Niger's programming approach.

Thus, considering the large number of beneficiaries, the high amount to transfer, distances between distributions sites and security risks, Mercy Corps decided to contract with a microfinance institution for this unconditional cash transfer. Based on a competitive bidding, Capital Finance was selected out of three institutions to conduct these operations. This system of hiring of a microfinance institution reduced the risk of armed robbery and avoided the Mercy Corps' agent from handling such huge amounts of money.

During the reporting period, two rounds of UCT were conducted during August and September. Each beneficiary received 32,500 XOF (\$68)/month. A large part of this cash received is dedicated to food purchase (81%) and other essential expenses of the household (see section IV).

Hence to date, a total amount of 321,100,000 XOF (\$677,426) has been distributed twice:

- 1st round: 4939 households have been reached (5 household absents). The total amount distributed is 160,517,500 XOF (\$338,645) corresponding to the amount of August;
- 2nd round: 4941 households have been reached (3 household absents). The total amount distributed for this round is 160,582,500 XOF (\$338,782) corresponding to the amount of September.

Cash transfers will continue until October as the harvest of cereals will not be completed before November (or even December for late varieties) in the two communes. Households therefore still need to be supported during those months of transition.



Day of beneficiaries' awareness by Mercy Corps field staff prior to cash distribution (left) and beneficiary who received her cash (right)

Improved seed distribution, via voucher system

The ECOUT program in conformity with its objective, distributed locally adapted and improved varieties of millet and cowpea seeds with the beginning of the rainy season. These varieties are better suited to irregular rains and have been chosen to strengthen farmers' resilience to weather-related shocks. The improved seeds were distributed through voucher system. Each beneficiary received vouchers valued at 18,500 XOF (\$39) for 10 kg of millet seeds (\$11.6) and for 10 kg of cowpea seeds (\$24.4). Distributions have been organized in 10 of the 36 sites.

Finally, as part of the implementation of the ECOUT program, 45.3 tons of millet improved seeds and 48.5 tons of cowpea improved seeds were distributed in the 36 villages. Households impacted by this activity are:

- 4,526 households for millet seeds, equivalent to 45.26 tons;
- 4,845 households for cowpea seeds, equivalent to 48.45 tons.

The gap between the beneficiaries receiving the seeds and those of the program (4,944) is due to the difficulty to access some sites during this rainy season (particularly in Dingazi commune), loss of vouchers for rare cases and absent of beneficiaries during distribution and raking.

The overall value of these seeds distribution is 87,618,000 XOF (\$184,848): 24,893,000 XOF (\$52,517) for millet seeds and 62,725,000 XOF (\$132,331).



Seeds of millet and cowpea received by ECOUT beneficiaries during the distribution day

Diagnosics of Early Warning System in the Department of Ouallam

ECOOUT program aimed to contribute to the strengthening of the early warning system (EWS) in Ouallam department. The program aimed to address the critical gap in the current EWS system. To this end, the program conducted a diagnosis which highlighted that EWS is functional in Ouallam department but several gaps remain.

Indeed, the EWS is functional at regional and departmental levels. Meetings of the regional and departmental committees are done regularly and on time.

At the communal level, the EWS committee called Vulnerability Monitoring Observatory (VMO) exists in all the communes of Ouallam and Dingazi. The situation of the community-based EWS (CEWS) in these two communes is as follows:

- The Ouallam's VMO covers three Community-based Early Warning System (CEWS):
 - Talkadabey composed by a cluster of 3 villages. This CEWS is functional due to the funding and monitoring of OXFAM-KARKARA ;
 - Dabrey composed by a cluster of 7 villages. This CEWS is functional due to the funding and monitoring of OXFAM-KARKARA;
 - Sargane composed by a cluster of 5 villages. This CEWS exist but is not functional.
- The Dingazi's VMO covers two CEWS:
 - Dingazi composed by a cluster of 7 villages. It is monitored by the commune of Dingazi
 - Yadia composed by a cluster of 5 villages. This CEWS is monitored by the commune of Dingazi.

In short, 5 CEWS exit in the two communes of Ouallam and Dingazi but only four are functional. Although some EWS are functional in Ouallam department, some difficulties/ challenges still exist, such as:

- There are not enough SCAP/RU to cover all the villages of the two communes: 15 villages out of 48 villages in Ouallam commune and 12 villages out of 40 villages in Dingazi commune;
- Several stakeholders do not implement activities on community-based early warning system;
- In many cases, the other villages of the cluster are far from the village center of the cluster (over 15 km);

- The absence of telephone network does not allow the use of modern ways of communication for the transmission of information (within the community, from the community to the vulnerability monitoring observatory and vice versa);
- Lack of training for the members of community-based early warning system (CEWS), vulnerability monitoring observatory (VMO) at communal level and sub-regional committee for crisis prevention and management at departmental on prevention and emergency management (floods, bushfires, etc.).

To fill some of these gaps, the ECOOUT program planned to establish CEWS in different villages and to conduct several trainings for the stakeholders during the next quarter. The potential sites of these future CEWS identified with the local authorities are:

- For Dingazi commune :
 - Bereyzédo ;
 - Banimaté ;
 - Garbey Goumandey;
 - Farka.
- For Ouallam commune:
 - Tollo Béri;
 - Kella;
 - Garbey Malo Koira ;
 - Koubora.

Identification of community outreaches' workers

During this quarter, a nutrition strategy was elaborated for ECOOUT program, based on C4D (communication for development) for behavior change in hygiene and nutrition practices. A memorandum of understanding has also been signed between the program and the health district of Ouallam for nutrition activities implementation.

Afterwards, community-level nutrition messaging will be disseminated through community outreach workers. These workers were identified by previous projects and NGOs, in partnership with the health district of Ouallam. For the two communes, the following numbers of outreach workers have been identified:

- Ouallam: 37 people within the villages of the program (except Samtigué), including 13 women;
- Dingazi: 25 people within the villages of the program (except Banikane, Banimaté and Tchigo) including 10 women.

During the next quarter, these community outreach worker will be trained on:

- The ECOOUT program: beneficiaries, objectives and activities;
- Community outreach worker's rules in the framework of the ECOOUT program;
- Training on malnutrition prevention tools: awareness on hygiene, culinary demonstration; promotion of food diversification, exclusive breastfeeding, food processing, and conservation.

Markets surveys

The identification and monitoring of commodities prices of five essential markets of Ouallam and Dingazi communes (markets of Ouallam, Sargane, Dabarey, Dingazi and Yadia) are conducted every week. Essential commodities monitored are: millet, oil, cowpea, rice, salt, sheep, and goat.

These markets and commodities are selected based on the markets attended by the program’s beneficiaries and the commodities frequently needed by program’s beneficiaries. The sizes of sheep and goat selected are based on the sizes of those of ruminants typically owned by the poor and very poor.

It appears from the analysis of trends in prices collected during the month of September that a slight price increase (5-10 %) of small ruminants (sheep and goats) occurred. This was due to the supply being less than demand because of the forthcoming feast of “Tabaski”. The food prices were stable in all markets tracked (figure 1).

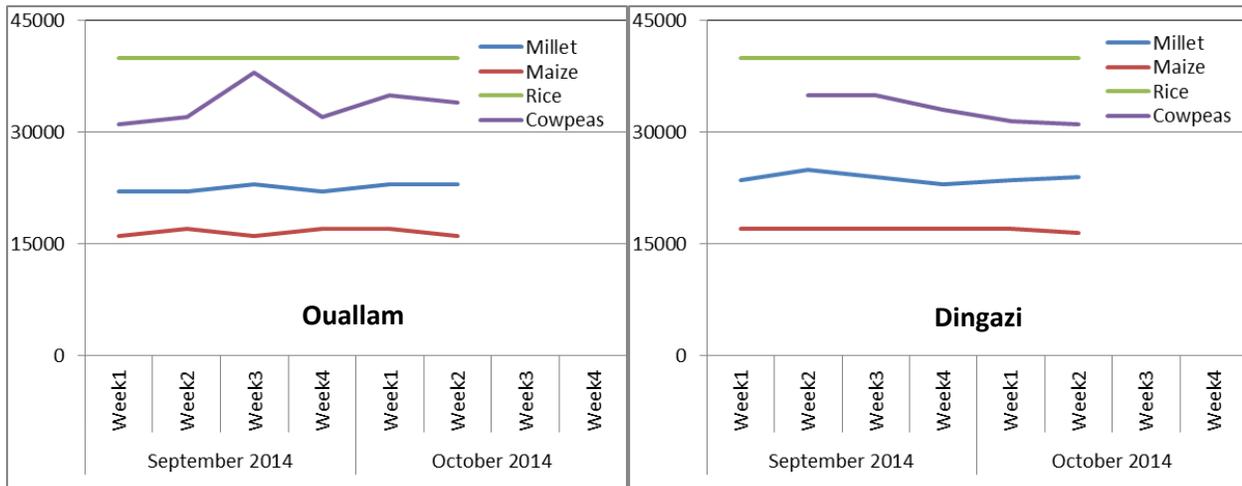


Figure 1: Food items prices’ evolution in the markets of Ouallam (left) and Dingazi (right)

Implementation of complains and feedback mechanisms;

Being accountable to our stakeholders is core to Mercy Corps’s strategy, where we have committed to improve our ability to be an open, transparent, and learning organization, accountable for its actions and able to meet high standards of public and stakeholder reporting. As part of an ongoing move to improve our accountability to all stakeholders, ECOUT program has committed to establishing and implementing a Community complains and feed-back mechanism that allows individuals and organizations to raise issues and feedback with Mercy Corps.

In the framework of this implementation, 36 complaints committees were set up in all villages of the program (one per village). Then, 50 members (40 men and 10 women) of these complaints committees from Ouallam and Dingazi were trained on different topics:

- ECOUT program: objectives, beneficiaries, and activities;
- Beneficiaries targeting methodology through HEA (Household Economy Approach);
- Roles and responsibilities of complaints committees.

After that, the program set up information through plates about the complaint mechanism in every village and town halls (at Dingazi and Ouallam cities). These plates contain the phone numbers of the complaint focal point and Mercy Corps’s Sub-office in Ouallam. At the end of the reporting period, four complaints were received from the beneficiaries on various aspects of the program (see complaints register in Mercy Corps’s Sub-office of Ouallam). For all these complaints, feed-backs were successfully handled.

3.2. Complementary beneficiaries' targeting at the end of the lean season

By the time Mercy Corps started the geographical targeting and beneficiaries' identification, a number of actors had also planned for emergency assistance to the population of the same geographical areas during the lean season. Strong coordination among actors was therefore crucial and thus a series of meetings were initiated to harmonize the whole intervention process in Ouallam to maximize the level of effort and resources among all partners. While Mercy Corps aims at building the resilience of communities through an integrated package of activities implemented during 18 months, most actors (OXFAM, CRS, Islamic Relief, and Qatar Charity) are planning to conduct emergency relief activities and provide assistance to the very poor households for only a few months over the lean season, until harvests start in September. Through the coordination process, Mercy Corps entered into an agreement with WFP to go for a joint effort in some of the villages (17) where we could both provide complementary interventions, with WFP assisting all very poor households and Mercy Corps assisting all poor households. This joint effort was unfortunately rejected on June 13th by the Deputy Secretary General of Tillabéri region, and Mercy Corps was informed that it should not intervene in the villages first targeted by WFP. With the government's rejection of the joint effort, the ECOUT program thus decided to target 36 villages, 18 in Ouallam and 18 in Dingazi commune. The HEA methodology was used to identify and select 4,944 very poor and poor households in those villages by way of their socio-economic status and household resources, in order to target the households whose livelihoods are most threatened. ECOUT began to support these 4,944 households during the lean season through September with FFW, UCT and seed distribution activities, while continuing to coordinate with the other actors and the local authorities to reach the ultimate target of 8,000 households.

Since the month of June, ECOUT program has been exploring strategies to identify and select the additional 3,056 households to reach the 8,000 households goal. The best strategy was to coordinate with organizations ending their interventions and the local authorities to revisit the selection process towards the end of September 2014 (end of lean season), before emergency related activities come to an end.

In accordance with this strategy, a coordination meeting between regional and local authorities, NGOs, and United Nations Organizations, was held on August 28th at Ouallam. This meeting recommended to Mercy Corps (program ECOUT) to work in 20 villages previously covered by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) during the lean season: 5 villages of Ouallam and 15 villages of Dingazi. Using HEA methodology, 2,838 very poor and poor households were identified and selected in those 20 villages to benefit from the ECOUT program activities. Therefore, the overall number of the beneficiaries of ECOUT program at the end of this reporting period is 7,782 very poor and poor households from 56 villages (23 villages of Ouallam commune and 33 villages of Dingazi commune). The complementary 218 beneficiaries will be reached through efforts to fill the gap. These 7,782 households (54,474 persons) will benefit from all the program activities on resilience building.

IV. Monitoring & Evaluation

Two post distribution monitoring (PDM) activities have been conducted during this reporting period:

- PDM after the distribution of improved seeds and food;
- PDM after the first round of unconditional cash transfer.

The main results of these PDM are as follows:

4.1. PDM after the distribution of improved seeds and food via voucher

- Regarding beneficiary satisfaction on the voucher process implemented by the program
 - 100% of beneficiaries received their vouchers before the day of distribution (1 or 2 days before)

- 94-95% of the beneficiaries said they understood the awareness messages disseminated during distributions
 - 77% and 69% of the beneficiaries take less than one hour to reach distribution sites, respectively for improved seeds and foodstuffs and almost 90% of them are on foot;
 - 81% and 77% of the beneficiaries, respectively for seed and food, spend between 15 minutes and three hours on the distribution site for the redemption of their vouchers;
 - 100% of the beneficiaries said they were satisfied with Mercy Corps staff and vendors behavior during distributions;
 - More than 90% of the beneficiaries were satisfied with the quality of seeds and food received.
- Regarding the uses of improved seeds and food distributed
- More than 90% of the beneficiaries have planted all improved seeds received, although there are cases where households consumed a portion thereof;
 - 100% of the beneficiary consumed the food received. However, 39% of them have shared some of this food with their families (neighbors or relatives) for solidarity reasons (Figure 2 below)

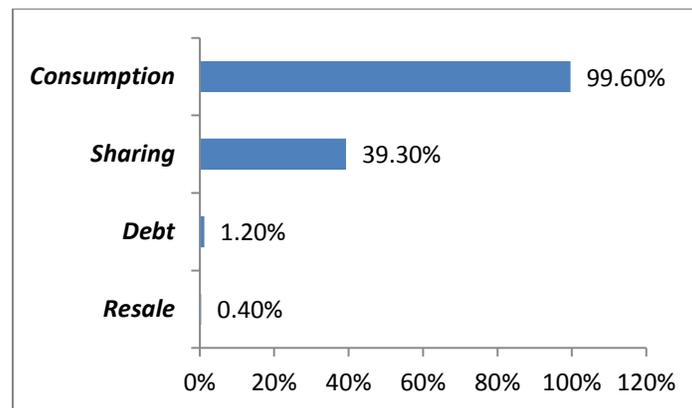


Figure 2: Use of food received by the households

4.2. PDM after the first round of unconditional cash transfer

- Beneficiary satisfaction on the conduct of operations cash transfer
- 100% of respondents claim they received their cash;
 - 95% of the beneficiaries said they have been well informed about the distribution site and date;
 - 86% take less than 2 hours to reach the distribution site;
 - 85% of the beneficiaries wait less than two hours to get their cash.
- Use of unconditional cash:
- Most of the cash received is intended to feed the household. Indeed, 81% of the cash received (\$55) is used by 97% of households to purchase food. The remaining cash is used in other expenses of the household as shown in Figure 3 below:

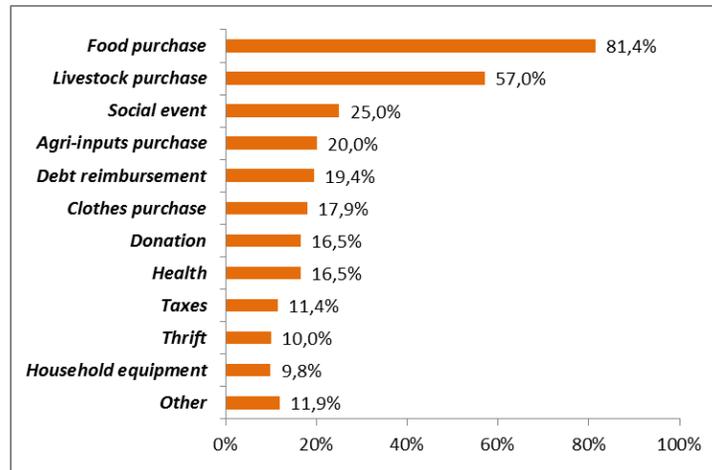


Figure 3: Use of unconditional cash by the households

4.3. Effects of food and cash distribution on HDDS and CSI

As shown in Figure 4, even if we did not notice a significant change in terms of dietary diversity, the different distribution operations helped vulnerable households to keep their average dietary diversity score of 5 food groups during the lean season.

Moreover, this dietary diversity is maintained without the use of negative coping strategies as shown in Figure 5. Indeed, 100% of households are food secure in Ouallam commune, 97% of households are food-secure and 3% are safe food acceptable in Dingazi commune. However, during the baseline, almost half of households were food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity.

Finally, we can conclude that these distributions operations of food and cash during the lean season helped maintain and even improve the food security of the most vulnerable households during the lean period which is often the most critical to them.

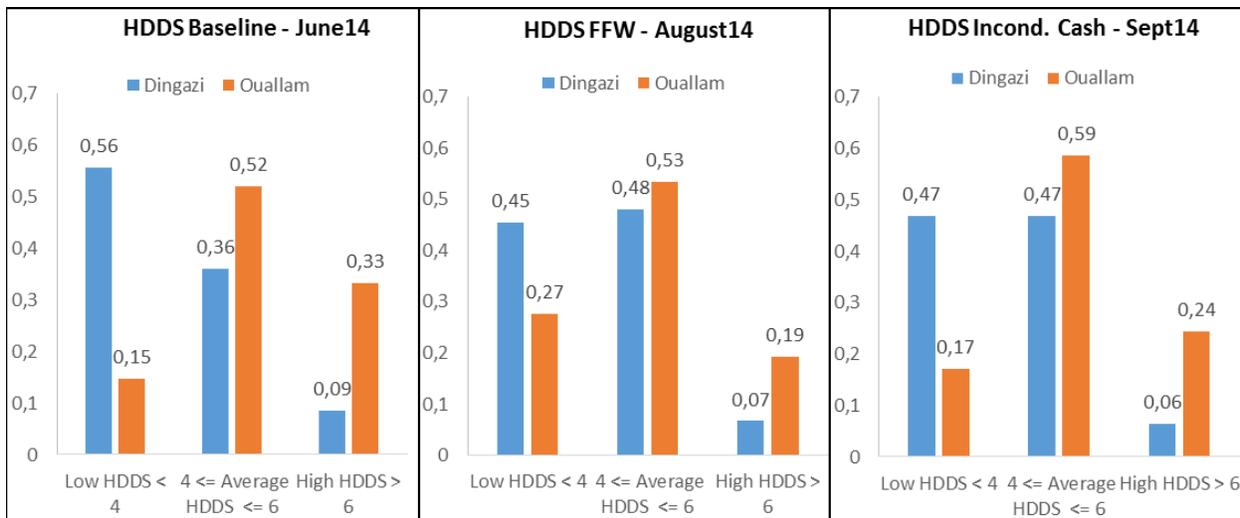


Figure 4: Evolution of HDDS after food and cash distributions comparatively to the baseline

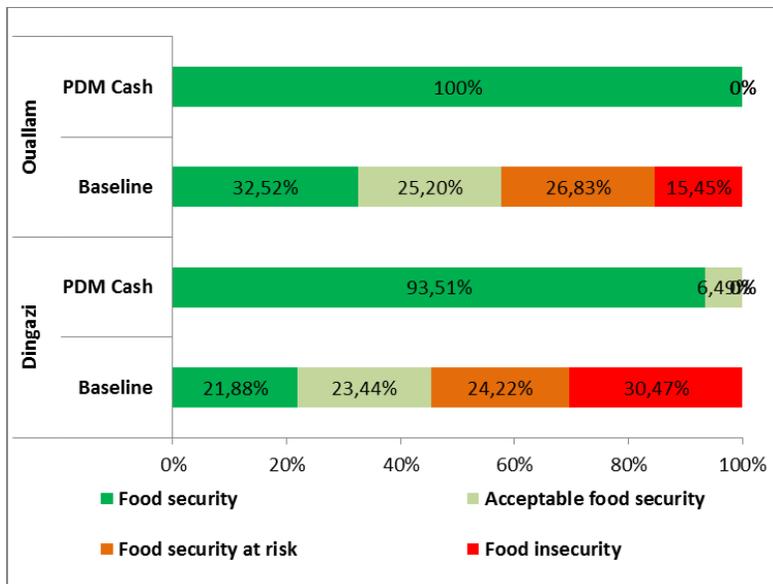


Figure 5: Effects of food and cash distributions on households' Coping Strategy Index

V. Coordination

Mercy Corps took an active role in the coordination process to harmonize the whole intervention in Ouallam through a series of meetings organized with all the stakeholders to maximize the level of effort and resources. Mercy Corps participated in coordination at the national, regional and sub-regional levels and this is why Mercy Corps in partnership with the department of Ouallam organized a coordination meeting on interventions in the department and how to redefine the area and duration of interventions after the lean season.

As a result of this meeting, recommendations were made which include that CRS and Mercy Corps collaborate to see how Mercy Corps may intervene in the villages CRS leaves at the end of the lean season (end of September). The data collected from CRS, which is ending its response during the lean season, identified needs and target beneficiaries in villages so that Mercy Corps can reach the complementary beneficiaries.

Finally, United States Government Accountability Office members with the FFP/ USAID representatives in Niger, visited the program at the end of the quarter, accompanied by Mercy Corps Country Director and the representatives of the Prefect and Mayor of Ouallam and Dingazi communes. That visit led to Dingazi as a recipient community for the second round of unconditional cash transfer.

VI. Challenges

The main challenge of the program ECOUT is the delay in geographical targeting and beneficiaries' identification. The program was able to target 4,944 very poor and poor households from 36 villages. Only these households benefit from all the activities during the reporting period. This led to an under spending of the budget (planned for 8,000 beneficiaries). However, to date, after a strong coordination with all the stakeholders, the program identified 2,395 complementary beneficiaries from 20 villages (15 villages of Dingazi and 5 villages of Ouallam). So, for the next quarter, the ECOUT program will reach the total 8,000 households. They will benefit from the integrated package of resilience building activities.

VII. Next steps

The program has successfully completed the emergency activities planned for the lean season. The program staff is now active with implementing activities that will strengthen the resilience of beneficiaries. Thus, the next quarter will focus on the following activities:

- Third round of unconditional cash transfer distribution to 4,944 households via Capital Finance;
- Distribution of agricultural inputs and tools to beneficiaries for vegetable production through vouchers;
- Targeting and identification of women who will earn the goats through vouchers;
- Distribution of 4,400 does and 600 bucks to the women identified;
- Design of goat husbandry curriculum and initiation of women's training activities;
- Post-harvest training activities (seeds selection, harvest conservation, warrantage);
- Development of a curriculum on climate-smart agricultural practices and training of farmers;
- Establishment of community-based early warning system to fill the gaps identified in the two communes of Ouallam and Dingazi and training of their members;
- Development of nutrition messages and community sensitization on goat milk consumption; essentials family practices, etc.
- Post-distribution monitoring.

[end of report]