



CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES – UNITED STATES
CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (CRS)

Niger Program

FINAL REPORT

BONBATU+

Project Number: AID-OFDA-G-14-00103

Project Period: April 17, 2014 to October 17, 2014

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Berms dug via CFW in Sabtaka Kokire, turning degraded land into communal pasture

Project Overview

Title: Bonbatu +

Location: Simiri and Ouallam communes, Ouallam department, Tillabéri region

Goal: Vulnerable households and communities habitually affected by crises have restored livelihoods and strengthened capacity to resist future shocks in the Tillabéri region of Niger.

Objective: Vulnerable households have supplemented their household income through Cash Grants and CFW activities

Partners:

- Asusu SA, microfinance institution
 - The GoN Department of Environment and Combating Desertification and the Department of Rural Engineering
 - Administrative and local authorities
 - Beneficiary communities
-

Targeted groups: Village households identified as vulnerable by the GoN Early Warning System (known as SAP for *Système d'Alerte Précoce* in French) following the 2013 crop year and CRS' Bonbatu project (2012-2013)

Beneficiaries

- 830 beneficiary households implemented recovery of degraded land recovery activities via Cash-for-Work (CFW) and received Cash Grants (CG) for two months at the peak of the lean season, providing assistance to 6,375 household members

I. Introduction

In August and September 2013, floods hit several areas of Niger, washing away crops, homes, and property. This was followed by the premature end of precipitation, which resulted in the drying of crops, particularly cereals, before they could mature. As a result, the Nigerien Ministry of Agriculture projected a deficit of 343,566 MT for last year's harvest, with 7,506,790 people (46.9% of the population) estimated to be suffering from food insecurity by April 2014. In this context, rapid interventions were required in order to avoid a sharp deterioration of the food security situation. CRS Niger's project Bonbatu+ continued the work of project Bonbatu (2012-13) in improving households' resilience while addressing immediate emergency needs in the Ouallam department.

To achieve this objective, CRS concentrated its efforts on vulnerable households in five villages. This strategic objective was designed to have an immediate impact on households' living conditions, protect communities' assets, increase incomes, and mitigate the impact of crises. By immediately improving food security, beneficiaries were able to manage the impacts of crises without being forced to sell their personal assets. All these activities were carried out in partnership with GoN environment technical services.

Major Accomplishments included:

- 830 beneficiary households identified in order to benefit Cash Grant and Cash For Work Activities;
- 830 beneficiary households received \$2.71 per day of work, with each household working a total of 15 days per month at the Cash for Work (CFW) sites in May-July;
- 830 beneficiary households received \$39.90 per month in August and September through cash grants;
- Between May and September 2014, five payments totaling \$167,565 were made to beneficiaries in Ouallam departments, with the help of ASUSU and in partnership with the GoN technical services;
- 313 hectares of land were recovered through CFW activities with berms and half-moons planted with economically valuable trees (*Acacia senegal*) and perennial herbs (*Chenopus biflorus* and *Adropogon Gayanus*);

II. Project Implementation

2.1 Meeting with the administrative authorities of the area

An informational and planning meeting was held on April 27, 2014 with GoN authorities, the Sub-Regional Committee for the Prevention and Management of Crises (CSPGC/CA) and the environmental technical services to discuss their involvement, request their guidance, and

explain the details of Bonbatu+. CRS was also able to confirm with them the selection of the five vulnerable villages that had been identified during proposal development: Sabtaka Kokire, Tolkobey koira tegui, Tolkobey fondo bon, Kabéfo, and Koubora.

2.2 Identification of actors and stakeholders

Various actors and stakeholders were involved in implementation to ensure the success of the project, including: decentralized GoN Technical Services (Environment and Rural Engineering), private actors (farmers, specialty groups, NGOs), and the communities themselves. To facilitate coordination and participation of different actors, the role of each participant was clearly defined in signed technical partnership agreements.

Table 1: Stakeholder roles and responsibilities.

Actor	Form of partnership	Key responsibilities
ASUSU	Sub-recipient	- Payment Cash
GoN Environmental Service	Technical collaboration agreement	- Identification of work sites - Start-up and implementation training - Supervision and verification of work - Technical support
GoN Rural Engineering Service	Technical collaboration agreement	- Start-up and implementation training - Technical support
Site Teams	Community participation	- Keep attendance records - Monitor work completion - Monitor site and tools - Support technical work - Supervision of payments
SIMA (Système d'information sur le marché, or Market Information System)	Collaboration	- Collect and analyze market data

2.3 Beneficiary targeting

From April 28 to May 4, 2014, CRS along with local authorities and GoN technical services conducted field visits to identify the 830 beneficiaries and to establish a calendar for Cash-for-Work (CFW) and Cash Grants (CG). As in the prior Bonbatu project, a participative approach was used to define the criteria for vulnerable households in the selected villages and the 830 households were identified by key informants and validated in a general community meeting, based on their vulnerability in Class C “poor” (high risk), particularly the female heads-of-household.

- *Targeting villages within targeted communes*

This targeting was based on the degree of the village’s cereal deficit in conjunction with the CSR/PC/CA. In selected communes, villages whose degree of deficit varied from 80 to 100%

were targeted, with priority to those villages suffering from a 100% deficit. The villages selected were not receiving assistance from other organizations.

- *Socio-economic categorization at the village level*

This classified all households in the village in terms of their living conditions, on the basis of criteria established in a village general meeting. During this activity, field staff played a facilitating role. Each household was categorized according to the target community, and the criteria and characteristics of the socio-economic class within the village. The criteria were:

- Household food supply
- Means/tools for production within the household (cropland, farm tools)
- Animal ownership
- Whether the household provided or hired labor
- Type of residence
- External household support and/or remittances

After defining the criteria for vulnerable households, focus groups were organized with key informants chosen by the community. With the support of project staff, they identified and classified households according to the defined criteria. All village households were classified by socio-economic class, and this list was then validated by the community. Based on these criteria, three classes of vulnerability were identified:

- A: "rich" (vulnerable);
- B: "moderately well off" (moderately vulnerable) and
- C: "poor" (high risk);

The C-class households constitute priority households for the intervention, followed by Class B households, depending on the number of households to be supported by the village.

The needs are enormous but only a limited number of households could be supported. C-class households were prioritized and then supplemented with B-class. The size of households and children under 5 years old are other factors weighed to decide on the number of households to be supported.

Thus, **830** households, 260 of which have a female head-of-household, were identified to receive assistance, of which approximately **98%** were class C and **2%** Class B.

2.4 Implementation

Sector: Economic Recovery and Market Systems (ERMS)

Sub-Sector: Livelihoods Restoration

Activity: Cash Grants

To support vulnerable households during the lean period, two monthly unconditional money distributions were organized. Payment was made by a microfinance institution with a good deal of experience in the area, Asusu-SA. The GoN did not allow CFW during these months, but

encouraged CG in order to allow vulnerable households to have the money to stay in their villages to farm their fields during the rainy season.

Direct cash payments were made to each of the 830 project beneficiaries, in the presence of their respective village committee members, by microfinance institution Asusu-SA. Each vulnerable household received the sum of \$39.90 per month, totaling \$66,256 distributed in August and September 2014. These 830 households benefited from CFW activities just prior to these Cash Grants, so this continuation of funds reinforced their ability to overcome food shortages and meet other basic needs during the lean season while they needed to remain at home to farm their fields.

From monitoring interviews with a sample of beneficiaries to analyze the use of the CFW and CG funds, the majority of recipients have devoted their earnings to the health needs of their family, paying debts, buying clothes for their children, and supplementing their meager food supply, all of which reflect the strong humanitarian need for this project.

Sub-Sector: Temporary Employment

Activity: Cash-for-Work (CFW)

i) Identification of activities

A joint mission with the GoN Technical Services was organized on May 6-12, 2014 for:

- (1) The selection of Water Conservation/Defense and Restoration of Land (CES/DRS) sites. This included the technical confirmation of sites to rehabilitate, identification of what work would be carried out, and evaluation of the areas to focus on.
- (2) The selection of socio-economic infrastructure work to be carried out (feasibility of rehabilitation, taking into account internal and external constraints).

This identification process was participatory and involved different communities. Beneficiaries proposed activities that were in the collective interest of the village. Government service agents provided technical advice so that community members could make informed decisions (technical feasibility of activities, appropriateness of the activities in the given area, and community-level opportunities).

The following activities were identified and validated:

- Land reclamation of degraded land in grazing areas marked by the Departmental Land Commission for the completion of forestry half-moons or berms.
- Land reclamation by planting trees for communal economic benefit in some villages (Acacia Senegal) and planting grass to improve the plant cover and availability of pasture (Andropogon gayanus and Chencrus biflorus) in other villages.

ii) Technical Training for project staff and community teams in project site management

In order to ensure independence at the community level and to create a local network of skilled human resources, team leaders were identified by the population to attend trainings on how to

complete the community works projects and how to manage work at the sites under the supervision of the state technical services.

Team leaders were responsible for driving technical components of the work within the community and for keeping a log of worker participation which was used to determine participants' payment. Team leaders were selected based on their level of schooling or literacy and trust within their communities.

At each site, the project began with two-day training on accepted technical practices for the selected community works projects, an essential step for implementation and local capacity-building. Project staff and GoN agents trained the village committees on their roles and responsibilities (including beneficiary mobilization and supervision, the management of small materials purchase for the work, facilitating payments, etc.) and conducted technical demonstrations of the techniques (including their supervision of the half-moon and berm construction) during their mission May 6-12, 2014. Thus, five committee members in each of the five villages were trained and all 830 beneficiaries participated in the demonstrations before beginning their work.

iii) Acquisition of small equipment and tools

After the planning session with GoN technical services and final decisions about the techniques to use, appropriate small materials (shovels, hoes, etc.) for the berms and half-moons were purchased and delivered to the targeted villages, according to the number of workers and the type of work to be done. Most CFW activities required the acquisition of certain types of equipment for the sites, including:

- Picks and crowbars to work the degraded land and pull out clay,
- Hoes for softer ground,
- Local land survey equipment for half-moon construction,
- Shovels to pick up clay and soil,
- Machetes to prune troublesome shrubs or bushes,
- Compass markers to measure and construct half-moons, and
- Water levels used to reflect contour when creating half-moons, and berms.

iv) Execution of CFW activities

CFW activities began with training/demonstration sessions organized for the 830 beneficiaries under the guidance of GoN Technical Officers. With each beneficiary working a total of 15 days, these activities recovered an area of 313 degraded hectares in the Ouallam department in May-July 2014. The completion rate for these activities was 104%. This high level of completion was attributed to the quality of project implementation and regular monitoring by dynamic management structures at each targeted site.

The berms were created to have perennial seeds planted that would add to the local pasture, some half-moons (in one village) are being developed with *acacia senegalensis* tree saplings, while others will naturally grow plants as the wind blows seeds onto them – all to restore the land cover in the area. In two villages, to improve vegetation cover and fodder availability,

communities seeded the berms with perennial herbs (*Chenopus biflorus* and *Adropogon Gayanus*), with financial support for seeds from their municipalities.



Half-moons dug via CFW in Kabéfo

2.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

The Bonbatu + project had an M&E system that permitted the real-time collection of data for both project activities and living conditions of households. This monitoring system is built on monitoring forms, supervision reports, and regular surveys conducted with beneficiaries. This system was able to generate information that allowed the project to enhance the overall satisfaction of households with project activities. Supervision visits were conducted jointly by CRS and GoN technical service authorities to assess project implementation progress and discuss any challenges or difficulties.

As indicated above, CFW laborers and activities were monitored by GoN technical service agents and CRS emergency supervisors. The government technical service agents supervised the work of CFW laborers on a daily basis to ensure the technical quality of the work.

At the end of each Cash distribution, post-distribution monitoring gathered information on beneficiary perception concerning the implementation of the activities. A survey was administered to 10% of the total beneficiaries, or 83 households. These households were randomly selected using representative, random sampling. At the completion of activities, a team composed of government technical service agents and a CRS supervisor conducted a final internal assessment of CFW activities and CFW beneficiaries to verify the number and quality of works constructed and the number of beneficiaries reached and also to provide recommendations and lessons learned for future projects.

The results allow us to consider the project's impacts from several socio-economic levels within the target communities.

Collection and use of market data: Bonbatu+ staff used a partnership with the agricultural market information system (SIMA) to collect prices, with SIMA providing cereal prices in Niger's central markets and other markets in the project intervention zone. Every two weeks, SIMA provided information on prices for key reference markets in the intervention zone of Ouallam. Additional information was gathered in questionnaires administered weekly by project staff in the small markets frequented by project beneficiaries. This database of prices in different

markets facilitated post-distribution market price analysis and helped inform if our intervention impacted the local market. No problems of inflation arose during the project.

2.7 Results

Sub-Sector: Livelihoods Restoration

Result 1: The cash transfer was sufficient to meet protection needs in the livelihood protection basket. The timing of the transfer in August-September, toward the end of the annual farming season, helped in promoting productive investments.

Result 2: Some of the cash transfer was used to pay back debts. The cash transfer also reduced the extent to which many households engaged in other harmful activities, such as the further accumulation of debt, asset production selling, and families did not foresee the removal of children from school once classes began again in October (as they otherwise might if the families needed to migrate for work).

Result 3: Market response: cash transfers allowed households to purchase food, clothing, etc. at regular market prices, rather than purchasing at credit which brings a higher cost.

Sub-Sector: Temporary Employment

Result 1: Cash-for-Work, according to participants in village meetings, alleviated household insecurity by giving participants a livelihood and a source of revenue, which in turn has allowed them to begin tackling problems (paying debt, meeting household needs). In all, around \$167,565 was distributed in the area to boost the incomes of beneficiaries. The money received by beneficiaries was used to purchase condiments (salt, oil, sugar, spices), food, health care, and clothing, and to observe ceremonies (weddings, baptisms, funerals) and religious celebrations of Ramadan and Tabaski.

Result 2: Project activities were chosen in conjunction with village members and technical service agents in order to protect the environment and watersheds. Through site visits and conversations with the technical service agents and the villages, the impact of land reclamation and planting through CFW activities on the local environment is tangible. A total of 313 hectares of previously arid land have been reclaimed and seeded through CFW activities. Direct observation from sites as well as from interviews with technical services and villagers has helped to compile a list of indicators that act as predictors of short- and medium-term environmental impact (provided that reforested land and structures are maintained). At first sight, across the five sites visited, a marked change has occurred. Everywhere, hectares of sloped and flat earth have given way to a succession of half-moons and berms covered with good vegetation growth.

Result 3: In total, 50 community members were trained in leveling and grading, layout, and completion of land restoration activities and pasture land management. These skilled human resources are now available to villages and constitute an independent network.

It is clear from the internal assessment that participating households improved their level of knowledge of natural resource management techniques—97% responded that they improved their personal knowledge, while only 3% responded that they did not gain new knowledge.

Result 4: According to local authorities and agricultural households, this intervention created an opportunity for farmers to meet fellow farmers from different villages. A friendly, cooperative spirit prevailed—farmers shared their concerns, kola nuts, and other food items. It encouraged gestures and attitudes that reduced prior antagonisms. For example, some villages were divided politically (according to party), but those few families who had previously been “in conflict” came together around the work sites. This enabled individuals to overcome differences but also to find ways to resolve other problems.

Result 5: In order to ensure independence at the community level, the Bonbatu+ team and GoN technical services organized a meeting August 12th to 20th with all five CFW management committees to create a local network of skilled human resources in natural resource management (NRM).

The project’s best method for sustainability rests in the transfer of skills and techniques that were learned and implemented by beneficiaries. The strategy of forming a network developed during project implementation to ensure continuity of project benefits after the project’s end. As planned, a management committee and a monitoring system were established for the rehabilitated sites. The viability of the system will depend on the ability of the management committees to organize and conduct activities on a volunteer basis or potentially with other external assistance to support site monitoring related expenses. In this case, the mayors of the municipalities appreciated the progress made thus far and committed to support site monitoring-related expenses such as a small payment for guards.

All participants attest to having acquired skills that raised their level of knowledge and ability in NRM. The management committees and the local authorities appreciated the fact that small materials have been donated to the communities before the termination of the project, which further strengthens the motivation to maintain the NRM activities in their communities. CRS and communities signed agreements governing the management of these small materials, which the committees supervised.

III- Monitoring and evaluation

Activity monitoring is done in close collaboration with the GoN Environment technical services and the communities themselves. Regular monitoring tools were elaborated at the beginning of the project, and information was regularly fed back to CRS' M&E officer who maintained a database. Joint supervision (CRS, GoN agents, and local authorities) was conducted to evaluate activities and address any difficulties.

CRS amended the Performance Target for the number of hectares reclaimed and protected for agro-pastoral use through CFW activities to 300, rather than the 30 hectares included in the proposal.

Sector/Sub-Sector	Indicator	Performance Targets	Cumulative Period Reached
Economic Recovery and Market Systems (ERMS)			
Sub-Sector: Livelihoods Restoration	<i>Number of people assisted through livelihood restoration activities, by sex</i>	5,810	3,888 male 2,987 female 6,375 total
	<i>Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support</i>	70%	72%
	<i>Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities</i>	\$62,652	\$66,256
Sub-Sector: Temporary Employment	<i>Number of people employed through CFW activities, by sex</i>	830	570 men 260 women
	<i>Average total amount per person earned through CFW activities</i>	\$122.67	\$122.06
	<i>Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities</i>	\$118,584	\$116,175
	<i>Number of hectares reclaimed and protected for agro-pastoral use through CFW activities</i>	300	312.8
	<i>Number of households trained in the implementation of natural resource management (NRM) techniques</i>	830	830

V. Success Story

Nafissa Boubacar is a resident of the village of Tolkobeye Koirategui (Ouallam department), located about 80 km from Niamey. She is 30 years old, and married with 6 children.

“When my husband migrated for work, I was left alone for 18 months with small children whom I struggled to take care of. It was due to that situation that my household was selected among the beneficiaries of Bonbatu+ in my village, where each month, after a certain amount of days worked for land recovery, the project’s staff in charge of the financial compensation pays us,” Nafissa explained.

She was also able to invest in her family’s farm and her own income-generating activities, as she detailed, “I have saved enough was able to buy tomatoes seeds for the rainy season, and also to protect against the enemies of the crops...because there was no other project that helps us in this field. This has enabled me to produce a lot of tomatoes during the rainy season, which I sold.

With the money I made from the tomatoes’ sale, I was able to send my three kids back to school, to take care of them when they were sick and at the same time I even bought a goat that I am raising at our home.”



Nafissa was very appreciative of the Bonbatu+ project and the efforts of the US government, the Nigerien government, and CRS to help her family and her village at this critical time.