



Country Specific Information: Niger

United States Agency for International Development
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance
Office of Food for Peace

**Fiscal Year 2012: Title II Request for Applications
Title II Development Programs**

Subject to the availability of funds and commodities, under this Request for Applications (RFA), the Office of Food for Peace (FFP) plans to enter into awards for the following countries: Guatemala, Niger and Uganda. Applications are submitted at the risk of the applicant, and all preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.

Background: The Office of Food for Peace (FFP) anticipates that funds and commodities will be available for Title II development programming in Niger in fiscal year (FY) 2012. The anticipated FFP funding for this program is approximately \$15 million annually for five years in support of up to two awards, subject to the availability of funds and commodities. This document supplements the Title II Request for Applications (RFA) with information on the United States Agency for International Development in Niger (USAID/Niger) and FFP's food security programming priorities.

Food Security Situation: Although the humanitarian crises in 2004/5 and 2009/10 were severe, Niger suffers widespread food insecurity and vulnerability year after year. Acute malnutrition has not gone down despite the passing of the drought crisis, the bumper harvest of 2010 and increases in household access to cereals because the main determinants have not been addressed. The crisis of inadequate food availability should be distinguished from the crisis of chronic and acute malnutrition as the two crises have distinct (even if overlapping) contributors and distribution. In terms of food availability, Nigerien producers remain trapped in low-input, small-scale cereal production systems. National cereal availability barely keeps pace with population growth, and food availability is subject to regional market forces that can shift food flows towards neighboring countries' less poor consumers despite acute need in Niger. Poverty and very limited income earnings by Nigerien households, compounded by a cycle of seasonal debt accumulation and loss of assets during crisis years, impair purchasing power during the lean season when food prices rise. Lack of access to essential health care, very low access to improved water and sanitation, and suboptimal infant and young child care and feeding practices give rise to chronic and acute malnutrition among children. In the absence of savings, safety nets or access to affordable credit, smallholders are poorly equipped to manage risk from rapid-onset shocks (e.g., drought) and longer-term factors (e.g., land degradation). Women and adolescent girls are disenfranchised because of norms governing land tenure, asset ownership and accumulation, access to education and household decision making.

Examination of data related to food availability, access and utilization reveal a complicated picture. Poverty incidence is highest in Maradi, Tillaberi, Dosso, Tahoua and Zinder. In these regions, poverty incidence appears to be greatest in the agropastoral belt that spans west to east across the country. Malnutrition is pervasive, but is consistently highest in Maradi, Zinder and Diffa. These three regions had both the highest prevalence and the largest absolute number of acutely malnourished children in 2010; the three regions also have the highest prevalence of underweight children and the highest prevalence of stunting. That Maradi and Zinder are hardest hit by malnutrition may seem surprising given that they account for 40 percent of national food production, but the scourge of undernutrition in Niger has its roots in infant and young child care and feeding, health care, sanitation and hygiene and gender inequity, and is not solely (or even predominantly) a problem of food access.

Policy Environment: Recent political events may signal new opportunities to make progress in addressing the governance-related constraints that have contributed to and hamper the Government of Niger's (GoN) response to food insecurity. Applicants should incorporate governance strengthening as a cross-cutting program element. At the national level, this may include: supporting national capacity for agricultural and veterinary research and extension (e.g., through the *Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique du Niger* (INRAN, the National Agricultural Research Institute of Niger)); supporting GoN implementation and donor coordination around African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) in accordance with the *Stratégie de Développement Accéléré de Réduction de la Pauvreté* (SDARP, The Accelerated Development Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty); assisting in development of a national food security strategy and strengthening of the national protocols for management of acute malnutrition; urgently needed strengthening of national leadership on gender; strengthening of GoN governance in sectors of land, agriculture, transport and marketing (including policy and procedure formalization and corruption reduction); and strengthening of production, marketing and early warning information systems. At the sub-national level, efforts may include: strengthening capacity at regional, departmental and local levels in line with the overall process of decentralization; strengthening land commissions with focus on improving land tenure security and arbitration; and assisting the GoN to define and clarify role of consistent GoN focal points on nutrition (who can then be the focal point for activities conducted with the Ministry of Health (MoH), such as incorporating nutrition considerations into health worker pre-service training).

Geographic Priorities: The FFP Title II development program targets resources for food security programming in the most food insecure regions, with full consideration for opportunities for synergies, partnerships and success. FFP will focus Title II development program resources on the geographic areas of Maradi and Zinder, followed (at a lower level of priority) by Diffa, Tillaberi, Dosso, and southern Tahoua. This recommendation is based upon data on stunting, wasting and underweight, historical food crises, and poverty, but also recognizes the enormous potential for strategic partnerships in Maradi and Zinder, and in the agropastoral belt, in general. **Applications may propose interventions in more than one of these geographic areas, but from a security perspective the sites must be accessible for monitoring and evaluation purposes by USAID and Title II development program partners.**

There are no pre-determined target areas within the geographic focus area identified above. However, applications must substantiate (with evidence) the proposed target areas at the district level based on comparative need and potential return on investment. Need should be defined on the basis of comparative food security and nutrition status of households and communities.

Within selected target areas, all children under two years of age and pregnant and lactating women and their households in areas with high levels of stunting may be considered for prioritization for nutrition activities aimed at improving food utilization to address the long-term negative effects of chronic child malnutrition. Livelihoods interventions can make an effort to place special emphasis on reaching poor and marginalized households, with communities engaged in criteria definition and beneficiary selection.

Program Length: Subject to the availability of funds and commodities, FFP is considering up to two five-year awards for the upcoming development program in Niger. A mid-term evaluation would determine if progress has been sufficient to warrant the development program's continuation during the final two years.

USAID/Niger and FFP Programming Priorities: The development program's focus should be: *to reduce food insecurity and malnutrition among vulnerable rural populations in Niger.* Mission and FFP priority objectives and recommended activities for the Title II development programs in Niger are summarized below.

The fight to sustainably reduce food insecurity in Niger must be waged simultaneously with a package of activities designed to address the determinants of widespread undernutrition as well as activities that aim to boost household productivity and income. Child malnutrition is not mainly due to the family's low income, but rather due to poor breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices, diarrhea and other infections due to lack of potable water, sanitation and hygiene practices, short birth intervals and large family size, mother's workload and time constraints, exacerbated by illiteracy and the weak health system. Governance, gender, vulnerability reduction, emergency preparedness, and program integration will be cross-cutting themes and must be addressed.

Under this objective, two broadly-defined priority components have been identified: improving nutrition among children under five and strengthening livelihoods. This dual track effort is intended to yield compounding returns in food security status by simultaneously addressing its three underlying causes - food availability, access and utilization.

For the development program priority component I, *Reduce chronic malnutrition among pregnant and lactating women and children under five with an emphasis on children under two*, please see the standard language on prevention of malnutrition in the RFA.

In addition to the overall guidance, in Niger applicants should consider the following illustrative activities:

- Conducting monthly outreach for malnutrition prevention/behavior change for children under two years of age and pregnant and lactating women in every village to improve infant and young child feeding practices (including early initiation and

- exclusive breastfeeding, adequate and timely complementary feeding, promotion of growth monitoring using volunteer model mothers, improved complementary feeding using locally available and affordable foods, feeding during and after illnesses, etc.);
- Improving hygiene practices and enhancing access to clean water and improved sanitation. Comprehensive water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions are essential and central to sustainable reduction of childhood stunting in Niger. Applicants should propose activities to increase access to potable water and promote optimal hand-washing at four critical times. Applicants should consider a community led total sanitation approach towards the elimination of open air defecation, in line with efforts being undertaken nationally in Niger;
 - Improving nutritional status and nutrition awareness among single and newly married adolescent girls and their families;
 - Increasing household diet diversity and diet quality through homestead food production such as home gardens and a small livestock program and other options, increasing household's access to food, etc.;
 - Improving prevention and treatment of childhood illnesses;
 - Improving access and quality of health services, including family planning services, as well as nutrition services in coordination with partners;
 - Improving detection and referral of children under five years of age with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM); and,
 - Including direct distribution of Title II fortified blended foods to pregnant and lactating women and children six-23 months to prevent and treat malnutrition.

Target Livelihood Groups, Households and Individuals: For the development program priority component II, *increasing the local availability and households' access to nutritious food by diversifying agricultural productivity, rural households' income and increasing resilience to shocks*, please consider the following:

The livelihood intervention should include but is not limited to: 1) diversifying livelihood assets and opportunities; 2) promoting improved technologies and practices; 3) increasing market access, information and orientation; 4) enhancing resiliency and risk management; 5) improving natural resource management; and 6) providing basic education and training for women and adolescent girls that may lead to strengthening their role in society and bring about change. Of particular note is that while improving the quantity and quality of production is important, considerable attention should be directed at the market for any products as this will lead to more sustainable improvements in income and food security. Therefore, proposed interventions must be directed toward the households also being addressed by the nutrition interventions. They should be guided by a thorough market analysis to ensure sufficient demand exists to sustainably support the increased production of any livestock or agricultural-related products. Within these broad parameters, applications must substantiate (with evidence) the choice of livelihood groups to be targeted. Applications should also define and substantiate (with evidence) the choice of sub-groups to be targeted within these broadly defined livelihood groups. In both cases, this should be based on the same criteria used to select target areas with the identified geographic

focus area – that is, comparative need and potential for return on investment.

In order to achieve compounding returns in food security status, the livelihoods interventions should benefit the same communities and households targeted by nutrition and health interventions. Applications should also specify how activities designed to address each of these sector priorities will be integrated for maximum impact. Given that transhumant mobility and ‘splitting the herd’ are key features of pastoralist and agro-pastoralist livelihoods in the areas targeted, this may entail targeting households and communities that are geographically distant, but socially and economically linked. FFP would like awardees to reduce use of community managed cereal banks in future development (vs. emergency) programming activities in Niger, given the findings of a recent Office of Inspector General (OIG) audit. Appropriate uses of food aid as a development assistance modality in Niger include, but are not limited to, Maternal and Child Health (MCH) programs, Food for Assets (FFA) or Food for Work (FFW), and Food for Training (FFT). This is an illustrative list and FFP is amenable to other modalities for the distribution of food as part of a preventative approach. However, any food distributions used in support of a preventative approach should be justified (with evidence) including firm distribution timelines (taking into account the differing lean seasons in the target geographic area) and specific beneficiary enrollment and graduation criteria.

Additional Key Considerations

Program Integration: Multi-sectoral approaches are necessary to address root causes of malnutrition; the application, therefore, should aim for close inter-sectoral linkages, complementarities in program approaches and convergence in implementation. The program approach should aim to build local capacities for program management, and planning and implementation. Program implementation should align with GoN’s and the various ministries’ policies and priorities.

Response Strategy for Predictable Shocks: Given USAID/Niger and FFP’s choice to invest multi-year resources in areas that are highly vulnerable to drought and other natural disasters, significant forethought regarding emergency response is required. Indeed, recurrent drought every few years virtually ensures that such a response will be required within the program’s lifecycle.

To address this, applications must contain a response strategy for dealing with predictable shocks relevant to the proposed target area(s) and livelihood group(s). This strategy should include activities that contribute to building local and state level early warning and response capacity. It should also be embedded in the proposed program’s strategy - meaning it should align with and support development goals and preserve development gains made in intervening (non-shock) years.

How food is distributed is critical in this regard. General food distributions, for example, can undermine livelihoods and coping strategies by introducing disincentives to production, and nomadic and transhumant mobility. However, FFP expects that applications submitted will identify health and nutrition interventions that incorporate distribution of Title II fortified blended foods as part of the response. Additionally, applications must identify and define both

trigger indicators and response activities that will respond to the elevated food insecurity.

Strategic partnerships: Lack of coordination was identified as one of the major challenges jeopardizing effective target achievements. The Title II development program partners should therefore ensure close coordination with relevant development and emergency partners, government and non-government entities at national, provincial, district and village level. Local coordination is essential.

Paramount among these is partnership with GoN institutions, with a strong capacity strengthening focus as discussed above. In the sectors of Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) and WASH, key partners to be considered include UNICEF (particularly in the Key Family Practices Program or KFP), the United Nation's (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization, and the World Food Program (WFP); additionally the REACH Partnership and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative may establish a presence in Niger. In the sectors of agriculture and marketing, applicants may consider partnering with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), the Niger Food Security Project (ARZIKI), the West Africa Trade Hub (WATH), the West African Seed Alliance (WASA), the Agribusiness and Trade Promotion Project (ATP) and the Expanded Agribusiness and Trade Promotion Project (E-ATP). Potential partners that Applicants may consider in humanitarian response and safety nets include WFP, and the World Bank whose new Safety Nets Program will include KFP as the soft conditionality and will operate in Maradi, Dosso, Tahoua, Zinder and Tillaberi.

Applicants should also articulate how the proposed activities complement the aims, activities and investments of other development actors, including the WFP, other UN agencies and NGOs, civil society, the private sector and communities themselves. Applications should include a description of the means through which the non-emergency program will contribute to and encourage an enabling environment for promoting gender equity. Gender should be incorporated into project design and targeting, to avoid a stove-piped approach in which men participate in agricultural activities and women participate in MCHN activities. Applicants should also indicate how the program will work with and through district government systems to build the capacity of local government to address the root causes of food insecurity.

Security: Applicants should indicate measures to safeguard staff, commodities, and beneficiaries at food distribution sites.

Evaluations: Applicants should review recent evaluations on the FFP Niger programs at the Development Experience Clearinghouse website at <http://dec.usaid.gov/index.cfm> and the FY11 Office of the Inspector General Audit Report on Niger available at <http://www.usaid.gov/oig/public/fy11rpts/7-683-11-008-p.pdf>.