
FY16 Q2 Quarterly Report

January-March 2016

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

2014-2016



*Women's gardening field school at Kabéfo. Photo:
Mercy Corps*

PROJECT SUMMARY

Award No: AID-FFP-G-14-00024
Start Date: April 11th, 2014
End Date (Extension): April 29th
2016
Report Date: April 29th, 2016
Total Award: \$6,998,130

I. Executive Summary

Since April 2014, Mercy Corps Niger has been 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 targets 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. During this quarter, the main achievements are described below:

- 7,986 households benefited from cash for work activities (rehabilitation of degraded lands, deepening of ponds, and construction of levee to avoid flooding, realization of hygiene and sanitation activities). Each beneficiary received XOF 12,500 (US \$20.3) meaning a total amount of XOF 99,825,000 (US \$169,195) distributed.
- 13 awareness sessions, related to essential nutrition actions, were organized by the community outreach workers; 798 people including 277 men, 474 women, 47 girls and 37 boys participated in these sessions.
- 6 boreholes were dug to the benefit of 6 villages. For 5 villages where the water is drinkable after the laboratory analyses, water management committees have been established and trained. Each village mobilized XOF 150,000 (US \$254, voluntary contribution) to provide start-up funds for the management committee as it is set in Niger's legislation.
- 104 community outreach workers were trained on infant and young child feeding. They have been officially integrated in the network of the Ouallam Health District.
- 35 HA of degraded land were rehabilitated with half-moons and zaï through cash for work activities. Half-moons and zaï have been filled with organic manure to improve plant growth.
- 15 villages where surface water is available out (of 56 villages) received improved seeds of vegetable for the establishment of gardening field schools. 1,344 people (90% women) were working on these gardening field schools and received trainings from agricultural extension agents (creation of nurseries for seedlings, supply of organic manure, techniques of vegetables seeding, transplanting and management).
- 45 people (3 people per each of the 15 villages) benefited from an exchange visit from Ouallam to the AINOMA²'s large-scale vegetable production sites.
- 11 villages received loans of XOF 9,283,380 (US \$15,735) from the microfinance institute (ASUSU SA) corresponding to 80% of the total value of the stored agricultural products of 39.5 metric tons during this second year of warrantage implementation.
- A regional workshop was organized for the strengthening of early warning systems in Ouallam. Following this workshop, 44 secretaries of all the community based early warning systems were trained on data collection and reporting, as part of the workshop's recommendations.

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

² *AINOMA is one of the most important suppliers of vegetable seeds in Niger. This enterprise has its seed production sites in Say Department and a laboratory in Niamey for seeds quality analyses.*

II. Program Overview

Large parts 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 of 2013, this pattern repeated itself, impacting the harvest of staple crops. The Ouallam department of Tillabéri region was one of the hardest hit, and with 59 percent of the population moderately food insecure - the highest proportion in the country - the population was immediately vulnerable to food insecurity.

The ECOUT program aimed to assist 56,000 beneficiaries (8,000 households) over an initial period of 18 months to meet their immediate needs and build their resilience to future shocks and stresses. The program was subsequently extended through a no-cost extension to slightly more than 24 months in length. ECOUT supports agro-pastoralists affected by food insecurity within the communes of Ouallam and Dingazi to improve their nutritional status through the purchase of nutritious food during the lean season using food vouchers and unconditional cash transfers. ECOUT also supports the diversification of household diets by increasing access to dairy products. Beneficiaries of the program received vouchers for the purchase of goats, animal feed and vaccinations, and benefited from training in animal husbandry, animal health and fodder management.

The ECOUT program also aims to increase the resilience of agro-pastoralist communities to future shocks. Specifically, the program is supporting community-driven projects to rehabilitate pastureland and increase water efficiency through Food for Work (FFW) activities. ECOUT further contributes to the recovery and increased resilience of farmers in Ouallam department by providing training on climate-smart techniques. Participants who complete the training have earned vouchers to purchase improved agricultural inputs. Lastly, the ECOUT program contributes to strengthening the GoN's early warning system (EWS) for food insecurity by building the capacity of community-based early warning committees to effectively identify imminent shocks and communicate projected needs to commune-level bodies. Mercy Corps also works to ensure that nutrition messaging is a part of all 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		- During this quarter, 7,986 households benefited from cash for work activities (rehabilitation of degraded lands, deepening of ponds, construction of levee to avoid flooding, realization of hygiene and sanitation activities) - Each beneficiary received XOF 12,500 (US \$20.3) meaning a total amount of XOF 99,825,000 (US \$169,195) distributed.
Activity 1.1.2.	8,000 households benefit from unconditional cash	X			

Description of Activities		Achievement			Quantitative and Qualitative Description
		Achieved	Ongoing	No	
	transfer (UCT)				
Activity 1.1.3	4,400 households benefit from vouchers to purchase goats (4,400 does, 600 bucks)	X			
Activity 1.1.4	4,400 households benefit from one-month animal feed vouchers and vaccinations for their goats	X			
Activity 1.1.5	4,400 households benefit from training in animal husbandry, animal health, fodder management, and nutrition/ hygiene around dairy production	X			
Activity 1.1.6	Community-level nutrition messaging and behavior change activities related to ENA (essential nutrition actions) and household dairy consumption		X		During the quarter: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 13 awareness sessions related to essential nutrition actions were organized by the community outreach' workers; - 798 people including 277 men, 474 women, 47 girls and 37 boys reached these sessions; - 104 community outreach' workers were trained on Infant and young child feeding. They have been officially integrated in the network of Ouallam Health District.
<i>Outcome 2: Agro-pastoralist population affected by food insecurity have increased capacity and resources that support resilience</i>					
Activity 2.1.1	Land rehabilitation and small infrastructures projects conducted under food for work activities		X		Through the cash for work activities, 35 ha of degraded land were rehabilitated with half-moons and zaï. These half-moons and zaï have been filled with organic manure to improve plant growth
Activity 2.1.2	8,000 households benefit from agricultural inputs, via voucher system		X		15 villages where surface water is available out the 56 villages received improved seeds of vegetable for the establishment of gardening field schools
Activity 2.1.3	8,000 households trained in climate-smart agricultural techniques		X		- 1,344 people (90% of women) working on the gardening field schools received training from agricultural extension agents. These trainings were related to creation of nurseries for seedlings, supply of organic manure, techniques of vegetables seeding, transplanting and management.

Description of Activities		Achievement			Quantitative and Qualitative Description
		Achieved	Ongoing	No	
					- 45 people (3 people per each of the 15 villages) benefited from an exchange visit from Ouallam to the AINOMA's large-scale vegetable production sites.
Activity 2.1.4	30 EWS structures benefit from training and capacity building support		X		- During this quarter, a regional workshop was organized for the strengthening of early warning system in Ouallam - 44 secretaries of all the community based early warning systems were trained on data collection and reporting, as part of the workshop recommendation.

3.2. Program activities narrative

3.2.1. Activities related to the outcome "Agro-pastoralists population affected by food insecurity have reduced nutrient gap"

Cash distributions

The distribution of cash within the context of Cash For Work (CFW) helps beneficiaries to meet their needs and reduce migration during the post-harvest period. During CFW activities, each beneficiary received XOF 12,500 (US \$20.3) after two weeks of work. A total amount of 99,825,000 XOF (US \$169,195) was distributed to 7,986 beneficiaries during this quarter. The main achievements of CFW activities were as follows:

- ✓ In 36 villages, 35 ha of degraded land were rehabilitated through half-moons and zaï, which were also partially filled with organic manure to promote plant growth;
- ✓ In six villages, beneficiaries deepened or dredged ponds or constructed levees to avoid flooding;
- ✓ In 10 villages, beneficiaries improved public hygiene and sanitation through sweeping of schools, markets and public areas and fenced community gardens linked to women's gardening field schools.

Community level nutrition messaging and behavior change

During this quarter, 13 awareness sessions were organized by community outreach workers and overseen by Mercy Corps field staff. These sessions were related to the essential nutrition actions listed below:

- ✓ Exclusive breastfeeding;
- ✓ Complementary feeding techniques for pregnant and lactating women;
- ✓ Promotion of local foods, including consumption of goat's milk and *Moringa*;
- ✓ Use of health services (preventive and curative)
- ✓ Hygiene and sanitation
- ✓ Hand washing

These 13 sessions reached a total of 798 beneficiaries including 277 men, 474 women, 47 girls and 37 boys.

Training of community outreach' workers on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF):

The ECOOUT program, in partnership with the Health District of Ouallam, organized trainings on IYCF. The specific objectives of this training were: i) to update the knowledge of community outreach' workers on IYCF; ii) to strengthen their capacity to communicate IYCF messages; and iii) to equip them with counseling techniques and tools.

A total of 104 community outreach workers (52 women and 52 men) out of 112 attended these trainings. At the end, community workers were recognized officially by the Health District of Ouallam and integrated into their network. These trainings were part of the exit strategy of ECOOUT program.

Construction of boreholes

During the extension phase, Mercy Corps planned to construct six boreholes in the highest priority villages. These villages were identified in partnership with the communes and the government technical services in Ouallam and include Goura Goura, Saptaka Kotchiré, Kabéfo, Berezedo, Banimate and Garbey Goumande. The construction of these boreholes aimed to improve the availability of drinkable water, which reinforces messages on essential family practices i.e. hygiene, hand washing, etc.

During this quarter, six boreholes were dug as initially planned. After the analysis of water quality by an independent laboratory, the results showed that the borehole water in Saptaka Kotchiré was unsuitable for human consumption. To avoid the risks of indirect contamination of humans via animals and plants, it has been decided not to authorize the use of water from this borehole for watering the animals and vegetables. Therefore, after discussion with the technical services and local authorities, it was decided to close this water point. The other boreholes were equipped (pump and superstructures) for household use by beneficiaries, we well as for watering livestock and vegetable production.

Meanwhile, the program team has undertaken the effort to establish and train water management committees in each village. Each management committee is composed of a President, a Secretary General, a Treasurer, two Hygienists, and a Maintenance person for maintenance and small repairs of the borehole, as well as and a borehole manager for the daily management of the borehole (see example of Kabéfo in annex 1). In addition, each community benefiting from the boreholes has mobilized XOF 150,000 (US \$254, voluntary contribution) to provide start-up funds for the management committee as it is set in Niger's legislation. This contribution will help to ensure the sustainability of the boreholes.



Half-moons constructed for land rehabilitation



A pit for wastewater collection



Digging of borehole in Kabéfo

3.2.2. Activities related to the outcome “Agro-pastoralists population affected by food insecurity have increased capacity and resources that support resilience”

Training of beneficiaries and monitoring of gardening field schools

As part of the program strategy on diversification of agricultural production, beneficiaries from 15 villages (where surface water is available) benefited from vegetable seeds and small equipment for the establishment of gardening field schools: this included four villages of Dingazi commune (Korou, Banimaté, Tchigo and Soudjeydo) and 11 villages of Ouallam commune (Kabéfo, Koubora, Goura – Goura, Tolkoboye Koira Tegui, Tolkoboye Fondobon, Sargane Gollé, Sargane Baba Windi, Sargane Boura, Deygorou, Diaga Koira and Kondabayé).

In these 15 villages, 1,344 people (see table 1) worked in the gardening field schools and benefited from training from agricultural extension agents. These field trainings were related to:

- ✓ Creation of nurseries for seedlings;
- ✓ Supply of organic manure;
- ✓ Techniques of vegetables seeding, transplanting and management; and,
- ✓ Vegetable harvests evaluation to estimate their size of production.

Table 1: Number of people participating in gardening activities per village

#	Villages	Beneficiaries per village
1	Korou	131
2	Banimaté	67
3	Tchigo	89
4	Soudjeygo	28
5	Kabéfo	78
6	Koubora	59
7	Goura Goura	57
8	Tolkoboye Koira Tegui	34
9	Tolkoboye Fondobon	75
10	Sargane Gollé	420
11	Sargane Boura	120
12	Sargane Baba Windi	50
13	Deygorou	59
14	Diaga Koira	43
15	Kondabaye	34
Total		1 344

Gardeners' field trip to the production site of Enterprise AINOMA

During this quarter (January 27-28, 2016), the ECOOUT program organized an exchange visit (from Ouallam to Say, more than 150 kilometers), in partnership with AINOMA. This visit was part of the program exit strategy and aimed to link producers with seed suppliers and other vegetable value chain stakeholders in Niamey. Furthermore, this trip aimed to improve farmers' knowledge on good vegetable production practices by visiting AINOMA's large-scale vegetable production operation, to assess their technical / production systems and exchange with other producers in Say. Thus, 45 beneficiaries from the 15 villages (3 people per village) participated in this exchange visit. The two days of the visit were organized as follows:

- ✓ First day in Say: the beneficiaries had the opportunity to visit AINOMA's sites of production for improved seeds of rain-fed crops (groundnut, sesame, cowpea, millet, maize, etc.), improved seeds of vegetables (cabbage, lettuce, onion, tomato) and fruit trees (citrus, mango);
- ✓ Second day in Niamey: At the AINOMA office, participants visited the experimental laboratory and seed processing and storage facility. The producers and AINOMA discussed how the enterprise could provide both vegetable and rain-fed seeds in Ouallam. Finally, the producers were connected with buyers in the main markets of Niamey for possible market linkages. This was really appreciated by the beneficiaries, and those from the largest vegetable producing villages such as Tolkoboye or Sargane know now they can have a win-win partnership with potential buyers in Niamey.



Harvest of potato at Korou



Carrot



Tomato



Onion



Lettuce



Cabbage

Pictures: Vegetables ready for harvest in Korou (Dingazi)

Scaling up of warrantage

➤ Distribution of loans via the microfinance institution

Initially as many as 30 villages expressed interest in participating in *warrantage* activities during the extension phase of the program. However, due to a lack of warehouse storage facilities and above all to the weak human resources of MFI partner ASUSU SA in Ouallam (only two agents in the office of Ouallam to cover the entire department), ultimately only 11 villages benefited from the scaling up of *warrantage*. A total of 779 people (548 women and 231 men) from these 11 villages, stored 39.5 metric tons of their agricultural products and received loans of XOF 9,283,380 (US\$ 15,735) corresponding to 80% of the total value of the stored agricultural products (see table 2).

Despite the difficulties described above, the scaling up of *warrantage* in Ouallam was a success. Indeed, compared to the pilot year, the number of villages and beneficiaries, the quantity of products stored, and the amount of loans distributed increased by at least 100% (see table 3). This exceptional adoption of the *warrantage* model in Ouallam showed the effectiveness of this practice, which offers an opportunity for vulnerable households to store their harvest and avoid spoilage and selling when prices are at their lowest.

Table 2: Beneficiaries, quantities of products stored and their value

#	Villages	Benef		Agricultural product								Stock value
		Sex		Millet	Sorghum	Cowpea	Groudnut	Voandzou	Sesame	Okra	Maize	
		M	F									
1	Bereyzedo	5	46	2600	0	0	2140	0	20	0	0	1 227 500
2	Dan Ara	24	2	1945	80	225	40	0	0	0	0	449 937
3	Diep Beri	14	93	450	0	0	4200	0	0	0	0	1 457 250
4	Dingazi	25	62	650	0	125	3260	75	0	0	0	1 262 000
5	Koria Sabo	27	53	700	0	1425	2275	0	20	0	0	1 454 375
6	Soudeydo	18	35	300	180	100	3620	0	96	0	0	1 363 600
7	Takassaba	9	87	122,5	0	115	1020	182,5	31	0	0	498 800
8	Iyam Bangou	42	20	2200	400	862,5	777	57,5	0	0	100	1 073 687
9	Korou	29	33	1300	350	327,5	1660	0	0	0	0	948 075
10	Goubeyze Bangou	33	26	1210	137,5	300	1315	810	170	0	0	1 168 000
11	Saptaka Kotchiré	5	91	0	0	167,5	802	386,3	96	90	0	701 000
Total		231	548	11477	1147	3647	21109	1511	433	90	100	11 604 225
		779		39515,8								

Table 3: Comparison of this year with the piloting year

Year	Number of villages of implementation	Number of beneficiaries involved	Quantities of agricultural products stored (metric tons)	Amount of loans distributed (XOF)
Year 1 (piloting)	5	386	17.4	3,186,630 (US \$5,401)
Year 2	11	779	39.5	9,283,380 (US \$15,735)

➤ **Building of storage facilities**

In response to one of the constraint of *warrantage*, a lack of warehouses, the program undertook activities to build these facilities in many villages. As part of Cash For Work activities, beneficiaries constructed warehouses in 13 villages that had shown an interest in pursuing *warrantage*. These villages benefited from the support of Mercy Corps to finalize their warehouses with cement, metal sheeting, and metal doors and windows.



New warehouse built during CFW activities



Agricultural products stored in a warrantage warehouse

Regional workshop on early warning system

The ECOUT program has aimed to contribute to the strengthening of the early warning system (EWS) in Ouallam department. To this end, it conducted a diagnosis that highlighted that the EWS is functional in Ouallam, but several gaps remain. To discuss these issues, the program organized a regional workshop in Ouallam during this quarter. Many stakeholders working on early warning systems attended this workshop from the regional (Tillabery) to community level, including: OCHA, UNDP, World Vision, Oxfam, Karkara, government extension services, regional committee for crisis and disaster prevention, traditional leaders, local authorities and beneficiaries. This workshop was an opportunity to:

- ✓ Present the main achievements of the program and the gaps in the EWS sector in Ouallam;
- ✓ Create synergy between stakeholders for the coordination of activities in the field, with a view to strengthening the existing EWS in the region of Tillabery;
- ✓ Strengthen community information transmission mechanisms via local market vendors, who function as information carriers from the villages to the commune and vice versa;
- ✓ Prepare for the exit of the program and ensure the sustainability of community based early warning systems in partnership with the communes and other actors.

The workshop concluded that the EWS is functional at departmental, communal and community levels in Ouallam (meetings are done regularly and on time). However, several recommendations were made to ensure a better functionality and sustainability of the EWS (examples of recommendations below):

- ✓ Improve top-down communication between the community based early warning systems (CBEWS) and departmental and communal structures, by transmitting all information on time;
- ✓ Create and operate a cluster for the different stakeholders working in the field of early warning in the department of Ouallam for the better coordination of activities;
- ✓ Suggest to the communes that they offer formal recognition and appreciation of the work of local vendors used as voluntary information carriers between CBEWS (village-level) and the Observatory of Vulnerability Monitoring (commune-level) to encourage them;
- ✓ Formalize transmission of information from the CBEWS to the Observatory via vendors (see success story of the vendor of Fondo Zongou village in annex 2) by the introduction of an acknowledgment of receipt provided by the Mayor;
- ✓ Strengthen the capacity of the secretaries of the CBEWS established by the program before ECOUT's close-out.

Capacity building of secretaries of Community Based Early Warning Systems

The program organized two trainings sessions during this quarter for the secretaries of the CBEWS in Ouallam and Dingazi, following the recommendation made by the regional workshop on EWS in Ouallam (see section above). These trainings aimed to improve the quality of reporting through monthly data collection sheets and other documents. Forty-four of 46 established secretaries in Ouallam department attended these trainings.



Participants to the training of secretaries of CBEWS at Fournemy (Dingazi)



Participants to the training of secretaries of CBEWS at Ouallam

Awareness campaign for the program exit

In order to ensure the sustainability of its activities, the program conducted a sensitization caravan as part of its exit strategy. This caravan, in collaboration with the Imam of Ouallam, touched upon all program activities. The overall objective was to ensure that there is a full ownership of all program achievements by target communities. This caravan reached a total of 1774 participants, including 662 men, 907 women, 89 boys and 116 girls. The key messages of the caravan linked with the main components of the program (nutrition, agriculture, livestock, early warning system) and can be summarized as follows:

- Nutrition: The importance of the hygiene of households surroundings, improvement in the dietary diversification of children under five, and in supplying pregnant and lactating women with EFA messages (including the consumption of goat's milk and attendance at health centers) for the well-being of households and communities;
- Agriculture: The combination of smart agriculture and diversification can contribute to improved agricultural production (training topics such as the use of improved seeds, farmer assisted natural regeneration of land, gardening, bio-control of pests, etc. were discussed during village assemblies);
- Livestock is a key asset for vulnerable households; they must continue to manage the goats distributed by the program well, even after ECOUT's end.
- Early warning systems: The program made great strides in improving community's understanding and practice regarding the roles and responsibilities of committees; their responsibility to effectively and sustainably support CBEWS/ER systems; and the importance of the transmission of early warning information and the function of the transmission network;
- General: Communities and community leaders in particular were encouraged to ensure the sustainability of ECOUT activities through awareness sessions after the program closes using educational materials distributed to them (pagi-volts) by the program;
- Warrantage and Islam: Warrantage is not contrary to Islam and all villages can continue this activity without the program, working through the office of ASUSU in Ouallam.

IV. Monitoring and Evaluation

Post Distribution Monitoring

During this quarter, the program conducted post distribution monitoring to appreciate the relevance of cash for work activities and cash distribution. The results of this PDM highlighted that:

- ✓ 98.9% of the beneficiaries reported their satisfaction with the implementation of cash for work activities;
- ✓ 99% of CFW beneficiaries reported having been well informed about payment details (date and place of payment);
- ✓ The cash received by the households was primarily used for food purchase (reported by 98% of households) and health expenses (reported by 38%) (see breakdown in table 4).
- ✓ Before the cash distribution, small trade of goods, wage labor, and migration/remittances were the main coping strategy used by households (table 5) during the lean season.

Table 4: Breakdown of the use of cash received

Activity	Percentage
Food purchase	98%
Health	38%
Reimbursement of debt	13%
Tax	7%
Animals purchase	1%
Social event	1%

Tableau 5: Coping strategies used by the households

Activities	Percentage
Assistance	9.09%

Picking	3.03%
Credit	4.04%
Animal fattening	4.71%
Exodus	12.46%
Labor	17.85%
Gardening	8.08%
Begging	0.67%
Small trade	24.58%
Nothing	1.68%
Remittance	13.80%

Final external evaluation (end line survey)

After a competitive process, the Improve Group³ was selected to lead the final evaluation of the program. This international firm is supported by a national consultant (*Réseau MARP*), to ensure an excellent evaluation, taking into account local constraints. This evaluation will combine two main tools for data collection, image grouping and household surveys. Collected data will be compared to that of the baseline. The evaluation will take place during the month of April 2016.

³ <http://theimprovegroup.com/>