



U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Environment Project Profile



Africa

Niger

683-0278

Sustainable  
Agriculture

## Gouré Natural Resource Management Interventions

**U**SAID has long supported efforts to combat environmental and agricultural limitations in the Gouré section of Niger's Zinder Department. The five-year (FY 1992-96), \$5.0 million *Gouré Natural Resource Management Interventions* (NRMI) project continues the work begun under USAID's *Niger Agricultural Sector Development Grant I* (ASDG I) program. Emphasis has moved from a government-implemented program under the previous project to a participatory approach under the current project. Villagers and communities are encouraged to adopt natural resource management practices and take more responsibility and control over available resources. Such efforts will be supported on a wider scale under the ASDG II program now under way. (See separate project profile.)

The Gouré project intervenes in rural natural resource management. The project trains residents to use basic agroforestry techniques, such as building live fences and establishing shrub windbreaks, construct wells for pastoral and cultivation purposes, and establish nurseries as a source of tree and shrub species. These efforts will help stabilize shifting dunes, protect cultivated areas from wind erosion, and keep livestock out of cuvettes.<sup>1</sup> Lastly, the project aims to prepare villagers to use such natural resource management and monitoring techniques to extend and expand the project beyond its formal end. Since the Gouré project emphasizes participatory planning and implementation of local natural resource management efforts, the specific means of

*(continued)*

### Highlights FY 93-94

- *Hired and trained 11 village-based technical agents in Participatory Rural Appraisal to help villagers prioritize, plan, and carry out project activities. Local Peace Corps Volunteers helped conduct 30 appraisals in the 10 project villages.*
- *Hired a gender specialist to work with women and promote the inclusion of gender issues in project implementation.*
- *Began collecting data for the project's environmental impact monitoring plan.*
- *Villagers in Dalari began building more than 11,000 meters of dune stabilization fencing with dead plant material.*
- *Villagers in Agouma established a soil conservation experiment using micro-catchments and water retention bunds. Their efforts increased yields in project-area fields by 60 percent during the rainy season.*

#### Project at a Glance

**Funding:** Life-of-Project \$5,000,000

**Project Duration:** FY 1992-96

**Implementor:**  
Aficare

**USAID Project Officer:**  
Curtis Nissly / Niamey, Niger  
Tel: 227-733-508 Fax: 227-723-918

accomplishing project goals depend upon village priorities and willingness to act. Over time, project organizers hope to provide information on village-level efforts and possibilities to regional and national decision makers and international donor agencies.

## Background

Niger, a vast West African country extending into the Sahel and Sahara, is susceptible to drought and extreme aridity. Most of its nine million people inhabit the more humid southwestern third of the country, where they grow grains, including millet, sorghum, and, in some areas, corn and wheat and raise goats, sheep and cattle. Desperate poverty and land degradation in rural areas pushes many people to seek work—seasonally or long-term—in urban centers in Niger and neighboring countries.

## Implementation

Under ASDG I, the U.S.-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) Africare implemented a local currency-funded program in integrated rural development, and now continues this effort under the Gouré NRMI grant.

## Project Progress

In the spring of 1993, Africare's technical assistance team, based in Gouré and Niamey, initiated orientation and administrative system activities for the project. The team hired and trained 11 local men to be village-based technical agents; the agents will help organize and facilitate villagers' natural resource management efforts. Although women were also invited to apply for positions as agents, none were hired due to their inability to pass a written exam. To address the consequent absence of women, project staff hired a gender specialist/organizer, and

will be adding another one soon, to work with women at the ten sites and promote the inclusion of gender issues in project implementation.

**Pilot village planning.** Specific project plans are being developed using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) processes in ten pilot villages. PRA engages communities in assessing social, economic, and environmental interrelationships in their area and developing action plans to address the natural resource priorities they identify.

Project staff used exploratory PRAs to select villages that were interested in hosting and collaborating in project activities. A PRA specialist trained the new agents in the PRA methodology and techniques. The agents, working with local Peace Corps volunteers and interested villagers, then began carrying out PRAs in each village. Thirty PRAs were conducted in 1993–94.

Each PRA team was requested to disaggregate all survey/interview questions along gender lines. However, for religious reasons, the predominantly male PRA teams were largely prohibited from gathering information from women respondents, thus skewing the overall information base gathered.

Preparation of natural resource management action plans, following completion of the PRAs, has begun at the village level. The village-based technical agents are receiving ongoing training from project staff in technical subjects, such as bund construction (building earth banks along contours) and digging *zay* holes (micro-catchments in which humus is placed, moisture collects, and grain is grown), extension techniques, and management issues.

The agents facilitate every aspect of project development and villagers are responsible for implementing

activities. Each village has a resource management committee that has created formal agreements with local officials, traditional chiefs, and project staff to outline their intent and plan of action and the roles each party plays. These agreements are recorded on cassette in the local language and kept in the villages. Each village has also submitted an outline of a local resource management plan to the Africare team and is following up with proposals for specific activities. Two projects intended to benefit the town of Gouré itself are providing trees, training and technical support to school children for tree planting around schools, and using participatory methods to help a neighborhood solve erosion problems. In order to incorporate women's issues adequately, the project is considering setting up parallel women's committees in each village.

Two of the ten pilot sites are also involved in a United Nations Development Programme/Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) anti-desertification project. NRMI-sponsored workplans from those sites are being coordinated with U.N. staff to ensure compatibility and cooperation in carrying out activities.

As an example of the flexibility needed in planning a participatory project, the Africare team has initiated an adult literacy program in response to villagers' requests. Seven instructors from the government's literacy service have been trained and placed in project sites; they plan to focus on local languages (which include Beri-beri, Haussa, Fulani, and Bouzou) and use such project-related documents as village agreements and proposals. In addition, instructors plan to read one chapter a week from Niger's newly passed Rural Code, which outlines land tenure and resource access rights for citizens. Priority for participation in the literacy classes is being given to members of village management project committees. Women are

participating in one village's program and are expected to participate in more programs in 1995.

Another example exists in the team's response to villagers' requests for credit to improve agricultural production. Informal contacts with the USAID-supported World Council of Credit Unions project in the nearby town of Zinder have been made to explore this issue.

**Research.** Two local student interns were hired to conduct studies on local biodiversity and the impacts of cutting shrubs used for dune stabilization. The latter was spurred by the concern that cutting large amounts of local vegetation to build stabilizing structures on dunes would cause overall losses of shrub cover in the area. The students' studies were to be revised by project staff and then repeated.

**Monitoring and evaluation.** Because monitoring and evaluation of development project impacts is a key part of the Participatory Rural Appraisal process, this aspect of the Gouré project has received much emphasis. Performance indicators employ indigenous systems of measurement wherever possible to assist villagers to continue local monitoring efforts beyond the close of the project. For example, millet equivalents are the measures being used for locally available economic resources.

Background information collected before and during the project is being used for planning, monitoring and evaluation purposes; this includes data on vegetation, soil fertility,

biodiversity, erosion, groundwater, and dune movement, as well as socioeconomic conditions and local knowledge of trees.

With the aid of PRA tools and extensive village involvement, project staff designed a socioeconomic monitoring system. Village-based agents will be required to report findings from the system to villagers on a monthly basis.

The team's forester and soil scientist developed a system to collect baseline data, since none exists for the region. In addition, an environmental impact monitoring plan was designed through a collaborative effort of USAID, the environmental advisor from USAID's Regional Development Support Office for West Central Africa, and local farmers, and data is already being collected. The system has two tracks, both monitoring impacts on soil, water, and vegetation. The first, a qualitative track, assembles farmers' impressions of project impacts and uses local indicators. For example, farmers note when plant leaves turn yellow (an indication of soil salinity). The second track uses quantitative measurements. Both data are gathered weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly by the agents and villagers at each site.

As they are developed, the monitoring systems will be integrated as much as possible. Both disaggregate the data they collect by gender.

**Innovative solutions.** The project is overcoming constraints in implementation with innovative and collaborative solutions. For example, the project has faced resistance from government

representatives who had expected it to continue in the manner of the preceding project with a government-implemented focus as opposed to the current village-based focus. The project team thus encourages officials to visit project sites and participate in site meetings and PRAs and makes regular presentations to them on project progress.

Another example is evident in the project's forbearance of "Food for Work" payments to participants. Unlike most development projects in the region, which depend on food or monetary payments to encourage beneficiaries to participate, Africare's team hopes that the participatory nature of the Gouré Interventions project process will suffice to encourage local participation. For example, at one site, in the village of Dalari, residents initiated dune stabilization activities one day after an Agent was assigned to their site, with no payments of any kind. They have been successful in building more than 11,000 meters of fencing with dead plant material to stabilize dunes in their area. Organizers believe that this approach will prove more sustainable than "food for work" projects, particularly after the close of the project when payments would stop. In fact, they expect that nonproject communities will adopt similar interventions once the benefits of project activities can be seen.

—Kara Page, Datex

1/6/95

<sup>1</sup> Cuvettes are low-lying areas with high water tables used primarily for dry-season cultivation.

# Goure Sites Detail

ENRIC  
Geographic  
Information  
Systems

