

Mid-Term Evaluation of the Wadata Resilience Food Security Activity in Niger



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ACRONYMS

AEP	Adduction d'eau Potable (drinking water supply system)
AUSPE	Association des Usagers du Service Public de l'Eau (Association of Public Water Service Users)
ANJE	Infant and Young Child Feeding Group
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
BMI	Body Mass Index
CF	Conservation Farming
CFA	Communauté Financière Africaine (African Financial Community)
CBO	Community Based Organization
CBSP	Community Based Service Provider
CGPE	Comité de Gestion de Point d'Eau (Water Point Management Committee)
CHW	Community Health Worker
CLA	Collaborating, Learning and Adapting
CLTS	Community Lead Total Sanitation
COFOB	Commission Foncière de Base (Rural Land Commission)
COFOCOM	Commissions Foncières Communales (Municipal Land Commissions)
COP	Chief of Party
CRA	Regional Chamber of Agriculture
CSA	Climate Smart Agriculture
CSB	Corn Soy Blend
CSI	Centre de Santé Intégré (Integrated Health Center)
CU2	Children Under 2
CU5	Children Under 5
CVD	Comité Villageois de Développement (Village Development Committee)
CVS	Comite Villageois de Salubrité (Village Sanitation Committee)
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
DHS	Department of Hydraulics and Sanitation
DOH	Department of Health
DRR	Disaster And Risk Reduction
DRS	Défense et Restauration des Sols (Soil Defense and Restoration)
ECVC	Youth Life Skills Schools
EdM	Husband Schools (Ecole de Maris)
EOs	Evaluation Objectives
ET	Evaluation Team
FEWS	Famine Early Warning System
FFA	Food For Assets
FFBS	Farmer Field and Business Schools
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FISAN	Food And Nutritional Security Investment Fund
FMNR	Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration
FP	Family Planning

FPMH	Forage équipé d'une Pompe à Motricité Humaine (Borehole with Human-Activated Pumps)
FY	Fiscal Year
GAM	Global Acute Malnutrition
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDT	Sustainable Land Management
GNP	Gross National Product
GoN	Government of Niger
GRN	Gestion des Ressources Naturelles (Natural Resource Management)
HCD	Human Centered Design
HEA	Household Economy Approach
HH	Households
HQ	Headquarters
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IGA	Income Generating Activity
IPC	Integrated Phase Classification
IRB	Institutional Review Board
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MA	Maman ANJE
M&E	Monitoring And Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Team
MFI	Micro Finance Institution
MMD	Mata Masu Dubara
MMF	Matasa Masu Fusaha (youth with initiative)
MiniAEPs	Mini Adduction d'eau Potable (mini drinking water supply systems)
MIYCF	Maternal, Infant and Young Child Feeding
ML	Maman Lumière (Mother Leaders)
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
MUAC	Middle Upper Arm Circumference
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRM	Natural Resource Management
ODF	Open Defecation Free
ODK	Open Data Kit
OHADA	Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa
PDC	Municipal Development Plans (Plans de Développement Communaux)
PEA	Poste d'eau Autonome (Autonomous Water Station)
PI	Principle Investigator
PITA	Participation, Inclusion, Transparency, and Accountability
PLW	Pregnant And Lactating Women
PO	Producer Organizations
PREP	Pipeline Resource Estimate Proposals
PSP	Private Service Providers
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
R&I	Refine and implement

RFA	Request for Applications
RFSA	Resilience and Food Security Activity
RMNCAH	Reproductive maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health
RUTF	Ready-to-eat Therapeutic Foods
SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition
SBC	Social and Behavioral Change
SCAP-RU	Community Early Warning and Emergency Response Systems
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIM	Système d'Information sur les Marchés
SLA	Strategic Learning Advisor
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SMART	Specific Measurable Attainable Realistic Timely
SP	Sub-Purpose
SPA	Service Provider Agents
SPE	Public Water Service
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
TEV	Terre Eau Vie (Land Water Life)
ToC	Theory of Change
ToT	Trainer of Trainers
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme
WRA	Women of Reproductive Age

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In 2018, the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance¹ (BHA) issued an award to Save the Children (Save) to implement a Resilience and Food Security Activity (RFSA) in Niger. The project, named Wadata, is implemented by a consortium of partners, including National Cooperative Business Association/CLUSA International, the Kaizen Company, and Développement pour un Mieux-Être.

The original award of \$41 million USD was for a 5-year project, starting in October 2019 and ending in late 2023. However, in 2023, BHA granted a two-year costed extension to Wadata, bringing the total budget to approximately \$50 million USD and the end date to September 2025.

The overarching goal of this project is to sustainably improve food and nutrition security and resilience among extremely poor and chronically vulnerable households and communities in four communes in Zinder (Guidiguir, Damagaram Takaya, Guidimouni, and Mazamni). Wadata aims to reach over 27,836 households (roughly 195,000 people) living in 683 communities (villages and hamlets).

Most of the activities involve direct participation with community groups, leaders, and members, as well as with specific professionals across the governmental, financial, and health spheres of Zinder. Progress towards Wadata's Goal and Purposes is supported by a comprehensive social behavior change (SBC) strategy.

The project consists of three purposes:

- **Purpose 1:** Enhanced collective action to address food, nutrition and water security shocks and stresses.
- **Purpose 2:** Increased capacities, assets, and agency for improved access to adequate and diverse foods at all times.
- **Purpose 3:** Improved nutrition, health, hygiene, and sanitation of pregnant and lactating women (PLW), adolescents, children under 5 (CU5), and their families.

METHODOLOGY

In January and February 2023, a mid-term evaluation (MTE) of Wadata was conducted by Tulane University. The overall purpose of the MTE was to assess the quality of the RFSA implementation, achievements, and outcomes, and to identify problems and constraints to address in the remaining project period. The evaluation objectives (EOs) included:

1. Review quality of service delivery and systems in addressing chronic food insecurity.
2. Identify evidence of changes.
3. Evaluate the efficiency of the RFSA.
4. Assess the degree and benefits of coordination, collaboration, and convergence with external organizations.
5. Assess early evidence of sustainability.

¹ Formerly the Office of Food For Peace (FFP)

6. Determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions focused on cross-cutting themes for the activities.

Outputs of all EOs were designed to help guide mid-term adjustments in the program implementation and/or design and provide pathways of changes that would improve program outcomes and sustained impact.

The evaluation team (ET) constituted a four-member, multidisciplinary team of experts of Tulane faculty and staff, as well as national consultants and data collectors. The team lead, who also served as the subject area expert for health and nutrition, was supported by three national subject area experts (Wash, Agriculture/livestock/livelihoods, resilience/governance/gender), as well as an experienced qualitative researcher to assist with field data collection and translation. Additional remote support was provided by the Principal Investigator (PI), project management staff, and an agriculture/livestock specialist consultant.

The evaluation employed a mix of qualitative methods, which was complemented by a document review and secondary quantitative data from program monitoring and baseline surveys. Fieldwork began with initial meetings and briefings in Zinder, followed by field data collection. The evaluation concluded with a validation workshop to present and discuss initial evaluation results with the IP, as well as a debriefing with the USAID mission.

FINDINGS

Since the start of Wadata in late 2018, despite setbacks and delays due to COVID-19 restrictions, the project had demonstrated progress on its strategic objectives, and activities are generally being well received by participants.

The project design identified 270 larger primary villages, with plans to focus activity implementation in those villages during year 2, then expanding their focus to the surrounding 400+ smaller villages (hamlets) during year 3. However, some activity implementation was delayed due to COVID-19 and other unexpected challenges, and at the time of the MTE early in Y5, the expansion to these hamlets had been done only for a limited number of activities and locations.

The full report presents findings separately for each of the main activities (or groups of activities), with the activity-specific findings presented by each of the six EOs. Here, the findings are summarized for each of the EOs.

EO1: Quality of service delivery and systems in addressing chronic food insecurity.

Across interventions, the ET observed generally high-quality interventions.

The Village Development Committee (CVD) structure is the core of Wadata's interventions, aiming to coordinate all the activities of the other community structures in the village set up by Wadata. Wadata has achieved excellent coverage of the primary 270 villages, though some have shorter durations of intervention than others. Some CVDs are highly functioning, though others have been inhibited by absenteeism of key CVD members, power struggles between village chiefs and the CVDs, the pace and commitment of the volunteer members, and lack of literate community members to serve as secretary.

Several activities were observed to be of good quality. Some examples include the Community Early Warning System and Emergency Response Committees (SCAP-RU), the recovery of degraded land through food for assets (FFA) activities and the associated establishment of land conventions, Conservation Farming (CF) and Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR), well established MMDs

that incorporate a wide variety of activities, the innovative MMF (Matasa Masu Fusaha, or Youth with Initiative), food assistance, and water point rehabilitation and management.

A few activities have not shown much uptake or impact. Some of these are directly linked to questions of quality in design and/or implementation. Composting has had limited adoption in areas with limited water access. Home gardens have been established in great numbers but are poorly owned by the communities and rather viewed as a Wadata-driven activity. Cooking demonstrations have been inconsistently implemented. Youth life-skill schools (ECVS) were not successfully established. Sanitation activities were found to be of good quality, but uptake of latrines was slow mainly due to cultural challenges.

Other activities, while of good quality, have experienced delays in implementation and so may not benefit from sufficient support from Wadata during the time remaining on the project to become well established. Some examples include: Seven of the planned ten market gardens are still in the process of being established and funded. Some of the CVDs have only been more recently established. Delays in the distribution of improved seeds leave limited time for ownership of the activity. Functional literacy activities, though of high quality, were meant to provide literate members to CVDs but only began with its single cohort of students in 2022 (finishing in June 2023).

The ET observed several positive examples of how Wadata adapted its approach by refocusing efforts away from poorly performing activities. For example, efforts to involve micro-finance institutions (MFIs) to finance certain activities were found to be exceptionally challenging and ultimately not successful. However, this presented a positive, successful opportunity for the MMD/MMF groups to move to the development of informal credits to self-finance their activities. Wadata recognized the flaws in their ECVC activity early on, and rather than try to rescue a failing activity, they are working to ensure that the ECVC youth members were absorbed into other youth-focused activities, such as MMF, as well as (where appropriate), ML and ANJE.

EO2: Evidence of Change.

The MTE was able to identify some promising evidence of positive change associated with several activities/approaches, generally those that were found to be of high quality and well adopted by the communities. Some examples include: The recovery of degraded land, where despite being a few years away from being ready for grazing, is already providing straw/hay for harvesting and selling, and seeds to use in establishing new areas. MMDs and MMFs have helped provide economic opportunities for women and youth. Access to safe water has improved in areas with rehabilitated water points and functioning water committees.

Other activities were not observed to be making an important impact, either because of the activity quality, or because of limited coverage/numbers of direct (and indirect) participants. Some examples include the limited current reach of the market gardens (though they have great potential), slow adoption of latrines, and slow adoption of alternative hand-washing techniques.

Social behavioral change (SBC) activities focusing on gender norms have been slow to have impact, apart from improved willingness of men to let their wives attend pre-natal checkups at the health clinics. The ET acknowledges that changes to behaviors that are strongly linked to culture, society, and religion are extremely difficult and slow to change, so activities such as Husband Schools may only be a necessary first step of a slow process.

The food distributions, coupled with malnutrition screening for children under 5, were credited with having a positive impact on child malnutrition by many community members. Blanket coverage of this

assistance ensured that exclusion errors were nearly non-existent. No evidence indicated that food assistance had any negative impacts on agricultural production or food markets, nor did it appear to create any degree of dependency.

EO3: Efficiency of the RFSA.

In the scope of this MTE, this EO focuses on aspects of human resources, staffing, and management; Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEAL); and activity targeting.

The Wadata staff was generally found to be experienced, committed, and technically very capable. The organigram is generally well defined and functional, and management has attempted to adapt it when needed. Wadata management has taken advantage of this expertise by giving the technical managers a lot of latitude to use their knowledge/expertise for activity implementation and adaptation, leading to better design and more engaged staff. The significant presence of the senior management in Zinder (rather than Niamey) has benefited the project, as the senior management were found to be very engaged at all levels, and very informed of the realities of Wadata's work in the communities.

There are some general challenges with staffing, though these are typical of any project of this type, and not specific to Wadata. First, the turnover of staff has been high during the project and is likely to increase towards the end of the extension period- a concern given the number of activities that should be brought to completion during this "overtime" period. Second, there is a strong gender disbalance in the staff, 80% or more of whom are male overall, and nearly all senior positions are occupied by men.

Wadata's M&E system is robust, with very knowledgeable and skilled staff. The data, centralized online, is very detailed- down to the individual level. Despite some challenges in data collection and management, the annual reports reviewed are of particularly excellent quality. Wadata should be commended for honestly presenting not only their successes, but also their challenges and shortcomings in the annual reports.

Wadata has benefited from their quality collaboration, learning, and adaptation (CLA) related activities, include the creating of a management system for the monitoring and tracking of recommendations, contributions to the strategy for the extension period and how best to monitor the progress towards sustainability, and work on several important research activities to help adapt the RFSA over time. Progress had been made over time to not only showcase best practices and success stories, but also to identify, document and address challenges and shortcomings.

The ET did observe some challenges with layering and sequencing of activities, however. The delay in implementation of several activities has had a negative impact on the way that Wadata activities have been sequenced. The ET did not find a clear, concrete definition of what would be a set of synergistic interventions in a community (layering), and links to Wadata's theory of change (TOC) are not evident in the day-to-day work, nor is it visible in the office.

The targeting of poor and marginalized households seems to be a fundamental flaw that has been overlooked by the project. Wadata has not ensured that very poor and marginalized people are effectively and adequately covered by their activities. There is no clear targeting mechanism to ensure that the very poor and marginalized are included in key activities. Though project staff often described activities as being inclusive of the very poor and marginalized, this was not consistently observed in the visited sites. Food for assets work targeted the poorest community members, but the activity managed by Wadata has no dispensation in place to allow very poor/marginalized households that do not have a member capable of working to benefit. Many activities require a financial contribution to participate. For example, most MMDs and MMFs have a fixed contribution amount for all members, and those that

cannot pay are not included. There is no clear solution for households who cannot pay for drinking water. The cost of a latrine, while very reasonable, is prohibitive for extremely poor households. Seeds for home gardens must often be purchased. The cost of transport to attend health consultations are at times prohibitive for some women.

Wadata staff often said that the very poor were indirectly helped by activities through community solidarity, some even describing it as a sort of 'trickle-down' theory. However, there was little evidence of this found during data collection.

It should be underlined, however, that there is little concrete evidence of the degree to which the poorest/most vulnerable are included/excluded from participation. It may be worthwhile investing in a more detailed study of this so that areas where the targeting errors of exclusion are the greatest can be addressed.

EO4: Coordination, collaboration, and convergence with external organizations.

Coordination and collaboration with the government sector was found to have been successful in several areas, such as literacy, but lacking overall. As many of Wadata's activities rely on government involvement and oversight, it is imperative to improve collaboration with government representatives—particularly focusing on effectively involving technical services and strengthening the capacity of decentralized structures.

Collaboration with other partners, such as those from RISE II, was generally positive, though there were several areas where improvements could be made. SCC provides a valuable platform for RISE II and RFSA partners to exchange lessons learned and improve collaboration, though more input from USAID-funded implementing partners on the scheduling and agendas of SCC meeting would contribute to their work.

EO5: Sustainability.

Wadata began meaningful discussions around sustainability of the activities and their impacts early in the project cycle and has done high quality research on the subject. For many of the activities, the likelihood of sustainability was largely tied to the stage of implementation of the activity in the village, as well as the quality, which for some activities was variable between villages.

Sustainability is a big challenge for CVDs, whose survival relies on volunteer efforts. Even in the best examples of function CVDs, it was observed that Wadata field staff play an important role in monitoring and managing CVD activities. In many cases, the functionality of CVDs depends on polyvalent field agent visits.

During Y5 and the extension period, the MTE recommends that the number of activities be reduced, and a strong focus is given to activities that have a demonstrated sustainable impact. Beyond support to the overarching CVDs, some of the most important activities to focus on during the extension period include (but are not limited to) water point rehabilitation and management, support to the Habbanayé, support to latrine masons, management of recovered degraded land, and support to market gardens. Other activities may also be important to support, though Wadata should be cautious with its reasoning, and avoid working with the goal of simply checking a box of completed-towards-target.

The vision of the project was also that there would be a certain 'spillover' effect of the activities conducted in the 270 'hub' villages into the smaller hamlets. Some activities have reached the hamlets—such as the food distributions (covering all eligible members in all hamlets), and FFA (covering eligible

households in the areas where FFA activities are begin implemented). However, examples of the unsupported replication of groups such as MMD, MMF, etc. in the hamlets are rare and exceptional.

EO6: Appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions focused on cross-cutting themes.

This EO focuses on interventions and intervention design intended to improve gender equity in decision making, social-behavior change (SBC), and youth participation in interventions.

Nearly all interventions were found by the MTE to have a strong focus on gender equity and youth participation. The design of gender and youth activities was found to be generally appropriate and culturally relevant. Targeting and inclusion of women and youth in interventions has been largely successful and effective.

In the CVDs, women and youth are represented to enable inclusion. However, the contributions of these members are not assured. Indeed, even if women and young people are represented on the committees, it was generally observed that they do not carry influence over decision-making at the village level. Additionally, despite reported efforts by Wadata to include other categories of vulnerable community members (such as those living in poverty or persons living with a disability) on the CVDs, this was not generally observed in the field.

Perceptions and practices, particularly those related to gender norms, have been slow to change. For example, though Wadata’s community influencers were quick to report changes such as elimination of child marriage or men allowing their wives to conduct income generating activities, the ET did not observe such large shifts in behaviors. The ET acknowledges, however, that changes to behaviors that are strongly linked to culture, society, and religion are extremely difficult and slow to change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation team presented the preliminary recommendations during a validation workshop attended by Wadata staff at the end of the field data collection, providing an early learning opportunity. Additionally, during the analysis stage of the work, a set of preliminary findings and recommendations were prepared by the MTE and shared with Wadata and BHA for their feedback, as well as in preparation for the sustainability workshop held in March 2023 to help inform the future development of the project during year 5 and the extension period.

The final recommendations that emerged from this MTE are presented at the end of this report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Setting

Located in the Sahelian region of West Africa, Niger is a landlocked country mostly comprised of desert and considered one of the poorest countries in the world, with a poverty rate of 44.1 percent (USAID 2021). The majority of the 25 million population live in rural areas in the south and west of the country where agroecological conditions support farming of staple grains, especially millet and sorghum, and cash crops such as cowpeas and ground nuts. The agricultural sector employs about 80 percent of adults and contributes to about 47 percent of the gross national product (GNP) (Feed the Future 2018). Livestock including sheep, goat, and cattle, are traditionally considered critical to livelihoods, and Nigeriens also export cattle and small ruminants to southern neighbors in Nigeria.

For decades, desertification and recurrent and often severe drought have had adverse effects on agricultural subsistence activities and livestock raising, which are increasingly being impacted by climate change. Food access is constrained by declines in crop production caused by erratic and reduced rainfall, overuse of the land available in the agriculturally productive zones, and limited income generating opportunities, affecting the quantity and quality of household food consumption (FEWS 2019). Adding to food needs, Niger maintains the highest fertility rate (7.8) in the world; correspondingly, 70 percent of the population is under 30 years of age (Feed the Future 2018). High fertility along with low education and literacy rates (58 percent of men and 85 percent of women are illiterate) impact livelihoods, business opportunities, and general development efforts, with Niger reported to have the lowest Human Development index in the world (Feed the Future 2018; UNDP 2019). Difficult environmental conditions and poverty force Nigeriens to employ a range of coping mechanisms to survive, including seasonal migration of male members to southern countries in search of income during the dry season.

Since independence in 1960, Nigeriens have lived under five constitutions and long periods of authoritarian, military rule, although a democratic, multi-party state was instituted in 2010. In addition to political volatility and violent upheaval of government leadership, desertification and recurrent drought, and ongoing poverty, the country has been affected by other setbacks such as animal and crop disease, flooding, and insecurity caused by Boko Haram in the east and attacks by armed groups near the Malian and Nigerian border, all of which negatively impact livelihoods and crop production and food insecurity (FEWS 2019; PREP Narrative CARE 2022).

Comprised of a mix of ethnic groups engaged in subsistence farming and herding, with the main groups including Hausa, Djerma and Songhay, Tuareg, Fulani, and Kanuri Manga, Nigerien society reflects the independent histories and cultures of diverse ethnic groups living in a single state (FEWS 2019). Islam is the predominant religion across ethnic groups, and approximately 36% married women are involved in polygamous unions (INS and ICF international 2013). Women's median age of marriage is 16 years (INS and ICF international 2013).

The majority of Nigeriens are from the Hausa ethnic group, a patrilineal society in which strict gender roles foster male social and economic dominance (Renne, 2004; Umaru & Van Der Horst, 2018). In Hausa culture, men are responsible for earning money and providing basic household needs while women are principally in charge of caring for family members, maintaining the household, and preparing and serving food. Gendered roles dictate that men control granaries and provide cereals and other staple foods to their wives to prepare meal foods; men are also the primary decision makers regarding

health care and key family decisions. Hausa women may engage in an informal economic sector involving trade, but the income they generate is often limited. The combination of female mobility restrictions, including restrictions on market access, and socioeconomic factors fosters female dependence on male heads of households. Efforts are being made to engage women in local community-based organizations often involving credit programs and income generating activities aimed to increase female access to financial resources and assets and address gender inequalities. Extreme poverty, limited livelihood opportunities, entrenched gender inequities, and ongoing environmental shocks create a confluence of factors that elevate household food insecurity in Hausa speaking regions (USAID 2017).

Niger reports some of the highest under-five child and infant mortality rates in the world. Nationally, the under-5 mortality rate is 2.2/10,000/day, reaching 3.5/10,000/day in Zinder. Correspondingly, high prevalence of child stunting and wasting pose an ongoing problem, with 43.5 percent of children under five stunted nationally, reaching 57.4% in the Zinder region, and 12.5 percent wasted nationally, and 14.3% in the Zinder region²; child wasting increases during the lean period prior to the annual harvest³. Poor infant and child feeding practices are pervasive, including low prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding (28 percent nationally, 14.6% in the Zinder region) and inadequate complementary feeding (19.5 percent of children 6-23 months received a minimally adequate diet nationally, and 27.7 percent in the Zinder region)⁴ (Child malnutrition has been linked to limited access to high quality diverse foods, poor knowledge of the importance of a balanced diet, and lack of quality health services and is associated with low maternal education and household wealth status (FEWS 2019; USAID 2021). Limited access to potable water and poor environmental sanitation conditions and hygiene practices contribute to a vicious cycle of infectious disease and malnutrition (FEWS 2019).

In addition, poor maternal nutrition is highly prevalent, especially among adolescent girls whose rapid growth and dramatic physical changes increase demands for nutrients and energy, contributing to the intergenerational cycle of poverty and malnutrition⁵. Specifically, 16 percent of women 15-49 years of age are underweight (BMI < 18.5), while 31 percent of females 15-19 years of age are underweight⁶. More recent data⁷ using mid-upper arm circumference of women 15-49 years of age indicate that nationally 3% are moderately or severely underweight, reaching 4.1% in the Zinder region. The nutritional status of females before and during pregnancy is critical for the health and survival of the mother and her baby⁸. Data from Niger show that 75 percent of females start childbearing by 19 years and before reaching full maturity, raising the risk of stillbirths and neonatal and maternal mortality, and contributing to low birthweight and stunting in children⁹. Widespread micronutrient deficiencies involving iodine, vitamin A, and iron also affect the health of women of reproductive age¹⁰. The recent SMAR survey indicates that 59% of women 15-49 years old are anemic nationally (59.2% in the Zinder region)

² SMART survey 2021: https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/rapport_definitif_smart_niger_2021.pdf

³ INS 2019; Feed the Future 2019

⁴ SMART survey 2021: https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/rapport_definitif_smart_niger_2021.pdf

⁵ Das et al 2017; USAID 2021.

⁶ INS and ICF International 2013

⁷ SMART survey 2021: https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/rapport_definitif_smart_niger_2021.pdf

⁸ Black et al., 2013; Han, Mulla, Beyene, Liao, & McDonald, 2011

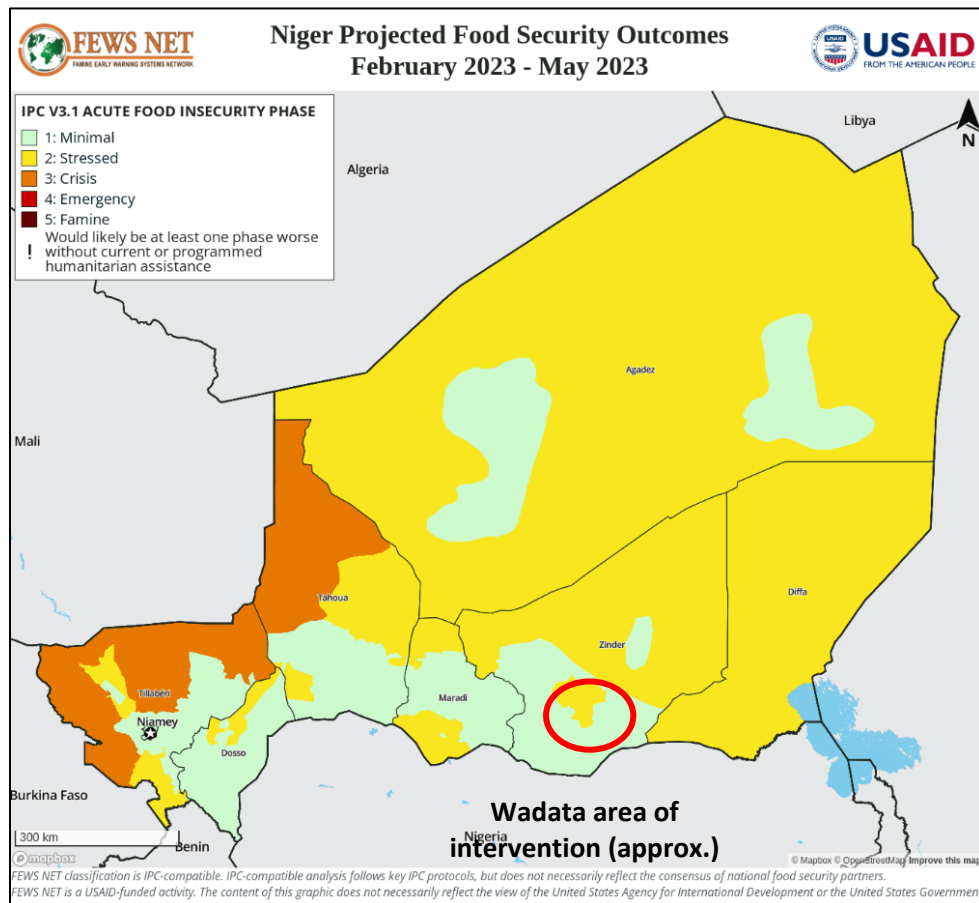
⁹ Bhutta et al. 2013; INS and ICF International 2013

¹⁰ INS and ICF International 2013

The Zinder region of Niger faces some of the most complex and extreme issues related to poverty and malnutrition in the country. Poverty and malnutrition in Zinder are affected by the lack of access and utilization of available resources, specifically for women and children. Economic barriers for women, specifically related to high rates of early childhood marriage and gender norms, further prevent opportunities for households to thrive financially as well. The lack of decision making for women and children in both the household and community-related committees and government entities leads to pre-existing problems of low-literacy, family planning, and nutritional access. Though the community has had the establishment of Village Development Committees (VDCs), less than half are currently functioning and the issues mentioned previously have been further neglected. Overall, most of these problems have a common theme related to stressed socio-economic and agro-climatic conditions, both exacerbated by natural and human-led influence.

Primary drivers of malnutrition and food insecurity in Zinder include 1) High Vulnerability to Shocks and Stresses and Chronic Extreme Poverty, 2) Poor Access, Availability, and Utilization of Nutritious Food, 3) Limited Access to Water and Poor WASH Behaviors, and 4) Lack of Livelihood Diversity.

Figure 1: FEWS NET food security projections February-May 2023



1.2. RFSA Purposes and Design

In 2018 (FY2019), the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance¹¹ (BHA) issued an award to Save the Children (SAVE) to implement a Resilience and Food Security Activity (RFSA) in Niger. The project, named Wadata, is implemented by a consortium of partners, including National Cooperative Business Association/CLUSA International, the Kaizen Company, and Développement pour un Mieux-Être.

The original award of \$41 million USD was for a 5-year project, starting in October 2019 and ending in late 2023. However, in 2023, BHA granted a two-year costed extension to Wadata, bringing the total budget to approximately \$50 million USD and the end date to September 2025.

The overarching goal of this project is to sustainably improve food and nutrition security and resilience among extremely poor and chronically vulnerable households and communities in Zinder, through layered interventions targeted to communities, households, and individuals.

Wadata is working to reach over 27,836 households, which is roughly 195,000 people within 683 communities (villages and hamlets), covering all four communes of in Zinder (Guidiguir, Damagaram Takaya (DTK), Guidimouni, and Mazamni).

Most of the activities involve direct participation with community groups, leaders, and members, as well as with specific professionals across the governmental, financial, and health spheres of Zinder. Progress towards Wadata's Goal and Purposes is supported by a comprehensive social behavior change (SBC) strategy.

The targeted villages included under Wadata use a "hub and spoke" model, with approximately 270 larger primary villages serving as 'hubs' for the remaining smaller, surrounding villages (also referred to as hamlets). Communities are grouped into clusters of 12 to 15 settlements, with two to three primary villages in each cluster. The original plan was that during Y2, the focus would be on the primary villages, and in year 3, services will begin to expand to secondary settlements ("hamlets"), with the local resource people (CBO members, CBSPs, CVD members, relais, etc.) continuing operations in primary villages with regular follow-up from activity staff. However, some activity implementation was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other unexpected challenges. Even in Y5, the expansion to secondary settlements/hamlets was only done for a limited number of activities and locations.

According to the proposal design document, most elements of Wadata aim to target about 60% of the targeted village population, though certain interventions will target a sub-section of vulnerable individuals from the poorest households. Additionally, some aspects (such as SBC campaigns, water points, etc.) were expected to have spillover effects for the target communities not directly participating in the activity (mainly referring to the hamlets). Wealth ranking and definition using a household economy approach (HEA) was used to identify the poor and very poor households in the targeted villages. This process is followed by building community consensus of the identification and needs of the poorest households.

To address this overarching goal, Wadata is designed around three main purposes, described below.

Purpose 1: Enhanced collective action to address food, nutrition and water security shocks and stresses.

¹¹ Formerly the Office of Food For Peace (FFP)

Wadata will enhance the existence, effectiveness and inclusivity of development planning and management, but also strengthen and empower specialized CBOs to address food, nutrition and water security challenges with their community, Commune, and private sector counterparts. Wadata will improve household and community management of land and water resources and reduce conflict over these resources. Within the framework of the Government of Niger's (GoN) Early Warning System, Wadata will take steps to improve the collection and use of early warning data by women and men, adults, and youth to contribute to the mitigation of shocks and stresses.

Purpose 1 activities deliver specific improvements in the capacity and collaboration of CBOs and CVDs to address food, nutrition, and water security challenges; will enhance community land and water stewardship; and will improve the effectiveness of early warning and response systems. Additionally, the community groups and institutions developed and supported under P1 form an integrative foundation for the Activity's SBC platform and activities under P2 and P3. Activities under P1 work primarily with communities, community groups, and the individual members of – or individuals mobilized by – these groups.

Purpose 2: Increased capacities, assets, and agency for improved access to adequate and diverse foods at all times.

Wadata will increase and stabilize incomes from diversified, non-agricultural livelihoods, particularly for women and youth, and will increase female access to and control over productive resources. This requires technical support and skills-building, but also group-based enterprises and increased access to financial services. Meanwhile, as agriculture and livestock production still constitute the livelihoods strategy for approximately 80% of Zinder's population, the activity will improve food availability and access through increased agricultural production and sales – underpinned by improved resource management – with an emphasis on livestock, irrigated crops, and improved inputs. Activities under Purpose 2 continue to work with community groups and their members, but also work directly with individual micro-entrepreneurs, CBSPs, financial services clients, job seekers, employers, traders, and producers.

Purpose 3: Improved nutrition, health, hygiene, and sanitation of pregnant and lactating women (PLW), adolescents, children under 5 (CU5), and their families.

Improvements in nutrition and health are essential for those most at risk of malnutrition, including PLW, CU5 (and in particular CU2 during the first 1,000-day period), and adolescent girls. Wadata will promote and improve optimal health and nutrition practices. Given the relationship between early marriage, early pregnancy, and the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition, the activity will improve the reproductive health of adolescent girls and young women while building male support for these actions. At the household and community level, Wadata will improve demand-driven hygiene and sanitation actions. Within communities and between communities and their institutional counterparts, the activity will improve equitable and reliable access to, and quality of, health and well-managed water services.

While P3 works through key CBOs and their members, the Wadata SBC strategy links activities to individual women and children, heads of household, community influencers, and CBSPs. Activities feature coordination and linkages with workers in health posts and health centers (ASC and CSI), while recognizing that health system-level work will primarily take place under the RISE II project Kulawa. The design of P3 acknowledges that improved nutrition, health, and hygiene in Zinder is a function not only of improved knowledge of health and WASH practices and access to services, but also of changes in attitudes, behaviors and norms that currently constitute barriers to optimal health and nutrition status.

Wadata is using four key leverage points to implement their RFSA. These include:

Leverage Point 1: *Female and youth empowerment for inclusive development.*

Wadata's activities aim to improve and expand women's and youth's status and roles in the household and in society. These changes will support other desired outcomes related to livelihoods, access to financial services, health related knowledge/attitude/practice, and better participation in economic, civic, and governance spheres.

Leverage Point 2: *Improved community natural resource management, with a particular emphasis on water.*

Wadata aims to reduce pressures on natural resources and protect the natural systems on which livelihoods and health depend. This will create greater access to farm and pastureland, improve sustainable water security, reduce competition and potential conflict between farmers and herders, and improve formal coordination among resources users. A particularly critical area of emphasis is the development, improvement, and management of sustainable water points that allow for integrated and inclusive community planning and use.

Leverage Point 3: *Participatory governance of CBOs, working together with their institutional counterparts.*

Wadata aims to achieve broad application of participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability (PITA) through a network of civil society and CBO, mobilized through and coordinated by local CVD counterparts. This network will help elevate the voices of women, youth, and the poor in development planning and management.

Leverage Point 4: *Engagement of community influencers as drivers and supporters of change.*

Changes in attitudes, behaviors, and norms are only possible with an enabling environment with the support of community influencers, including traditional and religious leaders, teachers, community health workers (relais) and municipal counselors. Wadata will engage these stakeholders as partners in change, to enable activities in the short-term and to sustainability improve conditions long-term.

2. Overview of Evaluation

In September 2022, Tulane University received an award to carry out the mid-term evaluation of Wadata as part of a joint evaluation covering all three RFSAs currently being implemented in Niger.

2.1. MTE Purpose

The overall purpose of this Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) is to assess the quality of the RFSAs implementation, achievements, outcomes, and identify problems and constraints to address in the remaining project period.

The MTE aims to communicate lessons learned to date, and to inform program staff and partners for mid-term corrections to achieve the overall goal of the program. Outputs of all Evaluation Objectives (EOs) will help to recommend mid-term adjustments in the program implementation and/or design and provide pathways of changes that would improve program outcomes and sustained impact.

To achieve this purpose, the evaluation has identified six main objectives, described below. Scoping interviews and initial document review indicate that MTE objective 5 (sustainability) is of particular importance to informing the RFSAs on how to adapt their activities in the remaining implementation period in order to focus on those activities that will continue to have impact beyond the life of the project.

2.2. MTE Objectives

The specific objectives of the MTE are:

- 1. Review quality of program¹² service delivery and systems in addressing chronic food insecurity**, taking into account contextual changes that may have occurred since the inception of the activities. Look at strengths and weaknesses of activity implementation; the quality of outputs in terms of the effects they are producing, their adherence to terms agreed upon with BHA, and their appropriateness and perceived value to target communities.
- 2. Identify evidence of changes (intended and unintended) associated with program activities**, examine how the changes relate to progress toward program objectives including behavior change outcomes in targeted households as determined in the Activity SBC Strategies, and identify factors that appear to promote or hinder the behavior change toward desired objectives and post-implementation sustainability. Examine how the evidence of change (intended/unintended, negative, or positive) validates the theory of change or if pathways of change need to be revised/refined.
- 3. Evaluate the efficiency of the RFSAs**, including (i) targeting of individuals (children under five; adolescent girls; women; youth; etc.), groups, and communities most vulnerable; (ii) the implementation and monitoring of Project cross-sectoral strategies including the gender and youth strategy and the SBC Strategy (iii) the program management and food distribution; (iv) the M&E system and CLA; (v) the human resources, accounting/financial and staff management.

¹² Note that for the purposes of this report, when the referring to a program or project, it is referring to the RFSAs overall. When referring to an activity, however, it is generally referring to a specific intervention that makes up the package of many interventions implemented by the RFSAs.

This will help to identify strengths and weaknesses of the program (under each component) against stated outputs and outcomes to date.

4. **Assess the degree and benefits of coordination, collaboration, and convergence** with external organizations (Government; RISE II partners; UN agencies; other projects) that are critical to achieve project goals and purposes. This includes efficiency and effectiveness of project design, management, and coordination mechanisms, including quality and usefulness of partnerships.
5. **Assess early evidence of sustainability** produced by the activity thereby determining the extent to which outcomes, systems, and services are designed and implemented to continue after the project ends.
6. **Determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions focused on cross-cutting themes for the activities.** This includes interventions designed and implemented to improve gender and equity in decision making and the adoption of priority behaviors by key audiences to achieve food security and nutrition outcomes, targeting youth to improve their access to, participation in project interventions and interventions that address causal pathways between behaviors and their determinants as described in the SBC Strategy.

As part of the Request for Proposals, a series of exemplary questions was provided for each of the EOs to serve as a guide to address each of the objectives. These questions informed the development of data collection tools as well as the analysis contributing to this report.

2.3. Methodology

2.3.1. Process Overview

The evaluation encompassed three phases, involving preparation, data collection, analysis, and report writing. Preparations began in September 2022¹³ and included a review of the draft statement of work, team member selection, document review, protocol development, logistics planning, and instrument development. A steering committee comprised of the Tulane evaluation team (ET) and the RFSA CoP and technical staff met weekly to discuss fieldwork preparations. The RFSA team shared project documentation and a matrix delineating ongoing activities carried out in RFSA communities.

The ET principal investigator carried out a scoping exercise in Niamey involving interviews with RFSA leadership to collect information to guide the evaluation design. In mid-December, the evaluation team shared the draft evaluation protocol and instruments for review by RFSA and BHA representatives.

The evaluation in Niger of the Wadata project took place from January 25th to February 10th, 2023, and involved a briefing of activities, data collection, and a validation workshop. On February 10th, the ET leads held a debriefing presentation of the evaluation process and preliminary findings of the three MTEs at the USAID mission with BHA representatives. After leaving Niger, the ET carried out additional key informant interviews remotely.

The ET submitted a revised version of the validation workshop presentation in late February and held a meeting with Wadata staff remotely to respond to additional queries prior to the BHA-led sustainability workshop, which took place in March 2023. ET technical leads carried out data analysis and report writing focused on their area of expertise.

¹³ The contract with Tulane was not finalized by the three IPs until mid-December 2022, but Tulane was able to begin some of the work before then.

2.3.2. Study Design and Research Methods

The ET employed a mixed methods approach involving documentation review and qualitative data collection procedures. The team administered complementary open-ended and semi-structured qualitative methods to capture information from a breadth of respondents filling diverse roles in project implementation and collaboration to ensure data triangulation. ET members also used available quantitative data (e.g., ongoing monitoring data, annual reporting data, and secondary data) to answer the evaluation questions.

The evaluation began with a desk review of relevant project documents, including the Request for Applications (RFA), reports of the formative research conducted during the R&I year, annual and quarterly project reports, baseline studies, and the Pipeline Resource Estimate Proposals (PREP), to gain an understanding of the RFSA design, details of activities and key actors involved, status of ongoing implementation, contextual factors specific to the RFSA area, and the general food security situation. The desk review included an inventory of other reports and studies that could provide relevant information to the project themes or contextual information about Niger and the Zinder region.

An initial meeting took place with Wadata project staff prior to data collection. RFSA MEAL staff briefed the ET on the implementation of field activities, technical themes, and monitoring of activities. The ET held a training to review the evaluation objectives, design, and data collection methods with technical leads and local data collectors.

2.3.3. Sampling

Due to the short period allotted for the evaluation, and the expanse of the project geographical area, the ET was able to collect data in all four project communes. To increase efficiency, the ET planned to visit villages with a range of interventions representing different sectors. The matrix provided by the project delineating project activities and distances to communities guided selection of evaluation villages.

Data collected on field activities focused on 14 villages, including both primary villages and 'hamlets'. The ET informed project managers about the choice of MTE villages the day before the field visit. The ET also collected data in communal, departmental and the regional capital with project actors and collaborators.

The evaluation design targeted a range of government officials, implementing partners, Wadata staff, and project volunteers and participants to ensure data triangulation with data collected from 192 respondents (80 women, 108 men). The table below presents the number of data collection events by method, sector focus, and location. The ET collected data in the four RFSA communes with Wadata coordinators, supervisors, field agents, collaborators, community volunteers, and participants; and in Zinder with Wadata staff, partners, and collaborators. The ET administered additional key informant interviews remotely.

Table 1: Evaluation interviews, observations, and respondents.

Description of data collected		Total interviews /observations	Total respondents	Female respondents	Male respondents
Methods	Key informants	37	45	8	37
	In-depth informants	11	11	1	10
	Direct observations	22	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Focus groups	27	132	70	62
	TOTAL	109	188	79	109

2.3.1. Data Collection Procedures

The team applied key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. Interview guides and other tools can be found in the Annexes.

The ET carried out key informant interviews with RFSa leadership and technical experts including the CoP, sector leads overseeing activity development, implementation and monitoring, and representatives of partner organizations or government agencies collaborating on-field activities. We collected information on the design of activities, status of implementation, and field actors involved. During interviews, the ET examined capacity strengthening, supervision structures, behavioral change strategies, and contextual factors that had occurred since the inception of activities, as well as collaboration and coordination with partners and stakeholders involved directly or indirectly and critical to achieving project goals. ET technical leads carried out key informant interviews in French or English.

Evaluation team members administered in-depth interviews with community members providing oversight and facilitating activities, field agents supervising interventions, and collaborators representing government sectors and other implementing partners. Topics explored included roles, training and materials received, supervision and monitoring structures, and community participation. The ET examined perceptions of activities, challenges faced with implementation, recommendations for improvements, and perspectives on work roles. Team members also assessed coordination and information sharing with government and other collaborating actors. ET members conducted interviews in French or local language depending on the informant’s preference.

The ET employed indirect and direct observations. Indirect observations focused on village infrastructures, farming practices, water sources, sanitation and hygiene practices, livelihood activities, and community member interactions including gendered roles. During direct observations, the ET assessed RFSa interventions related to crop farming and gardening, WASH (e.g., water sources, handwashing, condition of latrines, cleanliness around households), and land rehabilitation projects.

The ET led focus group discussions with villagers participating in activities (e.g., ML/ANJE, CVDs, water management committees, etc.) to assess involvement, information received, perceptions of activities, changes in behaviors (intended and unintended), potential social or other consequences associated with activities, and initial signs of sustainability. The ET attempted to identify contextual factors that may affect achieving desired objectives and longer-term sustainability. The ET led focus group discussions in the local language, with data collectors serving as moderators and translators as needed.

2.3.1. Analysis

ET members took handwritten notes or entered information directly on the computer during data collection and audio recorded select interviews. Team members held daily briefing sessions to review daily findings and plan for subsequent data collection. These sessions involved a presentation by each technical lead and focused on activity strengths and missed opportunities. The validation workshop, held with the ET and Wadata staff, presented an opportunity to share and discuss preliminary findings and recommendations.

Data analysis continued post-mission. The ET employed content analysis and data triangulation to validate results using a combination of data generated during field work, as well as information gathered through document review.

2.3.1. Ethics

The evaluation was vetted by Tulane's IRB. ET members obtained informed consent from all key informant and in-depth interview respondents and focus group participants before data collection. Consent forms can be found in the annexes.

2.4. Evaluation Team Composition

The evaluation team was made up of 11 members, with eight conducting the in-country data collection. When collecting data in Zinder, the ET worked simultaneously collecting data for both Wadata and Girma. The ET assigned each team member to focus one of the RFSAs (identified below). However, all the ET members provided support and expertise to both evaluations. It should also be noted that while the field team each had specific technical focuses, each of the members had expertise in multiple sectors, and so all members contributed to some degree to the collection and analysis across all areas.

The in-country data collection team consisted of:

- **Two co-team leads** (both Tulane Faculty/staff)
 - The first focused on overall coordination, administration, logistics, and communication, and also served as subject area expert for health and nutrition. (*primary focus: Wadata*)
 - The second co-team lead served was responsible for overall research methodology, and also served as the subject area expert for health and nutrition. (*primary focus: Girma*)
- **Four national subject area expert consultants**, including:
 - A WASH expert. (*primary focus: Wadata and Girma*)
 - An Agriculture/livestock/livelihoods expert. (*primary focus: Wadata*)
 - An Agriculture/livestock/livelihoods and Governance expert. (*primary focus: Girma*)
 - A resilience/governance/gender expert. (*primary focus: Wadata*)
- **Two local data collection experts** to assist the team with field data collection and translation.
 - One primary focus on Wadata
 - One primary focus on Girma

The in-country ET was supported remotely by three additional members:

- **Principal Investigator (PI)** (Tulane Faculty). The PI provided strategic input to management issues and analysis. The PI was also responsible for the in-country scoping interviews during the inception phase of the evaluation.

- **Agriculture/livestock specialist** (consultant). This specialist supported the overall design of the agriculture and livestock portion of the evaluation, and also provided overall RFSA expertise.
- **Project Manager** (Tulane staff). Managed all administrative and financial aspects of the evaluation.

2.5. Limitations

The MTE had certain limitations, including:

- Not all activities/areas received equal focus during the data collection.
 - Time in the field was limited, and travel times to reach many of the field sites was considerable because of distance and road quality.
 - There were a large and diverse number of activities that Wadata is implementing, making it challenging to cover all activities with sufficient depth (detailed information) and breadth (sample size).
 - In some cases, certain activities were found to be different from what was understood from the document review and planning workshop (either not well documented in general, or the implementation was different than the ET had initially understood). This required the ET to adapt the data collection in real time.
 - The Nigerien team members did not have a primary expertise/focus on health/nutrition, that expert role was filled by the team lead.
 - Security considerations put some limits on the time in the field, and on travel to Zinder.
 - A focus was given to those activities considered cornerstones, and those identified during the planning as being of particular interest to the RFSA.
- Qualitative data has certain limitations, including:
 - The sample may not be representative of the larger picture. While the ET attempted to reach saturation in data collection, there is still the possibility that the areas visited were not always fully representative of all areas of the RFSA's implementation. However, strong patterns emerged during data collection.
 - Qualitative data is vulnerable to subjective interpretation. To lessen this, results were discussed between team members, and triangulation was sought not only between data sources but also between ET members. Additionally, a validation workshop as well as a review of the initial conclusions/recommendations allowed the ET to receive feedback on areas where potential subjective interpretation may have occurred.

3. FINDINGS

In this section, findings from the primary and secondary data collected by the MTE are presented. For each RFSa purpose, an overview of the interventions done under this purpose is given. Then findings are presented separately for specific activities (or groups of activities) under that purpose. In some sections, these activity findings are broken down by the six evaluation objectives (EOs). For other activities/sets of activities, the findings for the EOs are presented holistically rather than being separated out individually.

Following the purpose and activity-specific findings, several additional sections present findings on key cross-cutting topics (such as Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), overall management, etc.). These additional sections serve to address certain aspects of the EOs that are not activity- or purpose- specific, as well as to consolidate certain key themes that emerged across purposes.

3.1. Purpose 1- Governance

Wadata's purpose 1 (P1) focuses on strengthening collective action at the level of intervention areas to cope with shocks and stresses related to food, nutrition, and water security. P1 is broken down into several sub-purposes (SPs).

SP 1.1: Improved social cohesion and accountability in village development planning and management.

Operationally, SP1.1 refers to the implementation and functionality of the Village Development Committees (CVDs). Also under sub-objective 1, Wadata supports the identification and engagement of community influencers to help fight against social and cultural barriers that hinder village development. This approach strengthens the leadership of traditional authorities and places them at the heart of the inclusive development of their localities.

SP 1.2 Sustainably managed, productive natural resource base enhanced.

SP1.2 focuses on the sustainable and equitable improvement of the management of productive natural resources. In the targeted communities, this objective is addressed through several activities. These include the development and adoption of local conventions/agreements to prevent conflicts over access to natural resources, the establishment and training of basic land commissions, and the recovery of degraded land.

SP 1.3 Effective responses to community- level shocks and stresses.

SP 1.3 focuses on access to timely information on shocks, and early response capacity. The key activity is the establishment of an early warning system or SCAP-RU.

To achieve the results under Objective 1, Wadata's activities focused on three interventions:

- Strengthening Local Institutions (CVD).
- Disaster Risk Management (DRM).
- Natural Resource Management (NRM) and Water Point Service Management (CGPE).

It should be noted, however, that since June 2022 water management has been jointly supported with activities under the P3, and so are included in that section of this report.

3.1.1. Activity: Village Development Committees (CVD)

The CVD structure in the context of the Wadata project, the CVD structure is the primary point of entry, and serves to integrate all other activities. Indeed, as part of the project, it is the first structure that is set up in the villages.

The CVD is composed of 11 members. To ensure inclusiveness, youth and women are represented in all CVDs. The choice of committee members is made in the village general assembly. In general, it is the villagers who propose the members, based on their understanding of the activity proposed by the project agents.

The main mission of the CVD is the coordination of the activities of all the other community structures set up by the project. With this in mind, CVD members have undergone a number of training courses to prepare them for their roles, including information to help members understand the organization and functioning of associated groups, and techniques of developing action plans and their follow-up. Training focuses on the Community Action Cycle process, to allow CVDs to more effectively identify constraints and appropriate community solutions.

According to the 2022 annual report, 668 members of a total of 221 CVDs had benefited from training in planning and resource mobilization across the 270 villages. It should be noted, however, that the duration of intervention is not uniform in all villages. Rather, the first generation, second generation and third generation villages are at different stages (see section on targeting).

3.1.1.1. EO1: Quality

The CVD is at the heart of Wadata's intervention. It is the community structure that follows the development and implementation of all the action plans of the other community platforms set up in the different sectors. In terms of its functioning, the village development committees hold monthly meetings to update and monitor the various interventions initiated or about to be initiated in the villages. The CVD approach, in its spirit, is a very good community intervention in the sense that it puts villagers at the center of the challenges of their development. This approach allows villagers to identify development priorities. According to a Wadata Supervisor:

Each village structure programs a certain number of activities in its action plan depending on the sector of intervention. The CVD follows up on these activities during the monthly meetings it holds.

The CVD therefore makes it possible to identify priority actions in villages and provides the framework for their implementation and monitoring.

To carry out their mission, the CVDs are equipped with equipment (register, notebook) to enable them to plan actions and monitor them. But beyond that, it emerged that the actions undertaken by the CVDs have contributed significantly to strengthening social cohesion at the community level. In many intervention villages, under the directives of the CVDs, many collective actions are initiated to take care of problems of health, education, access to water, etc.

3.1.1.2. EO2: Evidence of Change

Four years is not enough in the life of a project to really talk about changes following an intervention. However, evidence emerged that suggests changes in the experience of communities following the

implementation of the CVDs. The first change is the creation and implementation of CVDs. Having these structures in the villages (beyond their functionality) is in a way a starting point to drive change. Beyond this symbolic factor, the collective actions initiated by the CVDs have led, in some of the visited villages, to certain results in terms of social processes. As described by a Wadata supervisor:

There are many examples of change in the villages. Especially if we look at the actions collected that the CVDs have promoted. I can mention several villages, for example the village of There are many of them. If we take the village of, the CVD took the example of the difficulty of medical evacuation to convince villagers to mobilize money to buy an ox and a cattle cart that will be used to bring women for consultation. This problem has always existed, but the CVD made the villagers aware of it and when they understood, they contributed to solving the problem.

3.1.1.3. EO3: Efficiency

The selection of CVD members is made in general assembly of the village. The process that leads to the selection of CVD members is described by a polyvalent field agent as follows:

The choice of members is made in the village general assembly. It is done after the presentation visits of the project, its purpose and what it has planned to do in the village. This first visit is made by the Wadata staff, the representative of the town hall, the technical services, etc. On the day the committee office is set up, the villagers are informed in advance so that the villagers are there. When we do not inform, some people can go about their business. Once in the village, the people are there, as this morning, you saw the mobilization (reference to the arrival of the team of evaluators). It explains what the CVD is, its role, its importance and the profiles of the people who must be on the committee. That is to say, people who are available, who will be present, who at least know how to read and write, etc. We emphasize the presence of women and youth on the committee. Then it is the villagers who propose the people who are able to do the work"

All CVDs have been set up on this scheme. As it is organized, this targeting process is supposed to make it possible to have actors on whom the project will rely on to implement its interventions. In the committee, women and youth are represented to enable inclusion. However, despite reported efforts by Wadata to include other categories of vulnerable community members (such as those living in poverty or persons living with a disability) on the CVDs, this was not generally observed in the field.

In principle, the members of the CVDs are responsible for coordinating the actions of the various platforms set up as part of the project. There were, however, some difficulties in the functionality of the CVDs. In the villages visited, many CVDs are not functional: meetings are not held, action plans not completed, absence of the secretary (nearly always the only member who can read and write), demotivation, etc. These difficulties can be analyzed in three aspects: Targeting/selection of CVD members, voluntary commitment, and power dynamics.

As the process of selection of CVD members is conducted, it favors the selection of actors who have influence in the village. These people may not be the most dynamic and especially those who are able to volunteer in the conduct of activities. As described by a Wadata governance manager:

We have not been rigorous in targeting CVD members. We have noticed ourselves that some members of the CVD have entered the committee hoping to have something.

In the context of vulnerability of the targeted villages, vulnerable people are rarely selected by general assembly to participate in governance activities such as the CVDs. Thus, as mentioned above, it is the

most influential people or those who are close to the influential people who are selected to serve on the CVDs in the majority of cases.

The second challenge to functionality of CVDs is the voluntary commitment that is required of members. In a context of community vulnerability, volunteering seems to be a difficult option for villagers to apply. Most CVD members must work to support their families. Some go abroad to work and support themselves, often for months at a time. It is difficult for many members to invest their time and energy in activities where they will earn nothing. In many villages visited, key people from the CVD went abroad for work, abandoning their CVD responsibilities and leaving action plans unanswered. Sometimes, it is the only person who can read and write on the committee who is absent, which poses a problem for the formalization of activities.

Finally, the third challenge to CVD functionality is the power issues that may arise in relation to the content of the role of president of the CVD. In some villages, some village Chiefs find it hard to imagine that he is not responsible for a village development committee. From their perspective, any development of the village must be done with the Chief. Also, at the village level the president of the CVD can be seen as a competitor by some village chiefs.

It is nevertheless important to emphasize that there are CVDs in some villages whose mandates are well carried out. However, even in these positive examples, it was observed that Wadata field staff play an important role in monitoring and managing CVD activities. In many cases, the functionality of CVDs depends on polyvalent field agent visits.

3.1.1.4. E04: Coordination/Collaboration

The CVDs are at the heart of the Wadata project. All development issues in the village rely on their functionality to some degree. Several platforms (Maman lumière, école des maris, MMD, MMF, SCAP-RU, CLTS committee, etc.) are set up, each with a specific action plan. The CVDs are responsible for coordinating the activities of all platforms. This is a permanent challenge for the CVDs because the volunteer system greatly impacts the pace and commitment of village actors. As one CVD president interview stated:

You tell people: Don't put pressure on me, it's a job I do without earning anything, if I spend the day doing this work with you, will you give me the money for food for my family?

CVDs are not part of a global approach where certain stakeholders such as the GoN or other long-term actors are formally involved in their functionality or management with established mandates. Therefore, the question of successful collaboration and coordination is determined by the willingness, ability, and capacity of each of the CVDs to get members of other platforms to adhere to the approach of the Wadata project (in essence, encouraging volunteerism).

3.1.1.5. E05: Sustainability

Sustainability is a big challenge for CVDs. Being able to survive through volunteer efforts only is one of the conditions for the sustainability of CVDs. Even for CVDs that are currently functioning, it is essential to ensure their sustainability to be able to graft activities that may arouse the interest of CVD members. As one Wadata Commune supervisor described:

I understand them, we cannot ask a head of household, in the difficult conditions of life in the villages to give up what allows him to earn 100CFA or 200CFA and spend the day in meetings

without earning anything. That's why I try to explain to them to hold meetings when conditions allow, that's how we can give them a taste for activities. But it's not easy.

The sustainability of CVDs depends on the solutions to the problems mentioned above. If the CVDs feel overloaded in the coordination of several activities on a voluntary basis, Wadata risks leading them to tend towards trying to satisfy the achievement of project indicators without the appropriation of activities actually being done.

3.1.1.6. E06: Cross-cutting themes

Gender and youth issues are an integral part of the implementation of the Wadata project. On the ground, all platforms take gender and youth issues into account in setting up committees. The project involved traditional chieftaincy so that this dynamic was accepted in all intervention villages observed. As described by a Wadata gender manager:

We did awareness caravans with the sultan to explain the importance of having these two categories of people in the committees, especially women. And I think we've been successful in this area. Because we must not hide our faces, women and young people are more dynamic in associative structures than men.

All CVDs observed included young people and women members. However, the contributions of these members is not assured. Indeed, even if women and young people are represented on the committees, it was generally observed that they do not influence decision-making at the village level.

From a managerial point of view, even though youth and gender are important leverage points in the project's theory of change, Wadata employs only two Gender/Youth Supervisors (compared to four for other technical areas), which affects the monitoring of youth/gender specific activities and the achievement of objectives (this challenge has also been noted by Wadata who is seeking ways to address this).

3.1.2. Activity: Community Early Warning System and Emergency Response committees (SCAP-RU)

The establishment of Community Early Warning System and Emergency Response committees (SCAP-RU) is part of the general policy of management and prevention of food crises and disasters in Niger. They are set up to help report information from the community level to the communal and then departmental and regional level to the national level. As such, Wadata strengthens the national early warning system by setting up these community structures.

The SCAP-RU committee is typically made up of members from three or four villages in a radius of eight km who also have a good relationship with each other. Each of the member village chooses three delegates to be a member of the committee. The chairman of the committee is, in general, the chief of the primary village. It meets monthly in the village where the chairman of the committee resides. The main objective of SCAP-RU is to provide information in relation to the vulnerability risk factors observed in their villages or area. Risk factors are for example an epidemic, an invasion of insects during an agricultural season, a flood, epizootic outbreak, etc.

As of the end of FY22, the project had set up 50 SCAP-RU (achieving the goal of the life of the award).

3.1.2.1. EO1: Quality

The SCAP-RU is the extension at community level of the national system of the early warning system. In this context, as soon as they identify a problem, the escalation must be done through the different alert levels set up by the State, at the communal, departmental, regional, and national levels so that the problem is more effectively addressed.

From a functional point of view, the SCAP-RUs are part of the structures where the villagers have quickly assimilated the approach. This, it seems, is related to the fact that in the communes of Guidimouni, Guidguir, Mazamni and DTK, some SCAP-RU gave alerts that were taken care of. One SCAP-RU committee member interviewed stated:

During the past winter, we experienced flooding in the villages, more than 80 heads of families lost their homes and belongings. When we reported this to the town hall, all the victims received help. Each head of household received 80,000CFA to rebuild his house".

Another committee member provided another positive example:

We have reported an epizootic in small and large ruminants in and around our village. It manifests itself with pimples all over the body of animals. When we held our meeting and sent the statement report to the town hall, we sent a breeding agent, and all the animals were vaccinated. We just paid 200CFA per vaccinated animal, it was very appreciated by the villagers."

3.1.2.2. EO2: Evidence of Change

There are many examples that reflect the functionality of SCAP-RU in the Wadata project. The role played by the mayor's office (Mairie) is important. As part of the project and to facilitate the support of the structures by the communal authorities, Wadata supported the OSV of each commune with computer equipment (computer and printer). The capacities of actors at the Commune (Mairie) level have also been strengthened in this direction.

To support their monthly meetings, SCAP-RU members have introduced voluntary membership fees. For the moment the meetings are effective and at the communal level the concerns of the community actors are taken care of. Also, to make the meetings effective in the long term, given the vulnerable situation in which most villagers live, Wadata has provided the SCAP-RU with equipment that can allow them to generate resources and thus be able to finance their meetings in the long term. A Wadata governance supervisor described it as:

We have equipped [15 of the 50] SCAP-RUs with a solar kit consisting of two solar panels, an energy storage unit, and a battery. This will allow them to have a small cell phone charging business. They will be able to have some basis resources each time and at least finance the meetings.

3.1.2.3. EO3: Efficiency

The targeting of SCAP-RU committee members is the same as that of CVD members. Unlike the CVDs, the SCAP-RU committees in all the municipalities visited find symbolic comfort in their activities. As mentioned above, having served their community encourages them to persevere in the activity. This commitment also finds impetus in the provision of equipment that has been made to them. Field officers and supervisors are the first to talk about the success of this intervention.

3.1.2.4. E04: Coordination/Collaboration

Field officers interviewed are quite enthusiastic about monitoring the activities of the SCAP-RU. In terms of results, these structures are those through which the project integrates its activities into the national early warning system. At the institutional level, the activities of the SCAP-RU allow the mayors in the different municipalities visited to integrate and capitalize on the actions in their planning.

3.1.2.5. E05: Sustainability

SCAP-RU is an approach that is highly assimilated by communities. In the communities visited, they have understood the approach and it is, above all, in line with their seasonal and daily concerns. For the moment, meetings are held somewhat regularly in the villages visited.

SCAP-RU are part of the interventions through which the Wadata project can project itself into sustainability. Although the structure is mandated by the government (which encourages sustainability, there are some challenges with the links between the SCAP-RU and higher-level government response. The ET observed that the motivation to sustain the committees comes instead from positive local responses. Indeed, in the villages where there was a first intervention following the alerts raised by the SCAP-RU, the members of the committee ensure that they want to continue the activities even after the project. This commitment to continue the activities was prompted by the sense of symbolic comfort and interest in having served the public interest felt by the members of the committee.

Although the SCAP-RU visited were highly functional, the Wadata annual report from 2022 indicated that some still needed additional coaching to fully understand the importance of their mission, role, and responsibilities.

3.1.2.6. E06: Cross-cutting themes

This is one of Wadata's interventions that addresses issues related to community vulnerability issues. Indeed, the problems raised by the committee concern all social categories at the village level. When there was a flood in the commune of DTK, it was the houses of the poor that collapsed the most. The intervention of SCAP-RU has helped many vulnerable families.

3.1.3. Activity: Natural Resource Management

Natural resource management consists of three activities components: Local conventions/agreements, reclamation of degraded land, and assisted natural regeneration (these last two done as part of food for assets- FFA).

Local agreements are part of a general dynamic of prevention and management of conflicts related to access to shared resources at the community level. It is a long process that leads to a local convention. First, it is necessary to diagnose all local conflicts related to access to shared resources. The main conflicts are farmer/herder conflicts, farmer/farmer conflicts, and fishery/herder conflicts. Then, solutions are proposed by the communities to the various conflicts diagnosed. Finally, the communities agree on the amounts of the fines to be applied in the event of misconduct. All stakeholders sign the agreement. It is then popularized by word of mouth and then through community radios thanks to the support of the project.

Local conventions are part of a comprehensive conflict prevention and management strategy. In this sense, basic land commissions are set up in the villages. They are equipped with equipment for land tenure security.

The recovery of degraded land consists of making half-moons on uncultivable land that is also not used for grazing animals (generally land that has been degraded from overgrazing). After this activity, the reclaimed land is divided into three sections: a part for the sowing of herbaceous species, a part reserved for the planting of trees and finally the last part is left for the grazing of the animals of the village. Land reclamation is associated with cash/food for work, or otherwise called Food for Assets (FFA). Vulnerable households are targeted with the opportunity to work on these degraded land activities. Two partners implement these activities in the municipalities of DTK and Mazamni (WFP and Wadata). In one site, Wadata oversees the entire process. In the other sites, Wadata was responsible for the targeting of the households, and then WFP/partners managed the implementation of the work and payments. There are 5 FFA sites in total, including 1 managed by Wadata, and 4 by WFP. There are approximately 31 villages (out of 270), and 21 hamlets (out of 390) with participants in FFA activities. 4,510 participants (including 921 in the Wadata site). There were some differences in the targeting of the beneficiaries of these activities at the level of the two structures, as well as the forms of compensation (cash vs. food, and food types) between the two actors (further described below).

Figure 2: Half-moon preparation, first stage (before grass seeding)



Photo credit: Peter Horjus

Assisted natural regeneration is an intervention that has two objectives, the fight against desertification and climate change and the development of land. The intervention is associated with agricultural fields. In practice, farmers are taught to prune instead of cutting shrubs in the fields. Each FMNR group has 19

learners and one lead. The lead uses their land as the learning site, which serves as a role model for other growers who then replicate it on part of their fields.

3.1.3.1. E01: Quality

Local conventions have fully contributed to reducing conflicts over access to shared natural resources in all observed villages where they have been developed and implemented. Local conventions make it possible to have common and accepted rules for the management of shared resources. As described by a CVD member interviewed:

In the commune of Mazamni we were able to develop and implement local conventions and this helped to reduce conflicts. Ask the question to the chief of Mazamni commune, he will be in the best position to answer you since he has fewer conflicts to manage now.

The recovery of degraded land projects were very high quality in the areas implemented. For some of the degraded land sites, although they were a few years away from being ready for grazing, they were already able to harvest and sell some straw/hay from the grasses they were growing. Additionally, they were collecting grass seeds from the areas that had already been under recovery for a few years to use in the new areas.

As for assisted natural regeneration and the recovery of degraded land, community members interviewed by the ET expressed profound appreciation for the benefits of the activities initiated by the project. These two interventions are among those that have most affected the vulnerable in their implementation.

3.1.3.2. E02: Evidence of Change

There is ample evidence of change related to land reclamation, assisted regeneration and local conventions.

The recovery of degraded land has allowed efficient use of reclaimed land (part grazing, part planting forest species and a last part serving as grazing space), which may have longer term impacts (see section below). Additionally, some community members indicated that the FFA work opportunity allowed some men to remain in the communities outside of the agriculture season rather than migrate abroad to work. The chief of a small village (hamlet) stated:

This activity is important to us. It allows us to revive land that we thought was lost but above all, it allows us to have food. When we do this activity every 10 days, we are given cereal in return for the work we have done. It allows the poor to stay at home and work to have food.

The impacts on migration should be interpreted carefully, however. First, this change in behavior is linked to the payments for the FFA activities, and so will not last beyond the life of the project. Second, migration for work is not necessarily a negative behavior- indeed, during the non-agricultural season, out migration may provide substantial remittances that help bolster food security during the lean season.

Assisted natural regeneration is a good approach with immediate effects. It is highly appreciated at the community level. The testimonies in relation to the impact of this technique on the fields are numerous. According to the farmers, before the trees were completely felled, but now by pruning them it allows them to grow back better, and field observations show the success in protecting the areas for wind and sand and we see that they better protect the plants from wind and sand.

Local conventions, where they have been implemented, have strengthened social cohesion. They allowed different stakeholders to sit down to discuss common problems and find solutions. Apart from the spaces for dialogue that they have allowed, respect for conventions has reduced community conflicts. One CVD member described it as:

When you take the grazing area and the passage corridor of the village of ..., before, the passage corridor was narrowed, because farmers nibbled a lot in it, with the agreement, we were able to delimit again and enforce this delimitation.

3.1.3.3. EO3: Efficiency

The three interventions were each well appreciated. In this section, we discuss land reclamation and assisted regeneration for targeting issues.

The same criteria are not used for the targeting of the FFA participants of the poorest households targeted by Wadata and WFP. For both projects, the Wadata household vulnerability database is used to select the most vulnerable households, who are then given the option to participate (work) in the FFA activity. In the FFA managed by WFP, if a targeted household is found to have no member capable of working (for example, an elderly couple, or a single woman with many children), then these households are retained on the FFA payment rosters and receive the same benefits as those who participate in the FFA work. The FFA activity managed by Wadata, however, makes no accommodations for these most vulnerable households with no adult member capable of working. In the Wadata FFA activity, to receive the food payments, some household member of the targeted household must actually work on the FFA site. If no member of a targeted household is capable of working, then that household will not receive the FFA payments.

Another difference between the WFP and Wadata managed FFA activities is in the payment given. WFP starts with cash payments during the first few months after the harvest period, but later switches to food- providing rice, yellow peas, and oil. The Wadata FFA participants are always paid in food (never in cash), and receive sorghum, yellow peas, and oil. At all levels of data collection, it was clear that the rice distributed by WFP was almost always sold rather than consumed, but the sorghum distributed by Wadata was generally stocked and consumed. From a financial perspective, participants indicated they preferred rice because it had a large value when sold on the markets- more than they earned during the months when paid in cash. From a consumption perspective, participants generally preferred sorghum (or millet) over rice (which is not a common food in the targeted communities). Second, rice requires more time and fuel to cook, and must be prepared more frequently because it is less amenable to storage after cooking than sorghum, which is cooked as flour and formed into a ball of 'dough' that can be kept for several days and used for multiple purposes including porridge for children.

It should be noted, however, that from certain perspectives, the sale of rice is not considered in the negative. The amounts of rice being distributed, and the nature of the markets means the sale of rice by the participants did not impact market prices/flows of rice. Additionally, the households/participants appreciated the money they earned from selling the rice (rice can command a high price) and it seemed (anecdotally) that it still had a positive impact on overall food security.

Targeting as part of natural regeneration is done in the same vein as all project targeting. In the village general assembly, Wadata agents ask to have large producers who will experiment with cultivation techniques. Clearly in a targeting like this, the most vulnerable are not generally included as direct participants since they are not part of the large producers in the villages.

3.1.3.4. E04: Coordination/Collaboration

Within FFA, apart from the coordination with WFP on the FFA targeting and activities, opportunities for collaboration with external actors for these activities were not observed.

3.1.3.5. E05: Sustainability

Local agreements, land reclamation and natural regeneration are practices that can, with support, continue even after the project. These are interventions that do not contradict local practices and have already allowed communities to find interest in continuing them. Although the impacts specific to the FFA portion of the activities are not, by nature, sustainable.

3.1.3.6. E06: Cross-cutting themes

Land reclamation meets the project's objective of inclusion and equity. At land reclamation sites, women work in the same way, and they receive the same compensation as men. Although youth are included in the activities, and a lower age threshold is applied to those allowed to participate in the FFA work so that, among other risks, it does not interfere with children's education. However, the ET did not investigate overall school attendance among youth participants, which is likely low (in line with the area in general).

3.1.4. Activity Component: Community Influencers

Community influencers are a complimentary approach to facilitate behavior change in intervention villages. It is based on the fact that, in every village, there are people who are listened to and on whom one can rely on to influence adoption of regular habits, or to encourage certain practices. In each village, three people are chosen as community influencers: the village chief, the village Imam, and a woman whom all the women who village listen to, and who can be an example for them.

Where there is evidence for certain behavior changes, it was challenging for the MTE to determine if there was an association specific to the role of the community influencers. It was common in villages visited to have influencers or other people highly engaged with Wadata's intervention inform the ET that certain behaviors and activities are now well established- that they no longer practice early or forced marriage, that they all use health centers, that men accept that their wives conduct income generating activities (IGAs), etc. However, this optimistic reporting was clearly not the reality as observed by the teams. Although some initial changes were seen in the villages, they are not all widespread, and even where they begin to take shape in the villages, it is difficult to attribute changes specifically to Wadata.

3.1.1. Activity Component: Collaboration at the Communal Level

The importance of the links with municipalities and technical services, cited throughout the report, are fundamental to the success and sustainability of many aspects of the project (beyond just P1 activities).

During data collection, the mayors of all four communes were visited, and where possible, their inputs on Wadata were collected. All four mayors spoke highly overall of Wadata's interventions in their communes and expressed their appreciation. Two of the four mayors were particularly engaged and dynamic with the ET and provided important observations and suggestions for the project.

The mayors often brought up challenges related to the per diems for their staff when participating in meetings and joint activities. It was suggested that there are inconsistent practices of paying per diems between actors.

Additionally, they often asked for support for infrastructure and materials for their municipalities. The ET observed that the four commune offices of Wadata, all located nearby the mayor/communal offices, commonly had better infrastructure (internet, computers, furniture, latrines, water, security, etc.) than the mayor's offices. The lack of physical infrastructure may play a role in the quality of support the communal authorities are able to provide after the end of the project. As one mayor stated:

We cannot have good governance as long as the managers do not have good working conditions.

3.2. Purpose 2 – Livelihoods/Agriculture

Purpose 2 (P2) aims to improve access to adequate and diversified food through expanded and diversified income-generating activities and by improving the productivity and profitability of livestock and crop production activities while integrating the concept of nutrition-sensitive agriculture. The project placed particular emphasis on women and youth. Activities are implemented by creating and/or revitalizing community structures and by mobilizing providers of agricultural and financial goods and services to support these community structures. Twelve Wadata agents work under this component, including 6 field supervisors.

Two sub-purposes contribute to the achievement of the objectives of P2:

SP 2.1: Increase earnings from diversified livelihoods for women and youth.

Through this sub-component, Wadata promotes the diversification of income-generating activities, particularly for women and youth through their Mata Masu Dubara and Matasa Masu Fushaa groups.

SP 2.2: Increase profitability of livestock and irrigated crop production.

Through this sub-component, Wadata aims to improve animal and plant productivity by promising technologies and good practices in agriculture and livestock. The project established and strengthened the capacity of CBSPs to meet the demand for products and services created in the project intervention areas. To this end, a technological package has been diffused. Under this SP, the Wadata project also supports groups in the market valorization of animal and plant production through market gardening activities and cow-calf and fattening farms.

The main activities that fall under P2 include are diverse, from savings groups to agriculture-related activities to literacy training. These activities are supported by the establishment and capacity building of community platforms. It is important to note that activity packages vary between generations of villages.

3.2.1. Activity: Mata Masu Dubara (MMD)

To achieve P2, the Wadata project implements a package of agricultural and non-agricultural activities. The main gateways to these activities are MMDs and MMFs (see section below on MMFs). The activities are supported by the establishment of community-based service providers (CBSP), facilitators trained by the project. Facilitators work with MMDs by supporting them in their activities for a fee from these groups. Facilitators are also involved in setting up new groups at the request of women.

Inspired by traditional savings groups, MMD system is an approach long developed and implemented by development projects in Niger. The particularity of the approach is its simplicity in its implementation and its rapid appropriation by the participants. MMDs set up a collective savings fund based on regular weekly contributions. These contributions constitute a fund to finance income-generating activities. Members also use these funds to purchase and store food, to manage certain emergencies, to participate in social events in the community, and to grant credit to group members.

Wadata works with 743 operational MMD groups revitalized or created in all areas of intervention of the project. 76 MMD facilitators were trained to support these groups in their establishment and in the management of day-to-day business.

The financial services used by MMD and MMF groups to finance the implementation of their production and marketing activities is presented separately in the section further below.

3.2.1.1. EO1: Quality

The fact that Wadata has targeted operational and successful MMD groups is an asset to facilitate the implementation of activities. The diversification of MMD activities (livestock fattening, habbanayé¹⁴, peanut oil extraction, market gardening, home gardens, etc.) are also a positive point of the approach. On the ground, at the level of all the groups met, the trend observed is this diversification of activities coupled with the dynamism of women in this direction. This testifies to the ownership of the approach by the project participants.

At the level of some groups (not all) groups covered during data collection, members have the possibility to take loans that the person must repay with interest at the end of the period set by the group at the time of the credit contraction. However, some women do not want to take these credits because of the interest they have to pay, which is a forbidden practice in Islam. These loans are most often taken out in case of emergency for the woman (diseases, lack of food, etc.) or if she wants to start or develop an income-generating activity. However, there was some reticence to take out loans to start IGAs. One MMD member interviewed expressed:

Even if some women have tried to take out loans to start an IGA, the vast majority do not want because when you take a loan, you are given a deadline in which you must not only bring back the money, but also give the interest. And it's difficult to develop an IGA in the village that will allow you to do all this and earn a profit to also satisfy your personal needs, because people do not have much purchasing power.

Nevertheless, in some villages, thanks to their participation in MMD initiatives, some women say that they have been able to develop IGAs and thus manage to improve their standard of living.

3.2.1.1. EO2: Evidence of Change, EO5: Sustainability

The capacity building and various supports of the project have significantly improved the organizational and economic capacity of the groups. Women even undertake initiatives without the support of the project. For example, in some villages, some women even initiate storage activities for the resale of stored products to strengthen their savings activities and finance the activities of their groups.

¹⁴ Goat-raising activity, see section below.

An important point to highlight is the expectation that MMDs may self-replicate, where non-participant women may draw inspiration from Wadata-supported MMDs to form a similar group. The ET found some evidence of this in the small villages (hamlets) visited, women had organized themselves into MMDs without the support of Wadata. The simplicity of the approach is an important element that supports the sustainability and reproducibility of MMDs. However, self-replication is not felt consistently. A resident of a small village testified in this sense:

We saw Wadata working in the big villages [on MMD], when is it going to be done for us?

3.2.1.2. E03: Efficiency

Although the MMDs are generally effective, one of the concerns with MMD type interventions is that in order to participate, one must have some amount of money available on a regular basis to contribute to the group savings, so the activity may not be appropriate for targeting the poorest households. Wadata staff consistently disputed this, saying that women of all economic means participated in MMD, and that those with limited resources could pay a smaller amount per week, according to their means. However, this was not observed in any of the visited sites. In all the villages visited, the MMDs had established a fixed weekly contribution amount (50 CFA, 100 CFA, 200 CFA, etc.) set by the members of each group. In the MMDs interviewed, if a woman does not have the means to mobilize this fixed sum every week, she cannot become part of the group. There are indeed villages where rigorous control is put in place to select the members who should be part of the MMD groups. According to one respondent:

It is myself alone who is responsible for helping and monitoring these MMD groups, anyone I doubt does not have the means to fit into this savings group, does not join the group.

The lack of inclusion of the poorest women in the communities is further compounded by the fact that certain other Wadata activities, such as habbanayé (see below) are targeted towards MMD members, so non-members are not able to participate.

3.2.1.3. E04: Coordination/Collaboration

Wadata works with technical services and municipalities in the implementation of its activities. Interviews with project staff testify to the good collaboration between these state structures and the project. As MMDs are a gateway to activities, all three components can be found at their levels.

3.2.1.4. E06: Cross-cutting themes

MMDs are exclusively women's structures, but governance is ensured with the support of certain platforms set up by the project, including MMD facilitators and CVDs.

3.2.2. Activity: Matasa Masu Fusaha (MMF)

The MMF, which means "Youth with initiative", is an approach developed by Wadata in the Zinder region of Niger. The objective of the approach is to contribute to meeting the challenge of youth employment economically, by pooling all available strengths. The approach focuses on organizing young people in groups of 15 to 20 members aged 15 to 29 to highlight individual and collective initiatives to create an optimal framework that accounts for youth initiatives for harmonious and sustainable development. The approach centralizes young people to become key agents of change through the promotion of economic development activities.

MMFs are formed based on a number of criteria: the initiative of young people, their ability to develop IGAs, the commitment of the community to which these young people belong, the commitment and willingness to carry out the activities. The project carried out several actions aimed at refining the approach. Examples include the organization of the Youth Day initiated each year to promote pedagogy by example, vocational scholarships for young people (training of young people in trades): school fees, subsistence), pairwise training, empowerment of girls and boys, motivation of young people to create these structures, etc.

The financial services used by MMD and MMF groups to finance the implementation of their production and marketing activities is presented separately in the section further below.

3.2.2.1. EO1: Quality

According to Wadata's basic diagnosis, 2% of youth structures existed before the implementation of Wadata's activities. Subsequently, at least 212 villages are currently covered in the establishment of MMF groups, i.e. 78.5% of the 270 villages targeted. In terms of training young people in promoting trades, the project initially planned to train 1,000 in different trades. This number has been revised for technical reasons linked to the inadequacy of the training centers (one center per municipality) and their low reception capacities. Wadata works with 424 MMF groups to collectively mobilize more than 25 million FCFA in 2022. In addition, an internal evaluation of Wadata showed that 93% of these groups are well performing.

According to Wadata's 2022 annual report, of the 200 young people trained, 30 have created their own micro-enterprises and 82 work in associations or employees. A total of 112 are fully active, including 57 girls.

3.2.2.2. EO2: Evidence of Change

The approach has enabled young people, in many cases, to embrace agricultural and non-agricultural income-generating activities, to understand associative life and to feel involved in the development process of their countries. Promoting smart migration is also a good innovation. For Wadata, the exodus is seen as an opportunity and not an element to be fought. On another level, MMDs are seen as mentoring MMFs, which gives the impression that the approach is a transitional pre-phase from MMD to MMF in the long term.

3.2.2.3. EO3: Efficiency

MMFs have managed to develop income-generating activities in the majority observed by the ET. This generates a certain income for young people. However, it must be acknowledged that to participate in an MMF, the participant must generally already have sufficient financial means to participate. For example, for some groups they not only make weekly contributions (50 CFA, 100 CFA, etc.), but also it is necessary to give a certain amount in advance in order to join the group (1,500 CFA observed in one MMF, for example). As with MMDs, this means that those with less financial means may not be able to participate. It should be noted, however, that the ET was not able to quantify the degree of exclusion caused by the financial obligations. Further research could help shed light on whether this exclusion is rare, or if it is a significant concern.

3.2.2.4. E04: Coordination/Collaboration

To support the functionality of these youth groups, Wadata involves several actors including parents, community influencers, Village Development Committees CVD, MMD, as well as the local communal training centers, and local technicians.

3.2.2.5. E05: Sustainability

It is challenging to assess the sustainability of this new approach. However, a favorable trend can be seen through the interest shown by young people in the approach to the point of self-financing activities. MMFs are a continuous source of resources, technical and managerial capacity for young people, the connections with technical services and other actors and the continued motivation of these MMF groups is a good sign of sustainability of this approach. However, it was found that in the 5th year of the project, the activities are not effective for some MMFs who are simply satisfied with a few awareness-raising activities, with members making no financial contributions, and no IGAs conducted or planned. It was difficult to identify the causes of these cases of underperforming MMFs within the scope of the MTE, but it may stem from a combination of a need for more extensive support needed from Wadata (though that was not a common observation), a simple lack of motivation by the members, and a challenging environment in general for youth to create successful new IGAs.

3.2.2.6. E06: Cross-cutting themes

Unlike MMDs, MMFs are composed of girls and boys. Groups can be exclusively girls or boys or mixed. At this level too, the structures set up by the project support these youth groups as mentors- particularly the MMDs (which was observed to be a positive influence on the success of MMFs in a few cases, though the ET did not explore this link in depth)

3.2.3. Activity Component : Microfinance Institution Support to MMD/MMFs

Here, funding refers to the financial services used by MMD and MMF clusters to finance the implementation of their production and marketing activities. In the case of Wadata, the groups finance the activities almost exclusively through the funds mobilized through contributions and/or revenues from the sale of their products. At the beginning, the Wadata project connected the groups with Yarda, a microfinance institution (MFI) based in Zinder. This MFI ensured the preparation of the operating accounts of all MMD groups in the project area, and supported them in opening their own accounts, which was a real success. A positive point is that the project supported the organizational capacities of the MMD/MMF groups with a view to improving their performance.

However, the MFI financing was not successful. At the start, the project signed a partnership with a Zinder- based MFI called Yarda, who was supposed to finance the activities of the groups through a line of credit that Yarda agreed to extend, based on an overall action plan and the operating accounts of each group.

Wadata wanted the Yarda to finance the activities from its own funds, which proved to be a barrier to the funding process and resulted in delays in financing negotiations. In addition, the inventory credit (warrantage) activity envisioned by the project has not been as successful due to the lack of MFIs able to support project participants. As a result, attempts to connect them were in vain.

According to the experiences of MFIs in the project area, clusters often fail to meet their commitments. According to an MFI intervening for twenty years in the zone, there are hundreds of millions of CFA not recovered in the zone because groups have not been able to repay. This explains the reluctance of MFIs to go in the direction of financing groups without guaranteed external funds.

In short, the use of MFIs to finance the activities of the clusters was a major challenge that Wadata has struggled to overcome. With the facilitation of the USAID funded project Yalwa, four groups in Guidimouni were put in touch with MFIs for the replenishment of their stocks.

One positive note is that this presented an opportunity for the MMD/MMF groups to move towards the development of informal credits to self-finance their activities, which they have been able to do. This means that MMDs and MMFs do not depend on the Wadata for resource mobilization. This demonstrates a good understanding of the approach and the high level of performance of these structures.

3.2.4. Activity: Community-Based Service Providers (CBSP)

The CBSP approach was developed by the Wadata to promote the adaptation of new technologies and good agricultural practices to mitigate the effects of climate change and boost livestock and crop production. Service Provider Agents (SPAs) are remunerated by their communities according to the goods or service provided. Wadata has also connected these service providers with producers and selected suppliers of goods and services to meet the demand created.

34 agricultural CBSPs were trained by the project, 6% of which were youth. Wadata has already recognized that this is an area where they can work to expand their coverage.

In addition, 33 livestock auxiliaries were trained by the project each covering eight villages, including two women and four young people. Through these trained agents, Wadata aims to make certain products and services related to livestock activities accessible.

In short, one notes a low number of SPAs relative to the coverage of the areas of intervention of the project. However, Wadata staff report that they have respected the national standard which sets an SPA per radius of 15km.

3.2.4.1. *EO1: Quality*

Wadata has created the conditions for accessibility to certain agricultural and non-agricultural products and services through the training and equipment of auxiliary agents, agricultural SPAs and facilitators of MMD group activities. The SPAs also benefit from some training in techniques for setting up vegetable and horticultural nurseries, grafting, pest management, etc.

In terms of recognition, livestock breeding facilities are certified in accordance with the requirements of the Nigerien State. However, agricultural CBSPs are not certified.

3.2.4.2. *EO2: Evidence of Change, EO4: Coordination/Collaboration*

The CBSPs are in constant contact with the technical services and the municipal authorities. For CBSP/Livestock Auxiliaries, they even support the government actors during national vaccination campaigns. In addition, connecting them with suppliers in many cases has worked well. CBSPs have also significantly reduced the distance between state services and populations.

3.2.4.3. EO5: Sustainability

The activity of SPAs is likely to continue even after the end of Wadata, since they are paid for their services, and because there is an important demand. Wadata also supported the formalization of 18 SPAs, with a view to allowing them to take advantage of the market opportunities that exist and to be recognized even after the project.

3.2.4.4. EO6: Cross-cutting themes

Women and youth are among the targets for the training of agricultural CBSPs and livestock auxiliaries, though there is room for improved inclusion.

3.2.5. Activity: Conservation Farming (CF) / Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR)

CF/FMNR activities aim to promote sustainable agriculture by restoring productive bases, including land, and also by popularizing techniques and practices that can boost agricultural productivity. At this level, the project's strategy is to combine several technologies according to areas and needs to multiply the chance of adoption of at least some by communities. These technologies and practices include Zaï, half-moons, composting, improved seeds, assisted natural regeneration, and recovery of degraded using half-moons (some are discussed under P1 findings).

3.2.5.1. EO1: Quality

The project made a significant effort to build the capacity of producers on the use of technologies to conserve and improve soil quality. The project has also made significant efforts in promoting the entire technology package. The idea of the technology package is a way to increase the likelihood of adoption by participants. A positive point is that the demonstrations are made in the fields of others, which increases the probability of appropriation of the techniques. Promoted technologies are easily replicable (increased likelihood of adoption and sustainability). In addition, the availability of services via FMNR facilitates the reach of a large number of farmers.

3.2.5.2. EO2: Evidence of Change

Interviewed participants positively appreciate innovations and indicated a trend of community ownership, especially in areas exposed to continuous soil degradation. Data from Wadata's 2022 annual survey shows that 58% of farmers have used at least three sustainable farming practices and/or technologies related to agriculture and NAS in the past 12 months.

3.2.5.3. EO5: Sustainability

The activity in its essence is sustainable because it contributes in a palpable way to the improvement of production, especially since it occurs in a context of degradation of productive means, especially cropland. In areas with degraded/hardpacked soils, composting and Zais are well appreciated. On the other hand, in areas with poor access to water, activities such as composting are difficult to implement, as composting requires a source of moisture.

3.2.6. Activity: Market gardening

Market gardening is a for-profit activity, unlike home gardens, which are ideally intended for household consumption. Wadata promotes market gardening as a way to improve the incomes of women members of MMD groups through the sale of their production. The sites are run by MMD women organized into networks.

Wadata has financed three of the 10 planned market gardening sites. Other sites are in progress.

3.2.6.1. E01: Quality

A positive point is that the significant investments made cover all the achievements necessary for the proper functioning of a market gardening site, thus reflecting the quality of the approach. The investments concern hydraulic infrastructure such as drilling and solar panels with water reservoirs, irrigation systems, and concrete tanks to store water. The sites visited are properly fenced in to keep out animals.

Figure 3: Women working on a Wadata supported market garden.



Photo credit : Lawali Maman Maman Sanoussi

However, it has been reported that at certain times, some sites face low water flow, which means that women must spend a lot of time watering. Moreover, commodification of the production of the sites has not yet been fully successful- while respondents reported consuming what they produced; most did not indicate that it was yet a meaningful source of income for them.

Figure 4: Water source in market garden



Photo credit : Lawali Maman Maman Sanoussi

3.2.6.2. E02: Evidence of Change

The activity allows MMD groups to generate income and improve the diet of their households. These groups also foster improved social cohesion through the associated MMDs and networks, and solidarity among market garden participants.

3.2.6.3. E03: Efficiency, E05: Sustainability

The implementation of market gardening activities has been delayed due in part to the time taken by women to look for a site that is subsequently developed by the project. The sites are acquired based on a no-cost lease with a duration of 10 to 15 years (depending on the site)

Some minor challenges were reported by respondents related to insect attacks on crops, and the cost of seeds (related to profitability). However, the largest two challenges women discussed in interviews were 1) achieving meaningful profit from their activities, and 2) the questionable status of the land access at the end of the agreement. These risks and uncertainties certainly limit certain initiatives of women on the sites, in particular the establishment of woody fruit species. One member of a CVD that was supporting a network of groups said during their interview:

This is a ... 10-year ... [no-cost lease] that the owner made to us. After the 10 years, if we manage to save, we can ask the owner to sell us the site. If not, we will look for another site. We also hope another project will support us in this direction. This is our third crop cycle, but women do not sell the production, for the moment it is used for consumption.

Currently there appears to be no long-term sustainability plan in place with a post-land-loan vision from Wadata (at least not one the participants interviewed are aware of). However, some women interviewed did indicate their groups had hopes to eventually distribute half their crops among themselves for consumption and sell the other half and save a portion of the money to pay for the land in question, or purchase other land, after the 10 year lease was up. The feasibility of this plan, however, would require that the activity be sufficiently lucrative to save sufficient money.

3.2.6.4. E04: Coordination/Collaboration

On the sites visited, the women work in excellent collaboration with the CVDs.

3.2.6.1. E06: Cross-cutting themes

This activity is an excellent example of one that incorporates a focus on gender through the targeting and empowerment of women, and governance through the incorporation of MMDs and associated networks., as part of its core approach.

3.2.7. Activity: Home gardens

Wadata launched the promotion of home gardens in 2022. They consist of small growing beds located in concessions (apart from a few exceptions), proximate to a water point to facilitate the transport of water. Wadata supports households in establishing home gardens through supervision and providing seeds of moringa, sorrel and lettuce. The production is not intended for selling, but rather for household consumption to improve their diet quality, with a focus on households with members that benefit most from improved nutrition- children 6-23 months, pregnant women, and lactating women.

Figure 5: Home garden plot



Photo credit : Lawali Maman Maman Sanoussi

3.2.7.1. E01: Quality, E02: Evidence of Change

Although the activity had only been launched in 2022, the simplicity of the approach facilitates its appropriation, which was evident in the targeted communities visited. Home gardens were nearly ubiquitous in these areas. The products are also often used as part of the culinary demonstrations, further promoting their desirability.

3.2.7.2. E03: Efficiency, E05: Sustainability

One shortcoming observed in the field was that the participants had not fully appropriated the practice of home gardens. Rather, they tended to view them as a Wadata-driven activity and consequently relied heavily on Wadata's support in creating and maintaining their home gardens.

The fact that the implementation strategy of the activity has planned to promote home gardens in areas where water is available is a positive point which can support sustainability. However, the commitment of the populations and especially the good understanding of the meaning of the activity is another important point to emphasize in the success and sustainability of the activity, which is not the case in some villages.

3.2.7.3. EO6: Cross-cutting themes

Participation in home gardens is not limited to only women. In some villages visited, home gardens were nearly ubiquitous, and benefited from the interest of men and youth as well as their participation in the tending of the gardens.

3.2.8. Activity: Promotion of improved seeds

Wadata provides targeted communities with improved seeds to increase the production and productivity of food crops. According to the 2022 annual report, Wadata had distributed 7,200 kg of improved millet, cowpea, and sorghum seeds primarily in deficit areas.

3.2.8.1. EO1: Quality, EO2: Evidence of Change, EO3: Efficiency

Many of the participants and technicians interviewed stressed the relevance of the activity given the low use of improved seeds. A strong point is that most interviewees, whether direct participants or not, are unanimous that the use of improved seeds is essential to boost agricultural production in the current context. This reflects the awareness of producers, especially since Wadata is involved in promoting the use of improved seeds. But it should be noted that the project does not promote the production of these seeds. Nevertheless, Wadata connects communities and SPAs to the suppliers of these seeds.

However, acceptance of improved seed varieties is a major challenge. Farmers commonly reported a poor perception of improved seed quality, a challenge also highlighted in KIIs. These farmers believe, rightly or wrongly, that their traditional seeds are better than the "project seeds". Availability of improved seeds at affordable prices is another major challenge for the sustainability of the use by communities.

The delay in the supply of seeds is also a weak point to highlight. Indeed, the project distributed the seeds for the first time since its launch, which may negatively affect the ownership of the activity before the end of the project.

3.2.8.2. EO4: Coordination/Collaboration

Technical services support the project in the implementation and training of project participants. In addition, trained SPAs are linked to authorized distributors to make seeds available locally.

3.2.8.3. EO5: Sustainability

All the shortcomings mentioned above are likely to compromise the sustainability of the use of improved seeds promoted by the project.

3.2.9. Activity: Habbanayé / Livestock fattening

“Habbanayé” is an approach that consists of initially buying animals and distributing them to a first group of participants who will then pass them to a second group after the animals give birth and the young are weaned. Habbanayé is an activity initiated and formerly practiced by certain communities in Niger. The approach has been adopted and improved over time by development projects, including Wadata, within a much more elaborate framework with committees set up to monitor the activity and trained agents for the care of these animals.

Under this approach, Wadata has distributed 2,100 goats across 104 MMD groups to approximately or 1,000 women participants. In a few villages visited, residents indicate that promises to distribute goats and support their fattening were made but not followed up.

3.2.9.1. *EO1: Quality*

Habbanayé is very well appreciated by the participants in the communities visited. They consider it to be an improvement of a local practice and indicated that it is a factor of women's empowerment, improved nutrition, and social cohesion. A positive point is that the beneficiaries have received training on the management of livestock for breeding practices. Discussions with beneficiaries show that the trainings were well delivered and understood.

The dynamism of the breeding assistants and monitoring committees is also an important point to emphasize because they participate fully in the activity through the care of animals, the settlement of disputes etc.

However, animal mortality is a major problem that hinders the proper conduct of the activity. Although some villages did not report this problem, other villages reported several cases of mortality. The causes are not well understood, but could be due to poor choice of animals, poor quarantine conditions, and/or the unsuitability of the species distributed to the local context. Indeed, in some villages, most goats died shortly after distribution. In one village, a participant stated:

Our group had received 16 female and 1 male goats... now there are only 3 goats left, all the others died less than 10 days after distribution.

Additionally, in some cases, an abnormal calving time has been found to lengthen the handover cycles. The reasons for this are also unknown.

3.2.9.2. *EO3: Efficiency*

For targeting, the most successful MMD clusters are prioritized for activity. The vulnerability criterion is applied within the groups initially targeted to prioritize the more vulnerable. However, women that are not members of MMDs did not have access to participate in this activity. As discussed in other sections, this may mean that in some cases, the poorest/most marginalized households are not adequately targeted.

3.2.9.3. *EO5: Sustainability*

The motivation and commitment of the women beneficiaries is an important factor in sustainability. The shortcomings identified above, primarily the high animal mortality, must be addressed if the activity is to continue over time.

An internal evaluation of Wadata showed that there are MMD and MMF groups that have financed animals from their own funds to introduce the activity within their groups (11 MMD and 24 MMF). This shows their commitment to supporting the activity without the project.

3.2.10. Activity: Functional Literacy

Functional literacy was introduced by Wadata to facilitate the functioning of groups through the training of a few members who can ensure the planning and monitoring of actions even beyond the life of the project. Participants learn reading, writing and arithmetic in the Hausa or Kanuri language (according to their choice).

Wadata started the activity in 2022. At the time of the MTE, it was in the middle of the two planned six-month periods of holding literacy classes (January-June 2022, and January-June 2023).

3.2.10.1. EO1: Quality

The approach is particularly relevant in the Nigerien context, where the illiteracy rate is very high. It is decisive in the proper functioning of the groups supported by Wadata. The trend is much more in favor of ownership of the activity and success in the conduct of the activities of the groups. Well-developed modules are available, with teachers deemed qualified for the job. A positive point to note is the consideration of the three components of Wadata in the development of the module content, which refers to the activities of the project- an innovative way to transmit many messages of the project through these courses.

However, the poor condition of the learning space observed in some villages (classroom in a small hut, learners sitting on the floor), and the limit of the number of people trained are shortcomings noted in the field. The number of people trained within the groups is not up to the optimal functioning especially in contexts where seasonal labor migration is common, so potential participants are either busy with agricultural activities are out-migrated, and don't have time to participate in classes.

Figure 6: Female literacy class



Photo credit: Lawali Maman Maman Sanoussi

3.2.10.2. EO2: Evidence of Change

A positive change is observed within the groups. Indeed, registers and action plans are now developed and managed by the members themselves. An internal evaluation by Wadata shows that 52% of learners have learned to read and write.

3.2.10.3. EO3: Efficiency

The criteria for choosing villages are based on the motivation and commitment of the communities. Then, the Wadata staff looks at all the platforms in the village and identifies people in key positions that would most benefit from literacy training.

Activities are suspended during the rainy season, which though necessary, lengthens the duration of training.

In addition, the project has set up a good participant evaluation system with clear steps to ensure the quality of the teaching methods used.

3.2.10.4. EO4: Coordination/Collaboration

A literacy manager coordinates the activity with the support of his field supervisors. At the village level, literacy management committees have been set up.

3.2.10.5. EO5: Sustainability

While the sustainability of impacts of functional literacy participation at the individual level are ensured, the number of people trained is limited and has not been able to meet the needs for all the governance groups, which is a risk for the sustainability of many activities. For example, in one village, when the CVD was asked why the 2022 community action plan was not well filled out, they replied that the one literate member of the group had travelled for an extended period of time, so they couldn't fill out the plan, which risks follow-up of the CVD's activities.

Figure 7: Community Action Plan (incomplete)

Photo credit: Abdoutan Harouna

In addition, the CVD secretaries are not consistently people from the targeted villages, a compromise that may threaten sustainability of the groups, but is at times unavoidable because no literate candidate is locally available. As one officer interviewed indicated:

The project should have focused on recruiting local resources so that these people could continue to support the groups even without the project.

In addition, in areas where FFA activities are implemented, women are more involved in that work than in literacy classes, which affects attendance and can compromise the sustainability of the activity even before the end of the project.

3.2.10.6. EO6: Cross-cutting themes

Most of the participants enrolled are women. However, as indicated above, there was some degree of availability conflicts between women's participation in FFA activities vs. literacy classes.

3.3. Purpose 3 – Health, Nutrition, Hygiene

P3 focuses on improved nutrition, health, and Hygiene. Under P3, there are three SPs:

- **SP 3.1:** Improved reproductive health of adolescent girls and young women
- **SP 3.2:** Increased adoption of optimal nutrition and health practices
- **SP 3.3:** Improved water, sanitation and hygiene practices and services

Under P3, activities focusing on health and nutrition include social and behavior change (SBC) activities conducted by actors including Mamans Lumières (mother leaders- MLs), Infant and young child feeding groups (ANJE), Husband Schools (Ecole de Maris- EDM), community influencers, and community health and nutrition liaisons ('relais').

The WASH related activities cover water service governance, use of improved water services through rehabilitation and awareness, and adoption of good hygiene and sanitation practices. The overall objectives related to WASH include improving access and governance of water services through the construction or transformation of structures and the establishment/strengthening of community-level management structures; and improving access to hygiene and sanitation services through training/awareness of good practices and strengthening actors and the supply chain of inputs for hygiene and sanitation works.

It should be noted that some WASH related activities originally fell under P1 (including the water point governance related activities) but are now included here under P3.

3.3.1. Activity: Mamans Lumières (ML), Young Child Feeding Groups (ANJE)

The ML and ANJE and groups of the villages visited are each made up of ten members (exclusively women) that support activities including awareness raising (sensibilization) related to various health topics, interactive discussions, hands-on activities such as cooking demonstrations with nutritious local food recipes and Title II rations (CSB+ and Vegetable Oil) in the villages and at the distribution sites, screening of children under 5 for malnutrition (and referrals to relais/CSI of suspected cases), and support to pregnant and lactating women. As of the end of FY22, 238 ML groups and 238 ANJE groups had been established by Wadata, and with support and oversight by the relais.

3.3.1.1. EO1: Quality, EO2: Evidence of Change

Most villages visited reported that every two weeks, sessions are held by the ML and ANJE groups. During these sessions, the main themes discussed are: personal and environmental hygiene, the importance of antenatal consultations, infant feeding, attendance at health centers, etc. with these sensitizations there are also cooking demonstration sessions (porridges with CSB flour, porridges, soups, etc., based on local products). Most (though not all) of the groups interviewed have a good knowledge of certain practices in hygiene, exclusive breastfeeding, and child nutrition.

In the villages visited, there was a strong tendency to merge the ML and ANJE groups (not intended by Wadata). However, the logic of this combination was evident, and indeed may be a more efficient way to design implement these activities as many of the messages and overall goals are shared.

Furthermore, in many of the villages visited, the MMD meetings are also used to conduct awareness sessions for ML and ANJE. Indeed, the women in the ML and ANJE very commonly all belong to the same MMD. This may have some advantages such as time-savings through combined MMD and ML/ANJE meetings and ensuring that the resources of the MMDs are available to the group members. In practice, however, it was observed that the groups are somewhat insular. Respondents said that other women (outside of the MMD/ML/ANJE) in the village hardly participate in their sessions, so sometimes the ML and ANJE messages do not reach other women who consider themselves not to be part of the groups. According to one respondent:

Apart from us who are part of the MMD and make the contributions, the other women come only very rarely participate in our [ML/ANJE] sessions, they consider that the gathering is just for the MMD.

In several villages visited, the cooking demonstration materials provided by Wadata have been stored and not used for almost a year- which indicates that no demonstrations have been conducted. When asked why, one member interviewed replied:

I have never done a cooking demonstration. It's true Wadata brought us kitchen materials for these demonstrations almost a year ago, but until then we have never used them, it is still in storage. The agents promised to come back and teach us how to make certain soups, porridge, etc., but until then we wait.

3.3.1.2. EO3: Efficiency

For ANJE members, at the time of recruitment, for some villages it is two matrons, four pregnant women and four lactating women, as for the other villages it is simply a group of pregnant and lactating women. For the MLs, there is no specificity for the selection, it is just ten dynamic women who have been identified with the community relays.

In addition, these two groups had received training at the beginning (2020) in which one member of each group had been trained and was supposed to share this training with the other women once in the village, but this strategy did not work because the other women once at home did not return the training to the other women. In view of this failure, another training had been organized which now concerns all members of the groups. But despite this prospect, some groups even tend to forget what they learned in these training courses and may need additional capacity-building.

In some villages, despite the awareness raised, there are women who do not attend health centers because of the remoteness and lack of means of transport. One respondent said:

Sometimes, it is the realities of our community that prevent us from doing certain practices. For example, for a woman who has reached the last months of pregnancy, who cannot walk to the village where we usually do the consultations, if her husband does not bring her, or she pays 500CFA to make the round trip on a cart or motorcycle, or she gives up. And the latter option is more common because it's not easy to have that amount of money.

3.3.1.3. E04: Coordination/Collaboration

Significant effort has been made to connect the activities of the ML and ANJE with the community health workers. The promotion of use of health services is reliant, however, on the quality of these services (see section below).

3.3.1.4. E05: Sustainability

For the continuation (sustainability) of these cooking demonstrations, in some villages, community granaries have been initiated. Sometimes each household is asked to contribute, other times it is only the members of the ML and ANJE groups who make these contributions of food or money.

3.3.1.5. E06: Cross-cutting themes

At the level of all the villages visited, the ML and ANJE groups are not aware of the existence of village action plans developed by the CVDs, or if they are, they do not use them.

3.3.2. Activity: Husband Schools (EDM)

The husband schools (EDM) provide male support for gender equitable behaviors, practices, and norms. At least 238 EDMs have been organized and trained, covering most of the 270 targeted villages.

3.3.2.1. E01: Quality, E02: Evidence of Change

Despite the good coverage, the stability and quality of the EDM are not consistent. In many villages, the EDMs were only just formed in Y5 of the project, and overall, only approximately 50% of the EDM are fully functional.

There is not much evidence of meaningful changes in behaviors effected by EDM. Although the ET observed evidence of improvements in men's knowledge/awareness of gender equality, the consequences of early marriage, the use of modern contraceptive methods, etc. The ET did not observe meaningful evidence of this translating into changes in attitude or practice among these same men.

One notable area of success observed in behavior change, however, is that there appears to be improved willingness of men to let their wives attend pre-natal checkups at the health clinics.

Additional messaging related to household chore awareness has been piloted in 40 EDM. There are anecdotal stories of changes, such as boys or men transporting water, or men participating to a greater extent in childcare, but there is no evidence of any significant, widespread change in behaviors. At best, the activity could be credited with at least breaking some taboos- a necessary first step.

3.3.2.2. EO3: Efficiency, EO4: Coordination/Collaboration, EO5: Sustainability

Changes to behaviors that are strongly linked to culture, society, and religion are extremely difficult and slow to change. Impacts of EDM on these behaviors are unlikely to change significantly over the short duration of the project. Continuing the EDM support during the extension period may not prove an effective strategy given the need for long-term efforts to make real changes. However, Wadata has engaged in an opportunity to work with Agency for All on the Husband School approach. Agency for All will be conducting a research study that will develop, pilot, and evaluate a gender-transformative adaptation of the EDM approach through 2025. This may mean that instead of shifting focus away from EDM during the extension, Wadata may choose to increase focus to ensure well-functioning EDM that can be supported by Agency for All's collaboration.

3.3.1. Youth Life-Skills Schools (ECVC)

The ECVC is an activity meant to provide youth with certain life skills/knowledge. However, these groups are no longer functional. During the implementation of the first few ECVC groups, it was found that the youth were generally not comfortable with the large number of adults participating in the training. Links with the Relais and the EDM were made to help the ECVC organize their activities and support their planning, but this approach was not entirely effective. During the initial trainings, there were uncomfortable situations where certain topics, such as menstruation, were being presented to boys- and girls- by groups of adult men, which was not a successful approach. While the design was largely flawed, it is commendable that Wadata recognized the flaws early on, and rather than try to rescue a failing activity, they are working to ensure that the ECVC youth members were absorbed into other youth-focused activities, such as MMF, as well as (where appropriate), ML and ANJE. There may be a learning opportunity in documenting the reasons this particular implementation of ECVC was not successful, so that future projects can use this otherwise promising approach to greater success.

3.3.2. Activity Component: Community Health and Nutrition Liaisons (Relais), Links with the Healthcare System

Relais serve as the link between the community and the health centers. They support several activities including the regular awareness-raising activities and screening of children for malnutrition. At the end of FY22, Wadata was already working through 476 relais.

The relais are one of many ways that Wadata encourages the use of the local health services. SBC activities encourage women to attend pre-natal visits, give birth, and access family planning services/contraception at the local health clinics. Participation in food distribution by pregnant women (presented in more detail below) is contingent on visiting the health centers for pre-natal checks. Malnourished children found during screenings are also referred to clinics for care.

3.3.2.1. EO1: Quality, EO2: Evidence of Change, EO4: Coordination/Collaboration

Relais were found in all the villages visited, and reported making bimonthly awareness trainings on themes including personal and environmental hygiene, the use of modern family planning methods, health and nutrition of pregnant and lactating women and children, etc. In addition to these bimonthly sensitizations, in some villages they also systematically screen children for malnutrition, and some reported household visits followed as well. The relais are also training mothers to measure their own children's MUAC, which are then confirmed with the relais before referral to the health centers. The

referral system is well established in the villages visited, though in the smaller hamlets, the MUAC screening was found to be less consistent (or even non-existent).

It should be noted that the policy for compensating relais is not clear. The current government policy seemed to be in flux. Some IPs provide a small payment to the relais, others (such as Wadata) do not. The remuneration can be an incentive for the relais to do their job. More importantly, there should be a standard shared across all actors to avoid competition for the use of relais. It should be noted that this is a systemic problem in Niger that is beyond the scope of Wadata to resolve.

Wadata does not intervene directly in the services provided at the health centers, but their activities are extremely dependent on the quality and availability of services at the health centers. The quality and availability of CSI services are essential to meet the increased demand created by Wadata. As described by Wadata staff, their activities create the demand for services that the health clinics provide. As such, if the demand increases but the quality of care is poor, there is a risk of negative impacts on the willingness of women to continue to seek care at the CSIs.

Although the ET was not able to adequately assess health centers, some challenges with this collaboration did emerge during data collection. The partnership with Kulawa (USAID-funded activity that supports health centers) had been a challenge during the initial years of Wadata, due to many factors. However, respondents from Wadata and Kulawa both indicated that more recently the collaboration between the two projects had improved. Stocks at the health centers did present some challenges to quality of care. Evaluation respondents indicated that in the vast majority of cases there is the availability of contraception is available at health centers at no cost, though there are occasional stock outages. However, the Wadata Annual Report 2022 reported that the treatment of severe acute malnutrition suffered from frequent stockouts of packets of Ready to Eat Therapeutic Food (RUTF) (provided by UNICEF) at health center level due to a supply problem, which had an impact on the number of children registered for care after Wadata supported screening sessions. This was also observed by the ET. It was observed that RUTF packets are widely available for sale in shops in Zinder (for CFA 200- about \$0.30 USD), indicating a leak in the supply chain (or possibly widespread sale by recipients). The Nigerien ET members also reported that other commodities such as CSB were commonly found in the markets for sale (though the provenance was not known).

Figure 8: Photo of RUTF for sale on a store shelf in Zinder



Photo credit: Maman Sanoussi Lawali Maman

To address the stock shortages, Wadata has begun to implement an information system with USAID/Kulawa to facilitate the timely provision of inputs to health centers for the management of malnourished children who will be screened in the villages.

3.3.2.1. E03: Efficiency, E05: Sustainability

Despite the impacts made in many areas on women's attendance of pre-natal care visits and birthing in clinics, the ET also observed in some villages that women do not respect the pre-natal care cycle, and practice home births, because of the remoteness of health centers, and the lack of means of transport. As mentioned previously, some respondents underlined the challenges of attending prenatal care checks at the later stages of pregnancy, when walking to the health center was too difficult, and they did not have the money to pay for transportation.

Lack of standardization of ML and ANJE activities across communities may interfere with continuity. While trends show increases in utilization of health services, health facility quality and material availability must be assured to ensure the sustainability of interventions involving health facilities.

The MTE also found that the usefulness of the partnership with the RISE II partner Kulawa could be improved through a better understanding of respective activities and goals and sharing of gaps in accomplishing project outcomes.

3.3.3. Activity: Food Distribution

Wadata provides Title II in-kind food commodities (CSB and vegetable oil) across the entire implementation area, with blanket targeting of pregnant and lactating women (PLW), children under

two years of age, and adolescent girls. The distributions are typically paired with cooking demonstrations by ML, screening of malnutrition (supported by relais), and other messaging. Enrollment in the program by pregnant women is contingent on having a health center card confirming pregnancy and pre-natal check.

3.3.3.1. EO1: Quality, EO2: Evidence of Change, EO4: Coordination/Collaboration

The food assistance was consistently highly praised by all participants interviewed. These participants state they believe there has been a very clear decline in malnutrition, with severe malnutrition in particular becoming much less common. During each distribution, malnutrition screening sessions have been carried out for children under 5, which has made it possible to extend the reach of the screenings.

Despite these anecdotal reports from interviewed participants and other community members that malnutrition has decreased, Wadata's data from MUAC screening done during food distributions showed modest reductions in global acute malnutrition (GAM) between January and September 2022, which decreased from 20.3% to 16.5% (according to the AR22). While Wadata's monitoring reports indicate that this is a direct positive effect of their activities, this cannot be stated with certainty. Additionally, there was no change in the prevalence of severe acute malnutrition (SAM), which was 4.1% in January 2022, increased slightly before dropping to 4.5% in September 2022.

Additionally, despite the modest reductions in GAM observed, the level remains very concerning. Although screenings are not designed to be fully representative of the entire population of under-5 children in the intervention areas, a GAM of 16.5% (as measured by MUAC or weight-for-height) at the population level is classified as IPC (integrated phase classification) acute malnutrition Phase 4 (critical), and a level that is descriptive of IPC acute food insecurity Phase 4 (emergency). It should be noted that no large changes in GAM prevalences does not mean that Wadata's activities have had no positive impact. Considering the chronically precarious food and nutrition security in Niger coupled with a changing context from climate change and other shocks, a prevention of an increase in malnutrition rates could potentially be considered a positive impact.

Though an in-depth query was not conducted, the logistics and storage of food items distributed under this activity as well as the FFA was high quality and well organized. The logistics staff were at times somewhat overloaded, perhaps due in part to the fact that there was not an increase in logistics staff when the frequency of distributions increased. Despite the heavy workloads, the quality appears to have remained high, and despite some shipment delays in the United States in 2022, there were only very minor delays in one round of distributions.

In some villages visited, several women indicated they had been overlooked in the food distributions, even though they are pregnant and have their antenatal consultant books (part of the eligibility requirements). Though these cases were quick to self-identify in the visited villages, they represented only a small fraction of all eligible women, and generally stemmed from the time it took to register women on the distribution lists, rather than an overt exclusion.

Women also cited the insufficiency of the amount of food received, indicating that it did not last between distributions, which was triangulated by Wadata's current monitoring data. To address the more-serious shortfalls observed between the initial food distributions, Wadata decreased the time between distributions from every three to every two months, and increased the quantities given- which in the context appeared to be a very appropriate modification.

Those interviewed by the ET (participants and Wadata staff) cited that the main reason for the shortfall is that rather than limiting the consumption of the food to those individuals specifically targeted (which is unrealistic to expect), there was consistent sharing with other household and community members. In nearly all observations, the food items were consumed by the entire family. Sometimes the quantities given for two months are barely a month. According to one respondent:

When this [CSB] flour is available in the house, it is often used to make breakfast, lunch, or dinner for the whole family, so naturally it ends quickly, especially when the family is large.

3.3.3.1. E03: Efficiency

The blanket coverage of PLW, children under two, and adolescent girls with food assistance is the appropriate targeting choice in this context. Due to the widespread levels of extreme poverty and high levels of malnutrition, the error of inclusion is rare. Additionally, the exclusion errors are nearly non-existent, as comprehensive coverage ensures that all vulnerable and marginalized members of the target population benefit. Indeed, this is one of the very few activities of Wadata that *ensures* these most vulnerable are included.

The ET received no indication that the food distributions (including those also under the FFA activity) had any negative impacts on agricultural production or food markets. The food was nearly always eaten (even if shared)- no evidence emerged of the sale of the food items received. Additionally, although participants did have some degree of 'dependency' on the food distributions (simply because of the chronic food insecurity of the area), the food distributions did not *create* dependency. So, while the end of the distributions will be challenging for the participants, it does not appear that the food distributions have had any aggravating/negative influence on food security of the households/communities.

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Women also cited the insufficiency of the amount of food received, indicating that it did not last between distributions. This was triangulated by Wadata's monitoring data. During the early food distributions, Wadata chose to decrease the time between distributions and increase the amounts given in an attempt to address the shortfalls (from every three months to every two months). The primary reason the quantities are felt to be insufficient is from the ubiquitous sharing with other household and community members, rather than limiting the consumption to those individuals targeted (which is unrealistic to expect). In nearly all observations, the food items were consumed by the entire family. Sometimes the quantities given for two months are barely a month. According to one respondent:

When this [CSB] flour is available in the house, it is often used to make breakfast, lunch, or dinner for the whole family, so naturally it ends quickly, especially when the family is large.

3.3.3.2. E05: Sustainability

This food assistance is not intended to be sustainable. The activity has nonetheless enabled participating households to subsist by improving food security over a period of time. Impacts of other associated activities, such as diet quality improvements from cooking demonstrations, identification,

and prompt treatment of malnutrition from screening children for low MUAC, and likelihood of attending pre-natal checkups will be sustained to some extent after the end of the food assistance.

3.3.4. Activity: Water Services (Rehabilitation, Transformation, and Management)

Activities focusing on water access include both the rehabilitation/transformation of water points, and associated Water Point Management Committees (CGPE) and Associations of Public Water Services Users (AUSPE), as well as resources mobilization works and training of communal and community actors for better management, generally according to national guidelines.

Figure 9: Adolescent girls pumping water from a Wadata rehabilitated water source.



Photo credit: Peter Horjus

At the time of the MTE fieldwork, progress towards the overall goals of the rehabilitation/transformation of water points, including:

- The rehabilitation of 45 human-powered public pumps (FPMH)
- The transformation of 10 FPMH into autonomous water points (AEP)
- The transformation of 3 FPMH into simple mini autonomous water points (MINI AEP)
- The transformation of 3 FPMH into multi-village autonomous water points (Mini-AEP multi-village)

It should be noted that Wadata did not invest in the construction of any new water points, but rather on rehabilitation and management of existing water points. In some cases, the transformation of FPMH into multi-village increased coverage by expanding the spread of the water source to cover multiple villages.

3.3.4.1. E01: Quality

In the sites visited, the pairing of the water point management committees (CGPEs) for boreholes/Associations of Public Water Service Users (AUSPE) with rehabilitation/transformation showed clear successes in establishing sustainable safe drinking water access to the communities targeted.

Field data collection showed good alignment with municipality plans, and good collaboration with the communal technical services. Project interventions are part of national planning and policy/strategy frameworks, as well as the local water and sanitation plans. Additionally, Wadata has signed an agreement with the Regional Direction of Hydraulics and Sanitation DRH/A of Zinder to carry out quarterly analyses on all the water points of intervention according to the USAID Water Quality Assurance System and it is expected that the management structures that will inherit these systems will do at least two analyses per year.

While the quality of work done on water point rehabilitation appears high, the project remains well behind schedule in the completion of water infrastructure as planned. The FY22 IPTT reports that during the life of the project, 37 infrastructures were built or rehabilitated for basic drinking water services by Wadata towards a target of 140. The IPTT also indicates that 7,307 people have gained access to basic drinking water services as a result of Wadata's work, towards a target of 30,600 people. The delays in these activities are of concern considering that safe water is an important prerequisite for many other of Wadata's activities and is a primary driver of health and food security in the areas of intervention.

One challenge to the water point rehabilitation process is the slowness of the procurement processes, which has impacted the implementation times. Additionally, certain difficulties in complying with national directives with regard to governance were also observed, including the choice of the project not to intervene in the chief town of certain communes, and the difficulty related to the origin of the financing of certain works offered by individuals (rather than governance bodies).

3.3.4.2. E02: Evidence of Change

Wadata's interventions have undoubtedly had a positive impact on the rates of access to safely managed water services, which was observed in the villages visited.

In areas with deep water tables, the need for water points of any kind is extreme. In these areas, the CPGEs have been very well accepted by the communities, generally, as the community members recognize the need to pay into the system to ensure regular maintenance of the infrastructure.

However, in part of Wadata's implementation area the water table is much shallower (found in areas of the communes of Guidimouni and Guidiguir). In these areas, shallow open traditional wells are commonly found. As such, it has been more of a challenge to gain acceptance of many of the community members to pay for their drinking water, because the water from the traditional wells is free. Wadata has made additional efforts in these areas to help bring about improved awareness that drinking water from these open shallow wells is not necessarily safe (due to risk of biological contamination), but adoption remains a challenge.

Wadata staff also discussed home water treatment, including disinfection with Aquatabs tablets, but the evaluation team did not observe this in the field.

3.3.4.3. E03: Efficiency

The targeting of intervention sites is done in consultation with the technical services and the municipalities. However, it should be noted that Wadata has not constructed new water sources, but only rehabilitated/transformed existing water points. This is largely because in many areas, it is simply not possible to construct wells due to the geology of the locations. This physical limitation is beyond Wadata's control, but it has caused some friction with some villages, who complain because neighboring villages have benefited from improved water access, but they have not. However, Wadata has been vigilant to take equity into account, when possible, in concertation with the municipalities.

Despite the improvements in physical access to safe drinking water effected by Wadata's interventions, financial access remains unaddressed. The cost of drinking water at the managed water points is set by the communities and committees and is uniform for all households regardless of socio-economic status. When asked how the poorest/most vulnerable households cope with this financial burden, Wadata staff provided a large range of answers, including: the committees sometimes let them get water without paying, those households can purchase water on credit if needed, community solidarity/sharing will allow those households to get water, etc. However, in all scenarios described by the Wadata staff, there was no formalized way to mitigate the financial burden of drinking water access to the poorest households.

3.3.4.4. E04: Coordination/Collaboration

In addition to the areas of coordination and collaboration described above, Wadata also worked closely with Terre Eau Vie (TEV) at the start of the project to assess the water needs in the targeted areas. The report produced by TEV, however, was insufficient to target water rehabilitation efforts, and Wadata was forced to conduct their own assessments for their water rehabilitation and governance activities, causing some delay.

Coordination/collaboration is considered good by the technical services and the municipalities interviewed. The technical staff seems sufficient and up to the task. Indeed, the ET WASH expert described it as a 'pleasure' to meet the THA (Hygiene and Sanitation Technician) specially trained for this profession at the Commune level.

Wadata has made significant progress in establishing the CGPE. Until recently, there were some concerns that some of the CGPE did not fully understand their relationship with the communal authorities. Indeed, some CGPE members were reported to have believed that they answered back to Wadata, and not back to the commune. It was noted that the visibility panel immediately next to a rehabilitated manual water pump displayed Wadata's name very prominently, while making no mention of the communal authorities or their role. However, to the credit of Wadata, one dynamic water supervisor interviewed described how he took prompt initiative to rectify this once he became aware that some of the CGPE did not fully grasp the relationship with the commune.

Figure 10: Wadata visibility billboard next to rehabilitated water pump



Photo Credit: Peter Horjus

3.3.4.5. E05: Sustainability

All four intervention communes have SMEA agents thanks to the support of the project. Strengthening the capacity of municipalities through the recruitment of SMEA agents and inter-municipal delegates and training contributes to the sustainability of interventions through their appropriation by beneficiaries and local stakeholders. Solid establishment of the CPGE, and clear ownership by the communal government will be important factors in ensuring the water points remain functional. Access to the materials and expertise to maintain/repair water points is also essential to assure sustainability.

Improved water infrastructure and linking it with solid management is one of the most concrete and potentially sustainable areas of impact the project can have. The late stage in which some of the water point rehabilitation work is taking place threatens their sustainability. A strong focus on these activities during the remainder of Y5 and the extension are extremely important to maximize the potential for sustainable impacts.

3.3.5. Activity: Healthy Village Committees (CVS)

In all the villages visited, Wadata had set up CVS. The CVS organizes sanitation sessions every week on the agreed data agreed upon in the village general assembly, under supervision of the CVD. A town crier informs the population the day before. Households gather as a team in their neighborhood to conduct village cleaning activities, and the sessions generally cover all areas of the village. The CVS then reports the sanitation sessions performed to the CVDs.

3.3.5.1. E01: Quality, E02: Evidence of Change

The organization was found to be generally satisfactory in the villages visited. The observed CVSs were set up during the village general assembly, under the supervision of Wadata and the CVD. They all had

women and youth members. It should be noted, however, that these CVSs are not equipped with cleaning equipment, which added an additional challenge in activity implementation. Furthermore, the disposal of refuse is not consistently accounted for. Often times, they are transported to fields or burnt, but often refuse that is swept up is simply left on street corners.

Observations made on the general environment and in concessions show a general state of fair sanitation, and those interviewed indicated that the activity had improved the cleanliness of their villages.

3.3.5.2. E03: Efficiency, E04: Coordination/Collaboration, E05: Sustainability

All intervention village households are involved in the information, promotion, and/or implementation of these activities. The CVSs work closely with the water point management committees around water points and the latrine committees for the maintenance and proper use of latrines.

The CVS do not receive any remuneration for these activities, which may be a risk to sustainability once the project has ended. However, a few respondents indicated that from their point of view, there is nothing to prevent the continuation of these activities after the project, since they step purely from a personal commitment for the general interest. Long-term, however, the formal CVS structures are unlikely to last after the end of the project.

3.3.5.3. E06: Cross-cutting Themes

Women, young people, and people with disabilities are included in the CVSs throughout the process. In the rainy season flood zones are taken into account during the CVS days.

3.3.6. Activity: Hand Washing

The activity consists mainly of awareness and often demonstration sessions conducted by Community Influencers, Wadata's field agents, and health workers. Demonstrations include effective handwashing techniques and the use of 'Tippy Taps'. Emphasis is placed on key handwashing moments such as when leaving latrines, before preparing and eating meals or breastfeeding children.

3.3.6.1. E01: Quality

Raising awareness about handwashing is a regular activity of the project. The people's adherence to this activity results from the fact that Islam encourages ownership and the practice of the five daily prayers is an opportunity to remember it all the time.

The introduction of the 'Tippy Tap' technique was seen by the ET as a poor approach to encourage handwashing. First, none of the community members interviewed knew where to source the equipment needed to construct a tippy tap. Second, the project failed to take into account the very strong existing habit of using plastic 'kettles' for handwashing. These kettles are common in all areas of handwashing, including nearly all latrines observed. It is possible that RFSAs are discouraged from promoting the use of kettles, however, as they are not considered appropriate for handwashing under the definition of certain international development and health indicators.

3.3.6.2. E02: Evidence of Change, E03: Efficiency

The limited time spent in the villages made it impossible to observe whether handwashing takes place at certain key moments. The use of tippy-taps was not seen as achieving any level of adoption. The presence of kettles with water, and often with soap, was observed in almost all households visited. The use of kettles was already well integrated into people's habits before the project, though the observation of the presence of soap with the kettles is likely a result of Wadata's activities.

3.3.6.3. E04: Coordination/Collaboration

Raising awareness about handwashing is a common activity with the other community structures of the project: ML, water committees, latrines committee, CVSs, etc. However, no external coordination/collaboration was noted during data collection.

3.3.6.4. E05: Sustainability

It is a culturally compatible and integrated activity, so sustainability of the practice (though with kettles, not tippy taps) is likely.

3.3.7. Activities: Sanitation/Latrines

The project opted with other partners for sanitation marketing. Latrine prototypes were proposed by the project. Private service providers (SPOs) have been identified, trained and some have been given start-up equipment to meet the demand for sanitation works driven by marketers and APS themselves. Routine monitoring in 270 Wadata intervention villages shows that 1,807 new household latrines in 1,807 households were constructed in FY22 using permanent materials.

3.3.7.1. E01: Quality

The market-oriented sanitation approach was well conducted following all recommended steps including human-centered design (HCD), training and equipping PSAs, and deploying marketers. The approach used here by Wadata seems to be superior to Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), which focuses on behavior change before infrastructure. Wadata may introduce some aspects of CLTS training and awareness raising, however, which may be helpful in the context.

One challenge has been with the supply of construction materials for the masons, which has not always kept pace with demand. As a result, many households are waiting for availability of latrine construction materials. Indeed, there were even reports that some masons were building unimproved latrines because of the lack of materials. The supply chain therefore needs to be strengthened.

3.3.7.2. E02: Evidence of Change

Local masons showed the ET waiting lists for unmet requests, and they indicated that coverage rates of sustainable latrines are improved in many localities.

According to periodic project reports, the rate of improved latrine coverage is increasing in the project area. However, the impact is small. Data from Wadata's monitoring data indicate that the percent of households using an improved latrine increased from 4% to 10% as of FY22.

While construction of latrines seems to be in demand in some areas, this may not translate into widespread adoption of the use of latrines. The opposition to the use of latrines is deeply entrenched and difficult to overcome. An example of the cultural challenges emerged when a resident of a Fulani village said that the reason that they did not want to use latrines is because it was taboo for “two holes to look at each other”. Though odd sounding to the outsider, the Wadata staff familiar with Fulani culture immediately recognized this as a common belief.

3.3.7.3. E03: Efficiency

The implementation mechanism is in place and well understood by the population. As this is a market approach, there is no specific target population. Households must pay on their own for the construction of a latrine. While the cost is reasonable, it is still out of reach for the poorest households, and there is no accommodation in place to assist households that do not have the financial means to do so. Although there could be opportunities to encourage households to save through MMDs, for example (rec), the costs will remain prohibitive for the poorest households.

3.3.7.4. E04: Coordination/Collaboration

In the opinion of the actors met, the collaboration is rather good between internal and external actors. All the local masons met were put in contact with suppliers of materials for the construction of the latrines.

3.3.7.5. E05: Sustainability

Sustainability, here, will depend on the reliability of the supply circuits of inputs for the construction of latrines and the possibility of accompanying households with financial support, either externally or through savings via MMDs, etc.

3.4. Other Overarching Areas

3.4.1. Staffing, Management

The Wadata staff was generally found to be experienced, committed, and technically very capable. The organigram is generally well defined and functional, and management has attempted to adapt it when needed. Wadata management has taken advantage of this expertise by giving the technical managers a lot of latitude to use their knowledge/expertise for activity implementation and adaptation, leading to better design and more engaged staff. The significant presence of the senior management in Zinder (rather than Niamey) has benefited the project, as the senior management were found to be very engaged at all levels, and very informed of the realities of Wadata’s work in the communities.

There are some general challenges with staffing, though these are typical of any project of this type, and not specific to Wadata. First, the turnover of staff has been high during the project and is likely to increase towards the end of the extension period- a concern given the number of activities that should be brought to completion during this “overtime” period. Second, there is a strong gender disbalance in the staff, 80% or more of whom are male overall, and nearly all senior positions are occupied by men.

The choice to use polyvalent field agents, rather than sector-specific field agents, has several advantages for the activities. However, it also presents some challenges. At the community level, the polyvalent field agents have certain challenges to overcome as well. These staff members are the ones that are the

face of the project implementation to the communities, but this is not well reflected in their remuneration, resulting in heavy staff turnover. Additionally, the field agents often have very heavy workloads. Their polyvalent nature often complicates the monitoring of field activities, especially in areas where farming plots are far from villages or communication networks are not stable. This could lead the field agent to focus on areas and/or areas that seem much more manageable. "You can't be everywhere" says a field agent. The field agents have many supervisors at the communal level- each representing a different sector or theme. There is some degree of a lack of integration of the thematic field supervisors, making it particularly challenging for field agents to respond to requests coming from their many thematic supervisors. Another challenge with the field agents is that there is some tendency for them to focus on their area of training/expertise and give less attention to other themes/sectors.

3.4.2. Monitoring & Evaluation

Wadata's M&E system is robust, with very knowledgeable and skilled staff. The data, centralized online, is very detailed- down to the individual level. The annual reports and the annual participant survey reports are of excellent quality. The annual reports reviewed are of particularly excellent quality. Wadata should be commended for honestly presenting their challenges and shortcomings in the annual reports.

One significant challenge for the M&E team is related to the choice of software for the collection and reporting of their monitoring data ('Impact'). The choice to use this particular software was made during the early stages of the project before the M&E staff was onboarded. The programming of the data collection tools is not in the hands of Wadata staff, but rather is outsourced. The original data collection system that was prepared had significant flaws related to field operability when there was no network available, rendering it unusable for the project. While waiting for the outsourced software programmers to rectify these issues, the Wadata M&E staff created their own data collection tools using free online software (ODK), which was the only M&E data collection tool for a significant period of time. When the revised version of the Impact data collection software was provided, it was discovered that it was incompatible with the data collected through ODK, and so all existing data had to be re-entered into the Impact system by hand, requiring significant time and effort by the M&E staff. The M&E staff did indicate some advantages of Impact, in particular the fact that the reporting in Impact is superior. But significant flaws remain. Some data, such as the enrollment of newly pregnant women into the food distribution rosters, cannot be done in Impact and so it's done in ODK. Additionally, the M&E staff, though highly technically savvy, are prohibited from making any changes to the Impact database- so that even something as simple as correcting a misspelled village name must be sent as a service request to the company, who then makes the change- often taking a lot of time.

Other challenges with the monitoring system include frustration of the field agents in using the data entry app, particularly data transmission- which is often done at a later stage because of limited network access in the field. Field agents often use double data entry- once on paper in the field, and then later they re-enter it into the app once back in the office- which harkens back to data collection done a decade or more ago and renders the need for a mobile application somewhat questionable.

3.4.1. Collaboration, Learning, Adaptation (CLA)

Wadata benefits from a strategic learning advisor (SLA) and support staff. Interesting CLA related activities include the creating of a management system for the monitoring and tracking of recommendations, contributions to the strategy for the extension period and how best to monitor the

progress towards sustainability, and work on several important research activities to help adapt the RFSA over time.

A key challenge with CLA related activities is that they are not always prioritized by the technical managers. There is a tendency (not specific to Wadata) to use CLA to showcase best practices, success stories, etc. rather than documenting activity successes and failures so they can be disseminated internally and externally to the humanitarian and development community. In the initial years of Wadata, there was some degree of this common lack of understanding of the difference of learning and communications- the SLA was often tasked with activities more related to visibility and communications- a challenge not unique to Wadata. However, over time there have been improvements in making the distinction between CLA and communications.

An additional challenge with CLA throughout the entire humanitarian and development community is occasionally hesitance to share new, successful innovations with other actors who may be viewed (accurately or not) as ‘the competition’. Although USAID has encouraged shared learning opportunities in Niger through the USAID funded Sahel Communication and Communication (SCC) project to help shift this perspective and encourage CLA, this perception of competitiveness between implementers still has a certain validity in some cases.

3.4.2. Targeting and Coverage

Wadata has several areas that merit important consideration related to their global targeting strategy.

3.4.2.1. *Hub-and-Spoke Design*

It was challenging for the ET to understand the division of the villages and how they were targeted with the various activities through their “hub-and-spoke” model. Inconsistent nomenclature is used among the Wadata staff to describe which villages fall into which targeting category and stage of implementation. It was finally understood that all villages in the communes where Wadata is intervening fall into these four categories:

- **1st Generation: 144 villages.** At the start of the project, Wadata identified 144 villages to be the “hubs” where interventions would first be rolled out. The selection criteria was purely population based, selecting all villages with greater than 85 households, based on the 2012 census data.
- **2nd Generation (part 1): Additional 27 villages.** After Wadata conducted its own census across the entire area of intervention, they realized that some villages were larger than the 2012 census data had indicated. Using the same criteria (greater than 85 households), this added 27 villages to their primary targeting list.
- **2nd Generation (part 2): Additional 99 villages.** Based on Wadata’s census data, the project decided to include additional villages in their primary targeting list, using a lower threshold of greater than 50 households. This added an additional 99 villages.
- **Hamlets : 413 villages.** All villages with less than 50 households in the intervention areas (so, all those not included in the first or second generation) are generally referred to as ‘hameaux’ (hamlets). These villages are the secondary focus of targeting (the ‘spokes’ of the hub-and-spoke model).

This then brings the total of the first- and second-generation villages to 270, which are considered the ‘hubs’ of the targeting design. It is this figure (270) that is frequently used when discussing village-level

coverage of the project. These villages represent roughly three-quarters of the population, with the remaining one quarter of the population living in hamlets.

It is important to note that roll-out began in the 1st generation villages before the 2nd generation villages were added, so the 1st generation villages have generally benefited from longer implementation periods, and a greater number of activities than the 2nd generation villages.

In the design of the project, it was envisioned to focus on the larger ‘hub’ villages (generation 1 and 2) in Y2, and then to extend into the hamlets with some activities starting in Y3. However, the roll out into the hamlets has suffered from delays related in part to COVID19.

The vision of the project was also that there would be a certain ‘spillover’ effect of the activities conducted in the 270 ‘hub’ villages into the smaller hamlets. Some activities have reached the hamlets- such as the food distributions (covering all eligible members in all hamlets), and FFA (covering eligible households in the areas where FFA activities are begin implemented). However, examples of the unsupported replication of groups such as MMD, MMF, etc. in the hamlets are rare and exceptional.

3.4.2.2. Layering and Sequencing

The institutional set-up of the project is very complex, involving a multitude of internal and external actors and structures with numerous interventions in several sectors. This challenge of this design was compounded by the fact that several activities started late, with several activities continuing to be behind schedule. Among the reasons for the delays:

- COVID (in part)
- Complexity of activities
- Extension of the R&I period (16 months, instead of 8 to 12 months)
- US government shutdown (2018/19).
- Challenges in the geophysical study on water

The delay in implementation of several activities has had a negative impact on the way that Wadata activities have been layered and sequenced. While most of the 270 villages have CVDs in place, some have only had them in place a short time despite the fact they are supposed to be the entry point for other activities. Another example is the slow progress towards targets of water point rehabilitation still in Y5, when water access is fundamental for several other activities (handwashing, sanitation, home gardens, etc.).

Furthermore, the ET did not find a clear, concrete definition of what would be a set of synergistic interventions in a community (layering). The term ‘complete package’ is used to describe villages targeted with more activities. However, when the ET sought to find a list of villages that the project would consider having received a full set of interventions, it revealed that this ‘complete package’ term was only an informal descriptor. The project doesn’t have a formal definition of what a complete package of activities consists of, but respondents said that they would broadly define it as containing activities related to each of the three RFSA purposes.

This means that there is not a clear vision of what a synergistic set of interventions would be in a community. This is further exemplified by the fact that links to Wadata’s theory of change (TOC) are not evident in the day-to-day work, nor is it visible in the office.

3.4.2.3. Targeting of Poor and Marginalized Households

Challenges in sequencing and layering, as described above, are understandably inevitable with the complexity of the project and the unexpected challenges it has had to overcome. However, the targeting of poor and marginalized households seems to be a fundamental flaw that has been overlooked by the project. Wadata has not ensured that very poor and marginalized people are effectively and adequately covered by their activities. There is no clear targeting mechanism to ensure that the very poor and marginalized are included in key activities.

In theory, some activities assume that these extremely poor households can participate/be included, but the reality is that often they do not participate/are not included (for various reasons). For example:

- **MMD/MMF:** the theory is that each participant can pay according to their means, but the reality observed in the field is that most of the MMDs have a fixed contribution for all members, and those that cannot pay are not included.
- **Habbanayé:** This activity only targets the MMD members, so while there are targeting mechanisms in place within the MMDs, those unable to participate in MMDs are not eligible to benefit from this activity.
- **FFA:** Wadata targets the poorest households with FFA work. However, for targeted households that do not have a member capable of working- likely the most vulnerable of those targeted- there is no dispensation in place to allow them to benefit from the activity, they are simply excluded. This oversight is more glaring when considering the FFA projects managed by WFP, who uses Wadata household data to target the FFA work also, but they have a mechanism to provide targeted households the food payments even if they have no adult member capable of working.
- **Drinking Water Access:** As described in the section on water interventions above, there is no clear solution for households who cannot pay for water. Indeed, a common response even among Wadata staff was that the poorest households could pay later if needed- essentially saying that extremely poor households should go into debt as a way to access water.
- **Latrines:** the cost, while very reasonable, is prohibitive for extremely poor households.

There are several other examples where Wadata's activities require a financial contribution (cash payment and/or contribution to savings in cash or in kind) in order to participate or benefit. These include:

- Paying to construct a tippy-tap.
- Cost of transport to attend health consultations.
- Contributions of food to take part in cooking demonstrations.
- Members of ANGE/ML often are required to contribute to cooking demonstrations.
- Purchase of improved seeds.
- Cost of seeds for home gardens.
- SCAP-RU committee membership requires dues to be paid.

Wadata staff often said that the very poor were indirectly helped by activities through community solidarity, some even describing it as a sort of 'trickle-down' theory. However, there was little evidence of this found during data collection.

Another challenge with targeting the poorest households is the data/tool used. The project's baseline studies included a household economy approach (HEA) assessment to identify characteristics that can

be used to categorize households into four wealth groups (very poor, poor, middle income, better off), which was applied to Wadata's household census database to aid in targeting households for activities such as FFA participation. However, the project soon realized that the differences between these groups were very slight- without much variation. The underlying reason for this lack of difference is outside the scope of the MTE to assess. However, there was some indication that the methodology itself was flawed. Some key informants interviewed that had participated in the HEA study indicated that there were common errors in listing household assets. For example, if a poor household was responsible for the care of a camel that belonged to a wealthier household (a common practice), then the ownership was assigned to the poor household, resulting in a misclassification. It is true that in many communities, the level of poverty is extremely widespread with few exceptions. However, the flaw remains in the HEA analysis, which grouped households too bluntly. In cases where extreme poverty is the norm, there are often other criteria of vulnerability (elderly, chronically ill, single mothers with children) that can assist in identifying the "ultra' poor/vulnerable. However, Wadata seems to have gone in the other direction, considering the three wealth groups as identical when targeting most interventions, and then not targeting at all, assuming that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.

3.4.3. Sustainability: Y5 and Extension Period

Generally, RFSAs are granted extension periods to focus on refining existing activities and focus on sustainability and exit. However, in the case of Wadata, considering the implementation of several activities has been delayed, several activities that would merit continued implementation and support during the extension period to achieve a lasting impact. There are also certain activities that could be dropped during the extension- even if targets are not reached- so that efforts can be focused on priority activities. The selection of where to focus efforts is also important- determining if focus should be given to dynamic, well-performing villages that have several activities already in progress, where the most impact can be made, or to villages that are less performing and have few functional activities so that they might feel some degree of improvement before the end of the project.

Very much to Wadata's credit, careful and strategic thinking around these questions had already started prior to the MTE, including studies of priority activities in participant communities, and taking into account where there are delays. Additionally, preliminary findings from the MTE have already been used to inform a planning workshop that took place in March of 2023.

The recommendations section of this report contains several references to activities felt to be priority for continued roll-out and/or support during the extension period. Very broadly, the ET felt that the following are the most important activities to focus on during the extension period:

- Rehabilitation of water points, and support for the water management through committees, delegated private management, and the municipality.
- Support to the Habbanayé to resolve the issues around animal mortality, including links to suppliers of veterinary products and services.
- Support to the latrine masons, primarily in resolving supply chain issues.
- Management of recovered degraded land to ensure that agreements/conventions are well established and communicated.
- Support to market gardens to help them become more profitable.

Other activities may also be important to support, though Wadata should be cautious with its reasoning, and avoid working with the goal of simply checking a box of completed-towards-target.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

PURPOSE 1

Activity specific

CVDs

7. The experience with the establishment of CVDs to date now allows Wadata staff to draw from lessons learned to better establish new CVDs and to address underperforming CVDs. Lessons learned are primarily around the selection process/criteria of CVD committee members, including:
 - a. Ensuring consistent literacy capacity, or else establishing alternative record-keeping procedures that do not require a secretary to be present.
 - b. Do not place those who regularly out-migrate for work in key leadership positions.
 - c. Inclusion of the village chief as member or other specific role that can help avoid any sense of loss or conflict of power.
 - d. Continued efforts to include women and youth, such as inclusion of female representation on the CVDs from the ML and ANJE groups.
 - e. Time availability of members (since membership relies on volunteerism).

SCAP-RU

8. To ensure the sustainability of the SCAP-RU, the vulnerability monitoring observatories must be functional so that the chain of information transmission does not break.
9. Attempt to identify a focal point at the level of the town halls to take charge of the information reported by the SCAP-RU.

FFA/Land Reclamation

10. The success and observed potential impact of the land reclamation activities (combined with land agreements/local conventions) suggest that implementing this activity at a greater scale would expand its positive, potentially long-term impact. However, the ET recognizes this may not be feasible at this stage of the RFSA. Potential collaboration/advocacy with other actors (such as WFP) may provide a way to expand these activities in the future.
11. All FFA activities should have a mechanism in place to allow targeted vulnerable households without any adult members capable of working (elderly, handicapped, women with young children, etc.) to still benefit from the food distributions.
12. For the existing FFA/land reclamation activities, during Y5 and the extension, the local agreements with land commissions should be prioritized to ensure they are well established, and anchored in the logic of State policy, and that the communities are actively involved in promoting the conventions and ensuring the management rules are adopted, respected, and fairly applied.

Global

13. Capacity building of town halls to continue to support the community structures put in place will increase ownership of the activities by the Commune, whose continued support after the end of the RFSA will be required if the activities are to be sustained.
 - a. This could include supportive supervision and/or financing from the commune level for activities specifically included in the CVD action plans, thereby supporting the cycle of community-led development and handover of support from Wadata to Government stakeholders.
 - b. Better consideration of infrastructure needs (physical, IT, etc.) of the city hall/mayor's office is needed. In most cases, the Wadata commune offices are a short distance from the mayor's offices, but of superior quality (electricity, computers, latrines, available space, etc.). During the phase out of Wadata, these needs of the city hall/mayor offices should be addressed to help ensure the continued accompaniment of the communities and activities after Wadata's exit.

14. Work with other actors to align policies related to the payment of per diems to government staff.

PURPOSE 2

Activity Specific

MMD/MMF

15. Consider religious beliefs that discourage taking out loans with interest (forbidden in Islam), including sharia compliant VSLAs, interest free loans for certain activities, etc.

16. Consider ways to allow the poorest households access to benefits associated with MMD and MMF participation, including Wadata activities such as Habbanayé (MMD) or starting new IGAs (MMF), even if they are unable to contribute financially on a regular basis or socially isolated/excluded. For example:
 - a. Specifically targeting the poorest households with income generating activities (that do have financial barriers to participation), paired with MMD membership.
 - b. Consider having existing MMDs 'sponsor' extremely poor non-members to support them in developing IGAs that could lead to improved financial capacity to participate.
 - c. Alleviate the financial barrier of MMD participation through MPCA for the poorest households (this is beyond the scope of the current project, however)

Service Provider Agents (CBSP/APS)

17. Organize CBSPs into a network.

18. Diversifying the APS (e.g. health which does not exist at the moment)

19. Ensure that the CBSP/APS approach is sufficiently expanded in the project areas for the sustainability of the promised technologies.

Agriculture de conservation / FMNR

20. Structure the FMNR to include components related to savings, credit, and storage.

Market gardening

21. Considering the short period some of the market garden activities have been going on, it will be important to continue the monitoring and support of market gardening activities already in place during Y5 and the extension period to ensure they are fully established technically and organizationally.
22. Strengthen the capacity of vegetable producers on negotiation and decision-making techniques for the marketing of their productions.
23. Explore options for potential acquisition of the market garden sites by the groups so that sustainability is ensured beyond the current life of the land leases, and so that the investments in infrastructure and land preparation are maintained by the community rather than appropriated by the landholder after the lease expires.

Home gardens

24. Work must be done to improve the appropriation of the home gardens, Awareness raising coupled with additional hands-on technical support will contribute to participants fully understand their purpose and potential, and will help overcome the common perception that the home gardens are only feasible with Wadata's support.
25. Focus promotion of plants for home gardens on perennial and high nutritional value species (e.g. moringa) that don't require regular purchase of seeds.

Promotion of improved seeds

26. Even with the increased use of improved seeds thanks to Wadata, there is a need to increase awareness, and demonstration to get farmers to fully adopt improved seeds.

Habbanayé

27. Technical monitoring and possible medical investigations of the animals in the Habbanayé should be carried out in order to understand the reasons for deaths and delays in calving (such as disease, non-adapted breeds, poor quarantine practices, etc.), and the issues addressed.
28. Consider ways to include non MMD members in the Habbanayé activities, particularly the poorest/most vulnerable in a way that still maintains accountability and prevents the sale of the goats.

Functional literacy:

29. Although included as part of P2, much of this activity seems to be focused on supporting P1 governance activities. Consider re-orienting the M&E of this activity to gather information on how well it has achieved success in supporting P1 activities.
30. Start literacy activities earlier in the project cycle to maximize impacts on committee functionality.
31. Improve the learning conditions of literacy class participants where needed.

PURPOSE 3

Activity Specific

ML/ANJE

- 32.** Combine IYCF and LM groups for activity implementation and for their training/awareness.
- 33.** Include MMD activities with IYCF/LM groups (including meetings), while reinforcing that the IYCF/ML awareness raising activities should extend beyond this group.
- 34.** Repeat capacity building/training with existing groups to ensure the information is retained by the members.
- 35.** Reinforce links between these groups and the CVDs. Consider encouraging/requiring that at least one of the ML/ANJE group members be part of the CVD as well.

Husband Schools

- 36.** Recalibrate expectations of EDM's impacts on certain behaviors. Changes may take years or even decades to come about.
- 37.** During the extension period, a very strong focus on EdM will be needed for it to have an impact. Wadata will have to decide if the small changes that may result are worth the effort.
- 38.** However, the opportunity to work with *Agency for All* on the Husband School approach can be a deciding factor in continuing these activities with the aim of passing them on after the project ends. Longer-term work with EdMs can be essential to having a real impact on deeply rooted cultural norms.

ECVC

- 39.** The poor success and discontinuation of this activity is a learning opportunity that can be documented for future ECVC activities.
- 40.** Include young people from ECVC in other activities such as LM, IYCF, MMF, etc. (this is already Wadata's approach).

Community Health and Nutrition Liaisons and Links with the Health System

- 41.** Clarify the policy and practices for compensating health workers, possibly through the national and sub-national nutrition technical working group meetings to discuss challenges and solutions to policies and practices related to the relais.
- 42.** Make regular visits to the CSI to monitor the quality of services and the availability of products (family planning/contraception, RUTF, etc.).
- 43.** Strengthen communication and collaboration with Kulawa to ensure that services are available to respond to requests created by Wadata.
- 44.** Reinforce MUAC screening, especially in hamlets.

Food Distribution

- 45.** Despite the interventions, GAM rates have seen only very small reductions, and remain at extremely concerning levels among those screened. Better information is needed to understand if food distributions have had an impact on GAM rates. Statements of direct causation should not be made without concrete evidence. (Though as noted in the findings section, in the current national and global context, positive impact may manifest as a prevention of an increase in GAM rates).
- 46.** CSB distributions have been a strong motivator for the LM and IYCF Support groups. After the distributions end, it will be important to follow up and strengthen these groups.
- 47.** Coordination with Kulawa to strengthen the CSIs stocks of CSB/supercereal/RUTF (as applicable) to ensure availability.

Water points, committees

- 48.** Prioritize rehabilitation of water points during Y5 and extension. Strengthen the CGPC and delegated management during Y5 and the extension to ensure sustainability.
- 49.** Work to improve the local private sector linkages to support clear connections to technical expertise and relevant materials for long-term water point repairs.
- 50.** The improvement in the coverage rate at the municipal, departmental, and regional levels must be reflected in the annual reports of the HRD/A.
- 51.** Think about better geographical coverage rather than systematically rehabilitating sites that have been poorly managed and broken down.
- 52.** Focus sensitization on the importance of deep borehole water (less risk of contamination) for drinking water in places where there is resistance to the payment system.
- 53.** Prioritize the multi-village approach for Mini-PEA systems, particularly in the bedrock zone where locations for wells are limited.
- 54.** Strengthen water quality control.
- 55.** Reinforce water treatment at home, especially where surface or shallow traditional well water is heavily used.
- 56.** Work with communities and CGPEs to find ways to formally provide accommodation for extremely poor households who cannot afford to pay for drinking water.

CVS

- 57.** Consider finding a site for a common landfill at the level of large villages for better management of solid waste.
- 58.** Equip VHCs with “start-up” ground sweeping equipment to motivate the participants to carry out the activities as it is first being rolled out. Where possible, use materials that are locally available at low-cost so that established CVS will be more likely to replace the equipment in the future.

Hand washing

59. Optimize existing handwashing practices with kettles, rather than introducing novel equipment (tippy-taps) that communities are unfamiliar with. Work with youth and women's groups (using HCD) to identify ways to optimize the use of kettles and soap that will be acceptable to the community.

Latrines

60. Complete the masons' equipment kits with the minimum described in the SOPHAB.
61. Support the construction equipment supply chain in line with the generated demand. Make sure the supply of latrine materials is secure before creating additional demand.
62. Involvement of MMDs for savings and loans for the construction of improved latrines.
63. Find a support mechanism for the extremely poor households to build latrines, instead of the current mechanism based on village solidarity.

OTHER OVERARCHING AREAS

64. Ensure the use of consistent language when discussing project targeting of villages (generations, hamlets) and layering ('full package') of activities.
65. Conduct a review of the current coverage of activities across all villages, focusing on understanding what the current overlaps of activities are, and identifying where there are potential gaps to fill. Be sure this analysis uses the TOC to help inform what priorities in layering may be.
66. Revise the expectations of spill-over and independent duplication of activities in the hamlets and devise a clear strategy of what activities will be supported in which hamlets during Y5 and the extension period.
67. Conduct a study to fully understand the degree to which the poorest households are able to participate in Wadata's activities.
 - a. Include a review of the cost-burden put onto the participating households by Wadata's activities, particularly those that are targeted with multiple interventions that have cost implications.
 - b. Explore targeting criteria beyond those coming from the HEA study that may help identify households who are 'ultra' poor/vulnerable, or socially excluded.
 - c. Consider also exploring the degree to which youth are able to participate in Wadata's activities.

OVERALL, FOR Y5/EXTENSION

68. As outlined in the section on Y5 and the extension period, the activities considered to be the most important to focus on during the extension period include:
 - a. Rehabilitation of water points, and support for the water management through committees, delegated private management, and the municipality.

- b. Support to the Habbanayé to resolve the issues around animal mortality, including links to suppliers of veterinary products and services.
 - c. Support to the latrine masons, primarily in resolving supply chain issues.
 - d. Management of recovered degraded land to ensure that agreements/conventions are well established and communicated.
 - e. Support to market gardens to help them become more profitable.
 - f. Compliment the focus on the above activities with increased support to the CVDs and MMDs (where needed) to manage the functionality during this period and beyond.
69. Ensure that the project has the capacity of local human resources to ensure the sustainability of activities.
70. For the fifth year and the 2 years of extension, the project can envisage increasing the number of field agents (in proportion to the areas/activities supported) to ensure focused support.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RFSAs

71. Capitalize on the R & I period by investing in quality research that will inform contextually appropriate and feasible activities and effective combinations of interventions.
72. Increase the focus on making regular, ongoing adjustments to the sustainability plans during the implementation period, coupled with flexibility in shifting activity focus, targeting, etc. to keep a realistic focus on the sustainability goal.
73. Recognize that government involvement is critical to long term sustainability.
- a. From the outset, involve government technical services in training, supervision, and monitoring of activities;
 - b. Ensure project data is shared with government technical services;
 - a. Set up oversight bodies, such as steering committees and task forces, at the regional level which involve government representatives at different administrative levels;
 - b. Ensure that oversight bodies participate in field visits which allow them to understand RFSa activities.
74. During the R & I phase, start implementation of activities that are:
- c. known to produce results;
 - d. considered as high priorities by targeted populations;
 - e. known to take longer periods of time to execute and make an impact (e.g., WASH, agriculture, literacy);
 - f. foundational for the implementation of other activities (e.g., water access, literacy, governance).
75. Be strategic about the number of activities implemented and focus on the quality rather than quantity of interventions.
- a. Consider community limitations to participate in too many activities at one time;
 - b. Focus on interventions that are high priorities for communities and produce tangible results (e.g. crop/livestock production, water points, etc.) and are likely to be sustained after the implementation period;
 - c. Concentrate on combinations of activities that produce synergy to create change.

- 76.** Acknowledge that SBC Interventions that are designed to produce broad based social and cultural change are unlikely to take hold over a 4-5 year timeframe. Recognize that increased knowledge does not necessarily translate into behavioral change. Consider creating more innovative SBC approaches not strictly based on improving knowledge. Consider focusing SBC on a limited number of behaviors and focus on normative and other barriers with more modern strategic SBC approaches (nudging, etc.).
- 77.** During implementation, consider the importance of sequencing and layering of interventions. For instance, the success of some activities is dependent on other interventions (e.g., establishment of water points for improved agricultural systems, establishment of local governing structures to provide oversight of activities, etc.)

CONSIDERATIONS FOR BHA/USAID

- 78.** To address a common perception that project proposals with greater number of activities are more likely to get funded, encourage projects to take a tailored strategic approach when identifying activities to implement so as not to spread too thin and ultimately not provide as much support to community activities with potential for the greatest impact.
- 79.** Through mechanisms such as SCC, work with other USAID sectors and donors to continue to improve collaboration across USAID funded RISE II partners, while also working to reduce perceptions of competition for potential future funding. Try to ensure that RISE II partners and RFSAs follow the same funding cycle.
- 80.** Ensure that lessons learned in Niger and in other country settings are adequately shared across RFSAs (e.g., mass deaths following distribution of small ruminants, best practices setting up village development committees, challenges setting up WASH infrastructure, equipment breaking down, etc.)
- 81.** Carry out research 2-3 years (or more) after RFSAs have ceased implementation to understand what activities have been sustained over time and what activities are no longer implemented and why.