



Empowering Women in West African Markets

Case Studies from Kano, Katsina (Nigeria) and Maradi (Niger)

VAM Gender and Markets Study #7

2017



The Zero Hunger Challenge emphasizes the importance of strengthening economic empowerment in support of the Sustainable Development Goal 2 to double small-scale producer incomes and productivity. The increasing focus on resilient markets can bring important contributions to sustainable food systems and build resilience. Participation in market systems is not only a means for people to secure their livelihood, but it also enables them to exercise agency, maintain dignity, build social capital and increase self-worth. Food security analysis must take into account questions of gender-based violence and discrimination in order to deliver well-tailored assistance to those most in need.

WFP's Nutrition Policy (2017-2021) reconfirms that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential to achieve good nutrition and sustainable and resilient livelihoods, which are based on human rights and justice. This is why gender-sensitive analysis in nutrition programmes is a crucial contribution to achieving the SDGs. The VAM Gender & Markets Initiative of the WFP Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa seeks to strengthen WFP and partners' commitment, accountability and capacities for gender-sensitive food security and nutrition analysis in order to design market-based interventions that empower women and vulnerable populations. The series of regional VAM Gender and Markets Studies is an effort to build the evidence base and establish a link to SDG 5 which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

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Note

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Acronyms

3N	Nigériens Feed Nigériens (<i>Les Nigériens Nourissent les Nigériens</i>)
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data
AFD	French Development Agency (<i>Agence française de développement</i>)
CILSS	Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel
COFO	Code Rural Land Commission (<i>Commission foncière</i>)
DfID	Department for International Development
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FGD	Focus group discussion
GEMS	Growth and Empowerment in States
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
K2M	Kano-Katsina-Maradi
NEPC	Nigeria Export Promotion Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RCA	Regional Chamber of Agriculture
SAP	Early warning system (<i>Système d'alerte précoce</i>)
SCAP-RU	Community-based early warning system (<i>Système communautaire d'alerte précoce et de réponse aux urgences</i>)
SNA	Social Network Analysis
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAM	Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
WFP	World Food Programme
WOFAN	Women Farmers Advancement Network
ZHC	Zero Hunger Challenge

Executive summary

The aim of this study is to provide grassroots understanding of the market conditions faced by women farmers and traders in two culturally similar yet administratively different areas: the Kano-Katsina region in northern Nigeria and the Maradi region in southern Niger. The comparative analysis dispersed throughout this report provides an overall picture of context-specific gender barriers that limit women's participation in the sub-regional agricultural and livestock economy and in agricultural markets and value chains along the economic corridor that connects Kano, Katsina and Maradi. This study contributes to a better understanding and assessment of the links between gender and the functioning of markets and value chains under relatively stable (non-emergency; non-crisis) conditions. Such an understanding can support the World Food Programme (WFP), whose recent studies¹ examine the gender dynamics of food markets and value chains with an aim of understanding the different roles of men and women and their impact on gender equality.

With a view to deepening and expanding the WFP's actions and interventions in Niger and Nigeria, this study seeks to provide a contextual analysis of key environmental conditions, legal frameworks and cultural factors which impact on women's empowerment. By doing so, the study explores context-specific challenges limiting women's economic inclusion in markets and value chains as well as the enabling and disabling environment that affects farming and trade activities. Finally, it suggests possible programmatic solutions for the design and implementation of market-based interventions that can improve gender equality by empowering women.

The results of the study first show that gendered roles exist around the farming and processing of nearly all crops, but with significant differences reflecting the type of agriculture – whether small-scale/grassroots smallholder farming or agriculture with a stronger commercial orientation. Women predominantly manage most farming activities for growing vegetables such as okra, peppers and tomatoes. Women are also very involved in growing grains and cereals such as rice, beans, maize, millet, onions and groundnut. Women often handle planting and weeding on small commercial farms, while planting, weeding and harvesting on larger farms is handled through the paid labour of young men. Light processing such as husk removal, sorting and bagging is done by women while warehousing, stocking and transport is generally always a man's task. In northern Nigeria and in southern Niger, activities such as the husking of rice, processing of maize into flour and the roasting and preparation of groundnuts into groundnut cakes or cookies are heavily women-dominated. Additionally, women play a central and often dominant role in the retail distribution² of fruits and vegetables in urban and rural markets as well as the distribution of processed goods and prepared food.

The study also confirms that ownership of farmlands in Nigeria is predominantly male. Even when women operate in a collective to farm, they often rent land from male landowners - sometimes under unfavourable or restrictive conditions. Women in Kano and Katsina who

¹ WFP 2016a, b, c, d, 2017a.

² Agricultural products are transported in small consignments by women traveling between markets using taxis and commercial buses. Young girls and older women alike also often balance produce on their heads, selling and distributing foodstuff from place to place.

hire land for farming tend to experience a great deal of land insecurity, harassment and farm vandalism. In the Maradi region of Niger, many women farming on a small scale do own land, producing food both for their families and for local commercial sale; but some are landless and must work as labourers for other villagers. Almost none of the dozens of women engaged in this study had the money to buy additional land when this is sold by fellow members of their community.

Women in northern Nigeria face similar problems as men in agriculture and value chains specifically in the areas of access to capital, credit and loans and equipment for mechanised farming; harvesting; transportation; processing and storage. However, these challenges are structurally more difficult for women to overcome and there are significant barriers to improving agricultural productivity that are specific to women. These barriers include literacy, childcare and household time management, poor and/or unequal representation in the leadership of mixed gender market groups and associations. Women in many villages in both northern Nigeria and southern Niger may not always benefit from technical support or access to credit beyond their village mutual savings groups -- but there are communities that do benefit from and strongly support external intervention. The research team visited villages that get little or no external assistance from either the state or development partners; the limited economic options available to women in these communities clearly contrasted unfavourably with the position of women in communities that the research team visited that do benefit from external support from government technical services or development partners. Many face serious social pressures and some of those who are engaged in trade report that they face resistance from male counterparts to their hopes of expanding commercial activity.

Within the time and resources available, the research need necessarily had to identify priority locations where we could explore particular themes. Because of the high levels of rural poverty and severe strain on natural resources in Maradi region (Niger), the rural communities around Maradi were selected as a prime zone for our research into smallholder basic agriculture and rural issues such as access to land; this was complemented with research into similar issues in Katsina state, in Nigeria. Because of the size of Kano city and the scale of economic activity there, the research team selected Kano and surrounding communities as the prime terrain for research into the role of women within the functioning of markets and more commercial agriculture. This was complemented with research into women exporters in Katsina and, in Niger, the role of women in the market in Maradi, as well as comparative group discussion research with women in the livestock and fisheries sectors in Maradi and, for a national comparison, Niamey.

In broad terms, a number of comparative contrasts stood out: technical state advisory support to farmers is more developed in Nigeria, and notably includes at least specific provision for women advisers in each Local Government Area. The scale of the Kano commercial economy offers a larger scale trading arena than Maradi could offer; the federal system means that Nigerian states have resources and service delivery capacities of a kind that local authorities in Niger could not provide. By contrast, in Niger, food security and the design of policies and programmes to specifically address rural poverty appears to have a higher priority than in Nigeria and the country has one of West Africa's most comprehensive national systems for local level data collection and crisis risk monitoring.

But while these contrasts can fairly be drawn, there are also many features that Kano and Katsina states and Maradi region share in common, in the nature of society, patterns of landholding, and the nature of agriculture and the role of women in the rural economy. So while some of our suggestions for action, below, are country specific, to a substantial degree they apply to both northern Nigeria and southern Niger and may hopefully also have useful read-across to some other regions of West Africa.

The recommendations identified to address existing markets conditions and barriers faced by women in the study areas are based on the findings of the survey and information gathered during field research rather than a direct evaluation of programmes of WFP in Niger or Nigeria. Interventions aimed at empowering women in agricultural markets along the Kano, Katsina and Maradi corridor should focus on:

- **Gradually build up a map of needs across the varied range of communities** to that targeted support can be provided to tackle the specific challenges of each village.
- **Support systemic dissemination of advice on farming and environment conservation** to ensure that women smallholders in all communities are offered advice and training on basic techniques to boost crop yields and conserve soil fertility.
- **Encourage the creation of women's community gardens in each village** of the type widely used elsewhere in the Sahel to diversify nutrition, boost food security and increase women's ability to earn independent cash incomes.
- **Support dissemination of advice and equipment on crop conservation, processing and marketing.** Low-tech affordable methods can greatly reduce wastage and increase added value to agricultural products.
- **Promoting women's land ownership** to alleviate the undue stress and uncertainty caused to women who rely on insecure and often temporary land leases. This is complex and will require sensitivity, but progress is possible.
- **Implementing a quota system targeting women traders** for WFP local purchase of food supplies at Dawanau grains market, Kano.
- **Partnering and practically supporting authentic women cooperatives and farmers' organisations** to be more land secure and access agricultural inputs (such as seeds, fertilisers and pesticides).
- **Urgently developing and implementing programmes for training and functional literacy** (English, French and Hausa) for all female members of cooperatives or farmers' associations, not just women leaders and coordinators. Such programmes should provide financial knowledge, basic bookkeeping and accounting, technical and management training as well as farming and processing techniques.

- **Sponsoring the design of social change campaigns based on social norms messaging that strategically highlight female entrepreneurship** and women's positive contributions to agriculture. Local civil society, community media, grassroots women networks, particularly those focused on female entrepreneurship, can be strategic partners in the development of initiatives aimed at providing training and functional literacy to women at the community level. Community media should also be engaged for the development of social change programmes that are culturally-sensitive but also empowering to women. Such programmes should contain positive messages about empowerment and highlight men supporting successful and capable women in commercial activities.
- **Supporting women farm and trade cooperatives** to maximise the profits of group farming operations and transactions as well as engage more with banking services.
- **Incorporating social network analysis** to support understanding how gender inequalities are reproduced through social norms that limit women's choices and opportunities. A network approach can help development and humanitarian agencies such as the WFP better understand how gender is embedded in a wider system of socially mediated norms and practices and how the relations defining men and women's position in the social structure may cause disparities.
- **Encourage Nigeria to draw lessons from the Sahel food security monitoring systems overseen by CILSS and encourage Niger to strengthen these systems in Maradi region.** Although their prime purpose is to monitor crisis risk, the grassroots data collection in such systems provides government and development organisations with a wealth of detailed information that can assist in the design and oversight of longer term rural development programmes, including those designed to assist women.

1. Introduction

Highly performing agricultural value chains and market systems are critical to raising rural incomes and building more resilient livelihoods in West Africa. When markets thrive, people can generate income, invest in themselves and their families, build social capital and contribute to society. Where markets fail, or are weak, livelihoods come under great strain because economic opportunities have narrowed.

Market spaces offer different opportunities, challenges and benefits for men and women. Depending on the level of gender equality, women's livelihoods can experience greater barriers. In countries with high gender inequality, women's economic lives and fortunes are severely constrained by their lower ownership of land and other assets; lack of or unequal access to loans and credit; lower education and literacy; and a disproportionate share of unpaid household or care work that limits the time they have left for paid activity.

Such barriers and challenges tend to be exacerbated during and after periods of crisis. Where conflict disrupts communal life, women face increased responsibilities and burdens but often must deal with the added economic and social pressure in an unchanged environment of structural inequality. In recent years, market systems in some regions of West Africa especially for agricultural goods – the region's largest economic sector – have experienced major periods of climatic, environmental and economic changes, including conflict. In some areas, these have jeopardized the functioning of normal economic life and the food security of entire communities in the region (see Van Den Hoek 2017). Such crises and pressures have a serious human impact, but often with different outcomes for men and women.

Creating and supporting women's empowerment in West African agricultural market systems is a very topical subject. The World Food Programme (WFP) and similarly focused aid organizations are increasingly looking at market-based interventions for improving food security and building resilient communities. Such a programmatic focus is important but bears the risks of reinforcing gender inequalities by empowering some market actors over others. Policy frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals supported by the Zero Hunger Challenge (ZHC) recognize the importance of mitigating against these risks by carefully crafting interventions so that they empower women as a critical course for building more resilient populations (WFP 2017b).

The purpose of this study is to deepen understanding of the role that women play in the rural market economy and the agricultural and livestock sector value chain, from production at village level through to the processing and commercial trading of farm output in West Africa. This report focuses not just on economic activity related to the buying and selling of agricultural goods but also on their production – because West African women often sell goods they farm or produce themselves and therefore see their activities at both ends of the value chain as integrally linked.

This report seeks to examine the constraints that tend to limit the scope for women to achieve higher incomes from a more diverse and sustainable range of agriculture-related activities. It explores the rural and commercial setting in which women conduct their routine affairs and considers critical social, legal, regulatory and financial factors that influence women's chances

of benefiting from new livelihood opportunities and achieving better outcomes in agriculture. Building on an empirical survey conducted in dynamic rural and urban spaces in Nigeria and Niger, the report provides recommendations that can be useful for improving the outcomes of WFP interventions and strategies that are focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The research presented in this study attempts to bridge a thematic and geographic focus. The role of women in the grassroots rural economy, based on agriculture and livestock, has been examined primarily through research in the south of Maradi region in Niger, complemented with the work done in the Musawa area of Katsina state, Nigeria. This allows for comparisons between the two countries, while also revealing the role of women across a region that has a strong-shared coherence in terms of Hausa culture and aspects of village level agriculture. The livestock dimension of this theme has been examined through research among livestock entrepreneurs in Maradi region and with those engaged in livestock trade in Kano.

The role of women in the commercial value chain – from farming oriented towards the commercial market, through to processing and market activities, has been examined primarily through research in Kano city and surrounding communities and markets in Kano state, Nigeria, complemented with work done in the market in Maradi, Niger, and with women exporters and entrepreneurs in Katsina.

Based on the combined thematic and geographic approach to the study, the report is structured as follows. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 deal with the geographical scope, methodology, and conceptual framework of the study. Chapter 5 describe the findings from the survey. Chapter 6 focuses on the commercial value chain in Kano through a range of case studies. Chapter 7 deals with the role of women in the grassroots rural economy in villages across the Maradi region. Chapter 8 describes the comparisons between Kano, Katsina and Maradi. Chapter 9 outlines the nuanced context for interventions aimed at empowering women in southern Niger and northern Nigeria and outlines achievable solutions to address existing market conditions and barriers.

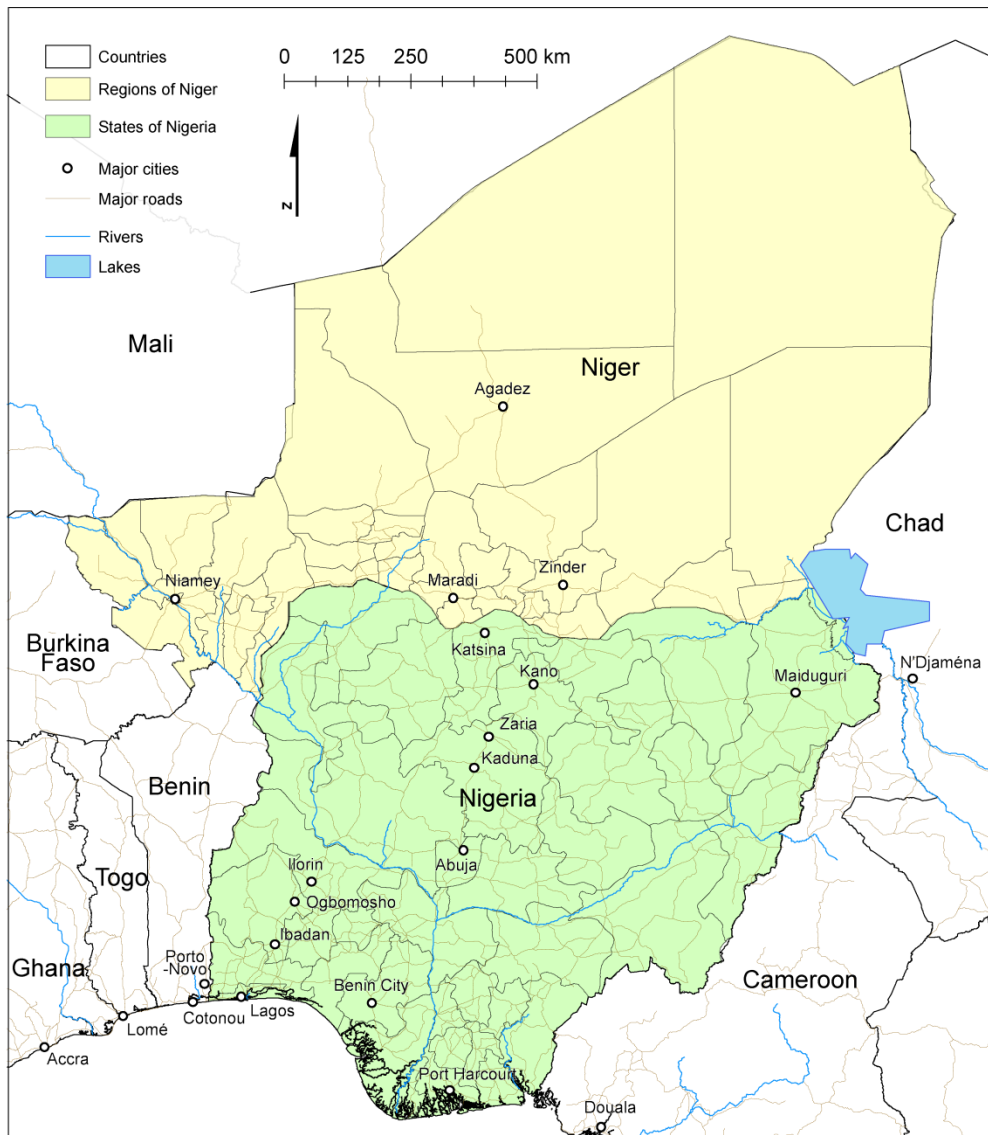
2. The Kano-Katsina-Maradi region

This report examines women’s participation in agricultural markets through case studies drawn from Kano and Katsina states in northern Nigeria and the neighbouring Maradi region of Niger. It is a vast region, extending more than 500 kilometres from south to north and with a combined population estimated at more than 30 million (Figure 1).

This broad area of the northern savannah and the Sahel exemplifies many of the development challenges seen in West Africa and typically experiences strong seasonal fluctuations in weather, with high risks of food insecurity for some months of the year. Rates of population growth are particularly high and there is intense pressure on the availability of land. Furthermore, this region remains at distance from the big markets and trade opportunities of coastal West Africa due to inadequate road and rail networks.

Yet the region has considerable assets. There are strong agricultural traditions, important productive potential, big urban markets within the region, particularly Kano – one of West Africa’s major cities – and well developed cross-border trading networks within the wider Sahel region. An all-weather highway provides a critical transport spine for the Kano-Katsina-Maradi (“K2M”) corridor, an axis recognized by the governments of Nigeria and Niger governments as strategically important (Abdoul and Trémolières 2004).

Figure 1. Niger and Nigeria

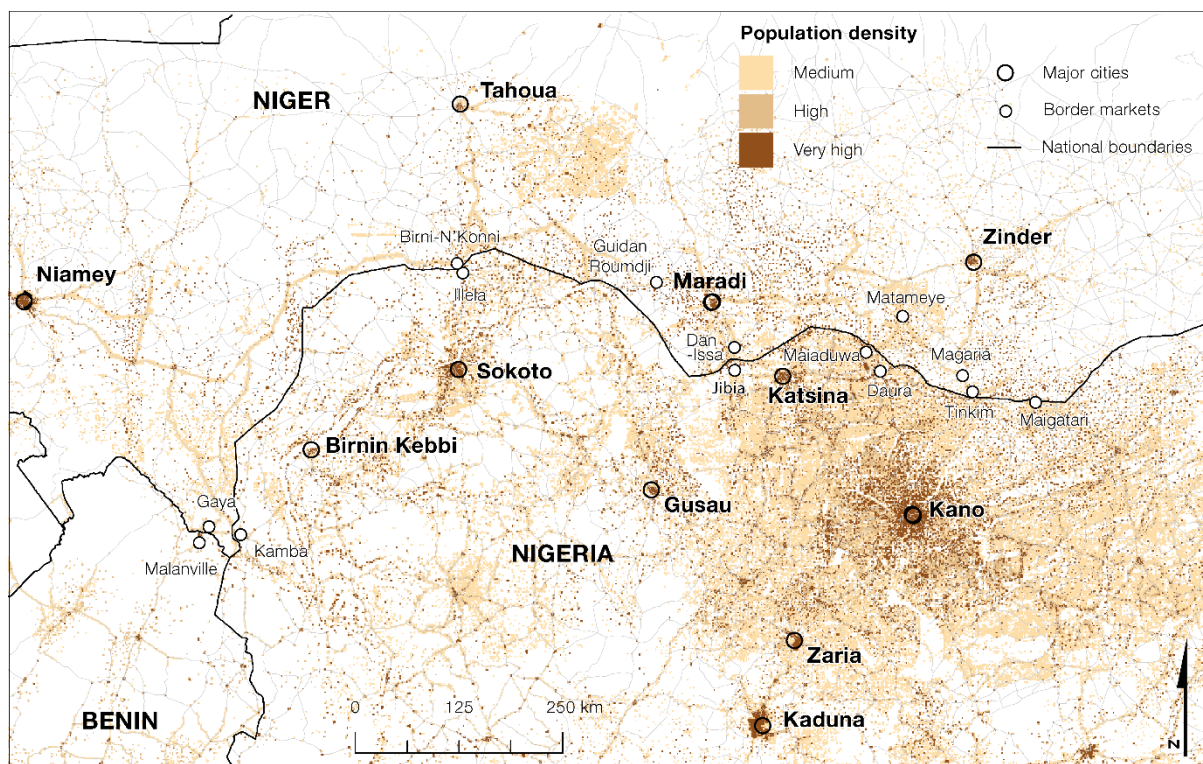


Source: authors.

Straddling the border, the region provides a unique opportunity to examine and compare the impact of differing Anglophone and Francophone administrative structures and financial and educational traditions on women’s participation in crop production and agriculture-related trade. These comparisons are particularly enlightening when made in the context of a region with a strong coherent sense of shared Hausa cultural identity and Islamic religious practices. The social norms and questions that apply across the region generally exist in differing legal and governing contexts in Niger and Nigeria.

In the Kano-Katsina-Maradi area of northern Nigeria and southern Niger the high population density coupled with the presence of large urban centres has since precolonial times encouraged the exchange of population, religious ideas and agricultural products (Miles 1994). The region is also characterized by numerous border markets such as Guidan Roundji, Dan-Issa, Jibia, Maiaduwa, Daura, Matameye, Magaria, Tinkim and Maigatari, that often work in pairs and serve both as transit points for unprocessed and semi-processed agricultural goods as well as manufactured products (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The Niger-Nigeria border



Source: OECD/SWAC (2017), *Cross-border Co-operation and Policy Networks in West Africa*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Reproduced and modified with permission.

The larger markets in this area also serve as storage sites for agricultural products such as cereals and onions before being distributed regionally (Walther 2012). New economic opportunities have helped revitalize former regional solidarities and given rise to new commercial elites that in both Niger and Nigeria are largely composed of wealthy male traders (Walther 2016).

The Maradi-Kano region is also a major area for crop production (millet, sorghum, rice and cowpea) and livestock (CSAO 2006). In recent years, agricultural activities have also been increased in Katsina for crops such as cotton and rice. The entire region is known for its intensive cultivation of irrigated crops, which predate the colonial period in the Hausa country. On the Nigerien side of the border, irrigated cultivation is practiced along the Maradi valley as well as around the seasonal pools and wetlands that dot the region. The local variety of onion cultivated around Madaoua, Galmi and Keita is exported throughout the region (Tarchiani et al. 2012). Agricultural production is even more intensive and mechanized on the

Nigerian side of the border where smallholder irrigation is practiced by small farms with low-cost technology such as individual motor-pumps.

On both sides of the border, environmental changes, population growth and urbanization have generated massive transformation in the agricultural systems (Mortimore and Adams 2001). Firstly, the growing demand for food in cities has stimulated urban and peri-urban farming (Maconachie and Binns 2006) with major consequences for women, who often carry out most urban farm labour and are heavily involved in post-harvest activities. Secondly, the region has experienced major changes in the selection, protection and harvesting of trees since the mid-1980s. Despite declining rainfall, local populations have intensified or expanded agriculture to respond to the continuous demand for cereals and wood fuels in ways that do not necessarily lead to “desertification” (Mortimore and Turner 2005, Sendzimir et al. 2011).

3. Methodology

To build a wider understanding of key themes, this study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches that rely on data collected in focus groups, key informant interviews and questionnaires designed to capture a broad range of demographic, land and women-specific issues. The study also draws on an extensive review of existing academic literature and other secondary literature, which have been summarized in the conceptual framework of this report.

3.1. Case studies

Field research for this study was carried out between June and July 2017 in northern Nigeria and southern Niger. Focus group discussions began with a single pilot in Katsina in June and was followed up by a full schedule of focus group discussions, interviews and questionnaire survey between 10 and 21 July 2017. A sample size of 258 women farmers was drawn from farming areas, markets and commercial centres across the area of study (Table 1 and Figure 3).

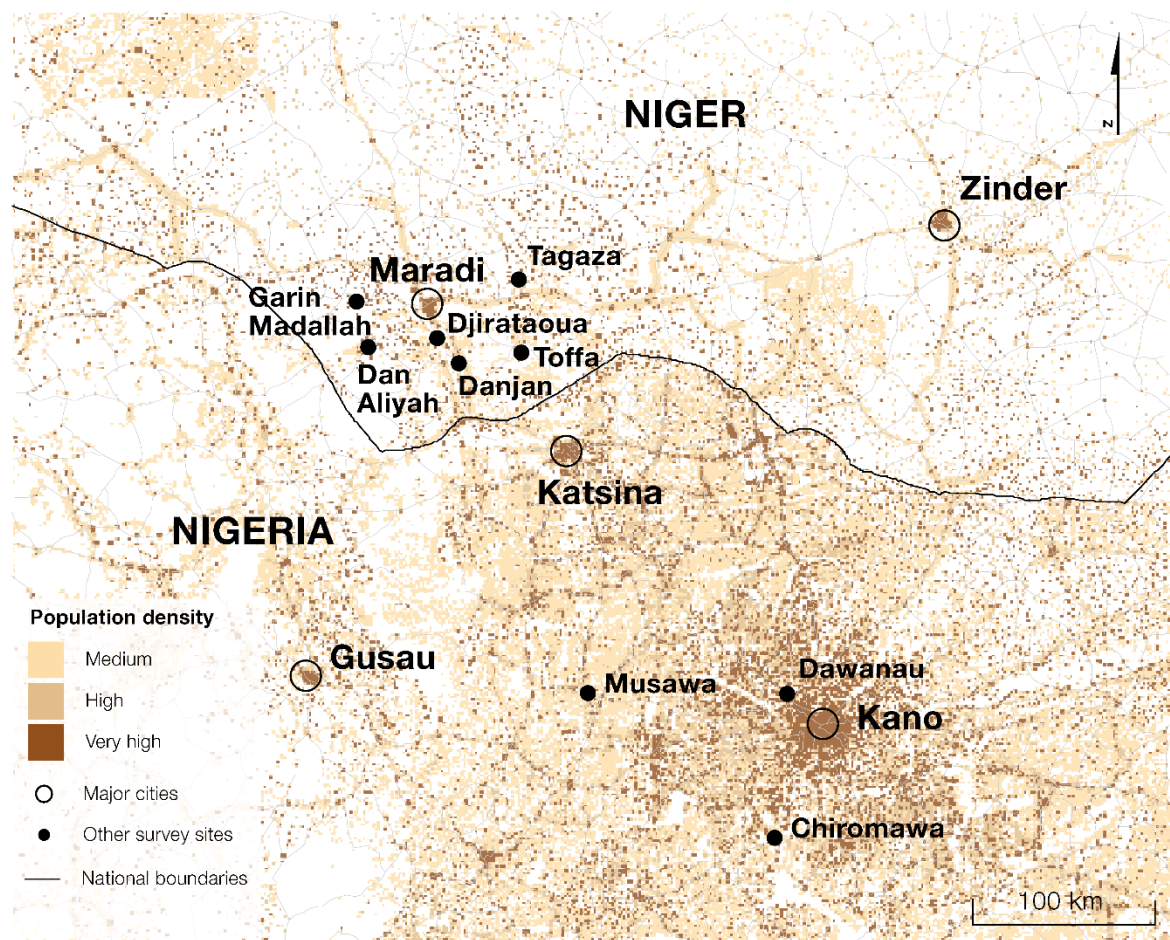
Table 1. Case studies

Area	Farming, market or commercial centre	Production
Kano, Nigeria	Challawa Chiromawa village Dawanau Kurmi market Yan Lemu Unguan Uku	Fruit and vegetable market Rice-growing Grains market Fruit and vegetable market Fruit and vegetable market Livestock market
Katsina, Nigeria	Musawa	Farming and processing of agricultural goods

Maradi, Niger	Tagaza, Garin Madallah and Dan Aliyah villages Danjan village Toffa village Djirataoua village Maradi market Maradi region	Smallholder farming, processing and trade Farming Lean season food aid and cash distribution Commercial <i>moringa</i> processing Food and utensils Livestock entrepreneurs
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Source: authors

Figure 3. Main towns and villages covered in the study



Source: OECD/SWAC (2017), *Cross-border Co-operation and Policy Networks in West Africa*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Reproduced and modified with permission.

3.2. Focus group discussions

The foundation of the rural economy in northern Nigeria and southern Niger is agriculture and pastoralism and one of the key goals of the study has been to secure deeper understanding of the position of women as farmers, livestock owners and traders, and the factors that shape and sometimes constrain their farming and trading activities.

Open-ended focus group discussions (FGD) and semi-structured interviews allowed the respondents to speak openly and freely about their experiences, practices and beliefs within a clearly defined range of agriculture-related topics. Focus group questions were tailored to the agricultural activities of the participants but general questions around common problems such as access to credit and decision-making were incorporated into each session. Participants completed attendance sheets indicating their various business or farming background and other demographic information and completed questionnaires that included parameters such as number of children under 15 years of age, length of time spent on domestic and commercial activities, participation in savings circle and access to water.

In both Nigeria and Niger, the research team interviewed WFP Country Office staff, partner organization officers and country office staff of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), government officials and academic experts. Six focus group facilitators and one research assistant was recruited for data collection and interpretation in the field; they were supported by several local assistant facilitators who assisted for specific discussions. Translators also assisted in transcribing audio recordings of focus group discussions from Hausa to English.

The in-depth group discussions were focused on target locations, communities and economic contexts where the core questions of the research could be examined through open group discussions and data collected using questionnaires. Sites for the field visits were carefully selected with a regard for feasibility, accessibility, market activity and security. In Maradi, focus groups were held in three villages selected precisely because they had not benefited so far from major interventions by international partners or NGOs. To facilitate comparisons, visits were made to three villages where interventions by external partners were more developed.

At each selected study site, meetings were held with coordinators of local NGOs, market associations and desk officers at state and local government ministries/departments of agriculture. During field visits to villages in Maradi (Niger) and Musawa local government area in Katsina state (Nigeria), the methodology included an introduction or interview with the village chief, local councillors and women leaders followed by focus group discussions or community interviews. During each interview, community or association meeting, the study objectives were presented to the participant(s) or informant(s) and the confidential nature of the discussion was stated and the participant assured of the neutrality of the study team.

Focus group discussions and community interviews averaged 1.5 hours and captured general information on the type and duration of farming or market activity, location of activity or business, main and supplementary income sources, farming or market challenges, ideas for improvement of farming or market conditions, gender dynamics as well as cultural and social dynamics. The focus group participants were informed at this stage that the discussion would be recorded without compromising confidentiality. For some group discussions in Niger, however, it was less practical to do so because of the large numbers of participants.

Using a set of 25 survey questions and 15 guiding questions, 21 FGDs involving 225 women, variously engaged in agriculture-related activity in northern Nigeria and southern Niger, were surveyed for this study (Annex 1). The FGDs were conducted in Hausa and facilitated by

Hausa-speaking women with community engagement and agricultural backgrounds. Facilitators were trained to use the guiding questions as prompts for stimulating reflective responses and then following up with queries for further detail or clarification.

The principal area selected for research into urban agriculture or large-scale agriculture that drives a commercially focused economy was Kano in Nigeria. Neighbouring Katsina provides a similar context that is experiencing targeted interventions to intensify farming and trade.

In Niger, the principal area selected for research into rural agriculture is the Maradi region. It exhibits some of the most intense development pressures evident in West Africa. Land is in particularly short supply and some previous research has suggested that social factors might significantly influence women's access to land and related economic opportunities (FAO 2002; Doss et al. 2013; eds. Snapp & Pound 2017). At the same time, rural development is a priority for the government of Niger and the country has been a leader in building food security early warning systems and testing models of cash welfare support for poor households. Nigeria does not have a comparable track record of such social support programmes and the WFP country office, which is under three years old, has been primarily focused on the humanitarian crisis in northeast Nigeria caused by the Boko Haram insurgency.

Field research in the Maradi region provides an opportunity to examine both the development challenges facing women in rural communities and the extent to which the services and networks developed by the Nigérien government may be helpful in unlocking constraints or reinforcing economic security. The programme of research in Maradi extended both to villages that have not experienced significant support from international partners and NGOs and to those that have benefitted from such support.

Focus group research into the position of women in the grassroots economy was also carried out in Nigeria, through a pilot FGD in Katsina and a programme of multiple women-only FGDs carried out in Musawa local government in Katsina state that examined women who are working in partnership with the Women Farmers Advancement Network (WOFAN), a well-established local NGO.

The realization of livelihood opportunities from agriculture is of course intimately linked to the market opportunities that are available. It was therefore important to analyse the position of women engaged in agriculture or pastoralism with a stronger commercial orientation. This was examined through two FGDs with women rice producers at Chiromawa village in Kano state, and through FGDs with women livestock owners in Kano and Maradi. Interviews were also held with women commercial producers of *moringa* in a village near Maradi. More widely, a key strand of the research was examination of the way that the agricultural market and food value chain operates, and the role that women play in this. The principle setting for this strand of the research was the Kano conurbation, one of the largest urban agglomerations in Nigeria and a major hub of commercial and industrial activity.

The team carried out 11 FGDs in Kano, and surrounding communities, to examine different aspects of the agricultural value chain, including the role of women in urban fruit and vegetable markets, livestock trade and the regionally significant Dawanau grain market. The analysis focuses on the following agro-pastoral products: rice, *moringa*, maize and goats. It

also broadly includes other products such as cotton, groundnut and farmed fish. The research examines how women's livelihood strategies for participation in commercial agricultural activities are impacted by issues as varied as access to credit and societal expectations of women and the extent to which they have any influence on the parameters of market operations and women's inclusion in the leadership of mixed-gender market associations.

In addition to the formal data collection exercise, the research team – which has carried out extensive research across the region prior to this present study – explored the main cities in Maradi, Kano and Katsina; and target village to observe typical community dynamics together with residents who served as local guides. Key observations included levels of urbanization or development, local markets and general commercial activity, household structures, farmland sizes and distance, vegetation and environmental conditions, transport infrastructure and generally observable wealth indicators. The research team spent a total of 28 days in the field engaged in interviewing, observation and document collection.

3.3. Limits of the study

The focus of this study was limited to areas of Kano and Katsina states in northwest Nigeria and Maradi region in southern Niger. These areas share similar religious, geo-climatic, cultural and social characteristics but are under different national administrative and economic regimes which allows for interesting comparisons, but not for country generalizations.

Moreover, the sampling of the study prioritized agricultural activities and sectors where women were active or most active. Therefore, the composition of the FGDs was overwhelmingly female (over 95 percent) and comprised of approximately 10 participants per group. Some focus groups had a few more participants because of their location (i.e. in a village where there was considerable interest for participation) and it would have been counterproductive to exclude some women. A single male-only FGD was held with the male-dominated executive committee of the Dawanau market association in Kano, Nigeria.

The Dawanau market association focus group was the result of a calculated methodological bias reflecting the sharply gendered nature of most market farmers and traders' associations in the region. Additionally, the women's groups seemed more organized and available for meetings during the daytime. The female-focus of this study does not, however, mean the findings are any less valid but that they simply reflect a strong female perspective. To incorporate the perceptions and experiences of men, interviews were conducted with male traders at Dawanau and male extension workers and officials in Kano and Katsina.

Additionally, it is not possible to make very broad and conclusive judgements on patterns or trends from the modest sample size of this study. Nevertheless, the findings discussed in the case studies highlight some context-specific realities and conditions faced by women farmers, producers, processors and traders in Kano, Katsina states in Nigeria; and the Maradi region of Niger. The sets of findings made here provide a tangible means of assessing the gendered experiences of these women in market places and their level of empowerment in the market systems and agricultural value chains that operate across this area.

4. Conceptual framework

Enhancing the position of women in market systems is central to sustained development and household poverty reduction in West Africa. This is because women's role extends far beyond the sphere of family life: they are key economic actors; in agriculture and the transformation of farm products; in local commerce and long distance trade; and as well in the livestock sector. Women's fundamental role in family life and the functioning of rural and commercial economies means their prospects for achieving higher incomes and more diverse livelihood opportunities are critical to building resilient economies across West Africa.

4.1. Gender inequalities at the individual, household and community levels

Gender profoundly determines livelihood prospects and generates many inequalities that limit women's access to and participation in market systems. In our conceptual framework, we consider that gender inequalities are reproduced through social norms at three different levels: the individual, the household and the community (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Factors affecting women's participation in markets



Sources: World Bank (2012), WFP (2017), Gnisci (2016), Oxfam (2011), USAID (2014) and authors.

At each of these levels, women traditionally encounter beliefs, expectations and judgements that can limit their choices and opportunities. Socially defined gender norms and expectations that proscribe women's behaviour and choices have a deep impact on the food system that connects production, processing and distribution, to food consumption and nutrition in West Africa (Gnisci 2016). Gender inequalities are also shaped or reinforced by the various institutions that animate and regulate markets in the region. Such institutions may take the form of formal or customary laws that apply to men and women, of policies that relate to market and business activities, or of finance, credit and savings regulations.

4.2. Social and cultural beliefs, norms and practices

Agricultural markets like any other sphere of human life and activity are not just the product of market forces but are very much the function of networks, collective decision-making as well as social or cultural norms that shape behaviour and expectations (see Box 1). Development programmes with a market systems approach are beginning to catch on to the fact that the universe of decision-making is not always rational but is critically "influenced by contextual cues, local social networks and social norms and shared mental models" (World Development Report 2015:3). Efforts to integrate women's empowerment into market-based development interventions are increasingly acknowledging the impact of social relations and issues on programmatic outcomes.

Drawing from the fields of sociology, cultural anthropology, psychology and behavioural economics, new approaches to understanding market system development are progressively integrating social network analysis, power analysis and gender analysis to better distinguish the underlying dynamics that shape and reinforce market conditions; especially the different ways they affect men and women.

Questions of agency – and particularly the social factors that influence an individual's preferences, choices or options and decision-making authority – are indeed critical to developing programmatic responses that address women's unequal access and participation in agricultural markets in West Africa. In this context, agency can be best understood as the process of exercising one's power to make or take decisions that impact on one's life and immediate social sphere or context (e.g. family and household). Although the exercise of agency primarily stems from within an individual's culture, external factors such as social expectations, societal judgements/sanctions and institutions are the framework that either encourage or undercut the exercise of agency (Golla et al. 2011).

Despite the acknowledgment of the role of contextual prompts and shared mental models, the evidence for how to effectively identify, measure and test for gendered social norms that influence women's economic empowerment in market systems is still an emerging field of study and experimentation. Therefore, this study contributes to the nascent evidence base for good practices, tools, lessons and solutions in programming for gendered social norms in agricultural market and value chains that can be tested across different contexts to improve implementation and outcomes.

Gendered social norms refer to the different beliefs and rules that govern or influence social behaviours, expectations and judgements applied to men and women. In the context of

women's participation and empowerment in markets and value chains, social norms refer to "the interaction between individual behaviours and collective behavioural rules that shape a) how people behave and b) how people expect people to behave in order to either maintain or change how women engage with markets" (Markel et al. 2016: 12). These norms influence core aspects of society from the individual to household and community; and generate differences in the roles of men and women and the expectations for what either *does* and *should do* in household and community life including economic activity. Such norms are spread, reinforced and endorsed in religious practices, traditions and conventions, family settings, workplaces and media (UNFPA 2014). They are also communicated through informal channels such as stories, rituals and ceremonies, role-modelling, or non-verbal transmissions.

The literature of social norms that influence or play a role in women's participation and economic empowerment shows that women and men tend to operate or be productive in different economic spheres due to the gendered norms that define what is an acceptable set of roles and behaviours (Sebstad and Manfre 2011; Mudege et al 2016). Social norms are transmitted and learned from childhood and then perpetuated or reproduced in adulthood through self-regulation and recognition of the judgements of others. Major events such as conflicts, political instability or economic shocks that for example, lead to high male mortality or unemployment can change perceptions of what is acceptable or unacceptable activity for women and force a change in attitudes towards women who engage in traditionally male-focused responsibilities or male-dominated activities. New influences such as alternative role models in the media can also shift points of reference for behaviour. In the context of markets and value chains, social norms are more commonly reflected upon, because of how they can constrain women's economic empowerment and limit women's participation – but they may also present opportunities or play a neutral role.

The literature on gendered social norms and market systems discusses two related issues: firstly, the fact that social norms generated and maintained at the intra-household and extra-household levels affect women economic activities (Kevane 2000: 90). Secondly, at the intra-household level, the fact that the unitary model is no longer adapted to describe how power relationships between men and women affect economic outcomes; meaning that this must be replaced with a "bargaining model" in which women and men negotiate income and expenses (see Doss 2006, 2013).

Within their own households, women are often less involved in economic decisions and relegated to housework and childcare. Women's participation in markets is also significantly impeded by gendered division of intra-household expenditure responsibilities. In many rural and urban households, it is not uncommon for many women to receive a daily allowance from their husband to purchase cereals and condiments for the entire family (Doss 2013). Gender norms surrounding how much influence women can exercise over decisions about expenditure, savings and investment, can also affect household's budget. Men and women tend to exhibit different budgetary priorities. While women are expected and commonly prioritise the food needs of their households, men can decide to spend a considerable part of the household's budget on ostentatious expenses, such as religious pilgrimages, weddings and baptisms; without being subjected to harsh judgements or any negative repercussions from their community for such decisions.

Social norms that govern women's household responsibilities tend to be deeply entrenched and are often described as sticky because they are generally accepted as cultural or natural. There also tends to be real and often high negative repercussions from the community that tend to reinforce gendered social norms in the household. These types of "sticky" norms are critical to identify because they often represent some of the toughest and most inflexible constraints that shape what and how women engage in economic activity (Bicchierri et al 2014).

Social norms that define the type of household work men can engage in and those that are unacceptable, such as cooking and cleaning, impact greatly on the time that women can spend on other activities (Bicchierri 2016). Unpaid household care work place a persistent and most often inflexible time burden on women. These household expectations tend to be supported by perceptions that care roles and responsibilities by natural order belong to women and social sanctions are quite severe for women that flaunt the norm and even for men (in terms of reputation and public image) that may take on more household care work.

Norms that regulate decision-making authority in the home also have major consequences for women's economic agency. In many contexts, men are given the final say in business decision-making or perceived as better than women in making business calculations. In some contexts, there are social pressures that ensure that men are publicly recognized or expected to make all decisions outside the household because of expectations placed on them to be providers and breadwinners while being perceived to be more business savvy. Deviations from these masculine norms, which can leave the impression that a man is not the provider or final decision-maker in his household, can bring shame upon his entire family – even when there is joint decision-making at the household level (Neema 2015).

Social norms that define household roles and responsibilities can also define what is acceptable for a woman to do but also when, where and for how long. The risk of social sanctions from the community such as gossip, public shaming, exclusion, community pressure, intimidation or even violence (or the threat of violence) for deviating from a gendered norm, contribute to women's decisions to not participate in certain market practices or behaviours even though it may make economic sense. Negative social norms and the social sanctioning of non-compliance are key factors in maintaining unequal access to power, resources, opportunities and results for women. For example, norms that limit women's right to land ownership tend to consequently suppress women's access to finance and other beneficial resources as well as improved livelihoods. In this way, the sanctions that underpin social norms and the "community policing" of behaviour contributes to maintaining the status quo of power relations. Thus, social norms incorporate "an expected agreement, or belief that the agreement exists, on the content of the norm and an enforcement of such agreement or belief by whoever holds power" (Muñoz Boudet et al 2014:24).

Consequently, married women tend to spend long hours doing domestic work and find themselves in the informal sector or working part-time just to balance their work outside the home with household care responsibilities. In their role in farming activities, women are more likely than men to have smaller, garden-sized plots or grow less profitable crops. Women's farm labour is also more likely to be undervalued or underestimated because jobs such as weeding are viewed as "family labour" or domestic responsibilities" and not necessarily

productive activities (Twyman et al 2015). The latter conditions are not directly due to social norms but are reinforced by gendered norms such as the segregation of sectors and tasks based on those perceived to be appropriate types of work for women and men due to cultural factors, biological attributes, safety concerns and household care responsibilities assigned to women. This type of gender segregation has implications for sectors such as cattle-rearing because of the responsibilities of daily care of cows, the necessity for land larger than the homestead and the common practice of transhumance which increases the number of interactions with strangers.

Social attitudes can also have an influence on access to technical advice and market opportunities. Maradi region and adjacent areas of Nigeria are relatively conservative in their social traditions. For example, in some villages in Kano, women are not permitted by their husbands to leave the family home, even to sell produce in the local village market. So, women's chance to engage in commerce in these households is restricted to what they can sell from their home to neighbours who are likely to be growing much the same crops and not need to buy much.³

While the discussion on gendered norms is critical to understanding market systems and is an important focus of this study, other variables such age, ethnicity, social status, levels of education, family background and so on, also affect economic activity and outcomes.

Box 1. Gender, trade and social network analysis

Formal approaches that map and model social structure have gained increasing attention in the policy field over the last decade (Bloom et al. 2008, Schiffer 2012, IRC 2016). Known as social network analysis (SNA), such approaches provide a visualization of the ties between individual actors, groups or organizations and highlight their structural constraints and opportunities. They are well suited to study informal social structures in which numerous actors are connected across formal administrative levels or state boundaries, such as policy networks or trade networks (OECD/SWAC 2017).

In addition to being an innovative scientific tool, formal network approaches can also explain differences in social capital between individuals and underscore structural causes of marginalization. This is particularly relevant for development and humanitarian organizations that implement public awareness and advocacy strategies around women's participation in markets.

Thus far, however, only a handful of studies have formally addressed how social networks were patterned by gender in Sub-Saharan Africa (see Adams et al. 2002, Caudell et al. 2015, Mekonnen et al. 2017). Except for the ongoing Cities and Borders program of the OECD Sahel and West Africa Club, none have specifically dealt with trade issues. In West Africa, the rare existing studies that have mapped trade networks (but do not consider gender issues) show that social networks can, on the one hand, positively contribute to labour market outcomes

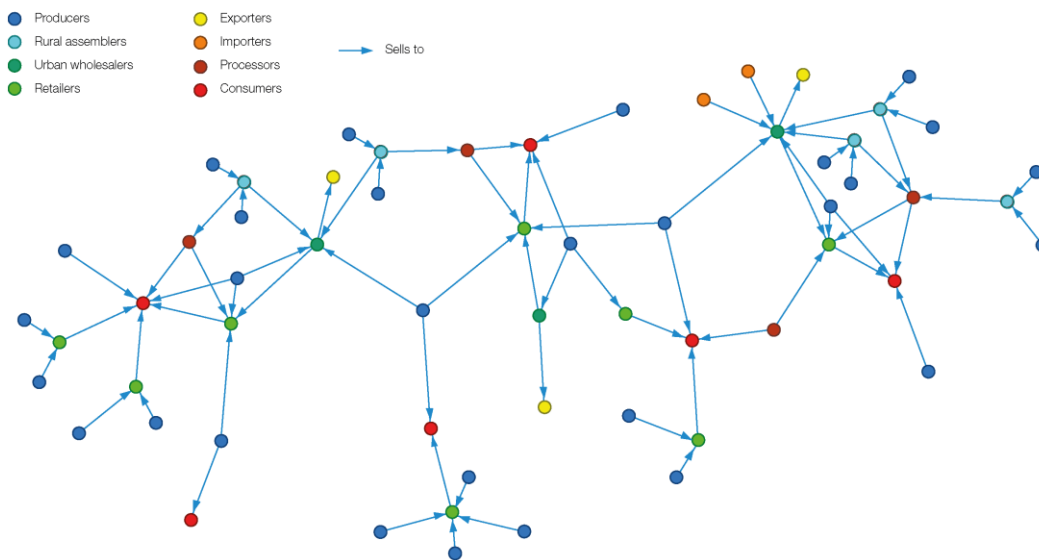
³ There is scope for a follow up study to deeply investigate communities where such restrictive social attitudes imposed an evident restraint on access to technical advice or market opportunities.

but on the other, present a social burden for those who face many social obligations (Walther 2015, Kuepié et al. 2015). The paucity of data on women's trade networks can first be explained by the fact that SNA has primarily been developed in Europe and North America and has only been recently applied to African issues and contexts. Network surveys are also time-consuming and costly because they often require interviewing entire populations rather than samples. Finally, several decades of panel surveys have created a habit of collecting data on the attributes of the actors (age, education etc.) rather than on the actual ties between them.

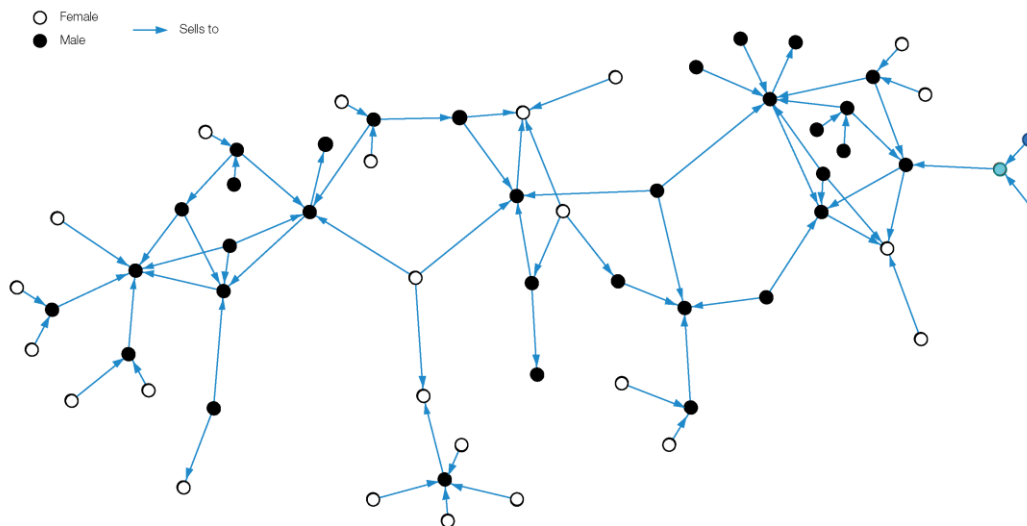
Gender – along with age, race, and ethnicity – is nonetheless a field of policy intervention that could benefit from more formal approaches to networks. Gender differences are indeed a powerful factor structuring social relationships on the continent, where the contributions of men and women to production and trade systems are often gender-specific. SNA could first help verify and visualize to what extent women and men tend to have distinctive cropping patterns or responsibility for different types of livestock, tend to different livestock, or sell different types, volumes and qualities of products along food value chains (see Figure below). Studies conducted in a variety of disciplinary and geographical contexts strongly support gender-specific differences and demonstrate that men and women tend to manage their social networks in ways that reflect substantially different social norms (Brashears 2008, Stehlé et al. 2013, Szell and Thurner 2013).

A relational approach could explain how gender inequalities are reproduced through social norms that limit women's choices and opportunities. Women's participation in markets is significantly shaped by a gendered system of relationships, at the household and community level, that constraint their access to information and resources as crucial as price and market conditions, new consumer demand, or news of border closures or existence of untapped market opportunities (World Bank 2012). Understanding how gender is embedded in a wider system of socially mediated norms and practices and how the relations defining men and women's position in the social structure may cause disparities is therefore of the highest importance for development and humanitarian agencies such as the WFP.

Supply chain by role



Supply chain by gender



Source: The box builds on a recent working paper drafted for the World Food Programme by Walther and Renk (2017).

African societies commonly display complex divisions of labour that greatly vary from one region to another and from matrilineal to patrilineal societies. Gender production roles are also rarely fixed and often experience changes that illustrate shifts in power relations between genders and between social groups (Byfield 2002). In Ghana, for example, Akan men and women were both involved in production and trade before colonial powers monopolized import and export trade. As colonial authorities introduced new crops and technologies, men increasingly worked in large cocoa plantations as wage labourers while women, who lacked access to land and formal educational qualifications, embraced informal trade (Clark 2000, 2010). Across West Africa, male and female labour contribution to food production tends to

be demonstrably gender-specific (World Bank 2008). Women are heavily involved in the horticulture sector and in the production of cereals, roots and tubers, such as millet, sorghum, cowpeas, maize, groundnuts, cassava, rice and yam (Gnisci 2016). Women and men also tend to have distinctive cropping patterns and often own different types of livestock. Additionally, women and men are frequently cultivating the same crops, but on different fields. Both can also cultivate different varieties of the same crops depending on whether it is ultimately destined to be consumed by the household or a high-yield variety to be sold on the market. Therefore, the description of cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, wood, pineapple and kola nuts as “male” crops, while subsistence crops as feminine, while common, is probably an oversimplification (Doss 2002).

One of the distinctive features of West African households is that men and women generally retain ownership or have specific rights on the pieces of land they cultivate and on the livestock they breed. As a result, households tend to have distinct sources of earnings and do not form a single production or consumption unit. The occasional sharing of incomes with other members of the household is regulated by social norms, events, and the bargaining power of each household member (Doss 2013). The revenues generated by different crops can be used to buy different goods and respond to various external shocks, such as droughts or economic recessions. In Côte d’Ivoire, for example, income from yam, the major food crop cultivated by men, translates into education, staples and overall food consumption, while income from cash crops cultivated by both men and women is associated with strong expenditures in alcohol, tobacco and prestige goods. Income from crops predominantly cultivated by women, such as coconut, plantain, oil palm, taro, sweet potato, vegetables, banana, fruit trees and some minor crops are used to purchase food (Duflo and Udry 2004).

Interestingly, West African women traders enjoy more autonomy than their counterparts in other parts of Africa but marked differences can nonetheless be observed across the region. Along the Gulf of Guinea, married women generally have the right to earn and control an income independently from their husband, whether communities are patrilineal or matrilineal, and to trade in public places (Clark 2010: 26). The situation is more heterogeneous in the Sahel, where women have been described as either highly independent or secluded and confined to their domestic courtyards, especially among Hausa Muslim communities (Joseph 2005, Rahman 2008). However, there can be differences in attitudes towards women’s independence and freedom to engage in social and economic contacts within a region, local community or even from one household to another. For policymakers and humanitarian organisations working in the region, it is very important to bear in mind that a multiplicity of gendered norms is common at the micro level in West Africa.

Across West Africa, the fact that women have less access to property, agricultural equipment and credit than men confines many of them to less productive sectors. Women’s inability to access and make use of agricultural resources according to their own needs constitutes a source of risk which adds to the already uncertain business environment of West Africa. Women’s access to markets is also constrained by the lack of proper and individual means of transportation and storage. Because of male gendered transport ownership many women have no other choice on market days but to walk long distances to sell their products, leaving their villages before the sun rises, while men ride their bikes or share taxis to the city.

Women are particularly numerous in post-harvest activities, whether it is in relation with processing or distributing foodstuffs. They process cereals, nuts, roots, tubers, fruits and vegetables; poultry, small livestock, and, more rarely, meat; handle and process fish (FAO 1997, Gnisci 2016). A significant part of this work is conducted within the family compound rather than in organised workshops or factories, which tend to make women's transformation activities less visible than men's.

4.3. Market distribution and infrastructure

Women and men often sell different types, volumes and qualities of products than men, sometimes to different customers and at different times (Harriss-White 2000). Generally, women tend to be overrepresented in the sale of fish, agricultural and food products destined for the local market. Many of the commodities sold by women, such as staple food and cooked food, can be prepared domestically and/or are perishable. They have a low value added, generate lower financial return and require little capital and credit (WFP 2017a).⁴ Men tend to trade in products and sectors that require larger investments and a more international market, such as hardware, foreign currencies, electronics, and other agricultural and manufactured goods imported from the world market. The sale of some products, such as meat and metals, is often restricted to lower-status individuals within each ethnic group. On the Gaya market in the Republic of Niger, for example, only maize is sold by both sexes. Fruits, vegetables, fish, condiments, retail grains, *garri* and yams are exclusively sold by women, while men sell meat, plastics, general food, new and used textiles, hardware, cosmetics and shoes (Walther 2008).

Gender-specific roles are learned at a very early age: Unaccompanied young boys and girls walk around the market, selling pieces of sugar cane, oranges and doughnuts prepared at home or in the shops of their parents, each according to dominant gender expectations. Spatially, men and women traders occupy different parts of the market in West Africa because of gendered notions of propriety in the public spaces of the marketplace. Many small-scale women traders lack a proper shop and conduct their business sitting on stools in the sun, or hawking as street vendors, without access to electricity, water and sanitation. These women are particularly vulnerable to city or state initiatives that aim at clearing markets from street vendors.

The fact that the mobility of women is more constrained than that of their male counterparts does not necessarily mean that all women are confined to small-scale retailing. West African women have a long history of long-distance trade and have been historically more involved in trade than women in other part of Africa (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1994). Their contribution to the trade economy was particularly important in urbanized regions where trade had pre-colonial roots, as in the Yoruba, Dahomey, Ashanti kingdoms, as well as in Sierra Leone and Senegal. During the colonial period, many women traders benefited from the rapid growth of capital cities and from the existence of a new urban workforce to trade fish and agricultural products, such as palm oil, cotton, kola nuts, and shea butter (Chuku 1995, 2005). Other women specialized in the trade of pottery, basketry, and beer and other products that had

⁴ This may be because more women start out in business at the micro- or small-scale level due to numerous reasons that may include availability of time, household responsibilities, business experience, assumptions about women's ambitions and abilities.

not been monopolized by the Lebanese-Syrian trade diaspora, such as textiles, a sector that has remained dominated by women until today.

Women were quick to adapt to the new “spatial order” brought by colonization (Howard and Shain 2005). The introduction of steamships, railways, trucks and the telegraph in the colonial period contributed to reorganize trade patterns along the Gulf of Guinea. Many Krio women from Sierra Leone took advantage of the new means of communication to export kola with distant colonies such as Nigeria, The Gambia and Senegal; expanding their trade network to previously untapped markets (Howard 2014). In the Nigerian city of Abeokuta, Yoruba women used the new infrastructure, credit, technologies and availability of European cloth during the early decades of the 20th century to invest in the local dyeing industry (Byfield 2002). Many Mina, Ewé, Akan, Yoruba and Fon women living in societies where agricultural work was primarily conducted by men left their region of origin to establish new businesses in cities where local women were little involved in trade, such as Abidjan (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1994). In Accra, the importation of European goods during the colonial period also brought major changes to women’s economic activities. As many women went out of farming and embraced trade, they became less dependent on the social hierarchies based on age that regulated the kin mode of production and increasingly constrained by sexually segregated structures on which they had little control (Robertson 1984). The scale of their business and their power to recruit labour was considerably diminished by the introduction of new capital-intensive modes of production and marketing, resulting in a decline of their economic options.

Since the 1980s, West African traders have taken advantage of the liberalization of trade, a growing urban demand and the withdrawal of European commercial houses to establish long-distance trade network within the region and beyond. Women trade networks play a crucial role in supplying regional markets with agricultural and manufacturing products from the world market (Boone 1994). The most documented example is the one of the Togolese Nana-Benzenes, who have built considerable fortunes by relying on exclusive resale rights negotiated with European commercial houses. Their monopolistic situation on the textile market gradually eroded during the 1980s, owing to the liberalization of the Togolese economy and the progressive democratization of the country, which called into question the close links that the Nana-Benzenes had built with President Gnassingbé Eyadéma. Today, the West African market is flooded with cheap imitations of European-produced wax prints from China and the Nana-Benzenes have been supplanted by new generations of businesswomen who deal directly with Chinese manufacturers (Sylvanus 2013).

The emergence of wealthy traders enriched through international trade has also led to the establishment of clientelist networks linking traders, politicians and religious leaders. In Senegal, Niger or Nigeria, for example, many large traders who prospered in the rice, sugar and wheat trade have close ties to the state and to Islamic brotherhood (Boone 2006, Benjamin and M’Baye 2012). These connections are even more important today as large traders no longer merely trade in the region and with Europe but have developed intercontinental business relations with the Middle East, South East Asia and the United States (Bredeloup 2012). In Senegal, for example, women entrepreneurs have contributed to open new trade routes to Arabia, China, Brazil and the rest of the world (Diallo 2014).

4.4. Consumption and nutrition

In recent decades, food consumption and nutrition patterns have experienced major changes due to urbanization and the growing importance of non-agricultural activities in rural areas. Combined with strong population growth, changing consumer preferences and rising incomes, urbanization has profoundly transformed the West African food economy. Rural and urban households consume a greater variety of products than before. They are more attentive to quality, freshness, health risks and the nutritional properties of the products they eat, leading manufacturers to give more careful attention to packaging and advertising. These changes do not only concern imported products such as rice or chicken, but more and more locally produced maize, roots and tubers, such as cassava, yams and sweet potatoes. The demand for processed food that is easy to prepare and quick to consume is far from being limited to a few capital cities. It has spread across the region, from the Gulf of Guinea to the Sahel, and from wealthy households to most income groups (Staatz and Hollinger 2016).

For African women, the pace of urbanization has meant more opportunities but also continued limitations (Sheldon 1996). On the one hand, cities have allowed women to develop less traditional family configurations, establish new forms of businesses and be more involved in social, religious and political movements. By moving to cities, many women can engage in professional activities in ways that would have been unimaginable in the rural areas. Better access to health care, family planning and education in cities has also expanded some women's family choices. Yet, women's work opportunities are still heavily constrained by their marital situation, their lower level of education and religious norms that limit equal opportunity with men. As a result, women are generally underrepresented in the formal sector of the economy and confined to risky and lowly-paid occupations such as street vendors.

Finally, another emerging trend in West African food systems is the spread of non-agricultural activities in rural areas. Jane Jacobs' (1969) controversial assertion, more than 40 years ago, that the rural economy is being transformed by urban change, and not the other round, appears to be coming true in West Africa. As value chains develop and new agribusiness emerge, more and more people work in the processing, distribution and marketing of food products. Food is also increasingly purchased through markets rather than produced by the households, even in rural areas, leading West Africa to steadily shift "from a subsistence-based economy to a market economy" (Allen and Heinrigs 2016: 8). These changes could potentially have an impact on women's economic activities by focusing on high-value and high-potential food crops (Gnisci 2016).

4.5. Legal systems and supporting institutions

The laws and institutions that influence the role that women can play in agriculture and the rural economy in northern Nigeria and southern Niger are derived from both customary and Islamic (*sharia*) law, and the modern legislation introduced under the authority of formal 20th or 21st governing structures. Moreover, while the Republic of Niger is a single entity for the

purposes of legislation, Nigeria is organized on a federal model, which grants the individual states significant latitude to introduce certain legislation.⁵

In theory, laws provide a clear framework for women to acquire land. Under Islamic law they can inherit, albeit only half the share allocated to male siblings, while under the law of the modern secular Nigérien state they inherit a share equal to male family members. Few Nigérien avail themselves of this.

Pressure from a woman's family often blocks the route to land inheritance for fear that a woman will marry and her land will then pass to the family of her husband (Bron-Saïdatou and Yankori, 2016). Women's ability to secure access to land in line with the rights they have on paper can be further hampered by the strength of community traditions. In many societies, this is an aspect of village life in which men tend to dominate, and this tendency can be further reinforced by the predisposition to regard land as something that has an almost sacred or mystical value, and in relation to which men enjoy an almost pre-ordained societal status – in parts of Senegal, for example. Often, women are pressured into handing over their land rights to a husband or other family member (Charlier et al. 2014).

The difficulty that women face in securing ownership to property in line with their legal rights is compounded by the social and economic pressures pushing them towards the margins of land access at a time when population growth is intensifying the competition for land (Doka and Monimart 2003). Moreover, this gap between the law and reality is a phenomenon even seen in women's access to senior jobs in the public service. In theory, women in Niger can use the courts to secure their equal rights to land under modern law; but *sharia* is becoming more predominant.

Women make a vital contribution to the rural economy in Nigeria as farmers, labourers and traders but have less access than men to land and financial assets; agricultural inputs and services as well as agriculture-related employment opportunities. Between 60 to 79 per cent of the rural work force are women but men are five times more likely to own land (FAO 2008). In northeast Nigeria, women own only 4 per cent of land, while they own just over 10% in the South-East and South-South of the country (British Council 2012). According to the FAO (2008), Nigerian women farmers have just 26.7 per cent of access to chemical inputs compared to their male counterparts; just 23 per cent of extension services goes to women, 21 per cent of credits, 16 percent of landownership and just 26 percent of storage facilities.

Land insecurity is a common experience for Nigerian women. Nigeria's property and land tenure laws do not directly discriminate against women, yet they are less likely to have opportunities to own land through direct purchase. Nigerian women commonly obtain land rights through patrilineal succession - marriage and inheritance - but these conditions of access are unreliable and prone to reversal either by divorce, separation, widowhood or cultural beliefs associated with women's altered relationship status to men. Above all, the male-gender-based land rights of women as wives or daughters do not often extend to outright ownership. Only a handful of Nigeria's 36 federal states have enshrined equal

⁵ Such as many aspects of *sharia* law which was reintroduced in 12 northern Nigerian states between 1999 and 2003.

inheritance rights into law allowing customary laws that stipulate that only men have the right to own land to remain unchallenged legally.

In formal legal terms, Nigeria's 1978 Land Use Act nationalized all land and vested authority over it in the federal government. Despite this theoretical cover, access to land is still governed by a range of *sharia* and local governance practices and in many communities, women's right to land is regarded as secondary to that of men when decisions are taken at the local level. The prevalence of *sharia* in northern states does offer women a route to outright land ownership through divorce, but levels of female ownership are still much lower than male land ownership – and the gap is particularly wide in the northern states (British Council 2012). In northern Nigeria's Katsina State, for example, women may more easily secure legal access to land, by inheritance or even gifts, yet social, cultural or religious factors may inhibit the ability to cultivate the land themselves (Sada and Mohamed 2013). The experiences and practices observed and collected during field research confirms these realities.

The enforcement of land rights also poses a real challenge for women living in rural communities, often distant from large towns where courts sit and perhaps intimidated by the administrative requirements and formalities that surround court proceedings. To meet the need for a local level, easily accessible structure to rule on land disputes and related matters, Niger has developed a system of Land Commissions operating at area, district and sometimes even village level (Refepa 2016). Of course, other forms of land tenure are also available: women may be able to rent land, or they may be granted usage rights, for example. As Bron-Saïdatou and Yankori (2016) note, Nigérien law even empowers local land commissions to compulsorily transfer land that is not being used to someone else who can make use of it.

However, this is still only a transfer of usage rights and not a transfer of ownership. Moreover, without permanent ownership women farmers may refrain from making strategic investments that would improve the land, guard against environmental degradation or boost production capacity but which are expensive – such as sinking a well (Bron-Saïdatou and Yankori 2016) – or will only deliver benefits over the longer term, such as planting trees for fruit or firewood. Even where their tenure of the land is secure, other factors can sometimes inhibit women farmers from making the most effective use of it. For example, in some cultures where men use draft oxen to plough, women rarely do so. Studies in Ghana and Nigeria have found that men are more likely to use mechanised methods (Ajadi et al. 2015).

Huge gender disparities also remain in the representation of women. Despite Nigeria's large female population, for example, only four percent of Nigeria's lawmakers are female. Nigeria has the lowest number of female parliamentarians in sub-Saharan Africa and ranks 133rd for female political representation in the world. In 2015, a bill to protect women's rights against gender discrimination in education and employment was rejected by Nigeria's lawmakers. The bill called for the elimination of discrimination against women in marriage and the protection of widows and children with regards to inheriting a deceased husbands' property and assuming legal custody of their children.

As outlined above, much of the literature on issues relating to rights and law highlights the gap between rights that exist in formal terms, and the practical reality of whether they are

respected in the real lives of women in Nigeria and Niger, and whether accessible mechanisms are available through which they can secure the application of their rights. Also, worth noting are the other factors that may inhibit women's ability to take full advantage of the rights they have – such as access to agricultural technology, legal advice and the courts or, even access to land itself, where this is in short supply.

5. Survey findings of women economic actors in Kano-Katsina-Maradi

5.1. Demography and education

The survey was conducted on a sample of professionally active women between 18 and 70 years of age, with an average age of 44 years. The most represented age group is women aged 40 to 60 (49%), followed by women aged 20 to 40 (46%). These women have a professional experience in agriculture and trade of 16 years in Niger and nearly 13 years in Nigeria on average. These high values, comparable to other groups of small traders observed on the Niger-Nigerian border (Kuepié et al. 2015), are likely due to the fact that most women in the region are involved in agriculture and trade from an early age.

In the Maradi region, almost two-third (64%) of the women surveyed have never attended school and 15% have received an Islamic education (Figure 5). Women with a primary and secondary degree of education represent 11% and 9% of our sample respectively. These rates are lower than the regional and national average (République du Niger 2009, 2016). The situation is noticeably different in Nigeria where the women surveyed are thus both more and less educated than the regional average observed in Katsina and Kano states (Figure 5). More than 76% of the women surveyed have received no formal education, either because they have never attended school (71%) or because they attended Koranic (Islamic) schools (5%). Only 4% went to primary school, 3% to secondary school and 17% went beyond high school.

Literacy levels in Nigeria reflect the same high numbers and regional disparities. The national female literacy rate is around 51 per cent but literacy among northern Nigerian women is as low as 5 per cent in some of the region's 19 federal states. Literacy among young women aged 15-25 years in the northeast and northwest is less than 50 per cent in most states – Sokoto has the lowest at 11 percent - compared with rates as high as 90.1 per cent in some southern states (National Bureau of Statistics 2015). According to the World Bank (2012), an urban child – boy or girl – from an affluent background averages 10 years of schooling while poor rural Hausa girls spend less than 6 months in a classroom. The impact of such low levels of literacy and education among northern women on agricultural development in the region tends to be negative and quite substantial. On an individual level, low literacy affects personal development, confidence and advancement, while wider consequences include, low productivity and poor economic growth.

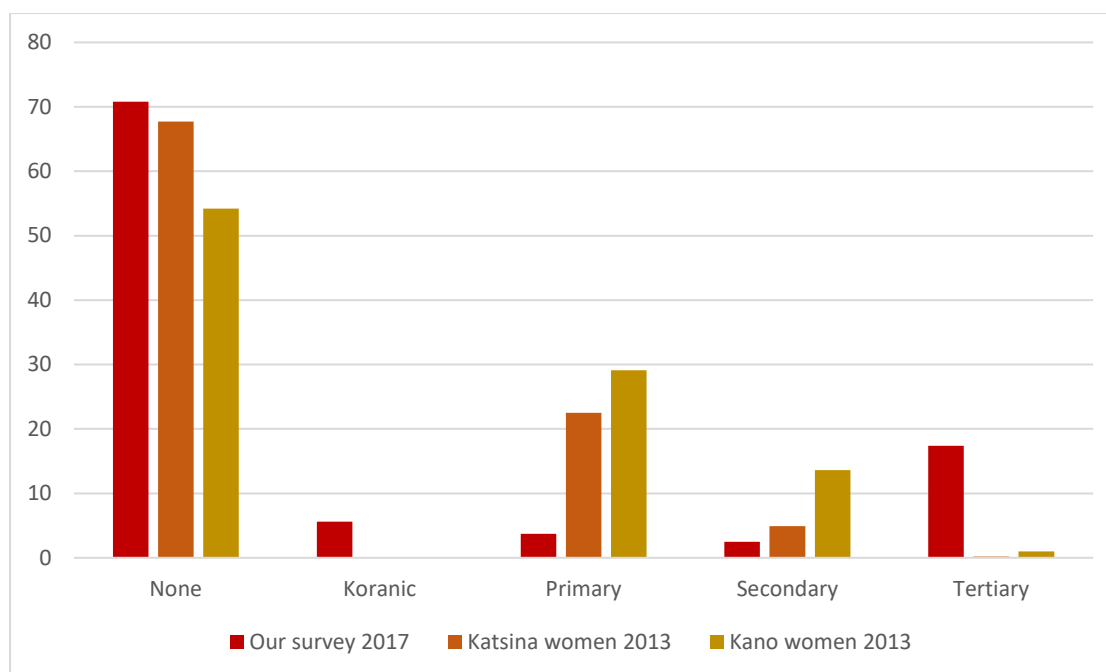


Figure 5. Educational attainment of the female population in Katsina-Kano, in percentage

Sources: Authors' survey, 2017 and National Population Commission 2014.

Interviewed women report having an average of 6.5 children in Niger and 5.6 children in Nigeria, a figure below the average of the Maradi region and Katsina (7.4) and Kano (6.8) states in 2013 (République du Niger 2010, NPC 2014). The clear majority of women (93% in Niger, 86% in Nigeria) have at least one living child, while the maximum is 12. They report an average of 3.4 children under the age of 15 years in Maradi and 1.7 in Katsina-Kano. These very high figures are hardly surprising in the Sahel, a region marked by record fertility rates and, consequently, an extremely young population.

Such high fertility rates are linked to a set of social and religious norms that promote early marriages, close births and discourage contraception use. Northern Nigeria has the highest fertility and teenage pregnancy rates in the country. In the northeast and northwest, roughly 32 per cent and 35 per cent of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 have had children. In Katsina and Kano states, the average age at first marriage for women aged 20-49 years was 15 years in 2013 (NPC 2014). In 2013, only 13 per cent of Nigerian women of reproductive age (15-49) were using any contraceptive methods and figures of modern contraception use from 2008 – which were just 11 percent – show that changes towards the uptake of family planning are happening very slowly (Guttmacher Institute 2015). Less than 1 per cent of northern Nigerian women use modern contraception despite programmes geared towards family planning in states like Katsina, Kano, Sokoto and Jigawa (NPC 2014). The clear majority (99%) of these women are Muslim. Only 14% of the women are single or widowed in Niger, and 12% in Nigeria, which is comparable with the regional average.

The level of education of women is, as elsewhere in West Africa, correlated with fertility. Thus, in both Niger and Nigeria, women who went beyond primary or secondary school are far less likely to be married than women who have never attended school (Table 2).

Table 2. Education attainment according to number of living children and marital status

Education	Children (number per woman)		Children under 15 (number per woman)		Married (percent)	
	Maradi	Katsina-Kano	Maradi	Katsina-Kano	Maradi	Katsina-Kano
No formal education	6.1	5.6	3.7	1.8	95	89
Primary or secondary	5.4	5.6	2.4	1.1	77	80
Tertiary	-	2.9	-	1.2	-	79
Total	6.1	5.2	3.4	1.7	92	86

Source: Authors' survey, 2017. Only the data for which education levels are known are presented.

Educated women also have an average number of children far lower than women who have only attended primary or secondary school or who have never received formal education. The difference is particularly marked in Nigeria where women with a tertiary level of education have twice less children (2.9) than illiterate women (5.6). Educated women also have fewer children under the age of 15 than the rest of the sample. In Nigeria, these results remain valid when the age of women is considered, whereas in Niger women with a primary or secondary level of education are much younger than the rest of the sample (Table 3).

Table 3. Education attainment according to age and experience

Education	Age (years)		Experience (years)	
	Maradi	Katsina-Kano	Maradi	Katsina-Kano
No formal education	41.4	44.1	17	12.9
Primary or secondary	30.8	41.8	13.7	8
Tertiary	-	43.9	-	14.2
Total	39.7	43.9	16.2	12.7

Source: Authors' survey, 2017. Only the data for which education levels are known are presented.

5.2. Land

The possibility of owning land to grow food products or commercial crops is crucial for Sahelian women. Our surveys show that more than three-quarter (76%) of the women surveyed in Niger and 40% of those surveyed in the Katsina-Kano area own land. The difference between the two case studies reflects the fact that traders are much more represented in the Nigerian sample while farming is the dominant activity in the Maradi region.

In Nigeria, the level of education does not appear to be a condition for access to land. On the contrary, women with no formal education are proportionately more likely (48%) to own their own plots than those with a secondary or higher level of education (22% and 38%). Leasing

of land does not seem related to differences in educational attainment either: almost 78% of educated or uneducated women have access to it. Similarly, the average age and the number of children per woman do not seem to correlate with access to land (Table 4, 5).

Table 4. Access to land according to education attainment

	No formal education (percent)		Primary or secondary (percent)		Tertiary (percent)
	Maradi	Katsina-Kano	Maradi	Katsina-Kano	Katsina-Kano
Own land	76.9	47.8	72.7	22.2	38.1
Do not own land	23.1	52.2	27.3	77.8	61.9
Rent land	21.1	78.9	33.3	33.3	91.5
Do not rent land	78.9	21.1	66.7	66.6	8.5

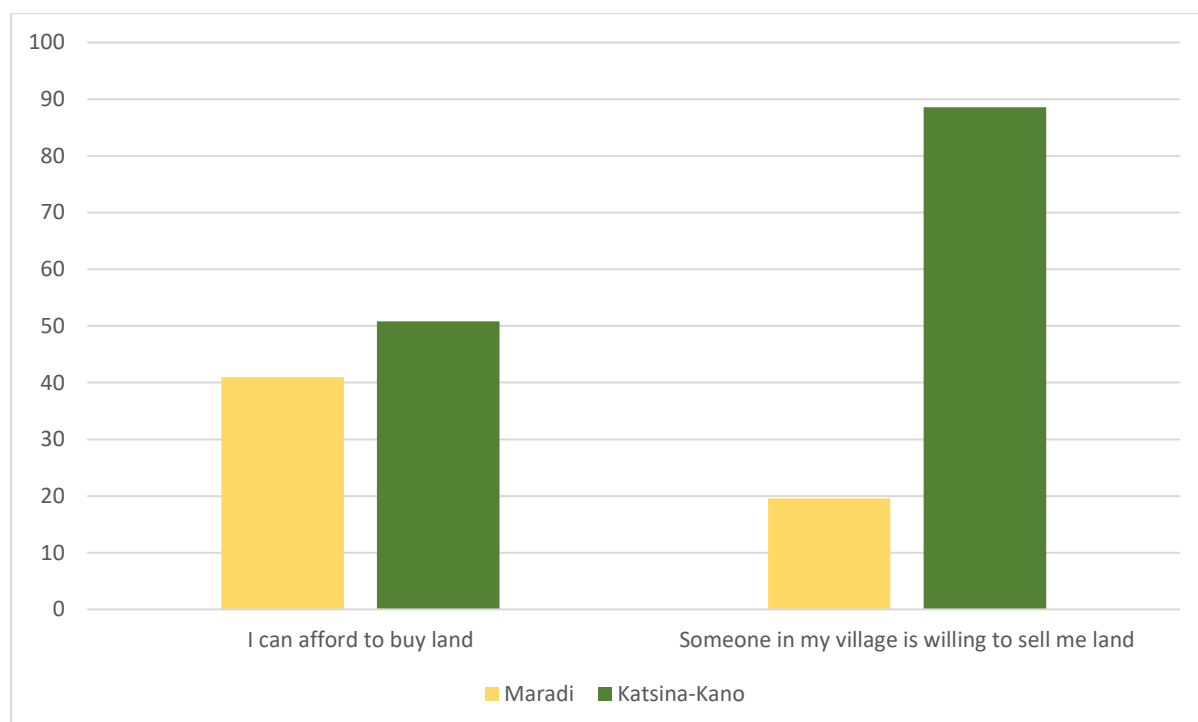
Source: Authors' survey, 2017. Only the data for which land ownership or rental of land are known are presented.

Table 5. Access to land according to age and number of living children

	Age (years)		Children (number per woman)	
	Maradi	Katsina-Kano	Maradi	Katsina-Kano
Own land	40.8	46.3	5.9	5.4
Do not own land	37.2	42.7	6.6	5.4
Rent land	43.9	42.8	5.9	5.1
Do not rent land	39.9	44.1	6.3	4.7

Access to land varies a great deal between the two case studies. In Niger, a large share (78%) of the surveyed women report that they cannot rent land. The situation is dramatically different in Nigeria, where a little less than half of the women report that they can rent land for several years (45%) or at least one year (38%). Only 17% of women report that they can rent land for a few months, for example during the rainy season. Similar contrasts are observed as far as land purchases are concerned. In Niger, 80% of the women say they would not be able to find a member of their village willing to sell land to them or to other women. In Nigeria, 89% of the women in our sample report that they would be able to purchase land if they wanted to (Figure 6). While the possibility of renting land seems within the reach of most women, almost half (49%) of the respondents say they do not have the financial means to buy land in Nigeria. The proportion is even higher in Niger (59%).

Figure 6. Proportion of women who can access land, in percent



Source: authors' survey, 2017.

5.3. Family and professional tasks

Women traditionally carry out a wide range of family tasks related to housekeeping, cooking, cleaning and raising children in the Sahel. A very high percentage (42%) of women surveyed in the Katsina-Kano region report that these tasks occupy them most of their day, a third indicate that they devote half of their day to family tasks, and another third just a few hours (Table 6). There are no significant differences between levels of education or marital status.

Table 6. Time spent on family tasks, in percent

	Maradi	Katsina-Kano
A few hours	68.8	28.4
Half of the day	12.5	29.8
Most of the day	18.8	41.8

Source: authors' survey, 2017.

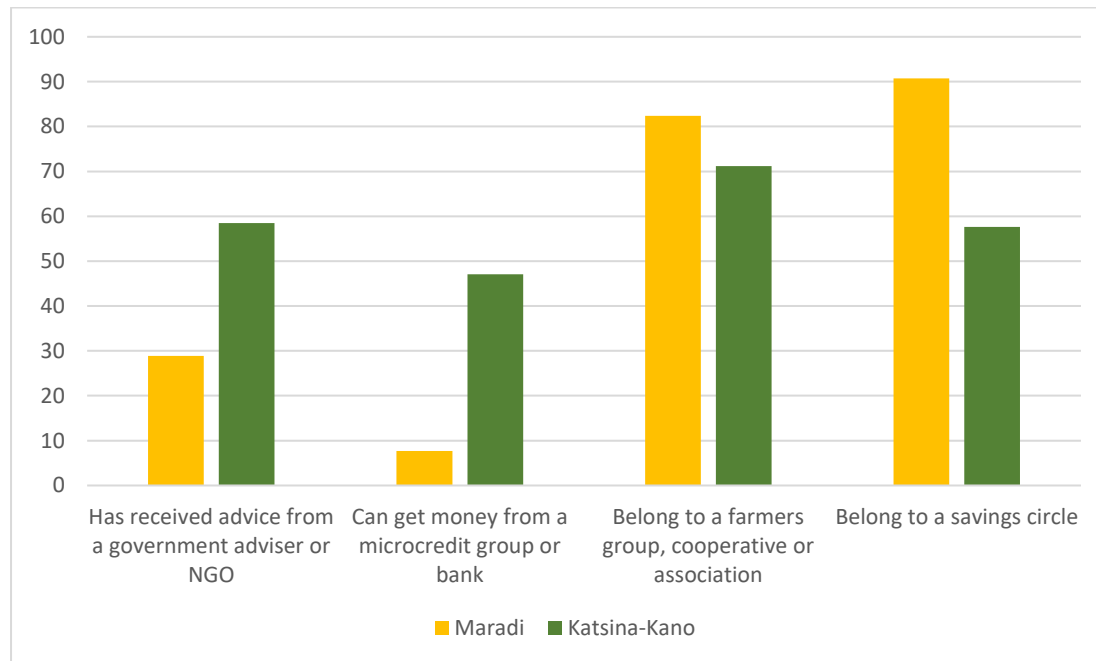
Women are also very active in the fields and in trade. Nearly 82% of women surveyed in the Katsina-Kano region report that they spend three hours a day on their farm or business and 14% more than half the day. In Niger, the average time spent on farming is 4.5 hours per day.

5.4. Advice and resources

The women surveyed in the Katsina-Kano region have received several types of financial or technical assistance. More than half (58%) of the Nigerian women report that they have been

helped by a government adviser or a non-governmental organization (NGO) on how to improve their farming techniques, much more so than their Nigerian counterparts, who are only a third of having received advice (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Advice, credit and professional membership, in percent



Source: authors' survey, 2017.

A little less than half of the Nigerian women (47%) have access to microcredit groups or banks to develop their business, again largely more than in Niger (8%). Membership in a farmers group, cooperative or association is also widespread in northern Nigeria (71%) and southern Niger (82%), as is membership in a saving circle (90% in Niger, 58% in Nigeria). These high scores partly reflect the fact that data were collected through women's associations.

Our results reflect major differences between southern Niger and Northern Nigeria, despite a common cultural and religious heritage. Women in the region of Maradi are far less educated and have more difficulties accessing land than women across the border in Katsina and Kano states.

6. Women, commercial value chains and development realities in Nigeria

The fast pace of urbanization in Nigeria has increased the demand for food and made even more urgent the need for economic prosperity and poverty reduction. Nigeria is central to West Africa's trade in agricultural products and a hub for the flow of goods between the coastal areas and the inland Savannah region. Large volumes of grains, vegetables and livestock grown and raised in the north move southward in exchange for roots, tubers and tree crops such as bananas and oranges that thrive in the favourable conditions of the middle-belt and wetter south.

With a population of over 12 million people, Kano state, northwest Nigeria, has the second highest state population in the country. Rapid urbanization in the last three decades has led to a spike in the demand for agricultural food products and the flourishing of Kano's markets – which are among the largest in Nigeria.⁶ This research focused on specialized agricultural markets in Kano but greater attention (due to reasons of access) was given to women traders at the Dawanau grains and tubers market, Yan Lemu fruit market and the Ungwar Uku livestock market. Women traders at the Kurmi and Sabon Gari market also actively participated in the study.

6.1. Dawanau Market in Kano

Nowhere is the interdependence between agricultural production and trade more obvious than at the large market of Dawanau located along Katsina road, roughly 20 kilometres from the Kano metropolis area (Ezedinma et al. 2007). Dawanau market is the largest grains market in Nigeria and potentially also in West Africa (FAO 2008); it has strategically placed Kano at the heart of northern Nigeria's economic development and the region's food security. All year round, the buying and selling of agricultural commodities from and to all parts of West and Central Africa demonstrates the key role the Dawanau market plays in the region's agricultural market system. Dawanau market is particularly known for Nigerian-grown cereals such as millet, sorghum and maize, as well as for wheat, sesame seeds, hibiscus, beans and groundnuts (Langyintuo et al. 2003, Mishili et al. 2009, Gambo 2016). These commodities are usually available all year round but each one experiences a peak supply period.

Dawanau is also an important hub in the cassava trade network which is traditionally cultivated in the south and middle belt of the country by small-scale farmers (Ospina-Patino and Ezedinma 2015). Cassava is now commonly consumed as cooked food by urban dwellers in the north of Nigeria as well as in other West African countries (Nweke 2002). Many West African women have embraced this demand and now work in the transformation and selling of *garri* and *attiéké*, two ready-to-eat processed cassava products. Despite its regional importance, the Dawanau market remains surprisingly understudied in policy and scientific literature. Relatively little is known of the complex network of formal and informal actors that make the food system resilient to climatic and political crises. Also, the role of women traders and their connections to Dawanau has until now gone largely unexplored.

Dawanau has about 35 commodity and non-commodity groups which are under the umbrella of the Dawanau Market Association. The market also has a transport and logistics operation which covers routes from Morocco to Sudan. According to the leaders of the market association, over 65 per cent of transactions that take place in the market are informal and thus poorly tracked or recorded.

⁶ Kano metropolis is the second largest commercial centre in Nigeria.



Members of the Dawanau international market association executive council (top row) and the study team in Kano. 13 July 2017.

Women entrepreneurs in the market operate out of their own stores dealing in staple products such as *garri*, rice, beans and yams, but they rarely travel outside of Nigeria by road to purchase commodities. Women who do engage in regional trade are more known for partnering with their male counterparts through financial investments and relying on them to organize imports or exports. One of the male leaders of the market association confirmed this saying “it is rare for women to travel outside Nigeria by road to buy commodities from other countries. At best, they invest money and men import the commodities. There was a woman I bought 500 bags of rice from for export, but she has never traveled out to deliver supplies.”⁷

Women traders at Dawanau market have their own leader but they are not fully represented at the highest level of political leadership in the market and therefore have very little input or influence over market decisions. The lack of representation within the executive committee of the association contributes to their exclusion from market-based interventions targeting Dawanau traders and limits their access to new opportunities. In the Dawanau focus group, the women traders claimed they had been excluded from supply orders by humanitarian agencies (including the WFP) for cereals and food stuff to feed victims of Boko Haram and internally displaced people in northeast Nigeria. They expressed their disappointment that no woman was involved in supplying food for deliver to the northeast and that the male-dominated executive committee was only willing to assemble supplies from male traders because the inclusion of women was not imposed by the buyers as a precondition for awarding these supply orders.

⁷ Focus group discussion with all-male executive committee of the Dawanau Market Association, 13 July 2017.

At Dawanau, it was evident that although the effort to purchase food in-country for the northeast humanitarian crisis is a commendable one, the execution of this intervention without consideration for gender dimensions, has unintentionally reinforced the status quo of inequality between men and women traders at the market. This example demonstrates that including women's voices more strongly in political decision-making in markets can lead to a more gender-sensitive environment which would support their empowerment in business. It also demonstrates that if market-based interventions are to be wholly effective and impactful on all traders; gender, age and power dynamics must be taken into consideration. Promoting and encouraging women's leadership in market groups and boards can be a significant way of raising women's influence on decisions that affect their lives.



Members of the study team with some Dawanau market women participants in the Dawanau market focus group discussion. 13 July 2017.

Women's leadership could be a central part of WFP's interventions in Nigeria with the view to boosting their participation and integration in market-based decision-making bodies. A lack of attention to women's political positions and inclusion in market associations such as at Dawanau can inadvertently reinforce their social and economic disempowerment. On a practical level, making the inclusion of women traders at Dawanau a condition for market-based interventions – especially contracts for government or donor funded food supply to conflict areas - could potentially make a quick impact in empowering female economic actors in this context by boosting their business.

Alongside issues of political exclusion, both male and female traders in Dawanau express dissatisfaction with their microfinance options and the politicization of government loans. Traders claimed that they encounter barriers to accessing credit because of high interest rates

from traditional banks (sometimes as high as 25 percent) but that Islamic banks which operate interest free loan policies, such as Jaiz bank, are similarly unappealing because many traders find the bank's processes cumbersome and discouraging. Traders also complained that the terms and conditions of most loans prevent them from taking advantage of market opportunities by restricting them to just the goods stated in the loan application.



Male labourers at Dawanau market sorting and bagging beans. 13 July 2017.⁸

6.2. Women rice producers of Chiromawa, Kano

Rice has become one of Nigeria's top food staples; demand was 5.2 million tons in 2016 and 2.3 tonnes was imported in the same year (FAO 2017). Nigeria is also one of the largest producer of rice in Africa and according to the FAO, the country's farmers derive more income from rice than any other cash crop (FAO 2017). There are roughly 1.43 million rice farmers in Nigeria producing the crop across 18 federal states; with Taraba and Kano hosting the largest number of rice clusters in the country – 17 each (GEMS4 2017).⁹ A total of 724,502 hectares of farm area is cultivated for rice production in Kano. While 499,736.8 hectares is cultivated in the wet season, 224,765.6 is used for dry season farming. Kano has 214,332 rice farmers who are active in the wet season and produce an average yield of 3.72 tonnes per hectare while 143,768 farmers work in the dry season, producing up to 4.28 tonnes per hectare in the dry season. Over 2.8 million tonnes of rice is produced by farmers in Kano in a year but the state but only 12,426 farmers operate within rice farming groups. Over 94.2 per cent of

⁸ There are sharp gender divisions of labour at the market. While men do most of the sorting, bagging and moving of produce, women sweep and clean the market.

⁹ Major rice producing states include Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Niger, Kwara, Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, Nasarawa, Kogi, Benue, Taraba, Abuja FCT, Ebonyi and Ogun - most them are in the north of the country.

rice farmers are outside rice farming groups.¹⁰ The Garun Babba¹¹ Women Farmers collective has over 15 members¹² who farm mainly rice but also grow maize, beans and groundnuts in and around Chiromawa. There are about 12,080 farmers in Chiromawa who cultivate about 36,240 hectares of land for wet season farming and slightly fewer farmers are involved in dry season farming on far less land – just 9,600 during the dry season (ibid.). The Garun Babba Women Farmers collective operate a collective farm of about 2 hectares for rice farming but individual members rent or own farmlands of about 1-2 hectares which are used to farm other crops.¹³ A few women in the focus group inherited their farmlands, while others had received land from their husbands solely for farming. Some women also farmed lands owned by their parents. Most of the women, however, lease the land on a yearly basis and complain that it is hard to lease a piece of land for longer because of high demand for fertile and well-watered farmland for rice close to their households and villages.

It is particularly problematic for women in the community because household demands on their time mean they cannot manage distant rice fields. During the rice farming season, some women have had experiences of farm owners returning their rent and asking them to leave the farm. In 2016, the cost for renting a hectare of farm land in Chiromawa was between N25,000 – N35,000 but the price rose by about 12 percent in 2017. The women tend to use their own or family land for maize and beans farming but need well-irrigated lands for growing rice on a large commercial scale. Where access to appropriate land is a challenge, women are hesitant to invest their limited resources in rice production.



Members of Garun Babba women farmers collective participating in a focus group discussion. 11 July 2017.

¹¹ In Garun Babba itself, there are about 13,214 rice farmers who cultivate an area of approximately 26,432 hectares in the wet season and 13,216 farmers who engage in dry season farming on an area of approximately 21,145.6 hectares in the dry season, according to GEMS4 2017.

¹² 15 members of the collective participated focus group discussions in Chiromawa on 11 July 2017.

¹³ About 5 members of the collective who participated in the focus group own a single hectare while 2 others have 2 hectares each.

The women farmers send their children to local markets to sell their farm produce, but they also sell directly to retailers. The Garun Babba women only supervise the farm work which is mainly carried out by hired labourers but most of the married women get help from their husbands and older male children on the farm. The women said that neither they nor their daughters engage directly in farming, because in that community females are not allowed to engage in manual labour. Instead, girls attend Islamic school each day of the week. Women in this community, however, were aware that girls in other communities directly work on farms. Husbands also play very important roles in the decision-making process and the women said they rely heavily on their husbands for financial and farming advice.

The Garun Babba women rice producers are involved in harvesting the rice grown on their fields and carry out some minimal processing at home. Domestic chores are carried out by female children during the harvesting period which typically takes up the early hours of the day. Most of the women said they usually finish their harvesting work by noon and their husbands do not prevent them from being involved in harvesting so long as proper arrangements are made to cover domestic duties.

The women's preference for home processing seems to have little to do with religious restrictions on Islamic women's movement but it is mainly because milling charges at the few functioning rice mills are high. On the collective farm, the women plant rice of better quality because of its commercial target and they have received training on how to clean this type of rice – called Isa Wali Rice by the locals – under the Growth and Empowerment in States (GEMS) programme, an employment project supported by Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Trade and Investment and funded by the World Bank and the UK's Department for International Development. Buyers of Isa Wali rice come from Kano city and neighbouring towns to purchase the high-quality rice, sold mainly by women, for up to 50 per cent more than other types of rice because of its superior standard. The Garun Babba women rice producers say they have not received any improved rice seedlings, fertilizers or loans and claim the training they received on rice processing was not targeted at them specifically. The association had learnt that training workshops were being held, so members were organized to attend.



Photo of some members of Garun Babba women farmers group with members of the research team after focus group discussions. 11 July 2017.

The women said their main challenge was dealing with pests and poor quality seedlings. They also complained of not getting farm advice from female technical experts which they would prefer. Because of religious norms surrounding interactions between men and women, many women are sensitive to how their personal interactions with male technical experts may be perceived. Group consultations and open workshops with male technical experts may attract less judgement; however, the preference for these women would be to have access to personalised advice from female extension workers. Because of their identification of pests and poor quality seedlings as a key challenge, the availability of regular farming advice and technical knowledge is particularly important to the Garun Babba women rice producers.

Box 2. “They give [the fertilizer and seedlings] to the men in town and we only hear about it”

“Nobody from the government or any association has ever brought us fertilizers and initially we had no idea how to get into all these groups that help people, or how to organise ourselves. This changed a few years ago when we formed this association. In the beginning, we had losses when we sold, like for rice [because] we sold lower than the cost price. Sometimes we profit[ed] sometimes we end up at a loss.

We still hear that fertilisers are being distributed for free from time to time but it hasn't gotten to us. They give it to the men in town and we hear about it. Our husbands don't get fertilisers either. They get angry that some of their friends get it without sharing it with them. We have also never received any loans. There is a mutual contribution we do among ourselves like a savings scheme but we've never had any experienced farmers to help us. Sometimes when we go to buy pesticides we ask the sellers how to use them and they teach us. We don't

have female farm experts to teach us. The men don't come to teach us [because] that is not our custom. That is why we just buy the pesticides. Our husbands sometimes buy pesticides from the market to help us but the problem is sometimes from the seedlings we get for planting, some of them are bad and the harvest turns out bad.”

Chiromawa-based women rice producers in focus group discussion, 11 July 2017.

5.4. Urban and rural Kano women's experiences in the agricultural economy

The biggest challenge for many of the Kano women farmers who grow maize, wheat, rice and beans, across both urban and – mostly – rural parts of Kano is related to their participation in dry season farming. The women said they usually dig their own wells and install diesel-powered pumps to supply water to their farms. One of the participants of the group discussion claimed that the seedlings they sometimes receive from the state government are often distributed late – in fact sometimes after the ideal planting season for the crop. For example, last year, the women claimed that seedlings were distributed to wheat farmers in December, 3 months after the ideal planting season had passed which caused them to have a poor harvest. Another farmer explained that she suffered a big loss in 2016 on her 6.5-hectare farm even though she tried to compensate for the planting late by investing in a longer period for irrigation. This was a significant financial investment for her but it did not lead to an increase in her productivity. Typically, an investment of N1.8 million should ordinarily yield N3 million (N1.2 million in profit). Because of the mass losses in 2016, some of the women who also had poor wheat harvests in 2016 have decided to withdraw from farming the crop to focus on rice.



Photo of farmers, marketers, traders and distributors after focus group discussions in Kano. 12 July 2017.

In the past, some of the women received government grants which included farm inputs. These grants and inputs are however, less regular and not delivered on time, which affects the quality of harvests. The women also said that disbursements were not always made to genuine farmers but to applicants with other livelihood needs. However, when harvests are poor – like they were recently because of late disbursement of grants and farm inputs – farmers are harassed by the government to return the funds or face charges in court. Promised farm equipment was presumably inaccessible even when the machines were available at the government offices. One farmer said she had an unexpectedly poor harvest and had to sell off the farm at a loss after using poor seedlings she had obtained from the government. Because of this experience, she has insisted she would no longer show any interest in government assistance for her farming business. Because of the difficulties of dealing with government, most of the women prefer to raise their own funds and steadily grow their business themselves.

Box 3. Women’s experiences with accessing government grants

“There are huge challenges with getting grants. You assume you will get the grant, and it would be sufficient to cater for all the labour needed from land preparation till harvest and even storage. But first, you buy [the loan application] form for N2,000 for a grant of N100,000; then you open a bank account with N2,000 and the running around. There are promises of rice mills, seedlings and fertilizer and the money. So, you assume the running around is little compared to the gains. It took me 4 months to run around, and then during Ramadan, we were summoned and given N25,000 for land clearing. But that only caters for one acre. However, you can’t even lease a plot and clear it for that amount, except you go way outside town. You also have to add up the cost of transport to and from the farm because these are costs that build up. In the end, we were told that the N25,000 was a loan, that we would be called up for the farm inputs. But there was silence till after the planting season was long gone even for dry season irrigation farming. You are better off utilizing your own funds to cater for the needs of your farm, rather than wait for the government. The entire process is politicized. When the announcements of our loans were finally made, we were told that the loans would be paid back with 13 bags of husked rice. But I declined and told them I wouldn’t pay back with my rice, because my seedling is a better breed [than what we received]. When I argued, they slashed [the loan] by half but, they didn’t even follow up. For wheat farmers, they were only given one bag of seedlings, no funds were given, no wheat mills, no water pumps, nothing even though these machineries were collected and kept at the government offices. A lady who harvested her wheat, sold off on the farm for N70,000 as the harvest was terrible, despite the funds expended on the farm the entire season. The lady was really perplexed and said on the farm that she would never show any interests in government grants again. So, for most women, we will rather gather funds on our own to start and grow gradually. That was how I started until I bought my own mill, water pump and other tools for the farm.

Kano-based female farmer, focus group discussion, 11 July 2017.

Some of the women who participated in the focus group said they rely on middlemen to market their farm produce while others hire trucks to transport the goods to the market for sale to bulk buyers. Women farmers with older children rely on these to market their produce.

All the women farmers at the group indicated that since commencing rice production, they organize in cooperatives. Typically, five women pool their resources together to split the cost for farm labour, purchase of seedlings, fertilizer and irrigation. They then harvest, thresh and share the threshed rice according to each person's contribution. Sometimes, buyers come to purchase from the farms which makes profit sharing easier, in other instances, the women organize transport for the produce to the market for sale. The domestic needs of members of the collective are also factored into the division of the harvested rice. Like the case of the Chiromawa rice producers, these women also only thresh the rice they grow and leave the milling of the rice to the middlemen and marketers. The inability of the Garun Babba Women Farmers Collective to engage in more modern and higher quality processing activities keeps these women at the lower side of the value chain and excludes them from achieving the kinds of higher profits that come through value addition.

Their operation as a collective has attracted the attention of the GEMS programme, which has given the group a grant to cultivate rice. The grant has enabled the women to expand their cooperative, which is now called the Tahama B. Rice Farmers Association and Processing, to 148 women and lease land for farming from their village head and other landowners in the village. The women also used the grant to employ the services of an accountant, farm labourers and to access training in dry season farming.

The association members said landowners are often reluctant to sell their land to women so they inflate the prices of land for women, placing land ownership further out of women's reach. The women also said they encounter problems when leasing land for both dry and rainy seasons and accused landowners of demanding two lease payments a year for each planting season. Consequently, the women are often under pressure from landowners to harvest very quickly or engage in dry season farming regardless of climatic conditions or their level of preparedness.

Box 4. "Seed distribution and availability is one of our biggest obstacles"

"My name is Hadiza Garba. I am a farmer, but I used to produce both during the rainy and dry season. Wheat is what I produce. Before my involvement in the wheat production I have been in the bakery business where I used the wheat to produce some cakes and snacks after mixing with sugar usually eaten among Hausa society. It is about seven years that I have been involved in wheat production.

Kura and Garun Mallam local governments in Kano state are the areas I used to farm because of the availability of the water drainages everywhere. But day in, day out the charge for hiring the land is getting and more than what a local farmer can afford. At first, they usually charge fifteen thousand naira for a hectare, then it increased to thirty, then thirty-five, last year they charge as much as fifty thousand. But this year the charge is now seventy to eighty thousand per hectare. We don't have any other alternative and we couldn't afford this amount, so we moved to a neighbouring field.

But, in farming, it is not always good to move from area to another land. It usually lead to low production in quality and quantity due to the newness of the land and other factors. When we shifted to another farm land, we faced the problem of water availability and

transportation. Seed distribution and availability is one of our biggest obstacles. Machines and equipment renting and labour wages are also problems we are facing when we shift from one land to another. We usually harvest thirty-five to forty sacks from one hectare but this year the story is sad for me, I just got four sacks per hectare! This type of profit will weaken others from joining farming.”

Kano-based female farmer in focus group discussion, 10 July 2017.

5.5. Women in the livestock trade in Kano

Women who engage in the livestock business in Kano tend to buy animals, fatten them for approximately seven weeks then sell them off for a profit. This type of livestock rearing can be combined with poultry and fish farming.

All the women in the focus group discussion who were involved in the livestock sector indicated they were all members of cooperatives that operated a mutual savings account to which they contribute agreed amounts to every week. When a member is not able to afford their weekly contribution, they are usually asked to carry out labour commensurate to the amount owed.

The livestock cooperatives typically operate a shed only when for jointly purchased livestock, smaller animals like goat and sheep are usually raised at home. Typically, commercial poultry farming requires a shed but less physical space is required than for cattle-rearing. Male labour is usually hired to care for the cattle and assist with heavy lifting, feeding and vaccinations at poultry farms.

Some of the women livestock traders indicated they had received grants from the previous Kano state government while others had received financial support disbursed by the federal government. Most of the women expressed reluctance to seek bank loans because they felt the requirements were cumbersome. Again, the common grievance related to unreasonable lease agreements and harassment from landowners who regularly threatened to take back lands leased for sheds or grazing or demanded extra payments for the women to continue using the same plot. Nearly all the women expressed a preference for owning land over leasing because of the frequency of erratic lease conditions. Also, many women said accessing government loans was often a tedious process and the requirements too cumbersome and expensive, making this option unappealing. There were often multiple administrative processes and it was usually unclear how much a loan applicant was to receive. When loans were disbursed, they were usually not sufficient or replaced with poor quality seedlings – even when the stated farming activity was livestock not crop cultivation.

Box 5. “Banks value a man’s business much more seriously than a woman”

“Generally, the banks, they don’t take women businesses seriously. Even if you have the records and what not, even if you produce all the papers, I tell you the general thing, they will value a man’s business much more seriously than a woman.

Perhaps there are other risks the banks are thinking of, when they are thinking about investing in a woman's business. They are thinking: 'Okay, beside the viability, what is the level of commitment of this woman to this business? If she has any kind of family problem or family issues or a relative becomes sick, she might have to abandon her business care for him'. They are thinking about all the practical things of a woman's life. How focused will she be on this business and invest the 5-10 years for it to grow. If she has a sick child you know, the husband will be there in the evening and in the morning at his office doing his business. So, they can guarantee that a man will be able to make the time investment and all the other kinds of investment that need to be made to grow a young business. But a woman will prioritize her family over her business.

So that is a risk for a bank but they won't say that to your face. Like that is why, we are looking at you, you are a young woman, you have two young children. All of those things you are going to be juggling over the next 5-10 years."

Kano-based business woman, focus group discussion, 10 July 2017.

5.6. Women in skin and tanned cowhide business in Kano

Participants of the focus group agreed that although more women were becoming interested in hides and skins business in Kano, it is still a male dominated trade with only a little female presence. The women usually purchase their products from male marketers at the central Kasuwar Kofar Wambai in Kano or from the Sabon Gari market. Sometimes animal hides and skin is imported from neighbouring Benin, but products sourced outside of Nigeria are usually more expensive. After tanning the animal skins, the women sell the finished products to markets in across Nigeria and sometimes to neighbouring Niger. Some participants in the focus group said they used to export goods to markets in Cameroun and Chad but have not been able to do so since the escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2009. The most common problems the women face at the border is harassment from border security officials. According to the focus group, female counterparts operating through the southern borders experience worse harassment and sometimes even rape but they have not heard of similar cases along the northern border.

5.7 Women's participation in agricultural markets in Katsina

Farming conditions for women in Katsina appear similar to those in Kano. Focus group discussions were conducted with women farmers growing rice, sesame, hibiscus, beans, millet and maize but also groundnut and soy beans across Katsina. The farmers cultivate this products for personal/household consumption but also to sell in the market. When crops, for example, maize is harvested, the women thresh the corn off the cob and bag all the grains. With millet, the women dry the grain, then it is threshed with sticks and bagged.

None of the participants in the farming focus group discussions had ever purchased land although one participant owned land through inheritance. All participants said the leased

farm land on of a yearly basis which varied in size from 30 to 50 hectares. Depending on the size of the farm, on average, between N30,000 to N40,000 is paid to landowners on a yearly basis. Depending on the availability of water, the women cropped during both rainy and dry season. Some farmers lease land close to earth dams and thus have access to water. When water is sufficient, a hectare of land can yield 40 bags of rice.



Photo of focus group facilitator, Hajiya Mariya Baba, and Katsina-based women farmers. 13 July 2017.

Many of the participants expressed frustration with land owners for instances where they are refused lease of farmlands even after previously having this agreement and seemingly good relation. According to them, land owners raised the hire costs yearly and the women had to make repeated visits to community heads for the resolution of multiple land disputes. One participant who grows sesame seeds and beans on leased land shared her experience with the group: “after first weeding, the landlord has now said he wants to take back his land to farm and I am lost on what to do.”¹⁴

The income derived by the women from farming often went into other agricultural ventures besides cropping. After the sale of the farm produce, many of the women said they re-invested their profits in livestock fattening and the profits made after the animals are sold are then ploughed back into the next farming season. The women also participated in *esusu* mutual savings schemes where contributions are made on a monthly basis and then loaned to a member of the scheme for a period of 10 months on a interest-free basis. There is usually no fixed amount for contributions to the schemes. Members can contribute as low as N5,000 or as much as N30,000 based on their ability.

¹⁴ Katsina-based women farmers’ focus group discussion, Katsina. 13 July 2017.

The women of Musawa local government area are predominantly farmers but nearly all the participants of the focus group engage in some processing and value addition. Musawa is known for groundnuts sesame seeds, soya beans, wheat, corn, millet and beans. The area is also well known for special varieties of millet, called *maiwa*, and beans, called *farin wake* in Hausa. Many participants growing groundnuts process the nuts into cooking oil and the butter or paste is used to make *kuli-kuli*. The women also mix groundnuts with sesame seeds to make *kantu amaro* (a salted baked biscuit).



Photo of some groundnut-based food items produced by women in Musawa, Katsina state. 14 July 2017

Beans is made into *daddawa* (a local seasoning for soups and stews) and sold by the women to local restaurants. The women are able to package their products and sell them out of their homes and at markets. Millet is also used in local drinks and meals such as *koko* and *kunu* while soya beans is processed into very popular protein-rich meals locally called *awara* and *qara'i*. The big markets for these types of goods are in Dan Musa and Jikamshi.

Most of the participants in the focus group hire on average 2 hectares of land and are able to access seeds from the Katsina state ministry of agriculture through their local government office at a reduced rate of 30 per cent compared with the normal market price.

The scale of production, processing and value addition by the women farmers of Musawa could be boosted through support with accessing fertilizers, high yield seeds, modern equipment for processing and packaging. The distance of Musawa to the big markets was raised in the focus group but it seems that is a challenge because of the absence of adequate storage facilities and the appropriate means of maintaining quality and freshness while transporting goods.



Photo showing several food items produced, processed and simply packed by women in Musawa, Katsina state. 14 July 2017.

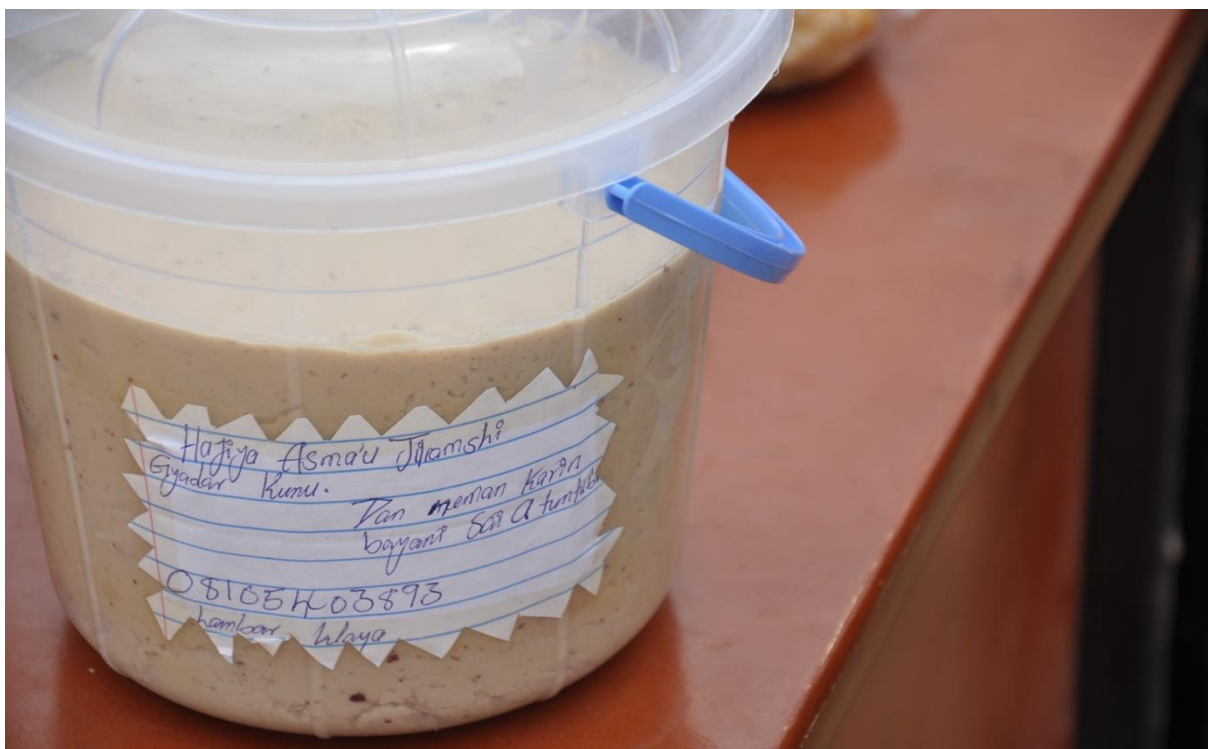


Photo of a bucket of groundnut porridge made, packed and labelled by a Musawa-based business woman. 14 July 2017.

Box 6. Women processors in the tomato trade in Katsina

My name is Hajiya Halima. I have been processing and bottling tomato, chili pepper and large red peppers for about 3 years although I started producing my tomato and pepper paste for longer than this. I used to do it just for home use but I later expanded it into a business where I am able to sell my bottled tomatoes and peppers to neighbouring states. I also make fresh juice but among the two agro-products, I prefer tomato processing because of the good relationship I have with tomato farmers I have been working with for long. I usually go Ajuwa market to buy tomatoes in large quantity from the farmers and other small marketers and distributors which consist even some children of about eight to fifteen years old. The availability of bottles is my biggest challenge. I usually rely on a supply of recycled bottles collecting by children who sell them in the market. I also have a challenge of capital to expand my business. Katsina state is favored by Allah with the rich nutrients in the soil and lots of land, this is one of the reasons we [Katsina] is one of the top states in Nigeria for fresh vegetables like tomato. It is really a good place for my business.

Katsina-based female tomato and pepper producer, 12 July 2017



Photo of Musawa women farmers, producers and traders. Katsina. 14 July 2017.

6. Development realities in Niger

Niger has the highest rate of population growth of any country in Africa and, at 7.5 children per woman, the world's highest fertility rate, defined as the number of children born to the average woman if she lived to the end of her childbearing years (UNFPA 2016). The national

population increased by an average 4% per annum over 2010-16. Yet, this rising population is supported by a fragile environment. More than half the national territory is the Sahara Desert or mountains, and home to just 3% of the population; the overwhelming bulk of Nigériens live in the south and the Niger river valley – yet even here, the climate is Sahelian and the natural resource base is fragile.

These pressures are reflected in economic and development realities: Niger's average per capita GDP in 2016 was \$363 compared with \$650 in Burkina Faso and \$781 in Mali. The prevalence of acute malnutrition in Niger has been on an upward trend, rising from 13.3% in 2013 to 14.8% in 2014 and 15% in 2016.¹⁵

6.1. The Maradi region

Development pressures are at their most intense in southern regions such as Maradi, where rates of population growth are particularly high and the pressure on the available supply of land is at its greatest, which is given over almost entirely to arable farming (whereas pastoralism plays a much greater role in the more arid north).

An aerial perspective of the region would show how every available fraction of land appears cultivated. Among development personnel and economic actors in Maradi, concern is expressed that little or no land is available for grazing; fields are not left fallow to recover after cultivation and almost no significant areas are covered with natural vegetation. The intense use of land means that soil erosion is a serious problem, particularly after heavy rains. Tracts of the landscape are scarred by the after-effects of erosion, with topsoil and vegetation washed away, leaving gravel and arid ground which is itself then exposed to the risk of further erosive impacts during rainy season downpours.

According to the Land Commission (COFO) in Maradi, the population of Maradi region is now doubling every 15 years and the number of livestock is also increasing. These trends put huge pressure on the supply of land and its resources – water, vegetation and fertility. The Commission reports that the proportion of total surface area that is cultivated ranges from 25% to 56%, and averages 36% - whereas 25% is normally regarded as the healthy saturation maximum, when allowance is made for the surface area that is taken up by villages, roads, towns and other non-arable purposes.

On average in Maradi region, there is less than one hectare of farmland per household. The average size of a household is seven people – who must be supported by the farming output from this small plot. Average cereal crop yields in the region are only 400 kg per hectare; the minority of farmers who follow all the best practice advice on planting and soil fertility achieve average yields of only 800 kg per hectare. The average food consumption needs for a healthy adult is 250 kg of cereals per person a year. The Code Rural office says that this means that the average family farm in Maradi cannot even produce sufficient cereals to provide adequate proper cereals nourishment for two adults – and even smallholders following best practice can only produce sufficient cereals to feed three adults and one child.

¹⁵ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator>

Inevitably, such a situation exerts extreme pressures in terms of land supply. In group discussions with women in Djirataoua (Niger) and in Katsina (Nigeria) there were complaints that some women did not have access to land but in both cases, women described a lack of willingness on the part of the community to organize a common response to the problem, so that landless women could be provided with plots.

This environmental and development context is the setting in which key issues impacting upon the economic role of women and societal context should be understood.

Box 7. Niger national food security strategy

The Sahel has a highly cyclical arid climate that concentrates rainfall in just a few months of the year; the main rains frequently fail or fall short of needs; climate change and population growth are increasing the pressure on the fragile resources of water, land and vegetation.

Following the catastrophic droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, the countries of the Sahel, supported by international partners, developed a comprehensive system for monitoring the risks to agriculture and food security at both national and levels. Under the aegis of the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), they developed common standards and technical methods and a system for oversight, to ensure that national assessments are made under common criteria. Over time, methods have been refined and harmonised; technological tools such as smart phones are being gradually introduced for data collection.

Each country has an early warning system (*Système d'alerte précoce* – SAP) for the collection of observations and data from the village level right up to national government. At several levels, technical specialists from the state and development organisations consult with community representatives and elected political figures. Collated and analysed at national level, the data helps governments and donors to spot impending crises and manage their impact in the short term, and design of food security strategies for the longer term.

Among the Sahelian countries, Mali, Burkina and Niger are generally regarded as having the most technically rigorous and well-embedded SAP systems. In Niger, the SAP is complemented by the 3N Initiative (*les Nigériens Nourissent les Nigériens* or Nigériens Feed Nigériens) which aims to strengthen underlying food security, community resilience and development. The 3N has been central to the electoral and governing programme of the current head of state, Mahamadou Issoufou; however, the initiative builds on ideas developed under previous administrations and, despite the noisy controversies of day to day politics, it appears to command a broad national consensus.

Both the early warning system (SAP) and the 3N are built on the principal of grassroots community engagement. The foundation of the SAP in each area is the local food security committee, the SCAP-RU (*Système communautaire d'alerte précoce et de réponse aux urgences*) – which brings together community representatives and technical staff from government departments such as agriculture or livestock. The aim is to foster observation

and data collection from community level upwards and reconcile potential differences between the perspectives of technical officials and those of elected councillors or mayors under voter pressure to present their communities as vulnerable, to attract more aid.

Locally generated data feeds up to the central hub of the SAP, which is attached directly to the prime minister's office and works closely with the government's crisis management unit and the donors. The system draws up an annual support plan (*Plan de Soutien*) that identifies regions and communities that are vulnerable and likely to need help in the near future, but it also maintains a regularly updated rolling three-year plan (*Plan Triennal*).

This system for crisis warning and response is complemented by the longer term 3N strategy designed to strengthen resilience and gradually build up communities' underlying food security and capacity to withstand crisis "shocks" such as drought and their level of economic and social development.

The central government's 3N High Commission has been working with 20 *communes de convergence* – municipalities chosen as test models. These act as local hubs to provide services and infrastructure support for agriculture and development in the surrounding villages. (A rural municipality typically has a population of 30-50,000, spread among 30-60 villages, often spread over a wide area.) Eventually, this approach should be extended to the other 246 municipalities in Niger, but with tools and projects appropriate to the needs of each area. The designers of the 3N hope it will encourage local communities to put forward their own proposals – for which the High Commission could then seek to mobilize resources.

6.2. Women in the village farming economy and society

Maradi region is widely regarded in Niger as the country's economic heartland, yet it is also an area where development pressures are particularly intense – and this has inevitable consequences for the position of women in agriculture and the related market value chain. Although the region enjoys better rainfall than most other settled regions of Niger, it is also more densely populated, which means that there is intense demand for the limited resources of land, water and biomass cover. Additionally, social factors have a significant influence. The role that women fill and opportunities for them to enhance their economic position are substantially shaped, and sometimes limited, by prevailing societal traditions or rules.

The Nigérien state has developed a sophisticated system for monitoring food crisis risk and environmental pressures, from the local to national level (Box 4). Over more recent years it has been rolling out a programme of rural development measures designed to enhance village agricultural productivity, complemented with cash welfare support for the poorest households. However, such government measures cannot shift the underlying environmental parameters imposed by the climate or the fact that the area of land available for agriculture or grazing is severely limited. Nor can they easily interrupt deeply rooted cultural practices and beliefs which are – as in human societies worldwide – an intensely sensitive matter closely related to social cohesion and concepts of identity.

This raises a question about how much longer, given the physical environmental constraints evident in Maradi region, the current social and economic model can continue to sustain current levels of nutrition and income, particularly in the rural communities where roughly 90% of the population resides. If this challenge is to be overcome, and levels of household welfare are to be sustained or gradually improved, the role of women will be critical, because of their importance not only to family life but also to the economy.

This section of the report explores the factors that shape the position of women in rural communities in Maradi region and examines the scope for adjustments or interventions that might enable them to enhance their livelihood opportunities within the environmental and social parameters that prevail. Further insight into these issues emerged from focus group and informal research meetings in Niger. Detailed notes from these are in Annex 6 (page 98).

6.3. Land ownership in rural communities

Among the population of southern Maradi region, who are overwhelmingly of Hausa ethnic origin, family structure and the related apportionment of economic assets and social responsibilities are powerfully shaped by deeply-rooted traditions. Any examination of the potential tools for enhancing the livelihood options available to women must consider this social reality.



Completing questionnaires with the members of the Tagaza village women's association, 17 July 2017.

In rural communities, land ownership and attitudes to property are a cornerstone of family structure. In the traditional model, typical of Maradi region, the heart of the family farm is the largest plot of land, the *gandu*, controlled by the head of the household, and earmarked to provide at least some food for all members of the family. Out of this land, the man carves a smaller plot (the *gamana*) for his wife; if he has several wives, each will have a *gamana* on which to grow food for herself and her children. Moreover, as time goes on and teenage boys reach young adulthood – around the age of 15 – each also receives a *gamana*, carved out of the *gandu*. Eventually, when the young man marries, this *gamana* becomes his own new *gandu* household plot. Girls do not receive a *gamana* of their own until they marry and, once married, they are expected to divide their time between working with their husband on the main *gandu*, and cultivating their personal *gamana*.

Over time, inheritance provides a chance for both women and men to increase their holdings of land: under *sharia* – the overwhelming source of governance for family matters – both the woman and the man inherit property. So, when a parent dies, particularly a man, land becomes available to pass to the next generation. This allows a man to add to his *gandu* holding as well as offering a chance for a woman to acquire a second *gamana*, to supplement the plot she already has.

However, even in the past, when the population was smaller and land was in more ample supply, this system placed constraints on the opportunities available to women. In contrast to a male teenager, a woman does not acquire a *gamana* plot of her own when reaching young adulthood but is instead expected to help with the cultivation of her mother's plot. When she gets married, she is dependent on the goodwill of her husband to allocate her a *gamana* of adequate size and soil fertility. When her parents' dies, the portion of their land that she would receive would only be half the size of the plot allocated to a brother. Furthermore, because they had other responsibilities such as childcare, women often came under pressure to surrender even this limited inheritance to a male relative who would, supposedly, be "better" able to farm it properly. Even in the past, women were constantly under a pressure that risked marginalizing their role as farmers and owners of land.

The high pace of population growth over the past 10-20 years has compounded this pressure. The same volume of land is supporting ever more people. When *gamanas* are carved out of family farms for young men, they are smaller than they used to be – which means that, when they marry, these men start with smaller *gandus*, from which they then carve out even smaller *gamanas* for their wives. In some cases, the husband feels unable to give his wife a separate plot at all. Meanwhile, at the point of inheritance, land inherited from a parent must be subdivided among often numerous offspring, even allowing for the fact that in today's modern economy, occasionally a child will have moved away to take up an urban job and may be willing to sell or give their plot to siblings.

This process has now been going on for several generations, culminating in a situation where both *gandu* and *gamana* plots are much smaller than used to be the case, and women, particularly find themselves in an increasingly fragile land ownership position. Also, plots are not only smaller, they are becoming more fragmented, through successive generations of inheritance and marriage: when a woman marries, she of course moves out of her parent's family farm and joins her husband to form a new household, and it is from his *gandu* that her

gamana is carved out. If she later inherits land from her parents, this will be part of their old family holding, probably quite geographically separate from the *gamana* she holds as a married woman – which thus excludes any possibility of merging the two plots to make a larger field that is more viable and efficient.

If the inherited land is too small or inconveniently situated, this can increase the pressure on a woman to give or sell the plot to one of her brothers, particularly if it is adjacent to land that he already has. Often, she may sell the land for a minimal price to a brother. However, in some communities this pattern may be shifting. In Danjan village, women participants in a focus group told the research team that all women in the community had now agreed a common stance – women in the village no longer hand over or sell land to male relatives, because they have learnt from experience that to do so undermines their own position as economic actors.



Focus group research in Garin Madallah village, Niger, conducted indoors during a rainstorm, 18 July 2017.



Photo of focus group discussion with women farmers in Danjan village, Maradi. 13 July 2017.

Consequently, women are disadvantaged both by the pattern and process through which land is inherited and by the simple fact that in most marriages *sharia* law only gives women half the inheritance share of men. In theory, civil law offers a more balanced alternative. Niger is a secular republic – and under the state’s civil secular law, women have the same inheritance rights as men. The law provides for them to inherit an equal share of property. If a couple are married under state civil law, then those equal property rights apply. However, in the reality of normal societal mores, this option is not available to most women, particularly in rural areas. Niger is an overwhelmingly Muslim country. The law that governs spousal property rights is the law under which a couple have married, and in most cases, particularly in rural communities, men and women go through a traditional marriage under *sharia* – a choice that is often, made on their behalf by their parents. Many couples subsequently register their marriage with the civil authorities to secure government documents confirming their married status, confirm the legitimacy of their children in the eyes of the state and/or engage in another administrative process. However, registration usually takes place after the actual marriage has taken place as a religious ceremony, and so the marriage is classified as Islamic and governed by *sharia*.

In the group discussion at Dan Aliya village, participating women were asked if they could imagine any adjustment to property and land rights regimes that might produce a more balanced outcome, giving women better access to land. The strong response from participants was that *sharia* laid down the rules in terms of inheritance and property, and this is what everyone had to live by. This means that the rules could not be altered in any way. However, in various interviews and discussions, several women interlocutors asserted that with land resources under great pressure, women frequently are not even accorded the rights to property inheritance that are specified by *sharia*.

Other than inheritance or being given a *gamana* by the head of the family or her husband, a woman does have other routes to acquiring land under Nigérien law which provides her with the same rights as a man to buy or rent land. In some cases, land can be rented long-term, allowing a woman to invest, build up soil fertility and steadily increase output. But if the land is rented for only a short period, such investment and improvement becomes much less worthwhile.¹⁶

A further option available in Niger is *mise en gage* (loan security) – where a woman lends an advance of money to the owner of a field and in return she is allowed to use the plot until the owner repays the debt. However, to buy, rent or engage in a *mise en gage* transaction, a woman must have cash in the first place. So, these tools for securing land on which to farm are in fact more accessible for those women who are already better off; women farmers who are already successful may use these tools to expand their activities. Those women who lack land of their own in the first place are likely to be the poorest and therefore probably lacking the money to rent or buy; and they are the individuals least likely to have spare savings that they could lend to a landowner to secure a field through *mise en gage*.



Women of Dan Aliyah village, Niger, at the meeting with the research team.

¹⁶ Women farmers in a Katsina FGD said they were only able to rent land for a single growing season - several months - at a time; they could not even rent land for a whole calendar year.

In cases of dispute, most matters will be resolved at village level by the village chief or other senior members of the community, and usually in line with *sharia* law and community tradition. Women do have the theoretical right to take their grievances to court. But for most in village communities, it would be extremely difficult to make use of the court system, with its formal procedures and arrangements for legal representation. In order to provide a more accessible alternative means of resolving land matters, Niger has established land commissions, with offices in major towns, which operate on a professional but still much simpler basis, through discussion and mediation, but with powers ultimately to make decisive rulings. In style and scale, a local COFO is a much less intimidating and thus more accessible structure.

Formally, the COFO can apply either state secular land law or *sharia*. The reality in Maradi region is that COFO usually bases its decisions on *sharia*, because this is generally perceived by the community to be the ultimate source of authority on family matters, including inheritance and land rights.¹⁷ In Niamey and some other towns, a growing number of young couples, usually from well-educated background, are making a conscious choice to formally marry under state civil law, which gives the wife property rights equal to those of her husband. But such marriages are still very much a small minority proportion, mainly in urban areas.

There is broad consensus in society on the shape of the various options for landholding and standardized state documents through which agreements over land can be recorded; the COFO can then confirm the full legal standing of such agreements.

The COFO also becomes involved in efforts to rationalize landholdings. As described above, these can, over the course of inheritance and marriage, become fragmented into small fractions that are not easy or economic to cultivate. The Commission does not have the power to proactively reorganize holdings of land into more rational and economic plots, through swaps and mergers. However, it does advise villagers on landholding and will sometimes suggest that they themselves could reorganize the plots themselves into a more rational pattern of holdings.

The COFO also seeks to encourage long-term land rental deals, so that the renting farmer can plan, invest and improve the plot, and it can formalize such deals to give the tenant land security. Many of the tenants who rent land under such arrangements are women. Another option is to structure a *mise en gage* agreement so that the contract provides for the land user to convert their occupation of the land into outright ownership, through stage payments – or, potentially perhaps, stage cancellations of the loan made to the landowner.

An alternative route to land access for women lies through concession arrangements, under which the Nigérien state or the mayor of a municipality or *commune* – equivalent to a local government area in Nigeria – makes land available to a group of farmers, and particularly often to a local women farmers' association. Such deals are usually governed by a concession

¹⁷ Research interview, head of a COFO in Maradi region.

agreement and have the advantage that, in the eyes of the state or the municipality, the success of the women's farming activity is the priority goal.¹⁸

6.4. Marriage patterns

In rural Maradi region the fragility of women's position as landholders is exacerbated by the nature of marriage patterns. Many men marry several wives, marrying for the first time to someone of a similar age group, but then marrying once more (or up to four times), usually to girls much younger than themselves. This means that many extended households consist of one man, farming the *gandu* with the assistance of all family members, with three or four wives operating what amount to satellite households, each consisting of a woman and the children to whom she has given birth. Because population growth and the repeated subdivision of land means that *gandu* plots are much smaller than in the past, there is an erosion in the capacity of the husband householder to use the *gandu* to provide food or income to significantly support each wife and her children. This leaves each woman increasingly dependent on what she can produce from her own, small *gamana*, to support herself and her children.

In research interviews in some villages a strikingly high proportion of women stated that they and their children were unable to survive on what they could grow on the land available to them and that they therefore had to spend much of their time working as paid labourers for those villagers with more land in order to generate income in cash or kind to supplement what they could produce on their *gamanas*.

An illustration of the income pressures felt by many households was the case of a woman in Tagaza village whose child was very severely malnourished. The child had already been treated once in the hospital in Maradi and restored to health and, upon discharge, the mother had been given nutritional products to take home, to ensure that the child would continue to be adequately fed; however, she was so short of money that she sold these products. She was breastfeeding the child but was herself so undernourished that she was unable to provide sufficient milk to the child, who then fell severely ill again.

In other interviews, several interlocutors stressed that the ease with which a man may divorce a wife leaves women in a disempowered and highly vulnerable situation¹⁹; interviewees reported that men frequently choose to divorce an older wife, so that they can take a new wife who is much younger. This can leave the divorced woman in a position of extreme economic fragility: if she is divorced by her husband, she loses the automatic right to his support and must support herself and her children only from her *gamana* and any other economic assets or livelihood opportunities that she has. She is freed from the obligation to cook for him (*préparer pour lui*) and accept his presence at her house, but this is in fact a loss – a very public signal of her reduced status. Her continued presence at the family holding, in her own small house, will usually still be tolerated, yet of course in emotional terms and social status, she may find this marginalized role hard to endure. The option of returning to her

¹⁸ By contrast, of course, a private landlord is motivated by their own commercial interests in maximizing the rental return on the land.

¹⁹ Under Islam, a man may have only four wives at any one time, but in Maradi region, divorce by repudiation is commonplace.

parental homestead, to ensure a more secure livelihood for her children, is not an easy one: particularly in current times, when family farm sizes are so reduced, the return home of a woman with several young children to feed, represents a massive additional strain for a household that may well be struggling to produce enough food and income for its existing members.²⁰

In southern Maradi region girls are still often married off at 14 or 15 years old, and one of the underlying pressures that sustain this pattern is the fact that when a daughter marries and leaves home, her parents are no longer required to support her. The high rate of population growth in Maradi region reflects the large size of families. One woman participant in the village discussion in Garin Madallah village had had 14 children – and she was not hugely untypical.

6.5. Farmland shortage and gender equality

Women's economic security is further eroded by one other consequence of the shortage of land: when a son marries, the mother may come under pressure to hand over her *gamana* to him, to provide him with a new *gandu* plot for his new household, if no other land is available to provide him with a *gandu* of sufficient size to support a new family. In our research interviews, no one spoke of such a situation, but some previous academic research has identified this situation (Doka and Monimart 2004).

Given the pressure on resources of farmland there is widespread debate in Maradi region about how to deal with the problem. People know they have rights and there is discussion of issues such as whether it is right for a villager to sell land to someone from outside the community when there are other fellow villagers who need more land themselves.

Debate over the land issue is shaped by one fundamental reality, according to a land rights specialist in Maradi: "*Men never see women as equal to men.*" However, in analysing these issues, it is important to be aware that rural southern Niger is not isolated from the wider African and international environment. Society is complex and even here, where patterns of community life are powerfully shaped by traditions and codes, the picture is one of nuance and, sometimes, paradox.

These nuances can be exemplified by the situation in Garin Madallah village. Large family sizes remain typical and the rate of population growth is high; yet some couples have begun to look at the use of family planning, because of the social and economic strain that would be imposed if they had further children. Leaders of the women's group in the village also stated that there was now agreement in the community that marriages should no longer be arranged by parents and families; instead, young people are now left free to make their own choices about whom they love and wish to marry.

²⁰ An indication of these pressures is the terminology with which many interviewees and focus group participants referred to their children and marriage, in terms of age and mouths to feed.

6.6. Generational differences in views on education

In Tagaza, Dan Aliya and Garin Madallah, three villages far from tarmac roads that have had no substantial external intervention by either Nigérien NGOs or international partners, the reach of the state education system is evident. Few adults over the age of 30 or 40 have a significant knowledge of French, the language of administration and schooling in Niger, yet in all three villages there is a substantial cohort of teenage girls who are attending secondary school and have a relatively good knowledge of French. During periods of social interaction between these girls and older members of the community, the educated teenage girls were regarded with a degree of respect and social status not only by less educated peers from their age group but also by adult women in the village who could not themselves read or write.²¹

But while education appears to command a significant level of respect or admiration, other complex social factors are also present. In one village, during the open discussion meeting with women from the community, the teenage girl students specifically asked the research team to ask their parents, in public, why the parents continued to put pressure on them to abandon school and get married at a young age. The girl students insisted they wanted to complete secondary education and go on to university, and only consider marriage after that stage.²²

This episode illustrates the contradictions and difficult societal choices that tend to arise in progressively changing places like Maradi. Young women are increasingly aware of the additional opportunities that might become available to them but also aware that they may not always be able to take up these opportunities in a society that is undergoing huge social change even though longstanding traditions and constraints on behaviour remain widespread.

The Nigérien experience was also paralleled by the situation in Musawa, in Katsina state, northern Nigeria. A set of simultaneous FGD discussions organized in partnership with WOFAN, a local agricultural development NGO, was conducted with the assistance, once again of young women from the community who had been educated to secondary level and had a good knowledge of English, and a clear understanding of the development issues and family choices under discussion. During a visit to Musawa primary school, the head teacher explained that his girl pupils were usually keen to continue their education to secondary level whereas the boys usually terminated their secular schooling after completing the primary level. The boys would then go on to work in the fields, albeit perhaps continuing with religious study in local Koranic school.

A similar generational difference was evident during a pilot FGD in Katsina city, where several younger women farmers or entrepreneurs present had a significant level of education and exhibited a degree of self-confidence and awareness of policy issues. Older participants mostly had little education and were often confined to more difficult economic situations, for example, several farmers and traders owned no land or fixed assets of their own.

²¹ The study relied on teenage school pupils in each village to assist with the interview of fellow villagers and completion of the questionnaires.

²² Tertiary education is an increasingly real and visible prospect in Maradi region, because the existing small University of Maradi is being substantially expanded on a new campus in the city.

A further hidden asset in rural communities is frequently the calibre of elected officials and administration personnel available at local level. In two of the municipalities encompassing villages in which FGDs were carried out in Niger, the local mayors are retired secondary school headmasters, well connected in the administration and in politics and certainly with the level of education and management skills suitable for working with development partners. In one municipality, the principal civil servant has been educated at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria; and in one of the villages visited for an FGD, the municipal councillor representing the village and living there is a former statistics official. In another municipality, the local registrar came to assist with the questionnaire process. Indeed, in all the remote communities visited, village chiefs, local elected officials and administrators were hugely helpful and clearly well engaged with the community as a whole. So, such personnel connections and skills at local level could be crucial in seeking to explore means of enhancing the economic position of women. There are however, some noteworthy caveats. Trading and commerce is central to Hausa culture and this has a powerful influence over attitudes in Maradi. In the eyes of many local people, the priority is to make money rather than spend time studying to get qualifications. There is a huge shortage of qualified personnel in the area and in the whole of Niger, it is Maradi that has the highest proportion of public servants who lack the baccalaureate which marks the successful completion of lycée education.

6.7. Access to markets, services and support

Maradi region is reported to have some of the highest levels of poverty in Niger, which is itself one of the world's poorest countries. Yet this is among the most fertile areas of the country, and one that is well connected with a major potential market in northern Nigeria.

To understand market dynamics in Maradi, this section of the study will examine the position of three villages that have benefitted from little or no external support, and contrast this with three communities that do benefit from substantial external intervention. Djirataoua, Toffa and Danjan are three villages in Maradi which have benefited from the support of international or Nigérien partners.²³ Tagaza, Garin Madallah and Dan Aliyah, on the other hand, have experienced relatively little assistance from Nigérien government services.

²³ In-depth interviews were undertaken in the first two, while a FGD was conducted in Danjan.



Collecting the women's moringa harvest, Djirataoua, Niger, 16 July 2017.

Djirataoua lies just 2 km down a hill from the main road from Maradi to the Nigerian border. It is situated on low ground that is relatively well watered, by comparison with the farming communities along the road itself. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation has been active in Djirataoua over a long period through investments in physical infrastructure. The fertile and well-watered conditions permit the all-year production of vegetables and fruit such as bananas, lemons, papayas and mangoes. By July 2017 construction work on a new wholesale agricultural products market had been completed, near the junction between the main road and the side road to the village – although the market was not yet operational.

Djirataoua is distinct from all the other Nigérien villages covered in this study because its economy is substantially based on the production of a valuable cash crop, *moringa*, which has medicinal, culinary and even cosmetic uses and finds a ready market both in the region and internationally. Djirataoua's location offers excellent conditions for the cultivation of this crop, which is processed and sold by the women of the village throughout the year. Women processors make a powder from the dried leaves and oil from the seed pods – even the stalks are used as animal fodder. A wide range of food crops are planted among the *moringa*, which allows the *moringa* to act as a shade hedge, shielding these crops from the hottest sun. More than 500 bags of *moringa* are produced each week in Djirataoua.

This pattern of agricultural activity is long established and the women farmers in Djirataoua also benefit from the technical advice of the regional Chamber of Agriculture (CRA), particularly on how to deal with pests. Villagers believe that the nutritional benefits of

moringa mean that malnutrition is now rare among their children; but the overall growth of a diverse farming base, with many fruit and vegetable crops is also likely to be a major factor.

The combination of fertile land and a steady cash crop income has permitted households to invest. There are about 200 ploughs in the community – which has some 1000 households. Women farmers have organized a savings group and each contributes CFA300 each week and use bank services both as individuals and as a group.

Although the Djirataoua women *moringa* producers and traders are in a far more favourable position than their counterparts in many other villages, they remain partially reliant on external support. Their relative prosperity is not sufficient to finance all their needs. For example, the municipal council is trying to get funding to build a second hard standing drying area for the *moringa*. Also, villagers have the skills to build a storage shed but lack the money to pay for the raw materials. Women *moringa* producers do have bags (500g and 1 kg) for packing *moringa* for sale, and labels, but they lack marketing skills to make the most of their opportunities. Furthermore, their inexperience in commerce is evidenced by the fact that they still sell as individual farmers, which leaves them in a weak position in their bargaining with *moringa* wholesale buyers who come out from Maradi. Although the price of the crop itself is fixed, it would be better for both sides if the women organized themselves as a commercial marketing group.

Even in this prosperous community, access to land is a major problem for women. About half do own their own plots, but others survive by small-scale trading or by working as paid labourers for those who do own land. There are some women who have no land because they gave in to social pressure to give their *gamanas* to male relatives or their husbands – and these women are now among the poorer members of the community. The land problem in Djirataoua is getting worse year on year, but it is not discussed by the village as a community. “*It’s everyone for themselves,*” said one interviewee. Moreover, the women say that men are “*not interested in helping to resolve land problems.*”

The example of Djirataoua demonstrates that over time and in favourable conditions it is possible for women to develop significant commercial activities in cash crops that diversify both their income base and the family diet. However, this example of relative success is underpinned by several important helpful factors that are not available to many other villages. Djirataoua’s location means it particularly well-watered and fertile. This permits all-year round production even though major rains are concentrated between late June and September. Djirataoua is also very near the region’s main international highway and its main market centre, facilitating market opportunities. Finally, the village benefits from the support of a key Nigérien advisory organization (the CRA) and a major international donor (Switzerland).



Livestock entrepreneur members of AREN, Maradi, 19 July 2017.

Still, Djirataoua's experience shows the need for advice on marketing and commercial organization. More significantly, in terms of wider conclusions about the position of women, even this relatively prosperous and well connected community exhibits the impact of social attitudes and practices that hamper women's access to land.

In Danjan village, near Maradi, women benefit from frequent visits by agricultural advisers. Women farmers reported that some of the husbands of younger women are wary of their wives meeting these outsiders, who are educated, arrive by motorbike and have a degree of professional status; but this is not a concern for longer married households. Most technical advisers are men and when asked, the women farmers of Danjan said that they might have a marginal preference for women technical specialists, but this was not important. The main concern for this group was to get the technical advice that would enable them to succeed as farmers and deal with farming-related challenges.



Photo of research team with Danjan women farmers after a focus group discussion. 13 July 2017.

Similar attitudes were evident among representatives of women's groups dealing with the Nigeria Export Promotion Council (NEPC) in Katsina. The NEPC office team is male, yet this has not dissuaded women farmers and processors from dealing with the office and seeking its advice – which has helped several women to export produce such as powdered moringa and shea butter. This women-focused export initiative is relatively new but seems to have the potential for enabling women move into new commercial opportunities.

The importance of getting advice on farming is illustrated by the contrasting experience of Garin Madallah, which has not enjoyed much external support. In time for the 2016 planting season the village chief gave the village women's association a field for them to cultivate as a joint enterprise. They planted crops but unfortunately the weather conditions were poor and the harvest results were very disappointing. This experience discouraged the women so they did not bother to plant the field for the 2017 season. The rains in 2017 have been ample, and the field might well have produced a good crop. But when the research team visited in July 2017, the season was well advanced and there was a risk that the women had missed the chance to plant by the time it had become clear that the weather was favourable.

A trained agricultural adviser could have discussed the poor 2016 results with the women in detail, and encouraged them to plant afresh in 2017, with guidance on the seed strains most likely to germinate and techniques they could use to increase the chances of success. Even though Niger is widely regarded as having the most developed food security management system in the Sahel, the country still has huge shortages of personnel and community level networks are far from complete.

The municipality of Tibiri – which includes Garin Madallah – had a population of 127,392 at the last official count, spread across 176 urban districts, villages and hamlets. Most of its communities live from farming, yet there is just one technical official from the state agricultural service and one from the state livestock service, and one livestock assistant, to cover the entire area, which stretches over dozens of kilometres, with most villages reached only by dirt tracks. The state is decentralizing the management of its environment, health, primary education and water services to municipality level, but the reform is not yet complete because many central government officials remain reluctant to cede more control and implement planned decentralization measures.



Lean season cash distribution, Toffa village, Niger, 20 July 2017.

Niger's food crisis early warning system (*Système d'Alerte Précoce – SAP*) is generally well regarded by its West African peers but municipalities are not included, at least not in the case of Tibiri. The municipal administration is informed of the data results concerning its area, but it is not involved in the process of data collection, evaluation or discussion. The latest reinforcement of the SAP system is the creation at grassroots level of community committees (SCAP-RUs) charged with monitoring the local situation and reporting to higher levels. By July 2017 only eight SCAP-RUs had been set up in Tibiri, although the municipality believes that about forty-five will be needed to provide adequate reporting coverage of all the 176 communities that Tibiri covers. As of July 2017, only four of the communities in Tibiri had been included in the programme of government welfare support which is discussed below.



Lean season food distribution, Toffa, Niger, 20 July 2017.

6.8. Programmes in context: the impact of Filets Sociaux

Niger has developed a nationwide programme of longer term welfare support known as *Filets Sociaux* (social security), financed largely by the World Bank, but with some complementary funding from the UK's Department for International Development (DfID). The fundamental aim of *Filets Sociaux* programme is to provide cash support to the poorest households for a period of two years, to enable them to make a three-part step-change: (1) to immediately boost their incomes so that they can better nourish members of the family, (2) to raise their incomes to a point where they can set some money aside each month, (3) to establish a small base of savings which can be invested in an economic asset such as an animal or a roadside stall. The expectation is that this investment will continue to produce benefits into the future and help them to maintain a higher income flow or better level of economic security.

The *Filets Sociaux* programme has been under development for a few years and was prepared through a careful targeting process based on a 2009 study by the World Bank and the IMF of five regions (Dosso, Maradi, Zinder, Tahoua and Tillabéri) which were identified as the poorest in the country²⁴. Maradi and Dosso were selected as those of highest priority because they were shown to have the highest levels of poverty (even though they are also among the most fertile and well-watered regions).

²⁴ Interviews with senior Nigerien officials responsible for the Filets Sociaux programme.

Data from the SAP programme was then used to identify the most vulnerable *départements* (counties) of each region – and in Maradi these were: Aguié, Guidan Roumji, Gangara, Dakoro, Bermo and Madarounfa. Workshops were held to bringing together government technical experts, development partner agencies and local mayors to identify the most vulnerable municipalities in each *département*.²⁵ Within each municipality, target villages are identified and those subject to insecurity are excluded, as are those already benefitting from cash transfer assistance from another source of support such as a development partner. Following this, in each target village, the cash payments are made to the poorest third of the households.

The *Filets Sociaux* programme is ambitious and nationwide in potential scope. But by the time all the layers of filtering had been applied it reached – in the first cycle – some 43,000 households across the whole of Niger; the second cycle has reached a further 40,000 households or so. The payments amount to CFA10,000 per household, per month for a two-year period and from the outset, recipients are told that the support will last only two years, so they should see the scheme not as a permanent welfare support, but a one-off period of assistance, to help them to begin to build a more secure level of income and livelihood.

The other key component of the programme is the accompanying community support which benefits all households and not just those receiving cash.²⁶ This mostly comprises public education sessions to develop the community's capacity to produce income and look after its members. Recipient women are asked to form producer groups, of 25 members each, who are trained in how to manage an association and additional income generating activities. Each group forms a mutual savings fund, with members paying in CFA1000-3000 each month. In each recipient family, one wife is selected to be the designated named recipient, with an ID card showing her photo and her thumbprint. In Sae Saboua municipality there are 1,436 participating recipient households.

The *Filets Sociaux* programme is now well established and its impact can be reasonably assessed. There are some concerns that the programme is not achieving the level of transformation envisaged at its inception.²⁷ Research and feedback information on the impact of the programme is at an early stage, but the indications so far, and the anecdotal observations of officials who have worked with the scheme, suggest that it may have had little or no discernible direct impact on levels of malnutrition in those communities and households where this is a serious problem.

A more nuanced view may be that the cash distribution element of the *Filets Sociaux* scheme has mainly a transitional impact in subsidizing the incomes of the poorest families during the period when they are receiving the money. By contrast, the cash for work scheme and the programmes of training and public education have had a much more lasting positive impact, in developing economic activity and the capacity of women in the recipient villages to organize themselves and diversify their incomes.

²⁵ For example, Sae Saboua municipality - which includes Tagaza village was one of those identified.

²⁶ The programme is also complemented by cash for work programmes.

²⁷ One expert Nigérien critic describes the initiative as “eminently political” which has fostered the spread of “dependency culture” in the Maradi region.

7. Cross-border potential of women's trade: the case of the K2M initiative

The wider Kano-Katsina-Maradi region is a substantially integrated economic and social space – underpinned by a shared Hausa culture and a history of trading ties between these cities that long predates the official boundary established in the colonial era and the different languages and systems of administration that it bequeathed. Today, there is a renewed awareness at official level of the importance of these connections and the scope for further developing trade and economic partnership across the modern political border. This focus sits within wider Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) initiatives to build on the reality of an already integrated informal West African regional economy and to construct a much more deeply integrated formal pattern of cross-regional trade.



Market traders with rural commercial development advisers from the regional agricultural chamber, Maradi, Niger, 16 July 2017.

In terms of physical infrastructure, the Kano-Katsina-Maradi axis already has the essential foundation: an adequate all-weather hardtop highway linking the three cities, an official border post, a major border market in Jibia town (Katsina state) - within walking distance from the border crossing, and functional mobile telecommunications on both sides of the boundary line. Equally important is the strength of personal trading connections. Many Nigerian businesspeople, including some women traders, travel to Jibia town every week, and often as far as Kano, while their Nigerian counterparts are regular visitors to Maradi. Meanwhile, wealthier inhabitants of the Niger city bring builders from Nigeria to construct homes more similar in style to Kano or Lagos than Niamey.

Over recent years, the governments of Niger and Nigeria have sought to reinforce the trade flows and social connections through permanent bilateral initiatives under the Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission for Cooperation, the Nigeria-Niger Chamber of Commerce and, more specifically to the subject region of this report, the K2M corridor initiative. The genesis of the K2M initiative was the 2005 Sahel drought, which obliged Niger to import large volumes of food, particularly grain, from Nigeria or via Nigeria, through the Kano-Maradi route. This major upsurge in the flow of goods revealed numerous impediments to the smooth flow of traffic and other factors that could be even more complicated once the urgency of crisis was past and trade was settling back into a routine mode.

Following discussions among development partners, the national governments and local market associations, a mandate was issued for the creation of a “K2M” structure in 2011. Formal implementation followed in 2014. Committees were set up in Kano, Katsina and Maradi to keep track of problems, meeting twice a year to deliberate on issues – such as traders’ lack of knowledge of official policies, or the existence of numerous illegal security force checkpoints (with 17 between Kano and Katsina alone, at one stage in 2014).

The initiative has become a model for similar corridor schemes along the routes between Kano, Jigawa, Dara and Zinder, Tahoua, Birnin Kebbi and Sokoto and Diffa and Maiduguri. It seeks not only to facilitate the movement of traffic along the K2M route but also to encourage associated development progress. K2M officials are particularly keen to see an increased role for women in agriculture and commercial activity. Indeed, K2M officials believe that there could be scope for the initiative to specifically support the role of women in farming and, particularly, in trade – where some women are held back through lack of access to training in technical issues or through a lack of access to finance.



Photo of women producers and exporters in Katsina. 12 July 2017.

The French Development Agency (AFD) is reported to be supporting the K2M initiative, while the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is supporting efforts to bolster the flow of agricultural goods between Jibia market, Kano and Lagos. The Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission, headquartered in Niamey, is also trying to encourage partnerships between both countries in security and in food production.

Even so, there is room for further progress. The transport connections that serve the corridor remain inadequate and the operation of the container train from Lagos to Kano is “haphazard”. Furthermore, the dry port that has been developed at Kano had still not become operational in July 2017 and corruption remains a critical problem at official checkpoints. There are also banking related barriers which prevent payments being made directly from Naira to CFA franc and vice versa (Hoffmann and Melly 2015). A more smoothly functioning formal cross-border trading framework would create a more secure and enabling context for women traders to expand their role in the region’s export trade.

Box 8. Impact of cross-border commercial banking environment on import/export trading.

“It is difficult doing business in naira while you are in Niger Republic which use different currency. This is the problem that could only be solved through ECOWAS intervention. Though some parts of Niger Republic like Maradi and Zinder use to accept Naira notes. But some women still face the problem of financial knowledge of the export business. The solution usually is to travel down to the border so that you can change the money at a bureau de change from your country notes to theirs [CFA]. This is very difficult for women due to insecurity, physical vulnerability and many factors. All these problems are usually from our colleagues in the business that are mostly male...but the biggest problem is the issue of transactions and currency change through bureau de change at borders and ATM issues.”

Kano-based female exporter, Kano focus group discussion. 11 July 2017.

Cross-border trade activity in the K2M remains resilient despite the conflict and humanitarian crisis around the Lake Chad basin. The trade resilience of this corridor can be explained in part by concentration of the Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria and the adaptability of trade networks that operated here due to their considerable informality. The porosity of the border has contributed to the volume and scale of informal cross-border trade along the Nigeria-Niger border which accounts for well over 80 percent of the economic activity. The scale of informal cross-border trade along the Nigeria-Niger border highlights the impact of this sector on livelihoods, poverty reduction and food security in the region despite the state revenue losses.

Box 9. Boko Haram’s impact on market activities in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi area

The jihadist insurgency led by the Boko Haram sect in the Lake Chad region took a particularly deadly dimension following the extra-judicial killing of the movement’s founder Mohammed Yusuf in 2009 (Pérouse de Montclos 2016). Originally concentrated around Maiduguri in northeastern Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has experienced several phases of geographic expansion and contraction (Dowd 2018). Violence peaked in the years 2015-16, when Boko Haram spread to neighbouring countries following the counteroffensive of the

Nigerian forces and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJT), a combined military force that brings together five West African countries (ICG 2016).

According to ACLED data, Boko Haram was involved in 2,074 violent events from 2009 to 2016, resulting in 28,174 reported fatalities (ACLED 2017). The consequences of such violence on human rights, food security and regional trade are immense. As of March 2017, the insurrection affected more than 10 million people, including 2.4 million people displaced and 7.1 million people in need of food assistance (WFP 2017c). A large proportion of the displaced people and refugees are farmers and pastoralists who have been forced to flee their villages or grazing areas.

Although Boko Haram did not explicitly claim a strategy for disrupting regional production and trade, its attacks between 2014 and 2016 often targeted markets and economic activities before the lean season (June) and after the harvest season (February). Consequently, producers who had not been forced to leave their villages for refugee camps or been killed by Boko Haram and government forces have been struggling to work on their fields and transport their products to markets (Van Den Hoek, 2017).

In addition, because Boko Haram derives much of its resources from local resources, such as fish and cattle (Seignobos 2017), governments have often closed their borders, even if this would endanger informal exchanges necessary for the survival of local populations. The closure of borders and markets added to the forced population displacements, bombing and bans on gasoline and fertilizers have had a noticeable impact on regional migration, grazing and trade patterns. For example, anecdotal reports point to serious disruption of the traditional export to Nigeria of red peppers grown in south-east Niger; informal reports suggest that cattle transhumance may have proved more resilient – but herders have had to divert much far to the west to avoid the areas of insecurity.

The impacts of the crisis greatly vary according to the socio-professional category of the actors considered and their location in trade networks. Traders have adopted three different strategies to cope with the insurgency: some have moved to other cities, away from northeastern Nigeria, some have redirected their routes to other markets, and some have negotiated with Boko Haram to keep their business open. Because of widespread insecurity around the Lake Chad and neighbouring border areas, trade flows that linked Maiduguri to N'Djamena tend to bypass Nigeria through Niger in the north and Adamawa in the south. Many border markets such as Banki in Cameroon that boomed over the last decades thanks to informal trade and smuggling have therefore experienced a strong decline. Local authorities who used to rely on such markets have seen their incomes decrease. In the periphery of Lake Chad, security and customs officials have generally taken advantage of the changes in trade routes to introduce new taxes or taken over the circuits of the traders who had fled the region.

Over the past eight years the Nigerian states of Kano and Katsina have experienced occasional urban terrorist attacks and violence, directly or indirectly linked to Boko Haram. However, the lasting effects of the insurgency on trade appear to have been limited to the Lake Chad region which is hundreds of kilometres away. The commercial networks linking Katsina, Kano and Maradi, where the surveys were carried out, appear to be largely unaffected by the crisis.

Potentially the most noticeable impact on the Kano metropolis is the increase in urban population as displaced citizens from northeast Nigeria have moved into the households of family members and friends. This sudden influx of residents has put pressure on social amenities and stretched many family budgets. The added uncertainty as to when internally displaced people will be able to return to their homes in the northeast and rebuild their lives, means that despite the routine nature of life in Kano, it will remain a city under intense economic pressure for some time to come.

Conflict related insecurity was not reported as a concern by any of those whom the research team spoke with, either in Kano and Katsina states or in Maradi region. There was near universal agreement with the proposition that this is a region of relative normality, where economic activity, government and public services can function in a routine manner. Routine highway criminality is still a concern, but there have been no suggestions that this has any links to the conflict and terrorism risks posed by Boko Haram in north-east Nigeria or adjacent border areas of Niger.

8. Designing achievable interventions for a nuanced environment

This study shows that there is a complex range of factors shaping the role of women in the rural economy and agricultural value chain in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi region and that there are wide variations in the way that different groups and individuals respond to opportunities and constraints. Consistent conclusions about sensitive issues cannot easily be drawn.

Moreover, in many situations there are evident contrasts and paradoxes. The community, country or individual that demonstrates flexibility or dynamism in some respects, may also suffer from serious constraints in others. Apparently obvious remedies may not always produce results, while communities often reveal hidden strengths or capacities.

This complexity represents an additional challenge for those seeking to design initiatives that aim to expand the livelihood opportunities available to women in this region of West Africa. But it also offers reasons for encouragement: even where the situation may appear particularly difficult, appropriately targeted actions can make a tangible and positive impact.

Women play a major role in the rural economy and the agricultural and livestock sector value chain across Sahelian West Africa – and this is certainly the case in Kano and Katsina states in northern Nigeria and in Maradi region in Niger. However, as this report outlines, numerous factors constrain their capacity to produce more food for their families, increase their cash incomes, develop new or more secure sources of livelihood and achieve greater economic and social emancipation.

In a region where rapid population growth is placing huge strain on the natural resource base, many women face difficulty in securing the ownership of land or even obtaining the use of farmland under other forms of longer term and secure tenure. They also face serious problems in accessing finance, technical advice and inputs; in Niger, while many teenage girls are enrolled in school, a high proportion of adult women farmers are still illiterate.

The regional and social context is of course a critical influence. The women of the wider Maradi-Katsina-Kano zone live in a region that already enjoys a relatively high degree of economic integration, relatively functional transport infrastructure and socio-economic cohesion. The border between Niger and Nigeria is not a serious obstacle to the movement of people, goods or animals, although central bank limitations on direct naira/CFA franc transactions have the practical effect of steering a high proportion of trade into informality.

In social terms, this wider region has a broad sense of shared Hausa cultural identity, trading traditions and family links in which the border is partially softened in practical terms. The governments of both Nigeria and Niger now treat this de facto integration as a positive factor for development that should be encouraged through initiatives such as the K2M corridor initiative and, at national level, the Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission.

While the deep-rooted trading traditions of Hausa society are a powerful support for economic activity, women in this region also live within significant social constraints and pressures on their roles as farmers and market actors. At village level, the restrictive impact of prevailing land inheritance rules is frequently compounded by internal family pressure to surrender available fields to male relatives, while in commercial markets male traders are often resistant to any broadening of the commercial role afforded to women traders.

Even so, amidst such social and economic realities, there is still scope to introduce a wide range of interventions and measures that could have a direct positive impact in helping women in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi region achieve greater economic emancipation – and with a positive overall benefit to living standards, trading activity and nutrition.

Achieving gender balance in agricultural markets does not have to be a zero-sum game where progress for women must imply a loss of space and development progress for men.

Greater economic emancipation for women, both in rural communities and in the subsequent agricultural and livestock value chain, can bring wider benefits for communities in economic and social terms. It is therefore crucial that interventions targeting women are introduced and implemented in a manner that emphasises the household and communal benefits of empowered women. Interventions should also not be communicated in a manner that creates the impression that men are “losing” while women are “gaining”.

Yet, given the context outlined by this study, interventions supporting women’s empowerment in Nigeria and Niger should also be careful not to reinforce existing detrimental market conditions, practices and beliefs that drive inequality and put women at a disadvantage.

Following this study’s detailed analysis of the environmental conditions, legal frameworks, social and cultural norms that influence the participation of southern Nigerien and northern Nigerian women in the region’s agricultural markets, some practical recommendations and proposals are enumerated here to aid WFP in the design and implementation of interventions that might advance the empowerment of women in economic terms.

In our interaction with the WFP team in Maradi, we were able to observe the depth of engagement with local communities and the challenges they face that it is possible to achieve with a strong on-ground permanent presence in a region of priority concern, such as south-central Niger. This enables the staff to build a deep understanding of the local context and the networks of contact with institutions and communities that can help to ensure the effectiveness of operations.

In setting out the following proposals for future action, we seek to be realistic about what it is possible to do, with the structures and resources at the disposal of WFP in northern Nigeria and south-central Niger, building on the expertise and practical experience of that the organisation has developed over the years of its operation in this part of West Africa.

8.1 Suggestions for action by WFP:

Gradually build up a map of needs across the varied range of communities

Our research in the Maradi region of Niger revealed that strengths and weaknesses, levels of access to financial or technical support and a host of other specific issues and challenges vary greatly from one village to another. Moreover, even communities within an hour or two's travel time from Maradi city may sometimes fall through the net and lack access to either technical service support or interventions by international partners or NGOs. It would not be realistic, given the constraints on state or development partner resources, to rapidly establish comprehensive service and support coverage, and financing, to cover every need. Different approaches or types of support are needed in different situations, municipalities, or villages.

So it would be useful to gradually build up a "needs map" of the communities across the Maradi region, as information is collected about specific local requirements; then appropriate support could be assigned. This will help to make cost effective use of resources. For example, our research found a village where the women had been granted a field to farm as a common enterprise, but they had not benefitted from any technical farming advice. So improving access to land may be less urgent, whereas regular visits by an agricultural extension worker to provide advice might achieve a quick impact in enhancing women's capacity to produce food and boost their incomes.

Support more systemic and organised advice on farming and environmental conservation

Elsewhere in Africa, the research team has seen how the provision of highly specific advice on farming techniques -- such as the organised planting of crops, planting cereals in rows or digging small embankments around plots -- can boost yields, help control weeds and reduce soil erosion. Of course, techniques must always be appropriate to local conditions in southern Niger or northern Nigeria. But WFP could certainly work with government services, Nigerian municipalities and Nigerian local government areas to encourage a more systematic and coordinated approach, to ensure that all or most communities have access to advice. In this region farmland is in short supply and population rising fast, so there is a desperate need to improve yields and conserve the fertility of the (limited) land that is available; this is particularly true for women farmers supporting their children on the produce of small plots. Better access to technical advice can help them do this.

Encourage the creation of women's community gardens in each village

In areas of western Niger and Mali visited by the research team, women in villages have established community gardens, fenced to prevent intrusion by grazing animals, where they work together in growing vegetables and other crops. The produce adds variety and nutrition to family diets and wells are used to sustain cultivation during the dry season; surplus crops are sold in nearby towns or at the roadside, to generate cash income for the women and bolster their economic empowerment -- which may also enhance their voice in community discussions and decisions. Women in the Maradi region villages visited by the research team said that they did not have such gardens, but they expressed keen interest in creating them. WFP could systematically encourage the creation of such women's village gardens. Where possible, financial assistance for the purchase of fencing and digging of wells would stimulate this trend and encourage women to sustain the gardens over the long term.

Support dissemination of advice and equipment for conservation, processing and marketing

Improved -- but low tech -- systems for conserving and processing crops can hugely reduce wastage and add value to the output of smallholder farmers, even those using only manual or animal drawn cultivation. There are organisations, such as Sasakawa (which is present in Nigeria) that have ample practical experience of advice and training in this field. WFP should support schemes to disseminate training to women, provide simple manual processing equipment and support the development of collective or cooperative women's community groups to process and market crops more effectively, particularly in communities that have not been supported in this respect before and which may be largely disconnected from the commercial economy beyond their village.

Identify and contract women wholesalers and traders for the local purchase of WFP food supplies. WFP's current efforts to buy locally in Nigeria, specifically from Dawanau grains market, for distribution to conflict-affected communities in the northeast do have the potential to boost the business role of women traders at the market. But the manner in which this is currently implemented has the inadvertent effect of reinforcing the advantaged position of powerful and connected male wholesalers. WFP should therefore be more strategic in its programme of the local purchase of food supplies; it should integrate a gendered approach that sets a minimum quota of women wholesalers. Such a requirement will directly boost female entrepreneurship in agricultural markets.

Provide organisational support and boost the capacity of female traders' associations and farmers' cooperatives. WFP should also partner with the women producers and traders' groups, to provide or arrange training and functional literacy in official languages (i.e. English and French)²⁸ to all their members not just leaders and coordinators. Training sessions should be practical, accessible and flexible.²⁹

The advance of secondary education means that in these communities there are usually a significant number of young women and older teenage girls who can speak and and write English (in Nigeria) or French (in Niger). They could be given specific training, so that they can support women producers and traders in their own communities, to reinforce training and

²⁸ Female entrepreneurs may also benefit from learning to read and write in the local Hausa language.

²⁹ It should be possible for training sessions to be delivered in homes and less formal settings.

the dissemination of technical advice on all aspects of processing, packaging, transport and marketing of agricultural products and dealing with regulations and administration. The study found that women's participation in farm-and market-based organisations was a very important factor in bolstering their access to land, financial resources and professional development. Therefore, the impact and reach of training and technical support can be maximised by targeting such grassroots networks.

Promote women's participation in all types of political decision-making bodies. Political decision-making bodies determine the direction of changes to the market environment, how gender-sensitive the market environment will be and how assets and investments are secured and pooled. They also negotiate improvements to market conditions and can be powerful advocates and drivers of change in negative attitudes and norms towards women traders. Because of the critical platform held by farm-and market-based organisations, it is strategically important to promote the inclusion and participation of women in their decision-making processes. This will support the cultivation of more gender-sensitive working environments at marketplaces for women and ensure their voices are being heard.

Identify and strategically support women engaged in domains typically controlled by men such as livestock, hides and skin. By providing a significant number of female entrepreneurs (minimum of 100) financial and specialised support in skin treatment and tanning, for example, the sector can be encouraged to modernise.

Encourage Nigeria to fully adopt the Sahel food security monitoring systems overseen by CILSS and encourage Niger to strengthen these systems in Maradi region

The Sahel countries system for monitoring food security risks through the mass collection of local data - overseen by CILSS - is also a useful support to the more general planning of rural development activities. However, the research team found that in Maradi region the local SCAP-RU layer of the system is not in place everywhere, while most of our interlocutors in Nigeria were entirely unaware of the system and report that no comparable arrangements exist in Kano and Katsina state. WFP could support Niger in extending the SCAP-RU network across Maradi region and it could encourage the federal government of Nigeria and the governments of Kano and Katsina states to seek CILSS advice on developing food security monitoring and data collection and look at the practical example of how the system functions in neighbouring areas of Niger.

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Annex 1. Focus Group Discussion Guide

Data collection sites: Kano, Katsina and Maradi.

Languages: Hausa, Pidgin, English and French

Duration of interview: 1.5 – 2 hours

Period: 10 – 21 July 2017

Deliverable per interview: Interview notes and audio-recording if possible

Deliverable per FGD: Personal data questionnaires, consent forms, FGD notes and audio-recordings if possible.

Size of Focus Groups: min. 10 – max. 15 participants

General instructions

The following sections provide a guide for organizing focus group discussions to learn about the role of women in agricultural markets and the barriers that limit their participation and empowerment.

The focus group discussion is also an avenue to explore issues including but not limited to:

- Women's land and inheritance rights
- Cultural and social norms that may restrict or support women's participation in agricultural markets and value chains
- Government formalities women must undergo to participate in agricultural markets and value chains
- Access to information on prices of seeds, fertilizer, labour, transport etc.
- Access to government-, NGO or donor agency-funded women's empowerment programmes and projects

Participants: Ideally participants should reflect a range of ages, levels of education, incomes, agricultural activities and patterns of work. The following individuals can be selected as participants of the focus group discussion: women farmers, producers, processors, traders, marketers, gender experts, agriculture extension workers and women in agriculture programme officers involved in or supporting women's empowerment in agricultural markets and value chains. The focus group discussions will mostly be sex-disaggregated (i.e. all female) but mixed-sex discussions will be organized with mixed sex groups like the Dawanau Market Traders Association and the Jibia Market Traders Association.

Participant Consent Process: Participants will be asked to sign a consent form to participate in the FGD. A copy of the signed consent form will be given to the participant and second (scanned or hard) copy will be retained by the focus group facilitator. Participants will be informed if any audio-recording will be used for data collection.

Demographic data: It is important to collect demographic and other data from all focus group participants. Simple questionnaires will be handed out to participants when they arrive requesting information on the following: participant's age, level of education, occupation, marital status, type of agricultural activity, length of time in agriculture, income/turnover,

distance between residence and farm/market/place of business, cooperative/association membership. Completed questionnaires will be collected at the end of the focus group.

Facilitator/Moderator:

Discussion guides: Free and open exchanges will be encouraged in all focus group discussions. A discussion guide will be provided to highlight the topics that need to be covered. This guide should not be used rigidly or restrictively. It is merely provided to prompt and stimulate in-depth and reflective discussions.

Data collection: The focus group discussions can be audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed for analysis. The recordings and transcription should not contain information that would allow individuals to be linked to specific statements. Confidentiality will be strictly adhered to.

Time, place and allowance for focus group: The focus group will last about one to one and a half hours. Where possible, discussions will take place at the offices of associations and cooperatives or in a relatively quiet location around particular markets. Focus group participants will receive N1,000 to cover their transport costs and refreshments.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Facilitator's welcome, introduction and instructions to participants (*please note a version of this will be provided in Hausa and Pidgin English*). Facilitators should ensure they introduce themselves, explain the purpose of the discussion, what the information will be used for and why the participants have been asked to be there.

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to take part in this focus group. My name is _____ and I am a/the _____. You have been invited to participate in this discussion because we are interested in your experiences and point of view. We appreciate you being here because we know you are very busy.

Introduction: Today, we would like to hear your thoughts and feelings about the challenges faced by women farmers, agricultural producers, processors, traders and distributors. Our discussion will take no more than two hours. Do you agree for us to record this discussion so it is easier for us to remember all the points and issues that will be shared? (If yes, switch on the recording device).

Anonymity: Even though our discussion is being recorded, no participant will be directly identified so please feel free to answer honestly and accurately from your own point of view. Everyone's experience is different and there are no wrong or right answers. Only answer questions or participate in discussions you feel comfortable with. No one will be placed under any pressure to share information they do not wish to share. The advantage of this type of setting is that we can all speak our minds freely and be as involved as we choose to be.

FGD rules:

- Please indicate to the facilitator if you wish to speak.
- Only one person should speak at a time so we can hear and understand each other. Please wait till until the person speaking has finished before commenting or responding. No side conversations.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Please say how you thin/feel about a topic not how you think someone else thinks/feels or should think/feel.
- You do not have to agree with what other people are saying.
- Please turn off your mobile phone if possible or put it on silent.
- Direct all questions to the facilitator.

Opening question

I will like us to start with talking about your experience of engaging in farming, trading, processing etc. and all the other agricultural activities you are engaged in. What has this experience been like?

Guiding questions:

1. Which produce do you market and why?
2. Where and how do you market your produce?
3. Which clients do you sell to?
4. How do you determine prices for your goods?
5. Do men and women sell the same quantities of produce? If there is a difference, why do you think this difference exists?
6. Are there products you think you cannot sell because you are a woman?
7. Do you and your spouse engage in farming, who makes the decisions on how much of your harvest you can sell and how much you keep?
8. What are the attitudes you face as a woman farmer/trader/seller/marketer etc.? What do people think/say/do?
9. Why do you think there are negative/positive reactions to your involvement in agriculture?
10. What access to and control over benefits do women have in trading in agricultural products? Do men have more/less control? Why do you think so?
11. How do you get (seed, fertilizer, labour, finance, transportation for products, credit)?
12. Are men and women willing and able to buy/access (seed, fertilizer, labour, finance, transporting, credit)?
13. What kind of barriers do women face as farmers/traders/distributors/marketer etc.?
14. Are there agricultural activities you cannot engage in as a man/woman?
15. Do you export any of the produce you farm or trade to a neighbouring country, West African/African market/consumers or overseas?
16. What type of experiences have you had in trying to export your goods?
17. Have you attempted to access government assistance for supporting your export business?

Closing question

Of all the issues we've discussed today, what would you say is the most important thing that needs to change/be done? What should the priorities be for empowering women farmers, traders, distributors and exporters?

Finally, does anyone have any question?

Conclusion

Thank you so much for participation in this discussion. It has been very insightful. Your opinion will be a valuable contribution to our study. If there is anything you remember and will like to add after this discussion is concluded, please contact me or any member of the team later. We will make available all our contact information. I would like to remind you that all comments that will be featured in the report will be anonymous.

Before you leave, please return your completed personal details questionnaire. Thank you.

Materials and supplies for focus group:

- Personal data questionnaire
- Consent forms (one copy for participants, one copy for the team)
- Pens
- Focus Group Discussion Guide for Facilitator
- 1 recording device
- Notepads
- Envelopes

Participants of focus group discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held in Kano (Kano central, Chiromawa village and Dawanau) and Katsina (Katsina central and Musawa local government) with participants that represented these categories:

- Kano-based women exporters
- Kano Market Women's Association
- Kano-based women traders
- Challawa women (fruit and vegetable) traders
- Kano-based women livestock-rearers
- Chiromawa-based women rice producers
- Dawanau market women traders/exporters
- Katsina-based women processors
- Katsina-based women farmers
- Musawa women farmers/traders

In Maradi region, FGDs were held in Danjan village, Tagaza (municipality of Sae Saboua), Madallah (municipality of Tibiri) and Dan Aliyah (municipality of Safo). Participants included:

- Market women
- Women livestock herders
- women food processors

Annex 2: Focus group discussion questionnaire - ENGLISH

Please answer these first questions

The information is private and we will not reveal your names. But your answers will help us get an overall picture of the many people we are meeting in our meetings over the next few days.

Please tell us:

Your personal situation

Your gender: woman or man?

Your age:

Level of education: Name and place of school:

Your religion: Muslim or Christian?

Are you married: yes or no?

How many children? How many aged under 15?

Land:

Do you own land? Do you rent land?

If you rent land – how long is the period you hold the land — several months (e.g.: the rainy season) - one whole year - or several years?

Can you afford to buy land for farming?

Are there are members of your village who are willing to sell land to you or other women?

Your daily routine:

Do family tasks at home take up half the day, most of the day or just a few hours?

How much of your time do you spend on farming or trading – more than half the day – or less than 3 hours?

Do you have access to water at or near your home? If not, how many hours do you spend getting water?

Farming experience and resources:

16. How many years have you been a farmer or trader?

17. Have you received advice from a government adviser or NGO on how to improve your farming techniques?

18a. Do you buy your own seed? 18b. Do you produce your own seed? 19. Can you buy fertiliser or pesticides?

20. Do you belong to a savings circle?

21. Can you get money from a microcredit group or bank?

22. Do you work for other people to supplement your income?

Cooperation and groups

Do you belong to a farmers group or cooperative or association?

If yes, does this group get advice from government on farming or crop processing or business?

Does the group process your produce or set quality standards?

Do you sell your produce through the group? Does it help to get you customers or deal with wholesalers?

Annex 3. Focus group discussion questionnaire - HAUSA

Tamboyoyi (Guntayen Ansa)

Don Allah, a ansa wadanan tamboyoyin. Amma ansoshin da zaku bamu suna da mahimmanu'a garemu, zasu taimaka wajen fahimtar ra'ayoyin mutane da zamu ta Hauna dasu.

Bayanin mutum

1. Jinsa:
Mace: Namiji
2. Shekarun haihuwa:
3. Addini:
Musulmi Krista: Wani daban:
4. Da aure: Ba aure:
5. Yawan yara:
6. Yara nawane masu shekara kasa da 15:

Mallakar Filin Noma

7. Filin naka/naki ne?
8. Haya mutum yake?
9. Iden na haya ne, na tsawan wane lokaci ne:
Watanni (lokacin damina kawai):
Shekara daya:
Shekaru da yawa:
10. Zaki ko zaka iya mallakar filin noma?
11. Akwai masu iya saida maka/maki filin noma a garin ku?

Rayuwar Yau da Kullum

12. _Sha'anin lura da gida da iyali, yawan lokaci:
Rabin yini: Fiye da rabin yini: Awowi kadan:
Lokacin zama a gona ko kasuwanci:
Rabin yini: Kasa da awa uku:
13. Saukin samu ruwa domin a'mfanin gida:
Kusa da gida: Nesa, awa nawa:

Kwarewa da kayan aikin noma

14. Shekaru nawa a harkar noma/kasuwanci?
15. Mutum na samun shawarwari daga Gwamnati ko Kungiyoyin sa kai?
16. Mutum shi yake da irin shuka? ko siya:
17. Mutum zai iya siyan Takin Zamini ko Maganin Kwari?
18. Akwai tsarin Tsumi da Tanadi?
19. Mutum zai iya samun Rancen kudi daga Banki?
20. Kana/kina yi wa wasu aika tau domin karin samu?

Kungiyoyin Hadin Kai

21. Mutum dan kungiya ne?
22. Wannan kungiyar na samun shawar wari da ga Gwamnati a kan kara noma, sarrafa kayan gona ko kasuwanci?
23. Kungiya na da ma'aunin gwada inganci kaya?
24. Kana/kina sai da kayayyakin amfanin gona ta wannan kungiya?

Annex 4:

Consent Form

- I agree to participate in the “Women’s Empowerment in Agricultural Markets” focus group discussion organised by the World Food Programme/Southern Denmark University to aid with the research of gender and markets.
- I have received information related to the purpose of this discussion and understand the aims of the project.
- I am aware of the topics to be discussed in the focus group.
- I am fully aware that I will remain anonymous throughout the data reported and that I have the right to leave the focus group at any point.
- I am fully aware that the data collected will be stored securely and safely and in accordance with data protection laws.
- I am fully aware that I am not obliged to answer any question but that I do so at my own free will.
- I agree to have the focus group recorded (audio) so it can be transcribed after the focus group is held.
- I am aware that I can make any reasonable change to this consent form.

Name.....

Sign.....

Signature of researcher.....

Annex 5:

Consent Form – HAUSA
Abinci na Duniya (WFP) tare da Jami'ar Kunduncin Denmark

*Jinsi da Kasuwanci akan Karfa fa wa Mata a Harkar Noma da Kasuwanci ga al'uman
Yammacin Afrika*

TAKARDAR AMINCEWA

- Na amince zan halarchi taro na Shirin Samar da Abinci (World Food Programme) na duniya da Jami'ar Denmark ta Kudu, domin taimakawa da bincike na jinsi da kasuwanci.
- Na samu bayani akan manufan wannan shirin, ina da masaniya dangane da abubuwan da zamu tattauna da wannan kungiyar da aka gayyata domin wannan manufa.
- Na amince za'a sakaye sunan duk wanda ya bada gudumuwan bayani a wannan taron.
- Ina da daman barin wannan kungiya a kowanne lokaci.
- Na amince cewa ba dole ne sai na bada amsa ga kowanne tambaya da aka yi mun ba.
- Ina da masaniya akan bayanen da aka dauka dangagen da ni, zasu kasance cikin siri da aminci, kamar yadda doka ta tanadar.
- Na amince za'a dauki sauti da kuma a rubuta bayanen da aka tattauna.
- Na amince zan iya canja ra'ayi na dangane da wannan yarjejeniya.

Suna.....

Sa hannu.....

Sa hannun Mai Gabattarwa.....

Annex 6: context and observations from Niger FGDs and informal group discussions

Comments on Niger village FGDs: *Tagaza, Garin Madallah and Dan Aliyah - with comparisons from Djirataoua and Danjan*

Methodology:

High levels of poverty and malnutrition are reported for Maradi region, despite the fact that the south of the region enjoys higher rainfall and better trade infrastructure links than most of Niger. In choosing villages in Niger for focus group and interview research, we sought to get an understanding of the factors behind this paradox, and particularly as it applied to the role of women in the village economy.

Southern Maradi region has a high population density, and it is therefore difficult for the services of the state or external partners to provide support to all communities. We wanted to understand the position of women in communities that were not already benefitting from significant external support. With advice from the Niger government's technical services for the region and officials in rural municipalities, three villages -- Tagaza, Garin Madallah and Dan Aliyah -- were selected for FGD discussion and questionnaire research as examples of locations that have not benefitted from external intervention by international agencies or international or local NGOs.

As a measure of comparison, a full FGD discussion and questionnaire was also conducted in Danjan -- a village where WFP supports intervention and is a familiar visitor; this looked at general agricultural and family economics. As a second comparative example, interview research was conducted in Djirataoua village, with a group of women producers of moringa, a cash crop sold to Maradi dealers for local and potentially also export sale; this village has a long history of support from a major bilateral partner, Swiss Cooperation.

In this section, we highlight a number of key analytical findings, which may have implications for the design of potential interventions or policy in respect of women in the Maradi region rural economy. We also make a number of comments drawn from the research team's presence at these FGD meetings.

Time and logistical constraints mean that the arrangements for the meetings in Tagaza, Garin Madallah and Dan Aliyah had been made by the local community in each case.

Each session began with an open meeting for the women and teenage girls of the village, in an open area in the village centre -- typically with an estimated 60-150 people present. Men and boys were around in the background, but did not listen in or appear to be a constraint on discussion. After 60-90 minutes of open question and answer discussion, led by the facilitator, the Niger research team distributed questionnaire forms to a random selection of those present. Most of the recipients spoke little or no French and could not write, so each was interviewed, to complete the questionnaire. (Interviews were conducted by the facilitator with the local registrar (Tagaza), a municipal councillor (Dan Aliyah) and, in all three villages, teenage secondary school pupils.

Younger women appeared to be under-represented in the open discussion: the slightly older middle age women took the floor or choose to speak at length more than younger women or the elderly-- but this appeared to reflect that they tend to occupy the leadership roles in the village women's association which was the de facto organiser of the meeting at village level. The president or deputy head of the association spoke first, and at some length, and they and other senior figures benefitted from a degree of deference to speak; however, there was no sense of an organised presentation and the facilitator made a point of calling on a wide range of individuals to speak; this included a deliberate effort to invite mid-older teenagers to speak, which was particularly successful in Garin Madallah.

Key findings and observations

- 1) ***Among adult women, the proportion who have had formal public school education -- even to primary level -- is very low.*** And the large majority have not even attended traditional Koran school in the village.

This may not have a significant impact of economic exclusion at the base level, because Hausa -- a major African language -- is the language of everyday life in southern Maradi region. Moreover, most women do know numbers and basic and money words in French, the language of administration, education and the formal sector economy in Niger. But their lack of knowledge of written and spoken French could limit their capacity to notch further up the scale of accessing services, administration, business support or practical advice (eg: labels on medicine bottles or written advice on health or agriculture). Written Hausa is much less widely used than in neighbouring regions of Nigeria, so a lack of basic written French excludes women from access to almost anything that is written at all.

We are in a period of social change: rates of primary and secondary school enrollment have been rising. In all three villages there was a significant number of teenagers attending secondary school, particularly girls, and this provides a new skill resource for the community. In watching their educated teenage daughters assist in the conduct of the FGD and questionnaires, the adult women in the community could see a demonstration of the practical usefulness of the schooling that their daughters had acquired. Among participants there was evident respect, even admiration in some cases, for teenage girls who had achieved a good educational level. In one case, even elderly women insisted on kneeling on the ground while the teenager filling in the questionnaire for them was placed sitting on a chair.

However, there was also evidence of underlying disagreements or tensions around this issue. When teenage girls in Garin Madallah were questioned, they specifically spoke of their ambitions to complete the baccalaurat and go to university. In one village the teenage girls asked the facilitator to question their parents on why the parents were putting pressure on their daughters to abandon school and get married young.

- 2) ***Marriage with children is the norm and most women have large families.*** The only unmarried questionnaire respondent was 18 years old. It is not unusual for a woman

to have eight or 10 children, sometimes even more; but in conditions of severe deprivation, child mortality remains a risk. Four of the 22 questionnaire respondents in Dan Aliyah village said some of their children had died. Family planning was not a major theme of our research, but was mentioned in the open discussion on some occasions, and in notably positive terms by some participants in Garin Madallah; it is an issue where there appears to be a greater societal openness to change than over the question of land ownership (*see below*).

The challenge posed by pressure on land and resources of water and vegetation can be approached from a number of angles. The question of land ownership is particularly difficult, because it is seen as directly relating to family structure, property rights and sharia law. So it may be easier to approach the question of pressure on land and resources through social policy avenues -- family planning and, particularly, girls' access to education. Education opens up a wider range of economic opportunities; and development agencies frequently report that it also leads girls to postpone the age at which they get married and, perhaps in some cases, to have fewer children.

Most women still have children under the age of 15. This is roughly the age at which marriage becomes common. In these village conversations and others -- for example, with women livestock entrepreneurs in Maradi -- this early-mid-teens age is sometimes cited as the moment when parents have the prospect of no longer need to support their child because that child will get married and establish a household of their own. In occasional conversations, this was actually described in terms that hinted at early marriage of girls being seen as something of a relief, because it reduced the number of mouths to feed in the household. But of course, early marriage and the creation of a new family that grows, further adds to the overall strain on land and natural resources within a community.

- 3) ***The research revealed significant differences between the three villages.*** Although having much in common -- all "off the beaten track" of development, all Hausa, and all in southern Maradi region -- there were notable respects in which they differed. In Tagaza a significant number of people benefit from technical advice on agriculture or trading, while only one respondent in the other two villages does so. On the other hand, many people in Tagaza do not own land, whereas every respondent in Dan Aliyah and most in Garin Madallah are land owners.

Such differences are a reminder of how specific conditions can be, varying from one location to another. One can draw broad overall conclusions, but the design of specific interventions may have to be adjusted to particular local needs, village by village.

And our results are a reminder that there are often marked paradoxes -- in a single village, progress in some respects may contrast with a lack of progress in others. Garin Madallah appears to have missed out on agricultural advice and support; however, it has a substantial number of girls attending secondary school, and with ambitions to continue their education at university. (An option that may have gained increased attraction with work currently underway to hugely expand Maradi university.)

- 4) As we have noted elsewhere in this report, **land ownership is a particularly difficult issue for women in Maradi region**. In Tagaza village a significant number of people own no land and have to use land owned by others or earn money to buy food by working as labourers for others.

Where land is in short supply, there are quite often villagers willing to sell some of what they hold. But in almost every case, women report that they do not have enough money to take up this opportunity; asked whether land was for sale and whether they would be able to buy it, a strikingly high proportion of respondents replied: Yes -- but No.

This suggests that it might be worth exploring alternative options for providing women with more land, such as group cultivation. Land to farm can be acquired through outright purchase, a rental agreement or a *gaje* transaction -- where land is lent to a user who provides a loan in return, an arrangement that can sometimes be transformed into a rent-to-buy contract; all these options can be expensive and beyond the reach of many individual women. But perhaps in some cases the transaction can be rendered affordable if it is done on a collective basis, with a group of women clubbing together to share the cost and the use. The village women's association could perhaps take on a plot for all its members; alternatively, smaller groups of women who collaborate together might be able to afford to take on additional land.

Where women do take on land collectively, this perhaps creates a valuable opportunity for the spreading of advice on farming techniques from a government farming adviser or an NGO/development partner. Techniques taught or tested on a common plot can then also be applied by women on the fields that they farm as individuals. In Garin Madallah the lack of government technical advice appears to be a contributory factor in the failure of the women's association to make full use of a common field provided for them by the village chief.

In none of the three villages was there a common vegetable garden of the kind often found in many villages elsewhere in the Sahel -- including in western Niger. It may be that cultural traditions in Maradi region explain this, but there does not appear to be any fundamental objection to the concept among the Hausa women that the research team met.

The team showed respondents a short video and photos taken in western Mali, depicting women working in their common vegetable garden in a village near Kita: in each case, respondents watching the video expressed amazement and admiration at the garden and the way women worked as a group to cultivate it. This suggests that where land could be made available, women might be able to develop such schemes in Maradi region; such gardens can provide nutritional diversity for the family diet and generate additional cash.

- 5) In many sub-Saharan communities, the collection of water and firewood is a major chore for women, taking up a significant amount of time. But most of the respondents did not see this as a major issue: **water, in particular, is often close by and most do not have very far to go to get firewood**. (Moreover, the consumption

of firewood could be limited by encouraging the use of fuel efficient improved stoves in any households where these are not already in use.)

- 6) The villagers had benefitted from little technical advice from either the state or local or international development partners. At one level, this was not surprising, given that the villages had been selected specifically as examples of communities that had been neglected by agricultural and economic development support services. However, this also illustrated the scale of the challenge facing Niger: all three villages lie within less than 90 minutes travel time from Maradi, the country's second largest city and a major administrative and service hub, so they could not be viewed as remote or hard to reach.

Yet they had benefitted from state support in other respects -- access to schooling for the current young generation, wells or boreholes close by and, in the case of Tagaza at least, regular visits by health workers. All three villages are well known to administrators or elected mayors/councillors of the municipalities to which they belong; at least two of the three mayors concerned are retired school head-teachers and the local administration personnel or councillors bring significant professional skills and educational background of their own.

In other words, these villages do not appear to suffer from an absence of state engagement or effective administration in general. But the state's services in support of agriculture and local entrepreneurship appear to be short of personnel and resources.

- 7) The lack of support on these specific technical agricultural/economic areas was reflected in the patchy questionnaire results for factors that might enhance farm output or the subsequent value chain.

In Dan Aliyah no respondent reported buying seed and many said they grew their own -- which suggests that improved varieties are probably not being used -- and although the villagers have access to crop processing machinery, only a few can afford to buy fertiliser or pesticides. In Tagaza, more people have access to these inputs and more also buy seed -- results that may also be linked to the fact that some members of this community do benefit from some external advice on farming. In Garin Madallah, no respondents use machinery and only one reported receiving any technical advice; many people buy seed, but a number reported that fertiliser and pesticides are too expensive.

Finance is another area of serious service absence: hardly anyone in the three villages has access to banking of any kind; almost everyone belongs to *tontines* mutual savings circles, but lack of access to larger credit offers from a bank or miccredit, limits the scale of investment that can be made by an individual or by a group of women.

- 8) Group structures and activities are relatively undeveloped, particularly in respect of the economic value chain. Every village has an active women's association and in at least one (Garin Madallah) this group has a shared field; but a high proportion of crop processing is carried out by women as individuals, missing the opportunity to achieve economies of scale and efficiency through group working; there is some group processing in Tagaza, but little in the other villages. There is more collective action on the marketing side: in Garin Madallah women sell their output only as individuals, but in Dan Aliyah and, particularly, Tagaza, women do sell their output collectively and many women said this does help to achieve better deals with buyers.

One aspect of collective activity that appears to be completely absent is quality control. Experience from other sub-Saharan countries suggests that by setting product standards and working to ensure that all output that is marketed collectively does reach a given standard, a farmers' group can achieve better prices for crops and processed agricultural output, and consolidate the loyalty of buyers, particularly higher quality buyers willing to make a long term purchase commitment (such as donor organisations seeking to source food aid locally).

Although most women do engage in the production of downstream processed food items, the range of products produced is relatively narrow; it may be that on a collective basis, it might be possible to add to the product range or market output more widely.

These findings suggest there could be significant scope for women in villages such as these to improve farm output and a better economic return on their activities if they were given more technical agricultural advice and assisted in the development of more group activities. Through collective action, they might be able to improve their access to land -- as already noted -- as well as fertiliser, improved seed varieties and pesticides at more affordable prices; through group action, there could also be scope to improve quality standards and the marketing of crops and processed food products, attracting greater sales and at higher prices.

These findings are encouraging in one important respect: many of the themes described here in section 8 can be tackled through advice or carefully targeted interventions of a kind well-tested elsewhere in west Africa, and the Sahel in particular. Moreover, such changes or interventions may not conflict with established social norms.

Tentatively, one might conclude that the agricultural value chain is a theme that has been under-developed in southern Maradi region. (For example, in Djirataoua -- a village that has benefitted from substantial external support -- the women moringa producers do not market their crop collectively, even though some dealers suggest that this would produce benefits for both for them as sellers and for the dealers buying the crop.)

Women livestock farmers from Maradi region

Livestock play a key role in the rural economy of the Sahel and particularly in more arid areas, such as the northern part of Maradi state. Time did not permit the research team to visit the main pastoralist areas, but the regional branch of AREN -- Niger's association of livestock producers -- organised a women's focus group discussion in Maradi.

While the south of Maradi region is dominated by arable farming, the entrepreneurs at this meeting came from communities often lying a bit further north, where both livestock production and arable cultivation is practised. The two activities are complementary, and there is a division of tasks within the family.

"We have been conducting the livestock business alongside farming for a long time. You need dung and manure from the animals you keep to use as fertiliser for the farm; it is like killing two birds with one stone. Most of our husbands are farmers, while most of the women are livestock owners," a participant explained.

Goats are the most popular animal because they are so adaptable to changing weather conditions; but many of the women also have sheep, and some have donkeys, cows or camels too. Typically, a woman will buy about 30 animals and distribute them among 15 women to rear at home for about six months, before the animals are finally sold for two or three times original purchase price.

Compared with counterparts in more northerly regions of Niger, the women feel they are in a relatively favourable region because they have easy access to markets for selling their animals and buying supplies. But even here in Maradi, they point out that for most of the year there is no rain -- whereas further south, in Nigeria, there is more rainfall.

They sell animals locally, in village markets, but also sell sheep and goats more widely in Maradi and even Niamey and other parts of the country. Some women export their flocks on the hoof as far as Chad, Benin, Nigeria or even Côte d'Ivoire, mostly through informal channels at present.

Most of the export markets use the CFA franc common currency, as does Niger itself. Of course, Nigeria uses the naira and although trade to this huge southern neighbour is well developed, the women do not have much confidence in the naira, because they have seen it decline in value; so they use bureaux de change to convert payments from Nigeria buyers back into CFA francs.

Support structures for the livestock business vary. Better off women producers will chip in collectively to help pay for veterinary treatment when needed, to contain disease, if one of their poorer sisters cannot afford it.

But access to finance is not so easily managed. Banks and micro-credit outfits often charge interest of 50-100%, or even more, for a one year loan. Because of the exorbitant cost of commercial financing, the women want to see government play greater role in providing technical support and arranging affordable credit for the purchase of equipment. NGO assistance has been patchy.

The women's role as economic actors is of course underpinned by their role in the family, and for most, as Muslims, this is crucially governed by sharia, Islamic law.

This means that at the point of inheritance, a man is entitled to a share of assets that is twice the share awarded to a woman; most participants saw this as a sensible necessity, because men are expected to shoulder responsibility for the welfare of their wives and children. There was also a general view that it is sensible for a man to have several wives, because there are many women and this practice ensures that each has a husband.

(No reference was made to migration, but this widely shared view of the need for polygamy may perhaps hint at high levels of male emigration from their communities, which would leave a gender imbalance in the population.)

But while there is a general belief in these traditional social norms, participants' attitudes to many issues were open and flexible: for example, the women reported that it is commonplace for people of different ethnicities to marry, or for a husband to have several wives from different ethnic groups.

Meanwhile, one participant was Christian and there was general awareness of Christians' different stance on marriage and inheritance -- and interest in the alternative set of inheritance rules also available in Niger, offering families the option of dividing property equally between women and men.

Remarks from a number of the participants hinted at the increasing economic, social and environmental pressures facing Maradi region.

Concern was expressed about the pressure imposed by rapid growth in population. Some husbands have taken their wives to hospital for family planning treatment.

Less positively, there were complaints that sometimes in cases of inheritance, the family of a deceased husband will insist on taking most of his land, leaving the widow with only a small portion, in breach of sharia principles; in such cases, imams sometimes fail to stand up for the rights of the woman, who then has to appeal to the village headman or even a court in a bid to keep her rightful share of land.

There was widespread complaint that the once lucrative livestock business has hit difficult times this year, with many producers forced to accept minimal prices for their animals when these reach the age to be sold. Animals are being sold for just 10%-20% of what the livestock owner originally paid to buy them six months earlier; there is a glut of animals on sale in the markets.

This does not seem to have been the result of drought; it may be a purely cyclical result of good rainfall and generalised success in breeding, so that too many animals are being released into the market at the same time. Moreover, this research was conducted in July, in the midst of the lean season, when consumer spending power is almost at its lowest.

Women in Maradi market

Because of its importance as a hub for the agricultural sector and for trade, Maradi is sometimes known as the “economic capital” of Niger and there is a large purpose-built and well-laid out market site in the heart of the city.

A number of women have businesses in the market, in activities related to agriculture and food -- but not usually in the main wholesale or retail trade in cereals, fruit and vegetables or meat. Women traders tend to operate restaurants in the market or sell mostly non-food products, such as plastic goods or utensils.

The research team carried out an informal focus group discussion with a group of women traders and also one lengthy in-depth interview.

One theme consistently emerged: Women face major social constraints on their capacity to develop their businesses, both because of direct practical factors and because of the attitudes of many men in the trading community. Certain activities are effectively reserved for men, so it is rare to find a woman who sells cereals, for example. There is a widespread perception that a woman’s prime role is to manage her family home, and business must come second.

Although they do attend the meetings of Maradi market traders -- which are open to everyone -- women complain that are pushed aside if there is any form of support being offered. Their frustration with perceived male attitudes is reflected in their comments in interviews and discussion groups:

“Men are egoist.”

“Men don’t want women to reach the level.”

“Women are held back.”

“If something is made available, then the men will get hold of it.”

Attitudes among men do vary. One woman trader explained that her late husband -- a Nigerian Hausa -- had been very supportive, encouraging her to expand her activities and start buying whole supplies direct from Kano.

But the predominant experience of women traders has been that men are restrictive: some do not believe women should engage in business at all and should concentrate on looking after the family. The most conservative will not even allow their wives to leave the home to go shopping in a public market; some others do permit their wives to engage in business, but only selling from home.

Education is not always the decisive factor: “You have some men who are educated but not enlightened.”

Such social attitudes can also impede the efforts of businesswomen to sell to larger customers and bid for contracts. Women are treated less seriously (*déconsidérées*) as potential suppliers -- even by established NGOs; the organisations themselves do not have discriminatory policies, but women suffer from the attitudes of the male subcontractors who make the purchases on the NGOs’ behalf.

Moreover, women also face the same practical challenges that would confront any trader, such as seasonal fluctuations in supply and in consumer spending power. The “lean season” (*la soudure*) -- the months before the new harvest comes in -- is inevitably more difficult, both because supplies from wholesalers are running low and may be more expensive because, in a region where the economy is largely based on agriculture, consumers have little money; it is only when the new crops are harvested that farming households will enjoy an income boost and be able to spend more in the markets.

However, female traders have particular difficulty in securing access to finance. Generally it is men who own family homes -- which they can use as security to get credit; most women do not have such a major asset they can pledge, to raise funds. Indeed, women often feel that the banks do not regard them as capable or competent and thus worthy of being offered financing.

A group comment: “The men do big business with the banks and get the credit they need, but men dominate and stop women fulfilling themselves and getting the credit they need. The men don’t let them get the credit they need.”

The ability to read and write French can obviously be helpful in dealing with financial and administrative hurdles; some women traders are literate and some are not. But rates of school enrollment are slowly rising in Niger and those who are illiterate often get their older educated children to help with administrative matters.

Maradi food processors

But some women have managed to overcome restrictive social attitudes and develop a relatively dynamic business model that links agricultural production in the villagers close to Maradi with the processing of output into value added food products. Women from a range of backgrounds and associations collaborate together in a workshop that even produces highly nutritious food blends for infants, using local natural ingredients in fixed formulae and packaging and labelling the end product to facilitate sale in the market or supply to humanitarian organisations.

Members belong to a range of local producer groups, such as the Mutunci Women’s Farmers Association -- which grows cereals on a cooperative 3 acre plot rented from landowners -- or the Tantalin Sanin Ciwon Kai (“Know Thyself”) to produce oil from groundnuts and process seeds and have plans to move into farming themselves.

A third organisation groups growers of onions; the crop is processed into a *gabu*, a product for which there is significant local demand. And another group buys groundnuts, beans and aya which it processes.

But they all would like increased support, whether from government, NGOs or commercial partners, to strengthen their operations, buy fertiliser and equipment for more modern production and processing and develop greater expertise in exporting.

Support for rural credit - feedback from research discussions

The ability to access to small amounts of credit can be a crucial tool in helping rural women enhance their often fragile household economics and many contribute to local mutual savings circles -- *tontines*. Our focus group research found that membership of tontines is almost universal. Usually, the members will choose of their number to act as treasurer and will take it in turns to borrow from the common fund to make small investments -- for example, to buy cooking oil to make pancakes to sell at a village stall.

The tontine system has a number of strengths.

Administration of a tontine is simple, and relatively transparent -- because contributions are set at a mutually agreed level and all the members are directly involved and thus able to see what is happening. There is almost no cost and the gradual increase in levels of school enrollment means that there is a growing number of villages with the literacy skills to keep basic records. The system is deeply rooted in local culture and helps to consolidate trust between members and a sense of mutual interest. It is easily adaptable to particular needs - for example, some women could form a second tontine to accumulate money for a particular purpose.

Different tontines appear to operate within the same village; certainly different levels of contribution are possible. Interviewees cited widely varying levels of contribution, ranging from as much as CFA100 per day to as little as CFA100 or 200 per week; some groups agree monthly or fortnightly contributions rather than a weekly payment. A major purpose of the village women's association may be to act as a *tontine*, but this does not always appear to be the case. Sometimes the women's association may undertake other joint projects -- such as the cultivation of a shared field.

But for all its strengths, the tontine system has limitations. In a country where many women can only afford a weekly contribution in the CFA100-200 range, *tontines* often struggle to accumulate sufficient funds to meet more ambitious needs.

So the Mecref women's credit scheme was set up to bolster savings and credit capacity. Originally created by women in the Niamey area, the organisation was then replicated in Maradi region -- where it has an office in the city and a network of local activists. It helps women organise themselves into groups that then borrow collectively, and on-lend money to individual members in varying amounts, depending on their needs and capacity to repay. So one person might borrow as much as CFA25,000, while another might borrow only CFA5000. A condition of using the Mecref scheme is that women are required to save through their local tontines, and thus help each other. As a Mecref manager points out: misfortune can hit anyone -- so five women might each take out a loan to buy a sheep, and two could lose their animals to disease, while three escape unaffected.

There is growing demand from villages around Maradi, but Mecref's capacity to expand is of course, tied to the flow of repayments from borrowers. So the hopes of significantly extending the scheme to additional villages depend on attracting donor support.

Participants' comments from women in a range of discussion meetings in Niger

- There are 3 types of law - customary, Islamic sharia and the secular law of the republic; often it is the first two that predominate, rather than the civil law of the Niger republic.
- Women campaigners -- such as the women's arm of AREN (the Niger national livestock association) -- are pressing for the proper respect at least of sharia rules on property -- ie: that women should inherit their rightful share (half that of men); many families fail to give women their entitlement.
- The 50:50 inheritance rights set out in civil law are not much applied; even in Niamey city, only a small number of marriages take place under secular republican law.
- The land system of *gandu* (main plot held by head of household) and the *gamana* (small individual plot, such as a woman is allocated) predominates across all of Niger; if a woman does make a success of her *gamana*, she often comes under pressure from the wider family to hand the plot over to a male member of the family.
- Divorce is very common in Niger. If a woman is divorced -- which in practice usually means that she has been repudiated by her husband -- she may have to return to her original family, but often the original family will not be able to support her and her dependent children.
- In western Niger, some campaigners use rural theatre or local radio to promote the case for girls' education and persuade parents to keep their girls in school longer, rather than marrying them off early; better educated girls are more likely to understand their rights and, later, they may also be in a better position to cope if they are divorced by their husbands
- The Coordination Paysanne -- the organisation representing small farmers -- has launched a programme to train women in their land rights and options for accessing land. For example, quite often the village chief will have a section of land that he controls and can allocate as he sees fit; women in fact have the legal right to go to the Code Rural (Cofo) and ask to be allocated some of the chief's plot to farm.
- Niger has no state family law. Some years ago, there were efforts to draft a family law partially based on the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW -- or *CEDEF* in French); but these efforts were fiercely opposed by conservative Islamists and some campaigners were threatened or targeted with personal public criticism. However, not all Islamic scholars in Niger take such a restrictive view of women's rights; some prominent imams are openly in favour of women's rights.
- In the Maradi and Zinder area there are many households where after a girl marries, she is kept at home; so there is a big challenge to keep girls in education.

- Formally, grazing land is the property of the state and earmarked as pasture; however, livestock owners face the erosion of these areas -- on the fringe of towns and cities grazing areas get eroded by urban settlement; in Zinder and Agadez regions, grazing land is being taken over for mining and quarrying; and in the north of madadi region, grazing land is being eroded by the northward expansion of arable farming, driven by rising population and demand for farmland.
- Women need access to land because they have to feed their children; but they are not getting enough access in Niger, including in the west of the country. (ie: this is not just a problem in Maradi region).
- In urban fringes, the erosion and shortage of arable land is leading some men to abandon farming, but women tend to try to continue with cultivation, even after land has been earmarked for construction - often they will persist and continue to grow vegetables on the land until building work actually forces them off it.
- Among the fishing communities of the Niger river valley, women do not have the right to actually engage in fishing by canoe or even to farm fish in pools on the shore. They don't have the right to actually board boats on the water. Their role is solely to process the fish. This is a major limitation on their economic opportunity, because the catching or farming of fish can be a lucrative business. The women have been campaigning for a change in social rules on this, but so far without success.
- One Peul livestock entrepreneur explained that she does not have the right to buy or sell animals in the market herself. She has to entrust this task to her husband or her brother. This is not a republic law, but it is a strong social prohibition among the Peul. It leaves women livestock entrepreneurs dependent on the skills and knowledge of their male relatives: the woman is deprived of a key aspect of business independence, because she must rely on others making choices on her behalf -- even if the husband or brother is a shrewd judge of animals' quality and value. And of course she is further disadvantaged if her male relatives are less skilled than she would be in choosing animals to buy or sell and striking the right price.

However, when asked whether she would like the government to create a women's livestock market in Niamey or order the main market to allow women to trade animals, the woman explained that there is no legal bar. The impediment is social -- and also a matter of confidence. She said that on one occasion she had in fact gone to the market herself to do business, and there had been no problem and no objections from the men there. So it is partly a question of overcoming her own sense of conservative restraint, as well as the wider social context.

Participants in one discussion cited one provincial town where there is a woman who lives in the market and is a livestock dealer, showing that this can be done -- but it is an example that stands out because it is so rare. Participants said that ethnicity is an influence on these issues: Peul and Tuareg women are more conservative and wary of any change in the constraints on the role they play in the livestock trade. By contrast, the Zarma/Songhai who live in the Niger river valley are more open to

change. So the women in fishing communities are pressing for a shift in attitudes to permit them to engage in fishing themselves.



Niger's future: children in the fields outside Dan Aliya village, 19 July 2017

