

Note for the Record of the RBA/Canada 2nd Steering Committee meeting
RBA Canada Resilience Initiative
16th to 20th September 2019
Niamey, Niger

Background:

The 2nd Steering Committee Meeting of the RBA/Canada resilience initiative was held in Niger between the 16th to the 20th September 2019 and attended by participants from Canada and RBA representation from Niger, DRC, Somalia, and HQ (Annex I – participants list).

The meeting was divided in two parts –first a field visit to the RBA Niger project sites in Maradi and Zinder (Annex II – field schedule) to see the project’s activities; followed by a one-day meeting in Niamey. The meeting’s objective was to discuss the implementation of the partnership and take stock of preliminary results with all different partners and components combined. The meeting allowed to debrief on the Niger field visit, present updates on implementation in the DRC and Somalia, share experiences and learning between the countries, and identify follow-up opportunities and actions to strengthen the initiative and/or identify where further support is required.

The following note for the record reflects the key issues identified through this visit, presented in the following five sections:

1. Programme strengthening
2. M&E, RIMA, and Reporting
3. Communications and Knowledge Management
4. Financial issues
5. Country-specific issues

The first four sections (i.e. 1 through 4) reflect general discussions and areas of work for the project, supplemented by observations from the field visit of the project sites in Maradi and Zinder. The fifth Section (i.e. 5) reflect country specific issues identified throughout the field visit, or through discussions at the meeting in Niamey.

Follow-up on each of the action points will be taken up by the RBA HQ team directly with the country offices and Canada.

1. PROGRAMME STRENGTHENING:

The following reflect issues identified to strengthen programme implementation and experience sharing.

- 1. Gender:** Issues around gender need to be more concretely explained, in particular on how the RBA is collaborating on gender in this project and what changes, if any, the RBA collaboration brings on the gender dimension of the intervention. In the DRC for example, there is a recognition of the improvements in women leadership and the status of women in farmer organizations emerging in this project. It was recognized that more work in strengthening, monitoring, and evaluating the impact on gender is required, and Canada raised the question on how the CO's are planning to measure impact on gender.
- 2. Nutrition:** Niger's experience of using local food products for community management of prevention and treatment of MAM through nutrition specific/sensitive activities (including mother support groups meeting weekly) generated interest amongst the DRC and Somalia colleagues, highlighting how learning from country/context specific approaches can be used to enrich activities in the other countries. There is however a need for better visibility and sharing on these activities and how they are implemented.
- 3. Land restoration and land tenure:** Somalia colleagues identified the rangeland management and pasture restoration for pastoralists, and Farmer-assisted Natural Regeneration activities seen in the project in Niger, as relevant for their own context and expressed interest in learning from this experience and possible replication in Somalia (possible partnership with the agroforestry training center in Somaliland). Issues around land tenure, access and rights and particularly in relation to the restoration of land and asset creation, including but not limited to land contract negotiation for FFA/works sites, were raised as a common challenge in all the three countries.
- 4. Collaboration with UNICEF:** based on the importance of ongoing or planned field collaboration with UNICEF (particularly on issues related to water and sanitation, education and nutrition) in the framework of the project, the idea to give more visibility to this RBA/UNICEF partnership was raised by the three countries as an area that requires further work. In operational terms, options could be to either implement the RBA integrated programme packages in areas where UNICEF has ongoing activities, or to request UNICEF to also work in the areas where the RBAs are implementing joint programmes, depending on what makes more contextual programmatic and operational sense. Strategically, options to formalize UNICEF's participation in the RBA programmes should be explored, for example by inviting UNICEF to join the RBA/Canada Steering Committee meetings at the country/global level, and in the framework of the Global Network against food crises.
- 5. Exit strategies/handover or transition to communities and governments:** How communities would be able to sustainably manage/mobilize the assets created once the project has ended was discussed, with different approaches being considered and applied in Niger and DRC given that their context (and asset) differ. Nevertheless, exit, or handover/transition strategies for project outputs to communities and government oversight was raised as an area that the country teams need to carefully consider and plan for, and where needed request RBA HQ support.

2. M&E, RIMA, AND REPORTING:

The three points below are interlinked, requiring M&E and RIMA data for reporting.

- 1. M&E:** It was noted that countries have existing M&E systems in place, which are planned and executed based on seasonality and project delivery rather than on reporting timelines. This is for the most part out of sync with the Canada project, leading to conducting additional M&E in the RBA/Canada project areas outside of the regular M&E schedules but also to reporting delays. It was requested this alignment between the M&E and the reporting timelines be reviewed with Canada to see if there are potential solutions to overcome this challenge, for example by changing the reporting timeline, or submitting the logframe later in the year as an updated annex to the report.
- 2. RIMA:** there needs to be a better alignment with the M&E baseline and RIMA data collection times and to have one report only that reflects on and presents changes (currently the two reports are separate).

The midline RIMA conducted in **the DRC** faced challenges as an estimated 25% of surveyed households from the baseline were displaced, and had to be replaced during the mid-term survey from both beneficiary (17.1%) and control group (28.2%) households. This experience provides a number of opportunities for learning on both the programmatic and the M&E side, namely; (i) what are the implications for programmatic aspects (beneficiary selection criteria, duration and type of assistance package, etc.); (ii) what are the implications of this change of the sample on reporting outcomes of the project and how can this be messaged? (iii) what needs to be considered and what are the risk mitigation measures to take into account when selecting surveys over time using panel data in contexts with high-risk of displacements? (iv) what are the adjustments and methodology development for displacement contexts?

The midline RIMA in **Niger** will be launched in April 2020, with the final report expected in July of the same year. There was an expressed wish to capitalize on the experiences/challenges with RIMA in other countries – for example, the recent DRC RIMA midline and the difficulty in finding the same households surveyed in the baseline after two years due to displacement, etc. The possibility of strengthening the support from the RIMA team with training and HQ presence during the next analysis (May 2020) was requested.

- 3. Reporting:** The annual reporting period runs by calendar year – i.e. January to December. RBA country teams are to submit their reports by the end of March each year to WFP HQ for consolidation, feedback from Canada, and finalization for submission by the end of May each year.

Translation was also raised as an issue as there are two languages (French in Niger and DRC; English in Somalia) and the annual report is submitted in English. This means that the DRC and Niger need to firstly develop the report in French (for and by national staff and government) and then translate this into English. This is a heavy process for the two countries, and also leads to reporting delays.

3. COMMUNICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT:

The following reflects issues identified to strengthen advocacy and learning around the project.

1. **Communications:** Canada requested that all communications materials are shared with Canada for GAC to disseminate these through their own channels and accounts.

Niger indicated that as individual agencies, they have different messaging on the RBA Canada initiative and there is a need to define clear, common messages at the Niamey level that can be used by RBA Niger, including in the field. They have also initiated a video-monitoring story, with the intention of following up with same households over several years. There is however no capacity in the country team to collect high quality single shoot videos, and compile the footage into a single video. Given the innovativeness of this type of video, support has been requested to RBA HQ and the RBA KM consultant (Barbara Gravelli) for video editing and montage. This will require additional finance to cover these costs.

DRC has reviewed and provided feedback to the RBA KM consultant (Barbara Gravelli) on the videos and photos taken for the DRC. Once these have been addressed, this communications material will be available for wider circulation.

Somalia has still not provided feedback on the global communications strategy nor submitted their own strategy for the project. The possibility of the KM Consultant to travel to Somalia for video and photo shoots needs to be explored, and if feasible this field mission should take place in 2020.

2. **Knowledge Management (KM):** Given the lessons being learnt across the countries, KM should be scaled up and experiences shared. KM products can be harmonized by using the same templates by the agencies to document learning – to this end, Niger has developed and uses an RBA good practice template that was developed together with FAO/WFP HQ support which can be shared and used by the other countries. Similarly, the DRC has a success story format that they use and can share for comparison. It was also noted that a common platform to store good practices would promote sharing across and beyond the countries.

4. FINANCING:

The following reflect common issues raised around financing.

1. **Review and streamlining of the process:** It was noted that the receipt of funds by the country offices and when they are required for project implementation is not aligned. This originates from the disbursement of funds from Canada to WFP HQ by the 31st of March (this is aligned to the Canada fiscal year 1st April to 31st March), the time it takes to register the funds and disburse by WFP HQ to FAO/IFAD HQ, and the final push-down to the country offices - a process which can take several months after receipt of the funds.

This is compounded by the actual implementation of projects based on seasonality (i.e. cropping seasons, or already ongoing programme activities from January each year) and the financial (and narrative – i.e. the annual report) reporting which runs by calendar year from 1st January to 31st December. The implication of this is that (i) countries aim to spend their full budgets by 31st December; (ii) countries need to draw down on different funding sources to cover the programme activities in the first 4 to 5 months of the year and then replace these when the next tranche is received (around May). It has been requested that RBA HQ/Canada review this process and see whether it can be streamlined, possibly by aligning the reporting systems (after the review of reporting timelines as per the above action under M&E and Reporting and the financial reports) and by streamlining/shortening the time between receipt of the Canada funds and final disbursement to the countries.

- 2. Clarification of IFAD's financing:** There were several misunderstandings regarding IFAD's financing allocations from the Canadian funds between the DRC and Niger, and more clarity was requested on the financial contribution and articulation with PRODAF activities in Niger. Additionally, the possibility for IFAD to invest more in infrastructure/*gros ouvrages* and support additional value chains was also raised. Clarification was provided by IFAD as follows:

In the RBA/Canada project, IFAD delivers its activities through two IFAD financed and Government implemented programmes each with independent coordination units in their respective cities:

- **In DRC:** through the North Kivu Agriculture Sector Support Project (**PASA-NK**) - Goma
- **In Niger:** through the Family Farming Development Programme (**PRODAF**) - Maradi

At the inception of the project the Canadian funds for IFAD were fully destined to the collaboration of the RBA DRC in addition to the contribution from PASA-NK's annual work plan and budget, whilst the collaboration of the RBA Niger would be financed through PRODAF's annual work plan and budget.

In the DRC, IFAD worked closely with the RBA DRC resilience teams in Kinshasa and Goma throughout all the design stages of the project (starting back in 2015). Following the inception in 2017, the DRC portfolio at IFAD was suspended due to arrears and ineligible expenditures, remaining suspended for over two years.

To ensure the funds from Canada were used to benefit an ongoing programme, discussions were held with Niger and the Government of Canada to reallocate the DRC funds to Niger. As the funds from Canada are received in yearly allocations, IFAD signed with the government of Niger a grant for CAN\$ 380 000 (i.e. a one-year allocation) in April 2019, which will be 90% disbursed by the end of 2019. When the DRC portfolio was revived along with the PASA-NK, it was natural that the country reclaim its Canadian funds that it had mobilized previously.

Moving forward, IFAD decided that the Canadian funds would be divided between the two countries to ensure a maximum of activities. To determine the portion for DRC, an IFAD/RBA scoping mission to Goma will take place in 2020. The objective of the scoping mission will be to determine the relevance of the initial objectives of the RBA programme in the DRC and IFAD's contribution to this, taking into account the DID (Desjardins International Development) report on rural finance in Rutshuru/North Kivu (May 2018), determine how implementation will take place, and determine/revise the portion of funds to the DRC if necessary. Depending on the findings of the mission and considering the weakened project

team for PASA-NK, the plan is to tender for a local or international service provider to support PASA-NK teams. Note that PASA-NK is an investment project for US\$ 58,25 million running from 2018 to 2025.

In Niger: It was clarified that IFAD, through its double hat of IFI and as a development organization, is also a financial contributor to the RBA/Canada initiative in Niger by providing indirect financing through the PRODAF in Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder regions. PRODAF is financing activities in this area at a value of US\$ 205,369,462 over a 10-year span, contributing approximately US\$ 20 million to the RBA project in addition to the Canadian Funds. As such, for future reporting, the RBA annual report will need to take into consideration the results of PRODAF as a contribution to the RBA activities.

5. COUNTRY-SPECIFIC ISSUES:

The following issues were identified through the field visit to the project sites.

1. Niger:

Generate more evidence: for example, using satellite imagery to conduct before and after analyses of the “*communes de convergence*”, and changes brought about by FFA and other works in the project sites. Additionally, more evidence (including qualitative) of the project’s impact beyond those on beneficiaries and the sites is needed. This would include for example: are project beneficiaries applying the new techniques learnt in their own fields, and have non-beneficiaries also adopted some these techniques? What is required to scale up project activities? What changes has this project brought in terms of RBA collaboration?

Community groups: whilst a number of groups and committees (e.g. women’s groups; farmer groups; fisherman groups; etc.) have been created and/or supported for different/multi-sectoral activities in the project sites, connecting these committees together will bring more opportunities for greater value chain development.

The field visit also showed that groups and committees are not always used for the desired outcome and will require a better framing of activities, with more guidance and support to the committees provided to reach the desired outcomes.

Seed security assessment: The project has adopted different approaches regarding the promotion of seed security in Niger (seed distribution) and DRC (support to seed multiplication and input shops for dissemination). A Seed Security Assessment has recently been conducted in the project sites in Niger to inform future activities and would provide the basis for developing a seed strategy.

Rural finance / Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA): RBA Niger is looking for ways to strengthen this component of the project, as this would also be in line with and supporting the refinement of an exit strategy/graduation approach. In Niger WFP has an ongoing collaboration with UNCDF on financial inclusion using mobile money, and the country would like to have an exchange with the DRC to learn from their experiences, since this component is stronger in the DRC project. They would also like to explore with IFAD whether more support can be provided to this component.

Local purchase/P4P approaches in Niger are less developed (than in the DRC for example) and is an area that the RBA Niger team could strengthen. Experience sharing and learning from the DRC is something to further explore and provide support to the Niger teams on.

2. DRC:

Two **asset creation activities** were programmed in the project – the first on road construction and rehabilitation (by WFP), and the second on land rehabilitation and reforestation (by FAO). Whilst the road works have been conducted, the implementation of land rehabilitation/reforestation activities have not begun. This is due to the difficulties of finding a sufficiently large number of people needed to work on these activities, given that the numbers of households in individual communities/villages are low, and distances between communities/villages are too far to be able to aggregate people from multiple communities to reach the mass needed for the works to be effective. Challenges on how to distribute cash transfers to low numbers of participating households across large distances were also raised. Even if these challenges can be overcome, a reduced (2 to 3 years) implementation period may no longer produce the initially planned desired outcomes and linkages to the other components of the project, and a reflection on whether to continue pursuing these activities or changing/reprogramming them to other activities for the remaining duration of the project would be a better course of action.

3. Somalia:

The project **targets the same beneficiaries/communities for two and half years and then replaces them** – i.e. one group for the first half of the project (i.e. 2 and half years) and a second group for the second part of the project. As the initial intention of the project was to follow the same households/communities for the duration of the project (i.e. 5 years) the reasons behind adopting this approach and the implications and opportunities this brings to the impact and learning of the project need to be better understood.

Furthermore, the **targeting of households in the project is based on nutrition status**. Given that this could lead to exclusion errors (i.e. the absence of malnourished children in a vulnerable household would lead to their exclusion) or have other negative implications, a review of the risk management measures to avoid these should be conducted with the Somalia RBA to learn from this experience and strengthen this if/where necessary.

End NFR

ANNEX I – PARTICIPANTS LIST

Government of Canada

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ANNEX II – FIELD SCHEDULE

DATE	TIME	ACTIVITES
15 September		ARRIVAL IN NIAMEY + SECURITY BRIEFING
16 SEPTEMBER: MARADI / FIELD VISIT		
16 September	8:00 – 10:30	TRAVEL FROM NIAMEY TO MARADI (UNHAS)
	11:00 – 11:30	Courtesy visit to the Governor + HC3N coordinator
	11:30 – 13:00	TRAVEL TO KOUROUNGOUSSAOU SITE BY ROAD
	13:00 – 14:30	Kouroungoussaou site visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome and overview of the visit by local authorities and the community (explaining activities through a community map) Site visit & Exchanges with beneficiaries: focus on land rehabilitation, agricultural production, capacity strengthening, nutrition activities, value chains, women’s socio-economic empowerment
	14:30 – 15:45	TRAVEL TO DUMANA ARA BY ROAD
		Dumana Ara site visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome and overview of the visit by local authorities and the community (explaining activities through a community map) Site visit & Exchanges with beneficiaries: focus on exit strategy activities (cereal banks, community fields, etc.), school feeding and complementary activities, adolescent girls’ support
17 – 18 SEPTEMBER: ZINDER / FIELD VISIT		
17 September	8:00 – 9:00	TRAVEL FROM MARADI TO ZINDER (UNHAS)
	9:30 – 10:00	Courtesy visit to the Governor + HC3N coordinator
	10:00 – 11:15	TRAVEL TO DAGOUJI BY ROAD
	All afternoon	Dagouji site visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome and overview of the visit by local authorities and the community (explaining activities through a community map) Site visit & Exchanges with beneficiaries: focus on land rehabilitation, agricultural production, capacity strengthening, value chains
18 September	7:30 – 8:45	TRAVEL TO RIGAL MANTCHE’ BY ROAD
	8:45 - 12:30	Rigam Maché site visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome and overview of the visit by local authorities and the community (explaining activities through a community map) Site visit & Exchanges with beneficiaries: focus on exit strategy activities (cereal banks, community fields, etc.), nutrition, school feeding and complementary activities, adolescent girls’ support
	12:30 – 13:45	TRAVEL FROM RIGAL MANTCHÉ TO ZINDER
	15:00 – 17:00	TRAVEL FROM ZINDER TO NIAMEY (UNHAS)
19 & 20th SEPTEMBER: NIAMEY / MEETINGS		
19 & 20 September	8:00 – 16:00	RBA Steering Committee (20 th September: Canada meeting with Red Cross 8:00 – 9:00)
20 September		DEPARTURE FROM NIAMEY