

Increasing women's incomes, increasing peace: unexpected lessons from Niger

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Introduction

In 2005, Niger experienced its worst food crisis in a decade. It was caused in part by a severe drought and a fall in food production (Sánchez-Montero, 2006). Agro-pastoral communities were among those most affected. To survive, the majority were forced to sell their livestock at below cost price in order to meet their nutritional needs.

As a result of the drought, in 2005 Lutheran World Relief (LWR) received funding from the Gates Foundation for a two-year drought-rehabilitation project in Niger, largely because of their sustained partnerships with local NGOs in the field. The Lutheran World Relief Pastoralist Survival and Recovery Programme (ARVIP) took place in 2005–2007 with the evaluation in 2008.

ARVIP focused on restocking women's sheep, building mixed-use wells for communities, improving forage storage and transhumance among 500 agro-pastoralists in 10 communities in Dakoro, north of Maradi, Niger. It was designed by LWR staff with pastoral expertise to focus

on recovery among pastoral/agro-pastoral ethnic groups of Fulani, Hausa, Tuareg and Tagamawa.

Our team conducted both baseline and final evaluation studies with partners, staff and the communities, combining qualitative participatory approaches and quantitative gendered budget analysis. We found expected, interesting results such as rises in income – but interestingly, there were other unexpected positive results.

This article discusses the unintended impacts and describes interesting programming and methodological lessons for practitioners focused on increasing community resilience. It also describes how we triangulated data using both qualitative and quantitative tools, enabling us to learn about gender-differentiated expenses.

Project activities

There were four project activities to improve people's food security:

- Three–five sheep given to the women of 500 households.
- Wells built in five of the communities.

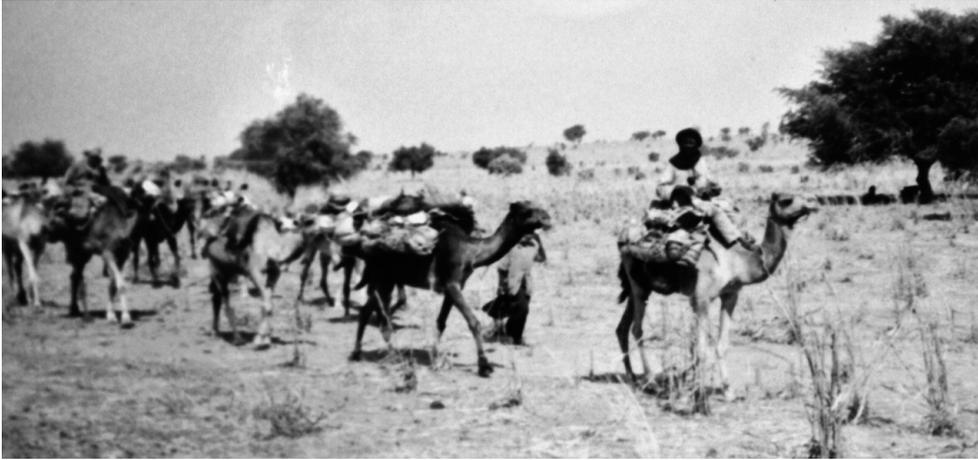


Photo: Jindra Cekan

An arid millet field, outside Paphel, Maradi district, Niger. This photo illustrates the food insecurity of the people: one short-term drought and agriculture is decimated. During the project, the minimum walking distance to a working well was two hours each way.

- Animal forage stocks given to half of communities.
- A community transhumance discussion between pastoral and farmer leaders and the local government.

In addition, we experimented with *habanaye*, a traditional livestock restocking practice where wealthier families pass on adult animals like goats or sheep to poorer and vulnerable family members and keep the young. LWR adapted it to pass on animals to communities outside of the clan.

ARVIP distributed over 1108 sheep to 605 women (worth almost FCFA 18 million/USD 43,000), built five community wells and rebuilt one, and put in six community animal feed-banks. We also had an especially transparent organisational development impact on community processes. For example, working with the

LWR field staff the community used participatory process to decide on the criteria for redistributing *habanaye* livestock, targeting the poorest and most vulnerable households.

Although we evaluated all four activities, this article focuses on findings from the animals and wells. These had the largest impact on women's empowerment especially. After being trained in PLA approaches, our team spent five days in each community for the baseline and final studies, with men and women, representatives of poor and better-off households, and management committee representatives.

PLA methods and processes used

We conducted focus group and gender-disaggregated household interviews across all ethnic groups, as well as transect walks and seasonal calendars. Seasonal calendars were vital to enable us to understand the livelihood cycles into which the new livestock, fodder banks and wells fitted. We used transect walks to discuss conflicts over natural resource constraints and competing livelihoods, for instance conflicts between farmers and herders or between different ethnic groups over livestock grazing. During the evaluation, we also innovated combining qualitative discus-

Box 1: Evaluation questions

- Has the project enhanced 10 local communities' resilience after their food crisis in 2005?
- Are communities more food secure and are these activities sustainable as a result of ARVIP?
- What were the results of the project activities of *habanaye*, livestock feed-banks and shared wells?
- Were these projects effective in helping communities to recover from this food crisis and withstand future ones?
- Were the activities participatory and what can we learn from this process to strengthen activities elsewhere?

Table 1: Restocking five poor women's households

Recipients	Animals owned before 2005 crisis (goats)	Animals sold during crisis	Animals born from ARVIP's <i>Habanaye</i> (sheep)	Young male sheep sold	Result
A	2	2	2	0	2
B	0	0	3	2	1
C	0	0	1	0	1
D	0	0	1	0	1
E	0	0	3	1	2
Sum	2	2	10	3	7

sions and quantitative budget exercises with men and women from different income categories. Topics included wealth differences, seasonal household budgets and income changes, de-capitalisation and coping strategies.

By having gender-separate discussions with the communities, we were able to make useful comparisons with what each group taught us. It helped us to triangulate data and learn about gender-differentiated expenses. It was also very helpful to learn across quantitative and qualitative tools, which is not always done concurrently. For instance, the budget tool was done verbally with male heads of households of wealthy, middle-income and poor households. The uses of funds qualitative tool was used with women's representatives from the same kinds of households.

Throughout, the women were our main focus. The project aimed to improve food security, access to water and household food consumption (a key province of women) while generating income for women directly (traditionally seen as more of a male activity). By comparing responses from men and women, we found that among some key respondents, due to project activities women's household incomes rose from 5% to 25% – a staggering proportion in these subsistence households.

Results: animals as income

Over 600 of the poorest families (out of a population of 6,150) across 10 communi-

ties benefited from the new sheep shared using the *habanaye* method. Pastoralists depend on rainfall for pasture and so seasonality determines their income. Having more animals and access to water improved their food security. However, the project not only helped herders restock their herds. It also newly capitalised some women who had no animals even before the crisis of 2005, and were therefore chronically vulnerable.

We chose a group of very vulnerable recipients of the first *habanaye* cycle to interview. One flaw in our evaluation was that we presumed that the drought had affected everyone in the same way, and that all poor households (accounting for 80% of the population) had lost animals. But when we evaluated the results we realised that some had previously had no animals at all. Talking with five women who were the most vulnerable in one community, only one had owned any animals (two goats) before the crisis (see Table 1). These animal gains were attributable to ARVIP.

We then did a ranking budget analysis with women who had sold 1–2 rams which had been passed to them. This confirmed the expenditures in Table 2. Ideally, such tracking of income and expenses should be done across years, with groups of pastoralist men and women, to track long-term impact. However, this was beyond the scope of our two-year project.

We also analysed how much income men and women spent on food, clothing,

Table 2: Uses of proceeds from the sale of young rams in FCFA (10 women, 8 men)

Recipients	Food	Clothing	Spices	Domestic	Animal Food	Ceremonies	Buy Animals
Women							
1	9,000	6,000	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	15,000	0	0	0
3	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	0	3,000	2,000	0	10,000	0	0
5	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	0	2,000	3,000	10,000	0	0	0
7	11,000	1,000	0	8,000	0	0	0
8	0	5,000	0	10,000	0	0	0
9	0	0	0	20,000	0	0	0
10	0	0	0	20,000	0	0	0
Men							
11	12,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	5,000	0	0	15,000	0	0	0
13	4,000	4,000	0	0	4,000	2,000	8,000
14	6,000	4,000	0	0	2,000	2,000	6,000
15	6,000	4,000	0	0	4,000	2,000	4,000
16	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	7,000
17	12,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
18	10,500	0	0	0	0	0	0
	115,500	29,000	5,000	98,000	20,000	6,000	25,000
%	39%	10%	2%	33%	7%	2%	8%
Total: 298,500							

spices, livestock, animal feed, domestic expenses and ceremonies. Interestingly, nearly 40% of respondents bought food (although men outnumbered women 2:1). Nearly all of the women bought domestic/household items (e.g. pots and pans, beds, dishes, often for their daughters' dowry) while men invested in animal feed, ceremonial expenses and purchasing new animals. But while the evaluators and staff expected large repurchases of female sheep, this was never mentioned by the women we asked. Instead, only four out of six men we interviewed did so on behalf of their wives. Our findings also showed that sheep were not just used to bolster savings or for food as the donor and LWR had expected. They were used to cover a wide variety of household expenses such as purchasing household items or providing dowries,

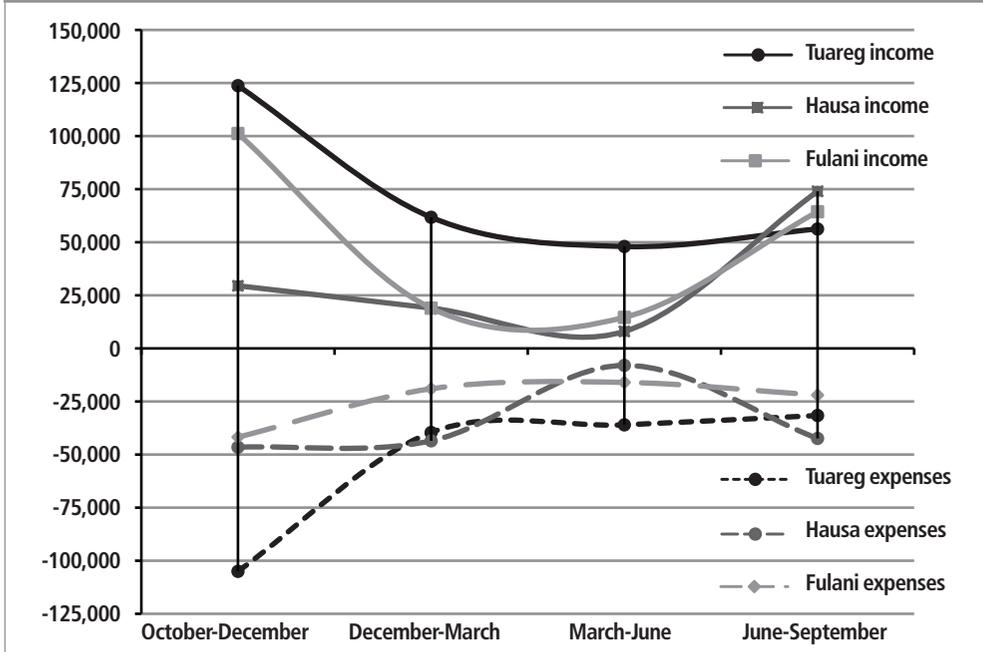
many of which were short-term and were not about fostering future resilience.

How does this fit into overall household income? Figure 2 shows average expenditure and income per family. While FCFA 10,000 is not a gargantuan amount for women to bring into the family via the sale of a ram, it could make a large percentage difference for household income, especially during the hungry periods of Dari and Rani.

It was difficult for the same people to participate in both the baseline and final evaluations as many pastoralists had not returned in time for the evaluation, although we interviewed as many as we could (around 20%).¹ But even so, the results showing cash income and expenditures highlighted the value of ARVIP inputs. The seasonal calendar (Table 3 overleaf) illustrates the typical household

¹ We delayed our return to match the previous year, but even so, the pastoralists stayed away longer than expected thanks to finding better pastures further away.

Figure 2: Income by ethnicity and seasonality in the 10 ARVIP communities (roughly 30 male respondents)



budget for the Fulani of the Paphel community. Data was gathered among groups of men and women separately (around 60 respondents).

Seasonality was a key factor, as usual. Approximately the same number of animals was sold in Rani and Damana seasons. But the difference in incomes was due to terrible terms of trade, e.g. a tenth of the income for the same animal sold during Damana as during Rani.

In addition, for 90% of the population, their basic nutritional needs were met in only three to four months of the year. The most vulnerable had to develop survival strategies for a staggering eight to nine months, including rural employment (land clearing, harvesting and field preparation), selling wood and straw, and migration. And during the 2004–2005 food crisis, most pastoralists were forced to sell their animals at below cost price. So any positive change in households' incomes, such as those generated by women, was key.

Participants told us that as a result of *habanaye*, few people in 2008 had to resort

to survival strategies, even though 2007 was a bad year for rainfall. ARVIP's inputs supported such resilience. The evaluation found that among respondents, incomes rose as a result of project inputs (e.g. wells and feed-banks – well-fed animals sell for more money). In fact, men in two communities estimated that animal values had increased by 40% and their individual household incomes by 25% since 2006. They sold rams from the first *habanaye* cycle just before and during Dari and Rani – both times of great vulnerability.

A key lesson was that highly vulnerable communities need multiple resources. ARVIP provided animals, water and feed to boost female and even male livelihoods. Women play a major role in the daily management of pastoralist family income. Sheep and goats are generally owned by women, who always have rights to the milk. In some cases, however, once the milk is sold, the men take responsibility for that money. Other women, mostly the poorest without animals, sew mats, gather wild berries and sell straw instead.

Table 3: Typical annual budget in Paphel community

Seasons	Kaka Oct – Dec	Dari Dec – Mar	Rani Mar – Jun	Damana Jun – Sep
Budget line				
Income (in FCFAs)				
Sale of animals	125,000	44,500	305,000	22,500
Rural employment and masonry	0	0	33,750	12,500
Watering at wells	0	0	1,500	0
Millet harvest	45,000	0	0	0
Total income	170,000	44,500	340,250	35,000
Expenses				
Millet purchases	125,000	0	150,000	0
Animal feed purchases	0	0	155,000	0
Ceremonies	33,000	750	500	1,000
Clothing	12,000	0	18,000	0
Medicine	0	0	12,000	1,200
Rural labour	0	0	0	20,000
Total expenses	170,000	750	335,000	22,200
Cashflow	0	43,750	4,750	12,800

In ranking exercises with both genders, all ranked *habanaye* sheep loans as the most important and wells second. The animals distributed to these women had a special impact. Women in both communities said that thanks to ARVIP, more income meant they could feed their families better.

Results: wells for time, peace and prosperity

Thanks to the new wells, women also had more time to generate an income. The wells had been well-sited due to community participation and provided sizeable improvements in water access and time savings to 400 households. One woman said Paphel's well was 'like a river'. For instance:

- Before the well, the Tuareg of Dogon Daji-Paphel drew water around 8km from their settlement. It took 10 hours to water their animals. Now it takes 10 minutes.
- Women had much more free time available thanks to greater water availability. They estimated that before they could only use 4–5 20 litre cans a day. Once the wells were installed, they could use 6–10 cans per day, saying 'Now we are available during the day, not just at night.'

Women told us universally that 'they had a lot more time' for other activities. For instance, some men noted that their wives had time to make lunch rather than spend the day waiting at the faraway well. Women reported finally being able to bathe themselves and their children as well as wash their clothing, improving both their well-being and their confidence in their appearance. New mothers had daily access to warm water for bathing during their two months in quarantine after giving birth: a rare luxury.

Potentially the greatest – and least expected impact – is in terms of time savings and how that translated into income and peace. According to the household budget exercise from Zongon Kuzuru, this had a large impact on several vulnerable households. And just as important were the reported decreases in gender violence and greater inter-generational peace and inter-ethnic harmony (see Box 2). Some women told us they were no longer beaten by their husbands because of their new incomes and personal cleanliness. They also reported that their relationships with their mother-in-laws had improved (thanks to being able to make

Photo: Jacques Ahmed Hlaibi



Standing with the leader of the Peulh community in Zongon Kuzuru, Maradi District, Niger. He was one of the more affluent pastoralists Jacques Hlaibi and I interviewed during the budgeting exercises with both men and women. Women and their livelihoods are often invisible, which this project changed.

them tea using water from the wells). Several people mentioned less conflict – both at the wells (between community members) and between herders and the more settled agro-pastoralists. In fact, there were a number of other gender-parity and community harmony impacts, all unexpected:

- Women repeatedly told us that now that they owned their own animals, their husbands respected them more. A separate Tufts University's Feinstein assessment, this participatory evaluation and project staff found this was true in all 10 communities.
- Project staff described how men and women sat far apart during the initial meetings. But during the final meeting in Koundumi, they sat together on the same mats, indicating an impact across genders.
- Similarly, other community members said they had got to know one another during community sensitisations. Now even different ethnic communities e.g. attended each other's baptisms and ate together. Paphel residents told us that the four communities in Paphel (dark and light Tuaregs and dark and light Peulhs/Fulanis) were closer as a result of the joint activities. This was true in other communities too: Kadogo

(Tuareg, Fulani and Hausa), Marafa (Tuareg, Fulani and Hausa) and Azagor (Tuareg, Tagamawa).

- During other Gates-funded project research, four communities said they were more highly respected because they had received three different inputs at the same

Box 2: Women's feedback on the impacts of water access

- 'Today even a baby can go to the well alone for water while before, people could go five days without even a simple wash because of the lack of water... so we have improved health.'
- 'Actually in one hour one can fill six jerry cans. This helps us make houses out of mud bricks and granaries from the same bricks instead of woven grass.'
- 'Water is so present – children complain less of thirst.'
- 'This time-saving has led to income increases by women doing animal purchase, fattening and resale, mat-weaving and sale, wild food and straw gathering.'
- '[Because we are clean] women are more valued and respected by our husbands, and the management committees are also more highly respected in the communities.'
- 'The herders use wells to ensure they're watering their herds, and it has led to a decrease in conflicts between farmers and herders.'
- 'The costs of watering one's animals have decreased – from FCFA 35,000 in other communities' wells to 2,000 per family per year for this well.'

Box 3: Time-savings equal income-generating activities

Two wives we interviewed used the time they saved weaving mats. They could produce two mats in one week compared to one mat in three to four weeks in 2005. Now over 35% of total family income comes from selling mats (compared to less than 5% before).

time. Importantly, each community also received recognition from the state, thanks to the project.

- The community as a whole owns the well (rather than an NGO or the landowner).
- Zongo Kuzuru and Paphel management committee members said that now they knew committee members from the other 10 communities, they greeted one another on market days and shared news, indicating an impact across communities.

Next steps/learning

The two main issues we faced were time and sustainability. Our advice to the Gates Foundation and LWR is to extend such projects for 3–5 years. Funds were only available for 18 months for the project head and two field staff. The project ended too soon to draw any long-term conclusions. Though without field staff, LWR's project officer and ARVIP's project head extended their project work without funding, which

they felt was imperative to see the second *habanaye* cycle through and to monitor the sale of the animal feed during the May 2006 close of the project. They also supported the well management committees as the wells had only been completed in July 2007. There was also a need for a longer evaluation to see whether and how communities continued reconstitution themselves. We needed more time to see the results of our project at community level, and while the communities still needed management support. Changing perceptions of women's roles also takes time, as does peace.

How could LWR repeat this project? A key principle of LWR is 'accompagnement', an equal partnership with communities: one that incorporates monitoring and evaluation at the community level in an on-going process throughout the project. Monitoring and evaluation should be a self-directed process, where communities determine the indicators and therefore what information should be monitored and evaluated. It should also use dialogue as the means for achieving our best community development outcomes, assume community leadership and decision-making throughout process, and prioritise participation.

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