



ISSN(e): 2789-4231 & ISSN (p): 2789-4223

# International Journal for Asian Contemporary Research

<https://www.ijacr.net/>



## The 3N Initiative (Nigeriens Nourishing Nigeriens): Rethinking Hunger and thirst issue in Niger in the context of poverty reduction

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### Article info

**Received:** 31 August, 2021

**Accepted:** 28 September, 2021

**Published:** 29 September, 2021

**Available in online:** 30 September, 2021

**Article type:** Review Article

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**Link to this article:**

<https://www.ijacr.net/upload/ijacr/2021-13-1022.pdf>

### Abstract

Causes of poverty vary by gender, age, culture, and other social and economic contexts. Hunger and malnutrition remain the core concerns. Niger ranks among the world's poorest countries, with subsistence agriculture and livestock accounting for 80 % of Niger's livelihoods. However, the agricultural sector is characterized by stagnation in production due to natural, human, technical and political obstacles. The paper aims to provide information about factors of food crises in Niger. In addition, this study also aims to inform the core priorities against hunger and food insecurity with a particular attention to Niger's 3N Initiative. Key findings emerged from the literature review, historical data, desk review carried out by program evaluations, and other project documentation. The result findings also highlight several factors of food crisis in the country and show that the 3N Initiative has become a key component in Niger's economic and social development plan and is a major contributor to poverty reduction. Key adaptation interventions that were identified in process as being of high priority by government, multilateral and bilateral institutions, and other partners were to address vulnerability and recurring crisis, and better understand and respond to the underlying determinants of food insecurity.

**Keywords:** Food insecurity, Hunger, Malnutrition, Poverty, 3N Initiative

### Introduction

Poverty and hunger, when occurring at a large scale and for an extended period, lead to famine. Today, throughout the world, one billion people suffer from malnutrition. In Africa, one-third of all children suffer from malnutrition. In Niger, a country with demographic growth, food and nutrition insecurity remains above WHO alert threshold.<sup>1</sup>

Approximately 80% of the Nigerien population is engaged in agriculture. However, because of scarce natural resources, many of these households cannot feed themselves from their own production. Several authors have suggested that the Niger crisis has been misinterpreted, and that rather than a unique

phenomenon resulting from a large shock, it resulted from adverse longer-term trends of vulnerability, exacerbated by relatively inadequate production. Because most households are unable to produce sufficient cereals for their own consumption, they rely heavily on the sale of animals, petty trade and loans to access food. Niger is a country where the risk of food insecurity is very strong and has experienced several episodes of famine. The most serious are those of 1973-1974, 1983-1984, 2005 and 2011.<sup>2</sup> The recurrence of food insecurity in the country is due to a very strong dependence on agriculture in winter where droughts are frequent. The analysis of available data shows that Niger is at risk for drought, severe grain shortages and many

<sup>1</sup> [www.wfp.org/countries/niger](http://www.wfp.org/countries/niger)

<sup>2</sup> Niger National Desk Review, 2012.

other consequences on the food and nutrition situation. Thus, one of the most challenging political questions in Niger is that of food security. Achieving sustainable food security features high on the agenda of the Strategy for Rural Development (SRD) as well as the Strategy for Poverty Alleviation both of which have been adopted by the Government, as strategies aimed at creating better conditions for the survival of Niger's populations. A research that can shed light on these important issue is therefore of paramount significance.

Achieving food security, one of the vital Sustainable Development Goals, along with adequate nutrition, is a basic necessity since a hungry population hampers economic productivity. In light of this situation, the government implemented a food sovereignty policy at the core of its development agenda to ensure long-term solutions to end chronic vulnerability. Like all countries in West Africa, Niger has engaged in efforts to promote agricultural development and economic growth. This process is part of the implementation of the Accelerated Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (SDRP) and the Rural Development Strategy (RDS). The overall objective of the Rural Development Strategy of Niger was to reduce the incidence of rural poverty from 66% to 52% by 2015 by creating the conditions for Sustainable Economic and Social Development to ensure Food Security of and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources.

The 3N Initiative was launched in response to the food crisis. The priority objective of the 3N initiative is to reduce poverty by improving the resilience of rural communities to climate change and food insecurity. It further aims to fight malnutrition, which threatens vulnerable people in rural areas, especially women and children. In other words, malnourished children are among the most vulnerable in Niger, one of the world's poorest countries. The consequences of climate change related repeated droughts, floods, and desertification mark the ecological fragility of the country. By tackling the root causes of those problems, the initiative aims for social justice.

The concept of vulnerability has been around in the poverty and famine literature for a long time, yet it's interpretation persists in food security and related literature. According to Alwang et al, vulnerability is a "forward looking" concept. "It seeks to describe people's proneness to a future acute loss in their capability to acquire food". Of course rising poverty is a factor contributing to rising vulnerability, but this does not make it the same thing. Poor people may not be vulnerable if they live in relatively stable contexts with

good infrastructure and social support systems. Conversely, non-poor people can be vulnerable if they live in unstable contexts characterized by widespread uncertainty. People can be vulnerable to many other things, such as a wide variety of illnesses and infectious diseases, accidents at work or atmospheric pollution and so on. In this paper, the interest is in vulnerability to an acute decline in access to food.

This study aims to investigate food security along with improvement of the nutritional status of Nigeriens men, women and children. The improvement of the nutritional status of Nigerien constitutes the fourth axis of the 3N initiative. This axis provides for the promotion of a balanced food consumption model, a healthy lifestyle, the reduction of the prevalence of various forms of malnutrition, the effective management of acute malnutrition, and the strengthening of the health control system and the national nutritional surveillance system.<sup>3</sup> The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we review the literature. In Section 3, we discuss the methodological approaches. The estimated results are discussed in Section 4. Section 5 concludes with some policy implications and lessons learned.

## **Literature review**

### ***Poverty Concepts***

The importance of the task of poverty reduction means that we must be clear as to what we mean by poverty, who the poor are and the best way to help them escape poverty. There are many definitions of poverty, according to how it is viewed. Encyclopedia Encarta, defines poverty as the condition of having insufficient resources or income. In its most extreme form, poverty is a lack of basic human needs to sustain as useful and working efficiency such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water and health services. According to the United Nations Human Development Report, poverty is defined as a complex phenomenon that generally refers to inadequacy of resources and deprivation of choices that would enable people to enjoy decent living conditions. There are many competing approaches for the definition of poverty. It is therefore impractical to identify and review all of them in this article. Yet, it is worthwhile to discuss the most prominent approaches. The philosophy behind the basic needs approach is that everyone should be able to pursue well-being. The central notion of the basic needs approach is essentially materialistic. It works by identifying a bundle of basic consumption and assess whether the population has adequate access to it. It has been generally accepted that the package should contain

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.futurepolicy.org/healthy-ecosystems/nigers-3n-initiative-nigeriens-nourishing-nigeriens/>

commodities that are universally needed, such as shelter, sanitation, clean water, food... etc. If any individual has inadequate access to these commodities, then the person may be considered as poor.

Poverty is very much an ill-defined concept. The term was often used interchangeably with terms such as deprivation, well-being and human development. In everyday usage the term poverty is synonymous with a shortage of income. The study of poverty has been integrated into a much wider academic field, particularly human development goals such as educational and health attainments. On a theoretical level, it gives poverty a more inclusive definition. Being poor no longer implies the deprivation of resources, but the absence of other non-monetary and humanistic qualities.<sup>4</sup>

Participatory approaches to poverty measurement seek to identify the things that matter to poor people. Different perceptions matter since the poverty concept adopted will influence policy. Two further conceptual issues are absolute versus relative poverty; and temporary versus permanent poverty. Absolute poverty is measured against some benchmark such as the cost of getting enough food to eat or being able to write your own name for literacy. Relative poverty is measured against societal standards. The distinction between the temporarily and the permanently poor is linked to the notion of vulnerability. The vulnerable are those at risk of falling into poverty. If there are poverty traps such that once someone falls into poverty they cannot get out again then there is a good case for anti-poverty interventions to prevent this happening. Another definition of poverty stresses economic opportunity. This concept is the most difficult to measure empirically, but it is typically the most central in theory and public policy debates.<sup>5</sup>

In attempting to summarize the definition of poverty, Englama and Bamidele (1997) asserted that poverty in both relative and absolute terms refers to a circumstance where a person is not able to provide sufficiently for his or her necessities or fundamental human requirements such as clothing and decent accommodation, food, the fulfillment of social and economic responsibilities, non-access to productive employment, lack of skills, resources and confidence. These preclude the person from advancing in welfare, which is limited by the scarce availability of economic and social infrastructure<sup>6</sup>

### **Poverty Reduction**

Economic growth has been the main driver of poverty reduction globally. Empirical studies increasingly

support the idea that countries which have incorporated population policies and family planning programs in their overall economic development strategies have achieved high and sustained rates of economic growth and that they have also managed significant reductions in poverty. Niger is one of the group of least developed countries (LDCs). Ranked 177 out of 178 countries according to the UNDP report on development, Niger's poverty is endemic. Their Human Poverty Index (HPI) is 64.4%.<sup>7</sup> The evaluation carried out within the framework of the preparation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) reveals that two-thirds of Niger's populations live below the poverty line. A third of Niger's population is extremely poor. The same report indicates that rural poverty suffered most severely. In fact, 90% of poor Nigeriens live in rural areas. The disaggregation of poverty by gender shows that women are more vulnerable to poverty than men because three out of four poor people are women.

Poverty reduction efforts have been hindered by high fertility rates and unsustainable population growth. This is because these factors negatively impact economic development. Rapid population growth means that women are having high numbers of children, which, in developing countries in particular, means increased chance of death. This devastating health impact limits women ability to improve their lives and to take care of their children. These consequences mean that women and children are also less likely to be educated and therefore will also have less chance of escaping poverty. The empowerment of women is the key method to confronting unsustainable population growth. Combining family planning services with programs to increase girl's access to education and promoting gender equality can increase their empowerment and this is strongly correlated with the lowering of fertility rates.

### **Vulnerability and Food Insecurity**

Vulnerability has an external and internal dimension, and food insecurity has a temporal and intensity dimension. An exploration of the two concepts suggests that in both cases the dimensions need to be combined in order to understand the different interactions and the interconnections between different dimensions in which they are embedded. This combination of dimensions is important for understanding the significant role that livelihoods play in the accumulation of assets and for accessing food. It makes the understanding of multiple causes and consequences of vulnerability and food insecurity for different households clearer.

<sup>4</sup> WONG, Shing Yip, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Alex Addae-Korankye, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Englama and Bamidele, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> UNDP, 2005.

Those households and individuals considered chronically poor or food-insecure are likely to experience severe food insecurity in the long-term, as a result of their weak livelihoods and minimal assets. Consequently, future studies on vulnerability to food insecurity should focus on these chronically food insecure households in order to determine the multidimensional nature of the challenges they experience and their ability to cope and adapt to these shocks. This would contribute to our understanding of the contexts in which the data from larger quantitative studies are embedded. The concept of vulnerability is used with different connotations. Vulnerability is a function of exposure to risks and the resilience to these risks. Risks are events that threaten households' food access and availability, hence, their food security status. Vulnerable groups are comprised of people who are likely to fall or remain below the welfare threshold in the near future. One of the earliest, but most widely accepted definitions of vulnerability is that vulnerability refers to exposure to contingencies, and the stress and difficulty in coping with those contingencies. Vulnerability thus has two sides: an external side of risks, stress to which an individual or household is subject; and an internal side which is defenselessness, meaning a lack of means to cope without damaging loss. External vulnerability refers to the structural factors that determine sensitivity and risk to exposure. These factors include processes such as the spread of infectious diseases (such as HIV and AIDS), political changes, conflicts and environmental changes. Internal vulnerability concerns the ability of households to respond and cope with the actions required to overcome or reduce the undesirable effects of exposure to processes of environmental, economic, political and social change. While some groups of people may be considered vulnerable due to criteria such as income, gender, age, disability and location, there may well be households within such categories who are not vulnerable. This is determined by their livelihood strategies.

Several studies show that people move in and out of food insecurity and poverty.<sup>8</sup> The terms vulnerability and food insecurity are often used interchangeably. Because vulnerability is linked to the uncertainty of events, everyone is vulnerable to food insecurity, but some more so than others. Being food insecure today does not necessarily indicate vulnerability, because the food situation could improve, in particular if looking beyond the immediate future. At the household level, the major types of risks include health, social and economic risks. These risks cause food insecurity by lowering food production, reducing income and increasing

indebtedness. In addition to some of the above risks, threats related to natural environment, health and social conditions could affect groups of households.<sup>9</sup> Those who are most vulnerable to further food insecurity are those who are already experiencing food insecurity. Consequently, in such situations vulnerability equates with the current experience of food insecurity.

## **Methodology**

### ***Study design***

This paper reports on a study undertaken in rural Niger, which concentrates a large part of the socioeconomic development of the country's agricultural areas. We used a range of qualitative methods to elicit local understanding. Initially, we conducted a desk review of available published and unpublished reports and other program documents related to nutrition, with emphasis on resilience in Niger. Materials included national policies and strategies, previous assessments, project reports, formative research, and other studies. We subsequently conducted a series of scoping visits in the country, involving the collection of additional documents and consultations with key informants including government officials, donor agencies, implementing partners, and other national and regional entities. In addition, a large body of evidence already exists on the nutrition situation in Niger, including several high-quality assessments, which were important sources for this review. The political situation remains uncertain, government institutions are usually weak and the army remains unable to enforce security. At the operational level, management of acute malnutrition is undertaken in Niger by health staff, community health workers and NGOs. In general, the various NGOs and associations, as well as technical and financial partners encountered during this study indicate intervening on behalf of women through institutional mechanisms. For all organizations contacted, and having an action plan, it clearly provides specific activities for rural women in the context of improving their resilience to food insecurity. In addition, many donors are currently funding initiatives directed exclusively or primarily towards rural women such as Women Empowerment. At the NGOs level, the structures involved were implementing several initiatives whose main purpose is to ensure women access to land. Also specific activities for women farmers such as technical assistance, training and awareness of new technologies in order to help not only women but the poor and the young farmers to adapt to climate change and achieving food security.

<sup>8</sup> Christian Romer Lovendal and Marco Knowles, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Christian Romer Lovendal and Marco Knowles, 2005.

**The study**

Niger is an enclave country located in West Africa in the heart of the Sahel region. It has a land mass of 1 267 000 km<sup>2</sup>. Three-quarters (3/4) of the nation's land mass is located in the northern part of the country where the climate is hot and desert-like and rainfall is less than 150 mm per year.<sup>10</sup> The country has experienced two major food crises. These are famines of 1972-1974 and 1984-1985. In addition to these two major food crises, the country has experienced periods of critical food situation: 1990-1991, 1993-1994, 1996-1998, 2000-2001, 2004-2005, 2011-2012. In 2006, 20% of Nigerien women aged 15 to 49 years suffered from chronic energy deficiency while acting as a pillar of food, health and nutrition security at the household level.

With a population of about 20 million and poverty rate of 44.1%<sup>11</sup>, Niger is one of the poorest nations in the world. Although poverty is declining in Niger, it remains widespread, especially in rural areas. Unchecked population growth driven by high fertility gives the country the unfortunate distinction of having the lowest Human Development Index in the world.<sup>12</sup> Extreme poverty, limited livelihood opportunities, profound and deeply entrenched structural gender inequities all contribute to food insecurity in Niger. The 2017 Global Hunger Index reports that Niger faces a serious level of hunger, ranking it 111th out of 119 countries.<sup>13</sup>

Malnutrition is widespread in the country, particularly among infants and young children. 14.8% of children aged 6-59 months suffer from global acute malnutrition (GAM), with 15.7%, in rural compared to 10.7% in urban areas (DHS, 2013). The country has suffered four acute food crises since 2000.<sup>14</sup> Even in good harvest years, child malnutrition has remained high. Since 2005, the prevalence of acute malnutrition among children in Niger has always been above the alert level, with a few regions exceeding the emergency level threshold. National nutrition survey revealed a national average of global acute malnutrition of 12.3% with a prevalence of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) of 1.9%. The situation is of great concern among children aged 6–23 months.<sup>15</sup> Niger remains challenged in terms of resources, although it is a main producer of uranium and began pumping oil in 2011.<sup>16</sup> Life expectancy is low and the fertility rate is among the highest in the world. Demography, therefore,

plays a key role in food crises in Niger. Gender inequality is an important determinant of population growth and, accordingly, the political economy of hunger in Niger. In southern regions, increased land pressures have created greater responsibilities for women to provide food. The result has been that food insecurity has increased for children, whose diet has worsened through a lack of variety. In northern regions, exclusion from pastoral production and a lack of non-agricultural alternative employment have forced women to farm for derisory returns under highly insecure conditions.

Niger still faces serious challenges to development due to its landlocked position, desert terrain and; high population growth rates putting increased pressure on limited resources; poor coverage of basic services, leading to a population that suffers from poor health and nutrition status; limited education and restricted access to existing services; poverty; political instability and related population movements.

**Data collection and analysis**

The government is the most important source of data in the country papers, followed by UN organizations. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is mentioned explicitly in only a few documents. Reports that have been collected are used as a result of collaboration between different partners and organizations. These efforts mostly concern secondary data.

In order to identify the most vulnerable areas and the types of households with the highest risk of food and nutrition insecurity within the country, we used sources such as baseline study for the Development Food Assistance Programs in Niger, USAID Office of Food for Peace Food Security and Desk Review for Niger. We identified the vulnerabilities of households and zones in Agadez, Tahoua, and Tillaberi urban centers, and Zinder where food insecurity was particularly high. We obtained information policies and programs by reviewing all relevant documents and databases identified at country, regional, and global levels.

<sup>10</sup> <https://infoflr.org/index.php/countries/niger>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/Niger-Nutrition-Profile-Mar2018-508.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/briefs/spring\\_drivers\\_of\\_malnutrition\\_in\\_niger\\_0.pdf](https://www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/briefs/spring_drivers_of_malnutrition_in_niger_0.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/Niger-Nutrition-Profile-Mar2018-508.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/niger-drought-and-locusts-situation-report-1-fy-2005>

<sup>15</sup> Dr Guero H Doudou Maimouna, Dr Yami Chegou and Prof Ategbo Eric-Alain.

<sup>16</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/niger-drought-and-locusts-situation-report-1-fy-2005>

## Results and discussion

Findings were reviewed with relevant Government and partner organizations to confirm that they were correct and represented the best available data. The Objective was to understand factors of food crises in Niger. Numerous factors contribute to the widespread crisis in Niger. Niger is characterized by a low level of development. Widespread poverty, an over-reliance on rain-fed subsistence farming, low education levels and some of the world's highest rates of fertility and population growth contribute to a sizeable population vulnerable to food insecurity.

### *Factors causing rising vulnerability and nutritional insecurity in Niger*

The drivers of malnutrition are complex. In most settings, it is difficult to identify significant causes of malnutrition, but it is possible to identify trends of malnutrition. Niger's agriculture sector is still vastly underdeveloped, relying on one season of rain-fed crops for most of the year's production. According to a 2009 report from the FAO, less than 1% of agricultural land is irrigated. Beyond a lack of water, major challenges to food production include a lack of financial resources or access for inputs, such as fertilizer, insecticides, seeds, or technology to increase yields. The RISE baseline found that fewer than half of households had access to a market for agriculture inputs. A USAID desk review also found a lack of use of good post-harvest processing and storage techniques and few longer-term storage facilities such as warehouses.<sup>17</sup> Rural families in Niger face both compromised production and limited market access. Due to low agricultural production and limited income, many households are unable to access adequate diets either through purchase or production of diverse, nutritious foods. Household production diversification has a larger impact on diets when market access is limited.<sup>18</sup>

While certain populations, such as young children appear particularly vulnerable to malnutrition, malnutrition is a crisis that affects all regions and all groups of people in Niger. Even in a good year, many Nigerien households struggle to meet their food needs. Niger has one main rainy season in June through September, with the main harvest occurring October through December. A typical farming household produces only enough to cover consumption through

March, and must then rely on purchases to meet their consumption needs until the next harvest.<sup>19</sup> A rapidly growing population is exacerbating these challenges. Niger has the highest fertility rate in the world at 7.6 births per woman of childbearing age.<sup>20</sup> There is a widely expressed desire for large families in Niger, which has the highest total fertility rate in the world. This often leaves women responsible for caring for children with little support from their spouse. Thus, Niger's inability to feed itself will only worsen due to the fast pace of its population growth and worsening effects of climate change.

Poverty is a key driver of food insecurity in Niger. Further, the incidence of poverty is highest among households in which the household head is primarily engaged in agriculture. Just under half of the population had access to basic drinking water services in 2015, and only 13% had access to basic sanitation services. Access is better in urban areas, where 89% of households have access to at least basic drinking water, and 44% have basic sanitation services. In Niger, only 46% of the population has access to safe water. The regions of Zinder, Maradi, Tahoua and Agadez, in particular, face limited access to drinking water, low sanitation coverage, and poor hygiene practices, especially among the poor. In a context of high food and nutrition insecurity, the lack of appropriate hygiene, drinking water and proper sanitation increases the incidence of water-related diseases, including diarrhea, which is a major underlying cause of malnutrition.

From a politically sensitive issue, nutrition became a national concern. The challenges to food security in Niger are immense and cannot be overstated. Resilience has been a cornerstone of nutrition and food security programming in Niger over the past decade yet continues to remain a challenge. Other challenges include the lack of women in decision-making control. Gender inequality is significant in Niger and deeply rooted in cultural traditions. Women have lower educational attainment rates. The lack of education especially as related to population education, sex education, the lowering of infant mortality and birthrates has contributed so much to population problems. Women who married early have children all their productive years because they do not know what measures they could take to stop bearing children. Likewise, young ladies who engage in illicit sex also get

<sup>17</sup>[https://www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/briefs/spring\\_drivers\\_of\\_malnutrition\\_in\\_niger\\_0.pdf](https://www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/briefs/spring_drivers_of_malnutrition_in_niger_0.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Marie T. Ruel, Agnes R. Quisumbing, Mysbah Balagamwala, 2017.

<sup>19</sup>[https://www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/briefs/spring\\_drivers\\_of\\_malnutrition\\_in\\_niger\\_0.pdf](https://www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/briefs/spring_drivers_of_malnutrition_in_niger_0.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/briefs/spring\\_drivers\\_of\\_malnutrition\\_in\\_niger\\_0.pdf](https://www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/briefs/spring_drivers_of_malnutrition_in_niger_0.pdf)

pregnant and have children who contribute to the over flow. All these are possible because they have not received any instruction on sex education and the adverse effect of over population. Niger has a Gender Inequality Index score of 0.695, ranking 157th out of 188 countries for gender inequality.<sup>21</sup> In general, women are far less likely to work in the formal sector at the local, regional, or national level.<sup>22</sup> The ability of women to make decisions is severely constrained, even around issues that, in many countries, are often the domain of women. In many cultures in Niger a man is rated and respected based on the number of children he has notwithstanding if he has the resources to take care of them. Also in rural communities' children are regarded as source of labor in the home and farm. So, the more children a man has the more helpers he has to take care of his domestic and farm work. Men reportedly make decisions around many aspects, including children's health care. The importance of family planning cannot be overemphasized. Young women who are often mothers of young children in Niger are in a particularly disadvantaged position. The challenge of gender inequality appears to be a major driving force affecting all aspects of health, nutrition, and food security. Although changing gender norms and power structures requires a longer substantial investment, current literature underscores that improvements in nutrition will not be possible without significant improvements in a woman's control over resources and decisions that affect her own health and more broadly, her household's livelihood and well-being.

#### ***Difficulties of Access to Food for some Social Groups***

Niger ranks 101 out of 117 countries according to the 2019 Global Hunger Index, with a 2019 GHI score of 30.2, considered serious, down from 52.1 in 2000, considered extremely alarming.<sup>23</sup> Niger's rates of child stunting, an indicator of chronic under-nutrition, were 53.5 and 54.8%, respectively, in 2000 and 2006. The most recent data, from 2016, show the child stunting rate at 40.6%, which is still considered very high.<sup>24</sup> Child under-nutrition rates vary substantially by region. Many Nigeriens have poor diets, including low dietary diversity and a high reliance on staple foods. Millet and sorghum constitute a large portion of the calories

consumed by Nigeriens, particularly among rural people living in poverty.<sup>25</sup> Diets of Nigerien infants and young children are inadequate. Just 23.3% of infants fewer than 6 months of age are exclusively breastfed, and only 5.6% of children ages 6–23 months consume a minimum acceptable diet.<sup>26</sup>

Exceptionally challenging socioeconomic conditions in Niger create a difficult environment for food and nutrition security. The major challenges that Niger is facing in the area of Livestock are productivity increase, production promotion and securing against the vagaries of the weather. Sustainable farming to contribute in improving the food security and incomes of the population and their resilience to crises and natural disasters must be a key objective. Healthy and dynamic livestock farming is the creed of the strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the poor rural population. Thus, it shall promote the employment of youth, especially women, while ensuring sustainable use of natural resources. The strategy, with its implementation, is a key issue for food security and increased rural incomes in a perspective of sustainable development of animal husbandry.

Niger has one of the lowest levels of educational attainment and literacy of any country in the world. Nigeriens average just two years of schooling, and the adult literacy rate is only 31%. Niger also has one of the highest population growth rates, at 3.8% annually. It has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with approximately three-fourths of girls marrying before the age of 18.<sup>27</sup> Households in Niger in which the woman was married at an early age have higher levels of food insecurity in terms of both dietary diversity and subjective self-assessments of food security.<sup>28</sup>

According to authors, over population has been blamed for a variety of issues including poverty, high unemployment rate, environmental degradation, famine and genocide. Due to the population explosion, the resources of the country cannot satisfy the populace anymore. A large population is a liability for most countries, especially one dependent on one source of income that offers limited employment. Over population has also brought increased unemployment, increased pressure on agricultural population, higher percentage of dependent children, higher rate of rural urban migration,

<sup>21</sup> UNDP 2014

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/briefs/spring\\_drivers\\_of\\_malnutrition\\_in\\_niger\\_0.pdf](https://www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/briefs/spring_drivers_of_malnutrition_in_niger_0.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/livelihoods-zoning-%E2%80%9Cplus%E2%80%9D-activity-niger>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/case-studies/2019-niger.html>

<sup>25</sup> Cheng and Larochelle 2016.

<sup>26</sup>

<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/FFP-Niger-Food-Security-Desk-Review-Oct2017.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/case-studies/2019-niger.html>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/case-studies/2019-niger.html>

lower returns on investment and lower per capita income.

As a result of the adverse effects of overpopulation on the economy of any nation, demographers and population experts advocate population control as the only solution.

### **Concept of initiative 3N**

Initiative 3N (i3N) consists of a program of investment that will allow Niger to reach the millennium development goals by incorporating the provisions of the strategy of poverty reduction, in order to ensure the conditions for a full participation of the population in national production and the improvement of their income. Achieving food sovereignty through the implementation of i3N is the Government's top priority. The i3N aims to strengthen national capacities for food production, supply and resilience to food crises and natural disasters.

Many projects are going on across the country to achieve food sovereignty. Many organizations are involved in implementing such projects. The approach used is an integrated community-based approach based on multi-sectorial land development, nutrition, and school feeding, under the leadership of the government with synergies and partnerships with all stakeholders. Since 2014 programs have been developed to enable people of poor and very poor households. Programs that help communities to cope with drought, to increase farming productivity, and to diversify away from farming are key to improving their resilience and food security. NGOs work with local authorities, beneficiaries and government technical services in all the phases of project.

### **Strategic directions of initiative 3N**

The Nigeriens Nourishing Nigeriens (3N) initiative is a food security and agricultural development strategy designed to address in a sustainable manner the structural causes of vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity. Adopting a multisectorial and multi-agency approach is an important component of Niger's Economic and Social Development Plan. The 3N Initiative is built around five strategic axes corresponding to the expected overall effects of investments and actions. These are: (i) the growth and diversification of agro-forestry-pastoral and fishing;

- (ii) Regular supply of agricultural and food products in rural and urban markets;
- (iii) Improve the resilience of populations to climate change, crises and disasters;

(iv) Improving the nutritional status of Nigeriens;

(v) Animation, Initiative Coordination and 3N momentum of reforms.

Thus the specific objective of the 3N Initiative is designed so that strengthening resilience to food crises and natural disasters is set as the starting point for efforts to be made under this initiative. In relation to gender, the 3N Initiative targets vulnerable households, women, youth, and persons with disability. Taking into account the gender dimension appears also in strategic programs, village, community and family service kits. It is clearly stated that women in general, and women heads of households in particular, are the priority target groups. Concerning service kits, a range of income-generating activities in which women are the main beneficiaries has been programmed. Thanks to the implementation of the 3N Initiative, there has been no famine in Niger since 2011.<sup>29</sup> The goal for 2021 is to reduce the number of Nigeriens living below the poverty line to 31% and achieve "zero hunger in Niger".

The Economic and Social Development Plan considers the 3N initiative as one of the main pillars of its success. Indeed, the strategic axis on the promotion of food security and sustainable agricultural development said that agriculture is the main vehicle of economic growth in Niger, and thus a reactivation of the sector is likely to contribute to economic growth that creates jobs and wealth. Although the Nigerien government has committed to taking multi-sectorial action on nutrition, more work is needed to incorporate nutrition into the agendas of various government ministries and encourage them to implement nutrition-sensitive programming. To help ensure that nutrition is prioritized, all relevant sectors should include appropriate nutrition-related indicators in their monitoring and evaluation processes.

### **Improvement of the Nutritional State of Niger**

Resilience programming has become a common theme of development programming in Niger. Various types of interventions have the potential to improve food security and nutrition such as nutrition education programs, the introduction of low-cost food processing and storage techniques, and livestock management practices. Research has shown, however, that the effectiveness of a given approach depends on the context in which it is implemented, which can vary from country to country and within country borders. A selection of the impact evaluation literature presents some of the available evidence on what has been effective in Niger. At the national level, the government of Niger should continue to invest in areas with a higher potential for food

<sup>29</sup><https://www.futurepolicy.org/healthy-ecosystems/nigers-3n-initiative-nigeriens-nourishing-nigeriens/>

production. Although access to health services has quickly expanded in Niger, there remain many challenges around the quality of service delivery. Access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation services are lacking. Creating safe and clean play spaces and disinfecting drinking water are important components to improving health and nutrition. Access to these services should be coupled with education to improve knowledge of good practices.

Women's role in food preparation can contribute to better nutritional outcomes within the household. It is, however, important to note that dietary diversification could be achieved through more diverse food production. Improving the rates of literacy and educational attainment in Niger, particularly for women and girls, is important for decreasing poverty and under-nutrition in the country.

Family planning programs also typically disseminate information on contraception, and on how lower fertility can help parents invest in their children and avail new opportunities for raising living standards. Parents, especially poorer parents, have imperfect information on these issues. Studies have shown that the mass media is very effective at increasing contraceptive use and reducing fertility. Reducing fertility also helps lower maternal mortality. Abortions following unplanned pregnancies are a significant cause of maternal death. Avoiding teen childbearing and having smaller families reduces maternal mortality risks, as does longer spacing between births. Improved maternal health care is another major factor in maternal mortality decline.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to provide a critical overview of the issues around poverty in Niger by exploring some analytical linkages between fertility and poverty. At the same time, the paper has also sought to draw out some of the complexities which lie behind the challenges and solutions of meeting the food demands in Niger. Feeding a growing population is a small part of what confronts the country. It does not just mean producing enough food, it also means producing the right type of food and ensuring that people are able to access it. It is hoped that this type of study will enable the broader understanding of the existing causes of chronic food insecurity, the differential impacts on various households, and what developmental initiatives are required to ensure improved food security and resilience to stressors at different levels.

For years, Niger has been confronted with chronic food insecurity and high levels of maternal and child malnutrition, common to the Sahel region. National nutrition surveys carried out over the years all point to the conclusion that the nutritional status of young

children in Niger remains a matter of great concern. The "Nigeriens Nourish Nigeriens" initiative brings together the efforts and policies of numerous ministries with the aim of harmonizing the actions needed to reduce food insecurity in Niger.

Due to climate vulnerabilities, people living in various coastal areas of Bangladesh have experienced lower crop productivity and cropping intensity. Natural disasters strike Bangladesh almost every year as a result of climate change. Crop agriculture is often constrained by different hazards and disasters such as floods, droughts, soil and water salinity, cyclones and storm surges (MoEF, 2009b).

The physiography of Bangladesh is characterized by two distinct features: a large, flood-prone deltaic plain and a small hilly area, which is flowing quickly across rivers. The country stretches 820 kilometers north to south and

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#### To cite this article

Bozari, N., & Gubo, Q. (2021). The 3N Initiative (Nigeriens Nourishing Nigeriens): Rethinking Hunger and thirst issue in Niger in the context of poverty reduction. *International Journal for Asian Contemporary Research*, 1 (III), 141-150.