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LEARNING BRIEFS

HAMZARI PROGRAM

PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE: LESSONS AND INNOVATIONS IN GUIDAN ROUNDJI DEPARTMENT, NIGER



Implementing partners



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FORWARD

With deep admiration and heartfelt thanks, I am honored to present this *Book of Learning Briefs*, a reflection of the dedication, innovation, and resilience that have defined the USAID Hamzari Program over the last six years (Oct. 2018 – Sept. 2024).

This compilation showcases key lessons, best practices, and the remarkable impacts that have touched the lives of countless individuals across the department of Guidan Roumdji (Communes of Chadakori, Guidan Roumdji and Guidan Sori), Maradi region in Niger.

From improving food security through access to improved seeds and resilient farming techniques to advancing maternal and child health through community-led platforms, open defecation free certification, these briefs highlight the collaborative efforts between local actors, technical experts, and communities to address some of the region's most pressing challenges.

Each page offers insights into our journey—how we've worked hand in hand with community members, technical services, local authorities, religious leaders to build stronger, more resilient systems capable of withstanding future shocks.

Our work would not have been possible without the unwavering support of USAID/BHA and our dedicated consortium partners, who have played an instrumental role in transforming vision into reality.

I invite you to explore these learning briefs, which not only celebrate our shared successes but also provide a roadmap for the continued journey toward sustainable and equitable development.

Let us carry forward these lessons as we continue to foster resilience, strengthen partnerships, and empower communities to thrive.

Sincerely,



Mathieu Lucius

Chief of Party,
USAID Hamzari Program
CARE Niger - Burkina Faso

ABOUT HAMZARI

Hamzari is a seven-year Resilience and Food Security Activity (RFSA) funded by USAID through the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). Hamzari's objective is to address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in the Maradi region, Niger. Hamzari implements a targeted, yet flexible, combination of interventions and activities to achieve its goal of sustainable, equitable, and resilient food and nutrition security for vulnerable groups, women, children, and youth under three purpose areas.



Goal: Achieve sustainable, equitable and resilient food security for vulnerable groups in Maradi



PURPOSE AREAS

Purpose 1 - Sustainable diversified livelihood and services improve resilience capacity and reduce extreme vulnerability for women, youth, and marginal households

Purpose 2 - Improved health and nutritional status among children < 5 years, adolescent girls, and women of reproductive age

Purpose 3 : Improved access and use of equitable and sustainable WASH services reduces disease and malnutrition among vulnerable populations



Donor: USAID/BHA



USD 42,200,000



October 2018 - September 2025



Region of Maradi

Department of Guidan Roundji

Communes: Guidan Roundji, Guidan Sori and Chadakori

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

OVERVIEW OF HAMZARI'S IMPACT AFTER SIX YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION

104,986

People directly reached (**62% women**) by Hamzari's interventions, representing a completion rate of **106%** of the final target **97,171 people**.

76 100

People (**73% women**) have increased access to public services in agriculture, livestock, health, nutrition and microfinance thanks to Hamzari's interventions.

25

Water retention bassins built to collect rainwater for watering animals during the dry season, each with a collection capacity of **300-400 m³** of water.

40

Market gardens (boreholes, irrigation basins, solar pumps) developed over **120 hectares**, benefiting **2,489 producers (58% women and girls)**.

137

Cereal banks facilitated access to **662 tonnes of millet** for **31,666 vulnerable households**, generating an income of **195.4 million FCFA** over two years.

2 049

Women benefited from funds to practise sheep fattening.

33 938

People (**94% women**) have access to savings and credit through the creation and revitalization of 1,761 MMD/VSLA groups.

3 058

Vulnerable women (**25% girls**) received **6,834 goats** (4,556 goats & 2,278 billy goats) as part of the Habbanayé livestock reconstitution program.

600

Hectares were restored to improve animal feed, with the participation of **6,028 people, 47% of them women**.

19

Livestock agents provided care for **23,904 animals** (cattle 21.4%, sheep 22.9%, goats 32.1%, poultry 22.1%).

Construction underway of a Garin Yara infant flour production unit with a capacity of 25 tonnes/month at Chadakori, the largest in the Maradi region.

24 502

Live births received at least four antenatal visits (ANC).

24 211

Children under the age of two received nutritional care at community level, thanks to mothers' behavior change to the importance of the quality, quantity and frequency of meals.

41 321

Children aged 0 to 5 benefited from specific nutritional interventions (behavior change to promote exclusive breastfeeding, breastfeeding until the child is two years old, hygiene in the preparation of the child's food, etc.).

37 704

Pregnant women received specific nutritional interventions (advice on mother and child nutrition, supplementation, assistance with "CSB+" enriched flour and vegetable oil).

6 963

Culinary demonstrations by **162 Care Groups** between October 2023 and September 2024.

66 445

People in **50 villages** have gained access to water through the construction of **16 Stand-alone Water Supply Stations, 3 mini drinking water supply systems, and 18 rehabilitated human-powered pumps.**

38

Public institutions gained access to water, including **32 schools** and **6 health centers.**

40

Masons and **9 private sanitation providers** were trained, facilitating the sale of over **7,000 latrines.**

70

Communal actors were trained in the communal WASH approach, and **267 people** in latrine emptying.

15

Economic Interest Grouping (EIG) of young girls have been set up to manufacture and sell menstrual hygiene products.

252

Villages declared **End of Open-Air Defecation (FDAL)** including all **199 villages** in the commune of Chadakori making this commune: **Chadakori FDAL**

50

School governments established and running

63

School latrines (**43 rehabilitated** and **20 completed**)



ACCESS TO IMPROVED SEEDS FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES: EXPERIENCES OF USAID HAMZARI

FFBS Group of Lihida village harvesting crops in October 2022

THE CONTEXT IN MARADI, NIGER

The Maradi region faces agricultural challenges such as overexploitation and soil degradation, aggravated by climate change, crop pest attacks, and lacks the appropriate technologies to fully exploit its potential. To overcome these obstacles and maximize agricultural potential, it is essential to restore soil fertility and practice sustainable farming techniques. Access to improved seeds, such as millet, sorghum, peanut, and cowpea, is essential, as they offer superior quality, disease resistance, and adaptability to farmers' needs, improving agricultural productivity, food security, and community resilience in the face of climatic challenges.

In this context, the USAID Hamzari program is intervening in the Maradi region to meet these specific needs. Implemented from 2018 to 2025 by a consortium of national and international organizations, including AREN, KARKARA, DEMI-E, WaterAid, GRET, and CARE, the program targets three communes in the Guidan Roudji department, selected for their vulnerability to food insecurity.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The USAID Hamzari program aims to improve sustainable, equitable, and resilient food and nutrition security for vulnerable groups in Chadakori, Guidan Roudji, and Guidan Sori communes. In the agricultural sector, sustainable access to improved seeds in the Maradi region is being promoted by the program to boost agricultural productivity, improve food security, and strengthen community resilience in the face of climatic challenges.

By providing technical and material support, the program introduces the use of improved seeds to farming groups, trains farmers in seed production and multiplication techniques, and encourages sustainable farming practices to maintain soil fertility and crop productivity.

ACCESS TO IMPROVED SEEDS AND RESILIENT FARMING PRACTICES

USAID Hamzari improves access to improved seeds by leveraging the expertise of Farmers Field Business Schools (FFBS) groups. These groups are actively involved in seed production and the dissemination of agricultural knowledge and practices, facilitating the horizontal transfer of knowledge and increasing the acceptance of improved seeds within the farming community.

USAID Hamzari identifies farmers' needs - (quality seeds available at the planting time and at affordable prices)- and seed production opportunities, through community consultations and field assessments. This participatory approach has enabled the selection of 15 motivated FFBS groups (210 producers, including 82 women), the involvement of local stakeholders, and the establishment of sustainable mechanisms for producing and marketing improved seeds.

USAID Hamzari works with the technical agricultural services, the National Research and Agronomic Institute or “Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique au Niger (INRAN)” and the Regional Chamber of Agriculture or “Chambre Régionale d'Agriculture (CRA)” to identify the well adapted, diseases-resistant varieties for the main crops (Niebe, peanuts, maize, millet, sorghum) and strengthen the technical and organizational capacities of FFBS groups.

In partnership with the Maradi CRA and the private seed company AMATE, USAID Hamzari supports producers in production, storage, packaging, , marketing and sales of seeds. USAID Hamzari trains producers on:

- Site selection for seed production
- Obtain basic seeds for seed production
- The establishment and maintenance of seed production plots;
- The main roles and tasks of seed producers;
- Challenges and means used to produce seeds;
- Ethics in seed production
- How to guarantee seed quality;
- Crop inspection;
- Reasons for seed sampling;
- Standards for Seed certification;
- Seed packaging;
- Harvesting and storage methods;
- Inventory management;
- Multiplication contract templates; etc.

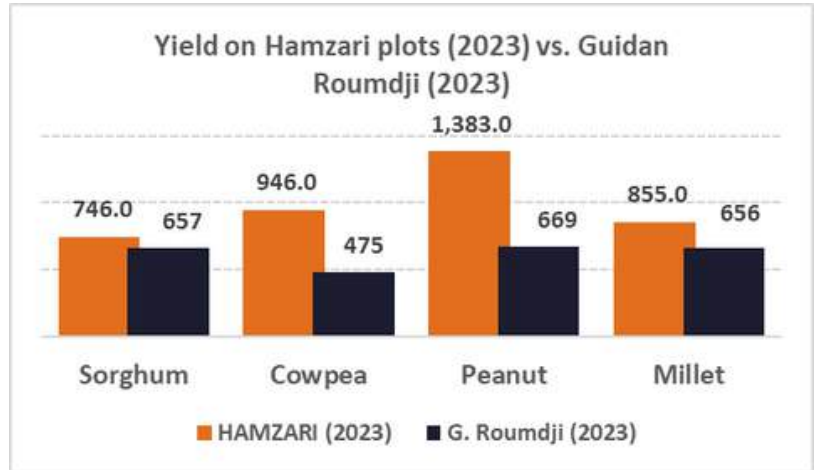
The INRAN, the CRA, the agricultural technical services, and the private seed company supervise the FFBS' action plans, making it easier for them to liaise with these players to acquire pre-basic or basic seeds , monitor production, and ensure seed quality.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN FFBS AND LOCAL ACTORS

The FFBS groups collaborate with local community structures known in the Hausa language as Mata Masu Dubara (MMD), which manage Village Loans and Savings Associations (VLSA), processing units, warrantage and cereal bank groups. In addition to MMDs, FFBSs work with producer organizations to facilitate their access to improved seeds.

RESULTS AND IMPACTS

By the end of the 2023 cropping season, the use of improved seeds and resilient and climate-adapted farming practices promoted by USAID Hamzari had significantly increased agricultural productivity and food security in its intervention area. Compared with common yields in the Guidan Roumdji department, USAID Hamzari's partner villages have achieved remarkable results (quantity in kilograms):



I'm a small producer in my village. Last year, I used the 55-437 variety of improved peanut seed. With 16 kg of seed, I harvested over 225 kg. Thanks to this harvest, I was able to buy an ox for 80,000 FCFA (130 USD), a sheep for 17,000 FCFA (29 USD), and a bag and a half of fertilizer. The rest of the money was used to provide for my family's health and food needs.

Rahamou Garba, new improved seed user at Bakatsomouba



Groundnut seed (55-437 variety) bagging by the FFBS group of Bakatsomouba

Photo: USAID Hamzari

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Our analysis reveals several key success factors, including the motivation, resources, capacities, and linkages that have sustained USAID Hamzari's seed access improvement initiatives.

Motivation :

- FFBS multipliers of improved seeds are motivated by yield improvement and marketing opportunities through producer organizations, MMDs, government seed purchase programs and NGOs;
- Subscription to the national directory of seed producers;
- Availability, downward price trend and confidence in seed quality.

Capabilities :

- The presence of community experts and seed multiplication centers (public and private);
- The presence of MMD groups, FFBS and seed multipliers;
- Availability of seeds and human resources such as technicians and expert farmers;
- Availability of model fields and demonstrations of modern technologies.

Resources :

- Availability of land to FFBS groups;
- Availability of agricultural equipment (seeders, ploughs, wedges, sprayers, etc.);
- Income from the rental of agricultural equipment and the sale of seeds.

Linkages :

- The well-established relationships between research institutions (INRAN), private seed companies (AMATE) and community seed producers provide important opportunities for maintaining and developing effective linkages and supporting agricultural production initiatives.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognizing the intervention area as suitable for seed production, combined with the presence of INRAN which has developed several proven disease-resistant and adapted crop varieties, facilitates access to basic improved seeds.
- The proximity and support of seed companies, seed inspectors, and research institutions to communities and private input sellers are essential in promoting improved seeds and boosting agricultural production.
- The availability of a network of local FFBS agents trained by USAID Hamzari facilitate the leveraging.
- Comparative yield data between sites using improved seeds and those using local seeds make a compelling case for promoting improved seeds for poor and vulnerable small-scale farmers.
- The creation of market opportunities (processing units, MMD groups for warrantage and cereal banks activities, etc.) constitutes sustainable outlets for the profitability of the seed sector.
- The challenge emerged from discussions with FFBS seed producers and technical agricultural services is the insufficient farmland to carry out seed multiplication activities, especially for millet and sorghum, which require a large area for isolation purposes.
- To make the production, marketing and use of improved seeds more sustainable, USAID Hamzari needs to 1) Train and raise awareness among producers about seed multiplication standards for different crops and 2) Organize producers into groups and networks to better meet seed multiplication requirements.



We are actively involved in the monitoring process and have participated in every stage from sowing to harvest. I appreciate Hamzari's initiative, which empowers local actors to produce seeds, thereby boosting local production of improved seeds. If this collaboration continues, we will keep supporting these seed producers and spread the word to others about the availability of local seed producers. The ongoing sensitization efforts are crucial for the sustainability of this initiative.

Sani Illo, Representative Maradi CRA





Photo credit: Bakissa Hamidou

HABBANAYÉ: LIVESTOCK ASSET BUILDING AND PROTECTING LIVES

A woman and her children around a goat received for habbanayé

SOCIO-HISTORIC CONTEXT AND THE HABBANAYÉ ACTIVITY

In the recent food and nutrition situation report of the [Food Crisis Prevention Network](#), the Maradi region is the second most populated region in Niger with over 5.3 million people. The recurrent shocks due to poverty and climate change make the living conditions of vulnerable communities extremely difficult. Furthermore, growing insecurity in the region caused a sharp escalation in humanitarian needs, putting more individuals and households at risk of food insecurity and acute malnutrition. According to the same report, about 510,000 people (10% of the whole population) of Maradi region are facing food insecurity phases 3 and 4 from June to August 2023.

Hamzari deploys sustainable approaches that ensure community ownership and use self-reinforcing and self-transferring mechanisms. One of the flagship activities promoted by USAID Hamzari is the 'habbanayé' activity, a traditional solidarity system. USAID Hamzari enhanced and innovated this practice to maximize its impact. The practice itself consists of lending a goat or other small ruminant to a community member in need. Once the animal gives birth, it is returned to its owner and the offspring are raised by the recipient. The rebuilt herd represents a source of food (milk, meat) and serves as a source of income to meet family needs. The cycle continues as the offspring multiply, spreading the livestock wealth throughout the community.

With this activity, USAID Hamzari addresses the root causes of chronic vulnerability through a livestock, income generation, and nutrition approach. The habbanayé helps communities better prepare for and recover from droughts and other economic stressors.

IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISM

USAID Hamzari targets women from the most vulnerable and marginalized households, based on vulnerability criteria established in a village General Assembly. After the targeting, beneficiaries are divided into two groups of peers, Hamzari selects a local money transfer agency to give the funds to the women, who in turn purchase the animals in local markets. Each woman in the first group receives a kit consisting of two goats and one buck, which she raises until she gets offspring. Once the offspring are weaned, she transfers the two goats and the buck to her peer in the second group, who waits for her turn to keep and raise the animals. Before the transfer, when the buck is fattened enough or get aged, the woman keeping and raising the buck can seek approval from the management committee to sell buck and buy a new one for the rotation pair. And she keeps the profit generated from the sale for her financial autonomy.

The innovation brought by USAID Hamzari consists in the integration of habbanayé to the Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA)/Mata Masu Dubara (MMD) concept for better sustainability. This approach allows women beneficiaries to integrate savings and credit groups to engage in income-generating activities to ensure the food security of their households in case of shocks such as bad agricultural seasons.

HABBANAYÉ

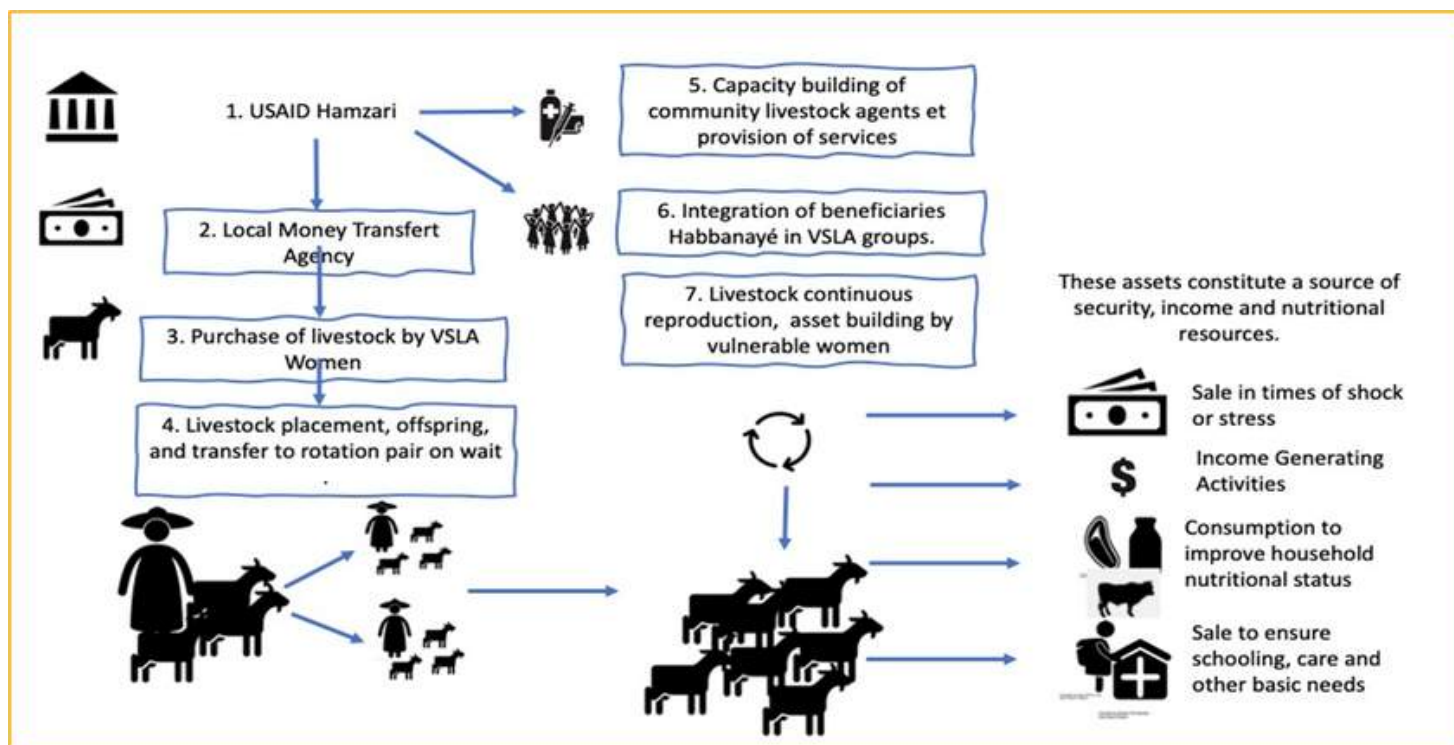
The traditional approach in which wealthier households loan a few female ruminants (such as cows, sheep, or goats) to a poorer friend or family member who keeps the offspring of the borrowed animals to build their own stock for the purposes of sustaining their families through difficulties like drought and conflict.

In each beneficiary village, USAID Hamzari promotes the habbanayé activity to structure the beneficiaries into VSLA/MMD groups. They have internal regulations for the joint management of the animals. A habbanayé Management Committee within each group ensures that the internal rules are respected, in particular the payment of monthly contributions (100 CFA francs per woman), the care of the animals thanks to the link that has been established with community livestock agents trained by the project, and the replacement of the animals in case of mortality.

MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS (OCTOBER 2020 - JULY 2023)

- Identification of 157 villages with livestock technical services and local municipalities.
- Targeting and rotation pairing of 2,280 highly vulnerable and marginalized women.
- Placement of 2280 animal kits (6,840, goats) through direct purchase by beneficiary VSLA group members themselves on local markets.
- Creation of 111 Women VSLA groups (MMD type) based on /thanks to the habbanayé activity.
- Establishment of 138 management committees and training of members on management tools (cash register, rotation or transfer to binomials, herd evolution monitoring form).

USAID HAMZARI HABBANAYÉ IMPEMATATION MODEL



MAIN LESSONS LEARNED FROM IMPLEMENTATION

- The participatory and inclusive targeting of beneficiaries, considering the zone's vulnerability criteria proposed by women at community meetings, allowed for better identification of the most vulnerable and marginalized women in the village.
- The spacing (two weeks) between the transfers of funds to women helps to avoid inflation of animal prices on local markets.
- The sustainability of habbanayé for the benefit of the most vulnerable depends on the respect of the rotations between women; therefore, the establishment of Habbanayé Management Committee is imperative to ensure the respect of these principles during and beyond project implementation.
- Group solidarity through members' contributions allows systematic replacement/renewal of animals that die, as well as payment of veterinary care when needed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Comply with the State's recent commitment to implementing the Habbanayé strategy, namely the granting of a goat kit consisting of three females and one male, to help vulnerable households rebuild their herds.
- Establish a Habbanayé beneficiary support fund to help maintain the kits (animals), to replace/renew animals lost to mortality, and to provide veterinary care in the event of disease.
- Undertake fodder production or actions to restore degraded grazing areas to facilitate animal feeding, especially in the context of climate change marked by fodder shortages.
- Undertake forage production or actions to restore degraded sites to facilitate animal feeding.

CONCLUSION:

Goat breeding is the most popular activity among rural women. Through the distribution of kits (animals), Habbanaye is helping to strengthen the resilience of beneficiary communities. The goats multiply rapidly without much expense, giving beneficiaries faster access to a source of income that can be mobilized to offset food deficits, cover household needs during the lean season, and enable women to meet social expenses (children's weddings, baptisms and weddings of relatives, health, etc.).



My name is Ani Ibrahim. I am 38 years old and I live in the village of Dan Ganga Tsohoua, in the commune of Guidan Roundji. I am married and mother of six children. I live alone with my children since my husband left us without means of survival. It is in this context of poverty that Hamzari helped women of vulnerable households through the raising of goats to reconstitute their livestock assets. I was selected by the women of the village with another peer and the project gave us funds to buy two goats and one buck. I take good care of these animals and my dream is that they can give offspring that will belong to me. With the offspring from this investment, I will one day rebuild my herd. The buck that I will sell soon to place another one with my peer, will allow me to earn income and satisfy the needs of my family.



Ani Ibrahim



Before the implementation of Hamzari, we were extremely vulnerable. With the 60,000 CFA francs (approximately \$90) that my partner and I received, we bought two goats and one buck. Some of these goats have already given offspring, and this helps us a lot - just before the feast of Ramadan, I sold some of the offspring that to buy food and clothes for my children. Thanks to the support through the habbanayé, we participate actively in the social life of the community. We thank Hamzari very much because we are no longer marginalized as we used to be in the past.



Yaha Sadi



Photo credit: Balkisa Hamidou

STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE THROUGH CEREAL BANKS: A REFLECTION FROM USAID HAMZARI

Two members pose in front of Tamroro's grain store

INTRODUCTION

As part of resilience and disaster risk reduction activities, Hamzari has supported 77 cereal banks. This support consists of building the management capacity of cereal banks, strengthening cereal stocks, as well as bringing storage warehouses up to standard.

METHODS OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

This learning brief has been produced following the review of the implementation process of cereal banks supported by Hamzari and is also based on data from the regular monitoring of these cereal banks and the rapid survey conducted by the project in November 2022. It aimed to document the successes, difficulties, and lessons learned, but also to formulate recommendations for the last two years of the project and the exit strategy.

THE CRISIS: FOOD, LIVELIHOODS AND GENDER INEQUALITIES

The Maradi region is facing food deficits with disastrous consequences on the livelihoods of the local population. Furthermore, structural gender inequalities contribute greatly to food insecurity. According to the Participatory Gender Analysis conducted during the "Refine & Implement" phase of the project, women and girls face discrimination in matters of inheritance, ownership and access to land and other assets, education and literacy, and decision-making about their health and lives.

THE SOLUTION

Hamzari implements a set of integrated and gender-sensitive interventions and thereby contributes significantly to the empowerment of women in the region. These interventions address the main underlying causes of food insecurity and include appropriately phased and sequenced activities for social and behavioral change. The support activity for Mata Masu Dubara (MMD), the Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), through the cereal banks thus contributes to the empowerment of these women and the strengthening of food security in local communities.

According to the inhabitants of the region, food self-sufficiency varies from three to six months after the harvest period (October to December). During the lean season (July to October), vulnerable farmers depend on markets for their food supplies, and this is when grain prices peak. Therefore, cereal banks allow vulnerable farmers not to buy cereals at higher prices during the lean season and not to have to sell their stocks at low prices during the harvest to meet their cash needs.

RAPID SURVEY RESULTS

The Rapid Survey, conducted in November 2022, focused on a sample of six villages with cereal banks and three villages without cereal banks, but having used their services. The data collection method consisted of interviews with participants in Hamzari activities in a village assembly around the Village Chiefs and MMD groups. From the analysis of the data collected, the following emerges:

- 100% of participants interviewed are satisfied with the services provided by cereal banks. Among the reasons for satisfaction are the availability of cereals during the critical lean season, the price practiced which is below that of the market, and the sales period which coincides with the first rains (which gives households the opportunity to engage in their own production activities).

- 100% of participants interviewed agree that the cereal banks performed well and enabled local populations to have availability and access to cereals during the lean season.
- All the cereal banks sold cereals at affordable and below-market prices during the lean season. This allowed households to procure more cereals for the same amount by sourcing locally.

SUSTAINABILITY OF SERVICES

Looking forward to the end of the project, Hamzari organized a learning session on the theme “Grain banks and sustainability”. The session examined the implementation of cereal bank activity considering the four pillars of sustainability. Following discussions with stakeholders, including community members, the following points were proposed:

SUSTAINED RESSOURCES

- Contributions in cash and in-kind to buy cereals (support in starting the cereal bank)
- Production of collective fields of MMDs (facilitate access to seeds to improve production)
- Benefits from grain loans
- Subsidies from international partners (subsidize successful cereal banks for the rehabilitation of their stores)

SUSTAINED CAPACITIES

- Inclusion of budget lines in community development plans
- Contribution from the diaspora
- Support to cereal banks’ action plans by international partners (strengthen their capacities in good management)
- Provide training to members to manage the cereal banks

SUSTAINED MOTIVATIONS

- Ownership and solidarity between members and non-members
- Strengthening of social cohesion
- Availability of cereals in the village at a low cost compared to the market.
- Save time, energy, and resources compared to going to the ordinary markets outside the village.
- Save time to take care of production work during the lean season.

SUSTAINED LINKS

- The participants proposed to proceed with the registration with the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) of all MMDs to allow collaboration with cereal banks and to subsidize them through funds from the Maison du Paysan available.

“

I am not a member of the VLSA group that operated the cereal bank, but I take full advantage of the services that are offered through the possibility of buying cereals to feed my six children, particularly during the lean season. In addition to price affordability, the cereal bank provides us immediate access to grains locally.”

Barira Abdou, a non-VLSA member

“

Often, even with money in hand, it was difficult to buy millet in the village. But today, thanks to God and Hamzari, millet is available in the village. The availability of millet is a great step forward.”

Maria Abdou, Member Cereal Bank

“

The purpose of the MMD network is to ensure the empowerment of women and combat food insecurity.”

Rahamou Hamissou, President an MMD network



CONCLUSION

- Overall, all cereal banks functioned well during the 2023 fiscal year. No reason for dissatisfaction relating to a refusal of payment was mentioned by the various management committees. However, the fact that some of the cereal banks provide cereals on credit, thus allowing vulnerable households to borrow from the bank during the lean season and repay their debt after the harvest, may present loopholes for sustainability.
- The rapid assessment and the learning session helped stimulate the level of commitment of the municipal authorities to support the cereal banks in view of the end of the project and sustainability. This materialized in the municipality of Guidan Roudji through the establishment of an ad-hoc committee to monitor all cereal banks and budget entry for the monitoring of development activities.
- The budget entry in the Annual Investment Plan has made it possible to finance the monitoring of development actions, in particular infrastructure such as water points, the activities of women's groups such as cereal banks, warrantage, and so on. These commissions also carry out special missions when a management problem is reported in development activities in the villages of the commune, to pinpoint the responsibilities at the root of the problem and find lasting solutions.
- Better, the mayor's office and the Cooperative Action for Rural Organizations Department of the Departmental Directorate of Agriculture provide technical advice and administrative support to the management committees of the various community initiatives, enabling them to draw up administrative documents (notably statutes, internal rules and regulations, compliance with the OHADA act, networking, and communal federation). These administrative documents also enable grassroots community organizations to forge relationships with financial institutions and projects/programs in the area, to benefit from the advantages and support needed to build community resilience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Systematize the exploitation of collective fields by MMD groups to sustainably strengthen stocks.
- Support MMD groups by securing land deeds for collective fields and land used for the construction of storage warehouses.
- Coordinate with the municipalities to connect the cereal banks and the State structures in charge of the sale of cereals at moderate prices.
- Find a mechanism that does not motivate cereal banks to be efficient to benefit from subsidies but to rely more on their own resources.
- Separate the economic and social functions of cereal banks. To sustain the activity and contribute to the empowerment of cereal banks, cereals should perhaps not be sold below the market price.
- Continue to emphasize the creation of cereal banks networks that ensure their follow-up and supervision beyond the end of the project.



Photo credit: Leonora Baumann

INTEGRATED COMMUNITY PLATFORMS FOR MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH AND NUTRITION: EXPERIENCE FROM USAID HAMZARI

Women give enriched porridges to children at a cooking demonstration in Allah-Karabo

BACKGROUND TO MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH AND NUTRITION IN NIGER

In Niger, maternal and child health face significant challenges. According to the 2012 Demographic and Health Survey, over 70% of children suffer from anemia, and only 23% of newborns are exclusively breastfed. Complementary feeding for young children meets recommended standards in just 3% of cases. These issues are worsened by limited access to healthcare and the low social status of women, increasing malnutrition risks.

Niger's patriarchal society limits women's decision-making power, especially in rural areas, affecting their health and well-being. To address this, the Hamzari program promotes better infant feeding practices, micronutrient supplementation, and food hygiene to improve both nutrition and the social factors impacting maternal and child health.

IMPLEMENTATION OF HAMZARI'S COMMUNITY PLATFORM APPROACH

To respond effectively to the challenges of maternal and child health and nutrition in the Guidan Roudji department, Maradi region, Hamzari has developed a three pronged strategy based on community platforms. This approach involves setting up Care Groups, Husband Schools (Écoles des Maris) and Peer Educators (Pairs Éducateurs), strategically distributed in the intervention zones to maximize the coverage of health and nutrition services and enhance community support.

The Care Groups, mainly made up of local women from Mata Masu Dubara (MMD)/Village Savings and Credit Associations (VSLA) groups, are essential vehicles for disseminating good health and nutrition practices within households in Hamzari intervention areas. Care Groups are peer-to-peer based health promotion programs aimed to effectively improve health behaviors and outcomes in low-resource communities.

In empowering mothers and local leaders, the Care Group model demonstrates that high-impact solutions to childhood malnutrition and illness can be simple, low-cost, and community-derived.

The Husband Schools play a crucial role in mobilizing men to support maternal and child health and nutrition initiatives by addressing harmful gender norms. By engaging men in reproductive health and nutrition issues, they create a family environment that encourages the adoption of healthy practices. The approach goes beyond mere awareness-raising, actively challenging the harmful social norms that perpetuate gender inequality, thus fostering a more supportive and equitable atmosphere for improving health and nutrition outcomes.

Peer Educators, made up of women and men, play a key role in promoting health and nutrition by organizing awareness sessions, training peers to recognize malnutrition, and encouraging positive behaviors. They conduct home visits, foster connections between communities and health centers, and share challenges with stakeholders to improve support and services.

“

Among all my children, Jaffar is the only one to be chubby, smiling and healthy. His weight increases with each visit to the health center. Through cooking demonstrations, I have learnt to prepare various foods for my child, including the wonder corn-soya blend. My child's health and nutrition status has improved.”

Amina Salissou, 35, lactating mother from Guidan Alkali village

**162 Care Groups
involving 3,240 women**

**67 Husband Schools
with 804 Men**

**1,264 Peer Educators
(Men, and Women)**

Hamzari community platforms for the promotion of maternal and child health and nutrition

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PLATFORMS

Hamzari's approach to community engagement begins with the MMD groups. Within the members of these MMD groups, Care Groups are organized into two complementary sub-groups: the Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) sub-group, which supports pregnant women and mothers with children up to the age of 6 months, and a complementary group, Lead Mothers (Mamans Lumière), for mothers of children aged 6 to 23 months. These groups are supported by Husband Schools and Peer Educators, each with complementary roles, as shown below.

Infant and young child feeding (IYCF) to :

- Identify pregnant women and educate them on the importance of good nutrition and hygiene during pregnancy and for women of childbearing age.
- Monitor pregnant women throughout their pregnancy, ensuring they attend prenatal check-ups, get vaccinated, receive iron and folic acid supplementation and have assisted deliveries, with support provided through home visits and trips to health centers.
- Encourage women to start breastfeeding right after birth and to breastfeed exclusively for the first six months.
- Ensure they attend postnatal check-ups, which include newborn care (growth monitoring and immunization) and family planning guidance.

Lead Mothers (Mamans Lumières) to :

- Raise awareness of complementary feeding, the importance of breastfeeding for children up to two years of age, and the importance of infant check-ups and hygiene (compliance with the vaccination calendar).
- Organize cooking demonstration sessions (age-appropriate complementary feeding from 6 months, frequency, quantity, consistency, preservation for children up to two years of age, and at household level).
- Introduce the use of individual bowls for children under 2 years of age.
- Follow-up malnourished children through home visits (culinary demonstrations of fortified porridges).

Husbands' school (exclusively men) to :

- Strengthen dialogue with influential groups (men, grandmothers, religious leaders etc.)
- Strengthen dialogue between technical services and the community on the concept of partnership and the methodology of the participatory approach.
- Facilitate access to family leaders to talk about taboo subjects.

Peer Educators (men and women) to :

- Organize awareness sessions, share training insights, and address community questions on health and nutrition topics.
- Train peers on the signs of malnutrition, encourage positive behaviors, and conduct home visits for breastfeeding and child nutrition.
- Encourage health center visits and maintain connections with health workers and beneficiaries.
- Share implementation issues with stakeholders for support and improvement.



I'm lucky to have been mentored by a Lead Mother from Hamzari who taught me important health and nutrition best practices. My baby is six weeks old. I practice and will continue to practice exclusive breastfeeding until my child is six months old. Breast milk contains everything my baby needs to grow. ”

Nana Aicha Moutari, Lactating mother from Dargué Village

INSTITUTIONALIZING COMMUNITY PLATFORMS FOR SUSTAINABLE HEALTH AND NUTRITION SERVICES

In the Hamzari intervention area, healthcare coverage stands at 47.7%, with more than 80% of the vulnerable community living over 15 kilometers from health facilities. Community platforms act as extensions of health services in hard-to-reach areas.

The Hamzari program leveraged existing local expertise to better guide activities promoting and preventing malnutrition, as well as encouraging good health and nutrition practices. One of the key challenges at the start of implementation was the collaboration between health centers and Hamzari community platforms. To address this, the Hamzari initiated networking activities and created consultation/dialogue frameworks between community platforms and health centers. Additionally, to prevent isolated activities, the program developed a mechanism for integrating and complementing actions among the community platforms (Care Groups, Husband Schools, and Peer Educators).

To ensure the sustainability of the community platforms it has supported over the past five years—Care Groups, Husband Schools, and Peer Educators—Hamzari is focused on integrating these structures into the state system. In close collaboration with key technical departments, including the Regional Directorate of Public Health, the Regional and Departmental Directorate of Community Development, and the Health District of Guidan Roudji, Hamzari, under the leadership of the Ministry of Public Health of Niger, plans to certify 886 members who have demonstrated exceptional performance. This includes 219 women from Care Groups, 446 model husbands from Husband Schools, and 221 Peer Educators, all of whom scored at least 70 out of 100 in evaluations. This certification, endorsed by health authorities, will strengthen the connection between these community platforms and the 17 integrated health centers in the Guidan Roudji Health District, ensuring the continuity of maternal, infant, and nutrition health services.

Additionally, Hamzari aims to professionalize these platforms by integrating them into public health systems through the Nigerien Agency for Volunteering in Development (ANVD). If successful, this integration will enable certified members to earn a livelihood from their activity. Hamzari is also working to expand the range of curative and preventive care provided by these local experts. This includes establishing mechanisms for motivation and financial support, potentially in collaboration with partners like UNICEF and UNFPA. These initiatives are designed not only to position these local actors as key players in promoting health and nutrition but also to ensure their long-term autonomy and sustainability by enabling them to generate income from their activities.

RESULTS FROM IMPLEMENTATION

The leverage of community platforms —Care Groups, Husband Schools, and Peer Educators— in the Guidan Roudji department has significantly participated in improving maternal and infant health and nutrition, demonstrating the model's potential for sustainability and scalability, even in the face of challenges.

By September 2023, through Hamzari's routines activities particularly in the care and support of pregnant and breastfeeding women, Hamzari had facilitated over 19,800 births with adequate prenatal care compared to 14,165 in 2022 (Hamzari's indicator performance tracking table). Through culinary demonstrations, active screening of malnourished children, referral to integrated health centers of children in need of care, over 41,300 children under five received nutritional interventions.

Hamzari encouraged Care Groups to establish nutritional granaries containing millet, sorghum, cowpeas, peanuts, and sesame through a voluntary collection during the harvest period. Today, Hamzari has established 171 nutritional granaries, 162 of which are managed by Care Groups under Hamzari's guidance, with 9 in villages that replicated the approach. To promote dietary diversity, Hamzari also encouraged the collective cultivation of nutritional gardens in villages with access to water and land resources.

Moreover, the program empowered over 40,500 women of childbearing age through education on proper nutritional practices. It reached over 21,600 children under the age of two and more than 37,700 pregnant women, offering them tailored nutritional support. These achievements highlight the transformative impact of the community platforms and provide a model for enhancing the resilience and health of vulnerable communities in Guidan Roudji and beyond.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY PLATFORMS

In June 2024, Hamzari completed an evaluation of the three types of health and nutrition community platforms using a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative insights from focus group discussions and key informant interviews.



Dargué husbands' schools raise women's awareness at the Dargué integrated health center

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EVALUATION

The Care Groups

- The diversity of performance between community platform members and communes suggests the need for approaches adapted to local contexts.
- Women aged between 30 and 39 are the most performants, indicating that this age group could be a priority target for strengthening the effectiveness of interventions.
- Rigorous use of tools such as registers, and Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) is essential for monitoring activities and early detection of cases of malnutrition.

The Husband Schools

- Men's involvement in Husband Schools has led to greater ownership of health and nutrition practices, thus strengthening family dynamics.
- Older men from the age of 40 onwards, because of their experience and availability, play a key role in the success of Husband Schools.
- Husband Schools are accessible to all levels of education, which reinforces their inclusiveness and community impact.
- In the context of our intervention area, where patriarchal power strongly influences the adoption of good health and nutrition practices, empowering men to make decisions is an essential lever for social change.
- The role of the Schools of Husbands as intermediaries between health centers and the community has elevated the social status of the men involved.
- The involvement of men in social mobilization for reproductive health and family planning has created a highly favorable environment for changes related to birth spacing, the nutrition of women of reproductive age, and especially the reduction of domestic burdens.
- The activities of the Husbands' Schools have improved men's perceptions of the benefits of reproductive health and family planning services, while also strengthening couple communication, resulting in joint decision-making that supports family well-being.

The Peer Educators

- The level of education directly influences their effectiveness and ability to carry out their tasks, underlining the need to incorporate ongoing training for less-educated Peer Educators.
- Relatively low rates of diarrhea management and recognition of danger signs indicate a need to reinforce ongoing training in these critical aspects of child health.
- The experience of older Peer Educators is a major asset, but it is also crucial to encourage the participation of young people to ensure the continuity of interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adapt strategies according to communal performance and age groups to maximize the impact of the Care Groups.
- Strengthen links between the Care Groups and state services to ensure the sustainability of activities after the end of the program.
- Encourage Husband Schools to continue organizing awareness-raising and community dialogues to sustain the impact of the program after it ends.
- Encourage greater involvement of young people as Peer Educators to ensure the sustainability of interventions.
- Continue training efforts, particularly for less-educated women, to improve the coverage and effectiveness of interventions.
- Continue to value the commitment of older members and use their experience to mentor younger generations.
- Develop appropriate training materials for members with no formal education to improve their participation and effectiveness.
- Emphasize ongoing training, particularly on topics where gaps have been identified, such as managing diarrhea in the home and recognizing danger signs.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the three health and nutrition community platforms – Care Groups, Husband Schools and Peer Educators – highlights their major contribution to improving maternal and child health in the intervention zones. The active mobilization of men through the Husband Schools and the significant impact of the Care Groups and Peers Educators on community health and nutrition testify to the effectiveness of these platforms. However, to guarantee the sustainability of the gains made, it is crucial to continue to fill the gaps, such as including the curative aspect in the initial package (prevention and promotion), and to maintain progress through the official recognition by the national health system of the crucial role that community platforms play in improving the living conditions of their communities. Additionally, ensuring a smooth transition of activities to local actors is essential for reinforcing the sustainability of the services provided by these community platforms

“ I used to think that breast milk wasn't enough for my baby, but thanks to the Care Groups' awareness-raising sessions, I've come to understand that it's all he needs. Today, my husband also helps me keep up with the medical visits and apply the Care Group's advice. ”

Nana Idi, Yamatawa Village



Photo credit: Bakissa Hamidou

OPEN DEFECATION FREE (ODF) CERTIFICATION OF THE CHADAKORI RURAL COMMUNE: EXPERIENCE FROM USAID HAMZARI

Group photo of the participants at the certification ceremony in Chadakori

INTRODUCTION

As part of its WASH activities, the USAID Hamzari program committed to supporting Niger's national strategy to end open defecation. Through a partnership with the Chadakori commune, the Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach led to a significant milestone: the certification of the commune in June 2024. This collective success was validated by a regional verification mission, confirming the Open Defecation Free (ODF) status. A post-ODF monitoring period, extended from six months to one year, helped solidify hygiene practices, offering long-term support to communities to sustain their achievements.

INTERVENTION STRATEGY

To achieve this, Hamzari developed a community-based strategy focused on:

- **Mobilizing traditional leaders** to unite the community in eliminating open defecation.
- **Training Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) committees** to guide local efforts and ensure regular monitoring of sanitation activities.
- **Facilitating experience-sharing** between villages to promote positive competition and mutual learning.
- **Conducting radio debates** to raise awareness on the importance of sanitation.
- **Encouraging community self-assessments and the development of action plans** to maintain their ODF status.
- **Creating a sanitation market** by training 41 masons and 10 private providers to construct and sell latrines, ensuring access to durable infrastructure.
- **Organizing hygiene campaigns** through competitions to motivate households, particularly women, to adopt strict hygiene practices.
- **Monitoring local initiatives** by supporting long-term actions such as fines for non-compliant households, engaging community leaders in latrine construction, and organizing regular meetings between the community and its leaders.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Thanks to a participatory approach and strong community mobilization, several initiatives were implemented to ensure the sustainability of sanitation practices. These actions strengthened local capacities, developed durable infrastructure, and promoted exemplary hygiene behaviors. Hamzari achieved significant results in the Chadakori commune, including:

- **Increased access to improved sanitation:** In 2024, Hamzari enabled 13,456 people to access improved sanitation facilities, exceeding the forecast of 10,800 people.
- **Growth of Private Sanitation Providers (PSPs):** The number of PSPs increased from 6 to 9, with significant growth in their monthly earnings, averaging \$183, supported by a business network strategy and promotional campaigns.
- **Expansion of the sanitation market:** In 2024, the market enabled the sale of 2,141 latrines and related items, showing that fast and affordable access to inputs encourages the adoption of sanitation infrastructure.
- **Training of 70 local actors** in the CLTS approach, reinforcing local sanitation capacities.
- **CLTS committee action plans:** The committees implemented 83% of their action plans, contributing to the sustainability of the ODF status in 199 certified villages.
- **Training of 90 educator pairs** to raise awareness on animal waste management, a key element of environmental hygiene.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The factors that contributed to achieving and maintaining ODF certification in Chadakori are based on a set of innovative and well-structured strategies aimed at mobilizing communities and sustaining the sanitation gains.

- **Strong community leadership:** Mobilization of traditional leaders to eliminate open defecation.
- **Institutional support:** Engagement of local authorities in monitoring and supervising CLTS villages.
- **Multisectoral integration:** Synergy between CLTS approaches and other food security and nutrition initiatives.
- **Structured collective efforts:** Establishment of CLTS committees to organize community actions.
- **Experience sharing:** Exchange between advanced and less advanced villages to share best practices.
- **Media awareness:** Radio debates to promote the adoption of hygienic practices.
- **Community self-assessments:** Tools that allow villages to plan for maintaining their ODF status.
- **Inter-structure synergy:** Collaboration between CLTS committees and other community structures (Care Groups, Schools of Husbands).
- **Hygiene competition:** Incentive campaigns encouraging exemplary practices.
- **Development of sanitation markets:** Training masons and private providers to construct and sell latrines.
- **Extended post-ODF monitoring:** Extending the monitoring period to one year to ensure sustainability.
- **Regional supervision:** Evaluation by the regional CLTS committee for rigorous follow-up.
- **Sustainability plans:** Empowerment of village committees to maintain ODF status.
- **Emulation competitions:** Model mothers and inter-school contests to promote hygiene.
- **Social inclusion:** Construction of latrines for vulnerable households to ensure equity.

CHALLENGES

The Hamzari program's experience in certifying Chadakori as ODF revealed several major challenges:

- **National context:** Access to basic sanitation services remains very low in Niger, with only 8% coverage nationwide and over 70% of the population still practicing open defecation, especially in rural areas.
- **Persistent social norms:** Some cultural norms hinder the implementation of CLTS actions, requiring innovative solutions.
- **Risk of relapse:** The size of semi-urban villages increases the risk of returning to open defecation after achieving ODF status.
- **Need for durable latrines:** Large villages require more solid infrastructure, which is difficult for vulnerable households to obtain.
- **Economic vulnerability:** Poverty limits communities' ability to build and maintain durable latrines.
- **Challenges for vulnerable households:** Families in precarious situations struggle to maintain ODF status.
- **Limited financial resources:** Communes lack sufficient funds to support sanitation activities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Inter-structure synergy:** Coordination between CLTS committees, Water Service User Associations (AUSPE), and Care Groups fostered concerted actions, consolidating sanitation gains.
- **Support from local authorities:** Backing from local authorities and communal structures reinforced the functionality and monitoring of CLTS committees, ensuring the sustainability of actions.
- **Product quality and customer satisfaction:** A 100% client satisfaction rate for product quality generated positive publicity and increased sanitation infrastructure sales.
- **Entrepreneurial development and employability:** Training private providers and young people enhanced their autonomy and entrepreneurial capacity, contributing to market sustainability after the program's exit.
- **Private sector involvement:** Integrating the private sector into sanitation marketing made services more accessible and economically viable.
- **Competitive approach for motivation:** Competition between villages motivated households to improve their sanitation infrastructure, strengthening community commitment.
- **Diversity of sanitation approaches:** The combination of complementary strategies to CLTS facilitated access to sanitation services in different contexts, ensuring the sustainable abandonment of open defecation.
- **Support for vulnerable households:** Subsidizing latrines for the most vulnerable promoted equity in access to infrastructure.
- **Strengthening community leadership:** Involving local leaders and communal authorities played a key role in achieving and maintaining ODF status.
- **Monitoring and empowerment of CLTS committees:** Strengthened monitoring and the empowerment of village CLTS committees enabled the sustainable maintenance of ODF status.
- **Importance of experience sharing:** Exchanges between villages motivated other areas to commit to obtaining ODF status.

CONCLUSION

The experience of Hamzari in certifying Chadakori as ODF shows that achieving ODF status relies on a holistic approach combining local leadership, community mobilization, and innovation in sanitation strategies. The involvement of youth, private sector engagement, and targeted support to vulnerable households were crucial factors. The program also demonstrated the importance of synergy between different actors and rigorous monitoring to ensure the sustainability of gains. Thanks to these efforts, Hamzari successfully transformed hygiene and sanitation behaviors, creating a healthier and more socially cohesive environment. Integrating these best practices into other communes could foster wider replication, accelerating the achievement of open defecation-free goals in the region.

SOME PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIALS

“As the village chief, I am firmly committed to continuing cleanliness activities and maintaining ODF status even after the program's departure. I made this commitment within my commune because cleanliness is fundamental and even supported by our religion, Islam. I will continue to remind community members so that we can maintain our status as an open defecation-free zone by continuing to use and keep our toilets clean.”

Ibrahim Arzika, Chief of Chadakori Village

“I am 53 years old with nine children. I am from Chadakori and live in the Chadakori district. I have a proper latrine at home, which I built primarily to preserve the dignity of my family, my visitors, and myself by avoiding open defecation. The project's support through advice, guidance, and capacity building on the use and maintenance of latrines, handwashing before meals and after using the toilet, and waste management has significantly improved the living conditions in our village. The contest organized by Hamzari helped us achieve what seemed impossible a few years ago. As a resident of the Chadakori commune, my contribution has always been to highlight to women during our group care meetings the importance of maintaining good personal and environmental hygiene and latrine maintenance.”

Hadja Mariama Adré

“After our district came in last place in the competition, I convened what I would call an urgent and crisis meeting. Consulting with natural leaders and the local Imam allowed us to draw the population's attention to the importance of using latrines. Young people contributed significantly to the construction of latrines by providing labor, and today we are proud of the results, as our health expenses have decreased. The suspicions husbands had about women practicing open defecation are now a distant memory, thanks to the latrine construction.”

Abdou Issoufou, Chief of Naguidé Village

“This initiative, supported by the Hamzari program, is vital for our community. It has enabled us to clean up our living environment in a very short space of time. As the commune's health manager, I initiated sanitation activities to put an end to defecation next to the former integrated health center, injecting substantial financial resources in vain. Today, Hamzari has got the population to do it for free! What's more, this ODF initiative has had a significant impact on the health of the population. Before, there were over sixty (60) cases of diarrhoea per month at the integrated health center. Today, with the initiative, we have less than ten (10) cases per month. We thank the Hamzari program and USAID for this.”

Dr. Moussa Abdoul Hamid Ousseini, Head of the Chadakori integrated health center



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