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HUMAN INTEREST STORYBOOK
HAMZARI PROGRAM

SYNERGY FOR THE RESILIENCE OF VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES **IN GUIDAN** **ROUMDJI DEPARTMENT, NIGER**



Implementing partners



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FORWARD

With immense pride and profound gratitude, I introduce this Book of Success Stories, capturing the resilience, determination, and transformation witnessed through the USAID Hamzari Program. Over the past six years (Oct. 2018 – Sept. 2024), this program has been a beacon of hope for vulnerable communities in the Maradi region of Niger, empowering women, men, youth, and households to rise above the challenges of food insecurity, malnutrition, and limited access to resources.

These stories are a testament to the people's unwavering spirit, their courage to embrace change, and their collective commitment to building a more resilient and prosperous future. From enhancing livelihoods through innovative agricultural practices to fostering social cohesion, nutrition and health improvements, each narrative reflects the tangible impact of our work and the lives we touch daily.

At the heart of this journey is the collaboration between dedicated community members, visionary leaders, and our invaluable partners. Together, we have not only addressed the urgent needs of today but laid the foundation for a sustainable tomorrow. I invite you to immerse yourself in these stories, which serve as both a celebration of success and a reminder of the continued path ahead as we strive to leave no one behind.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the CARE Country Office in Niger, as well as our generous donor, USAID/BHA, whose unwavering support and partnership have made these impactful stories possible. Your commitment to improving lives and fostering resilience in our communities has been the driving force behind these successes.

Let these stories inspire us all to continue pushing the boundaries of what is possible, driven by the shared vision of a world where everyone can 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 Roudjji

Communes: Guidan Roudjji, 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**)

NANA FATIMA'S EMPOWERING JOURNEY AS A LIVESTOCK AGENT

Nana Fatouma Moudi deworming a bull

One of the main obstacles to livestock development in Niger is the insufficient number of government livestock field extension agents in comparison to the size of animal populations. In response, the Ministry of Livestock in Niger has implemented the concept of "local animal health" through the use of livestock auxiliaries as an alternative solution.

Within this context, USAID Hamzari, implemented by CARE, works in collaboration with the local private veterinary service and the departmental livestock directorate in the Guidan Roundji department to enhance the Farmer Livestock Innovation System by introducing new livestock auxiliaries. In 2021, in response to the communities' requests in its operational areas, USAID Hamzari provided training for 19 livestock auxiliaries, two of whom were women. These livestock auxiliaries are community agents chosen by the communities to offer basic care and guidance to livestock breeders, including techniques for preparing livestock feed.

Nana Fatima Moudi, a 38-year-old widow and mother of seven children, is one of them. She resides in Guidan Ara with her children, a village situated in the Chadakori commune. She was a highly motivated trainee, determined to succeed in a male-dominated field.

After completing the training, USAID Hamzari equipped her with a demonstration kit containing an automatic syringe, subcutaneous and intramuscular needles, and a 4-liter vaccine cooler to launch her business. Additionally, she obtained a 20,000 CFA francs (USD 33) loan from the local private veterinary service in Guidan Roundji to purchase veterinary products.

Presently, she offers deworming, vaccination, calving assistance, and wound treatment for various livestock, such as goats, sheep, cattle, poultry, and dromedaries.

Nana Fatima's life has been transformed by her role as a livestock auxiliary. This opportunity has enabled her to provide for her seven children. She is proud to have sent her oldest son back to school, "My eldest son had dropped out of school because I didn't have the means to pay his school fees when I lost my husband. But thanks to my new vocation, I was able to enroll him back in school. This year (2023), he passed all his- exams to go to high school".

USAID Hamzari collaborates with individuals such as Nana Fatima to enhance their food and nutrition security at the individual and household levels. In addition to arranging food distributions for the most vulnerable, USAID Hamzari also establishes and reinforces income-generating activities both on-farm and off-farm livelihood activities.

Nana expresses, "Before I became a livestock auxiliary, I was considered one of the most vulnerable people in my community, and struggled to provide for my family. Today, everything has changed for the better. I didn't own a single animal. Today, I have seven goats, two sheep and lots of poultry. What pleases and comforts me about this job is that I see myself as a hero among women".

Everybody admires Nana Fatima. According to Abdoul Salam Haladou, a 25-year-old breeder from the village of Guidan Ara, "Nana is a source of pride for the whole village. One of the advantages of having Nana is that she can intervene at any time of the day. In our village, when an animal fell sick, we used to slaughter it quickly but today, with Nana nearby, this practice has reduced drastically".

For Sadia Adamou, a resident from Guidan Ara, "Nana is passionate about and loves her work. She is always available to serve others, day, and night. Also, when a livestock epidemic breaks out in the surrounding villages, Nana immediately alerts the village and makes sure everybody is aware of the need for vaccination".

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To facilitate his travels and reach more villages, Hamzari helped Nana acquire a motorcycle. "This motorcycle allows me to work in several villages. Before, I could only serve villages within a five-kilometer radius, but now I can go up to fifteen kilometers," adds Nana.

Nana Fatima hopes to pass on her trade secrets to her third son, who accompanies her in her work. She would also like to set up a veterinary products depot in her village to facilitate her work. To help her achieve these goals, Hamzari supports her with a business plan and introductions to other technical and financial partners.

“

Before I became a livestock auxiliary, I was considered one of the most vulnerable people in my community and struggled to provide for my family. Today, everything has changed for the better. I didn't own a single animal. Today, I have seven goats, two sheep and lots of poultry. What pleases and comforts me about this job is that I see myself as a hero among women.

Nana Fadima Moudi, Livestock agent

”



Photo credit: Leonora Baumann

Nana Fatima Moudi and four of her seven children



Photo credit: Bakissa Hamidou

WARRANTAGE LEADING FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE FOR HABSATOU ABOUBACAR

Habsatou showing her gorgeous fabric pieces

Habsatou Aboubacar, a determined 35-year-old woman and mother to seven children, has created an inspiring tale of resilience and financial empowerment in the village of Guidan Gobro, located 22 km north of the main town of the commune of Guidan Roudji, Maradi region.

Following a difficult divorce in 2021, Habsatou decided to proactively shape her future by venturing into small-scale commerce. She established a routine of visiting markets every Sunday to procure sweet potato sacks and fabric pieces, which she then effectively resold in her local community. Nevertheless, her main challenge was the inadequate capital that hindered her ability to keep up with the increasing demand.

In 2021, she found a glimmer of hope through the USAID Hamzari program. USAID Hamzari has been collaborating with MMD/VSLA, including the one Habsatou was part of, to help them formalize their activities, set up a cereal bank, and carry out warrantage as part of its strategy to create, revitalize, and support Mata Masu Dubara/Village Savings and Loans Associations (MMD/VSLA) through the accreditation acquisition process.

In 2022, a network called "Hadin Kan Mata," which means "Women's Solidarity," was established by three MMD/VSLA groups in the village of Guidan Gobro. The network, consisting of 58 members, had a committee that managed the cereal bank. Through their dedication and efficient organization, the network successfully gathered a substantial amount of cereal.

In 2023, the USAID Hamzari program acknowledged their achievement by awarding them a "Warrantage" fund of around 890,000 CFA francs (USD 1,483), which represented 80% of the cereal stock they had mobilized.

This is how Habsatou gained access to credit through the "warrantage" fund. "Warrantage" is a financial practice commonly used in agriculture, where a borrower uses a commodity (such as crops or other goods) as collateral for a loan. She was granted a loan of 62,000 CFA francs (USD 103) to expand her small business. With this assistance, she was able to increase her inventory of sweet potatoes and fabric pieces, going from 2 to 5 sacks and from 5 to 15 pieces, respectively.

Despite her limited education level (6th grade) and with her strong determination, Habsatou was seamlessly integrated into the USAID Hamzari activities. She is a member of the Farmers Fields Business Schools (FFBS) group, the care group, and the sanitation committee in her village.

Habsatou has achieved numerous successes. She invested in livestock, having purchased two rams that she intends to fatten and sell for the upcoming Tabaski festival (Tabaski, also known as Eid al-Adha, is one of the most important Islamic festivals celebrated by Muslims worldwide). Additionally, she has obtained a goat that has given birth to three offspring. Furthermore, she has made a purchase of five bags of peanuts for oil extraction.

With gratitude, she states, *"Thank God, I am a role model in my village. Despite the challenges, I have achieved several successes through my patience and determination to move forward."*

Habsatou intends to further grow her business and motivate other women in her community to embrace creativity and wholeheartedly pursue financial independence. Her story is a living example of the power of "warrantage" that can empower women and turn challenges into flourishing opportunities.



Photo credit: Bakissa Hamidou

Sa'a Samaila and her children

EMPOWERING WOMEN WITH NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH SMALL RUMINANT FATTENING

Economic activities in the Maradi region of Niger primarily revolve around agriculture, livestock farming, and forestry. Livestock breeding is the second most significant economic activity in the area. Within the communes where USAID Hamzari operates (Chadakori, Guidan Sori, and Guidan Roumdji), women's groups play an active role in income-generating activities (IGA), particularly in the fattening of small ruminants, with a focus on sheep.

To improve the food and nutrition security and resilience of women, youth, and their households in its intervention areas, USAID Hamzari has set up an innovation fund. This approach focuses on identifying, selecting, and financing locally initiated microprojects that contribute to the community's socio-economic development.

Following a rigorous process, USAID Hamzari identified, selected, and financed 30 high-performing Mata Masu Dubara/Village Saving and Loans Associations (MMD/VSLA) groups in 2022 comprising a total of 874 members, all of whom are women. The financing is based on a successive rotation system, where funds are given to the first group representing half of the total members (437 women).

Each beneficiary of the first group has received a capital of 90,000 CFA francs (USD 150) to purchase two adult rams of their preference in the local markets, fatten them, and sell them after three to four months of the fattening operation. As per the terms and conditions for receiving the funds, when the animals are sold, the members keep the profit and transfer the capital to the second group, who awaits their turn to engage in the fattening operation.

To ensure sustainability, each beneficiary is required to contribute 4,500 CFA francs (USD 8), equivalent to 5% of the value of the capital granted. This amount is used to purchase replacements for animals that died during successive rotations, as well as to cover the animals' treatment and maintenance costs.

Prior to the distribution of funds, USAID Hamzari provided training to participants on various fattening techniques (animal selection, maintenance treatment, marketing, etc.) to increase profitability. A few months after the first operation, participants expressed their appreciation for this initiative.

Mrs. Sa'a Samaila, (35), a member of the Ingancin Rayuwa MMD/VSLA from the village of Kiré, Chadakori commune stated, "When I received my money, I bought two rams of my choice in the local market at 90,000 CFA francs (USD 150). I fattened them for three to four months and sold them on the market at 140,000 CFA francs (USD 232). I made a profit of 30,000 CFA francs (USD 50) after spending 20,000 CFA francs (USD 33) on maintenance".

USAID Hamzari not only organized food distributions for the most vulnerable but also created and strengthened on-farm and off-farm livelihood activities. This initiative enables participants to engage in income-generating activities to ensure the food security of their households in case of shocks, such as poor agricultural seasons.

USAID Hamzari encourages participants to reinvest the profit as working capital to develop their business. "These 30,000 CFA francs (USD 50) profit enabled me to purchase another ram, fatten it for two months, and sell it at 45,000 CFA francs (USD 75). With this cash in hand, I intend to buy agricultural inputs so that I can have a good agricultural season, sell my harvest, and buy more animals to fatten", added Sa'a Samaila.

USAID Hamzari aims to ensure sustainable, equitable and resilient food and nutritional security for vulnerable groups in three communes of Guidan Roundji department.

To ensure the sustainability of the intervention and create the conditions for a maximum number of women members of MMD/VSLA groups to benefit from this activity, USAID Hamzari collaborated with the communities to establish a rotation plan for the 437 remaining members who are waiting. *"This is the first time I've undertaken an activity that has brought me this much profit. I'd like to take this opportunity to urge the members of our group to really take good care of their animals to allow more women to benefit from this activity,"* expressed Sa'a Samaila.

"Thanks to this activity, women are financially independent, able not only to meet their own needs, but also to save. Thanks to this support, many women are now able to rent land, cultivate crops and earn a substantial income", said Zouley Ousmane, president of Ingancin Rayuwa MMD/VSLA from the village of Kiré.

“ These 30,000 CFA francs (USD 50) profit enabled me to purchase another ram, fatten it for two months, and sell it at 45,000 CFA francs (USD 75). With this cash in hand, I intend to buy agricultural inputs so that I can have a good agricultural season, sell my harvest, and buy more animals to fatten. ”
Sa'a Samaila, Beneficiary of the fattening activity



Zouley Ousmane president of MMD/VSLA Ingancin Rayuwa network and her two rams



Photo credit: Amina Luman

Photo of management committee members in front of the restored Allah Karabo site

RESTORING PASTORAL LAND: ENHANCING SOCIAL COHESION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The village of Allah Karabo, located 40 km west of Guidan Sori in the Maradi region, shares a 33-hectare pastoral land with three neighboring villages. The primary economic activities in this community are agriculture, livestock breeding, and trade. However, the grazing area has been under threat for over a decade due to the invasive species *Sida cordifolia*, which is unsuitable as animal feed. This has exacerbated the issue of livestock roaming into crop fields during the agricultural season, leading to tensions within the community. The village chief has noted that over 40% of complaints are related to animals encroaching on crop lands in search of pasture, highlighting the seriousness of the issue.

In response to the degradation of natural resources due to climate change and human pressure, USAID Hamzari, in collaboration with town councils and environmental services in Guidan Roudjji, launched a series of awareness campaigns in 2021 to inform communities about the risks and consequences of disappearing pastoral lands on social cohesion, economic opportunities, and animal feed. Alongside these efforts, Hamzari and the Guidan Roudjji environmental service established, trained, and equipped management and monitoring committees for the restored sites. They also developed management and development plans to ensure the sustainable use of regenerated pastoral resources.

Through awareness-raising sessions, the people of Allah Karabo, particularly the youth and women, embraced the *gaya* approach promoted by USAID Hamzari. This traditional system encourages community members to work together, sharing tasks such as restoring pastoral lands. This method fosters solidarity and social cohesion, allowing the entire community to benefit from the collective restoration efforts.

In Allah Karabo, over 900 young boys and girls, under the leadership of the site's management committee, restored 20 hectares of the 33-hectare area by removing the harmful *Sida cordifolia* plant. The youth also contributed 47,000 CFA francs (USD 77) to purchase local herbaceous seeds and maintain the thousands of doum palms planted in the area.

USAID Hamzari consistently emphasizes the adoption of the approach by the stakeholders. "After USAID Hamzari raised awareness, we decided to commit ourselves to restoring our pastoral land, because it belongs to us, and we are the ones who will reap all the benefits. It will enable us to provide pasture for our animals and develop the livestock sector, which is one of the main activities of rural communities" says Sani Ali, general secretary of the restoration site management committee and member of the Farmers Field Business School (FFBS) group in Allah Karabo.

According to the village chief of Allah Karabo, "This site is a model of success, because thanks to this restoration activity through the commitment of the communities, we are seeing the growth of a diversity of herbaceous plants that had once disappeared".

"Since the restoration of this pastoral land, we have benefited from the availability of a grazing area for the animals; plant cover with herbaceous species that are useful and appetizing to the animals; and the growth of trees that provide a resting place for shepherds and animals." explains Sani Ali.

In addition to the availability of pasture for animals, the presence of thousands doum palm trees creates income generating activities (IGA) for women. The limbs of young leaves are used to make various handicrafts (ropes, mats, etc.), which are marketed through active channels in the area.

"In their first initiative, the management committee held a general meeting and decided to allow the women to harvest the leaves of the doum palm trees for resale. The arrangement was that each woman who accessed the site would contribute 250 CFA francs (USD 0.41) per day to the committee's fund. For four days, more than 500 women from Allah Karabo and neighboring villages participated in harvesting. This activity generated CFA francs 134,500 (USD 220) for the management committee and over 4,300,000 CFA francs (USD 7,013) in earnings for the women" explains Sani Ali, general secretary of the restoration site management committee.

Hamzari continues to support the management committee and the community in ensuring that this activity becomes more sustainable and profitable for women and young people by providing technical and business management assistance for the site. The program also connects the committee with the local town hall and environmental services to incorporate the village's production needs into their annual plans. *"Our commitment is to support the management committee in monitoring this pastoral land, which benefits the whole community and future generations,"* says Almou Ali, a member of the Allah Karabo community.

The restoration efforts, which began three years ago (2021), have involved over 6,000 people, 74% of whom were women. In August 2023, Hamzari observed the first visible results: hay was produced and managed according to the established rules, and sales began. This progress offers significant potential for creating fodder companies, which Hamzari plans to further develop to maximize profitability.

“

Since the restoration of these pastoral lands, we have benefited from the availability of a grazing area for the animals, a vegetation cover with herbaceous species that are useful and appetizing for the animals, and the growth of trees that provide a resting place for the shepherds and animals. ”

**Sani Ali, General Secretary of the
Restoration Site Management
Committee**



Photo credit: Ali Kollé Mahaman Nassirou

MOUSSA MAHAMAN IN CULTIVATING HOPE, AND HARVESTING RESILIENCE

Moussa with his harvest of watermelon

Since October 2018, USAID Hamzari, funded by the U.S. government, has been dedicated to creating sustainable, equitable, and resilient food and nutrition security for vulnerable groups, including women, children, and youth in the department of Guidan Roudji, Maradi region, Niger.

One of its key achievements has been the establishment of 48 market gardening sites spanning 120 hectares, benefiting over 2,900 producers—58% of whom are women—in the Chadakori, Guidan Roudji, and Guidan Sori communes. By empowering these groups to practice irrigated farming and manage water resources beyond the rainy season, the program addresses the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in its intervention areas.

In Northern Nigeria, Moussa Mahaman and his family's life were disrupted by the prevalence of banditry and kidnappings. Hailing from the Tuareg hamlet of Tara in Nigeria, Moussa, a 62-year-old head of household, lived peacefully with his family until bandits ravaged their home, setting their belongings ablaze in 2021. *"The bandits burned my millet granaries and took away my livestock. Their aim was to silence us,"* Moussa recalls.

Forced to flee for their lives, Moussa and his 16 family members found refuge in Niger, in the village of Dogon Gao, commune of Guidan Sori in the Maradi region. Confronted with this unexpected hardship, Moussa refused to be defeated. Drawing on his resilience and determination, he joined the market gardening group in Dogon Gao in 2023. The group consists of 70 members, including 35 women, and a 3.76-hectare market-gardening site enclosed and equipped by Hamzari.

This group, along with several others, received extensive support from USAID Hamzari, including the establishment and training of expert vegetable seed producers for commercial purposes, training for vegetable producers on production techniques (e.g., transplanting, crop density, organic fertilization, maintenance, and crop protection through the use of biopesticides), and the development of market gardening sites (e.g., fencing, construction of two reservoirs, two boreholes, an irrigation water storage basin, and solar pumps).

Benefiting from all this support within his market gardening group, Moussa transformed a 0.75-hectare plot, with 0.25-hectares inside the community site developed by Hamzari and 0.50-hectares outside. His preferred crops are watermelons, peanuts, and sweet potatoes.

Despite challenges, Moussa's harvest was a remarkable success, exceeding all his expectations. *"We harvested over 3,700 watermelons this season (2023-2024),"* exclaims Moussa, with a smile filled with pride. With these 3,700 watermelons from his campaign, he earns 1,295,000 CFA francs (USD2,158), offering his family new hope and financial security, demonstrating the viability of his market gardening enterprise.

With this revenue, Moussa envisions achieving his dream of autonomy and prosperity. He already bought a used motorbike for moto-taxi to diversify his source of income. Moussa purchased a new land of 0.5 hectares, and the home for his family to live in.

He extends warm gratitude to the welcoming community of Dogon Gao, highlighting the importance of community solidarity in challenging times. Grateful for the generous support from USAID, Moussa adds, *"I sincerely thank the American people for their support through the Hamzari program. Their support has been a ray of light in our dark days."*

MERI ADAMOU'S SOLAR PUMPS: A PATH TO EASY, PROFITABLE, AND PRODUCTIVE FARMING

At 55 years old, Méri Adamou is married and has four children. She lives in Hannou Gazané village in the municipality of Guidan Roundji. Méri is a resilient and committed woman who strives to improve her family's living conditions. To ensure her family's well-being, she became an active member of the local MMD/VSLA group.

The program's intervention in her village brought about significant changes in her life by enabling her to fully engage in market gardening. Although she used to practice gardening in the past, she lacked support and *faced numerous challenges, resulting in low profitability. Meri explains, "Before the arrival of Hamzari, I struggled with low yields in market gardening due to irrigation problems. We used to fetch water from the village well with a long waiting line – the water chore was very painful and took almost a whole day."*

Hamzari provided her VSLA group, Hikima Na Manoma (ingenuity of women producers), with two market gardening boreholes and two solar motor pumps. Expressing her gratitude for this support, Méri stated, *"With the new solar motor pump the project provided us, we no longer need to make endless water chores to irrigate the plants. Most importantly, we do not resort to individual financial contributions to purchase fuel or lubricant for oil change."*

As a result of reduced workloads and financial costs, Méri's production has significantly increased. Last year (2021), she estimated her production at around nine kilograms of cabbage and eight kilograms of lettuce. This year (2022), her production is nearly eight times higher, with diversified crops.



Méri Amadou in front of her fresh vegetable stall

During this year's campaign, Méri's yield saw a significant improvement. Her April 2022 harvest saw increased production of up to 63 kg of cabbage, 40 kg of lettuce, and 30 kg of onion. Her VSLA group received technical support from Hamzari on the manufacture and use of compost, biopesticides made from local products (neem, tobacco, pepper), and crop selection based on optimal timing.

Praising the project's efforts, Méri said, *"This increased production has enabled me to support my family, avoid taking out loans, and assist relatives and neighbors in the village. It has encouraged many of us to commit to increased production in the next season. I am grateful to Hamzari for this initiative, which has allowed me to avoid taking on debts to provide for my family. My savings will enable me to make regular weekly tontine payments in our VSLA group, where I serve as the vice president."*

“ With the new solar motor pump the project provided us, we no longer need to make endless water chores to irrigate the plants. Most importantly, we do not resort to individual financial contributions to purchase fuel or lubricant for oil change. ”
Méri Adamou



Photo credit: Balkissa Hamidou

EMPOWERED WOMEN OF TAMRORO: STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND FOOD SECURITY

Two members pose in front of Tamroro's grain store

The village of Tamroro, situated ten kilometers East of the commune of Chadakori, has benefitted from various initiatives facilitated by USAID Hamzari, notably the establishment of a cereal bank. In the previous years, the village encountered significant grain supply challenges, particularly during the lean season, leading to extensive travel for grain procurement and migration of household heads to urban centers in search of livelihoods. This exodus had detrimental long-term effects, compelling individuals to abandon their own production activities in favor of low labor wages in cities. As a result, women were forced to find other alternatives to provide for household needs, while waiting for their husbands to return.

USAID Hamzari revitalized, the "Wadata" Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) network of the village of Tamroro, which now plays a pivotal role through the cereal bank, significantly contributing to the resilience, food, and nutritional security of the local communities. Comprising four VSLA groups with 140 members in 2021, this network ensures exemplary and dynamic management of the cereal bank.

In 2021, USAID Hamzari selected the Tamroro cereal bank to receive project subsidy. The VSLA network utilized the 400,000 CFA francs (USD600) subsidy to locally purchase millet and replenish their grain stock, in addition to procuring pallets for cereal storage.

According to Mrs. Rahamou Hamissou, president of the "Wadata" network, "the network aims to empower women and fight against food insecurity."

Proudly recounting the history of their cereal bank, she stated, "We established the cereal bank in 2015, inspired by the experience of the village of Sarkin Yama, to address food shortages during the lean season. The bank's creation was made possible through the physical and financial contributions of the women in our network, including the purchase of land, securing the land title, and building a warehouse. We also received a donation of 50,000 CFA francs (USD76) from the municipality of Chadakori. Additionally, a 2-hectare field donated by the village chief allowed us to grow millet, which formed the initial stock for our cereal bank."

With the support of USAID Hamzari, through direct funding, improved seed donations, and capacity-building initiatives, the Tamroro cereal bank has emerged as a successful model. Over just two cropping seasons (2021-2023), the quantity of accessible cereals for network members surged from 11 tia (44 kg) to 25 tia (100 kg), repayable post-harvest.

The community highly regards the cereal bank's strategy of aiding non-VSLA households, inspiring increased participation and strengthening social cohesion. Mrs. Barira Abdou, a non-VSLA member who benefited from the cereal sales, shares, "I am not a member of the VSLA group that operates the cereal bank, but I fully benefit from the services offered, particularly acquiring cereals to feed my six children during the lean season. The management of this bank is very transparent, and it motivates me to join the network."

Local beneficiary testimonies underscore several positive community transformations with Hamzari's support- participants "The social cohesion stemming from VSLA group and cereal bank activities enabled us to come together and work hand in hand. We benefited from several opportunities, including the increase of women's purchasing power – some women in the village now have their own fields. Women now actively contribute to local development. This social cohesion is reflected in the strengthening of the bonds of solidarity and mutual aid between women during various social events".

Regarding the bank's perspective on sustainability, the president of the network answers, "To make the services of our cereal bank sustainable, we will enforce loan payment deadlines, both for members and non-members. This will allow the immediate replenishment of stocks at harvest time at low prices. We will also continue to exploit our collective field to increase our stock to be able to assist more households".

In January 2024, the "Wadata" network has 5,186 tia (12 965 kilograms) of millet in its stock, compared to 4,304 tia (10,760 kilograms) of millet in January 2023, an increase of 2,205 kilograms. The membership has increased from 140 members in 2021 to 200 members in January 2024. Hamzari also supported the network with the provision of improved seeds to boost productions on the collective VSLA field. The project also provided the network with improved peanut seeds to support the local processing unit operated by the VSLA.

“ I am not a member of the VSLA group that operates the cereal bank, but I fully benefit from the services offered, particularly acquiring cereals to feed my six children during the lean season. The management of this bank is very transparent, and it motivates me to join the network. ”

Mrs Barira Abdou, non-member Tamroro VSLA



Some members pose in front of pile of grain gabs in the storage

EMPOWERING YOUNG GIRLS THROUGH SAFE SPACES IN GARIN KASSO

Wassila Garba, a mentor in Garin Kasso's safe space

At the age of 16, Wassila Garba became a member of the Garin Kasso Safe Space in 2020, under the USAID Hamzari program. These safe spaces serve as a platform for mentors to engage with adolescent girls, focusing on critical issues such as gender-based violence, the consequences of young girls' marriage and pregnancy, and the significance of girls' education. The mentors, who are part of Care groups, strive to advocate for good health and nutrition practices with the aim of preparing the next generation of community leaders.

Garin Kasso, a rural village situated 50 kilometers west of Maradi, encounters various challenges, including limited access to education and healthcare, early marriage, and malnutrition. The safe spaces established by the USAID Hamzari program aim to empower girls aged 9 to 16 from vulnerable households with essential skills and knowledge on topics such as menstrual hygiene management, adolescent nutrition, leadership, associative life, literacy (reading, writing, arithmetic), and income-generating activities (catering, sewing, selling cereals, braiding, henna, etc.).

Wassila learned about the Garin Kasso safe space through a public announcement made by the town crier throughout the village. Selected due to her vulnerability and hearing impairment, she quickly became engaged in the program's activities. "Every morning of our meetings, I join our mentor to sweep the meeting place, set up the carpet, and prepare the hand-washing station," she recalled, highlighting her early dedication.

Thanks to the program, Wassila has acquired skills in leadership, menstrual hygiene management, nutrition, and more. She has learned to take better care of her health, show respect to her elders, and work towards financial independence by buying, storing, and selling grains. "We have become more enlightened girls in our community," she proudly stated.

A crucial moment for Wassila came when the mentors in the safe space had to leave. "A month and a half after the first mentor gave birth, the second mentor went on a trip, and I took over as interim mentor," Wassila explained. She demonstrated natural leadership and was determined to manage the safe space activities. She ensured punctuality, prepared the venue, and welcomed the other girls, thereby strengthening the group's confidence and safety.

This temporary responsibility led to official recognition. A Hamzari agent noticed her dedication. "The girls in the community wanted me to be their full-time mentor," she recalled. Subsequently, Wassila was invited by Hamzari to an orientation workshop, where she was confirmed as a mentor and tasked with creating safe spaces in eight other villages.

Wassila is now recognized not only in Garin Kasso but also in the surrounding villages for her leadership and dedication. Chamsiya Abdou, a mentor in Garin Kasso, said, "We thank Hamzari because, thanks to safe spaces, we have learned to educate and raise awareness among our girls about the dangers of early marriage and pregnancy, the importance of schooling and keeping girls in school to live a dignified life."

Under Wassila's mentorship, the girls of Garin Kasso have experienced significant transformations. They participate in cooking demonstrations aimed at promoting the consumption of nutritious foods, with a focus on fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, and dietary habits (frequency, quantity, quality). Seventeen-year-old Bassira Ousmane shared, "Thanks to Wassila's guidance, I've come to understand the importance of a nutritious diet".

Wassila's mother, Yada Abou, expressed her gratitude, " Previously, girls in our village were married off without their consent, but today we see that they have a voice in choosing their husbands. Hamzari has played a key role in changing perceptions about early marriage through its social and behavioral change activities. "

To date, the Hamzari program has established 149 safe spaces for 5,215 adolescent girls, progressively implementing them in supportive villages. Wassila Garba's story serves as a poignant example of the impact of the USAID Hamzari program on the lives of adolescent girls. Through her commitment and leadership, Wassila has not only transformed her own life but also the lives of numerous adolescent girls in her community. Her journey illustrates that, given the right opportunities, young women can emerge as influential leaders capable of shaping their futures and those of their communities.



Wassila Garba, a mentor from Garin Kasso's safe space, at an awareness-raising session.

“ Previously, girls in our village were married off without their consent, but today we see that they have a voice in choosing their husbands. Hamzari has played a key role in changing perceptions about early marriage through its social and behavioral change activities. ”

Yada Abou, mother of Wassila



Photo credit: Aïchaoumi SIDIBE

HUSBAND SCHOOLS TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY HEALTH

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

The village of Dargué, located 84 kilometers north of Maradi in Guidan Roudjji department, benefits from the USAID Hamzari program, which aims to reduce vulnerability and build adaptive capacity in three communes (Guidan Roudjji, Chadakori, and Guidan Sori) in the Maradi region from October 2018 to September 2025.

A key initiative of the USAID Hamzari program is the establishment of Husband Schools. These schools were created with the understanding of the local context that men's influence is crucial for women's and children's health, serving both as a potential obstacle and a powerful lever. The initiative seeks to actively engage men in reproductive and nutritional health efforts, incorporating gender considerations to foster behavioral changes that benefit women and children.

Since 2020, the village of Dargué has hosted four groups of husband schools, each comprising ten members. These schools receive training in reproductive health, family planning, nutrition, and social action for behavioral change. Bi-weekly, the school members conduct discussions and awareness sessions with men in the community, focusing on the importance of prenatal and postnatal care, family planning, hygiene, child immunization, infant and young child feeding practices, breastfeeding, and sanitation.

Members of the husband schools in Dargué regularly convene with Abdoul Aziz Yahaya Maikano, the chief of the integrated health center, to address challenges and initiatives aimed at improving the health center's services. According to Maikano, "Husband school members are like lights for community awareness. Thanks to their support, we have seen remarkable progress on several of our health indicators".

Husband schools' efforts have had a notable impact on maternal and child health indicators. Before their implementation in 2020, the rate of assisted deliveries was low, and child immunization rates were suboptimal. By the first quarter of 2024, these figures had risen considerably. Maikano shared, "We have gone from an average of 17 to 34 assisted deliveries per month, and from 50 to 85 children vaccinated per month."

Saidou Moussa, a member of the husband schools, attests to the positive changes observed in the community, "Thanks to our awareness-raising efforts, parents now bring their sick children to the health center rather than relying solely on traditional practices". Furthermore, the husband schools have played a role in improving hygiene at the health center by organizing a monthly cleanliness day.

The husband school initiative has also strengthened social cohesion, living conditions, and gender relations within the community. Ilo Laouali, head of Dargué Husband Schools, commented, "Thanks to our efforts, families have a better understanding of the importance of family planning and pre and postnatal consultations, which has improved their financial and social well-being."

In Hamzari's target communities, men traditionally hold absolute authority over family decisions, including matters related to women's health. They decide when a child should be weaned and whether women are allowed to visit health centers. To address this, Hamzari has worked to shift this mindset by leveraging men's authority through the promotion of the Husband Schools approach.

This initiative transforms male influence into a positive force, reshaping social norms and encouraging the adoption of healthy practices. As a result, the lives of women and children have improved. Amina Idi, a mother of five, shared, "Thanks to the awareness sessions at the Husband Schools, my husband now supports me, and I've been able to breastfeed my youngest child exclusively. I can see the health benefits compared to my other four children."

Souley Halimou, the chief of Dargué village, is pleased with the strong collaboration between the Husband Schools and the community, "Initially, we were skeptical, but today we see the benefits. The Husband Schools may have contributed to reduced infant mortality and acute malnutrition, significantly impacting the overall health improvement of our village population."

Since 2020, Hamzari has established 67 Husband Schools, engaging 804 men. These schools cover health areas within a 15 km radius and operate in 15 integrated health centers across Hamzari's three intervention communes. To ensure the sustainability of the Husband Schools' activities, Hamzari has equipped each school with income-generating kits such as chairs, solar-powered lamps, tables, benches, mats, tarpaulins, sound equipment, and solar-powered phone chargers. These items are rented out, and the generated income supports the self-financing of activities within the villages and other areas integrated into the health system.

The members of Dargué husband schools intend to sustain their activities post the 2025 conclusion of the Hamzari program. "Hamzari taught us the importance of maternal and reproductive health, healthy eating, and provided us with income-generating kits. With the resources generated by these kits, we will continue collaborating with the health center chief to maintain these advances", affirmed Ilo Laouali.

“ The members of the husband schools are like beacons of light for community awareness. Thanks to their support, we have made remarkable progress on several of our health indicators. We have gone from an average of 17 to 34 assisted deliveries per month, and from 50 to 85 children vaccinated per month in the first quarter of 2024. ”
Abdoul Aziz Yahaya Maikano, Chief of Dargué Integrated Health Center



Some Members of the Dargué husband school



TRANSFORMATIVE CARE GROUP IN RAFIN WADA FOR MATERNAL AND NEONATAL HEALTH

Awareness-raising session on key infant and young child feeding messages

Located 45 km from the commune's capital, Guidan Sori, in the Guidan Roumdji department of the Maradi region, the village of Rafin Wada has undergone a positive revolution through the intervention of a Care Group dedicated to maternal and child health, and nutrition.

In a region grappling with challenges such as a lack of awareness of danger signs of malnutrition, decisions influenced by women's low social status, and barriers to accessing healthcare due to long distances and low household incomes, USAID Hamzari has developed innovative strategies. These strategies aim to strengthen the healthcare system while establishing a community-based system to promote good practices in nutrition and reproductive health through Care Groups. The goal is to empower women in decision-making and economic aspects while enhancing their social status.

Altogether, Hamzari established 162 care groups with 3,240 women. The Rafin Wada Care Group, initiated in September 2020, stands out as one of the most dynamic groups in the Guidan Sori commune. Comprising of 25 members, including 12 in the infant and young child feeding support group and 13 Lead Mothers "Mamans Lumières", these two sub-groups collaborate closely adhering to a common action plan, effectively delineating their roles and responsibilities.

The women in the infant and young child feeding support group have implemented a rigorous system for registering pregnant women in the village and devising follow-up and support plans. They conduct awareness sessions through educational discussions and home visits. Since its inception, the Care Group has provided oversight for approximately 283 pregnant women and children aged 6 to 23 months, showcasing exceptional dedication to maternal and child health.

Amadou Yacouba, Chief of the Integrated Health Center (CSI) in Rafin Wada, remarked, "The activities carried out by the women members of the Care Group helped us improve our health indicators. They contributed to improving vaccination coverage, reaching over 120% each month. The Care Groups also contributed to improving family planning and assisted childbirth rates."

Conversely, the Lead Mothers have achieved notable milestones by replenishing a substantial nutritional stock, encompassing diverse food items, and establishing a communal nutritional garden. These efforts bolster ongoing cooking demonstration sessions.

Abou Maman, a member of the Care Group in Rafin Wada, said, "We quickly understood that the activities we undertake as Care Group members benefit us primarily because the women, we sensitize are first and foremost our sisters, sisters-in-law, and mothers. Today, we are proud to say that our activities are contributing to reducing malnutrition in our homes. Hamzari has shown us the way, and whether present or not, we will continue our activities."

In 2023, during the last two active malnutrition screenings conducted by the peer educators established by Hamzari, no malnourished child was identified in the village, reinforcing the positive success and influence of the Rafin Wada Care Group on the health and well-being of the community.

“ We quickly understood that the activities we undertake as Care Group members benefit us primarily because the women, we sensitize are first and foremost our sisters, sisters-in-law, and mothers. Today, we are proud to say that our activities are contributing to reducing malnutrition in our homes. Hamzari has shown us the way, and whether present or not, we will continue our activities. ”

Abou Maman, a member of the Care Group in Rafin Wada

INVESTING IN WOMEN, TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES: THE INSPIRING STORY OF THE GANÉ MUSAMU UNION OF HANNOU GAZANÉ



Members of the Gané Musamu Union and the head of the health center in front of the room they built

The Gané Musamu Union, founded in 2019 in the village of Hannou Gazané, is a dynamic coalition bringing together five Mata Masu Dubaras (MMDs)/Village Savings and Loan Associations (VLSA). It boasts a membership of 136 women. Through solid organization and rigorous management, the union actively engages in initiatives supported by USAID's Hamzari program, which assists in replenishing their cereal bank and provides advice and seeds to cultivate in their collective field.

In 2023, USAID Hamzari launched a food voucher distribution operation aimed at preventing malnutrition among adolescent girls in its "safe spaces" during the lean season (May-August). A total of 1,684 school-attending and non-school-attending adolescent girls from 37 safe spaces benefited from this initiative across the three Hamzari intervention communes (Chadakori, Guidan Roumdji, and Guidan Sori), with 513 girls from the commune of Guidan Sori. Each voucher, valued at 32,000 FCFA (USD 53), was distributed per month for basic food items (rice, millet, cowpea, sugar, oil) and vegetables and leafy greens (amaranth, moringa, squash, spices).

Safe spaces aim to provide girls aged 9 to 16 from vulnerable households with essential skills and knowledge on topics related to adolescent health and nutrition (menstrual hygiene management, adolescent nutrition, etc.), leadership, community engagement, literacy, and income-generating activities (catering, sewing, grain sales, hair braiding, henna art, etc.). This USAID-funded program seeks to ensure sustainable food security for vulnerable households in the Maradi region, with a particular focus on women, young adolescents, and children under 5.

Thanks to its exemplary organization and adherence to the required criteria, such as possessing a tax identification number, being registered as a business, providing certified invoices, and demonstrating the ability to pre-finance, the Gané Musamu Union was selected to supply vegetables and condiments worth 12.5 million FCFA (USD 20,833) for the 513 adolescent girls from the Guidan Sori commune.

Following the supply of these vegetables and leafy greens during the distribution operations, the union generated over 11 million FCFA (USD 18,333) in profits, strengthening the financial standing of the union and its recognition within the community. "We demonstrated our ability to successfully manage the provision of vegetables during the Hamzari food voucher operations, which has earned us great respect in our community," stated Koulouwa Makao, union president.

From the profits generated, the union invested 2,250,000 FCFA (USD 3,750) to permanently fence off a 1,143 m² site housing the cereal storage warehouse. Securing the site also created a meeting space for members' assemblies and allowed for planning future income-generating activities.

Additionally, to improve the conditions for pregnant women and new mothers at the health center, the union invested 650,000 FCFA (USD 1,083) to construct a mother's lounge. "I am very happy to be able to use this lounge. Previously, it was difficult to manage pregnant women in labor and those who had just given birth due to the lack of appropriate facilities. But thanks to this infrastructure, women who have given birth are now better cared for. They can rest more, receive closer monitoring, and be observed before being discharged, which was not possible before," said Laria Iro Rabo, head of the village health center.

Jamila Ada, a young woman who recently gave birth, expressed her gratitude: *"This room is of great importance to us, and we sincerely thank the donors. During my last delivery, which took place at night, I was able to stay until morning to receive the necessary care before returning home. During my previous delivery, I had to leave right away, which caused me pain and bleeding. I am truly grateful for this infrastructure and the support of the women of the union."*

To boost its members' income-generating activities, in April 2024, the union distributed 2,720,000 FCFA (USD 4,533), equating to 20,000 FCFA (USD 33) per member. *"With the 20,000 francs (USD 33) I received, I was able to buy a goat that has already given birth to two kids,"* said Halima, a union member. These goats will support Halima with economic opportunity and provide milk for her family.

The success of this operation has enhanced women's decision-making power within the community, encouraged more active participation from union members in its activities, and attracted new members. *"We hope this investment will benefit everyone, as we have long sought help from men to complete this project. Today, we are very happy and proud to have a positive impact on our community,"* concluded the union president.

The collaboration between the Gané Musamu Union and USAID Hamzari has very positive effects on the Hannou Gazané community. By investing in women, USAID Hamzari strengthens the financial capacities of union members, contributing to improved living conditions, food security, and community health, all while empowering women in decision-making roles.

“ This room is of great importance to us, and we sincerely thank the donors. During my last delivery, which took place at night, I was able to stay until morning to receive the necessary care before returning home. During my previous delivery, I had to leave right away, which caused me pain and bleeding. I am truly grateful for this infrastructure and the support of the women of the union. ”
Jamila Ada, Young Women who just gave birth



View of the outside of the fence on the Hannou Gazané union members' land



Ramatou (left) holds Sato with three of her four sales agents and one of her sons.

Photo credit: Labouli Mahamane Allassane

RAMATOU TSAHIROU PAVING THE WAY IN BARAMAKA'S FIGHT AGAINST OPEN DEFECATION

In Niger, approximately 80% of the population continues to engage in open defecation (National report on Water, Sanitation and Environment Indicators for 2023 by the Ministry of Water, Sanitation and the Environment of Niger). This practice has profound implications for public health, living standards, nutrition, education, and the economy.

To address this critical issue, the USAID Hamzari program initiated an ambitious initiative in 2023 as part of its Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene component. The objective was to establish a sanitation market by training and mobilizing 10 private sanitation providers (PSPs) in the Guidan Roudjji department, the program's intervention area. These PSPs are tasked with overseeing the establishment of the market and ensuring the accessibility and availability of sustainable latrines and related services to the targeted communities.

In June 2023, Hamzari supported its participants to participate in a technology fair organized by USAID-funded projects in the Maradi region, to promote innovations and technologies disseminated by the program.

Among the participants was Ramatou Tsahirou, a 32-year-old married mother of three from the village of Baramaka in the rural commune of Guidan Sori, located 22 kilometers from Maradi. Ramatou exhibited her cosmetic products, which she had launched with the initial funding received from Hamzari. During the event, she was intrigued by the sanitation products presented by the nearby PSPs.

Motivated by her curiosity and the need for sanitation products in her village, Ramatou became a sales agent to promote sustainable latrines. With the help of a PSP from El Kolta village, she quickly started her business and sold 10 latrines in one week.

With the support of the USAID Hamzari program, Ramatou progressed in her journey towards entrepreneurship. She became a PSP in her village after receiving training and material support from Hamzari. This training included the manufacturing of sanitation products, such as slabs and complete latrines, as well as marketing and awareness techniques. With 3.5 tons of cement, 210 Sato, 2 molds, a barrel, and other crucial materials provided by Hamzari, Ramatou successfully launched her business.

Thanks to Ramatou's dynamism and motivation, 80% of households in her village now have at least one latrine, significantly reducing the problem of open defecation. Her business now generates a monthly revenue of nearly 400,000 CFA francs (\$650) and she sells an average of 80 latrines each month. Ramatou not only embodies a successful entrepreneur but also serves as a catalyst for social change, actively contributing to the sanitation and development of her community, "I am proud of what I have accomplished today because I have helped clean up my village."

Ramatou's story transcends the boundaries of mere commercial success and symbolizes the empowerment of women in a traditionally male-dominated field. As she says, "Women have a crucial role to play in the development of sanitation sector." Through her awareness campaigns and door-to-door visits, she has captured the attention of her community, inspiring women to actively engage in the fight against open defecation.

Thanks to the efforts of Hamzari, through PSPs, over 1,550 households now have access to sustainable latrines in the Guidan Roudjji department.



The deputy secretary general of the Maradi governorate hands over a certificate of no open-air defecation to the Chadakori commune

CERTIFICATION OF OPEN DEFECATION FREE (ODF) STATUS IN THE RURAL COMMUNE OF CHADAKORI: A VICTORY FOR SANITATION AND PUBLIC HEALTH

On June 29, 2024, the rural commune of Chadakori celebrated a significant achievement in its fight against open defecation, a persistent issue in Niger. In a country like Niger where the national basic sanitation rate stood at only 8% in 2023, (National Report on Water, Sanitation and Environment Indicators for 2023 by the Ministry of Water, Sanitation and the Environment of Niger) this accomplishment is truly commendable. The USAID Hamzari program played a pivotal role in certifying Chadakori as having ended the practice of open defecation.

Sanitation continues to be a major challenge in Niger, with only 5.1% of rural areas and 25.4% of urban areas having access to basic sanitation facilities (National report on Water, Sanitation and Environment Indicators for 2023 by the Ministry of Water, Sanitation and the Environment of Niger). Furthermore, 70.4% of the population continues to practice open defecation, a behavior that is especially prevalent in rural areas, where the rate reaches 80.7%. This situation not only leads to economic losses but also poses risks to dignity, safety, and health, especially for women.

Since 2018, the Hamzari program has taken a proactive approach to address this issue. By 2022, Hamzari mobilized all 199 villages in the commune of Chadakori to act. Through the Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach, members of these communities took concrete actions to eliminate open defecation. In May 2024, ten months after the initial certification in July 2023, a verification mission confirmed that Chadakori had maintained its ODF status, reflecting the sustained efforts of the residents.

To achieve certification, Hamzari implemented several key actions, including mobilizing traditional leaders to unite around ending open defecation, and forming CLTS communal committees to guide community efforts. Villages exchanged their experiences of the approach which fostered the sharing of best practices, while radio debates raised public awareness on sanitation.

Communities conducted self-assessments to identify their needs and created plans to sustain ODF status. A sanitation market was established, training 41 masons and 10 private providers in latrine construction and marketing. Additionally, a hygiene campaign, organized as competitions, encouraged households, especially women, to adopt and maintain strong hygiene practices.

The ceremony, presided over by the Deputy Secretary General of the Maradi Regional Governorate, gathered administrative and customary authorities, representatives of NGOs, and state technical services. *“Chadakori is an example of what we can achieve together. We must continue to support these efforts for a cleaner and healthier Niger,”* stated Illiassou NOMAO, Deputy Secretary General.

The district chief of Chadakori, Ibrahim Arzika, expressed the joy of the communities and their commitment to maintaining the ODF status. *“As local authorities, we are firmly committed to continue raising awareness in our communities and to encourage the installation of sustainable latrines,”* he affirmed.

Despite the progress made, sustaining ODF (Open Defecation Free) status remains a challenge. To address this, the Hamzari program has developed maintenance plans with the community, including regular self-assessments and hygiene campaigns. Additionally, the sanitation market plays a key role, supported by nine sanitation product providers and Hamzari's subsidy of 1,115 family latrines.



The team responsible for taking delivery of the hydraulic works in deep discussion in the village of Taji Wouka, Guidan Sori commune

PROVISIONAL RECEPTION OF NEW STAND-ALONE WATER STATIONS AND SMALL-SCALE DRINKING WATER SUPPLY SYSTEMS

After years of struggle for access to drinking water, the communities of Guidan Roumdji and Guidan Sori have finally found the long-awaited solution, thanks to the USAID Hamzari program.

As part of its efforts to improve the living conditions of vulnerable populations, during this year 2024, USAID Hamzari built 10 stand-alone water stations in the communes of Guidan Roumdji (4) and Guidan Sori (6), and also extended a multi-village small-scale drinking water supply system in the Mairiga Bakoye locality. Thanks to this new infrastructure, over 10,000 people now have direct access to quality drinking water.

"Before this structure was built, we women suffered. We had to go to the well very early in the morning, carrying two loincloths: the one we were wearing and a spare one because our loincloths would get wet when drawing water. Today is a day of celebration for us, as this problem, which caused us so many difficulties, is now a thing of the past. We're committed to doing everything we can to maintain this structure because we don't want to go through the same thing again." Habsou Oumarou, from the village of Garin Idi

The effects of this initiative are visible: three health units and five elementary school have been connected to the water networks, bringing not only immediate relief to residents but also a healthier environment for pupils and patients. The newly installed network extends over 8,000 linear meters and includes 12 standpipes, fed by 10 water tanks of 50 m³ each, guaranteeing a regular supply of water.

"On behalf of the entire community, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to the generous donor who has made this work possible in our village. For years we have been looking for help, and today our joy is immense. Thanks to the USAID Hamzari program and the solidarity of the American people, our tears of distress have been wiped away." Ibrahim Idi, chief of the village of Garin Idi, commune of Guidan Sori

These infrastructures, which comply with national standards, have been entrusted to private operators within the framework of public-private partnerships with local town councils. This ensures efficient management and sustainable use of these resources, to the benefit of the communities concerned.

From July 22 to 25, 2024, provisional acceptance ceremonies were held in the beneficiary villages, marking the start of a new era for these communities. These events, held in the presence of local authorities and Hamzari program representatives, highlighted the importance of these infrastructures for the development and resilience of local populations.

From 2020 to 2024, the Hamzari program has installed 16 stand-alone water stations and 03 small-scale drinking water supply systems, equipped with 113 standpipes, offering a total capacity of 464 m³ of water. These infrastructures benefit over 39,000 people in 36 villages. Hamzari has also rehabilitated 16 human-powered pumps in the villages where it operates, boosting access to drinking water for local communities.



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