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FOSTERING FOOD PURCHASE PROGRAMMES IN WIDESPREAD POVERTY CONTEXTS: TARGETING SMALLHOLDERS WITHIN THE PAA AFRICA PROGRAMME IN NIGER¹

Rosana Pereira de Miranda,² Amadou Diop² and Israel Klug²

1 INTRODUCTION

With a surface area of 1,267,000 square kilometres, Niger is a vast Sahelian country located in the south of the Sahara Desert, which covers over two thirds of its land. In 2015, it had an estimated population of 17 million inhabitants and a particularly high growth rate of 3.3 per cent. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranked 187th in the 2014 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (FAO 2015). Its main economic activity is agriculture, including growing crops and raising livestock, with over 80 per cent of the population working in this sector. In Niger, agriculture is organised in the form of subsistence family farming and depends very much on climate variations, which result in food and fodder production deficits and social crises.

Therefore, Nigeriens suffer from chronic food and nutrition insecurity. Since 2005 they have experienced three major food crises that have eroded smallholders' living standards. Chronic malnutrition also affects 53 per cent of children aged 6–59 months (INS 2014); the acute malnutrition prevalence of 14.8 per cent rarely falls below the 10 per cent alert threshold defined by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Furthermore, vulnerable households' access to food is further undermined by inter-annual and inter-seasonal price volatility and by high food prices. To address the situation of food and nutrition insecurity, the Government of Niger launched the 3N Initiative (*Les Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens*, 'Nigeriens fed by Nigeriens') in April 2012, with the overall objective to "contribute to protecting the Nigerien populations from hunger and to ensure the conditions for a full participation to national production and improved earnings".

1. The authors would like to thank their colleagues from the Nigerien government and from FAO and WFP teams in Niger for sharing information, contributing to and revising this text, and providing suggestions and interviews—namely, Marcos Le Moal (WFP Niger), Nafiou Issiaka (WFP Niger), Malick Haido (FAO Niger), Amadou Diallo Allahoury (3N Initiative)—as well as the representatives of the Federation of Unions of Farmer-based Organisations in Niger (FUOPAN/SA'A), of Fuma Gaskiya, of Nazari and of the food supply agency (Office des Produits Vivriers du Niger).

2. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

This framework has five strategic priorities: i) increasing and diversifying agro-sylvo-pastoral and fish production; ii) steady market supply; iii) strengthening the population's resilience to climate change, crises and disasters; iv) improving the population's nutritional status; and v) facilitating and coordinating the 3N Initiative. Beyond the 3N Initiative, technical and financial partners such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) are working with the government to strengthen food security in Niger by supporting an increase in agricultural production and providing supplies to school canteens as part of the school feeding programme, among other interventions.

In this context, the implementation of the Purchase from Africans for Africa (PAA Africa) initiative in Niger receives technical and financial support from the Brazilian government, the High Commissioner of the 3N Initiative, FAO and the WFP. Since 2012 the PAA Africa programme in Niger has pursued three strategic objectives in dialogue with the overall mission of the programme: i) intensifying smallholders' local production, particularly among women; ii) promoting local purchase initiatives through farmers' organisations to provide food supplies to school canteens; and iii) capitalising on the initiative to strengthen the school feeding programme in Niger in relation to the marketing of the production of farmer-based organisations.

The PAA Africa programme in Niger has been operated by FAO and the WFP, in collaboration with the decentralised services of the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Institute for Agronomic Research (Institut National de Recherche Agronomique) and the four farmer-based federations involved. Its implementation started in 2012 and went through a pilot phase (2012–2013) and a consolidation phase (since 2014). This study focuses on the pilot phase.

The first phase of the programme ended in December 2013 and covered three communes of the Maradi region—Korin Habjia, Chadakori and Kornaka—in partnership with three producer-based federations and one union. As part of the activity dedicated to purchasing from producers, around 611 smallholders—including 273 women—were targeted to receive agricultural production support comprising inputs, equipment and technical training. Most (572) of the smallholders benefited from the guaranteed sale of their production through the joint support of FAO and the WFP.

FAO and its partners were responsible for supporting access to inputs and for providing millet and cowpea crop management training, as both crops were selected to be supported by the programme. The WFP implemented local purchases from producer-based organisations, supported grain storage and contributed to building marketing capacities among the organisations. During the pilot phase, 238 tons of millet and cowpeas were purchased to be used in 60 school canteens in the Maradi region as part of the school feeding programme.³

The targeting process focused on vulnerable small-scale family farmers exposed to food insecurity; it resulted in a set of interdependent results, opportunities and constraints. According to a survey conducted in 2014 to collect data on smallholders' living standards and farmer organisations, the project beneficiaries are extremely poor, and 70 per cent of their incomes are directly used to buy food. Furthermore, women accounted for more than 50 per cent of the smallholders participating in the project.

Institutional procurement programmes⁴ are spreading throughout Africa, as they offer opportunities for economic inclusion in rural areas by enhancing market access. They can also contribute to increasing income levels, strengthening households' investments and improving food and nutrition security, in line with the human right to adequate food (De Schutter 2014). Nevertheless, the lack of evidence on the development of such programmes in their various

modalities—home-grown school feeding, strategic stockpiling etc.—particularly in the sub-Saharan context, and on their livelihood impacts is hindering their potential expansion and development into public policies.

To meet the growing interest in including agricultural interventions in social protection initiatives in Africa, it is necessary to focus on the tools that are deployed in these various types of initiatives (SOFA 2015). Indeed, linking social protection instruments such as school feeding with institutional market initiatives improves the sustainability of such programmes. For this purpose, it is important to start by identifying the potential of the vulnerable households that could benefit from market access.

In this context, the very positive results achieved by the PAA Africa programme in terms of farmers' productivity and increasing capacity to market their production surplus highlight the potential of local purchases from small-scale farmers, despite challenges such as production deficits and insufficient incomes among farmers, who also lack access to technical services and inputs.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THIS CASE STUDY

The overall objective of this case study is to present the approach adopted by the PAA Africa programme in the Nigerien context, the programmatic decisions taken to adapt the local purchases to the local context, and the associated challenges

Its specific objective is to provide a detailed description of the experience developed in Niger as part of the PAA Africa programme regarding the selection of the farmers engaged in programme activities. This study aims to describe the targeting process that was developed and to identify and discuss the main constraints experienced in the context of the pilot project. It also aims to discuss the challenges and opportunities of this approach in the broader context of institutional procurement programmes. In addition, it intends to draw evidence from the Nigerien case to foster a broader discussion on the relevance of introducing targeting processes in this kind of initiative, as well as some implications of this choice regarding the tools used, the partnership structure and the expected outcomes.

By documenting local innovations achieved in Niger, we wish to present elements related to institutional procurement programmes as a whole and to their knowledge gaps to further strengthen their impact. Given the conciseness of this study, the ideas presented here do not always fully reflect the complex interaction of the factors that affect food markets and food and nutrition security in Niger. Besides, considering the pilot nature and the limited reach of the programme, this case study does not intend to draw firm conclusions but, rather, to raise relevant questions based on the experience from the country.

Despite the two objectives of the programme—i) supporting small-scale family farmers by opening new and reliable markets for their products; and ii) improving children's nutritional status and school attendance through school feeding programmes—this study exclusively focuses on the targeting of the farmers to participate in the programme, especially for productive support activities. This choice is linked to the lack of sufficient data to open a simultaneous discussion on targeting schools and children and to the intention to further explore the implications of involving vulnerable farmers in local purchase programmes.

The first section aims to briefly discuss the position of targeting in the discussion on institutional procurement programmes. The second section presents the implementation

approach, with a focus on the participation of farmer-based organisations, the tools that were used to support their production and marketing capacities and the results that were achieved. The third section describes the targeting process to open a discussion on the feasibility of operationalising this kind of programme in wider contexts of social and agro-climatic vulnerability.

2 TARGETING WITHIN INSTITUTIONAL PROCUREMENT PROGRAMMES: A BRIEF REVIEW

The discussion on targeting within local purchase programmes is part of a wider debate on the role of such initiatives in promoting more sustainable and fairer smallholder market inclusion channels. The obstacles to market integration result from: i) physical barriers due to insufficient infrastructure; ii) unbalanced market relations between producers and intermediaries; iii) the lack of market information; and iv) poor organisational capacities that undermine competitiveness and bargaining power.

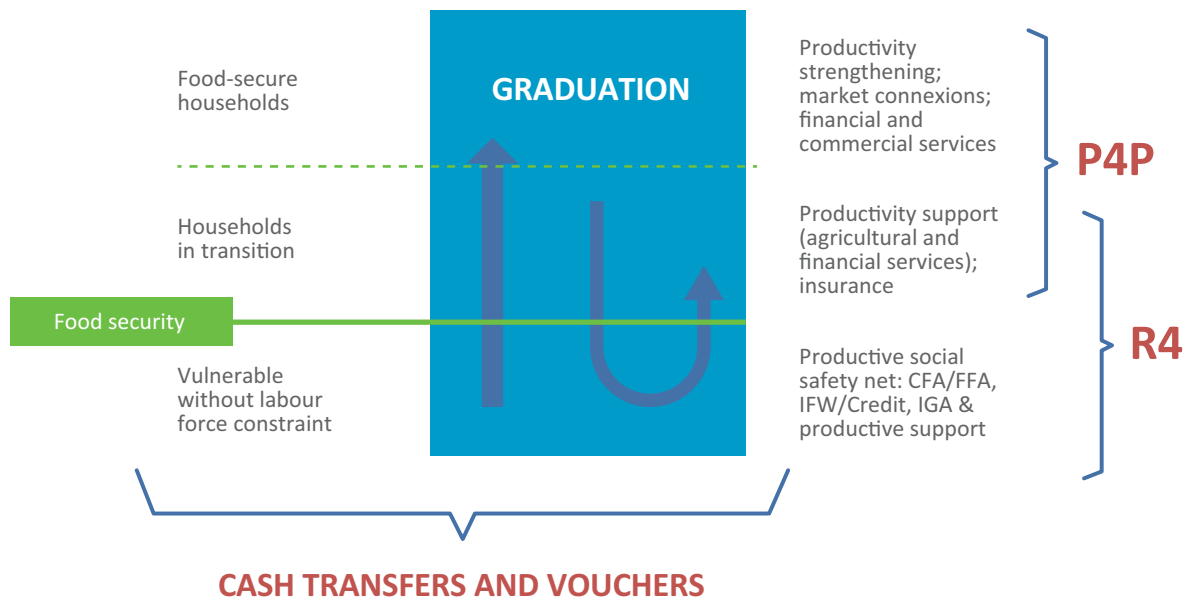
In this context, the traditional approach of liberalising agricultural schemes is not always successful in promoting adequate spaces for the insertion of family farmers in markets, as it does not lead to higher incomes, to investments in production or to improved food and nutrition security for farmers and communities (Al-Hassan, Sarpong, and Mensah-Bonsu 2006). That is why an increasing interest in support for family farming production can be observed. Its potential benefits include: i) developing local food systems as instruments of inclusion; ii) generating positive impacts on existing local markets (in terms of price, for instance); iii) engaging farmers in formal markets; and iv) increasing farmers' production and incomes (Swensson 2015).

In recent years, institutional procurement programmes have been considered by a growing number of governments, policymakers and international organisations, as they are acknowledged to have a significant potential to create, boost and support the development of food supply systems. Indeed, the Malabo Declaration adopted by the African Union in 2014 chose to include measures aimed at increasing agricultural productivity through social protection initiatives as a means to eradicate hunger by 2025. To do so, the Declaration recommends to "encourage the consumption of locally produced food items, including by promoting innovative school feeding programmes that use food items purchased from the local farming community" (African Union 2014).

These programmes rely on the idea that connecting smallholders with substantial and predictable sources of structured demand for agricultural products can reduce risks and foster a better quality, leading to improved food systems, increased incomes and reduced poverty.

Despite this increasing interest in institutional procurement programmes, their relevance in terms of costs and economies of scale has been questioned, as their impacts have not been sufficiently documented (CFS 2015). This discussion is closely linked to the need to adequately identify the audience to be engaged in these programmes. The potential impact of these initiatives on the poorest farmers usually conflicts with considerations of the farmers' capacity to comply with such initiatives, particularly in food deficit contexts. This position is clearly illustrated by the diagram in Figure 1, prepared by the Purchase for Progress (P4P) programme, an institutional procurement programme implemented internationally by the WFP that has systematically reflected on the various local purchase modalities to be implemented at different association levels.⁵

FIGURE 1

The P4P programme in the broader WFP portfolio to meet vulnerable farmers' needs

Source: Choularton (2014). Authors' translation.

The diagram includes local purchases as a complement to other measures for marginalised populations. Based on the experience of the P4P initiative, the authors consider market inclusion a more advanced stage of support for vulnerable farmers, particularly adapted to food-secure agricultural households (WFP 2015). This position reflects the most common approach among social protection programmes, which consider that market access is not compatible with the realities of vulnerable and food-insecure farmers. In that sense, few references try to analyse this issue in more depth based on local purchase experiences in the field, resulting in an important knowledge deficit in the sub-Saharan context, where rural poverty is widespread, and the lack of profitable and sustainable productive activities is at the root of the problem. By describing the limited experience of the PAA Africa programme in Niger, we wish to trigger a more in-depth discussion on this approach.

3 PAA AFRICA IN NIGER AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

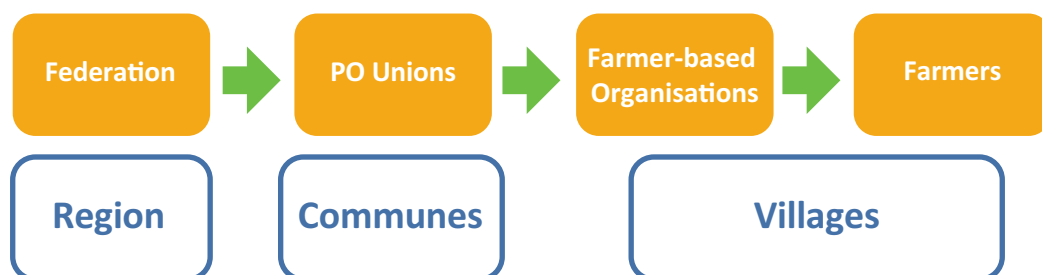
3.1 CREATING PARTNERSHIPS AND ENTRUSTING MANAGEMENT TO FARMER-BASED ORGANISATIONS

The PAA targeting process is based on a joint approach that has tried to leverage the strengths and expertise of the various agencies involved in the strategic context of 'convergence communes'. To some extent, this process prioritised communes with both a relevant presence of WFP school canteens and an acknowledged farmers' productive and organisational potential.

However, by choosing farmer-based organisations as the entry points for the programme's productive support, the targeting process actually prioritised organisational and productive

aspects. This is mainly due to: i) FAO's experience in the region through other interventions that suggested options in terms of engagement and stakeholders with a greater response capacity; ii) operational needs in terms of local purchase implementation; and iii) the relative capacity of these organisations to represent the farmers.

FIGURE 2

Farmer-based organisations and their geographic levels

Source: Authors.

As shown in Figure 2, the implementation of PAA Africa mainly focused on unions of farmer-based organisations, which in turn are organised in federations. Apart from one exception, the federations were responsible for organising support activities, providing training, distributing inputs etc., with the support of FAO, the Regional Directorate for Agriculture and the National Institute for Agronomic Research of Niger. Thanks to agreements between the federations and FAO, the programme resources were transferred to these organisations to carry out activities related to production support, among others.

To understand the effectiveness of targeting and the constraints related to participants' choices, some remarks have to be made about these structures and about the way they relate to development initiatives in the region.

Farmers' organisations (FOs) are grouped in unions, which in turn are grouped in federations whose mission is to supervise the FOs at the department, region or country level in the fields of management, agricultural extension and access to inputs and credits. Their structures and activities are financed by external financial support and by membership fees, which are collected more or less systematically (Le Moal 2013c). According to the WFP (2013), most of the households living in Zinder, Dosso and Maradi benefited from technical services provided by farmer organisations. In the Maradi region, marketing the production through FOs is the prevailing modality.

In this context, rural development interventions have largely adopted self-management as an organisational tool. The benefits of this approach are mainly related to the sustainability of direct implementation, as it reduces the influence of intermediaries in the supply chain and increases farmers' bargaining power in the context of adverse market conditions. Furthermore, marketing through FOs is more profitable for the farmers and can be further improved by introducing institutional purchases (WFP 2013). Finally, the association approach is particularly beneficial for female farmers, who face more obstacles to access services and markets. Indeed, the proportion of women surveyed who sell most of their production through FOs is significantly higher than among men. In 2013, farmers in Maradi reported that 53 per cent of female farmers' sales were performed through organisations, compared with 39.8 per cent among men. In 2014 these proportions were 60 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively (ibid.).

However, organisational and capacity disparities across the various association levels (between federations, unions and FOs) can be challenging in relation to the actual scope of local purchases from smallholders. To some extent, FOs depend administratively on unions and federations. For instance, access to financial services is only common to unions and federations, disconnecting the base from the financial system and possibly leading to a lack of management transparency (GATANCI 2014). Consequently, to ensure that the benefits granted to the federations and unions trickle down to the farmers' level, it is necessary to adjust the targeting process by including criteria related to the federations and unions' capacity to act at the grass-roots level. The coverage capacity of these organisations also suggests the importance of combining FO management with other approaches.

3.2 ADAPTING THE TECHNICAL TOOLS

Ensuring the sustainability of local purchases from smallholders depends on ongoing and adapted support and on creating synergies between several tools that address the main obstacles to these groups' participation. Not only do inadequate or inappropriate support tools limit the performance of the purchases, they can also deter key stakeholders from getting involved. The production support approach, the purchasing modalities, the availability of support services—funding, infrastructure, transport—are crucial in this context of vulnerability.

Productive support: In the case of PAA Africa, the production support that was granted during the pilot phase aimed at distributing agricultural inputs to produce a 200 ton surplus on a 500 hectare area. Through the associations, FAO provided improved seeds, NPK fertilisers, phytosanitary products for cowpea seed treatment, and transportation for the training agents. The WFP also provided the farmers with over 3000 Purdue Improved Crop Storage (PICS) bags, which increase seed storage, reduce post-harvest losses and minimise storage—one of the major constraints faced by the farmers engaged in local purchase programmes (Le Moal 2014b).

As far as the adoption of production technologies is concerned, the activities focused on millet/cowpea strip cropping, a production system which is barely used in the region despite its acknowledged benefits. This system is increasingly being adopted by farmers, who intend to continue using it and to mainstream it. As for the transfer of cultivation techniques, in 2013, 68 per cent of the producers complied with crop rotation, and all the farmers involved adhered entirely to the cropping system (Nouri 2013).

Marketing support: The WFP directly signed contracts with unions of farmer-based organisations for cereal purchases. The process included a price negotiation cycle, when better purchase terms were set up in light of the market conditions at that time. Two important aspects should be stressed in the context of purchases from family farmers and from their organisations: raising awareness and introducing quotas. The gap between authorised and delivered amounts also suggests a need for greater awareness. Procurement procedures should be disseminated before the sowing season, so that farmers can understand all the stages of the purchase operations and better prepare to meet the demand. At the same time, as purchase participation is voluntary, there can be a risk of high-performance and better-integrated farmers monopolising the purchases. A quota was set up in the village where this risk was higher—considering the heterogeneity of its producers—to ensure that each farmer would not be able to market more than 50 tons of production.

BOX 1

Input access

Input distribution has been adopted in countries where PAA Africa pilot projects are being developed, and this method is used within FAO's productive support approach. Farmers often report the lack of access to quality inputs such as seeds and fertilisers as a major constraint for the most vulnerable populations, let alone for farmers in Niger. In Maradi, for instance, only 1.8 per cent of family income is used to buy inputs, but input access is the second most common reason why families try to take out loans (WFP 2013). FAO's resilience approach in Niger focuses on improving input access, as is the case in the IARBIC project. Hence, input distribution as part of the PAA Africa programme aims to minimise a major obstacle faced by smallholders to increase their productivity.

However, after the pilot phase, FAO adopted a different approach, stopping input provision to support the cropping season through a strategy aimed at increasing FOs' access to inputs and self-management. In other words, PAA Africa farmers are expected to meet their own input demand using the tools provided by FAO projects—a decision prompted by the limited scale of the PAA Africa programme in Niger. The input procurement process is undermined by market and local supply failures, but also by the low volume requirements of the programme. Hence, the cost of purchasing inputs and the procurement schedule were not compatible with the needs of the programme.

This approach also reflects a programmatic choice of increasing the sustainability of the intervention and minimising farmers' dependence on input provision, especially considering purchase challenges and the fluctuations of FAO's available funds, for instance. It also strengthens the synergies between the various organisational interventions in the region, as investments meant to improve input access have already been made. Finally, this approach can result in greater accountability among farmer-based organisations in terms of decision-making on the productive approach to be adopted—seed production planning, loans and warrantees, input choice etc. In that sense, it is worth noting the results of the consolidation phase: 3950 kg of selected cowpea seeds and 1400 kg of millet were purchased from FOs through a rural credit granted by the Regional Directorate for Agriculture. A credit obtained thanks to the guarantee fund allowed for the purchase of 5 tons of fertiliser and 100 litres of phytosanitary products for cowpea seed treatment from three unions (FAO and WFP 2014).

However, this approach is still facing many obstacles, including farmer-based organisations' poor self-management capacities and their limited reach in comparison with federations' initiatives, for instance. Farmers can also be discouraged by the absence of an input provision, as shown by the organisations' decreasing interest after the pilot phase. However, the strong demand from new organisations led to an expansion of PAA Africa during the consolidation phase and to particularly promising results among women's unions, suggesting that an access approach rather than a distribution approach is a sustainable option, even when working with vulnerable farmers.

Its evolution will depend on the implementation of a continuous monitoring process aimed at strengthening production planning and organisational capacities, at ensuring that access tools actually are available and adapted to smallholders' constraints and needs and at investing in the community and self-organised modalities, reducing farmers' dependency on external inputs as a whole, such as community seed multiplication systems, agro-ecological soil fertilisation and management practices.

Funding mechanism: Investing in production and in production planning is hindered by farmers' rather limited income and their need for liquidity. To improve access to inputs, FAO placed a 50 per cent guarantee fund for the loans of FCFA80 million in a national bank as part of the *Intensification de l'Agriculture par le Renforcement des Boutiques d'Intrants Coopératives* or 'Agriculture intensification through the consolidation of input cooperatives' (IARBIC) project.⁶ This fund is operated by a committee created by FOs and is accessible to all the federations of PAA Africa-partner FOs. This fund is an option to provide more sustainable access to inputs and to cut down on payment delays, but it is still at an early operational stage. In 2014 the attempts to fund the federations' business plans failed because of a lack of information and understanding from the various stakeholders on the functioning of financial services and on smallholders' needs (Bouyer 2012). The guarantee fund can thus increase farmers' marketing options if several levels are involved in the process of developing financing plans and if access to financial services is improved.

3.3 RESULTS OF THE PILOT PHASE (2013–2014)

The objective of this section is to present some of the results of the PAA Africa pilot and consolidation phases to corroborate the analysis of the limits and opportunities of the implementation. Overall, farmers' productivity and total production increased substantially thanks to FAO and WFP's technical support through input provision. Significant marketing limits were found, although households' total incomes significantly increased due to the impact of higher sales. Finally, the expansion of the programme to new regions and new unions in Maradi during the consolidation phase suggests the importance of creating better market opportunities for smallholders.

As far as the intervention's impact on production is concerned, Table 1 shows the level of millet and cowpea production and yields among project beneficiaries.

TABLE 1
Millet and cowpea production as part of the PAA Africa programme (2013)

Communes	Localities	Total surface area (ha)	Yield (kg)		Production (tons)	
			Millet	Cowpea	Millet	Cowpea
Kornaka	Kornaka	137.5	565	290	78	40
Chadakori	Dragué	106	300	260	32	28
	El Kolta	29	400	223	12	6
	Sarkin	125	577	288	72	36
	Hatsi					
	Maiki	69	572	200	40	14
Mayahi	Koren Habjia	40	410	250	16	10
Total		506.5	494	265	250	134

Source: (FAO 2014).

TABLE 2
Millet and cowpea yields in Niger (kg/hectare)

	2011		2012		2012/2013	
	Millet	Cowpea	Millet	Cowpea	Millet	Cowpea
Country	391	338	544	283	515	236
Maradi	389	481	571	243	528	167

Source: Ministry of Agriculture (2013) and Directorate for Statistics (2012).

These figures reflect a clear difference from the yields recorded in 2012 by the same producers based on the traditional cultivation system, with averages of 494 kg/ha (2013) compared with 237 kg/ha (2012) for millet and 265 kg/ha (2013) compared with 132 kg/ha (2012) for cowpeas. In comparison with national and regional averages, regardless of the differences in plot surface proportions, these figures suggest a significant production potential among these farmers, especially for cowpeas.⁷

Thanks to PAA Africa, crop production doubled between 2012 and 2013 on the same surface (506.5 ha). In 2013, millet production reached 250 tons, and cowpea production reached 120 tons, compared with 120 tons of millet and 67 tons of cowpeas in 2012. In total, 572 farmers (273 women and 299 men) cultivated 506.5 hectares of millet and cowpeas using strip-cropping techniques. These figures are partly due to training and input support provided by the programme and to the rainfall of the 2012 cropping season in Niger.

As far as marketing is concerned, it is important to note that participating in WFP purchases within the PAA Africa programme was voluntary and thus open to all union members, even to farmers who were not targeted by PAA Africa and did not receive FAO support.⁸ In Maradi, five of the seven unions built up stocks from all their voluntary members, whereas Sarkin and Hatsi unions only sold PAA Africa beneficiary farmers' products. PAA Africa collected a total of 238.1 tons of food products from seven producer-based unions, including 137.2 tons of cowpeas and 100.9 tons of millet. Based on the tiered pricing system agreed by the WFP and the farmer-based unions, the producers received an additional FCFA18,596,000 (USD34,000), corresponding to 21 per cent above market prices, thus positively impacting their individual incomes.

Finally, some results point to a greater ownership of the programme methodology resulting in the geographic scale-up of PAA Africa with local funding from FAO and the WFP. During the consolidation phase (2014–2016), in addition to increasing the number of participants in Maradi, the programme started engaging farmer-based organisations in the regions of Zinder, Dosso, Tahoua and Tillabéri. Consequently, the number of beneficiary farmers more than doubled between the pilot phase and 2014 in the pilot area (Maradi)—with 1419 farmers in 2014—and the number of targeted villages rose from 60 to 90 between 2013 and 2014. As the number of participants increased, the cultivated surface also tripled; in the Maradi region 1507 hectares were cultivated by the PAA Africa farmers in 2014, compared with 507 hectares in 2013. In total, the consolidation phase engaged 8310 farmers in four regions (Maradi, Dosso, Tahoua and Zinder)—more specifically, in 17 communes and 187 villages—and organised in seven federations. The total amount of millet and cowpeas purchased reached 3115 tons (FAO and WFP 2014).

In addition to the programmatic scale-up to ensure the sustainability of the local purchases supported by the programme, an organic scale-up also resulted from the increasing interest of Maradi farmer-based organisations. As reported by the organisations' leaders and local authorities, this interest is mainly linked to the use of improved production techniques (a widespread perception of improved productivity within the communes), secured demand at the end of the season and the tiered pricing system.

4 THE TARGETING PROCESS WITHIN THE PAA AFRICA PROGRAMME IN NIGER

The targeting process of the PAA Africa programme aimed to select farmers and farmer-based organisations with marketable surplus, as well as vulnerable smallholders exposed to external shocks. It included three main dimensions: i) geographic targeting; ii) categorical targeting coupled with organisations' productive potential; and iii) individual targeting performed at the community level to select vulnerable farmers (see Table 5). The targeting methods were developed according to the targeting levels, from the regional level down to the individual farmer level.

Initially, the stakeholders discussed the possibility of targeting two different regions with distinct numbers of school canteens, to evaluate differences in terms of implementation and performance across various contexts. This possibility was subsequently rejected, as it was considered more profitable to focus on a smaller geographic area to achieve more robust results in view of a potential scale-up, considering the limited resources of the projects.

TABLE 3
Description of the targeting process

Targeting method	Category of beneficiaries	Targeting criteria
Geographic	1 region (Maradi)	<p>WFP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one of the communes out of the 24 selected by the convergence targeting of the WFP, UNICEF and FAO; • No more than two communes, depending on the resources available for the project; • The communes with higher numbers of school canteens or school children; <p>FAO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A region where soil and climate conditions allow for effective cultivation of the selected crops; • A region with food surplus, to avoid putting stress on self-consumption stocks; • A region where farmers have satisfactory technical knowledge to produce good yields; • A region where farmers are well organised; • A region where farmers are used to marketing procedures.
	3 communes (Koran Habjia, Kornaka, Chadakori)	
Categorical	24 farmer unions (productive support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic administrative organisation, e.g. elected management committee (president, treasurer, secretary), operational status, bank account; • Enough production to be sold (depending on FOs themselves); • Previous work with WFP local purchases; • Engagement in Farmer Field School (FFS) programmes and study visits on millet/cowpea cropping techniques; • Knowledge of the plant material and engagement in seed multiplication.
	7 farmer unions (marketing)	
Individual (community-based)	611 farmers (productive support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being part of a basic farmer organisation that belongs to a union covered by the programme; • Supporting the implementation of a maximum surface area of 1.25 hectares per member; • Respecting gender criteria (50 per cent women and 50 per cent men); • Respecting land access criteria (except in the case of exclusively female FOs); • Village located within a radius of 10 km from the union head office; Being engaged and active in the union's association activities; • Voluntary participation in local purchases performed by the WFP.
	572 farmers (marketing)	

Source: Authors, based on FAO and WFP (2014).

Poor rural populations were the main targets of the programme, although the vulnerability criterion was not the only entry point for the PAA Africa interventions.

The targeting strategy was rather based on using existing resources (human and institutional resources, factors of production etc.) to leverage the assets and expertise of the various agencies involved in the strategic context of convergence communes.

In short, the targeting process of the PAA Africa programme in Niger includes four noteworthy aspects: i) the convergence among agencies and the influence of their decisions; ii) a limited community participation; iii) a focus on broader criteria based on farmers' responsive capacity and the inclusion of the land size criterion as a proxy to reach the most vulnerable farmers (vulnerability to food insecurity in itself is not explicitly used as a criterion); and iv) the significant participation of female farmers.

4.1 THE CHOICE OF THE REGION: MARADI

The intervention area was targeted to leverage the synergies created by other interventions that were conducted by the development partners to strengthen the populations' resilience to shocks, climate change effects and the degradation of the resources and livelihoods of increasingly vulnerable households.

The criteria for this choice are listed in Table 5. At all stages of the targeting process, the discretionary influence of the implementation partners—FAO and the WFP—had a significant impact on the choice of participants. This influence led to good implementation results in Niger and enabled clear technical criteria to be defined, communities to be engaged in the targeting process, and the selected groups to be reached effectively.

Maradi is one of the most populous regions in the country, with over 3 million inhabitants, of whom around 80 per cent live in rural areas. Agricultural land accounts for 71.5 per cent of the region, pastoral land for 25 per cent, and forested land for 3.5 per cent. The main crops are cereals such as millet, sorghum and cowpeas, and some irrigated crops such as cassava, sweet potato and vegetables. The production system is an extensive agro-pastoral system with low stocks of organic matter. The available labour force is estimated at three agricultural workers per medium-sized household of eight persons. Rainfall is now very low, between 300 mm and 600 mm per year.

The regional associations are the Federation of unions of farmer-based organisations of Niger (Fédération des Unions des Organisations des Professionnels Agricoles du Niger—FUOPAN/Sa'a) and the Fuma Gaskiya federation, with a total of 25,000 farmers for both federations, and the seed producer union of Aguié, Al Héri, with 300 members.

4.2 SELECTING THE COMMUNES AND ENGAGING FARMER ORGANISATIONS

The selection of the communes was based on the experience of several agencies in the region, such as FAO, the WFP and UNICEF (for more information, see Box 2), and on the higher number of school canteens and school children. As for the selection of the region, the objective was to ensure the sustainability of the initiative and to include the project in efforts to achieve more inclusive development in the region. At that level, regional stakeholders were also involved in the targeting process, such as the Regional Directorate for Agriculture of Maradi, the Regional Chamber of Agriculture of Maradi, the farmer-based federations FUMA, SA'A and FUCR, and the NAZARI union. They provided information on school canteens, productive potential and organised groupings in the region.

Following an awareness and consultation mission to the intervention area, a committee composed of FAO, the WFP and the government was then asked to select beneficiary farmer groupings and school canteens. The exchange with the implementation partners, including the National Institute for Agricultural Research (Institut National de Recherche Agricole du Niger—INRAN), the Regional Directorate for Agriculture and the producer-based federations, made it possible to identify the farmer-based organisations that were qualified to participate in the implementation of the project and to define the technical modalities of their participation.

BOX 2

Convergence communes: a resilience approach

Since 2014 the Government of Niger and the United Nations System have been working to develop a holistic approach as part of the 3N Initiative. The main objective of the convergence communes is to mainstream the development partners' interventions through a geographic, programmatic and operational convergence of the initiatives conducted in the country. Sequential and multi-agency efforts are being deployed to gradually implement an integrated and multisectoral package aimed at strengthening communities' resilience (United Nations 2015).

Overall, 35 communes have been prioritised by the government and the United Nations based on their level of vulnerability, the typology of regions and the existing opportunities. Two of the three communes targeted by the PAA Africa programme (Kornaka and Chadakori) are included in this convergence approach, a condition that was set by the partners during the targeting analysis. The objective of this collaboration is to increasingly integrate WFP and FAO initiatives beyond local purchases, and to include UNICEF as an additional stakeholder.

Despite all the collaboration efforts, this approach is still facing the challenge of moving from theory to practice, beyond the limits related to the agencies' mandates and funding modalities. Furthermore, although this approach prioritises the commune as the entry point, the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the initiatives can vary; in the case of PAA Africa, farmer-based organisations are at the core of the intervention, given the nature of the programme. For the current phase of the programme, the WFP and FAO are also considering a joint intervention to engage beneficiaries of the PAA Africa local purchase programme in the WFP 'cash for work' modality.

TABLE 4

Characteristics of the targeted communes

Department	Production availability	Number of schools with canteens	Number of school children	Beneficiary communes	Organised groupings in the communes
Maiyhi	Good	6	2063	Koran Habjia	FUCR
Dakoro	Good	49	8416	Kornaka	NAZARI union
Guidan Roundji	Good	5	1124	Chadakori	FUMA and SA'A

Source: FAO and WFP (2014).

Within the FO unions, individual producers were then targeted based on criteria that were discussed with the project's technical partners, as listed in Table 5. Through preparatory missions, the federations asked the selected unions to perform individual targeting of the farmers based on the criteria listed and to raise awareness about the selection process and the overall programme.

FIGURE 3
Intervention area of the pilot project



4.3 CHARACTERISATION OF THE FARMER-BASED UNIONS TARGETED BY FAO

Overall, 611 producers (54 per cent women) were selected to benefit from agricultural production support through the provision of inputs and equipment, technical training and guaranteed marketing of their production. These 611 producers were organised in 24 farmer-based unions in three rural communes where 60 school canteens and 11,603 school children were assisted by the WFP. During the evaluation, 572 producers—of which 273 women (48 per cent)—whose production was previously supported by the PAA Africa project met the purchase request.

In the targeting process, the vulnerability dimension was reflected in criteria related to i) the size of the lands available to the farmers in the selected areas; and ii) the assets owned by the households. According to the WFP (2013), 77.5 per cent of the PAA Africa beneficiary households can be considered very poor (62.2 per cent) or poor (15.3 per cent).⁹ According to the first results of the national survey on households' living conditions and agriculture in Niger, around 60 per cent of the population is poor.¹⁰

These households directly dedicate around 70 per cent of their expenditures to food and only less than 2 per cent to agriculture and livestock inputs. The households' main livelihood activities are agriculture, small livestock farming and (migrant and local) paid work. Among poor households, the most significant productive assets are 1.5 to 2 hectare plots, small livestock and paid work (FAO and WFP 2014). At the national level, arable lands account for an average of 3.4 hectares per person, based on the size of the economically active population working in agriculture (World Bank 2017). Their main income sources are migrant and local work and selling cowpeas, grass and firewood.

The prevailing crops are millet and sorghum, in association with cowpeas or sesame, and yields are low: between 200 kg/ha and 400 kg/ha for millet and sorghum and between 100 kg/ha and 200 kg/ha for cowpeas. In 2012, the average yields were 237 kg/ha for millet and 132 kg/ha for cowpeas in the same area (WFP 2013). In 2013, cereal yields reached 424.4 kg/ha.

The proportion of households whose head has no education or Latin or Koranic literacy is very high (over 46 per cent). On average, only 14 per cent of them have a primary level of education, 4 per cent have a secondary level of education, and less than 1 per cent have a higher level of education (ibid.).

It is worth noting the high level of participation of female farmers and their organisations in the PAA Africa programme in Niger. In addition to accounting for over half of the programme participants, they were more successful in adopting improved techniques to increase their production and, more important, in complying with the contracts concluded with the WFP. During the pilot phase, their unions were the only ones to deliver 100 per cent of what was set out in these contracts. These results are promising, as most evidence provided by the P4P highlights the strong impact of local purchases in the framework of a gender equality agenda for rural areas. The experiences of this programme are based on an ambitious and well-defined gender strategy. They achieved positive results in terms of capacity-building, market access and increased marketing and income opportunities (WFP 2015).

4.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS TARGETING SMALLHOLDERS

The objective of this subsection is to present and discuss the implications of farmers' selection for the implementation process of PAA Africa, with a focus on potential opportunities and limitations experienced while working with poor farmers cultivating non-irrigated crops—mainly cereals—in a complex context.

Overall, opportunities are related to: i) the opportunity to participate in non-competitive grain markets and to set prices; ii) the potential impact on female farmers; and iii) building and strengthening short supply chains. On the other hand, the limitations are related to: i) farmers' needs and capacities in terms of the purchasing tools available; and ii) supply and diversification.

Participating in non-competitive markets and setting prices: In the sub-Saharan context, value chains are composed of a high number of smallholders working in a scattered manner with very limited storage capacity, selling small quantities of low-value products with limited access to markets and exposed to high risks (Gálvez-Nogales and Fonseca 2014). In this context marked by a lack of coordination, market dynamics are often insufficient to correct such distortions—or even enhance them.

This is the case in the Nigerien context. Overall, the food market is marked by the liberalisation of trade and agricultural prices and by the abolition of public monopolies. Cereal prices vary tremendously and can even triple over the course of a year due to speculation and, more important, to volatility in food production volumes, to isolation factors and to populations' liquidities (Le Moal 2013c).

Marketing itself is not a major challenge for farmers in the Maradi region, as demand is high. However, cereal producers are trapped in a vicious circle: their income cannot increase year after year because traders call on harvesting networks that have access to all cereals in the market and a discretionary power for setting low farm gate prices, thus leading to a decline in prices.

In this context of rather unfavourable market dynamics, an institutional market strategy focused on smallholders claims to offer other insertion opportunities by including other buyers, not only to integrate smallholders in markets but also to improve their options of marketing channels and prices.

TABLE 5
Prices offered to PAA Africa farmers (pilot phase)

	Prices offered by the WFP	Local prices	Production value	Price differential	Income from PAA Africa purchases per producer (average)
Millet	FCFA240/kg (USD0.43)	FCFA202/kg (USD0.36)	FCFA60,000,000 (USD109,090)	FCFA18,596,000 (USD33,810)	FCFA117,000 (USD213)
Cowpea	FCFA340/kg (USD0.61)	FCFA272/kg (USD0.49)	FCFA45,560,000 (USD82,836)		

Source: FAO (2014).

In the case of PAA Africa, guaranteeing prices for farmers increased their incomes, programme turnout and farmer organisations' desire to become WFP suppliers.

Table 2 summarises the price conditions established by institutional purchases. The additional income resulting from PAA Africa prices was FCFA18,596,000 (USD33,810)—21 per cent above market prices. The overall profitability resulting from gains in output and the price differential reached 69 per cent, suggesting a huge income potential, which, coupled with medium-term organisational and productive capacity-building, could lead to broader effects.

This approach has clear limits, particularly considering the possibility of implementing a broader institutional procurement programme. It is not possible to assess the extent of traders' influence on local prices, nor their reaction to the prices offered by a programme like this one. At a bigger scale, this price differential could exacerbate local price distortions, although studies based on this assumption revealed mixed results.

Potential impact on female farmers: A gender-sensitive targeting process could further increase the impact of local purchases. According to the WFP (2013), in 2013, female farmers marketed half of the production marketed by male farmers and received lower prices for it. Furthermore, women are facing obstacles in terms of participation in the labour force, access to services and the availability of land. A large number of female unions engaged in PAA Africa are working in community schemes to produce higher yields from their plots. Moreover, only 7 per cent of women reported being responsible for decisions related to the marketing of their production (WFP 2014).

Consequently, local purchase programmes targeting women and their organisations can offer more marketing and income-generating opportunities than women currently have. Local purchases are important for female farmers, as shown by their strong engagement compared with male farmers. During the pilot phase, unions exclusively composed of women were more successful in adopting improved techniques to increase their production and in complying with the contracts concluded with the WFP. Indeed, they were the only unions to deliver 100 per cent of what was established in the contracts. Following the purchases from smallholders, they were able to deliver around 796 tons of food, of which 483.2 tons were cowpeas.

The importance of focusing on investment in rural development, particularly on local purchases from women, results from women's socio-economic status and from the disproportionate challenges they face. Women account for 52 per cent of the Nigerien population and 82 per cent of the rural population (Albarka 1999). Among the 63 per cent of Nigeriens living below the poverty line, 73 per cent are female household heads. Moreover,

women often work in the informal sector, a condition that further limits their access to credit and to other production factors (AU/CIEFFA 2010).

Building and strengthening short supply chains: The costs of purchasing programmes decrease as stakeholders other than the WFP—particularly governments—join them, thus strengthening the participation of smallholders with limited resources. In the medium term, shortening supply chains can reduce costs related to transport and grain storage, especially as the regions that produce or benefit from food aid often overlap or are close to one another.

The food supply agency in Niger (Office des produits Vivriers du Niger—OPVN) also works with food crisis management and estimates that food aid operations account for FCFA10 billion (USD20 million) each year, of which 20 per cent is dedicated to logistics costs. It is acknowledged that food aid based on local and regional purchases offers benefits in terms of reducing costs and increasing capacity (Lentz, Passarelli, and Barrett 2013). Considering the isolation of many regions suffering from a food deficit in Niger, it is very likely that these same benefits might be replicated at the smallholders' level.

Farmers' needs and capacity in terms of the purchasing tools available: Developing local purchases from smallholders in contexts with little institutional capacity involves great marketing challenges. Purchasing processes were actually mentioned as some of the main obstacles faced by PAA Africa in its work with farmer-based organisations. Overall, the inconsistency between farmers' needs and capacity, on the one hand, and the purchasing tools available, on the other hand, led to limited results.

To meet the WFP's needs, signing contracts with farmer-based organisations depends on adapting the purchasing mechanisms in terms of competitive processes, although this could lead to an increase in logistics costs.¹¹ The WFP itself acknowledges that, despite the efforts to support production and marketing, the volume purchased from smallholders is still relatively low, specifically considering the needs of the region: during the pilot phase, the PAA Africa purchases accounted for around 10 per cent of the food purchased locally by the WFP.¹² The WFP also noted that several unions experienced difficulties in meeting the volume conditions established before signing the contracts, registering a compliance rate of 73 per cent.

This is due to: i) parallel sales after harvesting; ii) assigning parts of the production to food stocks, seed banks and stocks to pay debts; iii) production estimation errors; and iv) in two particular cases, unsatisfactory harvests. The WFP also noted that the purchase performance of legumes is better than that of millet.

This shows limits in farmer-based organisations' planning in relation to production marketing and also suggests the need to better adapt to the agricultural calendar and to farmers' income and liquidity limits, which urge them to sell part of their production to other buyers, even for unfavourable prices. During the second cycle of PAA Africa purchases, the households sold more than half of their production within only four weeks after the harvest. Overall, the main reason given by 56.6 per cent of the households is their "urgent need for liquidity" (WFP 2014). A process that is clear, adapted to local constraints, well disseminated among farmer-based organisations and with short payment deadlines after the harvest is crucial to improve the performance of local purchases from smallholders.

Supply and diversification: Beyond the marketing aspects, it is worth noting important constraints in terms of farmers' dependence on rain-fed agriculture and the implications for ensuring a stable and diversified production for school feeding. PAA Africa's production support and purchases focus on cowpeas and millet, but the FO unions involved in the

programme suggested other possible products, mainly other cash crops such as groundnut. Supporting diversification among the participants, not only to increase the school feeding offer but also to strengthen farmers' food and nutrition security, seems to be a promising option that would require greater investment in technology and irrigation, among others. Integrating other local farmer organisations engaged in home gardening and making the necessary adjustments to include the purchase of these products appears to be the most appropriate way in the short term to diversify production.

The idea of diversification raises the question of sustainability, which is essential to ensure the feasibility of local purchase programmes from smallholders. First of all, farmers' dependence on cash (and rain-fed) crops and external inputs can increase their vulnerability. According to available data, rainfall in Maradi has significantly decreased over recent years. Agricultural seasons are shorter, and temperatures are rising. One of the most populated areas in Niger is also facing population growth and the resulting demographic pressure, which are significant socio-ecological vulnerability factors (Mamouda 2011).

Likewise, phenomena such as urbanisation and deforestation, coupled with extensive agriculture practices, have led to a loss in soil fertility that cannot be reversed through the use of chemical fertilisers. Consequently, while it must be acknowledged that significant problems need be solved to overcome the food deficit in the region, one should not ignore the fact that conventional approaches based on the use of external inputs increase farmers' expenditures and can create a strong dependency (Le Moal 2013b).

5 DISCUSSIONS ON TARGETING WITHIN INSTITUTIONAL PROCUREMENT PROGRAMMES

The promising results of the pilot phase suggest potential successes in promoting smallholders' food and nutrition security and market access resulting from targeting. However, it also reveals a whole range of obstacles faced by institutional procurement programmes in such contexts, suggesting that the sustainability of engaging vulnerable farmers in local purchase programmes will mainly depend on well-targeted, sustainable and ongoing production support and rural development opportunities.

Certain elements related to programme design, the agricultural sector and social development should be taken into account by institutional procurement programmes targeting the most vulnerable people. All of them are linked to adjusting tools and expectations during the targeting process and apply to most initiatives working with family farmers on a small scale:

- **Defining criteria:** The Nigerien context involves a number of obstacles to targeting. Its high levels of vulnerability to food insecurity and poverty often imply that establishing distinctions between vulnerability levels does not make a significant difference. It suggests there can be other vulnerable groups that could be interested in participating in local purchases but are not covered, so their integration will depend on further refining the targeting criteria. In contexts of high poverty, local purchase programmes could use broader and less restrictive criteria, leading to a less time- and resource-consuming process, avoiding significant inclusion errors and helping to achieve the objectives of the programme.

- Approach focused on farmer-based organisations: The programme in Niger consists in purchasing from various association levels, conducting different activities based on each level while fostering a dialogue about the most appropriate entry point to achieve the programme objectives. This experience suggests that purchases from organisations with a higher aggregation level are more appropriate in terms of complying with contractual quality and quantity norms. Besides, purchasing from first-level farmer-based organisations can be more appropriate in decentralised contexts. It can facilitate direct delivery to schools and allow for the inclusion of fresh products. However, this level of organisation faces even more obstacles in terms of logistics and management.
- Inefficiency of local food markets: As grain marketing does not involve major difficulties for farmers in the PAA Africa region, an institutional market strategy focused on smallholders does not necessarily aim to improve access to markets in a static region but, rather, to provide better opportunities in terms of productive inclusion by incorporating new purchasers who can offer more favourable prices—especially during the lean season—and reduce the hegemonic influence of intermediaries. It is thus imperative to address the issue of targeting in contexts of excessively concentrated markets whose dynamics do not exclude smallholders nor maintain them in a poverty cycle, as seems to be the case in Niger.
- Furthermore, price monitoring and broader interventions to foster competitive markets are fundamental tools to create a favourable environment for institutional procurement on a larger scale and to encourage smallholders to participate. An institutional procurement programme should not be based on pricing methods to ensure higher incomes but should also be accompanied by more comprehensive policies related to the promotion of stable and competitive environments.
- Building a gender approach: The experience in Niger suggests that institutional market programmes that target vulnerable farmers can have a positive impact, especially on women. Women usually have no say in marketing-related decisions and generally face greater difficulties to access agricultural services (WFP 2013; 2014). Female unions achieved the best results in terms of compliance with the PAA Africa contract, as they were the only ones to deliver 100 per cent of the products set out in the contracts. Maintaining an approach focused on women also offers specific opportunities, as it creates significant channels for the marketing of women's production.

Overall, the Niger experience shows that it is sustainable to develop institutional procurement programmes focusing on farmers who are more vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity, especially as vulnerability is not coupled with a complete lack of production factors (insufficient labour force, limited access to land and water etc.). The success of such initiatives depends on the convergence between investment and rural development initiatives, on the one hand, and local purchases, on the other hand, and will be proportional to the investment capacity.

In that sense, further studies exploring how to create synergies between social protection and agricultural interventions through targeting are necessary to provide improved analytical frameworks. Some questions have not yet been explored, such as potential synergies, the sustainability of productive inclusion and women's position in institutional procurement programmes. Likewise, more detailed data at regional level about farmers' livelihoods and market dynamics could help to better assess the impact of institutional procurement programmes in highly vulnerable regions.

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NOTES

3. During the consolidation phase (2013–2015), the project was extended to the regions of Zinder, Dosso and Tahoua.
4. Institutional procurement programmes are initiatives where state institutions or other kinds of institutional purchasers (international organisations, NGOs etc.) use their purchasing power to ensure a stable demand to certain groups, usually by purchasing food from family farming. Institutional procurement programmes are also known as 'local purchasing' or 'institutional markets' initiatives and refer to the implementation of programmes specifically aimed at using institutional demand to boost local food markets.
5. For more information, see: <<https://www.wfp.org/purchase-progress>>.
6. For more information, see: <<http://www.fao.org/in-action/iarbic/accueil/fr/>>.
7. Cowpea production dramatically dropped in 2012–2013 because of poor fructification (pod development) in the Maradi region, known for its high levels of production. The chemical treatment applied to cowpeas by FAO and the decentralised services can thus explain the good results achieved by the PAA farmers.
8. This approach aimed at increasing the WFP's purchase opportunities and is compatible with the PAA Africa experience, which suggests that local purchases from smallholders are more likely to be sustainable when various modalities and purchase levels are considered.
9. These figures refer to poor living conditions. This form of poverty is measured by a score calculated based on the assets owned by the households. These assets fall into several categories: amenities, valuables, means of communication, means of entertainment, means of field work and means of transport. Based on the calculated score, each household can be identified as 'very poor', 'poor' or living in 'acceptable conditions' (WFP).
10. The concept of poverty is considered as an aggregate of well-being indicators and income poverty indicators.
11. However, the experience of the PAA Africa in Niger does not provide enough evidence to claim that institutional procurement programmes targeting the most vulnerable will not generate higher financial and human costs than working with other groups. A more in-depth report of the contract development process could reveal these cost differences (particularly in terms of time/labour force), but data are still insufficient.
12. It is worth specifying that, in the case of WFP purchases, local procurements cover all purchases performed in the country, not necessarily from smallholders and their organisations.



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