Multi-sector programmes at the sub-national level:

A case study of the communes de convergence approach in Maradi, Niger
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Niger has one of the highest rates of undernourished children in the Sahel region and is regularly confronted with episodes of food insecurity. As a result, it has a patchwork of humanitarian and development actors working across the country, with limited government oversight. The limited government funding and oversight makes implementing large-scale, multisector programming very challenging. However, the ‘communes de convergence’ (C2C) approach that began in 2013 has offered a promising example of government and partner agencies improving convergence and multisector collaboration in nutrition by working through communes (the lowest level of governance in the country). The approach came from the 2012 establishment of ‘les Nigériens nourrissent les Nigériens’ (3N initiative or I3N). This high-level body sits in the President’s office and has a mandate to coordinate nutrition across different sectors and implementing agencies in the country.

Led by the 3N High Commission (HC3N) and UN agencies, the C2C approach was rolled out in 35 pilot communes in Niger over a four-year period from 2013-2018. Communes were selected based on vulnerability, with the most nutritionally vulnerable communes given priority. The core concept of the approach involves each commune developing its own annual plan through a consultative process, bringing together all main agencies involved in implementing nutrition activities in that commune. This is formalised into a commune plan, which aims to provide a complete picture of what is to be done, how much each agency is committing to spending on what, which specific activities are to be carried out, and a timeline. The UN has played a critical and central role in developing and designing the C2C, including changing its own ways of working to support the convergence approach. The UN, implementing actors and government partners worked together to design and plan nutrition programmes to be delivered in the chosen communes.

In August and October 2018 ENN’s team of regional knowledge management experts visited Niger to document the progress of the approach at national and commune level. The visits offered a broad understanding of the work that has been done so far to reduce stunting in the regions, as well as the challenges of the approach. The findings from the visits offer other countries unique insights into multisector programming at a sub-national level.

The findings reveal that, while many challenges exist, the C2C approach offers a promising mechanism for ensuring coordination at a local level and avoiding duplication of services. Having all actors align around development work and providing a platform for communication have been extremely valuable. Stakeholders reported that improvements in planning and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) at the commune level are already being seen as a result of the approach. It has enabled joint UN programming, with all UN agencies slowly beginning to develop common programmes with common funding and shared responsibilities. It has also led to the strengthening of pre-existing programmes in the communes, such as the ‘Initiative d’Accélération des Objectifs du Millénaire pour le Développement’ (Millennium Development Goals).
Development Goals Acceleration Programme), and has enabled a local, contextualised focus on nutrition programming. Another positive aspect of the C2C approach is that it has led to greater resources being channelled into priority communes. One example of this is the extra human resources being provided to the communes through the UN Volunteers programme.

However, there have been a number of challenges to implementation of the approach. These include: overall programming is still being largely led by the national level, despite the focus on the local level; multiple overlapping governance structures in the country remain, which creates duplication and confusion; and coordination meetings have been discontinued due to logistical issues and funding constraints. Given the limited resources available to the Government of Niger, a reliance on non-governmental institutions persists and, at times, there is a lack of communication between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government technical services, which again adds to the duplication of interventions and creates confusion. Furthermore, a lack of funding has led to government technical services not being able to implement planned activities. On the other hand, there have been many tangible improvements in project communes in terms of increased mobilisation of stakeholders to achieve food and nutrition security, improved visibility of different partner plans, and greater synergy of interventions and capacity-building of municipality staff in relation to planning and implementation of nutrition programmes. However, it is impossible to say how much these improvements are the result of the C2C approach and what the exact ‘value add’ of the approach is in terms of programme convergence or nutrition outcomes. Better monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is thus crucial in order to prove the approach is worth the investment required.

As a result of the challenges identified, the report highlights some key recommendations. These include developing clear mandates for all the relevant institutions, ensuring donors drive NGOs to truly support and align with government plans, enabling processes to streamline coordination, developing clear M&E mechanisms, accelerating capacity transfer to the commune level, supporting innovative funding mechanisms, and improving targeting of the most vulnerable.

If multisector nutrition programming is to be successfully implemented in Niger, there is a need to examine the bureaucracy and reduce the multiple horizontal and vertical coordination frameworks. That being said, Niger is a very challenging context in which to conduct multisector programming and it has been encouraging to see the C2C approach make strides in developing coordination mechanisms for joint planning and programming. This case study offers useful learnings to other countries in the West Africa region and to a broader global audience on ways that local-level governments can drive coordination and avoid programme duplication, even when initiatives are set up by partner organisations, as well as how longer-term planning can be introduced into humanitarian, short-term interventions.
Introduction

Beginning in 2017, Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN) has been conducting a series of case studies on multisector programming across South Asia, East Africa and West Africa. Countries were selected based on criteria including national progress in reducing undernutrition and the presence of multisector structures and strategies at a national and sub-national level, or evidence of large-scale, multisector implementation at sub-national level. Since 2013 Niger has been utilising a ‘commune de convergence’ (C2C) approach to improving coordination and multisector collaboration in nutrition between government and partner agencies. The programme focuses on communes (the lowest level of government) and emphasises planning and implementing nutrition and resilience programmes jointly. The country offers a unique example of multisector programming as it seeks to bridge the divide between humanitarian and development-focused nutrition interventions.

This paper presents findings and observations from field visits and interviews held in August and October 2018 in Niamey and the Maradi region. The findings are based on interviews conducted with 37 stakeholders at the national level in Niger (Niamey-based staff and agencies) in the Maradi district and in two communes in this district (Djirataoua and Chadakori). The visits explored how the C2C approach was being conducted at a sub-national level, as well as key stakeholders’ understandings and views on the successes and challenges to implementing multisector programming at a local level. While determining which sub-national region to explore, most national-level stakeholders agreed that the regions of Tillabéri and Maradi offered good examples of the C2C approach in operation as they were more advanced in implementation than the other targeted districts. However, the region of Tillabéri shares a border with Mali and is affected by a high level of insecurity and risk of terrorist attacks. Furthermore, several high-level missions have been conducted in Maradi, which has spurred on programming in the district. Maradi was therefore selected as an area to study further.

During the field-level investigation, the regional knowledge management specialist (KMS) visited two communes in the Maradi region in order to gain a detailed understanding of how the approach is working at the commune level; i.e. what is working well and what challenges are impeding implementation. The two communes visited were Département de Guidan-Roumdji – Commune de Chadakori and Département de Madarounfa – Commune de Djirataoua. The region and the communes chosen were identified as examples of good practice of the approach by 3N and UN staff, so they should not be seen as representative of the C2C implementation in its entirety; rather, these case examples provide insights into how the approach can work and some of the challenges, from the perspective of those implementing the programme.
Outline

The report is organised into three sections. The first section outlines the multisector environment in Niger and the development of the C2C approach, as well as a description of the activities conducted in the C2C model. The second section presents field findings. The third section summarises the discussions and presents the lessons learnt and conclusions.

The learnings from this case study are potentially useful to countries in the West Africa region and to a broader global audience in highlighting broad learnings in relation to:

- How local-level governments can push to coordinate planning and avoid programme duplication, even when most initiatives are set up and conducted by partner organisations.
- How to initiate longer-term planning in areas that have primarily focused historically on humanitarian, short-term activities.

Background

Niger has one of the highest rates of undernourished children in the Sahel region and is regularly confronted with episodes of food insecurity¹. The country is characterised by chronic nutrition emergency and it currently has the highest rate of stunted children in the Sahel region. As one of the youngest populations in the world, a large proportion of the population is highly vulnerable to malnutrition. Over one million children are estimated to suffer from acute malnutrition, of whom over 400,000 are estimated to be severely malnourished². Stunting is estimated to effect 42.2%³ of children under the age of five and the caseload of children suffering with acute malnutrition was recorded as 18.2% in 2015, with much higher rates at certain points in the year. The trends in stunting and acute malnutrition remain unchanged over the last five years⁴. For many years, humanitarian aid has accounted for the large majority of nutrition spending in the country; much of which is still implemented directly by partner organisations. Only a small amount of funding is channelled through the Department of Nutrition in the Ministry of Health. Despite decades of funding and broad commitment from successive governments to tackle hunger and food insecurity, the precarious nutrition situation remains largely unchanged since the last major famine in 2005-2006.

Responses to improve the nutrition situation have been largely led by international and local NGO actors, and a complex patchwork of humanitarian and development actors continues to work across the country, with limited government oversight.

While nutrition has been a high political priority in the country for many years and is perceived by the government as closely tied to political support and stability, with famine seen as capable of bringing down the government, nutrition has not had an ‘institutional’ home. Instead, as in many countries, government responsibility for nutrition has by default fallen to the Department of Nutrition in the Ministry of Nutrition.

² See footnote [1]
⁴ See footnote [1]
Health, even though this department has a very narrow remit, limited budget and works mainly on community management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) programmes. The Department of Nutrition has neither political influence nor basic core funding.

In 2011 Niger joined the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement (SUN) Movement as part of a broad government commitment to address malnutrition and adopt a longer-term, multisector, preventive approach. One of the central aims of the SUN Movement, and several other global initiatives, is to institutionalise and embed nutrition at the highest level of government in every country. In Niger a significant step towards this was made under the current President with the establishment of the ‘Les Nourrisson les Nigeriens’ (3N) initiative in 2012, with its own High Commission. This high-level body resides in the President’s office and has a mandate to coordinate nutrition across different sectors and donor development programming in the country. Leadership on nutrition policy development, supporting multisector initiatives and planning also fall under its remit. The 3N has a national bureau of staff overseen by a High Commissioner who answers directly to the President, and branch offices in all eight districts of the country (Niamey, Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri and Zinder) to support regional cooperation and cross-sector action. The establishment of this body, with a mandate to coordinate nutrition nationally, has facilitated a unique, bottom-up, multisector approach, with strong support and buy-in from the UN (a very influential force in the country). Under the 3N, access to water and reclamation of degraded lands have been noted as the highest priorities for ensuring food security. However, the government’s budgetary priority is still ensuring security and only 3% of government spending is allocated to food security.5

The creation and empowerment of the 3N High Commission (HC3N) reflects the recognition that nutrition must be addressed more broadly than simply through the Ministry of Health; rather, it must be addressed through integration of nutrition across all sectors, including agriculture, water, education, communication, population, women, children and social protection, trade, finance and the economy, industry, youth and sport, and mining. Furthermore, the establishment of the HC3N demonstrates understanding that a national body is needed to coordinate the multitude of actions and agencies working in nutrition and related areas, in both humanitarian and development spheres. Under previous structures, the government struggled to bring together, coordinate and oversee the large-scale and fragmented work of partners in nutrition across the country who are engaged in both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive work.

The 2013 C2C approach is a promising example of government and partner agencies improving convergence and multisector collaboration in nutrition through working through communes (the lowest level of government) and planning and implementing nutrition and resilience programmes jointly. The C2C model is not a new strategy, but a new way of working. In some C2C pilot communes, coordination at implementation level has improved between parallel humanitarian and development programmes and the Government of Niger, together with partners, has been given the opportunity to implement a set of converging programmes for vulnerable communities. The focus in the C2C approach is on building nutritional resilience, which is defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a process of transformation wherein individuals, communities and institutions learn how to prevent and mitigate nutritional shocks, learn from past experiences and enable communities to “build back better”6. It is hoped that, by providing a set of nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific interventions to prioritise vulnerable communes, the C2C approach can facilitate improvements in communities’ resilience to nutritional shocks.

**Forces behind changing the ways of working**

The dominance of short-term, externally funded humanitarian programmes has defined the nutrition landscape in Niger. This has also broadly shaped the relationship between donors/external partners and the government. The government relies on external funding to complete basic governance functions and deliver programmes, which gives enormous leverage to partner organisations and donors who control large budgets.

This arrangement has been a point of contention with the government for many years; not just because of the limited spending through government, but also because of the challenge of coordinating many different, large-scale programmes by partners, including large, separate programmes by different UN agencies.

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5 RISE II

Several factors have contributed to driving a new way of thinking about and working in nutrition in Niger. An important aspect is the ‘One UN’ approach, which has pressured the UN agencies to look for ways to work together better and explore synergies in implementation. The UN has a very large footprint in Niger, with all the nutrition-relevant agencies having a large and growing presence (including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), whose focus all interlaps at implementation level. The growth and expansion of the UN is evident, with new regional offices currently being established for FAO and WFP across Niger, including the creation of new offices and posts in Zinder and Maradi.

For the UN, Niger presents an ideal testing ground to trial synergistic, converged nutrition activities. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen each agencies’ impact on nutrition by concentrating activities and converging on the same populations. This is an important factor behind the development of the C2C approach, which was conceived with great input from the UN. Globally, UN staff have seen the C2C as an ‘experiment’ in nutrition convergence.

The 3N has provided the UN agencies with the ideal collaborator for a convergence-based approach. It has an explicit remit to coordinate between different implementing agencies and line ministry staff at the regional and lower levels, and has the authority to bring different line ministries together. Crucially, the 3N has also put the commune level at the centre of its approach, in line with the new constitutional arrangements giving communes great autonomy (even though in practice this has translated unevenly into new governance arrangements). The 3N has promoted the view that communes should be the porte d’entrée (point of entry) to the community for programmes and that national and regional/departmental levels should be serving this level, which is an elected layer of government and closest to the communities in need.

Niger administrative divisions

At national level various ministries are in charge of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive actions, but there are also several other institutions in charge of cross-cutting issues, such as the 3N High Commission and the National Committee on Prevention and Management of Crisis (Food and Nutrition) and Disaster Reduction.

Regional level

The region is led by a governor. The deputy governor is in charge of coordinating emergency affairs, including food and nutrition emergencies. At this level there is also a regional 3N coordinator and a Planning and Community Development Directorate, which is in charge of coordinating development issues. Following the last Decentralisation Act, another body with power, the regional council, is being set up with the aim of implementing and coordinating community development issues. This body consists of 15 to 40 regional councillors and has responsibility for development-related issues at the regional level. Having been put in place after the 2011 elections, it remains in the early stages of implementation and is yet to assume its full mandate and responsibilities.

Departmental level

The departmental level is the next level down from regional and is led by a préfet (prefect), who coordinates emergency and crisis-related issues, in addition to overseeing general government administration.

Commune level

This is the lowest administrative level and is operationally quite different from other levels because of the decentralisation that has taken place in Niger. The commune is led by an elected mayor. It has administrative and budget-level autonomy and collects taxes of its own. This is in contrast to the regional and departmental levels, who receive funding and overall plans from the national-level line ministries; thus, the commune has much more autonomy in relation to funding and planning.

There are, therefore, broadly two types of administration in the country: the general administration, which includes line ministries, governors, prefects and technical services; and the elected administration, which includes the commune and regional council. The division between the two layers is often not clear and some confusion exists over mandates and power. In theory, the elected commune and regional council wield more political power and have greater administrative responsibility, but in practice this is not always the case. Given that the financial and human resource mandates still reside at general administration level, they continue to have a high level of political power and administrative resources. These responsibilities should have been transferred to the commune level, but the process of devolution has been delayed.

(A full outline of institutional arrangements and responsibilities in the C2C approach is shown in Annex 1.)
Another basic contextual factor that has led to the development of new ways of working is the simple fact that there is a shrinking pot of humanitarian funding worldwide and broad agreement that what has been done in Niger to respond to crisis levels of malnutrition has failed to address the root causes of malnutrition and hunger in the country. This is against a backdrop of global conversations around the need for more hybrid humanitarian-development approaches that are focused on resilience-building and bridging the gap between humanitarian and development interventions.

The communes de convergence approach

The C2C approach was rolled out in 35 pilot communes in Niger over a four-year period from 2013-2018. The leads of the approach were the UN agencies and the 3N initiative. The 35 communes chosen for the pilot are spread out over seven districts of the country, so all 3N district offices, except Niamey, were engaged with their district UN counterparts to roll out the approach in the selected communes in their districts. The objectives of the approach are to bring together all stakeholders in the most vulnerable communes, implement interventions at scale, improve funding and build capacity (human, material and technical) to achieve resilience in food security and nutrition and disaster risk reduction, and reduce poverty.

Communes were selected for the approach based on vulnerability, with those with the highest rates of acute malnutrition given priority. Consideration was also given to ensuring a spread of communes throughout the country, ensuring all districts are covered/selected. Communes in Niger vary in size, but most are made up of an average of 50-100 villages, with under 100,000 inhabitants. There are 265 rural communes in total in the eight districts of the country. The communes have had autonomous status since the first Decentralisation Act in 1995, which gives them power to develop their own plans, mobilise funding, recruit and manage staff, and implement activities. They are supervised by the Ministry of Interior Affairs and supported by the Ministry of Community Development, which oversees planning and capacity-building.

The core concept of the approach is relatively straightforward and focuses on common planning, common implementation and common evaluation. In practice, efforts have focused on ensuring common planning, with harmonised implementation and evaluation at times lagging behind. Common planning has been conducted at commune level, departmental level and regional level. Each commune in the approach is supposed to develop its own annual plan through a consultative process, bringing together all main agencies involved in implementing nutrition activities in that commune. The joint planning event brings all key players to the table to share details of their interventions and activities for the coming year. This is formalised into a commune plan, the Plan d’Action Annuel (PAA), and is then shared with and owned by all. This plan is supposed to provide a complete picture of what is to be done, how much each agency is committing to spending on what, which specific activities will be carried out, and a timeline for them. All commune PAAs in one region are subsequently combined into a single document, which is signed and shared among stakeholders, including UN agencies, government technical services, NGOs and mayors. This allows for common planning and sharing of information on activities. Subsequently, the annual plan and accompanying documents aim to serve as a monitoring document for the commune leadership to track implementation and oversee work. It provides a degree of accountability to local elected officials at the commune level (headed up by a mayor and elected councillors) for what partners have committed to and empowers them to monitor delivery and ensure that the criteria for receiving benefits is

translucent and shared among the community. The planning and formalisation process of the annual activities includes the implementers of nutrition-specific programmes (such as the health sector) as well as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), agriculture, education and other programmes (communication, environment, social protection, community development). The main aim of the joint planning was initially to improve coordination at the commune level by having interventions in the same priority regions identified based on commune-level vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition. Ideally, planning would have led to convergence of targeting at the household or individual level; however, this was not possible due to different targeting criteria and methods by the varying UN institutions and NGOs. For example, WFP utilises a seasonal planning livelihood method for targeting, while UNICEF considers malnutrition prevalence as its main criteria for targeting, as well as access to drinking water and presence of health services.

The UN has played a critical and central role in developing and designing the C2C approach, including changing its own ways of working to support it. UN agencies work together to design and plan nutrition programmes to be delivered in the C2C communes. These joint programmes are included as core projects in commune plans and often account for a large proportion of spending and activities overall. Participating UN agencies in the C2C joint planning process include: WFP, UNICEF, FAO, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNDP, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). Through this process, the UN agencies aim to support the joint planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all interventions in each of its mandates in order to improve nutritional resilience in the region; ensure linkages with the technical level and the technical services of the HC3N regional level and other NGO technical partners; support the municipal consultation frameworks for mayors and municipal services through the regional technical level and the technical services of the HC3N resilience in the region; ensure linkages with the transparent and shared among the community. The planning and formalisation process of the annual activities includes the implementers of nutrition-specific programmes (such as the health sector) as well as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), agriculture, education and other programmes (communication, environment, social protection, community development). The main aim of the joint planning was initially to improve coordination at the commune level by having interventions in the same priority regions identified based on commune-level vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition. Ideally, planning would have led to convergence of targeting at the household or individual level; however, this was not possible due to different targeting criteria and methods by the varying UN institutions and NGOs. For example, WFP utilises a seasonal planning livelihood method for targeting, while UNICEF considers malnutrition prevalence as its main criteria for targeting, as well as access to drinking water and presence of health services.

Thus far, joint actions implemented include conducting a baseline survey in 22 C2C communes; organising livelihood-based planning processes in six out of eight regions; supporting resource mobilisation efforts for the implementation of 22 annual action plans from the C2C communes; and implementing a number of joint projects, including a resilience joint project in Maradi9, a WFP-FAO-UNICEF resilience joint project10, a joint FAO-WFP Food for Peace Project10, and a Rural Women Economic Empowerment Joint Project11 in selected communes. Another example of joint projects is a joint initiative between four agencies (WFP, FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and UN Women) in five villages in Djirataoua which provides a comprehensive package of interventions built around the ‘Key Family Practices’ model, developed by UNICEF12. The agencies worked together to deliver a sequenced set of interventions, including behaviour change activities, market development and trainings, and infant and young child feeding (IYCF) trainings.

Each UN agency works very differently, with some implementing through decentralised government agents (e.g. FAO with agricultural extension workers); while others primarily work through established government regional and district institutions (e.g. UNICEF under a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with districts and NGOs) and others work through local implementing partners/NGOs (e.g. WFP). Only one UN agency, UNDP, funded commune governments directly, funding small-scale projects overseen by the communes. Thus, establishing joint programming mechanisms has allowed for the UN agencies’ interventions to be better coordinated. As the presence of UN agencies varied by district and communes, the specific joint programmes varied by commune. This allowed joint programmes to be highly tailored to the specific needs of each commune.

In Maradi, a district in the south which is the ‘food basket’ of Niger, malnutrition is largely a consequence of water scarcity, land degradation, gender inequality (including education) and behaviour, rather than basic food availability (an important cause of malnutrition and food insecurity elsewhere in the country); therefore programmes were designed to focus on these causal factors.

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10 For more information: www.fao.org/emergencies/la-fao-en-action/projets/projet-detail/fr/c/449817/
12 For more information: https://www.unicef.org/mdg/niger_57530.html
Coordination in the C2C approach is intended to bring implementing partners (including UN agencies and partners, commune leadership and regional 3N staff) together on a regular basis (quarterly in most cases) to check on progress, share experiences and refine programmes where necessary. At the commune level, a multisector coordination platform (the ‘Cadre Communal de Concertation’ platform) already existed in theory, managed by the Department of Community Development and Land Management (Direction du développement communautaire et aménagement du territoire (DC/AT)) and the 3N regional office and commune. However, prior to the C2C approach, the mechanism was largely ineffective due to a lack of funding and human-resource capacity. As a result, under the leadership of the UN, an alternative meeting system and structure was developed in the C2C approach and commune-level plans have also been placed under the mandate of the DC/AT in order for the C2C plans to sit alongside broader commune-development plans.

**Niger administrative divisions**

The objective of this approach is to improve the implementation of the 3N initiative by promoting a local-development approach based on building community resilience. In the approach, community resilience is defined as the ability to return troubled communities to their original state and for communities to prevent and mitigate shocks through learning from experiences and ‘rebuilding better’\textsuperscript{13}. The approach is therefore focused on promoting collaboration and coordination among the actors: in particular the development stakeholders, but also the humanitarian partners, in order to help communities become more resilient. Three convergence levels are outlined in the approach.

1. **Geographic convergence:** The C2C targets 35 of the 265 communes in Niger. This offers an opportunity to start at a small scale, with the potential to scale up interventions to build resilience against food insecurity, disaster and poverty. The targeted communes were selected based on vulnerability, typology and operability. A baseline survey was conducted at the start of the programme to determine a set of about 90 indicators on nutrition, food security and poverty. In the first year, 11 ‘priority 1’ communes were enrolled in the programme. In the second year, 12 ‘priority 2’ communes were added and in the third year, 12 ‘priority 3’ communes were added. All UN agencies involved focused their interventions in the targeted communes. However, the targeting did not go beyond commune level. The communities/villages targeted were not the same; nor were the households and individual beneficiaries. This has been identified as a weakness of the approach.

2. **Programme convergence:** As noted above, all communes targeted in the approach developed a multisector and multi-stakeholder joint plan. First, a PAA was developed at commune level. This was based on needs identified at community level. It was then discussed at departmental level by all technical services of the department and other key stakeholders. The departmental planning was then taken over to the regional level and put together with other convergence commune plans in the region. This was the last level of validation and sign-off for the planning, which was then shared with all stakeholders and became the common MoU. This planning process has allowed many stakeholders to come together, align their actions with communes, share information and create synergies. However, some stakeholders (mostly international NGOs) did not participate in the C2C approach and most government ministries have a top-down planning approach which is difficult to coordinate with a bottom-up approach:

   - **government planning starts at national ministry level, with funds then allocated to regional and departmental level. The national-level ministries also determine the national policies to which the regional and departmental levels should adhere. This higher-level planning approach is very different from the C2C method of planning. For example, the Ministry of Water Resources decides at a national level how many wells should be dug and this is disseminated to the regional level, which determines in which villages the wells will be dug, based on the number of wells stipulated by the national level. This is in contrast to the C2C approach, which aims to begin by analysing the needs at the community level and compiling this in a commune-level plan to be addressed by the various stakeholders working in the commune.**

3. **Operational convergence:** The C2C approach was supposed to go beyond common planning and focus on joint implementation, or at least synergistic implementation. In practice, however, this has been lacking and institutions have not been able to implement jointly. Stakeholders interviewed noted that, once planning has taken place, all the institutions implement in their own way and do not meet again until the end of the year, when they gather to evaluate what has been achieved. To overcome this implementation challenge, some UN agencies have developed common programmes, funded by the same donor, and implemented these jointly.

Examples of activities undertaken under the C2C approach

A number of nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific activities are prioritised in the C2C approach and sectors made efforts to take a more focused, nutrition-sensitive lens to activities. For example, an Accelerating Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment project, which aims to empower women through poverty-reduction activities, began including nutrition education and malnutrition screening processes in the C2C approach. The main focus of the approach is to bring different interventions together to impact on nutrition at the commune level. Such interventions included:

- **Agricultural production**: Irrigation, gardening, cereal banks, improved seeds, animal health, land recovery.
- **Nutrition**: Active screening and management of moderate and severe acute malnutrition; supplementation with iron and folic acid to women of child-bearing age, IYCF practices promotion, micronutrient supplementation.
- **Communication for development**: Promotion of essential family practices, community radio support, training of community health workers.
- **Health**: Improving the peripheral health system (district hospital, health centre, etc.); prevention and community management of childhood illnesses.
- **WASH**: Drinking water (boreholes, small water plant, treatment), Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS); hygiene, water and sanitation in schools and health facilities.
- **Education**: Promotion of girls’ education, school canteens, scholarships, school kits, infrastructures.
- **Child protection**: Strengthening of the registry office, juvenile justice office (SEJUP), promotion of community-based child protection, training of community workers.
- **Prevention and management of food security crisis**: Blanket feeding, cash and food for assets, cash transfer.
- **Local governance**: Capacity-building of municipal administrations (training, equipment, technical assistance); support to prevention and management of crisis and risk reduction.

(A complete outline of activities for Chadakori commune is shown in Annex 2).

An example of joint programming in Maradi

One example of joint programming was seen in the ‘Initiative d’Accélération des Objectifs du Millénaire pour le Développement’ (IAOMD) (Millennium Development Goals Acceleration Programme), which aims to tackle chronic and acute forms of malnutrition. Funded by the European Union (EU), this project focused on three main interventions: health and nutrition interventions; WASH interventions related to nutrition and capacity-building in planning and coordination, and M&E. It operated in 17 municipalities/communes in the regions of Tahoua, Maradi and Zinder. The project began in May 2013 and was completed in October 2018. Although elements of the project existed prior to the C2C approach, they were incorporated into the initiative once it began. This meant that the initiatives of the project were highlighted during the annual planning meeting and discussed with other implementing partners in the communes to identify areas of duplication and potential collaboration. Furthermore, in the project quarterly meetings were held, which enabled various C2C stakeholders to discuss ongoing implementation processes. C2C stakeholders included UN agencies (UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, FAO, WHO and UNFPA), NGO partners such as World Vision and AREN, government technical services and commune-level government officials. This supported the coordination of activities and helped to avoid duplication. It further helped in building synergy and complementarity by bringing a harmonised set of interventions into the commune.

Health and nutrition interventions included activities to strengthen the management of acute malnutrition,

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14 http://ne.one.un.org/content/unct/niger/fr/home/notre-action/ns-interventions-de-developpement-et-humanitaire/programmation-conjointe.html
micronutrient supplementation, management of childhood diseases, and screening for malnutrition and prevention awareness. WASH intervention-related activities included increasing access to safe drinking water in targeted communes and CLTS. Furthermore, advocacy and education on nutrition took place in social protection and women’s empowerment programmes. The C2C programme also contributed to the strengthening of planning, coordination and M&E capacities of district and commune-level officials.

In 2017 health agents and community health workers were trained in health promotion and IYCF practices. A vitamin A campaign was carried out and a complementary feeding strategy was developed, focusing on micronutrient powder supplementation. Coordination in the communes was strengthened through frequent meetings as per the communal consultation frameworks. The WASH component of the project was implemented by the Ministry of Water Resources and focused on constructing 618 drinking-water points and latrines. The WASH component and health and nutrition component were coordinated through common targeting as discussed in quarterly technical meetings and steering committee meetings. These coordination meetings involved the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Public Health, UNICEF and NGOs operating in the programme areas. NGOs were appointed by UNICEF to conduct the nutrition and health component of the project and were able to begin implementation of activities relatively soon after the project began. The WASH component, as delivered through the Ministry of Water Resources, was slower to begin; as a result, a five-year hydraulic work initiative did not begin until the third year of intended implementation. An evaluation of the IAOMD is being conducted at the time of writing.

**Overall findings**

It is clear from the case study and interviews with key stakeholders that the C2C approach offers a promising solution to several development challenges in Niger. It offers a platform for stakeholders to plan together and implement in a coordinated and aligned manner. Even when joint planning has not taken place, the C2C approach has forced organisations and agencies to collate individual plans and activities, which has enabled implementation activities to reduce duplication and address coverage gaps better. Additionally, the C2C approach is recognised as having the potential to build capacity among elected officials at the commune level as it engages them in decision-making around programming in their communities; a notable change from the top-down approach typically used. Such an approach supports the devolution vision of the Nigerien constitution and increases accountability for programmes that are implemented in communities by external agencies. However, a major caveat to this finding is that little data is available on programming convergence and on how effective the C2C has been in enabling convergence; thus these remain subjective claims from well informed key stakeholders, rather than ones based on concrete data.

Critically, the C2C allows partners implementing humanitarian-focused programmes, such as blanket feeding and CMAM programmes, to communicate and align with development work and long-term programmes that are relevant to nutrition (such as school feeding programmes, WASH, agriculture, education and land-reclamation projects), as both humanitarian and development interventions converged geographically. This enabled an opportunity for humanitarian-focused initiatives to consider longer-term programming through co-targeting vulnerable community members.

The approach brings currently non-aligned activities in the same commune into a single commune plan and provides a platform for communication among implementing agencies and communities. This plan and platform not only allowed for advanced planning, but the annual planning session was also used to reflect on the previous year, which provided an opportunity to evaluate which activities were conducted, discuss why certain programmes and activities were not delivered as planned, and identify ways to improve targeting and implementation in the next year. It also allowed better coordination by aligning new programmes and taking existing ones into account.

Throughout the fieldwork, informants were universally positive about the approach, despite reservations or problems raised in relation to implementation. All those involved in implementation saw that the approach has enormous potential and its effects are already being seen through improved planning, monitoring and evaluation at the commune level. Despite the approach being excellent in theory and having had many successes, major adaptations are needed to ensure it is fit for purpose and can be scaled up throughout the country. There is considerable learning from the implementation of the approach, which is worth documenting and sharing.
Specific findings and learnings

What has worked
While subject to many challenges due to the difficult nature of implementing programmes in Niger, the C2C programme has thus far had some positive direct and indirect results.

Enabling UN joint programming
The C2C approach was initiated to bring all stakeholders together to improve service delivery and build resilience in the population. As noted previously, it is based on the principles of common planning, common implementation and common M&E. In the first year, the main focus was on common planning, from the community level through to the commune and district level. However, due to resource, financial and time constraints in the following years, this focus on common planning was greatly reduced; currently all institutions (UN, NGOs and government) plan separately and come together later to put their planned activities together. Even though this has allowed improved coordination and information-sharing among stakeholders, it did not, in the beginning, bring about common implementation. Initially, once the planning phase had taken place, the

The Maradi Joint Programme: UN agencies' joint programming in the C2C

- The Maradi Joint Programme (PCM) was implemented in a context of extreme vulnerability in the region, which had a poverty incidence of 73.4% compared to 59.5% at the national level in 2009. The PCM was submitted by seven UN agencies (FAO, WHO, WFP, UNDP, UNCDF, UNICEF and UNFPA), with UN Women joining in the second phase of implementation, in partnership with other UN agencies (World Bank and IFAD), government institutions (technical ministries and HC/3N thereafter), and decentralised government institutions (regional directorates, regional council, communes) under the leadership of the UN Agencies Coordinator.
- The programme was aligned with the Accelerated Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (SDRP 2008-2012) and the Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES 2012-2015). The PCM contributes directly to United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) outcomes; i.e. (i) improvement of food security, sustainable management of natural resources and diversification of sources of income; (ii) increased use of basic social services and control of population growth; (iii) improving resilience in food and nutrition security, environment, disasters and socio-economic inclusion; (iv) increased use of social protection systems and control of population growth.
- In terms of the first outcome related to improving household food security, production and productivity, the production systems of small farmers have been improved through interventions which have resulted in increases in their production and income, as well as improved nutritional status of consumers. This was noted in mid-line assessments. Furthermore, in order to further strengthen interventions, a malnutrition coverage assessment was carried out to determine the barriers and boosters to service access and delivery and these findings were built into programme activities16.
- Access to health services was a critical aim of the initiative as the project had a focus on behaviour change to improve the utilisation of health services. Surveys conducted in both 2015 and 2016 in 17 convergence communes, including eight in the Maradi region, showed a substantial improvement to healthcare access, particularly for women17.
- In relation to consolidation of local governance through capacity-building of local institutions and communities, technical assistance was provided by UN Volunteers (UNVs) from 2014 to support the planning, implementation and monitoring of the approach.
- The second phase of the PCM adheres to this approach and is aimed at: (i) increasing food and nutrition-security resilience, resilience of the environment, disasters and socio-economic inclusion; (ii) strengthening systems and mechanisms for disaster/risk management, sustainable management of the environment and food security; (iii) increasing the accessibility and use of basic social services with social protection systems and control of population growth; and (iv) strengthening peace-building mechanisms.
- The PCM is an example of interventions combining development and humanitarian interventions with support to CMAM programmes, as well as agriculture, health and local governance.

actors involved did not meet with each other until the next planning session. Slowly, however, this changed, and the UN agencies began to develop common programmes, with common funding and shared responsibilities. These programmes were elaborated and implemented by sub-groups of UN agencies in a more coordinated manner. Given the scope and presence of the UN agencies in the country, bringing plans and implementation together in a coordinated manner has been a major achievement. An example of such joint programming is outlined below.

**Strengthening existing programming**
The C2C approach has also strengthened existing programmes in the country. One example of this is the IAOMD, as described above. The implementation of the IAOMD project has benefited from the C2C approach as it has allowed for complementarity of programming and strengthened coordination, with more frequent meetings to examine the communal frameworks.

The C2C approach benefited nine out of the 17 communes of the IAOMD project in 2015 and seven other new communes in early 2016, making a total of 16 IAOMD communes covered by the approach. The differences between ‘convergence’ communes and those outside the C2C initiative was notable in terms of the level of coordination between implementing partners and stakeholders, the number of meetings held and the level of funding that could be identified. Furthermore, while it predated the C2C approach, the IAOMD was adapted and integrated into it, which supported coordination and enhanced planning at the commune level. UNVs were put in place in all IAOMD communes to strengthen the commune’s capacity in planning, supervising and coordinating various development interventions and in monitoring the implementation of various IAOMD interventions. UNVs acted as advisors to mayors; supporting, among other things, the organisation and facilitation of the meetings and other activities of the commune.

The IAOMD project was key in some convergence communes and has led to funding important activities, such as commune capacity-strengthening, coordination meetings and nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions.

**Enabling a local focus**
The commune was identified as the entry point for services in the 3N planning and implementation mechanism. One of the most important aspects of the commune entry-point concept is to allow a more homogenous analysis and adapted programming. This focus on the local level is critical to enable contextualised services appropriate to each commune. The mayor of each commune receives and authorises all plans for intended interventions in the commune. Furthermore, in the C2C approach, stakeholders have been advised to target one commune fully, rather than target villages in several communes. Stakeholders were requested to target villages in the same commune with the aim of scaling up interventions in that commune before focusing on another.

However, even though the government has adopted this concept, it has not been fully enforced in some communes. This is due to a lack of implementation tools, funding and capacity at the decentralised level to monitor and evaluate the approach appropriately. Despite these issues, the C2C approach has provided...
the opportunity to improve local-level planning. It has enabled programming to consider the needs expressed directly by communities, as well as considering the context and aligning with the commune’s priorities. One mechanism for doing so, the ‘seasonal planning based on living’ approach, involved bringing together a few villages to evaluate and discuss their needs and plan accordingly. Microplanning in this way involved all villages in a commune and focused on needs identified in the nutrition, food security, education and agriculture sectors. These plans were then combined into the commune overarching plan.

**Extra support at commune level through UN volunteers**

One of the objectives of the C2C model is to strengthen capacities at the commune level. This was initially placed at the heart of the decentralisation process by the President issuing a decree on competence transfer, which aimed to support human and material resource transfer to the commune level. However, the additional capacity at local level has not yet been met. To overcome this challenge, the C2C approach, through UNICEF’s support, has provided technical assistance to the communes of Maradi through the United Nations Volunteer programme. Since 2014 UNVs have been supporting the planning, monitoring, implementation and reporting of convergence communes, as well as assisting with the broader multisector coordination framework.

The UNVs, who are managed by UNDP at national level, are graduates who must have a degree in agriculture, rural development, nutrition, sociology or economics and have some professional experience in order to work in the C2C programme. In Maradi the UNV model was set up in 2014 and continued for over three years until lack of funding forced the initiative to be stopped. The added value of these UNVs has been recognised by all actors at regional level (including the 3N coordinator, mayor, and UN agencies’ officers) as effective, beneficial and desirable for the C2C programme. This is probably due to their competence, but also to the resources that have been made available to them. For example, each UNV received a computer, a motorcycle and fuel for travelling. This allowed them to play an active role in monitoring and reporting on activities, developing micro-projects and supporting the capacity-building of staff at the municipality level.

Prior to the establishment of UNV, the government had introduced volunteers (known as ‘renaissance soldiers’) to support the municipalities in the implementation of the 3N initiative. According to the 3N Regional Coordinator and his assistant, these volunteers have not been as effective as the UNVs. In fact, they did not have access to the same resources (motorcycles, fuel, computers, etc.); nor did they have any field experience and did not benefit from adequate support and consistent monitoring. Although UNICEF’s UNV programme in Maradi is now closed, as a result of the experience accumulated by these UNVs, a few continue to support their municipalities on a voluntary basis.

**Some challenges to implementation**

**Ownership is still largely at the national level**

Despite the approach being grounded in joint planning at the commune level, in practice, planning, funding decisions and programme design are often conducted at the national level; so, by the time implementers sit down to jointly plan in each commune, they are limited in their scope of decision-making. This is particularly the case in relation to government technical services. While the C2C approach seeks to bring all stakeholders together, at times those from technical services are not able to fully participate in planning as they do not have the necessary information from the national level regarding what will be permitted and what interventions are budgeted for. This is largely due to the complex make-up of national-level institutions and ministries involved in delivering services at the commune level. While the 3N initiative is located in the President’s office and is driving the C2C approach, it is not an implementing institution. Rather, it relies on line ministries to implement activities and ensuring that all line ministries are aligned with the 3N strategy can be challenging. Furthermore, in practice, the C2C approach is largely led by UN agencies and ownership within the government remains a challenge.

The process of commune-level planning and compiling an annual plan in this context often becomes focused on combining already-determined activities and programmes into a master plan. By this stage, funds have already been committed to duplicative programmes at times, while gaps remain in other programme areas. Even though the C2C approach is a bottom-up programming method, funding still largely comes from the external donors to whom the projects are submitted, and decisions regarding which projects to fund are made at a
national level. The C2C programming is either made up of multiple projects for which funds are already committed, in which case there is little flexibility, or the funding is still to be secured, in which case there may be delay in implementation. Unfortunately, donors have not fully endorsed the C2C approach and programming continues to be largely top-down. This is mainly due to the fact that the plan does not fall in line with broader-level donor strategies and plans, which are more focused at a national level, and it is proving difficult for donors to change their strategies and adopt to those of the government. As noted previously, donors may give funding to the Ministry of Water Resources at the national level to dig a certain number of wells, and the Ministry will then decide where to dig the wells, rather than base the decision on commune-level needs and plans.

The challenges of planning are exemplified by the fact that, for the last two years, due to delays the annual planning meeting occurred in October, when the year was almost finished. This meant that ‘plans’ consisted in merely compiling a list of programmes already being implemented, rather than being an interactive review of commune needs and mechanisms for achieving convergence.

Furthermore, feedback loops between the national and sub-national levels in relation to planning are missing. Ideally, as a result of the C2C approach, the commune would be in a position to work with partners and the national-level government proactively to identify programme needs for the coming years and to provide feedback on duplication and programme gaps. This is yet to happen, however, with planning continuing to be broadly top-down.

**Duplication and mandate overlap**

There are many overlapping structures in the government of Niger, which creates duplication and confusion. The Niger Economic and Social Development Strategy (PDES) is run by the Ministry of Planning. The PDES has the overarching goals of ensuring social and economic development, cultural vitality and peace and unity in the country. The PDES strategy has five main objectives, one of which is food and nutrition security. The Ministry of Planning is therefore responsible for overseeing food and nutrition security strategy, as well as other development issues. This institution is responsible for multisector, multi-stakeholder coordination. It is represented at the regional level by the DC/AT. This office is responsible for coordinating all multisector issues at the regional level, including food security and nutrition.

The food and nutrition-security axis in the PDES has been used as the basis for the development of the 3N initiative. This initiative has been made multisector to ensure all nutrition actors are brought together to plan, coordinate and implement nutrition-related activities. The 3N is situated in the President’s office, under the direct supervision of the President with all relevant ministries participating in the approach. Despite this high-level positioning, the 3N is still subject to the strategy and mandate of the PDES overseen by the Ministry of Planning. This creates institutional and programmatic overlap, as well as confusion among implementing partners. Furthermore, having such a similar multisector mandate has at times caused leadership conflict and duplication. For example, for meetings and workshops, both departments need to be invited and, at times, decisions are not taken because each department feels it is the other’s responsibility. In practice, the 3N, linked to the President office, is in a more powerful position to provide multisector oversight and coordination. However, it often lacks the required human resources to achieve this mandate, particularly at the regional level, where only two government staff have been appointed to the 3N.

This overlap is also seen at the regional and district level. The Niger administration consists of four layers: the national level, managed by the President, where...
high-level bodies such as 3N are positioned, followed by the regional level, which is chaired by a governor, then the departmental level, managed by a prefect, and lastly the commune-level administration, which is managed by the Ministry of Interior Affairs. The different levels of administration are able to bypass one another, which creates confusion and duplication. For example, the departmental-level technical team reported that, at times, the regional technical team takes over its responsibilities and makes it challenging for the departmental level to adequately coordinate and monitor interventions. Furthermore, the commune level noted frustration with the regional and departmental technical teams implementing activities without the input of the commune level. This overlap makes coordination challenging and decreases efficiency.

Challenges around coordination and meetings
The schedule for commune-level meetings was very ambitious and has proven unsustainable for the communes. Meetings have therefore dropped off. Even in the communes considered in this work, where there is a high level of commitment to the approach, it has proven too difficult to keep regular coordination meetings going. In the first year of implementation, when people were highly engaged, there was more contact, but even in this initial year not all the planned meetings took place.

Bringing together the 3N, staff from line ministries and other implementing agencies (i.e. local NGOs), the UN and commune-level officials to the communes has proven to be logistically challenging and expensive. There is no dedicated fund for these coordination meetings in Maradi. This may vary as the grouping of UN agencies involved in and leading the C2C varies by district. The commune leaderships felt they were given responsibility to organise meetings and bring implementation agencies together but were not given adequate funds and support to pay for fuel, per diems and other basic costs of organising meetings. In addition, many communes lack the necessary basic facilities to be able to coordinate effectively; e.g. many do not have an electricity connection or lack computers to be able to carry out this work.

In practice, only the annual (planning/evaluation) meetings took place. While these annual meetings were well attended, many of the key stakeholders may not see each other again for an entire year to plan for the next year. This lack of ongoing communication is a major limitation of the approach.

Meetings must be built into the approach and need to be less ambitious, with biannual meetings more achievable for many communities. Participating institutions should also commit funding for coordination to support the communes, which have proved to have very low funding capacities. It will also be useful to explore other means of communication rather than meetings or workshops, which are logistically challenging and expensive.

As noted previously, in parallel to the Cadre Communal de Concertation, the UN has created another coordination framework in the convergence communes. This new coordination framework was supposed to be more dynamic than the initial platform, which does not meet regularly, and also encompass more sectors. The cadre communal de concertation, which predated the C2C approach, did not include the education sector, which is part of the C2C approach. This parallel coordination framework was created to take into account all sectors involved in the C2C approach. In practice, this parallel coordination platform is funded and supported by UNICEF and that extra external support makes it more functional.

The UN actors are very well coordinated, with a GTTR established in each district of the country, with regular meetings bringing all UN agencies together to plan, discuss and share information about their work. Each GTTR appoints a district UN lead and creates a pot of funds collected from all agencies to support coordination meetings. In Maradi, the lead agency is UNICEF, with UNDP, WFP and FAO all members of the GTTR. UN Women and IFAD and some government offices (3N initiative and the DC/AT) are also involved. The government stakeholders involved felt that too much attention was put on UN coordination meetings in a way that excluded them from these talks. On the other hand, UN agencies saw that their joint programming created a dimension of complexity that required these additional meetings and were necessary.

The 3N plays a key role in bringing together UN and government actors at the district level; the only agency with the leadership to do so. It also plays an ongoing role in keeping stakeholders informed and facilitating the exchange of information. The DC/AT also has a mandate to coordinate line ministries with UN agencies and there is a UN focal point in the DC/AT. However, in practice, the DC/AT lacks the leadership to provide such a level of coordination and there is thus duplication at this level.
Reliance on non-governmental institutions
Many NGOs, both national and international, are present in the country, particularly following the 2005 food and nutrition crisis. They serve as a critical component of development and relief interventions in the country, mobilising funding and implementing activities directly. NGOs are often considered less prone to corruption than the government (which is ranked 112 out of 180 countries on transparency18) and to have more capacity than the government to implement activities.

However, at times NGOs and government technical services do not sufficiently communicate with each other, which creates frustration and duplication. Members of government technical services spoke of the frustration this causes, particularly when funding is given to NGOs for services that the government is able to implement. Furthermore, the government lacks funding to monitor NGO activities adequately.

Funding channels have created tensions
A large number of government stakeholders interviewed during field visits noted the frustration with funds being channelled directly to both national and international NGOs and UN agencies, rather than the government having oversight of this. They noted that it would be easier and more effective to channel money through the government as the technical services team understand the context and the needs of the communes. However, there is widespread belief among the UN agencies that the government lacks the capacities and accountability to manage funding and implement activities. In reality, only the UNDP funds the commune level directly. Government technical services suffer from heavy administrative procedures and currently lack funding to implement their own activities. An example of the administrative burdens can be seen in recruitment, which has to take place at a central level, based on a national civil service policy, while NGOs and UN agencies are able to recruit at a local level easily.

This channelling of funds that bypasses the government level has created a significant amount of distrust between the government and UN agencies, which at times has impacted on the quality of implementation and resulted in frustration among stakeholders. Stakeholders interviewed noted that the government often felt frustrated that funding was not channelled through its ministries for implementation and that, as a result, government officials were reluctant at times to readily cooperate with NGOs.

Not all money committed is spent
One aspect the C2C has managed to achieve thus far is to channel UN funds for communes. However, not all of the budget that has been committed for the approach has thus far been spent. Although not uncommon, the fact that the communes now have oversight of spending and programming increases their visibility with respect to spending and, understandably, communes find it concerning to have an underspend.

One of the causes of underutilisation of funds is the difference between planning funding allocations and those that can be achieved in reality. Most of the activities planned under the C2C approach are suggested by the UN agencies. The UN agencies can at times propose programmes that are at a very early

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18 [www.transparency.org/country/NER](http://www.transparency.org/country/NER)
Multisector programmes at the sub-national level: A case study of the communes de convergence approach in Maradi, Niger

stage of inception, without committed funds. These programmes may therefore be subject to change, modification or even cancellation after the C2C planning process. Thus, committed funds are subject to change.

The second cause of funding underutilisation is the lack of capacity of government and implementing partners. These implementing partners (both government and non-government actors) at times do not have enough technical capacities and expertise to make good use of funding available. Many lack the human resources necessary to carry out planned activities properly.

Furthermore, there seems to be limited communication between the UN agencies and the implementing partners, including the communes and government technical services. Where the technical services were expecting the UN agencies to inform them of available funding before they start developing terms of references (ToRs) and planning for activities, the UN agencies were expecting these technical services to initiate TORs first, in order for the UN to subsequently fund activities.

Lack of indicators for showing impact
One of the main findings of the field visits is that M&E mechanisms to measure impact have not been given sufficient consideration in the C2C approach. While there is a “broad understanding”, as mentioned during interviews, that the C2C has improved the nutrition situation and there are many tangible improvements in project communes (particularly in relation to coordination and reducing duplication of interventions), it is impossible to say whether there has been improvement in nutrition outcomes and whether this has been the result of C2C. In other words, it is not possible to quantify the value-add of a converged and coordinated approach. While a baseline survey was conducted at the start of the C2C approach, a mid-term survey was not carried out due to disagreements around methodology between UN agencies, who were more comfortable with each agency carrying out an independent assessment of activities. However, the UN agencies have subsequently agreed to organise a common assessment in all communes. A consultant has been hired to conduct the work; this exercise is ongoing at the time of writing. It is hoped that this assessment will be able to shed light on the impact of the C2C approach.

While it was noted anecdotally during interviews that several M&E systems of NGO agencies have shown a decrease in the numbers of children requiring treatment for malnutrition, it is impossible to say how much of this is due to the C2C approach. However, SMART assessments in the Maradi region have shown overall positive improvements, with global acute malnutrition rates reducing from 16.2% in 2012 to 13.3% in 2016\(^{19}\). Part of this decrease could be attributable to implementing the C2C approach.

Currently, no convergence data exists in the district and M&E systems are currently not equipped to measure the C2C approach on an ongoing basis. Ideally, such convergence data would focus on vulnerable households and villages in order to assess the number of individuals targeted with multiple interventions or multiple sectors, but this has not yet been achieved.

Better M&E is crucial to prove that this approach is worth the investment. One challenge is that the communes are tasked with monitoring, but often do not have the resources to conduct it thoroughly. Another challenge is that implementing agencies often collect their own M&E data and do not share this with the government officials. In practice, implementers are more accountable to their donors (the UN) than the commune-level officials; a power imbalance that the UN agencies must try to address. (An example of a commune annual action plan is shown in Annex 1.)

Missed opportunities for capacity-building
One of the most impactful elements of the C2C seems to be the capacity-building at the commune level. While many mayors have welcomed the C2C and tried to make the most of the approach, which puts them at the centre of planning, targeting and implementation, they have claimed that many opportunities for proactive capacity-building for themselves, their staff and members of the community have been missed. Many of the activities being delivered by the UN and governments through the C2C have only been funded for a limited time and mayors want to see more capacity-building initiatives integrated into programmes to ensure continuity once the scale of funding is reduced. Much of the work being done through C2C, such as land reclamation, can be conducted by members of the community if they are given the knowledge and tools to do so. Short-term approaches are still seen as dominating thinking in the C2C approach, despite the aspirational focus on resilience-building.

\(^{19}\) SMART assessment conducted in 2016.
Key recommendations

• Develop **clearer mandates** for all institutions with an interest in nutrition programming, particularly in relation to distinguishing roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government. This is especially critical for the 3N initiative at the regional level. This requires institutional mapping, including an analysis of nutrition governance across the institutional architecture in Niger. The analysis will need to identify areas of confusion, duplication, overlap of mandates and gaps.

• Ensure that **donors drive NGOs to better support and align with government structures and priorities** so that they are seen as complementary to rather than competing with government plans and activities.

• Donors must work to support the government to **improve financial transparency and accountability** so that, over time, donors feel sufficiently confident to fund the government directly, thereby leading to greater and more sustainable government funding for nutrition.

• **Streamline coordination** between nutrition actors, particularly in relation to meetings, so that these are seen as a ‘value-add’, rather than burdensome and duplicative.

• Develop **clear monitoring mechanisms and procedures** to ensure that impact of the C2C approach can be measured. Setting up M&E mechanisms for multisector programming is challenging and the country can perhaps look to other countries to replicate their multisector M&E frameworks. In this regard, consideration needs to be given to targeting, and M&E mechanisms should focus on identifying ways to determine which households and individuals are receiving a package of multisector services.

• **Accelerate the devolution process and capacity-transfer** to the commune level so that communes are truly empowered to implement and monitor large-scale programmes.

• Support **innovative funding and resource-mobilisation**, particularly for coordination and M&E, to reinvigorate and sustain the UNV mechanisms in the country.

• **Improve targeting to the most vulnerable**; while targeting the commune level is a positive first step, targeting must move beyond this to identify the most vulnerable villages, households and beneficiaries in communes.

Conclusion

Working in the context of Niger is very challenging as the country faces multiple development challenges and very limited resources at the government level to adequately support its young and growing population. In spite of these challenges, the C2C approach represents one way of conducting multisector nutrition programming at a local level, ensuring that programmes are better coordinated through joint planning and programming. The approach has encouraged a broader focus on nutrition in the country, which culminated in Niger adopting its first National Multisector Nutrition Security Policy in November 2018.

However, if multisector nutrition programmes are to be successfully implemented in the country, the level of bureaucracy and multiple horizontal and vertical coordination frameworks, which are neither fully functioning nor well-funded, must be reduced. Furthermore, donors need to resource and empower the government adequately to build nutrition resilience, and NGOs must be perceived as co-collaborators with government, rather than being seen as in competition with it.
Annex 1

Institutional arrangements and responsibilities in the C2C approach

Note: Normal pathways refer to pathways set out in policies and strategies. Bypass pathways refer to those where there appears confusion and pathways are in reality as opposed to those originally planned.
## Annex 2

### 2018 annual action plan of Chadakori commune

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axis</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Quantity/target</th>
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<td>Improving household Food security</td>
<td>Intensification and diversification of agricultural production</td>
<td>Dissemination of technology: research &amp; development, farms school</td>
<td>Livestock production</td>
<td>Number of goats</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Training session</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support with improved rainfall seeds (greater yield)</td>
<td>Quantity of seeds disseminated</td>
<td>12 Tonnes</td>
</tr>
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<td>Support with improved irrigation seeds (greater yield)</td>
<td>Quantity of seeds disseminated</td>
<td>350 kg of maize, 1.25 kg of vegetables</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Equal access to food and production facilities</td>
<td>Training workshop sensitisation on land property</td>
<td>Commune workshop</td>
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<td>Organisation of community sensitisation sessions on social coexistence</td>
<td>Sensitisation sessions</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Setting up land-use conflict-management group</td>
<td>Land management group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and behavioural change communication on population, family health and nutrition</td>
<td>Mass sensitisation</td>
<td>Setting up of listening groups</td>
<td>Number of listening groups</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>Integrating gender and women leadership</td>
<td>Baseline survey</td>
<td>Survey</td>
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<td>Integrating gender sensitive activities into village committees</td>
<td>Number of comities set up</td>
<td>120</td>
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<td>Capacity-building in child protection at community level</td>
<td>Putting in place child protection committee and orientation of members</td>
<td>Commune capital city</td>
<td>21 members</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Providing communication materials</td>
<td>10 new villages of the commune</td>
<td>10 villages targeted</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sponsoring of new member villages by older ones</td>
<td>10 villages of the commune</td>
<td>1 village identified as meeting site</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving nutrition status of the population</td>
<td>Improving treatment of acute malnutrition and management of inputs</td>
<td>Management of severe acute malnutrition</td>
<td>Screening and management of cases of acute malnutrition</td>
<td>Number of children treated for malnutrition</td>
<td>127,406 children treated for acute malnutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Training of health personnel in management of acute malnutrition</td>
<td>Train 5 health personnel in the commune</td>
<td>Health centres in the commune</td>
<td>5 health personnel trained</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prevention of chronic malnutrition</td>
<td>Screening of acute malnutrition in children under 5 during lean season</td>
<td>Distribution of super cereal and screening of acute malnutrition in children aged 6-9 months</td>
<td>All children aged 6-23 months received super cereal and children aged 6-59 are screened for malnutrition</td>
<td>Children aged 6-23 months</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reducing rates of chronic malnutrition</td>
<td>Supplementation with iron and folic acid</td>
<td>Supplementation of girls of very poor households</td>
<td>All girls aged 10-19 years of very poor households are supplemented</td>
<td>Girls aged 10-19 years</td>
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<td>Improving infant and young child feeding practices</td>
<td>Train 25 health personnel and 80 community health workers on counselling in young child feeding practice</td>
<td>Number of health personnel and community health workers trained</td>
<td>25 health personnel and 80 community health workers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reducing rate of chronic malnutrition</td>
<td>Promotion of Essential Nutrition Action (ENA)</td>
<td>Training of 25 health personnel, 80 community health workers on ENA</td>
<td>Number of health personnel and community health workers trained</td>
<td>105 persons trained</td>
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<tr>
<td>Axis</td>
<td>Sector</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Quantity/ target</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving nutrition status of the population</td>
<td>Reducing rate of chronic malnutrition</td>
<td>Promotion and counselling in IYCF</td>
<td>Training of 25 health personnel, 80 community health workers on counselling in infant young child feeding (IYCF)</td>
<td>Number of health personnel and community health workers trained on IYCF</td>
<td>105 persons trained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Screening of acute malnutrition during the lean season</td>
<td>Distribution of super cereal and screening of acute malnutrition in children aged 6-59 months</td>
<td>Number of children treated for acute malnutrition</td>
<td>127,406 children treated for acute malnutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Iron, folic acid supplementation</td>
<td>Supplementation of girls of very poor households</td>
<td>Girls of 10-19 years received iron/folate supplementation</td>
<td>Girls aged 10-19 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving access to basic public services</td>
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<td>Management of infectious diseases</td>
<td>Organising 3 coordination meetings at commune level</td>
<td>Number of meetings organised</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organising 4 prevention of malaria sessions</td>
<td>Number of sessions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vaccination</td>
<td>Support social mobilisation for the activities of vaccination</td>
<td>Number of mobilisation sessions organised</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organise 5 sessions of vaccination against poliomyelitis</td>
<td>All villages in the health sector</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Support the activities of preventing transmission of mother-to-child HIV</td>
<td>Monitoring session held</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sensitisation of young people and adolescent on HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Monitoring session held</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reproductive health</td>
<td>Equip 5 health centres with newborn reanimation kits</td>
<td>Health centre equipped</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure the monitoring of mother-child at community level</td>
<td>Number of monitoring sessions held</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Improving access to water infrastructure and sanitation</td>
<td>Setting up 5 drinking-water points in one school</td>
<td>Number of drinking water points</td>
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<td>Branching to water source and promotion of hygiene and sanitation in one health centre</td>
<td>One institution</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Supporting school canteens in 13 schools</td>
<td>Number of students reached</td>
<td>2,768 students</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting with school kits</td>
<td>Number of students reached</td>
<td>15,000 students</td>
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<td>Supporting with school bag</td>
<td>Number of students reached</td>
<td>15,000 students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Initial training of teachers</td>
<td>Number of teachers reached</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and behavioural change communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social and behavioural change communication, family health and nutrition</td>
<td>Organising sensitisation on essential family practices</td>
<td>% of women adopting essential family practices</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organising information day and information-sharing meetings with local authorities, traditional rulers and religious leaders</td>
<td>% of information sessions organised</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scaling up of sensitisation on essential family practices</td>
<td>Setting up M&amp;E system (monitoring notebook at community level)</td>
<td>All villages</td>
<td>% of villages carrying out monitoring with monitoring notebook</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Results-sharing workshop</td>
<td>Number of workshops held</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Producing and disseminating broadcast on essential family practices</td>
<td>Number of broadcast programmes produced and broadcast</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting planning, coordination and M&amp;E activities</td>
<td>Social mobilisation through traditional rulers and religious leaders for sensitisation of essential family practices</td>
<td>All villages</td>
<td>Number of religious messages disseminated</td>
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### Stakeholders interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Job title</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mamane Sani</td>
<td>Secretary General, 3N Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Aboubacar Mahamadou</td>
<td>Nutrition officer, 3N Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachir Moctar</td>
<td>Food security officer, 3N Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed Moustapha</td>
<td>Food security officer, 3N Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salissou Yahuza</td>
<td>BCC officer, 3N Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Aissa Soumana</td>
<td>Nutrition officer, UNICEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moutari Zezi Dade</td>
<td>M&amp;E officer, UNICEF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boureima Adamou</td>
<td>Food security officer, WFP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bintou Tindjani</td>
<td>Nutrition officer, WFP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Lodesani</td>
<td>Knowledge Management coordinator WFP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdoul Malick fourera</td>
<td>Nutrition officer FAO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djibo Banaou</td>
<td>Food security, FAO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr MAïdadjé Oumarou</td>
<td>NGO Programme coordinator, ALIMA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Nassirou Ousmane</td>
<td>National Nutrition Directorate, SUN focal point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Atté Sanoussi</td>
<td>Assistant Director, Niger National Directorate for Nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khamada Baye</td>
<td>Ministry of Water Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saley Mahamadou</td>
<td>former 3N officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cécile Basquin</td>
<td>Nutrition Cluster Coordinator, UNICEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ousmane Yacouba</td>
<td>Women empowerment and child protection regional office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harouna Aïlo</td>
<td>Agriculture counsellor, Chadakori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mme Maimouna</td>
<td>UN Volunteer, Jirataoua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahaman Bako (MBK)</td>
<td>Nutrition focal point, Madarounfa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abdoulaye Assaga</td>
<td>3N regional coordinator, Chadakori</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kanfo Harouna</td>
<td>Assistant 3N regional coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amadou Cissé</td>
<td>Regional UNICEF coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Hamza Elh Djibril</td>
<td>Regional coordinator, FAO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiari Boukar Sadik</td>
<td>Regional coordinator, UNDP</td>
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<td>Boubacar Seydou</td>
<td>Mayor, Djirataoua</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moumouni Korao</td>
<td>Assistant Director, Community development</td>
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<td>Boubacar Soumana</td>
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<td>Yacouba Abouda</td>
<td>Assistant Regional Director of Agriculture</td>
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<td>Dr Rabo Souley</td>
<td>Regional nutrition focal point, Maradi</td>
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<td>Mamane Saley</td>
<td>Food security officer, WFP Maradi</td>
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<td>Ousseni Issoufou</td>
<td>Mayor, Chadakori</td>
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<td>Zeinabou Ibrahim</td>
<td>Assistant to Mayor, Chadakori</td>
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<td>Raffaele Chiara</td>
<td>Programme officer, European Union</td>
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<td>Rakotofiringa Aurelie</td>
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