


4-3

Niger's Famine and the Role of Food Aid

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Executive Summary

Since the mid-1970s Niger has suffered from political instability and corruption. Following a 1996 coup, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) worked with Niger to implement various structural adjustment programs, but nearly 10 years later, in 2004–2005, the country faced a food crisis. One-third of Niger's population suffered from high levels of food insecurity and vulnerability. Yet the food crisis gained little media coverage; the government of Niger denied the country was even faced with a food crisis and continued to claim that food shortages were normal for this country.

As the crisis progressed, Niger did receive aid, yet efforts to improve the situation did not help. Many blamed the situation in Niger on donor countries—their delay in sending assistance and their lack of overall assistance. Others blamed the structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and most found at least some fault with the Nigerien government. The food crisis in Niger evolved into one of the largest food crisis “blame games.”

Numerous challenges arise as policymakers try to craft a common solution appropriate for all stakeholders. In an analysis of what happened in Niger and why food aid was so ineffective, many central themes emerge. Corrupt governance was one issue, as was the timeliness of food aid. Food aid arrived too late; it then became available at the time of Niger's harvest, depressing market prices of Niger's staple foods. The United Nations, then, must examine how to most effectively target the neediest populations and how to best access assistance for these emergencies. In addition, one cannot separate the food crisis from the chronic poverty that exists in the country. Poor infrastructure, Niger's geographic position as a landlocked country, and low agricultural productivity remain a challenge to the overall health of the region.

Many policy options exist for the donor countries, international institutions, and the government of Niger. Such options include improving the United Nations' Central Emergency Revolving Fund, establishing a Global Food Aid Compact, and reforming the Nigerien government (including implementing the country's poverty reduction strategy). Such

steps can help prevent future crises and help alleviate the suffering of the people of Niger.

Your assignment is to develop a set of policies that will satisfy the main stakeholder groups.

Background

A landlocked country roughly twice the size of Texas with a population of approximately 12 million, Niger experienced a massive food crisis in 2004–2005. In the 2004 Emergency Assessment of Niger, the World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that “3.8 million people nationwide face a high level of food insecurity/vulnerability, i.e. their food consumption and access to food are severely inadequate” (WFP 2005).

The physical characteristics of Niger make the country susceptible to food shortages. It is extremely hot and dry, droughts are common, and less than 4 percent of the land is arable (the arable land runs in a band across the southernmost part of the country) (Lovgre 2005). Locust invasions can occur, destroying much of the pasture necessary for livestock grazing, and a large invasion did occur before the 2004–2005 crisis. It is estimated that more than 50 percent of Niger's cattle have died from lack of food (Lovgre 2005).

Figure 1: Map of Niger



Source:
<http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/niger.html>.

Out of 177 countries ranked according to development status, the United Nations Development Programme ranks Niger 176th—second to last. The poverty rate is around 63 percent, and the fertility rate is between 7.8 and 8 children per woman—the highest in the world. By 2050 it is estimated that Niger will be the second most populous country in West Africa. Because the population keeps increasing, it is unlikely that Niger's food supply will ever meet the country's demand. Niger's subsistence crops consist of millet, sorghum, and cassava.

A large percentage of food-insecure households depend primarily on petty trade, remittances, and gifts. Only 23 percent of these food-insecure households raise cattle. The WFP's Emergency Assessment found extremely high levels of malnutrition, with 40 percent of children under five affected by stunting nationally. A WFP and Hellen Keller International survey found the wasting rate to be 13.4 percent among children 6–59 months of age (WFP 2005).

Minimal natural resources and high population growth rates aside, poor infrastructure and a lack of access to markets also contribute to the high poverty rate in Niger. Niger is a former uranium exporter and had easy access to international markets at one time. As this industry came to an end in the 1980s, exports declined. Agricultural products and livestock are potential export goods, but they are largely traded informally and have yet to become a large share of any "official" market. Worsening road conditions and poor telecommunications infrastructure also contribute to Niger's isolation from Africa and the rest of the world.

Throughout the 1990s, there was a drastic degradation in health services. In 1995 the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that Niger had only one doctor per 62,606 inhabitants and one maternity and child care center per 28,000 children. Only 14.4 percent of children between one and two years of age were vaccinated. Niger also has the lowest level of education in West Africa, with an illiteracy rate at around 80 percent (ANB–BIA 2000).

Current government policies, past regulations, and a wide range of historical events have also helped foster the poverty cycle in Niger. About eight successful or attempted coups d'état occurred between 1974 and 1999, resulting in feelings of uneasiness

and political instability. In 1996 Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara took power in a coup, leading many of Niger's donors to withdraw their assistance programs. Maïnassara was assassinated in 1999 by his own guards. Later that year democratic elections were held, bringing Tandja Mamadou to the presidency. After these elections, foreign assistance was reinstated by many of the donors who had previously withdrawn their aid to Niger. During this time, there was also intense political corruption and embezzlement of public funds by government officials.

It was thought that with the election of President Tandja, confidence and stability would be restored to the government. Although conditions did improve, corruption is still apparent, and transparency and accountability are minimal. Judicial oversight and enforcement of legal rights are absent from the legal system. Gender rights are rarely respected. Public sector institutions are poorly developed, and the citizens of Niger have little confidence in them. The majority of individuals in Niger lack access to basic public goods and social services. Thousands of public sector employees have gone on strike because of unpaid wages. In both the public and private sectors, there is a lack of education and professional skills. Because of political instability, poor management, and a shortage of training facilities to produce a highly skilled workforce, those who are educated often leave the country in search of better work.

About 80 percent of Nigeriens work in the agricultural and the informal sectors. The government's attempts to assure fair working conditions in the formal sector—a required six weeks of paid vacation every year for employees, a minimum wage of US\$35 per month (higher than the local market level), a maximum work day of nine hours, restrictions on weekend work, and prohibition of layoffs—have discouraged business development. Each year, the World Bank publishes a list of the best countries in which to start or operate a business. In *Doing Business in 2006*, the World Bank ranked Niger 150th out of 155 (Kristof 2005).

The IMF has supported economic reforms in Niger through the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) and the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PGRF). A debt repayment package was put in place under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) program. The World Bank and the IMF

encouraged the government to cut spending and privatize state enterprises. By 2004 Niger had fulfilled its duties under the HIPC, including presenting a poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). According to the World Bank and IMF, the PRSP "provided an appropriate analysis of poverty in Niger and of the authorities' strategy to alleviate it." Because of these reforms, the Paris Club creditors canceled Niger's total external debt (IMF 2004).

The PRSP addresses many of the issues underlying Niger's food shortage. It includes strategies for poverty reduction to the year 2015 and incorporates a multitude of issues, many related to food security. Among Niger's national priorities are health, water and sanitation, development of road transportation, and political and economic governance. In addition, the PRSP addresses priorities for the productive sectors. In the rural sector, high-priority actions include agro-sylvo-pastoral development and food security, desertification control and management of natural resources, and income-generating activities and development (IMF 2002).

Beginning in 2004, drought, locust invasion, and a continual cycle of low agricultural productivity and high food prices caused Niger to spiral downward into one of the world's worst food crises.

Stakeholders

The Blame Game

Aid groups say the UN has been too slow, and UN officials say money from donors was even slower, and just about everyone agrees that Niger's government should have asked for help sooner (New York Times 2005).

The food crisis in Niger has become one of the most complex emergencies in West Africa. Plans to alleviate starvation were slow and largely ineffective. Food aid arrived too late, leading to increased deaths and malnutrition. When food aid did arrive, it came during Niger's harvest, depressing the market prices of Niger's staple foods.

Because of these missteps, the current crisis has evolved into one of the world's largest blame games. It is still unclear exactly who is at fault or

what went wrong. Many were quick to blame donor countries, who supposedly failed to provide adequate assistance. One must also ask why Niger ended up in this crisis in the first place and look at the role and responsibilities of the Nigerian government.

Donor Countries

Numerous countries and agencies lend assistance to Niger. Some of the more notable development partners are Belgium, Canada, China, the European Union, France, Germany, Japan, the African Development Bank, the IMF, and the World Bank (World Bank 2007).

In 2005 the United States donated US\$13.75 million for various programs to battle food insecurity in Niger. U.S. assistance included aid US\$500,000 in seed money for supplemental feeding programs for children from 24,000 families. In August 2005 the United States donated another US\$7.5 million as part of the West Africa Regional Program (WARP), a large U.S. program focused on regional development and poverty alleviation (USAID 2005). Yet U.S. assistance amounts to only 5 percent of total aid to Niger.

Niger and some international institutions were quick to blame donor countries for their lack of support, yet Niger's dependence on this aid is enormous. In 2002 donor assistance accounted for 45 percent of Niger's government budget and 80 percent of its capital budget (U.S. Department of State 2007).

In the 2004–2005 food crisis, donors chose to send aid independently of the UN and other agencies. Because of this decision, the timing of the aid varied by country, and Niger failed to receive the aid when it was most needed.

The United Nations/World Food Programme

The WFP's 2004 Emergency Assessment of Niger details many of the causes of the food crisis. Some of the findings, as stated in the Emergency Assessment, include (WFP 2005):

- Niger had overall decreased production and income-earning opportunities prior to 2004.

- Production of millet, sorghum, maize, and rice fell by 9 percent in 2004/05 compared with the 1999–2003 average (a 16 percent decrease in the domestic per capita supply of food).
- Cereal imports fell by 60 percent between January–May 2004 and January–May 2005. According to the assessment, “This can be attributed to higher prices on Nigerian markets, tightening of controls on cross-border trade, and the slowdown of imports from Burkina Faso” (WFP 2005, 5–6).
- Prices for staple foods increased (37 percent increase for millet, 25 percent for sorghum, and 23 percent for maize).
- Sheep and goat prices fell by 23 percent.

A rise in staple food prices can be partly attributed to traders in Niger who export grain to wealthier neighboring countries (Vasagar 2005). A decline in the terms of trade between cereals and livestock led to a significant decline in the income of those reliant on livestock sales.

Between September 2004 and August 2005, the WFP made various appeals for aid. In February 2005 WFP Niger shifted its focus away from the Niger development program and toward the food crisis. Around this time, the government of Niger and the WFP agreed to subsidize cereals rather than distribute free food (this became an enormous debate, to be discussed later in greater detail). By August 2005 US\$22.8 million had been pledged to the WFP.

As the crisis continued, the United Nations and various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) blamed donor countries for much of the delay in food aid, while other NGOs blamed the United Nations for implementing misguided food assistance programs.

It took 10 months for the first general food distribution to get sent to villages in Niger (Timberg 2005). One reason for the scant aid was likely Niger's lack of assets (like petroleum); in many food assistance situations, those countries with more assets receive aid at a greater speed and in larger numbers. Another reason for the delay in

assistance was the large number of natural disasters that occurred between August and November 2005. After Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, funds to Niger began to dwindle. Finally, Niger's hunger is localized and does not expose others to these dangers. Emergency interventions for localized (and isolated) hunger can be rare, allowing the country to receive aid only after it has garnered media exposure.

In general, these delays have led to increased deaths and a significant rise in the cost of aid. The UN estimated that the delay in sending food aid to Niger increased the cost of food assistance from US\$1/child to about US\$80/child (Murphy 2005). Instead of being shipped by sea and over land, the food had to be expedited and flown to Niger.

Many NGOs claimed that the food aid distributed by the WFP was misdirected and did not reach those most in need of assistance. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said that the aid reached the moderately malnourished rather than those in the most extreme stages of starvation. They went on to say that the eastern Zinder province, one of the poorest regions, received no aid (BBC News 2005a). MSF also released a statement in September 2005 stating that there were both bureaucratic and logistical problems with food aid deliveries to and within Niger. The WFP admitted to minor problems in food distribution (such as delays at the Burkina Faso–Niger border) but largely rejected the idea that aid was misdirected (Afrol News 2005). Journalists noted, however, that aid may not have been misdirected and that they actually found men “locking away food stores when they leave their villages for any length of time” (BBC News 2005a).

International Institutions

The World Bank and the IMF are continually confronted with a large number of critics. Just as they were criticized for their initial economic reforms imposed on Niger, they were then criticized for their handling of the food crisis in Niger.

Some of the criticism relates to two controversial programs that were part of the 2005 structural adjustment programs: the implementation of a 19 percent value-added tax (VAT) on basic foodstuffs and the abolition of emergency grain reserves as a way to prevent distortion of markets. “Under the

letter of intent signed between the IMF and the Nigerien government in January to receive funding under a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PGRF), Niger agreed to extend VAT to milk, sugar, and wheat flour and reduce VAT exemptions on water and electricity consumption" (Bretton Woods Project 2005). Johanne Sekkenes, leader of MSF in Niger, blames the IMF and the EU for pressuring Niger into implementing their structural adjustment programs (Bretton Woods Project 2005).

After much public protest, the VAT extension was abolished not long after being put in place. With regard to the sale of emergency grain reserves, the IMF denies ever encouraging this step in Niger (Bretton Woods Project 2005).

The IMF role in denying free food distribution is still being debated. Many people believed that the IMF encouraged the Nigerien government to subsidize food, rather than give free handouts. The UK's *Observer*, in August 2005, stated that "the Niger government, under instruction from the IMF and EU, at first refused to distribute free food to those most in need," adding that "the powers that be did not want to depress market prices that benefited wholesalers and speculators." The IMF African department director denies that the IMF ever encouraged this policy (Bretton Woods Project 2005). Others believed that it was the Nigerien government's idea (not a recommendation from the IMF) to offer millet at subsidized prices, rather than hand out free food.

Also still debatable is whether or not this policy was "correct"—that is, if it did in fact prevent market distortion. What is known, however, is that the subsidized food offered was still much too expensive for poor people in Niger. Food remained on sale in local markets, yet the poor could not afford to buy it. After thousands of citizens protested in the streets of Niamey, the capital of Niger, the WFP began free food handouts in 2005.

The Nigerien Government

NGOs, donor countries, international institutions, and, of course, the Nigerien government must focus more on the government's own accountability and responsibility. In addition to the poor regulations and political instability that occurred before the famine, the government of Niger

shocked many in the way it chose to handle the food crisis.

As over 3 million people faced severe malnutrition and food insecurity, the government continued to deny that its people were suffering. A BBC news report stated that Niger's government denied widespread starvation, even claiming that the most recent harvest had produced a food surplus (BBC News 2005b). Ben Omar Mohamed, a government spokesman, accused the WFP of sending out false information regarding Niger and of trying to discredit the country (Mamane 2005).

President Tandja acknowledged that there were food shortages but claimed that these conditions were more or less normal for Niger (Mamane 2005). He told BBC Radio, "The people of Niger look well fed, as you can see" (Loyn 2005). This statement drew much criticism from the public and the media as they continued to see images of severely malnourished children.

One explanation for President Tandja's lack of response could have been fear that international attention to Niger's food crisis would jeopardize Niger's image and the 2005 Nigerien-hosted Francophonie Games.

Much of the media wanted to document what the Nigerien government denied. The International Press Institute (IPI) reported government pressure to keep findings of starvation, hunger, and corruption in Niger secret. "In a sign of the government's displeasure at the mention of famine, Tchirgni Mainouna, editor-in-chief of the government weekly, *Sahel Dimanche*, was removed from her position and given three months leave after the newspaper's 29 April issue warned of an impending famine" (International Press Institute 2005).

The IPI also stated, "Aside from reporting on the food crisis, the media also investigated the flow of aid into the country and its distribution. Some reports highlighted claims that ruling party officials were diverting aid to their own supporters. This led to a legal complaint from the governor of the Agadez region, Yahaya Yandaka, against Hamed Assaleh Raliou, director of the independent Sahara FM. Raliou was arrested and then given bail. He appeared before the Agadez regional court on 15 July and faces further hearings" (International Press Institute 2005).

At a time when the independent media could act as a warning system and assist the government in the crisis, journalists have instead been jailed and fined for reporting the truth.

Given that Niamey is in the southernmost part of the country, relatively far from the poorest regions and those who suffer most, the government has been accused of being disconnected from its poor people and not caring about the nomadic poor who live in the northernmost part of the country (Anarkismo 2005). This disconnect, according to accusers, has resulted in both poor food aid distribution and a lack of effective policies to enhance smallholder farmer food production.

The crisis continues, as does the cycle of blame. The food crisis is not as severe as it was during 2004–2005, but large amounts of severe food insecurity remain throughout Niger.

Policy Options

Many of the policy options available will help establish a more effective food aid system that could prevent future “blame games” and ineffective treatment methods. The United Nations, donor countries, and the government of Niger can establish a host of reforms and effective policies.

Policy Options for the United Nations and Donor Countries

Aid was slow in getting to Niger. Appeals for aid did not result in the funds necessary to assist the poor. The UN was dependent, as it is in many food crises, on the media. If there is heavy media coverage of an event (like the tsunami in Southeast Asia and the Darfur conflict in Sudan), more aid is likely to flow to these countries. This is a dangerous situation, however, because many emergency situations go undocumented by the media. The BBC was the first international news company to show pictures of Niger's food crisis, but not until July 2005, months after the beginning of the catastrophe.

Central Emergency Revolving Fund. One way to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of food aid may be to update the UN's Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF). Oxfam International

recently published a report focused on how best to reform the CERF (Oxfam International 2005).

Established in 1992, the current CERF is set up to respond to emergencies that donors do not choose to fund (that is, “neglected emergencies”). It includes a US\$50 million account that the UN can tap into for various emergencies. If the UN wants to use this money, it must indicate how it plans to replenish the used funds. Oxfam International states, “Due to its limited size and rules of operation, the existing fund has done little to spur timely and sufficient responses to emergencies that donors are unwilling to fund” (Oxfam International 2005).

Donor governments know they need to do more to improve the timeliness and predictability of aid. Given the problems associated with the current CERF, an updated CERF would contain a larger pot of money and establish greater efficiency in providing funds to a country in crisis. Although donors have made this commitment, many have still failed to commit enough funds to get to US\$1 billion, the minimum amount Oxfam believes is necessary to get address these neglected emergencies. One way to identify the need for increased aid is through the UN's Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP). The difference between the CAP (an appeal for aid for a complex humanitarian emergency) and the amount actually donated for that crisis can help identify the increased need for assistance. Oxfam has reported that in 2004, less than two-thirds of the UN's CAP requirements were met (Oxfam International 2005).

In addition, because the updated CERF is large, can be dispensed rapidly, and can be used for neglected emergencies, assistance to these countries should be less reliant on the media. In the case of Niger, this change is especially useful. When governments attempt to cover up their crises, as in Niger, the media are often kept far away from the most desperate regions and the public remains uninformed.

This updated CERF, according to Oxfam, could be financed by donor governments. In total, they say, it represents less than US\$1 per person from the rich OECD countries.

Besides updating the current CERF, additional measures can be improved. Famine early warning

systems can be made more effective. Donors, NGOs, and international institutions had conflicting perceptions of the severity of the initial food crisis. Resources must be funneled into improving the famine early warning systems to help prevent such miscalculations. Indeed, if proper calculations can be completed on the appropriate data, crises may be prevented before they arise. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to improve the amount and type of data collected.

Donor countries could also improve their communication with each other and with UN agencies. In addition, food aid must be appropriately targeted and distributed to those who need it most.

Overall, new policies related to food emergencies and new funds that are sent should be directed to countries before emergencies strike. In other words, assistance must be sent before a crisis gets out of control.

The Global Food Aid Compact. In September 2003 the Berlin Statement of Food Aid for Sustainable Food Security, created at a food aid workshop in Germany, suggested a Global Food Aid Compact. Such a compact could be used as an improved mechanism for the administration of food aid around the world (Barrett and Maxwell 2005).

The current food aid monitoring system, the Food Aid Convention (FAC), is a fairly weak document, with “no mechanism for effectively monitoring or enforcing signatories’ compliance with terms to which they have agreed” (Barrett and Maxwell 2005, 3). The FAC was revised in 1999 to permit “cash contributions to transport and other delivery costs to be counted against the value of commitments, setting a precedent for recognizing financial contributions to food procurement as food aid commitments, however it does not count shipments of higher value commodities against signatory commitments, putting the emphasis squarely on basic grains, pulses, root crops and edible oils that are most valuable in addressing emergency needs” (Barrett and Maxwell 2005, 7). Within the FAC, there is also a weak prohibition against “tied food aid.” Food aid directly or indirectly tied to commercial exports of agricultural products can significantly increase the cost of food aid and cause great delays in delivery. “The median time for a formal request for emergency food aid from the U.S. until port delivery is nearly five months”

(Barrett and Maxwell 2005, 8–9). The FAC has been revised six times since 1999 and excludes the participation of recipient countries. Other major food aid players, including the WFP and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), have no legal role in governing the movement and administration of food aid within the FAC.

The Global Food Aid Compact would seek to resolve the challenges associated with the current FAC, including the lack of accountability, efficiency, and oversight. First, the GFAC would include recipient-country governments, operational agencies, and donor countries. Second, the GFAC would force donors to make commitments in terms of tonnage, physical volume, and cash. Assistance (in the form of grants, not loans) could be sent to countries with ineffective or nonexistent governments. The GFAC, as currently planned, would be linked to the World Trade Organization (WTO) for monitoring and enforcement, although it would be administered through a Global Food Aid Council. As explained by Chris Barrett and Dan Maxwell, the Global Food Aid Council would be “an interagency body drawing on pre-existing technical capacity necessary to oversee and implement the compact” (Barrett and Maxwell 2005, 14). Finally, the new GFAC would include a code of conduct where “all signatories would agree to role-specific obligations as well as to a universal set of underlying principles governing the allocation, utilization, and monitoring of food aid” (Barrett and Maxwell 2005, 20). Currently, all food aid codes of conduct are voluntary.

In addition, aid agencies and governments must focus on more than the distribution of aid. It is easy to overlook, for example, immunizations and deteriorating livestock while agencies discuss whether or not it is more appropriate to give free food or subsidized food handouts. As already noted, the United Nations must also plan for uncertainty and create contingency plans, and there must be increased communication between all agencies and stakeholders (ODI 2005). It is also important to make efforts to address long-term sustainable solutions, including investing in increased agricultural productivity.

Policy Options for Niger

Perhaps the most important changes must arise within Niger. Food shortages, crises, and famines cannot be thought of as isolated events. They are inextricably linked to the chronic poverty that pervades much of Western Africa. As a result, government must establish policies that address both the continual cycle of poverty and emergency situations.

Niger needs policies that address the lack of education, the lack of health care, current disincentives for businesses, the lack of rural infrastructure, and the low levels of agricultural productivity. These policies can be addressed within the Nigerien government, the private sector, or both. Both the government and the private sector can and should take steps to overcome these problems.

Niger must do more to improve the overall health care situation in the country because worsening health conditions have large negative economic impacts, contributing to both rising costs and decreased productivity. Increased rates of malaria and malnutrition also increase the need for food aid. The soaring population growth rate must be recognized and controlled through education and other policies.

In addition, rural infrastructure improvements are critical. Poor road conditions add to Niger's isolation as well as increasing the time and money it takes to reach a rural village. Given Niger's geographic location and lack of natural resources, efforts must also be made to increase agricultural productivity. As a short-term policy option, the Nigerien government can invest in emergency stockpiles of food so that, during food shortages, there is less dependence on foreign aid.

The IMF recommends consideration of the following issues as potential goals within Niger:

- Improved economic growth rates
- Improvement of social indicators
- A reduction in the economy's heavy dependence on foreign aid
- Vulnerability to exogenous shocks
- Continued lowering of the high debt burden
- Fiscal consolidation
- Lowered production costs

- Diversification of the production and export base of the economy
- Improved competitiveness and business climate
- Tax reform (including efforts to widen the tax base and bring at least part of the informal sector into the tax system)
- Wage restraint
- Prioritized spending
- Safety nets (buffers) for vulnerable groups
- Minimized direct involvement of the public sector in the economy
- Strengthened institutional capacity (especially related to tax, customs administration, debt management, and statistics)
- Improvement of timeliness, quality, and coverage of Niger's economic data
- Implementation of the poverty reduction strategy paper

The Policy Challenge

Implementing appropriate policies to more effectively deal with both Niger's famine and other food shortages in West Africa requires an appropriate analysis of the challenges that arise within this situation.

Many central themes can be teased out from the discussion. As this case study shows, corrupt governance is a severe problem in Niger and must be addressed before food aid distribution can be administered appropriately. The timeliness of food aid is another aspect of food distribution that must be examined. In the case of Niger in 2004–2005, food aid arrived too late. Once food aid did arrive, it was harvest time, and the increased food in Niger's markets depressed the price of the country's staple foods. The delay in food aid delivery can be attributed to a number of factors, including the Nigerien government's rejection of an approach based on free food handouts, slow reaction by donor countries, and a UN fund that could not be accessed quickly enough. The UN and the WFP must come up with a policy that can effectively distribute food aid (that is, reach the target population at the appropriate time). Chronic poverty still pervades Niger, caused by many factors including poor infrastructure, low agricultural productivity, a lack of natural resources, increased rates of

HIV/AIDS, a high rate of population growth, and poor governance.

Stakeholders should find a way to end the blame game and work on establishing a policy with a common solution appropriate for the alleviation of poverty and acceptable to each stakeholder group.

Assignment

Your assignment is to develop a set of policies that will satisfy the main stakeholder groups.

Additional Readings/Recordings

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