Geographically delimited by the department of Kollo in the South, the region of Dosso in the South-East, the region of Tahoua in the North-East, by Mali in the North and by the department of Tera in the West, the departments of Tillabéri, Ouallam and Filingue include 1,323,895 people (of which 386,915 are located in the 6 targeted communes) representing 4.2% of the total population of Niger. The communes of Inates, Ayerou, Banibangou, Tondikwindi, Sanam and Abala are located in the North of these three departments. Located in a pastoral, agro pastoral and rice-growing area, these three departments were particularly affected by the 2009-2010 crisis. In 2011, despite a good agricultural campaign, they remained amongst the most vulnerable with more than 36% of the population suffering from food insecurity. In the 6 northern communes, the HEA survey led by ACTED in 7,000 households highlighted a very difficult situation regarding the profile and the means of subsistence of these populations: 52% are considered poor and very poor in the communes of Inates and Ayerou, 99% in Tondikwindi, Sanam and Abala and around 80% in Sanam and Abala.

In regards to the agricultural campaign of 2011 (which takes place between June and September), these three departments are amongst the most affected by the current agricultural crisis: more than 94% of the villages are in deficit and over 89% of the population (1,188,643 persons) is affected by food insecurity. Indeed, the conjunction of the lack of useful rain during the months of June, July and September, and the multiple attacks of crops by pests have led to a heavy cereal and forage deficit. This situation is all the more worrying as it affects extremely vulnerable populations which haven’t had enough time to recover from previous crises. For the 6 municipalities targeted by the ACTETD evaluation, 218 villages are in deficit and food insecurity affects 295,087 inhabitants, 76% of the population, according to the Regional Directorate of Agriculture.
RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

FOOD SECURITY

In Agriculture:

- 97% of the people surveyed have sown. The most used seeds are millet (90%), sorghum (85%) and cowpea (78%).
- 100% of the people surveyed believe that their harvest is poor. Amongst them, 88% harvested less than 50 sheaves of millet (a 7 person household consumes an average of 2 sheaves a day). The majority (88%) believes that the lack of rain is to blame while one tenth of the respondents highlight pests (crickets, rodents, birds, etc.) as another cause for the low production. The majority of the respondents estimate that their harvest will not enable them to cover more than 2 months of the food needs for their households.
- Confronted to this situation, more than 51% of the households plan to sell personal property and 40% are planning on migrating.

In Pastoralism:

- 90% of pastoralists surveyed believe that the quantity of available forage will not cover more than 3 months of their livestock’s needs;
- During focus groups, less vulnerable herders predicted that pastoralists would concentrate on less affected areas, quickly consuming the stock of forage and the water resources.
NUTRITION

Nutrition surveys led by the Government and different humanitarian actors (including ACTED) have highlighted for many months very worrying situation with malnutrition rates close to or above the emergency threshold set at 15% by WHO. The latest nutrition survey (INS-Oct.2011, Tillaberi) confirmed this with rates of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) and Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM), respectively of 13.1% and of 1.1%. Children 6 to 23 months are the hardest hit with more than 22% of MAG and 1.9% of MAS.

Regarding the evaluation, it focused on nutritional and food practices and allowed to highlight that:

- Most parents, and in particular mothers, lack knowledge on the age and the techniques of weaning. In fact, mothers mostly mix breastfeed from the first few hours following birth;
- Children only rarely benefit from nutrition adapted to their needs and often feed from the family meal; mixed breastfeeding lasts between 20 and 24 months;
- Children consume very little protein-rich foods (meat, eggs, milk and fish). This problem is particularly acute for girls, on who weigh many dietary restrictions (for example, the prohibition to eat eggs).

HEALTH AND ATTENDANCE OF HEALTH CENTRES

- The proportion of villages that have access to a health centre varies from one commune to another. In Inates, Ayerou, Sanam and Abala, more than 65% of the villages surveyed have operational health cabins (HC). For Tondikwindi and Banibangou, 55% of the villages have access to an operational HC. Despite this variable coverage, the large majority of respondents (between 93 and 97% of them) use both HC and Integrated Health Centres.
- However, it came out from the meetings with the authorities, the interviews and the focus groups that these centres suffer from the lack of health workers. In 67% of the centres observed, there were less than two health workers. During the meetings, they often mentioned insecurity and isolation of the areas as main factors for leaving. They are poorly equipped and suffer from poor supply. In fact, this problem was observed during a screening in June 2011 during which several supply disruptions of nutritional inputs were reported in the health centres of the communes of Banibangou, Tondikwindi, Sanam and Abala.

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Given the results of the evaluation, the communes of Inates and Ayerou seem to benefit from a greater number of water infrastructures, mostly in good condition. Also, it seems that the surveyed people adopt better hygiene practices.

- The presence of family latrines is variable depending on the communes. In the communes of Inates and Ayerou, more than 72% of the people surveyed have access to latrines in close proximity. The situation is more worrying for the other 4 communes. In Tondikwindi and Banibangou, more than 66% of the respondents declared not to have access to close proximity latrines. In Sanam and Abala, more than 81% of the respondents are in the same situation.
- In the communes of Tondikwindi, Banibangou, Sanam and Abala, the majority of latrines (respectively 66% for the first 2 and 81% for the last 2) were not operational.
CONCLUSIONS

Given the importance of the forage and cereal deficit, food stocks will be exhausted by the end of the year. The extreme vulnerability of the majority of the population, which has not recovered from previous crises, will only be worsened as many survival strategies will be ineffective: pests consumed an important quantity of food usually destined for animal consumption and the extent of household indebtedness often does no longer permit migration. The nutritional situation, already alarming, can therefore only worsen.

As the Nigerien government anticipated, an urgent response must be put in place by the end of 2011. It will need to integrate different axes of intervention to better answer the multiple needs of the populations.

In the 6 targeted communes, in coordination with the WFP and the other humanitarian actors present in the area, ACTED has defined a response strategy to the crisis which is structured around 5 priorities and which will target the 20,000 most vulnerable households.

PRIORITY 1: ENSURE THE POPULATION’S ACCESS TO BASIC FOOD
- Cash for Work aimed at the most vulnerable households and activities of rehabilitation of the environment (renovation of trails, restoration and development of pastures, construction of firebreaks, plantation of trees);
- Unconditional Cash Transfer aimed at extremely vulnerable households who are incapable of taking part in community work;
- Distribution of Vouchers and Vouchers for Work, with the organization of food fairs for the commune of Inates, poorly supplied with basic food.
- Free targeted distributions.

PRIORITY 2: FIGHTING MALNUTRITION BY MOBILISING POPULATIONS ON GOOD PRACTICES FOR FOOD, NUTRITION, HYGIENE AND HEALTH
- Implementing a KAP survey to assess more accurately the knowledge and practices in regards to nutrition
- Educate households on key family practices through the development of community networks also in charge of facilitating the transfer of information on the nutritional situation
- Support and monitoring of malnutrition cases at their return to the villages.

PRIORITY 3: ENSURE ACCESS FOR THE POPULATION TO QUALITY WATER
- Rehabilitation of drilling;
- Rehabilitation of water infrastructures (wells for domestic use and pastoral wells) in the targeted villages;
- Rehabilitation of sanitary infrastructures (latrines) and distribution of hygiene kits (filters, can, bucket, soap).

PRIORITY 4: IMPROVE THE RESILIENCE OF AGRO PASTORAL AND PASTORAL POPULATIONS
- Train households in agricultural and pastoral techniques to reduce the impact of climate hazards and improve productivity;
- Development of a community network in charge of supporting populations on agricultural and pastoral issues;
- Provide populations with quality agricultural and pastoral inputs;
- Develop alternative and complementary crops to rain-fed productions and enhancing irrigation infrastructures.

PRIORITY 5: ENHANCING THE MANAGEMENT CAPACITIES FOR COMMUNAL AUTHORITIES’ CRISIS
- Involve the communal authorities in the management of issues of food and nutritional security in their communes;
- Support the communal authorities in the development of crisis management structures.