



**Niger: where there is neither water, nor food**

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**African Studies Unit of the Forum**



## Introduction:

Niger ranks last in the Human Development Index, ranking 189th out of 189 countries. It is facing a state of poverty, insecurity and climate change. Food insecurity in Niger has reached crisis level, with 1.2 million Nigerien suffering in the period between October and December 2020

The problem of food insecurity is partly due to the recurrent shocks from the effects of climate change such as droughts and floods that disrupt the agricultural season. Arable land decreases every year due to water erosion of the soil, resulting in the loss of crops and livelihoods for thousands of affected farmers. The percentage of malnourished people in Niger has risen to 12.7%. Health experts estimate that more than 450,000 children between the ages of 6 and 59 months will suffer from malnutrition in 2021.

Hunger and malnutrition have limited the economic activity of many of the country's population centres. Many local industries have collapsed, and citizens have had to sell their possessions to buy food. Many have survived by cooking wild plants and eating tree leaves. Many farmers have been affected by the wasting syndrome to the point where they are unable to cultivate their land.

In a statement delivered to Parliament in 2020, the Prime Minister of Niger indicated that “food insecurity is an expected result of weak agricultural production, as well as weak fodder production in pastoral areas, and the floods that Niger witnessed led to great losses of lives and properties.”

The population of Niger is experiencing two of the worst crises that threaten humanity, the lack of water and food. This began in 2004 and worsened over time as a result of human and natural causes, including the attack of locust swarms, damage to crops, lack of rain and drought that affected crops and livestock, and armed groups on the borders.

Despite the presence of oil, uranium, and gold, it is, alongside, are classified as the poorest country in the world. It suffers from the effects of climate change, and the rise in greenhouse gases.

The crisis began in the southern regions of Niger (Maradi, Tahoua, Tillaberi and Zinder). It has caused increase in prices, malnutrition of children, scarcity of water and fodder. Moreover, its eight regions, which are the most food insecure, suffer from large



population movements. As a result of their insecurity, there are restrictions on humanitarian access.

Acute malnutrition rates increased at that time to 13.4% in Maradi in southern Niger, and 2.5% of severely malnourished children under five years of age. The countries (Chad, Niger, and Mali) are considered the worst in providing health services to children, allowing the spread of environmental pollution, and malnutrition.

Agriculture in Niger is also difficult because it is manual, which exhausts the energy of the small farmer. There is also not enough grain to provide them with the energy needed to farm.

The crisis affected several countries, but "Niger" was classified as the most affected country, by the United Nations (UN), which accused it of slow response to the crisis.

This crisis has caused a state of drought and poverty, as about 90% of the total population lives on agriculture and livestock. At the beginning of the crisis, a deficit in grain production was recorded by 15%, and 36% in animal feed production.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has confirmed that the Central African Sahel region, which includes "Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger", is facing a serious food crisis for 2020. The number of affected people has reached more than half a million in Niger. Moreover, the United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) declared that the food crisis in Niger is worse than the last emergency they faced in 2005.

About 7.8 million people are now living in a severe food shortage crisis and lack food resources, equivalent to 60% of the population of Niger. Farmers and villagers living east of the capital "Niamey" are facing the worst crisis since 1984, according to a 2020 OCHA report.

The situation worsened with the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the world. The passage of food resources became more difficult than before, as the borders were closed. Niger was classified as one of the poorest countries in the world, and suffered other diseases such as malaria, diarrhoea, Respiratory infections, hepatitis E outbreaks, and meningitis C.



The UN has estimated that 1.9 million Nigerien do not know where to get their food, 42% of children under five suffer from acute malnutrition, 73% of children under five are anaemic, and life expectancy reached 53 years.

**According to international organizations reports regarding Niger, it was found that:**

- 1- 81.3% of Nigeriens live in rural areas.
- 2- The population growth in Niger is one of the highest growth rates in the world.
- 3- Approximately 85% of adults cannot read or write.
- 4- These percentages of illiteracy and population growth exacerbate the problem of food insecurity and water shortage.

This report, issued by the African Studies Unit at the Forum for Development and Human Rights dialogue, discusses the crisis of food and water shortages in Niger.

**Food and water crisis in Niger**

- The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) expressed in 2019 that Nigerien women suffer from food insecurity in rural areas.
- About 7.8 million people in Niger, comprising about 60% of the population, suffer from hunger. This is due to the collapse of agricultural and livestock production. The UN expects the crisis to increase, with about ten million people facing severe food shortages in the sub-Saharan region.
- The country suffers from desertification and drought, as more than 17 million people live on only 20% of the lands of Niger, as 80% of which are desert, and only 20% of the land is arable.
- More than 95,000 people have been displaced to the "Tillabri" region of Niger, near the country's borders with Mali and Burkina Faso, by 2021, which has exacerbated the food shortage crisis.
- The CEDAW expressed its concern that 82% of the Niger population lived in poverty in 2019.
- The President of The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), after his eight-day visit to Niger in 2019, said that the arable land has decreased. He also stated that there is an unpredictability of the provision of water resources due to climate change and drought in the country.

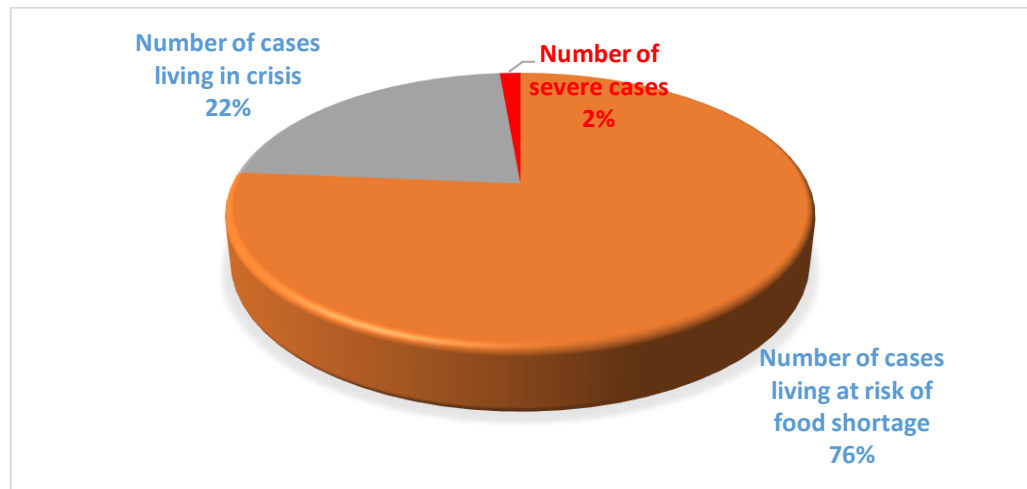


- In Niger, specifically in Niamey State, the epicentre of the pandemic, 7,015 children need support, and more than 867,000 children in Niger need food protection in 2020, an increase of 200,000 children from 2019.
- The OCHA reported that about 4.2 million people are displaced in the Sahel, including Niger.
- The WFP has confirmed that the Central African Sahel region, which includes (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), is facing a serious food crisis, with nearly 11,000 people one step away from famine.
- The WFP confirmed that the number of people suffering from the food shortage crisis may double to 57.6 million by the end of the year, compared to only 36 million before the Corona crisis. The percentage of those suffering from the crisis is 10% in Niger.
- During the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), it pointed to Niger the challenges that were exacerbated by the burden of external debt and the food crisis.
- Niger was also referred to for implementing the 3N initiative to ensure the exercise of the right to food, cooperating with the international community and specialized United Nations programmes, and taking concrete measures to ensure access to adequate food.
- Questions were raised about how Niger addresses malnutrition. How does Niger prioritize the problem of malnutrition? During the UPR, what are the measures taken by the government to combat food insecurity, malnutrition and lack of drinking water?
- In 2020, 5,768 hectares of cultivated land were inundated as a result of the floods in Niger. The flooding of the Niger River on its banks destroyed more than 5,500 hectares of crops.
- Refugees in Niger suffer from a food and water shortage crisis as well, as the International Organization for Migration has proven that migrants were not able to access water or food for 2020.
- Getting clean water in Niger is difficult because of the high cost of drilling wells between the rocks, which reaches \$8,000 and \$14,000.
- The food crisis in Niger based on the reports of the UN and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on the latest numbers of cases of hunger and malnutrition for the year 2021.



Niger food crisis	
Item	Number
Number of incurable cases	86, 000.
Number of cases in crisis	1.4 million
Number of cases at risk of food shortage	4.8 million
Total number of hungry people by FAO 2017-2019	Approximately 6.8 million.

The latest numbers of Hunger and Malnutrition cases for 2021



- 64% of the rural population in Niger do not have access to clean water. While about nine out of ten citizens lack a proper way to dispose of their waste.
- Water pollution and lack of clean water leads to the spread of diseases, as the residents of "Niger" resort to using unclean pond water, as well as hand-dug wells. This leads to exposure to pollution; due to sewage leakage.



## **The role of the African Union, the UN and international organizations in resolving the crisis for the year 2020 AD:**

1. Islamic Relief has provided assistance to more than 2.97 million Nigeriens to date, in water and sanitation, food security, treatment of malnutrition, and seasonal food distribution projects.
2. Islamic Relief has facilitated families' access to land irrigation systems through water conservation technology.
3. The FAO Africa, in cooperation with regional and global partners, worked to take measures to reduce the side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It held meetings to identify critical actions and solutions to the pandemic response, and examine the impact of COVID-19 on agri-food systems.
4. FAO works with the African Union Commission and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to ensure that African governments, Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) and other financial partners prioritise food systems in their actions and investments.
5. The cooperation has also effectively resulted in the "Green Revolution in Africa" and the "African Green Revolution Forum". It also led to holding dialogues with the private sector and its owners to participate in developing solutions to resolve the crisis and reduce the negative impact of COVID-19.
6. FAO Africa collaborated with Country Offices and government counterparts to issue and analyse food prices and potential risks.
7. The WFP provided emergency food aid to more than five million people in Niger. The FAO provided 13,000 tons of animal feed and distributed more than 3,400 tons of premium seeds. The needs of 94% of the affected villages across the country were covered.
8. The FAO and the WFP have called for a "grain bank" project, marketing chain support, and continued support for nutrition centres that care for people who are victims of malnutrition.

### **Recommendations**

- 1) Raising food and agricultural awareness among the different groups of people and their awareness of the size of the responsibility entrusted to both the state and the people, by enabling civil organizations to assist them culturally and educationally.



- 2) Establishing plans to assist the most vulnerable groups and those who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic, so that they can obtain sufficient and safe food.
- 3) Cooperating with international organizations to develop long-term strategies to resolve the crisis, such as drilling wells and purifying polluted water.
- 4) Relying on agricultural crops that are used as materials in other industries, such as rice and wheat in order to reach self-sufficiency.
- 5) Searching for alternatives to solve the crisis and establishing the idea of barter between countries, such as bartering between livestock and agricultural crops or minerals.
- 6) Protecting hand-dug wells from pollution and sewage leakage through modern techniques, and digging new wells with a pillar to protect them, in cooperation with international organizations in order to supply Niger with money and equipment.
- 7) Establishing water pumps, for the residents living far from wells and find it difficult to obtain water. These pumps help to get the water to reach the residents in their places of residence.
- 8) Supporting the private sectors to support the implementation of mechanisms for building and managing the necessary capacities to plug agricultural food projects and improve food security and nutrition.
- 9) Expanding digital technologies to provide better agricultural food services and improve the performance of commercial markets.
- 10) Price scheduling to provide food at affordable prices for the different groups of society.