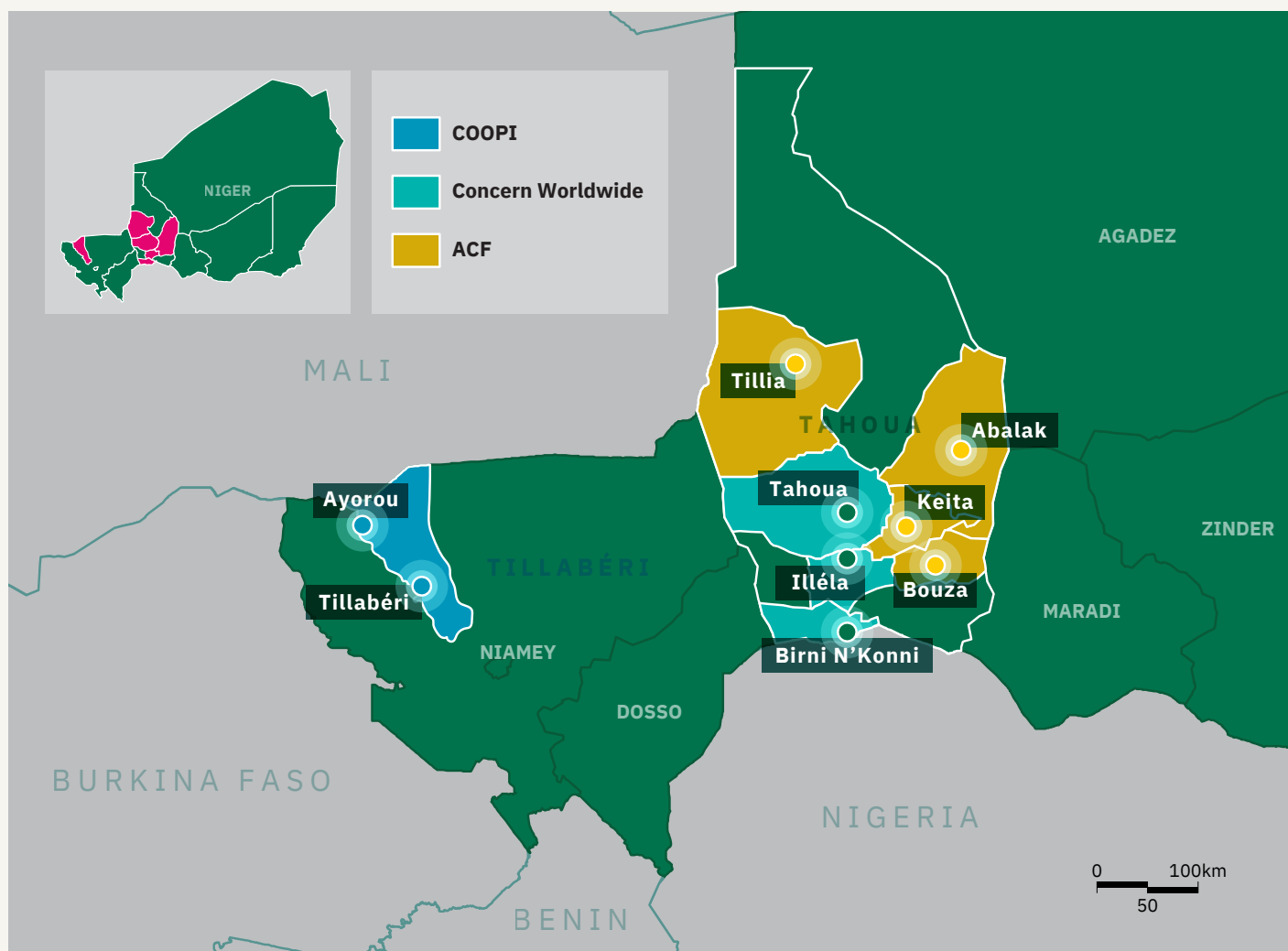# EARLY WARNING EARLY ACTION AND RAPID RESPONSE IN NIGER – LESSONS LEARNED

NOVEMBER 2022

FIGURE 1: Map showing areas covered by the EWEA component of the ERNE programme in Niger (Illela, Tahoua, Konni covered by Concern; Bouza, Keita, Abalak and Tillia covered by ACF; Tillabéri and Ayorou covered by COOPI).

Introduction

Early Warning Early Action (EWEA) is a core component of Enhanced Responses to Nutrition Emergencies (ERNE)[1], a 3-year programme (2020–2023) to reduce morbidity and mortality linked to malnutrition in children under five in Democratic Republic of Congo[2], Ethiopia, Niger, South Sudan, and Sudan. The ERNE programme has three pillars of intervention: response, preparedness and prevention of undernutrition in conflict-affected countries[3]. The Early Warning Early Action (EWEA) component focuses on risk analysis, monitoring, early warning, and enhancing the capacity of vulnerable communities. Under ERNE, Concern has established a global partnership with the Red Cross Climate Centre (RCCC) for additional technical know-how. This learning paper was developed as part of that partnership, and focuses on learnings from the first two years of implementation of the ERNE Early Warning Early Action (EWEA) component implemented in nine departments in Niger (Tahoua, Illela, Konni, Keita, Bouza, Abalak, Tillaberi, Ayourou and Tillia).

Food insecurity is endemic in Niger with marked seasonal trends. The first quarter of 2022, saw the highest number of food-insecure people in the last eight years (FAO, 2022)[4]. In addition, annually, over 100,000 people are affected by flooding, and as many as 4 million are exposed to the impacts of droughts (GFDRR, 2019). These hazards threaten food production of 80% of the population, who are primarily dependent on rain fed agriculture. Climate change, insecurity leading to displacement and violence against civilians, create a complex humanitarian situation in Niger, with over 3.7 million people needing humanitarian assistance in 2022 alone (OCHA, 2022). Niger also hosts 280,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 250,000 people who have fled violence from neighbouring Burkina Faso, Mali, and Nigeria (ibid). Concern has been present in Niger since 2003, implementing both humanitarian and development programmes in order to provide basic needs and, at the same time, improve the resilience of local communities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Early Action/ Rapid Responses actions are both needed as response options in fragile contexts affected by climate hazards and displacement.

- Community/departmental risk profiles and mapping carried out by local and national actors and structures are a critical tool for effective risk analysis and stakeholder buy-in.

- Early Warning Systems reliant on volunteers to collect community level data run the risk of the system collapsing if these structures are not consistently resourced.

- A range of coordinated Early Actions can be triggered when Early Warning Systems are based on partnerships between local, national and international actors who each bring different response options to the table.

- A coordinated understanding of Anticipatory approaches by all actors is important in order to shift from a focus on purely emergency response to complementary timely early action.

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1. ERNE is funded by the European Union (Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations) under a Pilot Programmatic Partnership (PPP).
2. DRC Programme concluded in August 2022.
3. For an overview of the ERNE programme, pillars and results, see the *ERNE Programme Brief* on Concern's website.
4. In Niger, 6.8 million people are chronically malnourished, and over 4.4 million will face acute severe food insecurity in the 2022 lean season (WFP, 2022). Of the children, 450,000 are severely malnourished, while 1.2 million suffer from moderate acute malnutrition (Sida, 2022).

Methodology and learning objectives

The paper outlines how Concern approaches EWEA in Niger, with an overview of the key EWEA components and risk categories. It provides an analysis of three Early Actions/ Rapid Responses in Niger that took place in 2020 and 2021, with a focus on how these responses were triggered, the outcomes, and what was learned. The paper aims to answer the following questions:

Q1) What were the pre-identified indicators, data sources, and triggers/thresholds Nutrition indicators, climate indicators?;

Q2) What were the pre-identified early actions and how did these actions occur?;

Q3) What were the main challenges faced in the intervention?; and

Q4) What key capacity building would most benefit ERNE EWEA in Niger and the broader ERNE programme?

Early Warning System Stakeholders in Niger

Niger has a well-established Early Warning System in place, with functioning stakeholders from village level to national level, including:

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM STAKEHOLDERS IN NIGER
- Local: Village level Community Structures for Early Actions and Emergency Response (SCAP-RU)*
- Departmental: Vulnerability Monitoring Observatory (OSV).
- National: Niger-Support for the National Scheme for the Prevention and Management of Disasters and Crises (DNPGCCA), Water Bureau (DGRE), National Met Office (DMN), Civil Protection Directorate (DGPC), Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs & Disaster Management (MAHGC), National Statistical Institute (INS), University of Niamey.
- Regional: Niger Basin Authority (ABN), AGRHYMET Regional Centre, the African Centre of Meteorological Application for Development (ACMAD), Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS).
- Red Cross Red Crescent: Nigerien Red Cross, Red Cross Climate Centre, French Red Cross, Belgian Red Cross, Luxembourg Red Cross.
- UN agencies: World Food Programme, Food and Agriculture Organisation
- INGOs: Save the Children, Oxfam, CARE, World Vision, Concern, Action contre la Faim, International Rescue Committee, Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI).

Acronyms in French

Early Warning Early Action under ERNE in Niger

EWEA contributes to the Response and Preparedness pillars of the ERNE programme by reinforcing community members' resilience to shocks and hazards caused by climate change and conflict and strengthening systems to effectively prepare for and respond to shocks and emergencies and assisting households at risk of food insecurity. Concern implements the ERNE EWEA component with Action Contre la Faim (ACF) and Cooperazione Internationale (COOPI), to leverage capacity and increase operational coverage. In Niger the EWEA model builds around the existing Early Warning System in country - *Systeme d' Alerte Precoce* (SAP) - through direct support to community level

data collection and validation systems run by the national authorities, Niger-Support for the National Scheme for the Prevention and Management of Disasters and Crises (DNPGCCA).

EWEA in Niger has five components, as described in Table 1.

EWEA COMPONENTS		OUTCOMES
Risk analysis	• Identification • Prioritisation • Mapping • Sentinel Village Identification	→ **Department profiles**
Planning	• Early warning and response planning	→ **Early warning and response plans**
Risk monitoring	• Data collection and analysis • Communication of results	→ **Triggers, bulletins, disaster risks evolution/ manifestation**
Early warning	• Detecting thresholds exceedance • Warning • Emergency preparedness	→ **Disaster signals** → **Resource mobilization**
Enhancing community capacity and resilience	• Food/cash distribution • Community awareness	→ **Assets enhanced/ maintained**

TABLE 1: Niger EWEA components

EWEA components:

1. Risk analysis

This involves creating department level Risk Profiles and identifying sentinel sites for routine Early Warning data collection. For each department, the top five risks are prioritised and mapped out. Existing Risk profiles for eight departments in the regions of Tillaberi, Tahoua and Maradi as part of the SAOURI/WASSI[5] programme were updated, and a new risk Profile was carried out for Tillia department.

2. Planning

Early Warning response plans are developed in coordination with various stakeholders at community and national level using the existing national structures (see Stakeholders box above).

3. Risk Monitoring and Risk Framework

Village level Community Structures for Early Actions and Emergency Response (SCAP-RUs) collect department-specific hazard data from the sentinel sites using a participatory approach. Hazard data is collected and monitored during relevant time scales. For example, the onset of rains is closely monitored in June as it is crucial for the planting season. If the onset of rains is delayed to July, this is evaluated according to a pre-identified threshold for action.

Besides monitoring department-specific hazards, data is also collected on household economic status[6] and market food and animal prices. Price volatilities and security risks are also monitored to determine the most appropriate modality for assistance. Data on beneficiaries' preferences are not collected regularly but prior to eventual assistance, mainly through a rapid needs assessment.

The Concern **EWEA Risk Framework** considers seven risk categories, each with several (potential) indicators, as in the table below:

	RISK CATEGORY	POTENTIAL INDICATORS
Shock Indicators	Climate / Drought	Start of rains, dry spells, end of rains
	Climate / Flooding	Quantity of rainfall, River levels
	Population movements	Displaced population
	Health Shocks	Epidemics
Context Indicators (Specific to population in programme area)	Markets	Market Food and non-Food Item prices
	Health and nutrition	Malaria Incidence, GAM and SAM
Impact Indicators	Livelihoods / Coping capacities	Household Reduced Coping Strategy Index, LLH Coping strategies Index, Food Consumption Scores, Food stocks

TABLE 2: Concern ERNE risk matrix categories and potential indicators

4. Early Warning and Triggering a Response

Early warning consists of regular monitoring of hazard data against pre-defined thresholds. SCAP-RU data are collated and analysed bi-monthly at departmental level, by Vulnerability Monitoring Observatories (OSVs). If early warning thresholds are exceeded, Concern supports the communication of the OSV validation through Early Warning bulletins.

Concern triggers Early Actions and Rapid Responses by complementing SCAP-RU risk monitoring data with market monitoring (of staple foods and livestock prices) and routine collection of Household Economic status data. This last activity also contributes to the national Integrated Phase Classification system in place.

5. Enhancing Resilience and Capacity of Communities

Early Actions and Rapid Responses are provided through cash transfers or in-kind food when market assessments indicate that cash transfers are not feasible due to market failure. These responses aim to support household level food security and preserve household productive assets that would otherwise be sold to withstand the current shock. The responses enhance communities' awareness of critical issues that enable them to prepare for any occurrences.

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6. Through four key indicators: Food Consumption Score, Livelihoods Coping Strategies, reduced Coping Strategies Index, and Minimum Acceptable Diet

ERNE Early Warning Early Action and Rapid Response Case Studies

Tillaberi Flooding 2020 – Rapid Response

The ERNE programme responded to flood affected households through the distribution of cash transfers (40,000 FCFA) and WASH kits (10 bars of soap) through a three-month intervention. The first phase supported 188 targeted Households (HHs) in the most affected communities. The second and third phases switched to an in-kind modality because the markets could not meet demand, and supported 139 HHs meet their food needs through in-kind rations (50kg millet, 50kg rice, 15kg cowpea and 5 litres oil).

FIGURE 2: Tilaberi flood cash distribution – October 2020; Photo: Concern Worldwide

Ayorou Displacement 2021 – Rapid Response

The ERNE programme responded to the needs of internally displaced persons through a three-month in-kind food intervention. 400 HH met their food needs through in-kind rations (100kg millet, 20kg cowpea, 5 litres cooking oil, 1 packet of spices and 1kg salt).

FIGURE 3: Ayorou distribution communication with recipients, Aug. 2021; Photo: Concern Worldwide

Abalak Food Insecurity 2021 – Early Action

The ERNE programme responded to the needs of food insecure households through a three-month in-kind food intervention. 1,000 food insecure HHs from low socio-economic groups were supported with in-kind food rations (85kg millet, 15kg cowpeas, 1kg salt and 5 litres cooking oil). Households with children aged 6-23 months were also given 5kg of fortified flour per child. The intervention was complemented with nutritional screening, nutritional education and behaviour change communication related to breastfeeding, covid-19 and health seeking behaviours.

FIGURE 4: Abalak food distribution – June 2021; Photo: Concern Worldwide

FIGURE 5: MUAC screening 6–23 month-old children during in-kind food distributions in Abalak; June 2021; Photo: Concern Worldwide

	TILLABERI FLOODING 2020	AYOROU DISPLACEMENT 2021	ABALAK FOOD INSECURITY 2021
Indicators, triggers, and data	The validated ERNE EWEA Risk monitoring matrix includes a **daily quantity of rain threshold of 540-50mm** to trigger an alert and >50mm to trigger an emergency response. Indicators collected from the **SCAP-RU**, the **CSRPGC** and data analysis from the **DNPGCA** was verified through in situ assessments.	The indicator used was the numbers of displaced people which was obtained from government authorities (**MAH).**	Food security indicators from the **OSVs and the DNGPCA** were complemented analysis of Dietary Diversity and poor Food Consumption Scores exceeding the emergency threshold set in the departmental profile of the department.
Triggering	Decision based on the results of a rapid assessment carried out in September, which led the government to declare a state of emergency.	Decision based on the results of the rapid assessment triggered by conflict-induced displacement in May.	Decision based on the deterioration of the food security indicators discussed at the EWS OSV meetings in February 2021.
Partnerships	Early warning/monitoring was done in partnership with **CSRPGC** and **DNGPCA**.	The initial needs assessment was conducted by the **RRM actors** of Tillabéry. The HH targeting was done in partnership with **Regional Directorate of Civil Protection** of Tillaberi.	The action was conducted in partnership with **CC/SAP/ DNPGCA**.
Number of HH receiving support	188 flood affected households in Bonfeba, Tamijirt, Bibiyergou, Tanne, Dinigue, Zindobon 1 & 2 villages.	400 most needy households using socio-economic criteria displaced to Tillaberi, Ayorou, Banibangou, Tera and Anzouro (representing third of the displaced population).	1000 food insecure households in 4 localities Chadawanka et Mayata (commune d'Azèye), Tazagaiza 1 et 2 et Tihirit (commune d'Abalak), (representing 42% of the population).
Actions	• Rapid needs assessment - September 28th • Unconditional cash distribution of 40,000 CFA per household and a wash kit in the 1st distribution cycle (October). • Food distributions in the 2nd (November) and 3rd cycle (December). • In-kind modality selected due to lack of functioning markets in the operational area.	• Household vulnerability assessment using Household Economy Approach (HEA) for targeting most socio-economically vulnerable. • Three Food distributions cycles (June, July, August). • In-kind modality selected.	• Rapid assessment. • Household targeting methodology. • Four food distribution cycles (March, April, May June). • In-kind modality selected due to markets being too distant to reach by affected population. • MUAC screening of children 6-23 months at each distribution.
Outcomes	• **Adequate food consumption score increased** from 27% of the population at baseline in September to 76% after cash distribution in November and to 71% after food distribution in January. • **Average Reduced Coping Strategy index decreased** from 37.8 at baseline in September to 26.6 in November and 22.9 in January.	• **Adequate food consumption score increased** from 2% of the population at baseline in May, to 64% in July and to 97% in September after food distribution. • **Average Reduced Coping Strategy index decreased** from 22 at baseline in May to 8.9 in July and 3.7 in September. • **Up to 54% of HHs noted that the food was insufficient**, reportedly due to sharing and the distribution's **failure to consider household sizes**.	• **Adequate food consumption score increased** from 3% of the population at baseline in February, to 56% in March and to 88% in June post distribution. • **Average Reduced Coping Strategy index decreased** from baseline levels to 8.8 in June.
Challenges	• Around 12% of food distribution was reported to be re-distributed. • Challenges with accurate consideration of HH sizes. • Some special needs beneficiaries reported challenges in accessing the distribution sites.	• Challenges with accurate consideration of HH sizes. • Difficulty identifying the needs of host HHs. • Rapid identification of beneficiaries in a dynamic context of active displacement is challenging.	• Challenges with accurate consideration of HH sizes.

TABLE 2: Summary of 3 upscaling/early-action/early-response actions implemented by Concern Niger under the ERNE programme

Lessons learned from implementing EWEA and Rapid Response in Niger

1. Involving communities in the data collection process and reinforcing the local institutions is critical

The evidence assessed in this paper clearly demonstrates the value of the data from the SCAP-RU and OSV in providing the background vulnerability mapping and risk which, in combination with national partners (e.g. CSRPGC and DNPGCA), can trigger actions and guide rapid needs assessment and beneficiary identification. Using local technical structures, SCAP-RU and OSV facilitates the meaningful monitoring of risks, targeting, and response. In addition, the involvement of the OSV and SCAPRU develops their capacities and allows systems to be adapted to the local context. Moreover, the close collaboration with CSR (*Comites sous regionaux*, at the department level) in charge of the bi-monthly analysis of data collected by SCAP-RUs in addition to risk information in the area is also effective in building the capacities of local structures.

The permanent functionality of the community structures (SCAP-RUs and OSVs) and the good collaboration between these local technical structures and other humanitarian actors is a positive feature of the EWS in Niger. However, SCAP-RUs are not uniformly distributed so many areas are not covered, they have limited resources including IT resources, and it is sometimes difficult to communicate with them. Travel and data collection is often difficult and there are security concerns in some regions. With further funding and capacity development, the village-level structures, such as OSV and SCAP-RU, could be strengthened and expanded to provide greater coverage. This is not a new observation, and requires constant advocacy.

2. Partnerships with local, national and international partners are key, but also create challenges

The evidence assessed clearly indicates the value of partnerships to support the nationally led Early Warning System in Niger with decentralised structures down to the community level (DNPGCA and the SCAP-RU). The case study responses demonstrate how the EWS can generate information and trigger coordinated actions through these partnerships. However, these actions are limited to partner operational presence and funding mechanisms, so is not consistent. Much EWS response is still geared towards emergency response in-kind and more progress is needed for the adoption of Early Actions from actors whose remit allows for this.

3. EWEA in fragile and conflict prone regions is challenging and requires a flexible and dynamic approach, and a good understanding of the anticipatory approach

Conventional EWEA/Anticipatory Action is strongly rooted in the ability to have pre-identified vulnerability and hazard related indicators, thresholds and triggers. In the contexts in which Concern Niger operates (and similarly in other ERNE programme countries), the operational context is in constant flux with conflict and climate induced displacement. The risk profiles in the operational areas of Niger highlight the geographic specific nature of vulnerability and the changing risk context. Attempts to use migration indicators (e.g., number of people displaced) has had some value, but does not provide a timely early warning signal. As a result, a lot of resources must go into the rapid needs assessment and identification of beneficiaries every time the context changes, as pre-identifying households runs the risk of many exclusion errors.

In spite of an existing national Early Warning System and increasing political will for the uptake and scaling up of EWEA across regions, many decision makers are more

accustomed to the yearly hunger season cycle and emergency response rather than anticipatory action. In this context, successfully upscaling EWEA in Niger will require complimenting the Cadre Harmonise[7] (Integrated Phase Classification) process with locally responsive EWEA approaches. There is a continued need for meaningful engagement, information and awareness raising among local technical structures, federative and local bodies to engage with the existing information systems and consider increased understanding of EWEA strategy and EW risk frameworks, which can be reproduced in new regions.

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