Background/Risk
The Sahel today is marked by food insecurity, persistent poverty, corrupt governance, high population growth rates, and recurrent weather shocks made worse by climate change that often drive vulnerable communities into crisis and conflict, making them vulnerable to violent extremism.

In Niger, common shocks include: drought, lack of water for household consumption, animal disease, food and input price increases, and household illness. Climate change is leading to increases in average temperatures and variable and erratic rainfall—a major challenge in a country dependent on rain-fed agriculture. A recent survey indicated that 87 percent of households in Niger experienced at least one shock in the last year.

Within a Resilience Focus Zone encompassing parts of the Tillabéri, Maradi, and Zinder regions, USAID is working with the national and local government offices to implement social protection measures that will help buffer shocks and stressors for all Nigeriens.

Program Strategies
USAID’s resilience programming in Niger is all layered within the Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) II program (2018–2023). RISE II supports communities to overcome multifaceted challenges without compromising future well-being. RISE II is an integral part of USAID’s long-term focus on strengthening the resilience of the Sahel’s most vulnerable people. The program spans Burkina Faso and Niger and has over 30 partners, including World Food Programme (WFP), government stakeholders, and civil society, with an investment of $540 million.

RISE II’s vision is that chronically vulnerable populations in Burkina Faso and Niger, supported by resilient systems, effectively manage shocks and stresses and pursue sustainable pathways out of poverty by:

1. Enhancing social and ecological risk management systems
2. Increasing and sustaining economic well-being
3. Improving health, family planning, and nutrition outcomes
4. Enhancing governance of institutions and organizations
5. Enhancing social, economic, and political agency of women and youth

RISE II integrates a global approach to risk management and shock response, strengthening local capacities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from shocks and constraints. For example, RISE II activities are required to develop contingency plans to prepare for likely shocks.

Crisis modifier provisions allow extra resources to be made available rapidly to respond as conditions change. This innovative model, which is designed to complement USAID’s humanitarian assistance and improve effectiveness and efficiency of all USAID efforts, is also informing USAID’s resilience efforts beyond the Sahel.
Activities and Strategic Partnerships

Resources in agriculture, health, and governance are programmed into a broad suite of activities that cross all the development sectors envisioned under RISE II. RISE II activities receiving funding that are already implementing activities include TerresEauVie; USAID Kulawa (formerly Niger Health Services Delivery); USAID Yalwa (formerly Niger Markets and Nutrition); Sahel Human Voice in Governance Activity; Resilient Governance in Niger; and Sahel Collaboration and Communication (SCC). Three Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)-funded Resilience Food Security Activities (Girma, Wadata, and Hamzari) are also core RISE II activities being implemented in the Zinder and Maradi regions.

Additional activities that will be working partly in the resilience zone and in other parts of the country include buy-ins to CATALYZE to enhance access to finance, the USAID Bridge Youth Connect activity, the International Fertilizer Development Center Mechanism to support the Sustainable Opportunities for Improving Livelihoods with Soils consortium, the Livestock and Legume Innovation Labs, the West Africa Trade Facilitation activity, and health buy-ins to several mechanisms, including MOMENTUM, Advancing Nutrition, West Africa Breakthrough Action, and Country Health Information System Data Use.

The RISE II portfolio uses adaptive management in many ways. USAID’s SCC activity provides structured and regular processes for USAID implementing partners to collaborate, learn, and adapt. USAID staff are directly and substantially involved in these adaptive discussions. All major awards also include crisis modifiers and the requirement for the proactive creation of contingency plans during work planning. These plans guide risk reduction activities, facilitate context monitoring, and allow early actions to reduce harm to RISE II populations and development gains. USAID’s community-centered approach engages local communities so that their capacity is enhanced to adapt and respond to shocks and stresses, a critical aspect of long-term resilience.

Evaluation and Learning

Households in the RISE II zone were exposed to increasing shocks over the last several years and outcomes such as poverty and food security saw declines in both Niger and Burkina Faso. Despite these challenges, results from recent surveys show that households with higher levels of participation in RISE II programming were better able to mitigate the effects of shocks and stresses. USAID participants in crop, poultry, and small ruminant cultivation activities have seen their incomes increase by an average of 45 percent.

Results from 2020 RISE II endline impact evaluation are expected in late 2021.

Contact John Meyer, Senior Strategy and Impact Advisor, Center for Resilience at johnmeyer@usaid.gov to learn more.

Data: Data come from the World Bank’s 2019 Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) Surveys in Malawi and Uganda and 11 rounds of phone interviews conducted by the World Bank in 2020/21. The phone survey samples drew from households interviewed during the 2019 data collection.

This publication was prepared by the Feed the Future Knowledge, Data, Learning, and Training (KDLT) Activity, contract number GS00F439GA, Delivery Order 7200AAI9M00001, implemented by Bixal Solutions Inc, with subcontractors QED, TRG, and MarketShare Associates. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. Government.