

Tillabéri commune mobilizes its citizens to mitigate the risk and impact of floods

TerresEau Vie Niger

In 2020, Niger experienced the worst floods in its history. The Ministry of Humanitarian Action and Disaster Management estimated that more than 632,000 people were affected by the floods in October 2020. Since 2011, floods have become increasingly recurrent throughout the country. They occur during the rainy season (July-September) when the rains are often abundant and occur frequently, and when the Niger River flash floods (November-December) triggered by heavy rainfall. The shock is becoming structural, making these populations even more vulnerable, resulting in chronic food insecurity coupled with a lack of access to water and sanitation and requires long-term prevention solutions

In urbanized areas, beyond shallow zones occupation for construction and climatic causes, the severity of these floods can be related to garbage and sand clogging the water drains and canals. If all gutters would be clean, floods would no longer be so dramatic in those areas. Local solutions should be developed at local level to mitigate or combat the impacts of floods on housing and health, as clogging of gutters with waste is more of an attitude problem than a financial constraint. But the lack of capacity and resources among local authorities cripple them in taking effective preventive action.

The USAID TerresEauVie Activity, under USAID RISE II Initiative, is providing communes and their citizens the capacity and tools to effectively prevent flood shock. TerresEauVie is helping Vulnerability Monitoring Observatories (OSV¹,



200 men and women cleaned up the streets and unblocked the gutters in Tillabéri to mitigate the risk of flooding. The town hall ensured the collection and transport of garbage to appropriate places. Photos: TerresEauVie, June 2021.



French acronym), chaired by the mayor of the commune to have a better command on how to monitor risks and produce and transmit shock alerts (an essential component for the early warning system), risk preparedness. and disaster.

Within the framework of communal multi-risk contingency plans², TerresEauVie encouraged 23 communes to conduct large-scale cleaning days to prevent the risk of flooding. It gave them equipment such as shovels, rakes, brooms, and wheelbarrows (6 in Tillabéri, 2 in Maradi, and 15 in Zinder). In total, the communes mobilized more than 17,000 people, mostly young people and women. Together, they cleaned 26 kilometers of gutters in 13 communes where gutters were

¹ The OSV oversees the "Community Early Warning and Emergency Response Systems" (SCAP-RUs, French acronym) based at the village level, whose mission is to quickly transmit information on shocks and vulnerabilities.

² These plans are defining mitigation, response, and recovery scenarios, with measures to rapidly mobilize resources (internal and external) that should make it possible to quickly assist people in need.

present and the other communes focused on cleaning public spaces (major roads, town halls, schools, health centers, etc.).

Tillabéri is one these communes. More than 3,800 people had been affected by the two successive floods in the commune in 2020. It changed people's view on the floods from a nuisance to a threat. This was far enough for the OSV to seek to protect the houses from water runoff due to clogged street gutters. It was urgent to protect the thousands of inhabitants, but also the temporary shelters of 12,000 internally displaced people who settled in the Tillabéri Arena after fleeing armed conflicts occurring in the region. Using the equipment made available by TerresEauVie, the OSV organized a vast operation to de-silt the fully clogged drains and clean public spaces. In two days, 100 young people and 100 women swept nearly 4 kilometers of road and unblocked almost a kilometer of gutters. The town hall mobilized a tractor and a truck using their own funds to collect and transport the waste out of the agglomeration and incinerate them in pits outside the inhabited areas. This has significantly facilitated the flow of rainwater during the rainy season and unauthorized dumps have been eliminated.

Mister Hamani Doula, the OSV reporter of Tillabéri and head of communal service for agriculture, is satisfied: *"This made the city visibly cleaner, and above all, we managed to prevent water from running off into homes. This year, we avoided flooding due to poor gutter maintenance."* Mister Moussa Douma, the mayor of the commune of Tillabéri adds: *"From our meetings with health sector managers, we know that this has also prevented the outbreak of certain diseases such as malaria because the cleanliness of streets and gutters and reduction of permanent puddles put a stop to mosquitoes' proliferation in these areas."*

This initiative encouraged by TerresEauVie created a new dynamic in the commune: youth associations requested these materials from the town hall to organize cleanliness days. Ibrahim Ali, President of the youth association of Kabia district, testifies that, *"We have seen the success of the cleaning operations and we plan to organize this every month in our neighborhood to clean the public squares and backfill the places where wastewater stagnates and causes the multiplication of mosquitoes. We hope this will inspire young people in other neighborhoods to also get involved in flood prevention."* Moreover, building on TerresEauVie, the Niger Community Cohesion Programme (lead by Niger Government) has also equipped young people with carts so that they can collect waste from the streets.

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*Hamani Doula, reporter of Tillabéri OSV,
Head of communal service for agriculture*

This is a major milestone: streets are clean, flooded homes are averted, and the incidence rates of the deadly disease is reduced. This has galvanized Tillabéri OSV that still seeks to better prevent the risk of flooding. It is now reaching out to the commune's partners to rehabilitate and build dikes to protect thousands of people and fields from the floods of the Niger River. *"If nothing is done to retain the waters of the river, this situation will come up again and again,"* Tillabéri mayor warns. This is why he actively participates in the regional flood management committee to ensure that this measure is part of the priority actions implemented in terms of prevention. While the urgent needs of flood victims must be addressed, tackling the source of the problem is the only way to sustainably prevent these disasters and save lives.

USAID's Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) project has been implemented in Niger and Burkina Faso since 2012. The second phase, RISE II, continues the same efforts with the overall goal 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. Within RISE II and led by Winrock's Sustainable Water Partnership, the USAID "TerresEauVie" Activity enhances communes' self-reliance by making social and ecological systems resilient through three components: (1) Improved water security; (2) Enhanced sustainable productive land use; and (3) Improved management of shocks, risks and stresses.

This publication is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Winrock International and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.