

Keynote address by H.E. Mahamadou Issoufou, President of the Republic of the Niger in His Excellency's capacity as President of the G5 Sahel

I would like to thank the President of World Food Programme Executive Board, Mr Kálmán, and the distinguished members of the Board for having invited me to address this session of the Board.

I would also like to thank the Executive Director, Mr David Beasley, who I very recently had the honour of welcoming to my country, Niger. His exemplary background as Governor of South Carolina has made him the right man to be heading this organization today.

Ladies and gentlemen, in 2011, at the beginning of my first term of office, I launched the 3N initiative, "*les Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens*" (Nigerians Nourish Nigerians agriculture initiative) so that drought will no longer be synonymous with famine. The 3N initiative, which is one of the major priorities of Niger's Renaissance Programme covers five areas.

The first area of work of the 3N is a diversification of agricultural and pastoral production with increased production of areas under irrigation and also a diversification of rainfed agricultural production too and also the short cycle and long cycle livestock production and sustainable management of soils and ecosystems. It is a matter of having effective water management systems, having fertilizers, improved seeds and other inputs and protecting in this way the productive capital through these different forms of defence and also reclamation of degraded land.

The second area is linked to a regular provision and supply to rural and urban markets of agricultural products and this area calls for the promotion and the transformation of agrosilvo pastoral products, fisheries products, wood and novel products; improving the infrastructure and the circuits for marketing including the possibility of export of this production.

The third area, finally, is the improvement and enhancement of the resilience of the more vulnerable groups in with regard to climate change and other crises and catastrophes. We need to prevent and manage climate change and crises. It aims to forecast that we have the capacity at the level of households and grassroots communities to face the situations of deficits in agricultural production by improving the efficiency of our early-warning mechanisms and coordination of emergency interventions and developing also some plans to deal with the risks faced by producers and the households.

Improving the nutritional status of the people of Niger is the fourth area –which calls for the promotion of a well-balanced diet, good life hygiene, reduction of the various forms of malnutrition and effectively taking into account acute malnutrition by strengthening our health control systems on food and strengthening our national surveillance programme on the nutritional status of populations.

Coordination and support for these reforms is the fifth area.

Thanks to the 3N initiative there has been no famine in Niger since 2011. The agricultural GDP has grown by 9 percent per year over the 2011–2015 period and Niger, therefore, has been able to accelerate its approach towards achieving first the Millennium Development Goals 1 and 7 and achieving the objective of cutting in half the number of food-insecure people in Niger before the deadline that was set in 2012. These results were recognized by FAO and the 3N initiative was given a certification by witness to its success in Rome 2013 and 2015 and the third prize of best future-oriented policies awarded by the World Future Council in collaboration with the United Nations organization to combat desertification in 2017 in its work to recover and restore degraded land and combat poverty. Poverty is essentially rural in Niger. Three of every four poor people live in the rural area. We have reduced that number of people below the poverty threshold from 63 percent in 2011 to 44 percent in 2016. Our objective for 2021 is to achieve 31 percent and to end hunger in Niger.

Investment plans are currently being worked out with a very special focus on water management, on providing inputs to producers at the rural level and working to improve soil, sectors where we have not yet been able to meet, unfortunately, all of the funding needs. An important tool to fight poverty was this 3N initiative and also an important tool therefore in facing illegal migration and an instrument in fighting terrorism. There is a linkage between these scourges and poverty that is very well known. As a true green revolution, the 3N initiative is also an instrument in addressing climate change.

As you will have seen these different workstreams of the 3N initiative are certainly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. The 3N initiative at the same time provides emergency solutions and also addresses structural solutions dealing with the humanitarian and development side. Emergency solutions, as we know



from experience, are more costly than structural interventions. Curing is fine but preventing is better. That is the vision that we are working on along with all of our partners and in particular WFP. With WFP we are trying at the same time to save and to change lives, that is to implement a humanitarian agenda and development. Saving lives is what we do, and have been doing, with WFP since 1968. At the very beginning WFP started working in school feeding and food assistance in cases of emergencies and malnutrition that after the great drought experience that we had in Niger the need was felt to expand WFP's activities to take into account the concerns and in particular the need to redress the environment, to combat desertification, to support agricultural and livestock production, along with fisheries, social protection as well as governance.

There has been an evolution and an adaptation of WFP's approach to the institutional framework of WFP. WFP is committed to carrying out a whole range of activities along with the programme strategic approaches to take into account the needs to step up production and to provide for good childhood nutrition as well as adolescence and a predictable approach to deal with the most vulnerable in particular in carrying out important studies on, for instance the cost of hunger and on climate-smart agriculture. All of this is important and has led to the implementation of a multi-stakeholder approach in the field launching also initiatives based on a convergence. WFP has contributed to our countries joining the international processes and to end hunger.

As we know, WFP is present in those areas where violence linked also to Boko Haram have led to the displacement of thousands of people and this has destabilized the region of Diffa and precipitated the local populations into situations of great vulnerability. The border with Mali has also been increasingly destabilized. WFP is providing food assistance in these areas to help the victims of the conflict, the refugees, the internally displaced persons, the returnees as well as the local host populations. To change lives WFP is working with the Government throughout Niger to ensure that our people become more resilient to the many different shocks including climate-related shocks which threaten farmers' capacity and their livelihoods. That is why WFP is implementing a protracted PRRO and an integrated package with a number of complementary activities. There are different activities aiming, for instance, at improving nutrition and the education of children and teenagers and these actions have led to conditions enabling a demographic transition in a country in which the population is growing exponentially.

These actions are an important part of the work that is being carried out working on the humanitarian development nexus and which is based on three different pillars. The first pillar is the implementation of an integrated package that aims at building resilience at the field level. The second pillar is capacity development. Finally, the third is the development of strategic partnerships. Very recently, in early 2017, collaboration of Niger with WFP has been expanded through the strategic review for zero hunger consistently with our national policies and strategies adopted by Niger and in alignment with Sustainable Development Goals.

Looking at the current food situation in Niger, the Government has developed a response plan for food insecurity for 2018 that aims at improving access to food for the most vulnerable and also ensuring that there is fodder for livestock, building resilience to protect the livelihoods of the most vulnerable households and contribute to the reduction of morbidity and mortality linked to malnutrition when improving monitoring and evaluation and coordination of the various interventions. Our objective is to assist 1,624,000 people who are severely food-insecure during the lean season. The total cost of these interventions has been evaluated at roughly €300 million and this means that it is important to mobilize resources to assist the vulnerable people.

Today, the people of Niger have become aware of the need to determine their own fate. They are actively committed to production activities and transformation of the rural world and the rural economy. This is being done through the work and the political and strategic choices of Niger.

On behalf of the people of Niger I would like to thank WFP for its commitment standing by our side, a commitment that the Executive Director once again reaffirmed during his recent visit to Niger. I would also like to once again state our appreciation for the exemplary partnership of the Sahel countries with your institution.

Nowhere else have WFP missions proven to be more relevant than in the Sahel taking into account the structural challenges in this region and also the many very diverse causes of this that are due to many different reasons, geographical, demographic, climate-related, socio-economic, security. The members of the G5 Sahel are convinced that we are at a turning point in history. Political will can lead to positive change in the Sahel taking into account the leadership of the G5 Sahel member countries as well as our friends and partners. We must seize this time and this momentum and move rapidly forward in the implementation of initiatives to ensure peace and security and accelerate the multi-sectoral development of the Sahelo-Saharan region.



From the security point of view, we are already on a good path with the joint force that has been established. From a development point of view, besides the individual initiatives of member countries, the G5 Sahel has established a priority investment programme emanating from its development and security strategy to ensure that our people feel this gradual positive development of the Sahel area in a very tangible way. It is a four-area based plan. One of these areas of focus will be resilience and human development and there will be a round table of partners on 6 December in Nouakchott in Mauritania.

Other important initiatives and development and resilience building are also under way. There is the climate commission for the Sahel area as part of the COP22 presided by Niger with 17 countries of West Africa as well as the centre and east. This commission has been validated and its operations should lead, by end-2018, to the adoption of a climate investment plan for 2018–2030 with a priority investment plan for 2018–2030. In Niamey, in November 2018, there will be a summit of the heads of state and government of this commission followed by a round table for funding of the investment plan.

We also have an international conference on desertification and a green economy that my country is organizing with the support of a number of partners including the international organization for Francophonie, the French-speaking countries. This conference has the aim of mobilizing additional support for the implementation of good practices in this area and we would be very happy to count WFP among our key partners in ensuring the success of these important initiatives for development and resilience-building for our population. With the support of WFP and other partners we firmly believe that we will rise to the challenges of the people of Sahel and soon they will be a distant memory.

