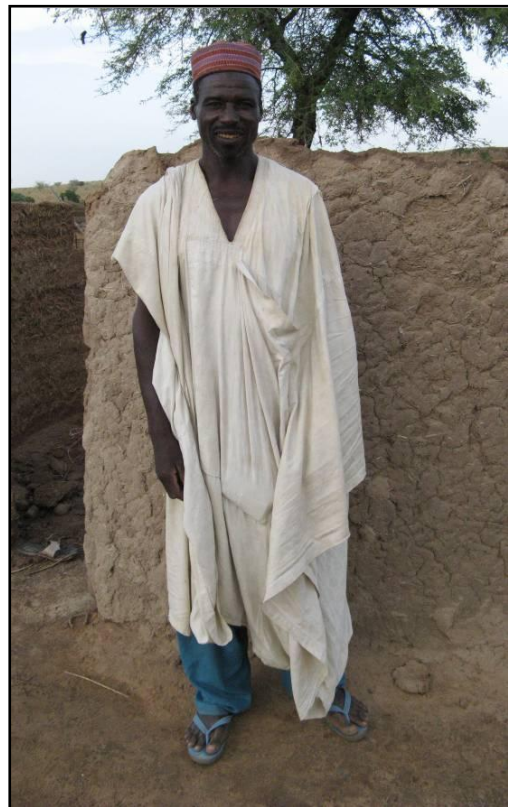


## Story from the CEB project in Niger

Last October, a CBA team visited the community of Rombou as part of the preparation of a project led by local NGO CEB. During the visit, the project consultant listened to villagers talk about their challenges and interviewed a man named Moussa Chadou Kané. A year later, a report from the field shows how the project has started to have positive impacts for both the Rombou community and Moussa himself.

*October 2008*

The people of Rombou are farmers and their stories illustrate the hardships they are facing. Harvests are down—the average field yields only about one third of what it did 30 years ago—and most families can't grow enough food to feed themselves. As we listen to the comments, a few stand out. A young man named Bureima stands up and addresses the crowd. “The rain is insufficient,” he says. “We plant seeds and they start to grow, but there isn't enough rain to produce plants.” The village chief explains that there have been years when nothing was harvested due to locust infestations. Even now, there are locusts in the village, although they have not done any significant damage to this year's crops. One man



Moussa Chadou Kané

complains of violent storms and high winds, while another talks about the need to plant trees for wind breaks. As if to prove their point, a storm with strong winds and driving rain blows into the village a few minutes later, sending everyone scurrying for cover and forcing us to stop the meeting temporarily.

After the meeting, I interview one of the participants for an individual perspective. Katiella Mai Moussa, the CBA National Coordinator for Niger, interprets between Hausa and French as I talk to Moussa Kané, a slender man in his late 40s. He's a breadwinner with six children and no formal education. When I ask him how much money he makes in a year, he tells

me that he really doesn't know. Instead, he talks about how much millet he produces. He never grows enough food to feed his family for the entire year, he says. "The fields don't give anymore," he complains, and, echoing the fatalism I heard so often, he tells me that he "depends on God to make ends meet." But he's not solely dependent on God, since he admits that he also cuts firewood to sell. This is a common practice in the area—and an understandable behavior considering Moussa's poverty. Unfortunately, it's also an action that exacerbates the area's already severe environmental problems by cutting trees which slow the wind, control erosion, and fertilize the soil.

I ask Moussa if he has a plow, as I know from my experience in Mali that the poorest of the poor often work their fields by hand without the benefit of draft animals and plows. When he's understood the translation, he chuckles a bit and makes a gesture towards his hands. They are large, strong, and calloused from work. The answer is evident—he does the work by hand, spending hours every day working the land with a traditional hoe. He tells me he hopes to get animals and a plow.

The one-year project planned for Roubmou and two neighboring communities will address some immediate needs and provide a learning opportunity for all involved. The project will purchase basic agricultural tools, which most families can't afford, such as plows and draft animals for about 10 poor households. The plows, together with the use of drought-resistant seeds and fertilizer, should allow farmers like Moussa to adapt to the area's changing climate and put more food in the family granary.

*October 2009*

Project implementation began in April and Moussa is one of the project's many beneficiaries. At the beginning of the planting season in June, he received 12 kilograms of seeds of an improved variety of millet, called HKP, which has a short growing cycle. He also received 4.5 kilos of K VX, an improved variety of the local niebé bean (similar to black eyed peas). Faster growing varieties are an essential adaptation response as rainfall becomes more irregular and overall aridity increases in the area. Importantly, these improved seed varieties were developed in Niger at the National Institute for Agronomic Research, so the project is helping to move improved varieties from research centers to farmer's fields.

Moussa also received training on how to correctly plant and care for these improved seed varieties and planted all the seeds as instructed. The results were immediate. While rainfall in the area this year was not good, he was still able to get a modest harvest. If Moussa had planted traditional seed varieties that require more water, he would have harvested almost nothing this year. Moussa tells the project that he and other farmers are convinced of the value of the new seeds. In fact, farmers who haven't participated in the trials of improved seeds have noticed the improved production and are considering switching. Moussa says that he's happy to have a better harvest than he would have otherwise and he's now excited to train other farmers on the techniques he learned.

More improvements are on the way. Later this year, the poorest families in Roumbou and the two other participating villages, will receive agricultural tools, including plows and shared draft animals. This means that 45 villagers, including Moussa, should be able to further improve their yields next year, especially since the project will also provide fertilizer.

Due to the timing of project startup, some elements have been delayed, but the community has helped work around these challenges. The construction of a storehouse for agricultural supplies has been postponed, as the project began during planting season. The building will start after the harvest is over in November. In the meantime, a community member lent a room in his house as a temporary place to store the improved seeds and pesticides. Even without having the storehouse in place, the village has organized a management committee and farmers have already been able to access the new seeds. Additionally, more than 30 people have been trained as local experts in pest-management techniques and improved Natural Resource Management, increasing overall capacity to sustain food production.

With the project about halfway through implementation, the results are beginning to show. The communities have found the project to be very pertinent and responsive to their needs. CEB, the NGO implementing partner has been happy with the results so far, and is now motivated to work more on adaptation. Hopefully, the project will have even more results to show next year.