

## Field notes – Niger training for standard recipes

Niamey, June 9-21, 2019

**Monday June 10, 2019**

Present: Balarabé, Kazim, Jikatt, Aichatou, Gervais (only briefly at lunchtime), Moktar

I met with the team for the first time and we did introductions. We then dived right into the discussion of the sampling note written by Marcello and the corresponding section in the protocol on sampling.

### *On sampling*

I learned that the team decided to choose the marginal strategy with 620 households to visit per cluster. This was a change compared to before when they had settled on the country strategy. The shift was mainly attributed to lack of resources.

We went with the team over sampling strategy in the protocol. This section of the protocol had been updated to take into account the work done by Marcello in his sampling note for Niger. While the main information was there, there were some problems with some numbers and we went over them to correct them and make sure that the section was consistent throughout.

While the protocol discussed the number of households to visit per cluster, it did not have any information at all about the skip pattern and how to implement it. In the sampling note by Marcello, there was an example of a skip pattern presented in table 3 for each group of 20 households per cluster. The way to implement this skip pattern led to an extended discussion with the team. The Niger team believed that it's just easier to implement a systematic skip such as for instance in the case of children 6-23 months to ask about them only in households given odd numbers. The statisticians present in the meeting assured that this would not compromise randomness in any way provided that household numbers in each cluster were randomly attributed. The team proposed to ask about children 24-59 months in all 20 households per cluster and skip every other household for women of reproductive age (WRA). Because the number of households to be visited is 17 for 24-59 months and 11 for WRA, this means that the team would have oversampled children and slightly undersampled women. This became a lot clearer at the end of the day after further discussion with Megan. In the meantime, no final decision was reached with the team about the implementation of the skip pattern and the team agreed to revisit this decision again during the week after further thought on the topic.

**Action point:** Kazim will take the lead on writing that new section on the skip pattern in the protocol for us to review by the end of the week.

### *On the implementation of the 24-hour recall*

As part of the discussion of the sampling strategy, the question of number of households to visit and recalls to conduct per cluster came up. It quickly became apparent that the team had not planned any time for preparing the respondents for recall by asking them to use separate bowls and plates to help them more easily visualize how much they eat. What was planned in the budget is that one team, each

composed of 3 enumerators and one supervisor, would spend 3 days per cluster of 20 households. We discussed the idea of using those 3 days in the following manner:

- Day 1: explain the purpose of the study, get informed consent, administer the FRAT questionnaire, possibly collect anthropometry data, prepare the respondents for the recall
- Day 2: possibly prepare the respondents for the recall in another cluster
- Day 3: return to the cluster to perform the 24-hour recalls.

This would leave people only one day to get used to using plates, cups and bowls if it is not their usual habit. This is not ideal but, given that enumerators cannot stay any longer (because this will considerably increase the budget), it seems we have no choice. The team did nevertheless estimate the cost of staying a 4<sup>th</sup> day at 11-12 million Fcfa (about \$19,000).

#### *On using CAPI for the collecting of 24-hour data*

When I asked the team about their plans for 24-hour data collection and tablet use, they told me that they intended to use the same tablets which they will use for the FRAT questionnaire and other components of the survey. The statisticians had already programmed something on ODK to allow enumerators to enter recipe data using tablets (in preparation for the upcoming standard recipe data collection) and in their minds, they were going to expand and build on this to use for the 24-hour recall data capture.

I explained to the team why this expectation was unrealistic using concrete examples. I asked them how some basic things could be programmed in ODK such as customized probe questions depending on the food entered in the quick list of the first pass, or how to return to ask for more details about each food already entered in the first pass. The team quickly realized that programming ODK for the 24-hour recall will not be feasible. So we quickly moved to a discussion about what it means to use paper for the 24-hour recall in terms of additional costs. Printing costs did not seem to be a major concern but data entry was. They had not budgeted for data entry operators and were starting to think about how they could compensate for this extra cost. Given the newly revised workplan of the 3 days spent in each cluster, we floated the idea of using the 2<sup>nd</sup> day (while waiting to the recall on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day) for enumerators and supervisors to enter 24-hour recall forms using CS Dietary. The INS has hundreds of small portable Asus tablets with a keyboard and fully functioning version of Windows on which CS Dietary could be theoretically installed (please see picture below). I am taking one of those machines with me to the hotel tonight to test if CS Dietary could work on it. This could be one way to keep the costs down and do data entry without the need for specialized operators. However, we still need to work out some logistical and planning details before fully implementing this idea.



### *On the timing of next steps*

Towards the end of the day, I was able to sit down with Balarabé alone and go over the timing of the next steps and activities related to the main survey. Initially, the plan was to train enumerators for the 24 hour-recall in August and then pretest the survey tools beginning of September before moving ahead with data collection. We revised this timeline to train the enumerators in September instead of August. Given where the team is right now with its preparations, and given their multiple commitments especially towards the activities of the PNIN (NPIN in English) which they are part of, it is going to be a very significant challenge to be ready in September. However, here again, it seems like we have no choice. The INS team is bumping against a hard, unchangeable deadline to start the study by November. This November date is crucial for several reasons:

- Funding: the team has hard commitments towards the donor who is watching what is happening very closely.
- Logistics: the INS is contributing to the budget of this survey by lending vehicles and drivers to the team for no charge. However, these are only available in November and December. After this, they will be used for other big surveys that the INS is conducting as part of their annual activities.

- Methods: the team has decided that they wanted to conduct the study in the post-harvest season which corresponds to this November-December season for several strategic reasons. They do not want to miss that window.

Because of this, I came to understand that this November date is close to impossible to change. I get the impression that the team will conduct the main survey in November regardless of their readiness state at that point.

### **Tuesday June 11, 2019**

Today we started work very late almost around 11 o'clock because all the major arteries in Niamey were closed. The president's motorcade was expected sometime in the morning and the city was practically shut down.

When I arrived that INS, we continued the discussion on the scope of work to be done to get the team ready for the big survey in September.

We started by reviewing the FRIL. My first quick take on it until I get the chance to look in depth into it is that it seems to be very comprehensive and one can see that a lot of effort has gone into it already. The food list has about 1,100 lines with all possible combinations of cooking methods and sometimes description of processing status like mashed or pureed. The recipe list has about 300 lines with each line representing a single recipe or variant of recipe.

### *On conducting FGDs to complete the FRIL*

The team intends to conduct about 50 FGDs (10 FGD per region) with not only participants of the same age groups to be included in the survey but also with key informants such as community leaders and personnel from health centers. While they were persuaded by my arguments that they need not do as many FGDs, they said that it was too late now to change those plans and that certain things were already set in motion with the administration that they can no longer change. Also, they coupled the FGD with recipe standardization which is why they have so many of them. The idea is that each team, after having done the FGD, would independently identify the most commonly consumed recipes and go out to observe the preparation of those recipes in the households. I pointed out the very obvious flaws with this plan and shared my concerns about having too many repetitions for the common recipes and missing many of the least commonly consumed (and likely more nutritious) ones. We decided to fix this by putting in place a coordination system at the central level which would tell the teams in the regions which recipes they need to collect information on depending on what is already covered and what is not. The main reasons they initially wanted to let the teams operate independently in a decentralized manner in the region is because there is no mobile internet coverage in those areas and therefore the information entered on tablets cannot be uploaded at the central level. I suggested replacing that with SMS messages where each team could send the list of recipes to a database manager at the INS in Niamey. That person would be responsible for keeping track of which recipes are collected by which means with how many repetitions for each.

### *On the leadership of the survey*

I proposed to use a RACI matrix in order to help everyone get a clearer picture of what is expected of them and to better understand who is in charge of giving the final ok on each activity. I introduced the concept of RACI to Balarabé and he seemed to like it a lot. We ended the day with the promise of working on the RACI matrix the next day.

### **Wednesday June 12, 2019**

As agreed when we parted yesterday, we started the day today with working on the RACI matrix to assign responsibilities and roles among different team members for the activities covering roughly the next 3 months. It turned out to be a very useful exercise not only for the team who had not really had the time to stop and formally think about this but also to me. It helped me better understand the dynamic in within the team between the respective roles of Balarabé, Habi, and Gervais. We spent the better part of the morning filling in the matrix.

### *On the collection of standard recipes*

Following yesterday's conversation about FGDs and standard recipes, we took some time today to get more in the logistical and planning details of how exactly this will happen. The current plan is to send two teams per region for a total of 10 teams and 20 workers (2 workers per team). Each team will spend 3 days in their respective areas to conduct the FGDs on the 1<sup>st</sup> day with one worker serving as the moderator and the other serving as the note taker. Then the team would split with each worker observing the preparation of a total of 5 recipes over 2 days in the households. Under that current plan, the teams would be able to do a total of 100 recipe observations, which might be far from sufficient given the number of recipes that we could possibly choose to standardize. The other challenge here is that they would not ask mothers or caregivers to prepare recipes. The plan is that they would identify those who spontaneously offer to prepare recipes or those who already had plans to prepare them anyway and then tag along. That might work for the most common and frequent recipes but it could be very problematic for the less commonly consumed recipes or the more expensive ones which would be a lot harder to cover just within 2 days.

Armed with that fact, I recommended to the team that they organize the preparation and collection of standard recipes centrally. That they would invite people to come and prepare them in a central location with the workers purchasing and providing all the ingredients necessary. Not only would this ensure that all recipes are covered but also it would allow the 2 workers to do many more recipes compared to going to the households to observe them.

However, the team pushed back very hard against this suggestion. While they acknowledged the limitations of their plan, they felt very strongly that if people were asked to prepare recipes and asked for the list of ingredients to prepare them that this would be perceived as some type of cooking competition. They are convinced that people would cook fancier and richer versions of the recipe not only to shine in the competition but also to please the "guests" meaning us, the team. I was not entirely successful in reassuring them that this could be avoided with proper explanations to people of the purpose of the activity and that we have done this in many other countries with no impact on the "richness" of recipes. They proposed to test out both approaches and see if recipes are impacted, but by the time conclusions could be drawn, it would be too late to do anything about. As we work together on the recipe list, we shall

see if we can cover everything we need with just 100 observations. Maybe if the number of observations needed turns out to be a lot higher, then the team could be persuaded in this case to change their strategy.

#### **Thursday June 13, 2019**

This morning, we continued the discussion about the plan for the collection of standard recipes. The Niger team's plan is the following:

- In each of the five regions, we will have 2 teams;
- Each team will be composed of 2 surveyors and 1 supervisor;
- Each team will go to 1 village or urban area and stay there for 3 days:
  - o On day 1 in the morning, the team of 3 will organize an FGD around foods and recipes;
  - o The team will then draw a list of the 5 most commonly consumed recipes in the area as identified by FGD participants;
  - o On the evening of day 1, each surveyor will observe the preparation of the 1st recipe (from the list of 5) at a household, for a total of 2 repetitions of recipe #1 on day 1;
  - o On days 2 and 3, they will each do 2 recipes observations per day, one for lunch and one for dinner, again each doing the same recipe on the list so as to have 2 repetitions for each recipe.

I argued that there was no need for the 2 surveyors to work of the same list of 5 recipes with 2 repetitions for each recipe. So the plan changed to the following:

- After the FGD, the team will make a list of the 10 most commonly consumed recipes;
- Surveyor 1 will take the recipe numbers on the list and surveyor 2 will take the recipes with even numbers. I proposed to do it this way so as to spread out the difficulty of finding recipes at households over the 2 surveyors given that it is likely that recipes 1-5 on the list will be easier to find than recipes 6-10 which are by definition less frequent and popular;
- If during an observation even for a given recipe, the person at the household is preparing something else at the same time to accompany the main dish such as a salad for instance or any other type of recipe, then the surveyor will try to collect that recipe too.

I also successfully argued that surveyors should seize the opportunity of observing those recipes to also collect the conversion factors for their methods of estimation. After having looked at the list of recipes, we decided to choose two methods for the recipes: proxy weight of dry rice and proxy weight of play-doh. This was something entirely new to the Niger team. At that point of the discussion, we had had not a chance to talk at all about methods for estimations of portion sizes of foods and recipes. They were still at that point thinking about "calibrating" a huge variety of utensils, cups, plates, bowls, etc. with the expectation that these were going to be their main methods for estimation. For some recipes, they had planned to do this calibration exercise with several utensils. For instance, for gruels and porridges, they had planned to use ladles, spoons and all sorts of cups and plates. They understandably dreaded this exercise and did not know where it started and ended exactly. Therefore, the news about using only two methods for almost all recipes came as very welcome news and a huge relief for them. They said that they were now starting to get a clearer picture about something that they were very worried about. It reminded me that it was very important at some point to go over them with the proposed methods for all foods and recipes.

We spent the rest of the day going over the logistical preparations for the new plan and the details of how to contact people and find them to help with the standard recipe observation.

But there was one shortcoming of their plan that they were willing to address which was to coordinate and keep track of collected recipes centrally. Teams in regions cannot be left to decide independently of which recipes to collect just based on the information coming out of FGDs. If left uncoordinated, that would give us unneeded repetitions for the most common recipes and not enough repetitions or no recipe observations at all for the least and likely more nutritious recipes.

The information coming out the FGDs will be entered on tablets using a special ODK interface developed for that purpose. The information is then sent at a central server as soon as those tablets have a stable 3G connection. I asked the team if they expected to find 3G coverage everywhere including in remote rural areas and they said no. Therefore, I told them that teams needed to send their list of 10 recipes they intend to work on by SMS for confirmation at the central level before getting the green light to proceed ahead. As the work progresses, I told the team that there will have to be instructions to ignore certain recipes (for which we have reached the number of needed repetitions) and focus on missing ones. This was agreed upon and is going to be included in the training next week. But we still have not identified who will be the coordinator responsible for collecting and looking at data centrally to make decisions and direct teams in regions according to what is missing.

#### **Friday June 14, 2019**

This morning, almost all of the Niger team members were working on correcting the written tests that were given to the potential surveyors. They had received over 150 applications for the 30 positions they posted. They graded the papers, ranked people according to their grades, and selected the top 37. As it happens, we had relatively few women apply compared to the number of men but they generally fared better on the written test. Our final group is composed of 10 women and 27 men.

In the afternoon, we went over the recipes in the existing FRIL with the team. I spent the last couple of evenings taking out “recipes” which were not actually true recipes. For instance, Jikatt and Aichatou had added things like cooked rice, pasta and couscous, biscuits and doughnuts as recipes. I took such things out of their file and categorized the remaining recipes under the following main categories:

- Céréales au gras
- Aliments pilés
- Boules
- Grillades
- Bouillies
- Boulettes
- Compottes
- Couscous riches
- Galettes
- Jus de fruits
- Omelettes
- Tô (aussi communément appelés Pâtes)
- Purées
- Râgouts

- Salades
- Sauces
- Soupes

We went within each category to have a look of examples of such recipes and discussed them and the categories in general. It was a very productive and useful conversation. For instance, it helped clear up obvious confusions between team members about what they understood ragouts, sauces and soups to be. It also helped us make decisions about categories of recipes to be standardized at the household level. With the help of the team, we identified the following recipe categories for which data collection at the regional level was not worth it. These were recipes that were either very infrequently consumed or very reasonably assumed to be prepared in the same way across the country:

- Compottes
- Purées
- Omelettes
- Jus
- Galettes

These standards for these recipes will be gathered and standardized by Jikatt and Aichatou near Niamey following the same procedure and data forms used by the surveyors for the remaining recipes across the 5 regions.

#### **Saturday June 15, 2019**

Because of all the changes we had made over the week and also because some questionnaires and tools did not work well, we spent the day updating the questionnaires. Fortunately, we also had with us the ODK programmer who was making changes to the ODK interface in real time for perfect correspondence between paper and electronic forms. We also wanted to ensure that the logic behind some loops in ODK held well and made sense relative to the kind of information we were gathering in the context of the FGD and the recipe observations.

It is important to note here that it is not possible for surveyors to use the tablets for direct data collection. We intend to train the surveyors to use paper to collect the data or write down notes from the FGD and then, when the work is done, to later enter the data on the tablets. The tablets are serving here as a data entry tool rather than a data collection tool.

Towards the end of the day, we installed ODK on our phone and proposed that each test the interface during the evening.

#### **Sunday June 16, 2019**

We decided to meet this morning because we needed to make some changes to the ODK interface after testing it yesterday. We updated it and this solved some of the most important issues.

We seized this opportunity to update the training agenda and fine tune our respective roles.

#### **June 17-18, 2019**

The training has started and everything has gone well in the past couple of days. Balarabé did a general introduction to the nutrition survey and its objectives and then I took the lead to explain what standard

recipes were and how we were going to collect them. We went over the recipe categories and the recipe list with the surveyors to familiarize them with their names in French and other local languages.

The second day, Ali trained the surveyors on how to conduct focus groups and I trained them on how to extract the information on recipes, identify which ones they need to do, how to find people to help them with the recipe preparation and how to coordinate their work at the central level.

In between training sessions, I directed Jikatt and Aichatou to create variants for some recipes in their FRIL. Many of the recipes potentially had meat, poultry or fish, milk and other important nutrient-dense foods added to them and we discussed how to create different versions of the same recipe based on that. We made the key decision for sauces and soups to NOT create versions with or without meat and other animal source foods. The main reason is because we do not expect individuals to consume animal source foods in proportions equal to their proportions observed in the recipe preparation. For almost all these types of recipes, people take out pieces of meat and fish and serve more or less of them to different household members. So during the recall, these pieces will necessarily have to be estimated separately thereby making recipe variants with meat or fish with assumed homogeneous consumption irrelevant in these cases.

At the end of day 2 (Tuesday), we had a team meeting with Gervais, Dr Aboubacar, Balarabé, Yatta, Guillaume, Jikatt, Aichatou and other key figures. Dr Aboubacar reminded the team that it was important that all team members be present at the training and the discussions with me. He was worried about a trend of seeing many key figures come in and out of the training and meetings with no one except Balarabé having the full picture of everything that has changed. He was also very happy with the work that had been done so far. Gervais expressed his worries about seeing so many men among the surveyors, but the other members reassured him that this should not be a major problem. Guillaume was identified as the person who would help with the coordination of recipe collection at the central level even though the team still needed to fill him in on the details. We discussed how to evaluate the surveyors on the field, who would do the supervision, and finalized details for the field work on Thursday.

### **June 19-21, 2019**

The training ended on Wednesday, but I did not get enough time to go through everything like I wanted. We spent a lot of time during in-class role playing which did not work very well with this group. Also, I did not get enough time to demonstrate recipe observation in detail. I did get the opportunity to go over the main points and it should be good enough for that group to be able to do what they need to do during the field day on Thursday.

Initially, I was supposed to go out with the team on Thursday to observe their work on the field. However, the night before, Islamists attacked a check point and killed two policemen on the same road that we were supposed to take to go the field. The team decided that it was safer for me to stay at the hotel which I did. I spent the day working on the FRIL, testing the ODK interface and updating paper questionnaires accordingly.

The next day, Friday, I heard back from the team and from the surveyors about the field day went. There were some organizational problems. For instance, because the equipment was not ready before the team boarded on the bus, the team left with a 2hour delay (they left at 10 am instead of 8 am) and this had

repercussions throughout the field day. There were a few focus groups that they could not do because of that delay. In the end, trainees were able to observe the preparation of one recipe each as planned but the focus group training was a disaster. They could do only 2 focus groups and the 30 people being trained had to be divided up into 2 groups of 15. There were more observers than participants in each focus group.

The surveyors came back with some very interesting cases of recipe observations which served as very good practical examples in class and, based on what I saw in the forms, the forms were mostly properly completed which was the main point of the whole exercise. They also had comments about the FGDs and how to conduct them more efficiently and the whole thing became more concrete for them.

Another very good thing that came out of that field day was the fact that the team saw that it did not make a lot of sense to ask all sorts of questions about agricultural production, the distance to mills, where people buy staples and how they use them and other similar type of questions in the context of the FGD. We had discussed this briefly earlier in the week and I told them that it did not make a lot of sense to ask those questions in the context of FGDs about recipes. The team pushed back against this and insisted that these questions be included which made for a weird mix between qualitative and quantitative methods.

After the debriefing the surveyors, I sat down with the team to go over the next steps and review important points with them before I leave. We decided to cut out all the questions from the FGDs that were not related to recipes. Most of these questions had already been included in the questionnaire of the main survey. The few remaining ones in the FGD were transferred to the survey questionnaire. After this, we went over 4 important items:

1. The work that Aishatou and Jikatt needed to do on the FRIL. They needed to create more variants of some standard recipes and further clean the food and recipe list. I had been working with team during the two weeks and guiding them. The work needed to be completed during the week of June 24-28.
2. The work that the central coordinator keeping track of the standard recipes collected and how to efficiently do this.
3. How and who will do the calculations for the standard recipes so that the recipes are ready by the time the main survey starts.
4. The collection and organization of conversion factors for foods and recipes.

In order for me to best help the team, they asked that we set up two whatsapp groups; one for the FRIL work and another for everything else. We agreed to follow up mainly through whatsapp and phone calls as emails were not the most efficient or quick way of collaborating with the team.

And with that, we come to the end of these notes from the June trip to Niger.