

# TACKLING GENDER INEQUALITIES IN NIGER'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM



## **TACKLING GENDER INEQUALITIES IN NIGER'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

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### **PHOTOS & ILLUSTRATIONS**

Front

From the UNESCO film "Gender Equality in Education, Pilot Project in the Torodi District, May 2015-April 2016" produced by Moussa Hamadou Djingarey.

Back

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## INTRODUCTION

This document addressed to decision makers and relevant stakeholders aims to inform and promote girls' schooling and learning in Niger. It is divided in two complementary parts that can also be read independently.

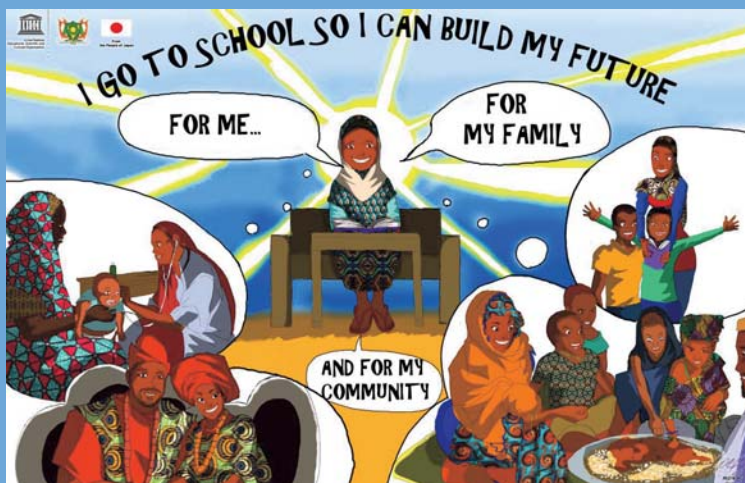
The first part is a short advocacy document with background information on the issues and benefits of girls' education in Niger as well as recommendations to continue with the progress accomplished. The second part is a selection of good practices from successful girls' education interventions in Niger that illustrate and support the arguments and recommendations issued in the first part.

This material was prepared in the framework of a pilot project "Tackling gender inequalities in Niger's educational system". The project was initiated in May 2015 by the UNESCO Regional Office in Dakar, Senegal, financed by the Government of Japan and implemented for one year by the Nigerien Government, targeting 14 schools of the Torodi district (Tillaberi region) at the primary and lower secondary levels. The choice of Torodi was strategic because this district has been left out of many development projects. The overall objective of the project was to improve girls and women's participation in education in order to promote an inclusive educational system, which would support sustainable socio-economic development for Niger.

The activities of the project were developed based on an analysis of girls' education and learning conditions in selected schools in the Torodi district as well as interventions implemented by education partners to promote girls' access to, and retention and performance in school. This small-scale pilot project was designed as a means to identify issues and contribute to filling the gender gap in education. The focus was on identified

successful activities including sensitization of local beneficiaries, training of female teachers and tutoring sessions for girls.

For further information on the project, please visit the UNESCO Dakar Regional Office web page at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/fr/dakar/education/basic-education-in-africa-programme/girls-education-and-advocacy-project-in-niger/#c1504084>



Poster developed by the UNESCO Regional Office in Dakar.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the partners and colleagues who contributed to this document by providing information on their interventions in girls' education in Niger or by revising the content.

Ms. Sarah Bourvis collected good practices from the partners and drafted this document that was reviewed by the national project team, Ms. Catherine Collin, Ms. Akemi Yonemura, Ms. Sasha Rubel and Mr. Gwang-Chol Chang.

## KEY MESSAGES

WHAT WE KNOW	WHAT WE CAN DO
<p><b>Girls' education</b> is a <b>fundamental human right</b> and <b>hope for a better life</b> with dignity and equal opportunity. It is a <b>key factor for development</b> and <b>poverty reduction</b>, providing family, community and national benefits.</p> <p><b>Tremendous progress</b> has been <b>accomplished</b> since the year 2000 for girls' access to school in Niger, <b>but continuous efforts are needed</b> to reduce the gender gap.</p> <p><b>Effective solutions</b> to reduce the gender gap in education, targeting both the social demand for girls' education and educational provision, <b>were successfully implemented</b> in Niger and <b>can be scaled up</b>.</p>	<p><b>Quality improvement of education</b> (providing conducive school environments, new learning opportunities, female teachers as role models) is essential to ensure access to school, as well as support and knowledge for parents and communities.</p> <p><b>Better education governance</b> promoting decentralization and participation of local communities is needed to improve management and quality of education.</p> <p><b>Advocacy, sensitization activities and research</b> targeting stakeholders should be continuously and consistently implemented to ensure sustainable and relevant support for girls' education.</p> <p><b>Synergy among stakeholders</b> should be reinforced to ensure effective utilization of resources as well as sustainable impacts and local ownership for girls' education.</p>

### WHY IS GIRLS' EDUCATION BENEFICIAL FOR NIGER?

Gender equality in education is not only a concern for women and girls, but also an issue for national development and contributes to a peaceful society, wealth creation through acquisition of skills and contribution to the labour market, and increases the chances of children going to school.

More specifically in Niger, girls' education<sup>1</sup>:

- **Reduces early pregnancies and child marriages:** Women with a primary school education have their first child 1.3 years later than women who never went to school.
- **Balances population growth:** A 28-year-old woman has on average 4.1 children if she never attended school. This figure drops to 3.7 children for women with primary

school education, and 2.9 children if women completed the first cycle of secondary school.

- **Helps women to become healthy mothers:** 81% of women without any education benefit from prenatal care, compared to 99% of women with a secondary school education.
- **Improves children's health:** Only 50% of children with an uneducated mother receive complete vaccination, while up to 73% of children are fully vaccinated when the mother has completed a secondary school education.
- **Fights against hunger:** 45% of children with a mother who has never been to school suffer from chronic malnutrition, compared to 23% of children whose mother has completed a secondary school education.

All these examples emphasize the importance of the completion of both primary and secondary school education for girls. While primary education makes the biggest difference in the lives of women and families, it is secondary education

<sup>1</sup> Data extracted from: Institut National de la Statistique, « Enquête Démographique et de Santé et à Indicateurs Multiples du Niger EDSN-MICS-IV », 2012, and « Rapport d'Etat sur le Système Educatif du Niger » (RESEN), Octobre 2010.

that ensures consistent and long-term behavioural changes so that all stakeholders support girls' education.

## CONTINUOUS AND COLLECTIVE EFFORTS ARE NEEDED FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION

Niger is a large, mainly rural and poor country (three out of four people live on less than 2 dollars per day) with one of the fastest growing populations in the world. More than half of its 19 million inhabitants are 14 years old or younger, which highlights the importance of inclusive and quality education to empower the young people to become actors of national development and agents of change.

The Government of Niger's commitment to improving the educational system is reflected in the Sector Programme for Education and Training (Programme Sectoriel de l'Education et de la Formation-PSEF) 2014-2024. This program covers all education levels, from pre-school to higher education and sets out the objectives of the national strategy for enhancing girls' education.

Girls and women's education has always been a development issue of paramount importance in Niger. Impressive progress has been made especially in terms of girls' enrolment in primary school since 2000. Overall, the gross enrolment rate (GER) of girls in primary education went up from 27% in 2000 to 65% in 2014 (UIS, 2014).

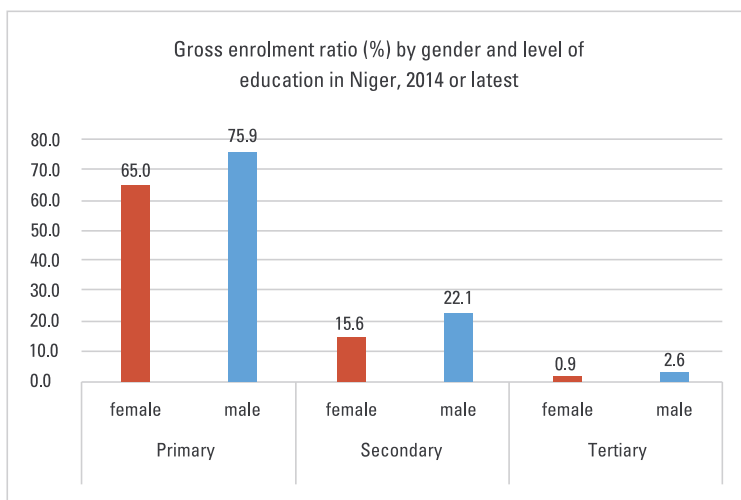
However, despite national and partner commitments towards girls' education, gender disparities are still pervasive with regards to educational opportunities. The low school survival rate of girls at the primary school level results in their low representation in secondary and higher education. For instance, regardless of the age of the students, the GER at the last grade for girls drops massively from primary to lower secondary school. The lower representation of girls in school is also reflected in their weak literacy rate. Only 17% of 15-24 year old girls are literate (UIS, 2015): half of the boys of the same age group.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF GIRLS' EDUCATION IN NIGER

The challenges of Nigerien girls' participation and performance in schools arise from factors related to low social demand for girls' education combined with poor educational provisions.

Low social demand for education is tied to gender-based perceptions of girls and women's roles in the family<sup>2</sup>. Social representations, especially in rural areas, that expect girls and women to become responsible wives and mothers, show how deeply rooted gender disparities are in Niger society. In this framework, education can be seen as a threat to family values and girls are often left out of the educational system at an earlier age than boys, mainly for the following reasons:

- **Gender roles, domestic responsibilities and high opportunity costs of girls' education:** In a country where poverty is dominant, parents do not always understand the advantage of educating their daughters especially because they could engage instead in an income generating activity beneficial for the family or help their mothers' domestic duties.



Source: Data extracted on 18 May 2016 from UIS.Stat

- **Child marriages and fear of early pregnancies:** Early marriages for very young girls are highly frequent in Niger because it is considered as a means to prevent pregnancy outside marriage. Half of 25 to 49 year old women in 2012 were first married before the age of 15.<sup>3</sup> School is socially not compatible with the life of a married girl.

<sup>2</sup> Roufaï Ali, Daouda Mamadou Marté, Zakari Hamadou, Allakarbo Hassimou, Dr. Lawali Malam Moussa, « Les impacts des travaux domestiques sur la scolarisation des filles au Niger : Cas de la région de Zinder », ROCARE, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Institut National de la Statistique, « Enquête Démographique et de Santé et à Indicateurs Multiples du Niger EDSN-MICS-IV », 2012.

Poor educational provision is also a major obstacle to girls' education:

- **Inadequate learning environment:** The lack of basic school infrastructure such as classrooms, water points, canteens or latrines, represent a huge obstacle to girls' access and retention in school.
- **Scarce educational opportunities in rural areas:** The distance to school and a lack of housing structures is of concern for girls' access and safety. As a consequence, the transition to secondary school is particularly difficult to ensure.
- **Lack of qualified teachers especially female teachers:** Quality of teaching is difficult to ensure because a lot of teachers are not adequately trained, including on gender issues, and, with a higher number of male teachers in rural areas, learning environments are not always gender friendly.
- **Direct costs of education:** Going to school is expensive and the perception of low economic returns from educated female labour is considered a constraint on girls' education by many Nigerien parents who live in poverty.

Despite these challenges, cultural and social practices are evolving and, for instance, female teachers are becoming more respected and even tend to be preferred for educating girls<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, Nigerien people are indirectly and gradually recognizing the individual and collective value of girls' education. In this context, sustainable responses to the factors influencing girls' education should address both demand and supply constraints in order to promote comprehensive and effective solutions for girls' learning.

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<sup>4</sup> UNICEF et Gouvernement du Niger, « Stratégie nationale pour accélérer la scolarisation des filles », août 2014.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



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Equal educational opportunities for girls and boys in Niger are necessary to ensure sustainable socio-economic development of the country. Based on the implementation of the project “Tackling gender inequalities in Niger’s educational system”<sup>5</sup>, as well as the following good practices, some recommendations aiming at further progress in girl’s education are presented below under the four themes: quality of education; education governance; advocacy, sensitization and research; and synergy among stakeholders and financing.

### QUALITY OF EDUCATION

- **Conducive and attractive education system** combining safe school environment for girls where all the basic services and school infrastructures should be provided (classrooms, furniture, gender-separated latrines, etc.). The education system could also compensate for the high opportunity cost of girls’ education by building useful infrastructures for the whole community (mill, water points, and day care centres) and financing the direct costs of girls’ education (providing host families, school canteens and scholarships).
- **New learning opportunities for girls and adults** including second chance classes, remedial courses and vocational training could be proposed so that no girls are left behind. Literacy programmes for adults are also prominent because literate parents are more likely to send their daughters to school.
- **More teachers should be adequately trained, including on gender sensitive approaches** in order to improve the quality of education, increase school’s attractiveness and ensure transition from primary to secondary school. Gender training and teaching support should be provided for teachers through pre-service and in-service programmes.
- **Recruitment and appointment of trained female teachers in rural areas** who can serve as role

<sup>5</sup> See the project description on page 2.

models and support girls' learning could inspire them to pursue their education and become more active in their community. For this to happen, it is necessary to create incentives for more female teachers to go to rural schools or to recruit local female teachers.

### **EDUCATION GOVERNANCE**

- **The government should support decentralized management of education system and resources** in order to ensure the quality of education. This will require empowerment of decentralized education departments, including a better allocation of educational resources (staff, financial resources, etc.).
- **Participatory school management** should be strengthened, where local communities are involved in setting up strategies and systematic operations for the daily management of education through local organizations, such as School management committees/decentralized school management committees (COGES/CGDES), Associations of Mother Educators (AME) and Associations of Parents (APE).

### **ADVOCACY, SENSITIZATION AND RESEARCH**

- **Advocacy and sensitization activities** on the importance and benefits of girls' education should be continuously and consistently implemented to impact behavioural changes. These activities should target all partners and beneficiaries of education including community leaders, COGES/CGDES, parents and students.
- **Collection, analysis and sharing of reliable data** especially on gender issues in education in Niger should be ensured for scientific research to evaluate long-term impacts of education. This would also lay the groundwork for efficient and innovative girls' education interventions giving appropriate responses to clearly identified needs and eventually influencing national policy and strategies.

### **SYNERGY AMONG ALL STAKEHOLDERS AND FINANCING**

- **Synergy among stakeholders** should be reinforced to ensure effective utilization of resources as well as sustainable impacts and local ownership for girls' education in alignment with the Sector Programme for Education and Training 2014-2024.
- **Complementary and integrated girls' education interventions** should target the major issues affecting girls' education. Based on respective areas of expertise, stakeholders should plan and implement coordinated activities, and scaling up successful experiences. These integrated activities need to be included within long-term interventions to create sustainable impacts.
- **Participatory and community based interventions for girls' education** should involve local actors from the design phase. The implication of prominent local figures such as religious and opinion leaders as well as community based initiatives including COGES/CGDES and AME should be encouraged to establish relevance, ownership and sustainable commitment for girls' education.
- **More funds** should be allocated to support teacher training, books for students, pedagogical materials for teachers and facilities



# GIRLS' EDUCATION IN NIGER: WHAT HAS WORKED

## A SELECTION OF GOOD PRACTICES



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Effective solutions to reduce the gender gap in education were successfully implemented in Niger and could inspire future interventions.

This part provides an overview of completed gender and education interventions in Niger, which had a positive and relevant effect on girls' access, retention, and performance in both primary and secondary school<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> The good practices were directly collected from partners or publicly available documentation (previously compiled good practices and evaluation reports).

# FINANCING HOST FAMILIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS FOR GIRLS' SECONDARY SCHOOL RETENTION<sup>7</sup>

June 2006–December 2010



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## IMPLEMENTING AGENCY

Ministry of Secondary Education (MSE) of Niger and African Development Fund (ADF)

## BENEFICIARIES

984 girls in 63 rural lower secondary schools in the 7 regions of Niger

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In rural areas in Niger, girls' enrolment in secondary education drops drastically compared to primary school enrolment. This is partly due to scarcity of secondary schools and insufficient alternatives in rural areas, more specifically, the absence of boarding schools. Secondary schools with low girls' enrolment rates were selected by the COGES<sup>8</sup> (community representatives, school administration, teachers and students) and girls were placed in host families, which in return received 45,000 FCFA per trimester. Girls also received a scholarship (12,000 FCFA) along with some school supplies. The COGES was responsible for the management of financial resources, monitoring and sensitization of girls as well as their host families and families of origin.

## KEY RESULTS

Sensitization activities were very successful in raising girls and communities' awareness about the importance of pursuing education. Along with the scholarships, the project contributed to the significant increase of girls' attendance in the targeted schools. In 2004-2005, 28% of the students in these schools were girls, while the number rose to 39% in 2010-2011. Beneficiary girls were more successful and their repetition rate was only 12% in 2009-2010 while it was 23% for all the students of these schools. According to the academic authorities, the improvement of girls' retention and performance in school resulted in fewer early marriages and pregnancies.

## CHALLENGES

Support for host families should have included food supplies since financial help was not always dedicated to the care of the girls. Additionally, choosing host families should be unbiased and not include COGES members.

A lot of parents are still reluctant to send their daughters to a post-primary school because of the use of girls for domestic work, small businesses and fear of unwanted pregnancies. It is necessary to provide other kinds of support for parents, such as an income generating activity.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Placing girls in host families eliminated worry about the distance from home to school, meals, or lack of tutors and school supplies. While financing the direct costs of education contributed to retaining girls throughout secondary school. Also a successful transition to secondary school was a way to reduce early marriages. Training of the COGES and its subsequent management of the project contributed to the ownership and sustainability of the project by the local community.

## MORE INFORMATION

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<sup>7</sup> The source is from the information provided by the Ministry of Secondary Education. This girl's education component is part of the larger ADF project, which focused on training, infrastructures, and equipment.

<sup>8</sup> COGES: School Management Committee

<http://www.bit.ly/girlslearning-aideetaction-1>

## **“GIRLS IN SCHOOL”: COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDERS’ INVOLVEMENT<sup>9</sup>**

July 2008–December 2009

**“We no longer have work for boys and another for girls. Everyone does everything...roles formerly played by boys, are now played by girls. Similarly, the tasks considered to be devoted to girls are now done by boys.” – An inhabitant**

### **IMPLEMENTING AGENCY**

Aide et Action

### **BENEFICIARIES**

15 schools in 3 rural municipalities (Tagazar, Tondikandia and Imanan), district of Filingué, region of Tillabéri

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The “Girls in school” project was initiated to support the implementation of community owned school projects in rural municipalities. It targeted girl students from 6 to 13 years old in 15 schools with a low girls’ enrolment rate, and parents and teachers advocating for empowerment and gender equality in school. Beyond the numerous sensitization activities including raising awareness about gender equality through local radios and religious sermons, the project also promoted the revitalization of 15 Mothers Education Committees, the provision of school supplies, giving awards to the best teachers, students and community organizations, as well as the organization of tutoring sessions for girls.

### **KEY RESULTS**

Overall, the project had a positive impact on the attitudes and behaviours of all the beneficiaries towards the education of girls and the value for the community. The enthusiasm and participation of all stakeholders at decentralized levels convinced the parents to massively send girls to school.

In the targeted schools, there was a sharp increase in the enrolment of girls. The project also supported greater performance for girls. Five targeted schools fielded candidates for the primary education certificate and obtained better results for girls compared to boys. Out of the 5 schools, the success rate for girls was 100% in 4 schools and 56% in one school.

Bringing girls to school became a competition between families as a new symbol of the parents’ open-mindedness. According to some Associations of Mother Educators, parents even started to express their desire to enroll their children in school before the age of 6.

### **CHALLENGES**

In December 2009, this short project was technically closed because the objectives and expected results were achieved. In order to ensure sustainability of these results, it was expected that the Education’s decentralized departments would carry on the training and monitoring of the activities of the Association of Mother Educators (AME), Parent Teacher Associations and School Management Committees.

### **KEY SUCCESS FACTORS**

The tutoring sessions along with the rewarding of the best female students and teachers have significantly contributed to the improvement of the attendance and performance of girls in school.

Sensitization activities on women’s rights have improved the perceptions and behaviours towards girls’ education throughout the entire community. Empowerment of the local population: Parents, especially women with the Mother Educators Committees, and religious leaders, were actively involved in the management of the educational system, which should ensure the sustainability of the project.

<sup>9</sup> Devers Marie, « Compilation of good practices in girls’ and women’s education in West Africa », [http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/Compilation\\_of\\_Good\\_Practices\\_West\\_Africa\(1\).pdf](http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/Compilation_of_Good_Practices_West_Africa(1).pdf), 2014.

# NGO CONSORTIUM TO IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE, TEACHING QUALITY AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION<sup>10</sup>

October 2008–September 2010

*Project was intended to last 3 years but stopped after 13 months because of political crisis in the country.*

## IMPLEMENTING AGENCY

Plan Niger, Aide et Action, Counterpart, Volontaires pour l'Intégration Educative

## BENEFICIARIES

200 schools in 20 towns in the 7 regions of Niger

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Within the framework of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the United States Government assisted the Government of Niger in increasing the completion rate of girls' primary education and improving the performance of the education system. Under the leadership of Plan Niger, the consortium of NGOs: Plan Niger, Aide et Action, Counterpart, Volontaires pour l'Intégration Educative (VIE) was in charge of the implementation of the IMAGINE project. This project was very participatory with implementation areas divided among the consortium of NGOs on the basis of each member's expertise.

IMAGINE was developed on a unified approach decided among all stakeholders:

1. Increase access to education through the construction of school infrastructures;
2. Improve the teaching quality through capacity building, training modules and incentives for female teachers to come to rural areas;
3. Increase community-based participation and improve school management through social mobilization and sensitization activities promoting girls' education.

## KEY RESULTS

The access component of the project (16.5 million dollars representing 80% of the budget allocation) was the most efficient since the necessary infrastructures to create a conducive school environment were successfully built. For instance, with only some 60% of the project planned budget, the partners built more than the intended number of classrooms. The project design was also a considerable improvement in the education sector as the school complexes comprised complementary and integrated structures (three classrooms separated by two multi-purpose halls, three teachers' lodgings, three latrine blocks, a day care centre, and a water point.) The greater accessibility resulted in improved girls' enrolment and reduction of gender disparities. For instance, the female/male teachers parity index in the IMAGINE project sites improved greatly and was more than 1 (90% of the teaching staff was composed of women in all the villages), while it was below 0.6 at the national level. The material conditions created (housing) to attract and retain female teachers in the rural areas were of crucial importance. The combination of formal and non-formal education was another innovative success factor because it brought together all the age groups with adult literacy classes taking place at the same time that the children were in school.

## CHALLENGES

The budget limitations and the sudden halt to the project did not allow the classroom teachers to be trained. Sensitization activities did not start from the beginning of the project. Also, a lot of girls and boys left school because of external factors such as famine and political instability.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

The joint work of the consortium members as well as the involvement of local actors in the project (COGES and AME) ensured the ownership and sustainability of the project. While the recruitment of female teachers served as a source of inspiration for parents to register their daughters in school. Adult literacy classes encouraged parents to support their daughter's education. and the construction of infrastructures encouraged girls to attend school.

## MORE INFORMATION

Report: <http://bit.ly/projectimagine-report>

<sup>10</sup> The source is from the Final Evaluation Report of the project, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pdacr616.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacr616.pdf).

# PROVIDING AT-RISK GIRLS WITH A SECOND CHANCE AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING<sup>11</sup>

2010–2013

## IMPLEMENTING AGENCY

Aide et Action, Orange Foundation

## BENEFICIARIES

120 girls, 10 rural communities in the district of Douthi (Dosso region) and 7 rural communities in the district of Filingué (Tillabéri region)

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project was implemented in a complex sub-regional context. In Douthi and Filingué, rural areas, educational facilities were scarce and poorly equipped. The lack of qualified teachers, among which 80% were contractual teachers, negatively impacted the internal and external efficiency of the educational system. In these regions, education was mainly based on formal learning and literacy programmes. The learning conditions were also limited by the lack of participatory and community involvement in educational governance.

This project focused on two main components:

1. The creation of enabling environments for quality education for girls through: (a) second chance classes for girls who had left school early or had never been to school, and (b) vocational training to integrate dropouts and out-of-school girls into the socioeconomic life with income generating activities;
2. Increasing community participation and capacity in basic education management and monitoring.

## KEY RESULTS

Overall, significant progress was achieved with regard to the two main objectives. In total, 8 second chance classes were opened and welcomed 85 girls of ages 9–13. Institutional stakeholders emphasized their enthusiasm because students from the second chances classes performed better than their counterparts in the academic tests. Girls' access to vocational training was also very successful as 17 out of the 54 participating girls passed the training completion tests enabling them to be assisted in developing both a professional and personal project.

## CHALLENGES

The project design was not integrated into the formal education system because it lacked some focus on essential issues including girls' general access and achievement in school, which limited the impact of the project.

Also, the project's implementation was jeopardized by many persistent obstacles, including the household's extreme poverty, which led to girls' dropout to seek income generating activities. Very young girls were also expected to follow the practice of exogamous marriage (marrying outside their community), which took them far away from school.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Second chance classes and vocational training improved not only the access but also the performance of marginalized girls and therefore could be considered as two major innovations for this project.

Additionally, the greater involvement of local communities ensured greater sustainability and ownership of this innovative project.

## MORE INFORMATION

<http://bit.ly/girlslearning-aideetaction-2>

<sup>11</sup> Devers Marie, « Compilation of good practices in girls' and women's education in West Africa », [http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/Compilation\\_of\\_Good\\_Practices\\_West\\_Africa\(1\).pdf](http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/Compilation_of_Good_Practices_West_Africa(1).pdf), 2014.

# AN INTEGRATED RESPONSE TO GIRLS' NUTRITION AND EDUCATION ISSUES<sup>12</sup>

2012–2015

## IMPLEMENTING AGENCY

World Food Programme, Government of Niger

## BENEFICIARIES

1,564 girls, municipalities of Koleram, Gaffati and Dogo, region of Zinder

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Both low education participation and malnutrition of girls constitute major development obstacles for Niger. The country faces among the highest malnutrition rate within its regional context with 15% of its population suffering from acute malnutrition in 2015. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), the lack of girls and women's educational opportunities in Niger, especially for rural and nomadic populations, is one of the causes of malnutrition, which in turn affects school attendance and performance.

The WFP reinforced its impact by targeting the combined improvement of education and nutrition of girls in Niger with a pilot project in the region of Zinder for adolescent girls (10 to 19 years old). The goal was to create a real change in people's behaviours in terms of girls' nutrition, hygiene and school attendance. Along with the help of the Ministries of Health and Education as well as the COGES, the pilot project provided the beneficiary students with canteens and meals enriched in micronutrients powder or iron and folic acid supplements. A group of vulnerable girls was also selected to receive a scholarship to support their education and encourage girls' retention in secondary education.

## KEY RESULTS

Nutrition, education and sensitization activities have greatly improved girls' school attendance and performance as well as their general well-being. Overall, the scholarships supported the retention of girls in the secondary school cycle. For instance, girls' access to the higher grade increased from 32% in 2013-2014 to 68% in 2014-2015. More specifically, sensitization activities on early marriages seem to have been very efficient since a 100% of the interviewed households have

reported that they understood the advantages of postponing girls' marriages. The project also improved the self-confidence of the students in expressing their ideas when different from their peers (from 50% in 2013 to 91% in 2015 declared being confident in class.)

## CHALLENGES

Large scale nutrition and education programs were limited by the low level of students in primary and secondary schools and the low perception of the value of education. This required long-term behavioural changes and frequent sensitization campaigns.

The shortage of teachers, the low quality of the teaching and the inefficiencies of school infrastructures also limited the monitoring and access of girls to education and nutrition programs.

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Education interventions were included in an integrated approach with the cooperation of multiple actors, which would eventually ensure a sustainable impact. The compilation of diverse interventions such as the distribution of dry rations, enriched meals, scholarships and sensitization activities, and improved both the nutrition and educational participation of girls.

Continued activities from primary to secondary school contributed to change nutritional behaviours and retain girls in school. The role of community, and regional and national authorities was essential to ensure the monitoring of the project and its later integration into policy planning.

## MORE INFORMATION

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<sup>12</sup> From the information provided by the World Food Programme.





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