

EVALUATION DEPARTMENT

Report 10 / 2020 **COUNTRY EVALUATION BRIEF**

Niger



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The purpose of this Country Evaluation Brief is

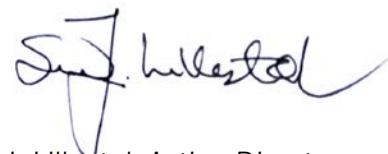
to present relevant knowledge about donors' development efforts in Niger.

The brief systematises relevant findings from existing evaluations of development interventions in the country. The idea is to present the findings to the reader in a succinct and easily accessible format.

Readers who want to explore key issues in depth can access the underlying reports through the reference list. At our website, you can also find a set of short "Evaluation Portraits" summarising the key contents of those documents.

The Country Evaluation Brief was researched and produced by Particip GmbH.

Oslo, November 2020

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Siv J. Lillestøl', with a stylized flourish at the end.

*Siv J. Lillestøl, Acting Director,
Evaluation Department*

Main Findings

The report draws mainly on findings presented in 28 evaluations and reviews published since 2014 of major donor-funded programmes and projects in Niger. Although more stable than most countries in the West Africa region, Niger has known internal infighting and **POLITICAL INSTABILITY** in the recent past. The situation remains fragile due to a combination of factors, which also impact on the outcomes of aid. The findings of evaluations show uneven but overall positive results, with the effects of aid being more encouraging and visible in some areas of intervention than in others.

- External aid has been aligned with the country development and security priorities and policies; apart from migration management, which has been mainly an external priority. Aid has been channelled primarily through the **PUBLIC SECTOR** to support Niger's social services and infrastructure in the first place. Weak financial and human resource capacities have, however, limited national ownership and sustainability of results.
- **HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE**, as well as support for peacebuilding, development and security, have contributed to community resilience and to some degree of stability in Niger, despite the regional security challenges. The Government has also been a willing and responsive partner to donors' security concerns and priorities, namely with regard to the fight against transnational terrorism and illicit trafficking – including illegal migration, which has decreased significantly.
- Development assistance has had positive impacts, as found by evaluations of interventions in **AGRICULTURAL AND SOCIAL SECTORS** and as illustrated by significant improvement in some development indicators over the years (namely, health and education). Local capacities for sustainable agricultural production and climate change adaptation have also improved, contributing to food security. However, infrastructure, resources and capacities remain limited in several areas – including the health sector, as the COVID-19 crisis highlights.
- Gender targeted interventions and increasing attention to **GENDER MAINSTREAMING** across sectors are achieving some degree of change that has the potential to yield more significant progress and socio-cultural changes in the long run. Despite progress, **GENDER INEQUALITIES** remain high, and violence against women and girls is still prevalent.

Key Facts Niger

Estimated population: 22,442,948

(World Bank 2020; 2018 data)

Population under the age of 15: 50.0%

(World Bank 2020; 2018 data)

Urban population: 16.4%

(World Bank 2020; 2018 data)

Urban population growth (annual %): 4.3%

(World Bank 2020; 2018 data)

Human Development Index (HDI): 189 (of 189)

(UNDP 2020; 2019 data)

Gender Inequality Index (GII): 154 (of 162)

(UNDP 2020; 2018 data)

Poverty headcount ratio at USD 1.90 a day (2011 PPP): 44.5%

(World Bank 2020; 2014 data)

Adult literacy rate: 30.6%

(World Bank 2020; 2012 data)

Life expectancy at birth (male/female): 62 (60/63)

(World Bank 2020; 2017 data)

Child mortality rate (under 5, per 1000 live births): 84

(World Bank 2020; 2018 data)

Net ODA received (% of GNI): 15.2%

(World Bank 2020; 2017 data)

Corruption Perception Index rank: 120 (of 180)

(Transparency International 2020; 2019 data)

Internally Displaced Persons (new displacements in 2018 due to conflict and violence): 52,000

(World Bank 2020; 2018 data)

Mean years of schooling: 2.0

(UNDP 2020; 2018 data)

Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, PPP (current international USD): 1,040

(World Bank 2020; 2018 data)

GNI growth (annual %): 6.4%

(World Bank 2020; 2018 data)

GNI per capita growth (annual %): 2.5%

(World Bank 2020; 2018 data)

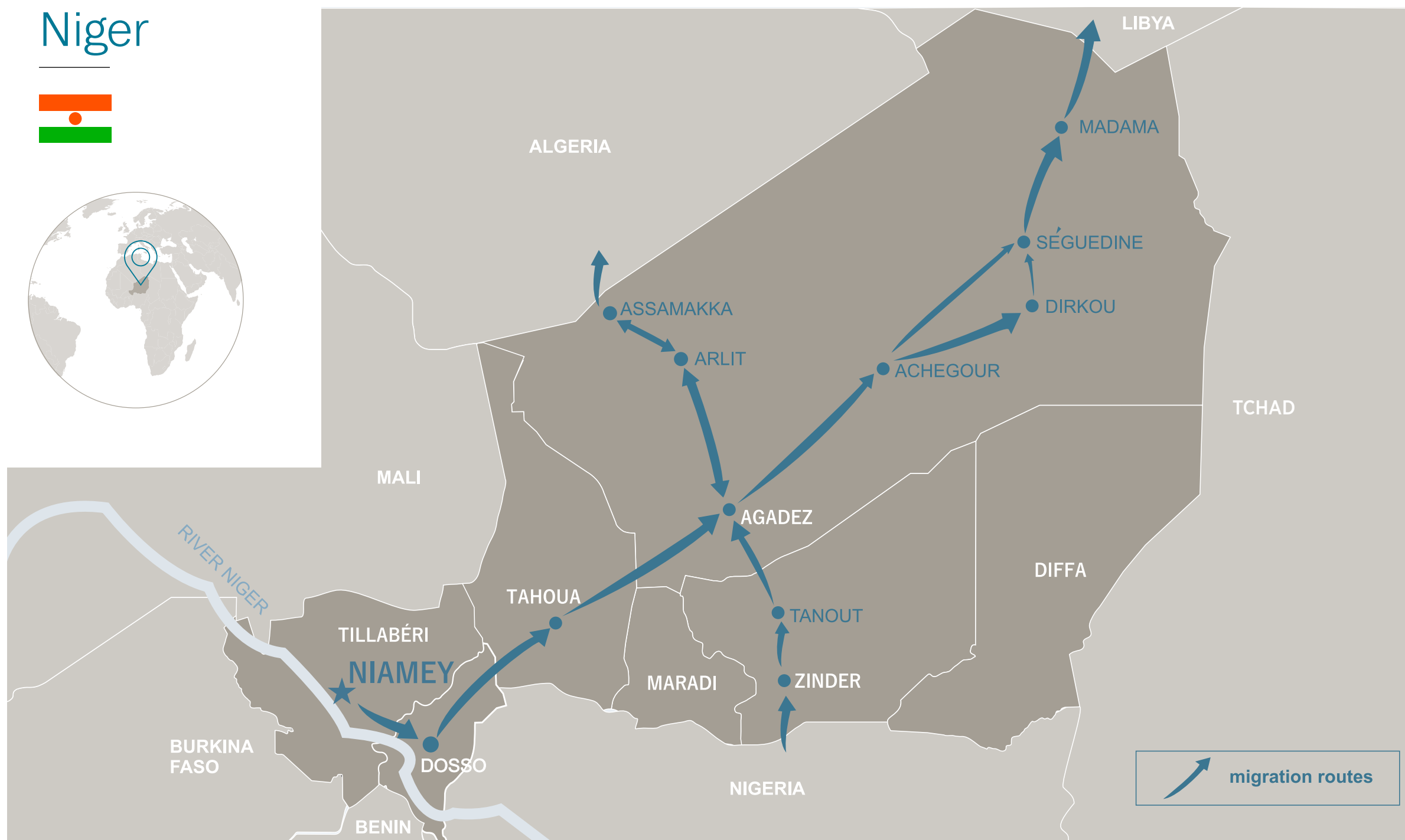
GINI index: 34.3

(World Bank 2020; 2014 data)

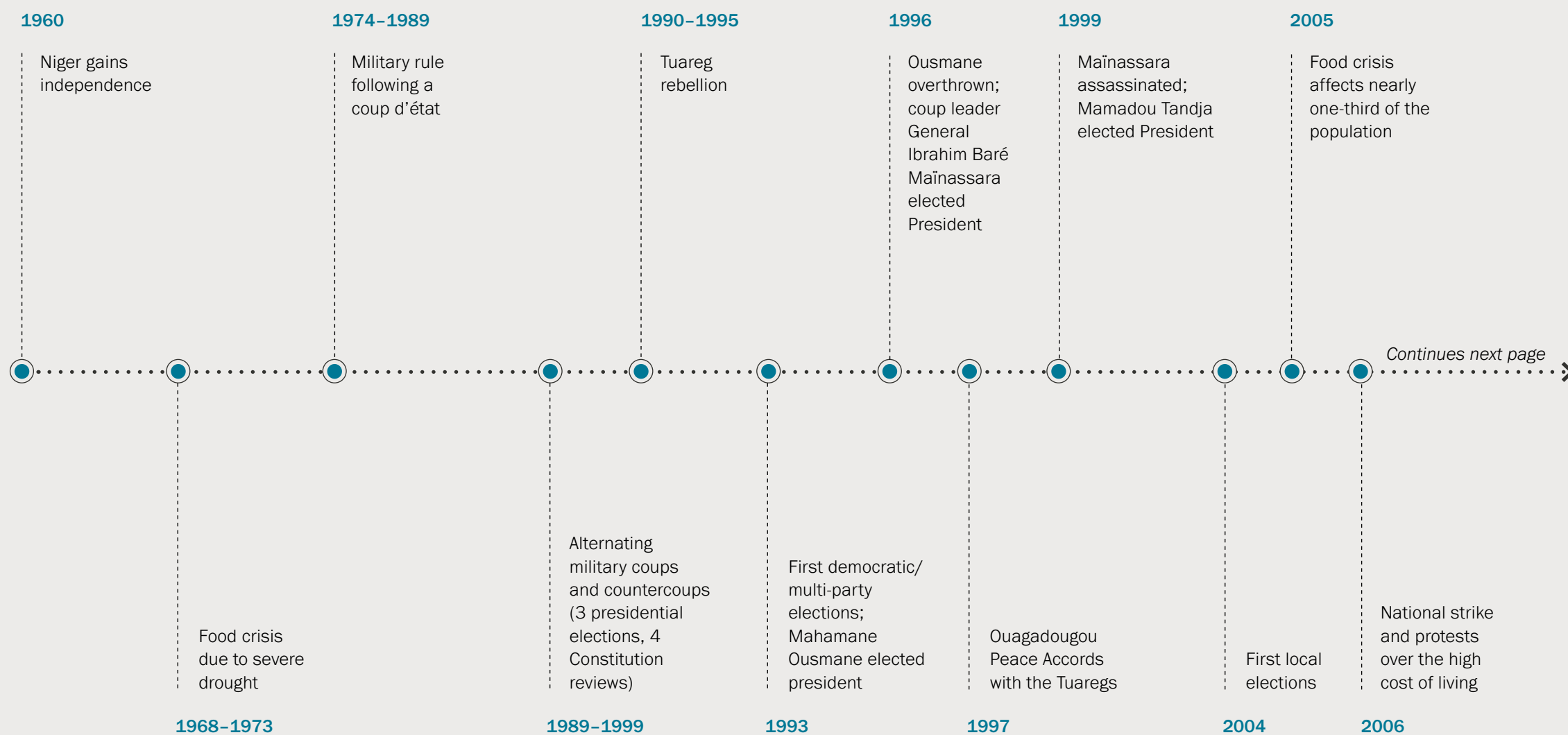


Aerial view of the historic town of Agadez, granted World Heritage status by UNESCO in 2013.
Photo: Issouf Sanogo/AFP/NTB

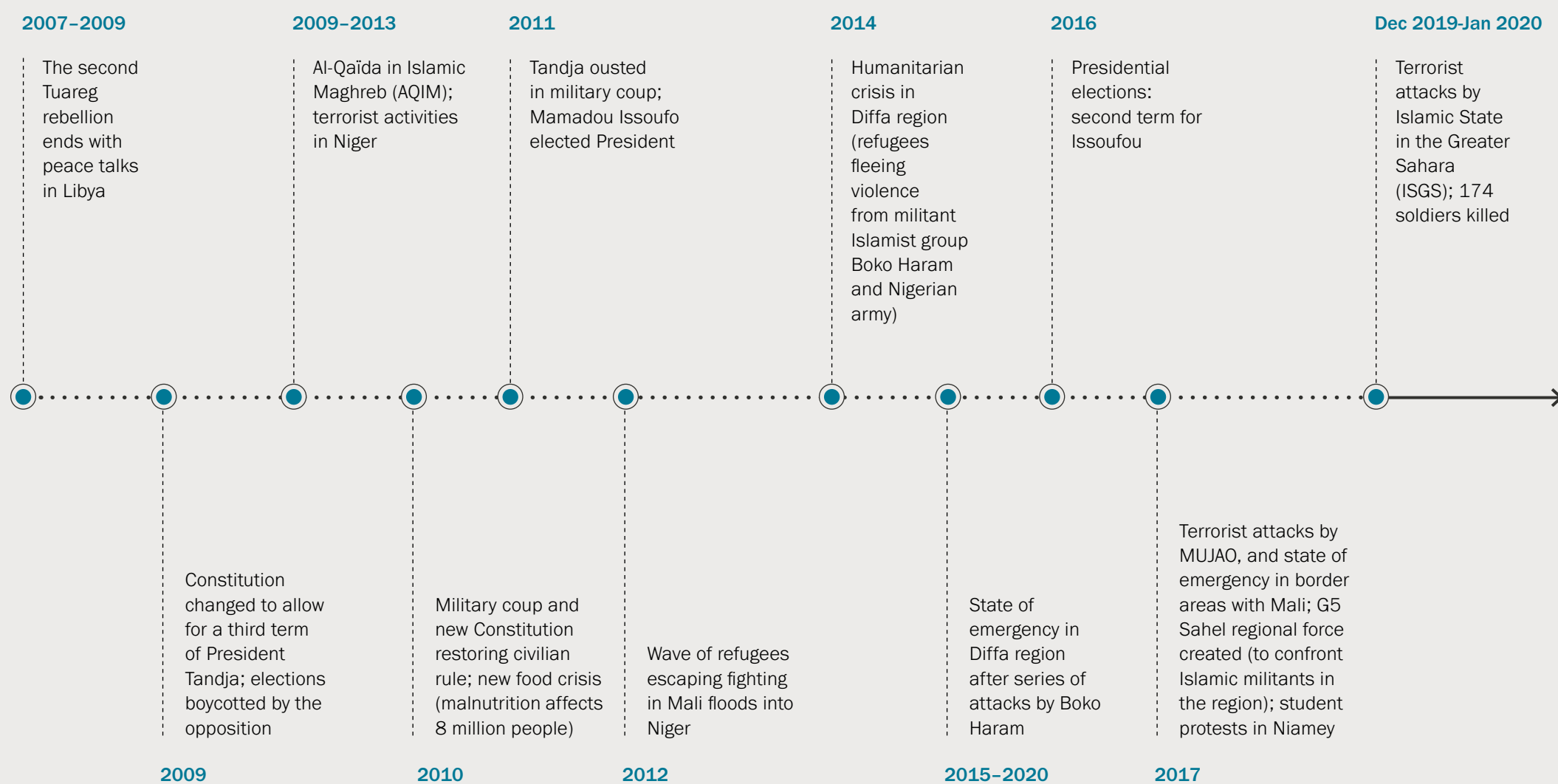
Niger



Key Events



Key Events



Introduction

Niger is the fifth largest country in Africa and the world's poorest nation. Notwithstanding increasing donor attention to the multiple challenges faced by the country and its good economic performance over recent years, several factors have limited the progress on development and the effects of aid.



*A market in Niamey, January 2018.
Photo: Dmitry Kostyukov/The New York Times/NTB*

Niger is prone to recurrent droughts, floods, and locust infestations, and had the second fastest-growing population in the world in 2018 (World Bank 2020), which puts significant pressure on the state to respond to increasing social needs and demand for jobs. In addition to the strong demographic pressure, the effects of climate change, the influx of refugees in border areas (fleeing violence in neighbouring countries) and displacements as a result of deteriorating security conditions have had a negative impact on the population's livelihoods, exacerbating food insecurity. Despite its natural resources and steady economic growth, Niger still faces mounting development needs and remains dependent to a significant extent on external aid, as the recent COVID-19 crisis highlights. The donor community has stepped up financial, development and security assistance to help the authorities cope with the challenges and to keep Niger's fragile democracy and socio-economic stability afloat, while addressing its own interests and security concerns – namely, on the migration and counter-terrorism agendas.



*General view of Tahoua Village, 2005. Niger is prone to recurrent droughts and floods.
Photo: Environmental Images/Universal Images Group/REX/NTB*

Country Context

Despite a relatively stable political environment since the restoration of constitutional order in 2011, Niger's stability and development are under strain. The country is prone to recurrent natural disasters that, along with the effects of climate change, exacerbate food insecurity and the risks of social unrest.



A young man carries his belongings in a wheelbarrow in the Kirkissoye neighbourhood in Niamey in August 2020, after the Niger river flooded. Photo: Boureima Hama/AFP/NTB

80 per cent of Niger's territory is covered by desert and is vulnerable to climate change effects.



Photo: Lindsay Gossage/SIM USA/Flickr

Niger gained independence from France in 1960, after 70 years of French colonial rule. The period between the mid-1970s and 2010 was marked by political instability and infighting, with alternate periods of military and civilian rule, social unrest, coups and counter-coups to restore democracy. Although it has been relatively stable for the last decade, particularly in comparison to neighbouring Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria or Libya, Niger's development and stability is under pressure from several inter-related factors, internal and external.

Landlocked between the Sahara Desert and the semi-arid Sahel belt, 80 per cent of Niger's territory is covered by desert and is vulnerable to climate change effects. Although progress in climate change adaptation techniques has contributed to better food security, drought and erratic rainfall has contributed to soil erosion in parts of the country and made seasonal planning in agriculture difficult. Food crisis are recurrent; 42 per cent of children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition. Despite its natural resources (uranium, oil and gold), Niger ranks last in the Human Development Index 2020. The country is dependent on international aid. Although its economy is now more diversified, the main sources of revenue still come from agriculture, livestock and uranium exports.

Economic growth (5.4 per cent on average in 2016-2018) is due primarily to the improved performance of the rural sector (agriculture, livestock, forests and fishing), which accounts for more than 40 per cent of Niger's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and almost 80 per cent of its labour force, and sustained activity in the construction and services sectors (World Bank 2019c).

Niger's demographic growth – the second highest in the world – has limited the impact of development aid and of social policies. Its population has tripled in the last 30 years, adding significant pressure on education and health services, offsetting government and donor sectoral investments. Even though poverty rates have decreased over the last decade, nearly 2 million people more are living in poverty compared with 2005. The Government has invested an approximate average of 6.5 per cent of the GDP in health expenditure since 2000 (World Bank 2020) and health indicators have improved. Nonetheless, inequalities in access to health services remain huge. The situation of women is especially difficult, with prevailing gender inequality. The country has the highest occurrence of child marriage in Africa, and the highest adolescent birth rate in the world – 186 births per 100,000 women aged 15-19 in 2017 (World Bank 2020) – exacerbating the risks of maternal mortality. Despite improvements in maternal

health, access to family planning and quality of health services are poor. Early marriages are also associated with poverty, little or no formal education, abuse and violence, and unequal representation and opportunities (World Bank Gender Data Portal).

Unlike some of its neighbours, the state is present throughout the territory. Nonetheless, the country is facing mounting security threats, even if terrorism remains an exogenous factor. The combined effects of terrorist attacks in Niger – perpetrated by Boko Haram (from Nigeria) and other Islamist groups in Mali and Burkina Faso – and inter-communal conflicts in the North and Lake Chad area have generated insecurity and a humanitarian crisis, especially along border areas with these neighbouring countries. Niger is also a transit route of illegal migration to Europe and for other illicit trafficking. Under pressure from the European Union (EU), the Government adopted, in 2015, a law criminalising illegal migration and all assistance to illegal migrants, which appears to be effective in curbing migration flows to Europe (UNHCR 2020b).

The Government has identified social development and demographic transition, economic growth, sustainable environmental management, as well as governance, peace and security, as strategic pillars of its Economic

and Social Development Plan (PDES II 2017-2021). Several factors continue to create a potential breeding ground for social unrest and political strife, namely: the prevailing poor living conditions; perceived corruption; limited decentralisation and delivery of basic services due to the state's weak budgetary and resource capacity; increasing insecurity in border areas and the immediate negative impacts of government response measures that have fuelled inter-communal conflict and political tensions (e.g. the illicit trafficking law, and the state of emergency in parts of the country most affected by insecurity). In the past, a confluence of similar factors triggered Tuareg rebellions in Niger. In recent years, an increase in budget resources allocated to the security forces, as security concerns rise higher in government and international priorities, has sparked student riots and popular manifestations of discontent. More recently, the Government's quick response and confinement measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 have been met with similar protests and confrontations with the police (ACAPS 2020).

The Government declared a national health state of emergency on 27 March 2020 and developed a national COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (total budget of USD 168 million) aimed at reinforcing co-ordination and strengthening



Two men walk along a path in the Hamdallaye refugee camp, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, July 2020. Photo: Selim Meddeb/ UNHCR/REUTERS/NTB

of epidemiological surveillance, containment and response capacity, as well as promoting risk communication and community engagement. It has imposed a series of containment actions and has implemented some measures to mitigate the health and economic impact of COVID-19 (e.g. free treatment in hospitals, improving health response capacity, electricity and water bills paid by the state).

Donor Engagement

Official Development Assistance (ODA)¹ to Niger has doubled in the last 10 years, with the social sectors being the main areas of external support. Niger is highly dependent on foreign aid.

1 The CEB uses the term ODA in accordance with the official OECD-DAC definition: "ODA flows to countries and territories on the DAC List of ODA Recipients and to multilateral development institutions are: i. Provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies; and ii. Concessional (i.e. grants and soft loans) and administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as the main objective" (OECD 2019).

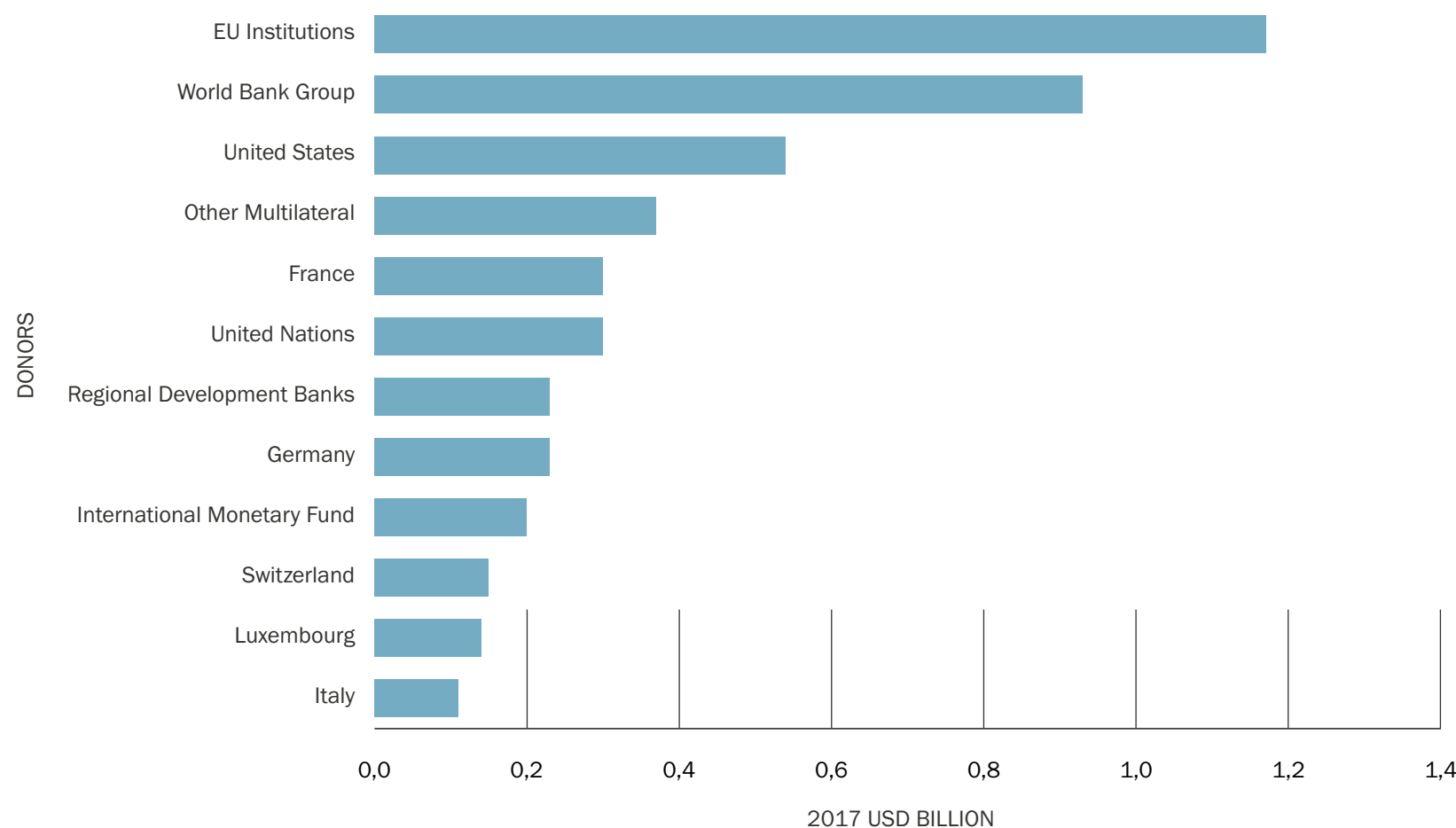
Refugees prepare food inside UNHCR Mangaize refugee camp, north of Niamey, 2012. A wave of refugees escaping fighting in Mali flooded into Niger in this year.
Photo: Issouf Sanogo/AFP PHOTO/NTB



Aid flows to Niger have steadily increased during the last decade, especially as the regional security environment and humanitarian situation have deteriorated after the conflicts in Libya and Mali since 2011 and 2012, respectively. ODA represents nearly 38 per cent of the proposed state budget resources for 2020. Other direct resources to sectors account for an additional 10 per cent of the 2020 budget (Niger Ministry of Finances, 2019).

Throughout the period 2014-2018, the combined ODA of the EU and the World Bank represented about 45 per cent of overall ODA to Niger (Figure 1). The EU, Niger's main donor, has provided nearly EUR 1.2 billion of aid in the period 2014-2018. The EU's assistance has focused on five main areas: (i) food security and resilience; (ii) support to the state for the provision of social services – namely, through general budget support; (iii) security, governance and peacebuilding; (iv) road infrastructure; and (v) migration as a major priority since 2015/16, with EUR 253 million having so far been allocated to projects aimed at strengthening state capacities to curb illegal trafficking and addressing migrants' needs in Niger through the EU Trust Fund. In fact, Niger is the biggest beneficiary of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EUTF 2020). Other main donors are the United States (US), global funds (the

Figure 1 Top 12 Donors of Gross ODA, 2014-2018



The category "Other Multilateral" includes the Global Fund, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI), the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID), the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and, of lesser financial expression, the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) and the Adaptation Fund.

Source: OECD CRS Aid Activity database data 2020.

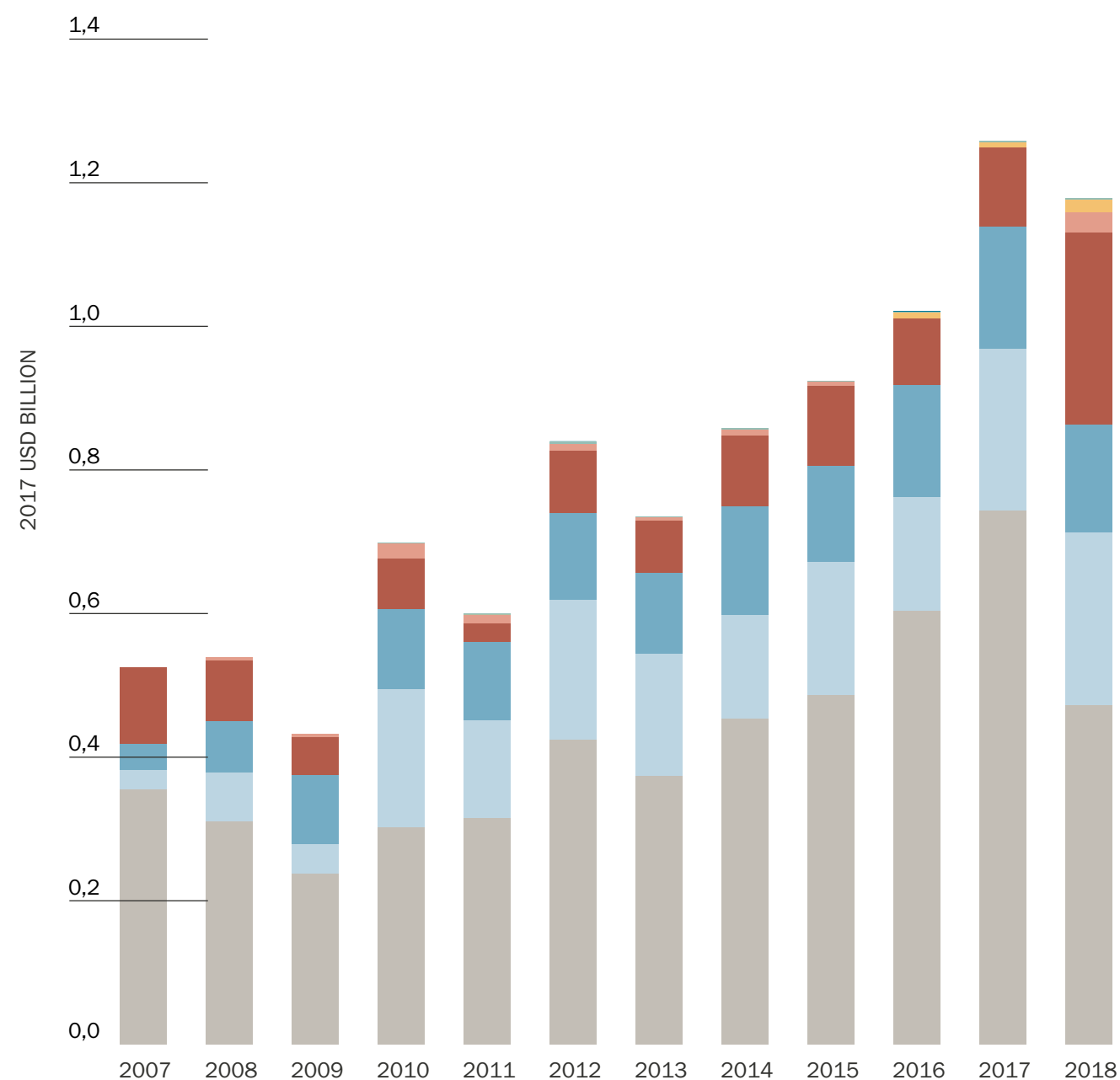
Global Fund and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation are the leading funds under the “other multilateral” category), France, and the UN agencies, which together provided approximately a third of ODA to Niger between 2014 and 2018. Norway was the eighth largest bilateral donor, with approximately USD 71 million in 2014-2018.

Since 2007, most ODA has been channelled through the public sector (over 50 per cent on average). Between 2017 and 2018, however, it decreased by one-third (approximately USD 250 million), while ODA through other (not reported) channels more than doubled (Figure 2). Multilateral organisations have been the second most used channel of aid to Niger. Support through civil society organisations (CSOs)²

² The report uses the term civil society organisation (CSO) in line with the OECD DAC definition: “CSOs can be defined to include all non-market and non-state organisations outside of the family in which people organise themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain” (OECD 2011). CSOs thus include non-governmental organisations and international non-governmental organisations.

Public Sector Multilateral Organisations
Civil Society Organisations Not reported
Other Private Sector Institutions
Teaching institutions, research institutes or think-tanks
Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

Figure 2 Total ODA by Channel, 2007-2018



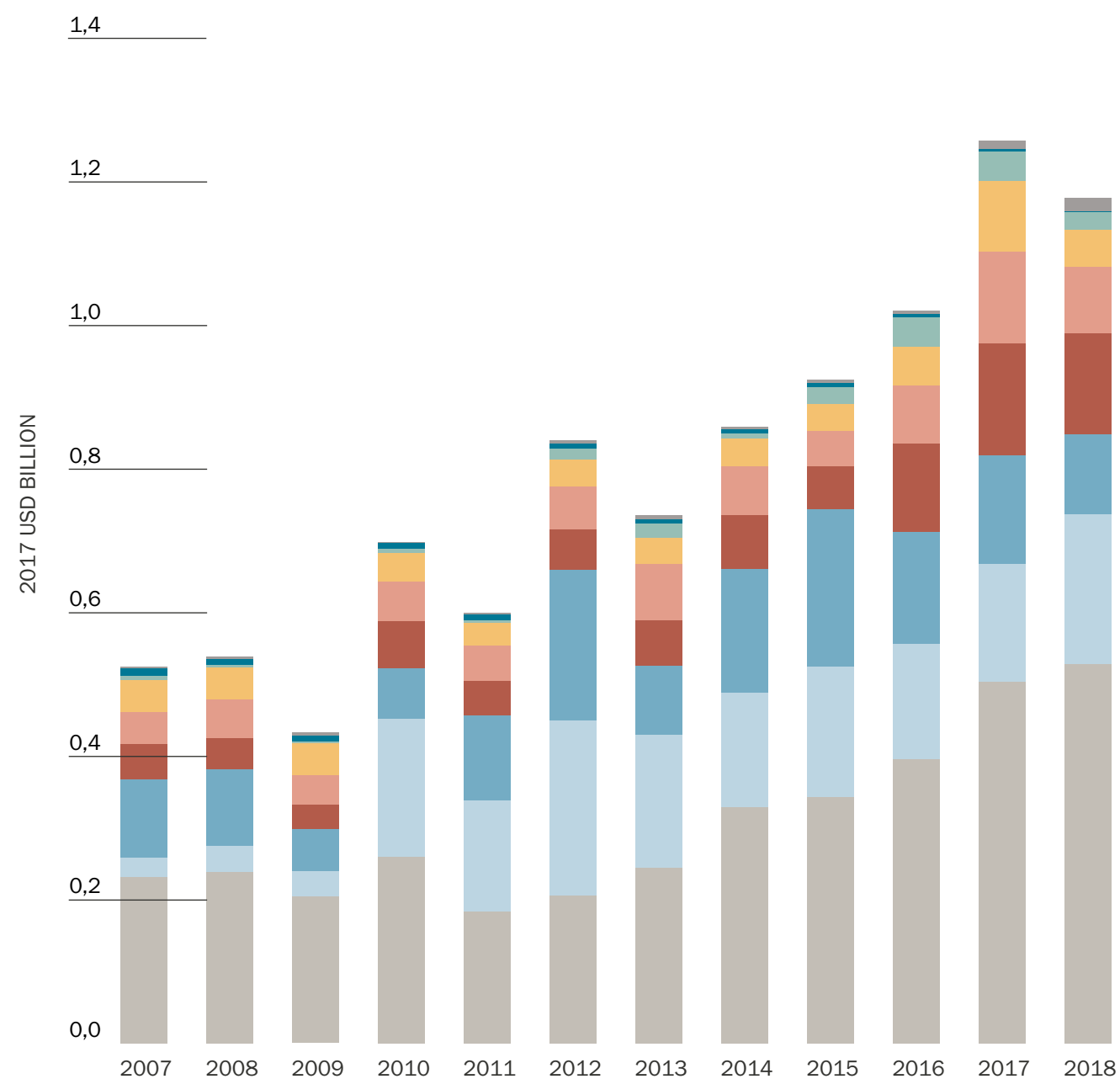
Source: OECD CRS Aid Activity database data 2020

has remained at similar levels, while aid to Niger has doubled since 2011. The near stagnation of support channelled through CSOs may be explained by the willingness of donors and the Government to strengthen state institutional capacities (at central and decentralised levels), by the limited absorption and resource capacities of CSOs, and by donors' concerns about the perceived lack of independence of these actors.

■ Social Infrastructure & Services ■ Humanitarian Aid
 ■ Commodity Aid / General Programme Assistance
 ■ Production Sectors ■ Economic Infrastructure & Services
 ■ Multi-Sector / Cross-Cutting ■ Unallocated / Unspecified
 ■ Action Relating to Debt ■ Administrative Costs of Donors

“Social Infrastructure & Services” comprise i) Education, ii) Health, iii) Population Policies/Programmes & Reproductive Health, iv) Water Supply & Sanitation, v) Government and civil society. “Commodity Aid / General Programme Assistance” comprise i) General Budget Support, ii) Development Food Assistance, iii) Other Commodity Assistance. “Production Sectors” comprise i) Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, ii) Industry, Mining and Construction, iii) Trade Policies and regulations, and iv) Tourism.

Figure 3 Total ODA by Sector, 2007-2018



Source: OECD CRS Aid Activity database data 2020.

The bulk of development support to Niger in the period 2007-2018 has been to the social sectors' infrastructure and services (30-45 per cent of total ODA). These include: health and population; education and vocational training; water and sanitation; social protection; democratic participation and civil society; decentralisation and support to subnational governments; public finance management; domestic revenue mobilisation; and employment creation. Humanitarian aid has increased about tenfold compared to previous years, in response to a food crisis in 2010. It has remained at similar levels since due to recurrent floods, related disease outbreaks, waves of refugees and displaced persons fleeing violence in neighbouring countries, and insecurity in border areas of Niger. The UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that 2.3 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance in Niger. There has been an increase, mainly since 2015, in assistance to: the production sector (e.g. agricultural policy, services and administrative management; industry; and private sector development) and economic infrastructure and services (e.g. energy and transport policy and infrastructure; business policy; administrative management; information and communication technology). This reflects, to some degree, the ongoing shift in the development paradigm,

with increasing attention to trade and private sector roles in development (see Figure 3).

Norway's main areas of support in Niger are consistent with the general trend of international aid to the country. Its focus has been on the social and productive sectors: education; democratic participation and civil society; human rights and social protection (with a focus on gender equality and preventing violence against women); support to agricultural policy, development and administrative management. Almost a quarter of Norway's assistance has been provided as humanitarian aid.

The bulk of development support to Niger in the period 2007-2018 has been to the social sectors' infrastructure and services.

Evaluation Findings

For the last decade, food security and agricultural production have improved. Poverty reduction and social services have progressed, but impacts of development aid have been limited by the increasing demographic pressure. Deep-rooted socio-economic and cultural obstacles continue to pose significant challenges to the empowerment of women, girls' education, and gender equality.



*Tuareg women working on the site of the Irhazer project funded by France near Agadez, November 2019. Five thousand pastoral families, whose livestock have been decimated by drought or floods in recent years, have turned to farming as part of the project.
Photo: Boureima Hama/AFP/NTB*



There have been positive results in building resilience to droughts and food crises, for example in the village of Mazadou, that avoided malnutrition during the drought in 2012. Photo: Benedicte Kurzen/UNICEF/Flickr

Rural Development and Food Security/Nutrition

Donor support over the years has succeeded in building national capacity for sustainable food production and supply, increasing productivity for selected agricultural crops, and strengthening food security and resilience to disaster and climate change. Targeted food assistance alone did not have the expected positive impacts on malnutrition. The combination of measures targeting agricultural production (e.g. improved agricultural techniques and food production, better access to markets) and more standard food assistance has had the strongest positive impact on child malnutrition in Niger (DIFD, WFP 2018), strengthening evidence that reinforcing the long-term food-producing capacity of households is more effective than traditional approaches to malnutrition.

In general, donor interventions have been successful in introducing and facilitating the adoption of innovations and new approaches to rural development, supporting agricultural production, and building local knowledge and capacities that have effectively contributed to improving food security and nutrition. Multi-year projects over a sufficient period of time, and involving key national partners (e.g. farmers' organisations,

Ministry of Agriculture), are seen as critical to achieving effective changes in practices and building local capacities to apply, sustain and expand innovative and sustainable agricultural practices (FAO 2016).

Climate Change Adaptation

Climate change adaptation has, to a large extent, been mainstreamed in sector interventions and has been aligned with the 3N Initiative ("Nigeriens Nourish Nigeriens"), the government National Policy on Climate Change, and national adaptation plans. Most of the priorities identified through these processes have been addressed through pilot projects that have informed other interventions, which disseminated good practices in the use of improved seed varieties, sustainable gardening, and livestock reconstitution, while supporting income-generating activities that did not, however, have a noticeable impact on households' income (UNDP 2019; Oxfam 2019; FAO 2016; USAID 2016).

Similar approaches – i.e. combining development of capacities, support for sustainable crop production/ gardening and livelihoods – have been used in conflict-affected areas to improve refugees' and host communities' resilience with positive outcomes in

terms of food security, livelihoods, and creating a local/community level market thanks to some investment, temporary jobs creation, and improved agricultural productivity (CARE 2018a; USAID 2018b; USAID 2016). Evaluations concur that farmers in agricultural and silvopastoral areas in Niger have adopted sustainable land management practices, and local communities have incorporated climate resilience in their local development plans as a result. These positive outcomes have prompted other communities in non-targeted areas to adopt similar practices, thus extending the impact of interventions to other zones. The uptake of good practices has been more limited when it comes to the maintenance and expansion of infrastructure development, even small infrastructure (e.g. water, sanitation).

There is a high level of awareness of climate change risks in Niger at the national level, as illustrated by the policies developed and adopted – namely, the 2014 revised National Strategy and Plan of Action for Climate and Variability (SNPA-CVC) and the mainstreaming of climate adaptation in the 2014-2023 Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production and in the Strategic Framework for Sustainable Land Management (2015-2029). Projects have been generally successful in raising awareness and in developing local level capacities,

contributing to a better understanding of climate change, both among administrative and technical communal services, and in agricultural and pastoral communities. They have been effective in achieving behaviour changes in agricultural and environmental management practices and use of technologies, resulting in better food security, nutrition practices, and communities' resilience to climate change.

Education

The education sector in Niger has progressed significantly. In 2018, over 65 per cent of children were enrolled in primary school, compared with only 26 per cent in 1999 (World Bank 2018, net enrolment rate). However, the high population growth demands larger investment in teachers' training, salaries and infrastructure. Enrolment is particularly low in rural areas and among girls and nomadic children, drop-out remains high (World Bank 2018), and the quality of education is poor (UNICEF 2020). The Government has adopted the Education and Training Sector Plan for 2014-2024, a reference document for national and external support to the sector. Total public expenditure for the education sector almost doubled between 2010 and 2015, although it has dropped since (World Bank 2020).

Projects have been generally successful in raising awareness and in developing local level capacities, contributing to a better understanding of climate change.

Development assistance has also contributed to strengthening decentralised capacities and regional education programmes.

Through budget support, sector financing allocations and project funding, donors have supported government efforts to improve education, particularly in primary education access and completion, and vocational training. Donor support has promoted universal access and quality education, by focusing on out-of-school children (Strømme Foundation 2018) and by supporting alignment of the curricula of madrassas and informal schools with the basic Niger education curricula for better quality and equal opportunities to continue education or to find a job (UNICEF 2018c). Development assistance has also contributed to strengthening decentralised capacities and regional education programmes (LuxDev 2016d).

Overall, sectoral interventions have had a positive impact, although in some cases it has been more limited than expected or in comparison with other countries. For instance, one project verified a lower rate of out-of-school children in Niger reintegrated into the formal primary school in 2015 who, by May 2018, remained enrolled (33 per cent), compared with other countries in the region (56 per cent in Burkina Faso and 71 per cent in Mali) (Strømme Foundation 2018). Luxembourg's support to the Education Development Programme in Dosso, on the other hand, was said to have contributed to improving the planning and

management capacities of sector's regional and departmental institutions, and contributed to a five or sixfold increase in children's enrolment and school attendance in the period between 2012 and 2016, and a 13 per cent decrease in adult illiteracy in 2016 compared with figures for 2011 (LuxDev 2016b).

Another important area of sectoral support has been vocational training and skills development targeting mainly youth. The Government adopted a National Programme for Vocational and Technical Training for the integration of young trainees, aimed at improving the level of education and skills of the younger population. Vocational training has been used both as a means for integrating youth into the socio-economic fabric and for preventing radicalisation in areas of influence of Islamist radical groups such as Boko Haram in Diffa/Lake Chad region. The impact of these interventions is, however, not clear from what could be extracted out of the selected evaluations (LuxDev 2016d; UNICEF 2018c).

Health and Population

Through budget support, sector funding allocations and project interventions, donors have supported government policy plans and efforts to improve efficiency and quality of healthcare (e.g. supporting

implementation of the National Health Development Plan). Improved health indicators since the 1990s suggest that sector interventions, combined with other improved conditions (e.g. nutrition, food security), have made a positive contribution, as reflected in the increase of average life expectancy – from 43 years old in 1990 to 62 in 2018. Sustainability, particularly with regard to hygiene and sanitation, is generally positive. Beneficiaries appear to continue the good practices introduced by interventions (USAID 2018c).

Evaluations of selected sector interventions find, however, that impact in terms of a sector-wide approach was only modestly achieved. The shortcomings are partly attributed to several missing elements, related to: (i) quality and relevance of sector strategies and annual work plans; (ii) country capacity and systems for financial management, procurement, and strategic management; (iii) quality and functionality of partnerships with national and international actors and stakeholders; and (iv) predictability and flow of funds and the absorptive capacities of implementing agencies. Part of the difficulties in demonstrating sector results also lies in the absence of monitoring systems to systematically measure and provide evidence of improvements in the service delivery efficiency and quality of care (Independent Evaluation Group 2016).

Alongside traditional support to the health system in Niger, there were small-scale innovative approaches, such as the mobile clinics for primary healthcare in regions already poorly covered by the health services and affected by insecurity. The mobile health clinics are considered a relevant strategy for the context of regions like Diffa that host many refugees and displaced persons and where health services were already unable to cope with the population needs before the crisis. Weaknesses in the collection of data did not allow for drawing conclusions on the efficiency, cost-effectiveness and impact of the mobile clinics, in terms of the level of increased access to healthcare and sanitary coverage. Immunisation, reproductive health and nutrition have nonetheless improved in targeted areas. The sustainability of benefits of this type of interventions is, however, problematic in the absence of resources and capacities in the national health system to maintain the mobile clinics (UNICEF 2018b).

Some interventions targeting health (reproductive and maternal health in particular), education and child protection (e.g. on legislation criminalising early or forced marriage) also addressed the critical issue of demographic growth. The World Bank Multi-Sector Demographic Project, for instance, aimed at strengthening Niger's capacity to address demographic



Screening for malnutrition at a health centre in Dogo, 2018.
Photo: Ollivier Girard/European Union/Flickr

challenges. The project targeted both governmental officials and the general population, with a specific focus on women. However, weak capacity of the ministry and socio-cultural challenges have limited the impact of the project. Understanding of population growth implications has increased, but attitudes and behaviour regarding population and reproductive health issues are found to have changed very little and remain a significant challenge (Independent Evaluation Group 2016).

Peace, Security and Migration

Funding for conflict prevention and peacebuilding represents a small share of ODA, but its logic has informed interventions in other sectors. For instance, interventions in education, land and water management, climate change adaptation or livelihoods are credited with having helped stabilise Niger, strengthening local capacities and mechanisms for preventing and managing conflict factors such as land and water; reducing intra- and inter-community violence; supporting socio-economic integration of youth at risk of radicalisation; easing tensions and promoting social cohesion and community resilience through livelihoods and the provision of basic services (e.g. to refugees/displaced and host communities); and promoting intra- and inter-religious dialogue, as

well as community dialogue (CARE 2018b). Some of these interventions were, however, too short-term to consolidate social cohesion (USAID 2016). Continuity of support for these types of interventions is an issue, even if, in some cases, other interventions followed up with similar approaches (e.g. in Diffa, the border areas with Mali and Burkina). Furthermore, external factors continue to challenge effects and impact on development gains as security concerns take priority and deteriorating security conditions in some areas limit populations' access to basic services and economic development.

Funding for border and migration management has increased significantly since 2015, through a dedicated EU Trust Fund (EUTF 2020), as did security and counterterrorism activities – most of which do not count as ODA. An increasing share of Niger's budgetary resources since 2015 has gone into the security sector, partly in response to external priorities and pressure. This has raised concerns among national and external development actors that investment on security comes at the expense of the social sectors, and has sparked public protests. The negative impacts of security and migration measures on the livelihoods of communities most affected by conflict or in migration corridors have further triggered social discontent.

Interventions are credited with having helped stabilise Niger, strengthening local capacities and mechanisms for preventing and managing conflict factors such as land and water.

Youth and Employment Creation

With 50 per cent of Niger's population under the age of 15 years old and with one of the highest population growth rates in the world, job creation would seemingly be a top priority for the country. However, out of 50 employment-related projects in Niger from 2007-2018, reviewed by a World Bank study with regard to support to employment for youth (World Bank 2019a), only 15 specifically targeted youth (15-35 years old), and their beneficiaries represented less than 2 per cent of the overall estimated target beneficiaries. Due to population growth, the projects aimed at youth have reached less than 8 per cent of youth entering the labour market, and focused mainly on the more educated groups. Furthermore, there is no conclusive evidence that this support has helped youth to secure employment in the fields they trained for or to improve their revenues. Donor support in this area appears, however, to be adapting to the demographic reality of the country in ways that may bear more conclusive results in the future: While earlier interventions tended to focus on temporary work opportunities, often related to humanitarian relief and recovery interventions, newer projects have focused increasingly on promoting jobs and youth initiative through the provision of cash grants or in-kind inputs. (World Bank 2019a).

Across sectors, the large investment in rural development is found to be well targeted, but there may have been more opportunities to include youth than were seized. There is also no clear evidence that technical training, a dominant feature of employment-related projects, has improved youth employment prospects and revenue. Furthermore, capital-based support has been a weak link in many of these interventions. Institutional co-ordination is found lacking, and employment-related projects lack inclusiveness, leaving behind the less skilled and disadvantaged youth and focusing primarily on the best trained (World Bank 2019a). Overall, evaluations highlight that government and donor efforts to promote job creation need to go hand in hand with strengthening the formal local private sector if the aim is to provide jobs for Niger's fast-growing potential labour force. Government reforms, scaled-up donor support and large-scale projects, ongoing or foreseen, provide opportunities to improve job creation, although implementation challenges and the deteriorating security environment may hinder or limit the potential benefits in the current context.

Gender Equality

Niger updated its National Gender Policy in 2017, committing to achieve gender equity and equality. An

Due to population growth, the projects aimed at youth have reached less than 8 per cent of youth entering the labour market, and focused mainly on the more educated groups.

important measure (that donors have been calling for) was the adoption of a Presidential decree in December 2017 extending the age of girls' education, with a view to delaying marriage and childbearing. This could possibly have a positive impact in the long-term, not just on maternal and child health, but also on women empowerment and the economy. However, development interventions related to these issues have so far had a limited impact in curbing early marriages and pregnancies, as indicated by the World Bank data mentioned above.

Evaluations of donor supported interventions find that there has been increasing attention to mainstreaming gender equality, women's rights/protection and empowerment across these sector interventions and in the design stage, namely in rural development/food security, nutrition, health and education, and peacebuilding projects. Efforts to achieve synergies between projects promoting gender equality also seem to be increasing. Gender-sensitive analyses are rarely conducted, though, and implementing partners often lack solid gender-specific capacities.

The selected evaluations note a positive impact of rural development and food security activities on women empowerment. There has been greater participation of

women in decision-making processes at the community level, improvement in the livelihoods of women, and, in some instances, a reduction of women's workload as a result of increased participation of men in tasks commonly carried out by women (Oxfam 2019; DFID, WFP 2018; FAO 2016). Gender equality interventions have had some success, changing women's attitudes towards gender-based violence and how men perceive women's rights and capacity (e.g. owning cash savings and deciding on their use; inheritance; own properties or assets). Progress in women's empowerment has been achieved mostly in terms of their participation in community decision-making structures, although it is less clear to what extent women's voices are effectively taken into account. Autonomy for women to decide on the use of assets within the family household remains mainly limited to widows or divorced women who are the single head of the household (World Bank 2019a). In some targeted areas, a decrease in early or forced marriage has been linked also to the sensitisation conducted by projects (CARE 2018b).

Interventions focusing on preventing gender-based violence (namely, in regions affected by Boko Haram terrorist activities) have promoted improved livelihoods and support to victims. They have pursued some degree of institutionalisation and sustainability through

advocacy, including showcasing prevention of violence against women and women empowerment to authorities (at national and local levels) and decentralised technical services. However, besides issues of resources, these are mindset and cultural changes that require much more sustained efforts and context-sensitive approaches. Duration of projects has often been too short to consolidate changes, and donor and national co-ordination have been too limited to allow for building on previous or ongoing activities (UN Women 2017).

Lessons

Aid interventions, provided mainly through the public sector, have been aligned with the overall national development and sector strategies, promoting country ownership and ensuring donor harmonisation. However, there is a lack of strong monitoring systems and capacities for data collection of results and impacts of development interventions to inform policy and project design.



*A teacher and her students in class, Tilaberri Region, April 2017.
Photo: Kelley Lynch/GPE/Flickr*

Strenghts

Development aid to Niger has mostly targeted policy areas that are relevant to the needs of the country and that are aligned with the government priorities. Migration management support has been clearly an external priority more than a national one in Niger, although some degree of common ground has allowed co-operation in this area to develop.

Aid interventions, provided mainly through the public sector, have been aligned with the overall national development and sector strategies, promoting country ownership and ensuring donor harmonisation. Multi-year funding and long-term projects have favoured national and local partners' involvement and mobilisation, and national and local capacities development. These have been key elements to ensure contextual relevance and to achieve results and durable changes – especially in terms of food security, thanks to innovative and sustainable agricultural practices and climate change adaptation. Dissemination of knowledge and good practices has ensured the rolling out of knowledge and sustainable practices into other communities, thus extending the benefits and the impact of interventions (e.g. farmer field schools, community-based Dimitra Clubs – latter being

community spaces for exchange of views and sharing of information aimed at promoting the participation of women and men (of all ages) in development actions).

Development aid has worked at different levels. It has contributed to the development of national policy, legislation, strategies, policy plans, and to strengthening management and operational capacities of central level actors. It supported processes and capacities also at local level (e.g. decentralised services, community-level actors) for implementation of legal frameworks, operationalisation of policies, but also for local stakeholders to voice their views and have input into policy and legislative design processes, such as the Loi d'Orientation Agricole (agricultural orientation law). There has been a clear effort to generate synergies between the policy and operational levels, and between national and local levels, which in some areas – such as food security, and sustainable land and water management – has achieved positive results and durable impacts.

Weaknesses

Despite the steady increase in development aid to Niger over the last decade and the attention to strengthening institutional capacities, financial resources and national



Children in the streets of Agadez. Photo: Hannes Rada/Flickr

Evaluations in general concur on the lack of strong monitoring systems and capacities for data collection of results and impacts of development interventions to inform policy and project design.

management and absorption capacities remain insufficient, given the scale of the needs and the demographic challenge.

The scale and continuity of interventions provide both positive and negative learning. The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) "farmer field schools", for instance, have proved to be effective in disseminating and promoting the uptake of innovative and sustainable farming techniques and practices. However, pastoral field schools did not have visible results, due to the relatively small scale of this FAO pilot and the lack of follow-up (FAO 2016). In addition, implementing partners often lack relevant expertise and long-term funding to scale-up interventions. Gender-specific expertise, in particular, is weak.

Evaluations in general concur on the lack of strong monitoring systems and capacities for data collection of results and impacts of development interventions to inform policy and project design. For many projects, evaluations are not in the public domain, and many of those that are available are weak or provide mostly anecdotal evidence. Some sector interventions have achieved sustainable effects and continue to roll out knowledge and good practices, especially in the food security and agricultural sector. However, it has

been more problematic to ensure sustainability – for instance, of infrastructure maintenance, the transfer of responsibilities and competencies from project staff to the state administration, or continuity of longer-term societal changes through small short-term and discontinued interventions.

Gaps

Development aid in Niger covers the most relevant sectors and needs. Findings from thematically-relevant evaluations concur, however, on the need to better integrate emergency and development interventions, especially in projects aimed at building resilience and improving the management of disasters and food crises. The COVID-19 crisis has further highlighted the still-enormous needs and poor coverage of the health sector, and the weakness of social protection mechanisms to cope with the socio-economic impacts of crisis.

Dialogue between donors and the Government is open and collaborative enough to allow the addressing of more thorny issues, such as demography and gender equality issues. Despite some progress, related policies and measures remain weak. The Government appears wary of moving against deeply-

entrenched cultural beliefs and practices (or unsure of how to push through this agenda), especially in the face of a growing influence of conservative Islam, and when unpopular issues such as migration, the deteriorating security environment, and the backlash on the local economy of government response measures – including to the COVID-19 crisis – erode popular support. While donors see the key importance of moving forward on these issues, implementing partners do not always have the specific skills or the contextual understanding to achieve local buy-in to promote change on such deeply-rooted societal issues, nor do most interventions take a long-term coaching approach to these matters.

In light of the population growth and already pressing needs in Niger, the focus on private sector development and market access, skills development and jobs for youth is fundamental for inclusive growth, but is still only emerging in overall development assistance to Niger. For many donors, this would represent a shift in the development paradigm that may require different approaches and more adapted instruments. Furthermore, and despite the discourses on integrated approaches to fragile contexts, national and external actors still struggle to find effective ways to work across sectors. Few interventions effectively

seek to bridge humanitarian and development approaches, and few implementing partners seem to have the tools and skills to do so.

Looking Ahead

Addressing demography and gender inequalities in Niger will be a slow and lengthy process that requires a wide alliance and mobilisation involving political, religious and community/social actors, and would need substantial incentives for change. So far, this agenda seems to have been pushed mainly by donors, with some political sponsoring by the Niger Presidency. Although there have been efforts to involve community leaders and civil society actors, the efforts would need to be scaled up, sustained, involve a wider coalition of national and local leaders, and ensure context-specific cross-sector approaches.

Education and youth play a critical role in such a mindset change. The significant effort put on education over the years has not been sufficient to match the increasing needs of the sector due to the population growth. The quality of education is poor, the drop-out rate is high (especially among girls), and unregulated informal education structures have proliferated. Evaluations concur that investing in human capital

through education and skills training is critical for inclusive economic growth, development and stability in Niger. Support needs, however, to be more connected with market needs and link up with credit/financial solutions to incentivise private sector initiative. Evaluations and studies underline that reducing gender inequality would generate significant economic gains, creating the conditions for empowering women and curbing the demographic trend.

Despite the nexus mantra, integrating recovery, longer-term development and peacebuilding approaches has been an exception rather than the rule in ODA assistance to Niger, due to factors such as funding, mandates, programming cycles, and capacities. Evaluations underline the critical support provided by humanitarian aid, but also call attention to the perverse effects of persisting on an emergency mode only. A report by the global charity CARE International UK stated: “Today, depending on the projects and their location, populations move around and households duplicate each other, with 2 to 3 locations depending on the NGOs [non-governmental organisations] and aid distribution sites” (CARE 2018a: 34).

Methodology

This evaluation brief presents the synthesised main findings of 28 evaluations and reviews published since 2014 of major donor-funded programmes and large projects in Niger.



*Fishing on the river Niger, 2014.
Photo: Gert-Jan Stads/IFPRI/Flickr*

The evaluations reviewed for the brief were identified through a systematic search of global development co-operation databases, websites and report databases of individual multilateral and bilateral donors and CSOs. Through this search, a total of about 60 evaluations were found, and subsequently narrowed down to 28 with the help of certain selection criteria. The selection was made to ensure that: a) the main sectors and areas for development co-operation are covered; b) a good balance between different sources and channels of ODA exists; c) the evaluations are of a high scientific quality; and d) achieving a good mix of evaluations commissioned by large bilateral donors, multinational organisations and major international CSOs. While this approach resulted in a balanced sample, the fact that the Country Evaluation Briefs (CEBs) are, by definition, based on evaluations constitutes a degree of limitation as the available reports do not always cover all crucial areas of development co-operation and development challenges. To mitigate these limitations, this CEB also draws on a small number of relevant academic articles, policy studies, government publications and other types of assessment.



*In a region frequently hit by drought, these half-moon structures can play a significant role in preventing future disasters. They are designed to preserve the rain water when it next rains, refilling the water table and encouraging the regrowth of vegetation. Dosso, 2012.
Photo: Fatoumata Diabate/Oxfam/Flickr*

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Abbreviations

CEB	Country Evaluation Brief	OECD CRS	OECD Creditor Reporting System
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
DFID	Department for International Development, UK	UN	United Nations
EU	European Union	UNDESA	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
EUTF	European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa	UNDP	UN Development Programme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	UNFPA	UN Population Fund
FCFA	Currency (franc) of the Financial Community of Africa	UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
GNI	Gross National Income	US	United States (of America)
IEG	World Bank Independent Evaluation Group	USAID	US Agency for International Development
MUJAO	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mali)	USD	US Dollar
OCHA	UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs		
ODA	Official Development Assistance		
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development		

Commissioned by

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This report is the product of the authors, and responsibility for the accuracy of data included in this report rests with the authors alone. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Evaluation Department.

November 2020

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Cover photo: Désirée Von Trotha / DPA / NTB
*Migrants from sub-Saharan countries with
target Europe and goldminers on a lorry to
the goldfields of Djado shortly before leaving
Agadez; on these goldfields many migrants will
work to finance their further way to southern
Libya. January 4, 2016.*

Design and layout: Fete Typer

ISBN 978-82-8369-057-6
November 2020