

Lessons Learned from Niger's Rural Code

Paper #1 : An Introduction to Niger

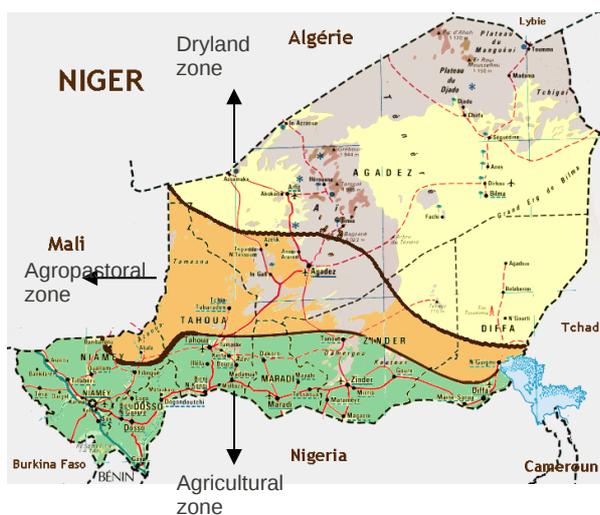
General Introduction : Niger's Facts and Figures

Striking Demographics
Total population : 15 878 271 inhabitants (2010) Total fertility rate : 7,75 children per women (2009) Population growth rate : 3,3% Population under age 15 : 49,6% (2009)
Severe Underdevelopment
GDP per inhabitant in US dollars PPP value: 700 (2008) HDI : 0.340 (182 th and ranking last in the world chart in 2007) Population living with less than 1/ less than 2 dollars a day : 62,1% / 86% Child and infant mortality rate (<5 years old) : 253‰ (WHO 2008) Illiteracy rate m/f (15-24 years old) : 72,2% / 88,4% Life expectancy at birth f/m : 42/43 years old, decreasing(WHO 2008) Access to drinking water : 46% of the population
An Economy Based on Agriculture and the Exploitation of Natural Resources
Share of agriculture in total GDP: 39% Agricultural labor force : 86,9% Population living in rural areas : 83,7%

Niger : a Primarily Rural Sahelian Country

Niger is a landlocked West African Sahelian country. It is bordered by Algeria and Libya in the north, Chad in the east, Nigeria and Benin in the south and Burkina Faso and Mali in the west. It possesses various natural resources, mostly mining deposits, most of which remain untapped. The country draws most of its income from uranium exports and the exploitation of large deposits located in the north, in Arlit and Akouta¹. Phosphates are also being extracted from the Niger valley, as well as coal and tin. Traditional salt industries operate near Agadez and Bilma, and on the banks of lake Chad. There is also iron and copper deposits, and oil has been discovered at the Libyan border.

Agro-ecological repartition in Niger



Niger nevertheless remains one of the poorest country in the world. Its economy is based mostly on food-producing agriculture and animal husbandry. Nearly 84% of the population lives in rural areas in 2010, and the primary sector hires almost 87% of the population. Livestock production is the second most important source of income for the country, with uranium production as the first one. Agriculture comes third.

National area : 1 267 000 km²

Dryland zone = 65 %

Agropastoral zone = 20 %

Agricultural zone = 15 %

Agriculture prevails in the southern area, a region that represents about 15% of the national territory but concentrates nearly three quarters of the population. Nigerien agriculture mostly rests upon small-scale family-owned farms. Work in the fields is not mechanized, and uses sometimes animal traction (but most of the time it is performed by

¹ One of the mining companies being French owned corporation Areva.

hand). On an average-size farm -5 ha- about 12 persons dwell while 6 are considered labour force. Millet, sorghum, manioc, cowpeas and rice (in the flood-recession areas of the river) are produced for local consumption. The average output reached 411 Kg/ha for millet and 290 Kg/ha for sorghum in 2009. Out of about 2.7 millions hectares of land fit for cultivation, only 40 000 are irrigated, which limits de facto off-season crops and induces strong rainfall dependency. Cash crops (groundnuts and cotton) are specific to the southern area that enjoys higher rainfall. Groundnuts are the main export crops with an output of 431 kg/ha.

Animal husbandry is practised in dry and semi-dry areas and covers the whole northern part of the country. In 2006, livestock amounted to 2.4 million cattle units, 4.9 million ovines, 7,7 millions caprines, 439 000 camels and 106 000 horses. However these figures can vary a lot from a year to another, depending on climate conditions. About 75% of livestock breeding activities can be described as nomadic and transhumant, with a high level of mobility for men and cattle, including cross-border flows. Herders are driven by their search for the water and natural pastureland that constitute most of the livestock's diet. Rainfalls therefore determine moves and stops, whether at a smaller or larger scale.

Great Challenges for the Future

The Nigerien political system has been particularly unstable for the past 50 years, both because of historical and political reasons. Like other countries of the sub-region, Niger suffered from the consequences of a fast-moving, complex and disruptive decolonization process. While this process was peaceful in appearance, the former colonies remained highly dependant on their ex-colonizers and international institutions². The political system inherited from the colonial era –no efforts were made to adapt it to local conditions - has failed to provide stability for the newly independent States, to enforce the populations' fundamental rights, and to foster appropriate development for States and societies.

A Brief Political History of Niger

After 38 years of French colonization, Niger became independent in 1960. The first President, Hamani Diori, was elected by the National Assembly and remained in charge until the 1974 military coup. Niger was thereafter ruled by the Supreme Military Council with Seyni Kountché as a leader. Kountché's political activities focused on economic recovery following the 1973 drought and subsequent food crisis, and on maintaining cooperation policies with France, especially for uranium mining.

When Kountché died in 1987, the country entered a transition period. A new Constitution was passed in 1989 and brought civilians back in charge, although in the context of a unique party system : the National Movement for the Development Society (*Mouvement National pour la Société de Développement - MNSD*). Following strong political restlessness, the army took over again in 1996. In 1997/98 uranium prices dropped, leading to an important economic and political crisis that brought about the assassination of the President in 1999. His successor was appointed head of state by a National Reconciliation Council (*Conseil de Réconciliation Nationale*) comprising only members of the forces. The army vowed to hand the power back to civilians, and planned a constitutional referendum and free elections, but it banned political parties.

ber 1999, Mamadou Tandja, ex-member of the army and leader of the MNSD, was elected head of state for a 5 years term. His action was mostly focused on the "President of the Republic's special program" (*Programme spécial du Président de la République*) with food self-sufficiency for the country as the main goal. He faced loud protests when he tried to change the Constitution in order to stay in charge after completing two terms in office, and was toppled by a new coup in February 2010. Those involved in the putsch created a "Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy" (*Conseil Suprême pour la Restauration de la Démocratie - CSRD*) and suspended the Constitution of the sixth Republic. The junta claims it will clean up the Nigerien political system, tackle corruption issues, create adequate conditions for sustainable development and better governance, and organize elections before February 2011 to bring civilians back in charge. The junta made itself ineligible for these upcoming elections.

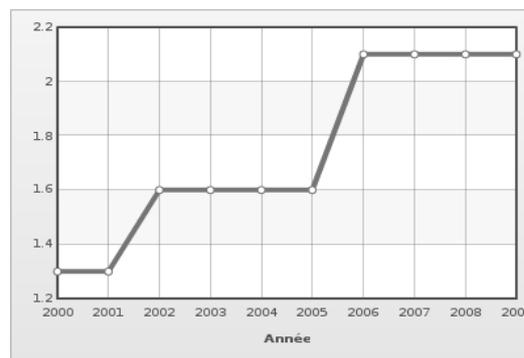
² The Nigerien government depends largely on bilateral and international aid to sustain its operating expenditure and public investments. It benefits from considerable loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in particular through the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) and the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative.

Like for other countries of the sub-region, Niger's debt, added up to widespread corruption and poor outcomes from the exploitation of resources (most of the time administered by foreign companies from the North) have kept the country highly dependent on international aid.

Niger's national debt represented nearly 18% of the GDP in 2009 and its foreign debt more than 2 billion US dollars. The debt service reached 10% of the country's goods and services in 2007 and accounted for about 30% of the State's total expenditure³. Meanwhile, Official Development Assistance amounted to 542 million dollars in 2007, about 13% of the Nigerien gross national income.

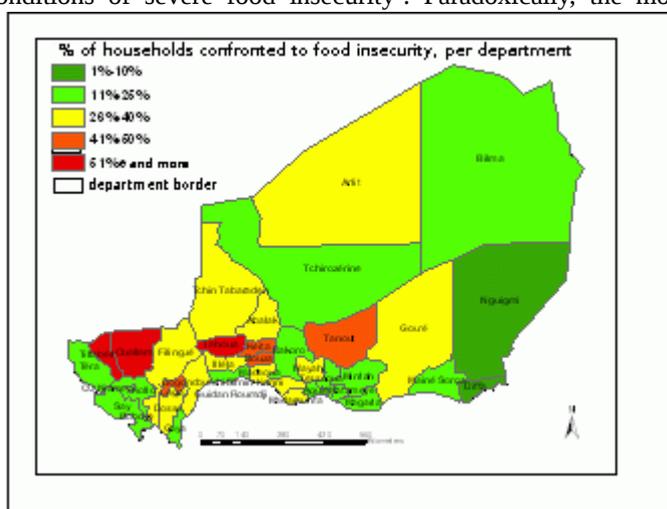
The greatest challenges that Niger faces now are obvious : to build a truly democratic system adapted to the country's specificities and difficulties, to achieve financial independence, but also to tackle poverty and end chronic food insecurity.

Niger – Foreign Debt (in billions of US dollars)



Source : Indexmundi

Despite extensive agropastoral activities, 32% of Nigeriens have no access to food security in 2010, half of them facing conditions of severe food insecurity⁴. Paradoxically, the most vulnerable households are those engaged in food-



Niger – Food insecurity rate in 2008

Source : USAID

producing agriculture or small-scale livestock production. The net cereal production per person reaches about 160kgs per year, while requirements amount to 250kgs : there is a 36% net gap to cover the country's global needs. Moreover production yields vary a lot and depend on climate conditions. The soaring population growth rate -3,3% per year, one of the highest in the world- exacerbates land disputes, with a terrible impact on food security for most of the population. Shrinking farmland and the subsequent end of bush-fallow rotation systems lead to soil-surface degradation and lower agricultural outputs, as well as a gradual encroachment of farmland over pastureland, and even more disputes between herders and farmers, but also farmers and other farmers, herders and other herders. Moreover, successive ecological crisis and especially the terrible droughts of 1973/1974, 1984/1985 and 2004/2005 created new pressures on land and

natural resources. Droughts have an impact on cattle movements, and flocks tend to push south for water and pastureland, causing damage to crops before harvests, and once more heightening tensions within the rural world.

In this context, and in the absence of a real capacity to change the demographics, one of the most urgent step to take in order to tackle poverty and food insecurity in Niger consists in promoting a concerted rural and agricultural development policy, as well as securing the rights of small farmers and herders on land and natural resources.

This context explains how crucial the development of a Nigerien Rural Code was, and we provide here some educational material to document the issue.

3 Source for figures : Committee for the Abolition of the Third-World Debt (CDATM – Comité pour l'Annulation de la Dette du Tiers-Monde).

4 Source for figures : joint survey carried out by WHO and USAID.