

NIGER

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About Niger

- 14 million people live in Niger. (World Development Indicators database -2005) According to the most recent UN Human Development Report (2005), Niger is the poorest country in the world with over 60% of the population living on less than \$1 a day.
- Average income per head of population is only \$240. (World Development Indicators database - 2005) In the UK it is \$37, 600 (World Development Indicators database -2005)
- Constitutional government was re-established following Presidential and legislative elections in October and November 1999 after a coup in April 1999.
- 45 % of children are enrolled in primary school (World Development Indicators database -2005). 100% of children in the UK are enrolled (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2004)
- The average life expectancy is 45 years (World Development Indicators database -2005). It is 79 years in the UK. (World Bank Development Data 2005)
- 259 children out of every 1,000 die before the age of five (World Development Indicators database -2005). The equivalent figure in the UK is 6 (World Bank Development data 2004)
- An estimated 1,600 women die in childbirth per 100,000 live births (UN Human Development Report (2005). The equivalent figure for the UK is 11. (World Bank Development Data 2004)
- Around 1.1% of the population is living with HIV/AIDS (World Development Indicators database - 2005). In the UK 0.11% of the population live with HIV/AIDS. (UNAIDS & WHO report on the Global Aids Epidemic 2004)
- The average annual population growth rate over the past 5 years was around 3.3% (World Development Indicators database – April 2006)
- 46% of the population has access to safe and clean water (World Development Indicators database – April 2006). In the UK the equivalent figure is 100%. (WHO & UNICEF Report 2004)

DFID: Working to reduce poverty in Niger

Over the past 5 years the UK Government has provided £9.5 million directly to Niger, mostly for debt relief, plus additional contributions of £47.6 million through multilateral agencies.

DFID assistance to Niger is focused on those areas where our international role, knowledge and experience mean we have a comparative advantage and can make a real difference i.e. girls' education, humanitarian assistance and debt relief. In January 2006, Niger received 100% debt cancellation from the IMF under the G8's Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative. The UK government has also cancelled 100% of Niger's outstanding bilateral debt.

Governance

Niger is a stable country - multi-party politics are now well established and President Tandja was re-elected in 2004 to his second 5-year presidential term with 65% of the vote in an election that international observers called generally free and fair. President Tandja, who is the current ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) Chairman, has indicated that he intends to pursue economic reform on the basis of good governance. There have been regular demonstrations against price rises and lack of student allowances, demonstrating the tensions of macro-economic stabilisation. There are also tensions between the government and nomadic Touareg in northern Niger, who feel excluded from the economy and social provision. Concern has been expressed by local and international human rights

organisations about widespread bonded labour: a rigid and non-permeable caste system with children from lower castes being handed over to those in a higher caste where they work without pay, but are given food and protection in return.

Education

Niger has made improvements in education provision over the last decade, for example, primary enrolment increased from 24% in 1990 to 38% in 2002. Education is a focus of the President's Special Programme of poverty reduction projects. In 2002 a 10-year development plan for education was launched in line with the country Poverty Reduction Strategy.

During the joint visit by Hilary Benn and his French counterpart Xavier Darcos to Niger in February 2005, the two ministers signed an undertaking to help Niger accelerate progress towards education and gender MDGs. DFID funding will be channelled through the French Development Agency to Niger in support of the Government's education plan, the first delegated cooperation arrangement with France in Africa.

DFID will provide £7 million over the next 3 years with the possibility of further support later.

Freedom from Hunger

Extreme poverty, marginal livelihoods, and other chronic issues lie at the heart of the crisis which affected Niger and other Sahelian countries in 2005, with inadequate rainfall and locust infestation the previous year adding to the problem in some areas.

The UK Government was one of the first donors to respond to the crisis in Niger when the UN launched its emergency appeal in May 2005. We provided £3.25m to the relief effort and followed up with a further £2m to aid the recovery process and ease further humanitarian stresses. Last year's crisis had a devastating impact on more than 3 million people in Niger. The loss of livestock and other assets has made many people highly vulnerable to further shocks.

On the back of reasonable food production some nutrition stability has returned this year with the humanitarian community far better placed and resourced to respond effectively to emergency needs. However, the legacy from the 2005 crisis suggests that up to 1.8 million people could still face acute food shortages in the coming months and up to 380,000 children in Niger could require food aid this year. We have agreed to provide an additional £1.5 m in 2006 to help prevent a repetition of last year's nutrition crisis. The funding will be provided through the UN and NGOs who are working on continuing relief operations in the country.

In addition, DFID has set aside £1,500,000 over three years to help address longer-term nutritional vulnerabilities in the Sahel.

Making progress against the Millennium Development Goals...

Niger is severely off track to meet all the MDG's . There has been slow and inadequate progress towards almost all targets. For example, Niger is severely off track to reduce hunger by half: 40% of infants remain underweight (2000); .severely off track for primary completion with only 25% of primary school children completing in 2004 and youth literacy less than 20% (2001). It is severely off track to meet all gender equity targets. Maternal mortality remains high at 1,600 per every 100,000 live births in 2004, and only 16% of births were attended by a skilled attendant (2000). Niger was severely off track for all four environmental sustainability targets. In 2002 88% (11.5 million people) did not have access to improved sanitation. (sources: World Development Indicators database 2000-2006)

For more information about DFID's work in Niger please visit www.dfid.gov.uk

If you are a journalist and wish to know more about DFID and its work to reduce poverty in Africa please call DFID press office: 0207023 0600.