

# profile

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NIGER COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION

## Alleviating poverty through natural resources management

**Niger is a landlocked country, and more than 80 per cent of its territory is covered by desert. Poverty is deeply entrenched and rural, especially in the Maradi region where population density is highest. Agriculture and livestock are the cornerstones of Niger's economy. However, lack of diversification makes the economy vulnerable to climate and market shocks, and traditional subsistence agriculture is under threat because of increasing population pressure and severe degradation of natural resources. Limited access to land for rural households, especially women, is a major obstacle to improving their incomes and food security. The country's socio-political landscape has been consistently marked by social unrest, armed internal conflict and political and institutional crises. Despite its difficult climate, Niger has sufficient water for agriculture – although only 30 per cent of land is currently irrigated.**

Since 1980, when it first launched operations in Niger, IFAD has contributed to the financing of eight projects and programmes in the country with a total cost of US\$234.6 million, 45 per cent of which covered by IFAD loans (US\$105.6 million). The Fund's interventions during the period reviewed (1997-2009) were guided by two country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOP) formulated in 1999 and 2006, respectively. The specific objectives of IFAD's intervention in Niger aimed at improving natural resources management; developing basic institutions; building capacity; increasing access to rural financial services and basic social services in rural areas; and upgrading agricultural and livestock productivity.

### Main evaluation findings

The evaluation confirms the relevance of IFAD-supported operations in Niger, inasmuch as they respond well to the needs of poor rural people and have shown flexibility when dealing with emergency situations, such as the food crises of 2004-2005. As a consequence, the 2006 COSOP adequately incorporated the strategic orientation of reducing the population's vulnerability to such crises by diversifying their incomes and boosting agricultural production. The geographical concentration on the Maradi region led to improved efficiency and impact, and helped forge partnerships with other donors.

Overall the evaluation found that, while limited in terms of geographic coverage, the country programme has made a significant contribution to improving incomes and food security in Niger. Agricultural production has increased notably, thanks to innovations related to natural resources management, such as farmer-managed natural



Workers harvesting "Diffa" peppers in Gueskerov. The project has contributed to the development of the "Diffa" pepper, an off-season crop well adapted to the region.

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### NIGER AT A GLANCE

**Population: 14.3 million (2008)**

**Population growth: 3.5% (2001-2007 average annual)**

**GDP growth: 3.4% (1997-2007 average annual)**

**Population living on less than US\$1 per day: 70% (2005 estimate)**

**Agriculture: 46% of GDP (2005-2008)**

**Life expectancy at birth (2009): 56**

**Human development index 2007: 0.374**

**IFAD lending since 1980: US\$105.6 million**

*Sources: World Bank, World Development Indicators 2008; UNDP, Human Development Report 2008.*

regeneration (which consists of protecting and managing re-growth of trees and shrubs in fields); land reclamation; community management of grazing land; and small-scale irrigation. Simple and accessible to even the poorest of them, these innovations were quickly picked up and disseminated by farmers. Furthermore, the tripartite relationship between projects, research institutions and beneficiary groups was useful in promoting agro-ecological, social and institutional innovations.

This positive dynamic stimulated by the portfolio was strengthened by other results, although more modest, such as the construction and rehabilitation of rural roads and the improvement of access to rural financial services, albeit temporarily. Finally, the portfolio made an impact on human capital, particularly in education, health, social capital and empowerment, especially of women, through the establishment and capacity-building of grass-roots organizations. However, the evaluation considers that, in many cases, these improvements are still vulnerable to external shocks, such as international market prices.

In overall terms, IFAD grants made for significant synergy with ongoing investment projects, thus contributing to achieving COSOP objectives. However, more effective use of benefits provided by the grants could have been achieved had a knowledge management strategy been put in place.



Millet being stored after a harvest in a village in the district of Aguié.

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## Key recommendations

The country programme evaluation drew up four recommendations. These are:

**Focus IFAD's strategic priorities** on strengthening institutional capacity and diversifying rural incomes, while continuing to target the Maradi region.

**Pursue the evolution to a programme approach** within the rural development strategy for Maradi region. IFAD should support the regionalization process by integrating project interventions into the regional rural development strategy, which would therefore constitute a government-managed programme, and by strengthening complementarities and synergies with ongoing interventions by both the Government and other donors. The next COSOP should foresee providing support to local partners in preparing and implementing the regional rural development strategy, and in strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy.

**Develop and implement an innovation agenda**, identifying priority areas for both innovation and scaling up. IFAD and the Government should fully exploit the experience of the *Project for the Promotion of Local Initiative for Development in Aguié* in terms of approaches to identify and promote farming innovations, without neglecting the funding of innovations and their scaling up beyond projects and Maradi region. To that end, the next COSOP should incorporate a realistic scaling-up strategy, making full use of non-lending activities.

**Adjust IFAD's operating model to the particular context of Niger** based on simplicity at the strategic and operational levels, and taking account of the capacity of implementing agencies and partners. Given the often unpredictable context, adequate resources should be provided for direct supervision and implementation, with focus on increasing the participation of IFAD, the Government and other partners.

### Further information:

Republic of Niger, Country Programme Evaluation, Report No. 2350-NE, May 2011, ISBN 978-92-9072-199-4, Independent Office of Evaluation, Via Paolo di Dono, 44, 00142, Rome, Italy. The full report and Profile are available online at [www.ifad.org/evaluation](http://www.ifad.org/evaluation); email: [evaluation@ifad.org](mailto:evaluation@ifad.org).