

# Youth of Niger: schooling and training as useful tools for inclusion

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### PITCH

Education and training can help drive escapes from poverty, and education policy needs to understand and deal with each barrier to this goal. Government and donors need to allocate increased budgets to reduce barriers to youth labour inclusion via education.

### MOTIVATION & CONTEXT

In recent decades, Niger has witnessed rising costs for access to public education and health services, and reduced recruitment of local youth for salaried public sector jobs. In the 2010s expenditure has somewhat stagnated or decreased in social sectors. However, several policy reforms have been prioritised in education, concerning teaching, funding and fees management, and protection of vulnerable students.

Young adults (18-35 years) in Niger are underemployed. The state's promotion of entrepreneurship as the solution for inclusion has led to widespread precarious and low wage employment.<sup>1</sup> Current education programmes seem not adequately aligned with the state's focus on entrepreneurialism. There are also wide urban/rural, gender and

wealth gaps in education achievements. The associated article<sup>2</sup> explores the challenges that education and training programmes face to reinforce youth inclusion in the labour market.

### METHODS

A multidisciplinary and mixed-methods approach<sup>3</sup> identifies how young people in Niger experience chronic poverty, sustained poverty escapes, or (re)impoverishment. A qualitative dataset collected in Tahoua and Zinder regions and national quantitative data consider how multiple drivers of poverty escapes or descents affect youth inclusion in labour markets, in this brief through education.

### RESULTS

Notwithstanding the dissatisfaction evoked by some groups in Tahoua and Zinder on the management of schools in the last decades and the barriers of access and completion of the school cycle for chronically deprived youth, the prisms of education and training/apprenticeship are found as means of inclusion in the labour market.

Most students in school attend public schools in the country, particularly at the primary level. However, the poorest children frequently drop out because of the overall costs of education (school fees, uniforms, furniture, etc.), reflecting direct and indirect rising costs of schooling. This is mitigated to a degree if parents are members of savings and credit groups, where savings can help pay these costs. There are also problems in the quality of teaching, such as dilapidated school infrastructure and outdated pedagogical approaches. The poorest individuals complain about the long distance from school, hunger of schoolchildren and the humiliation they endure due to their inability to cover school fees. The ability of formal education to contribute to a sustained poverty escape depends on the availability of adequate livelihood opportunities. Finishing secondary education via public schooling is associated with poverty escapes, yet this trend is stronger for wealthier households. Those who complete high school more often than others tend to find stable job opportunities, though even they face challenges.

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**Key words** Education, Training, Employment, Gender

**Geography** Niger

**Themes** Education, Employment, Youth, Poverty

**Find out more about this project:** <https://www.afd.fr/en/carte-des-projets/youth-inclusion-labour-markets-niger-evidence-tahoua-and-zinder>

To strengthen the inclusion of young people, efforts should be concentrated on supporting at the local level identification and tailoring of services for students from poor backgrounds.

Quranic education is seen as an important site of continuing education in Tahoua and Zinder, particularly for children dropping out of public school. However, the shares of individuals in the country with this as main source of education are generally lower for youth compared to adults, except for those in impoverished households (with high dropout). Quranic schools link young people to religious values, and can also provide opportunities for formal and informal jobs within Quranic education. However, many participants did not perceive strong network effects leading to other types of jobs. For stronger links, these schools should better integrate basic and technical skills.

Second chance education through training or apprenticeships vary in length from one week to two years, either being fee-based or requiring payment for participation. Informal training is a common practice, whilst formal vocational training and apprenticeships are often not open to the poorest. Both are useful to build incomes in Tahoua and Zinder, particularly when linked to comprehensive NGO programmes which subsidise the acquisition of assets. These NGO programmes are more useful when targeted to poor young women and men.

Women's efforts to obtain training and develop enterprises are preceded by careful renegotiations of gender and generational norms. These renegotiations involve working in innovative ways within local social contexts, whether enabled by standard education, or through meeting needs of the household or spouse. The support of older men

who recognise the challenges faced by younger generations has been crucial in this. Young women often train in agro-processing or tailoring services (grain and food processing, home-based work and sales) helped through NGO training. Young men access more vocational or informal training in mechanics, construction and carpentry. In spite of training provisions, access is uneven among socio-economic groups and by gender. Moreover, starting-up an activity and ensuring its continuity are major barriers to sustained poverty escapes. The scope of training programs should be expanded to target value chains in local areas. Their coverage should also be extended to more explicitly target youth in poverty, including by providing material to work on trades following the apprenticeship, which was otherwise a serious constraint to using the training received

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ The state should take further steps to expand investment in teaching quality and infrastructure. Local public schools should improve their accountability measure and clarify the information about fees structures, including the functioning of COGES and CGDES.
- ▶ Decentralised measures should be identified in favour of children from chronically poor households, to strengthen the identification efforts of local authorities and to adapt school programming towards localised measures such as free school meals or partial/seasonal school fee exemptions.
- ▶ The pedagogical approach should be modified to better respond to current challenges (digital, insecurity, climate change, health) and accelerate the process of introducing mother tongue teaching in early years to promote literacy and make education more accessible.
- ▶ Youth in the poorest households should be supported with comprehensive technical, business training and apprenticeships with materials provision. This will necessitate:
  - Strengthened support to existing structures that offer second chance education and their extension nationally to secondary cities.
  - Support for changing gender norms in programming so that young women and men can better exploit training and enterprise development.
- ▶ A better funded multipurpose youth entrepreneurship programme could be complemented by a job strategy to promote medium sized enterprises and local areas value-chain production, especially in light of the need to diversify the economy and reduce overreliance on natural resources.

<sup>1</sup> Shepherd, A., Harouna, A., Poggi, C., Diwakar, V., Diarra, A., and da Corta, L. (2021). Youth of Niger: entrepreneurship between struggle and norms renegotiation. Policy Dialogues n.51. Paris: AFD.

<sup>2</sup> da Corta, L., Diarra, A., Diwakar, V., Eichsteller, M., Harouna, A., and Poggi, C. (2021). Youth inclusion in labour markets in Niger: Gender dynamics and livelihoods. AFD Research Paper n.216. Paris: AFD.

<sup>3</sup> Diarra, A., da Corta, L., Diwakar, V. and Harouna, A. (2021). Mixed methods approach for research: combining the LASDEL ethnographic methodology with CPAN's critical realist poverty dynamics methodology to explore youth employment inclusion in Niger. AFD Research Paper n.217. Paris: AFD.