

How is gender equality included in education sector planning?

An analysis of power, voice and social change in Niger

Niger Country Report

Annex D.6 Niger Country Report

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List of Acronyms

CAMOS	Cellule d'appui à la mise en œuvre et au suivi de PSEF/ Support Unit for the Implementation and Monitoring of the Education and Training Sectoral Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CWD	Children with Disabilities
ESA	Education Sector Analysis
ESP	Education Sector Plan
INGO	International Non-governmental organisation
LEG	Local Education Group
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PTSEF	Plan de transition du secteur de l'éducation et de la formation
SNAEFF	National Strategy for Accelerating Girls and Women's Education
TFP	Technical and Financial Partner
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Context and overview of planning process

Although the last two decades have seen considerable progress on global commitments to address gender disparities in education, many challenges remain. Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are still furthest from equality in educational access and achievement, with factors such as poverty and location compounding with discriminatory gender norms to exclude girls from education (UNESCO 2022b). Through the [Gender at the Centre Initiative \(GCI\)](#), a program that encourages Ministries of Education to embed gender equality at the heart of education systems, a study was commissioned to examine how gender equality is integrated in education sector planning in 8 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Niger and Sierra Leone). The synthesis report identifies examples of good practice, opportunities and threats to promote gender transformative education systems. This country report presents the findings of the analysis for Niger.

The Education Sector Planning (ESP) process was led by the Support Unit for the Implementation and Monitoring of the Education and Training Sectoral Programme/ Cellule d'appui à la mise en oeuvre et au suivi de PSEF (CAMOS) in Niger, with support from an international consultant and representatives of 6 ministries responsible for education delivery.

This process started with the Education Sector Analysis (ESA) in 2018 and the subsequent evaluation of the previous ESP in 2019. Both documents highlighted significant inconsistencies in national statistical education data which was a stimulus for the development of a transition plan, the Plan de transition du secteur de l'éducation et de la formation (PTSEF)/Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2019-21. The ESP provides a three-year planning and review of key bottlenecks provided in the ESP 2014-2024. These include: i) availability of school infrastructure to solve issues relative to school access and the time allocated to learning in temporary shelters, ii) current teacher training, iii) availability of data, and iv) progression of students' grades especially by increasing access to secondary level and improving students' orientation. Out of these issues, only the first and the last, impact girls' education.

The development of the PTSEF/ESP takes place at the same time as the development of the National Strategy for Accelerating Girls and Women's Education (SNAEFF) which was validated in 2020. The PTSEF therefore refers to the SNAEFF, asking for its implementation.

The appraisal of the PTSEF was completed in October 2019. It assesses equity as being diluted within the Plan's three axes (access, quality, governance) despite some strategies related to the reduction of disparities included on access.

The following analysis focusses on the ESP 2019-21/PTSEF planning process in Niger. It is based on 13 interviews conducted with stakeholders from the Ministry, civil society organisations (CSOs), donors, technical partners and consultants directly involved in the process.

Thematic Findings

Political Economy

Political Will

There is political will to address gender issues as there is an understanding among top leaders that without solving these issues, the social and economic situation of Niger will not improve especially due to the very high demographic growth of the country. Advancing girls' education is therefore considered as one of the main solutions to limit the demographic growth which is a key issue for the new government. Discussion around gender actions to support girls' education is vivid with the launch of a presidential initiative on girls' boarding schools for secondary students.

The ESP 2014-2024 had planned to carry out a study to better understand the barriers to girls' schooling and to develop a Gender Strategy. This has been achieved successfully. The PTSEF focuses on the implementation of this Strategy. The PTSEF addresses two key concerns: (i) quality of the country's statistical data and (ii) pressing problems in the education sector related to access.

Lack of resources is also a common factor quoted by the majority of respondents for low delivery on gender responsive efforts. In addition, planning for the SNAEFF is not integrated within the Ministry's planning and the Ministry's planning is not well connected to the budget planning. It represents a challenge for money to flow towards the PTSEF and the SNAEFF.

Accountability

Every year a review of the execution by the Ministries and the local education group (LEG) of the Plan takes place. This is an opportunity to follow up the PTSEF's implementation and provide recommendations. The non-execution of the SNAEFF has been discussed during the ESP/PTSEF review. However, based on the current LEG structure, no gender experts and persons involved in the SNAEFF are part of the LEG or its sub-technical groups as a permanent member. A deep dive into gender issues within the LEG meeting is rare and specific technical expertise are often not called for contribution.

A CAMOS official said that PTSEF recommends approximately 8% of the national operating budget of the Ministry should be allocated to the implementation of the SNAEFF. Yet, this level of budget has never been allocated. This is also the case for others strategies which did not receive the allocated budget planed.

Relationships

Power and decision-making

Together, the international consultant, CAMOS experts and representatives of the Ministries were responsible for drafting the document. Multi-stakeholder consultations were done with technical and financial partners, INGOs, representatives of CSO and experts from the Ministries took place during the drafting process to get inputs. Presentation workshops were also conducted at the end of the process in the capital city and in all regions to receive feedback from a wide range of stakeholders (unions, parents, religious leaders, decentralized bodies, NGOs, etc.).

To understand the consideration of recommendations from the consultations, the representatives from CSOs and the INGOs reviewed the final document and were satisfied with the consideration of gender from the access to schooling viewpoint.

The planning process was also male led, with a significant number of males (12 out of 13) in the writing team. From this, it can also be inferred that the key personnel consulted from the Ministries were majority male as the law which provides for a quota of 25% of women in positions of responsibility within the Ministries is not respected.

Networks and Coalitions

The technical and financial partners (TFPs) influence the government through their funding, their interest and commitment to gender and guidance to integrate it in the plan. They have had the opportunity of reviewing the draft of the PTSEF and their comments were generally integrated. They, especially the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), did push on integrating gender dimensions. The lead of the LEG has also had the opportunity to discuss the plan with the Prime Minister.

“The PTSEF is developed to get funding. Therefore, if the funders say that one theme should appear in the plan you should integrate it” - CAMOS representative, Niger.

Another route of influence quoted involves building a common voice. This includes engaging organizations working upstream to discuss issues and to take decisions

on which issues to bring up with the Ministry. Lobbying also exists on specific themes such as children with disabilities (CWDs) which has led to the inclusion of a few sentences in the PTSEF.

Voices

Gender expertise

CAMOS' staff are experts in planning, statistics, monitoring and evaluation. From the interviews, it was observed that at least two members, have an expertise in gender. Additional gender expertise sits within the Ministries (Girls' Education Directors), UNICEF and national CSOs. All of the stakeholders were involved during the wider consultation for drafting the document.

A consultation during the drafting process took place with representatives of the gender units, but the quality of input was low, showing that people nominated to gender roles do not always have the necessary expertise and/or receive the needed capacity building. However, other personnel of the Ministries consulted during the drafting process had experience on gender.

For the development of the PTSEF, no gender expert was recruited. A CAMOS member further confirmed this stating, *"they thought everything has been discussed during the development of the SNAEFF"* for which an international gender expert had been recruited in the starting phase.

Findings from interviews indicate limited exchanges between the persons developing the SNAEFF and the ones developing the PTSEF.

Gender input from the discussions on SNAEFF to the PTSEF are also limited. However, it is important to note that experts from CAMOS participated in the SNAEFF and ensured that the strategy is reflected within the PTSEF. But key resource persons involved in the development of the SNAEFF were not consulted for the development of the PTSEF. As a result, the international consultant working on the plan, was not able to get good inputs on gender to feed the PTSEF although a whole group of stakeholders was working on the SNAEFF.

"The link between our sub-committee on quality and the SNAEFF committee was not strong. The SNAEFF group was a bit apart and the contact was not as strong as with the other groups" - Technical committee representative, Niger.

Voices of young people and communities

There were significant regional-wide consultation processes held with a wide variety of stakeholders including local government, parents through school

management committee, religious leaders and CSOs, etc. to look at the PTSEF draft and propose amendment. However, youth were not consulted. When stakeholders at regional level asked for modifications, Ministry's staff and NGO's staff leading the consultation process brought their request back to the CAMOS for amendment. The CAMOS did not provide answers either they did take their request into account or not. Stakeholders involved within this consultation process reported no modification requests on gender at that level. Three CSOs representing the coalition of women organizations were consulted during the planning process. They had the opportunity to share their view about gender issues.

Society

Social Norms

With regards to social norms, community and religious leaders have a strong influence. Awareness-raising campaigns involving theologians from major religious universities who are familiar with the content of the Qur'an in relation to girls' education have brought about a positive change in recent years. But in some instances, there is a lag in understanding the importance of girls' education.

Interviewees highlighted that if religious leaders are against a law or policy advancing gender norms, they have the power to mobilize the community. As the majority of people are illiterate, and there is strong adherence to the word of religious leaders. Interestingly, religious leaders today do not present girls' access to education as a threat, but they do present girls' empowerment as one. Advocacy on areas introducing reproductive health education, postponing the age of marriage, etc therefore remain more problematic. These are also sensitive areas for many parents and communities in Niger.

Before the start of the planning process for the PTSEF, a decree setting the age of marriage at 16 years old and enabling the right of married women to continue to go to school, was passed. However, while measures to support its implementation were discussed, nothing was concretely written in the Plan.

Debate on social norms was limited within the development of the PTSEF as priorities laid elsewhere. Requests from gender experts were mainly to ensure the SNAEFF was part of the PTSEF as a reference document in order to support its funding and implementation. Their requests were accepted.

Resistance

Gender issues were confined to an issue linked to school access. Interviewees highlighted a resistance to look at gender issues more broadly mainly due to a lack of capacity and fear of communities and religious leaders' reactions.

Cultural and social norms is also observed as a resistance to change. Ministry executives can analyse the education context through gender and develop strategies to reduce gaps but culturally they may feel close from the current status quo on social norms.

SWOT analysis

3.1 Strengths

There is acknowledgement by the Ministries of the inequity between girls and boys in education, the presence of gender experts and recognition of CSOs influence and efforts on promoting gender and allowing actions to be taken to advance girls' schooling.

The inclusion of diverse voices in the consultation process is also important for creating a mobilisation for education.

3.2 Weaknesses

The sector faces many difficulties which led the technical partners to require the development of the PTSEF occulted on gender issues in education.

The PTSEF terms of reference were very specific about the problems to be solved for the education sector and gender was not the main preoccupation even if the decisions on the grade progression or access in general aimed to improve the schooling of girls.

The PTSEF took place when reflection on gender issues were happening for the development of the SNAEFF. Unfortunately, the link between both processes was limited and key gender experts involved in the SNAEFF were not consulted deeply for the PTSEF. At the same time, substantive inputs on gender, especially working strategies, were difficult for feeding into the PTSEF.

Nomination to the position is the responsibility within the Ministries and not based on competences but political reasons. Positions of responsibility are distributed in proportion to the parties that supported the President's party. The party will appoint faithful members to the party not the one fitting the requirement for the positions. As a consequence, there is low assiduity and a high turnover. A recent decision to limit political nomination for the Ministries of education has been taken recently.

3.3 Opportunities

There is space for discussion and collaboration on gender. The LEG has just established thematic strategic groups, including one on the SNAEFF to coordinate and facilitate discussion.

The mid-term review planed in the SNAEFF is an opportunity to generate information on the implementation of the strategy, understand key lessons learnt, successes and bottlenecks. These should also feed the next ESP by highlighting what can work for who (as girls are not a homogeneous group) and propose a capacity building plan to work on the operationalisation of those strategies.

The current context seems ripe to advance gender in and through education. Education data has also been improved. Communities are more receptive to girls' education and request better education services to accommodate girls. Planning officers at the regional level will be trained on gender education

planning. Decentralizing the planning process to the level of the county office can also support the advancement of gender.

Political commitment towards girls' education has become stronger recently with the arrival of the new president and the launch of the girls boarding school for secondary school initiative. These positive developments can advance the gender agenda considerably.

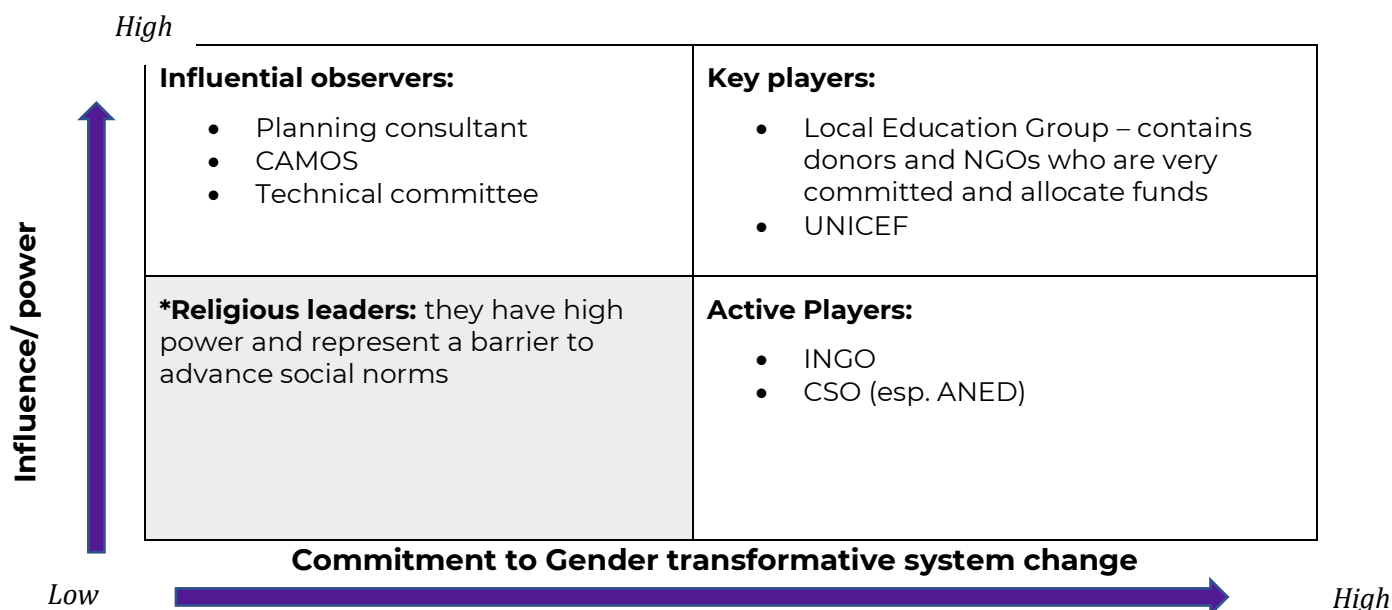
3.4 Threats

The SNAEFF, for which the PTSEF planned funding, has not been implemented due to the non-allocation of funds, the limited funding support of the technical partners, the limited implementation capacities and difficulties in planning.

The gross enrolment rate is currently decreasing in all regions in Niger (not only the ones affected by conflict). A study on school demand revealed disenchantment of mainstream schools in favour of religious schools.

Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder Matrix



Key informants list:

Ministry	<p>Abdelkader Galy, CAMOS/PSEF</p> <p>Abdou Moumouni Aboubacar, CAMOS/PSEF</p> <p>Abdou Kinassa, CAMOS/PSEF</p> <p>Alhouseini Mamane, Initial and In-service Training Direction, Ministry of Education</p> <p>Mariama Chipkaou, Girls' Schooling Direction, Ministry of Education</p>
CSOs	<p>Aissa Adamou, Plan International</p> <p>Bori Assoumane, Plan International</p> <p>Fodi Halima, ANED</p> <p>Abdou Lokoko, National network of education sector organizations</p>
Consultants	<p>François Robert, International Consultant</p>
Technical partners	<p>Ramatou Madougou, UNICEF</p> <p>Julie Maline, AFD</p> <p>Charlotte de Grauwe, EU</p>

List of Documents Reviewed

1. Dr Alberto Begué Aguado, Evaluation ex-ante du Plan de Transition du Secteur de l'Education et de la Formation 2020-22 au Niger, Oct. 2019
2. République du Niger, Plan de transition du secteur de l'éducation et de la formation 2020- 2022, Oct. 2019
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4. République du Niger, Aide-Mémoire de la deuxième revue sectorielle gouvernement – PTF – société civile au titre de l'année 2018, Juin 2019