

Improving the quality of education for children from rural communities in Niger

April 2014 to March 2015



OXFAM

FINAL REPORT

YEAR 3 OF A 3 YEAR PROJECT

Background

In Niger, over one million children do not go to school, of whom three quarters are girls. As a result, less than a third of the adult population can read or write. This is a significant cause of poverty; Niger is now the world's least developed country. Poverty itself then further prevents the provision of education, as families are forced to send their children to work rather than to school to earn much needed money, and teachers often lack vital training and resources.

The Project

Oxfam ran a range of activities to help children enrol and then stay in school. This included building and equipping classrooms, and building toilets within schools. Oxfam promoted the importance of girls' education through awareness raising campaigns. Teachers were provided with essential training, allowing them to better understand the curriculum and develop teaching techniques. Activities also increased community involvement in the education system, supporting parents to take part in decisions about how schools are run, and communities to lobby the government for increased support for education.

Key achievements

- In January 2015, a total of 4,486 pupils were enrolled in all 18 project schools, up from 2,700 students when the project began.
- In January 2015, 51 per cent of children enrolled at project schools were girls.
- This number is higher than expected and gives an indication that parents are now willing to send their children, including girls, to school and keep them in school for as long as possible.



A group of students examine the hygiene kits at Pétel Kollé School, Bankilaré. Photo: Daouda Mounkaila/Timidria.

Enhance school facilities

Two blocks of two classrooms were built at Senokobadjé and Pételkolé Schools. Previously, classes took place in straw huts or under trees, which deterred many students from going to school, and made the education system appear less credible to parents. However, building classrooms out of permanent materials will protect pupils against bad weather, improve learning conditions, and encourage attendance. This will allow 200 students to attend school in safe conditions. The classrooms were equipped with solar electricity which will power lighting, making it possible for students to continue learning in the evening, and teachers to prepare their lessons. The new classrooms are also used to provide adult literacy lessons at night. Lessons provide parents with information on how educational resources are managed, making them more likely to send their children to school, and enabling them to become involved with decisions regarding education on both a local and national level. 3,846 textbooks were then purchased for pupils and 225 coursebooks for teachers. This has given teachers sufficient teaching and learning materials for themselves and for students, enabling them to deliver better quality lessons which are more engaging for students.



Children use hand washing buckets to teach each other how to wash their hands in Aviation village. Photo: Amadou Idrissa/ADD.

Improve sanitation and public health

Two blocks of latrines were built in Seno-kobadjé and Pételkolé Schools, providing 328 students and 11 teachers with access to clean and safe toilets. This will encourage attendance, particularly for girls, who were previously put off from going to school as they could not go to the toilet safely or in private. Partner schools also received 36 hygiene kits which included hand-washing equipment, soap, wheelbarrows, rakes, water barrels, and brooms. This equipment will help local people to keep schools clean, allowing new facilities to be maintained, and providing a better place for children to learn in.

Hand-washing equipment was used to introduce children to the idea of systematically washing their hands with soap after using the toilet, and before and after eating. Teachers were trained on the “Child to Child” approach, where trained children teach other children about good hygiene practices such as hand washing. This has proved an effective way of encouraging good practices, as children are likely to follow the example of others. It is likely that hand washing will spread through the community, as children tell their friends and families what they have learnt, which will help more people to prevent the spread of diseases.

Encourage high-quality teaching and productive learning

60 teachers took part in training sessions led by school advisors and inspectors, which focused on teaching French, reading, and Maths. The sessions introduced teachers to teaching methods which directly engage students, and help them to learn through actively taking part in activities. For example, during the training sessions sketches and role plays were organised by pupils with the support of their teachers. This is a technique that can then be used in the classroom to help students learn through interacting with others.

The project also organised training sessions for 126 members of School Management Committees and School Institutions, organisations with a responsibility for how schools are run. Through these sessions, people gained the knowledge and skills needed to develop action plans for schools, and implement them effectively. The action plans developed included a range of activities, such as strategies to keep schools clean, and encourage the attendance of both students and pupils.

Reading clubs were set up in all 18 project schools. Each club helps students to organise into groups and help one another to improve their reading skills. This both improves students’

reading abilities, and encourages children to support each other to learn. In total 87 reading clubs were formally set up, benefiting 1,880 students. Reading clubs were established with the support of School Management Committees, teaching institutions, the Association of Educating Mothers, and school governments. This increased community involvement in schools, creating trust within the school system. Combined with other project activities, such as the construction of concrete buildings and toilets, this increases the credibility of schools, and is likely to change parents' mindsets, making them more likely to send their children to school.

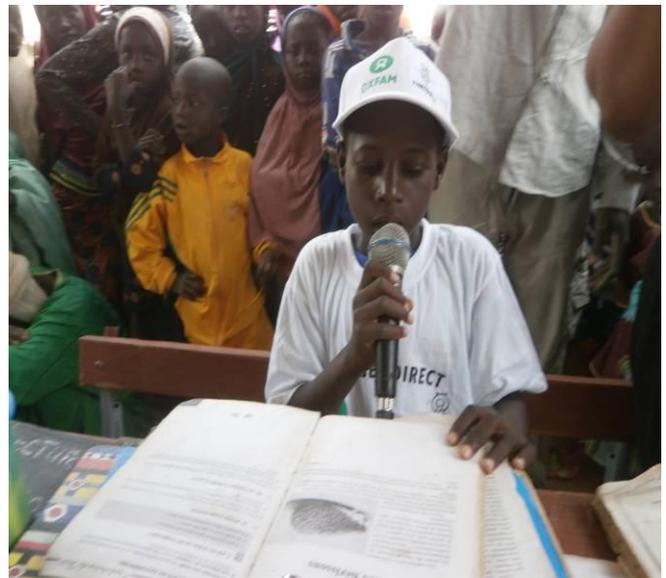
Promote girls' education

Three quarters of all children out of school in Niger are girls. Girls are often married at a very young age, and then expected to stay at home to look after their house and have children, rather than go to school. The project organised community activities which discussed issues such as girls' and boys' schooling and early or forced marriage. Wedding and naming ceremonies, for example, provided excellent opportunities for discussions as many people were gathered in one place. As these discussions took place outside of schools, they were able to include a large number of the population.

"We, the women of Nasser village, are very enthused by our children's performances in the inter-school reading club competitions. Before the competition I did not attach much importance to reading clubs. When Nafissatou's club practiced at home or went to school, I thought it was an excuse to avoid providing the help every mother expects from her daughter, in this case help around the house.

"But when the jury announced that my daughter had finished in second place I could not believe my ears. An indescribable enjoyment filled my body. Nafissatou suddenly became 'bigger' than me by her merit and by her performance in reading. From now on, I have no doubts about the objectives of reading clubs, which we were always sensitive to as mothers. Reading clubs are a praiseworthy initiative to continue and popularise and I will spare no effort to support the participation of my children in reading club activities."

Chaïbou Kadidja Hama, mother of Nafissatou Chaïbou, second prize winner at the inter-schools reading competition in Nasser village.



Harouna Moumouni, 13, takes part in a reading competition at Nasser School, Bankilaré. Photo : Moqaze Mohamed/Timidria.

To strengthen this work, community radios broadcast programmes about early marriage, forced marriage, the enrolment of girls at school, and HIV/AIDS. Specialists took part in the shows, and community members had the opportunity to call in, ask questions, and offer their opinions. This prompted a discussion between both those who called into the shows, and within the wider community. The shows were listened to by several thousand people, and were therefore able to spread important messages, such as the importance of educating girls, to a wide audience.

Support communities to lobby for increased government support

To increase awareness of project activities, the Ministry of Primary Education visited project schools, and Oxfam made a short film which documents project activities, the positive impact they are having on children's learning, and the potential for project activities to be replicated in schools across Niger. This will introduce people working in the education sector to project activities, which can then be replicated across Niger to benefit many more people.

Oxfam organised a workshop for forty executives from the Ministry of Primary Education. The workshop discussed teaching techniques introduced through the project. The new techniques place importance on helping children to learn through taking part in activities, and building knowledge by interacting with other people and the world around them. The techniques also help children to support each other to learn, and teachers are encouraged to ask children who know more to help those who know less. Executives are now able to introduce these techniques in other schools across Niger.

Several radio programmes were organised with community radio stations on topics relating to the quality of education in Niger and fair access to school. The radio show carried messages on a wide range of topics from the right to education for all girls and boys to the need for sufficient resources to be allocated to education within government budgets. During the radio shows, school students spoke about the positive effects project activities, such as the building of classrooms and toilets and introduction of new ways of teaching, have had on their lives. Mayors of the areas involved and members of academic authorities were present when children delivered these messages, which ensured that key messages concerning education in Niger were heard by those with the ability to bring about wide-scale change.

To help communities and civil society organisations to lobby for education as a right for every child, Oxfam organised workshops which built people’s knowledge of how local government works in relation to schools, and equipped them with the skills needed to influence authorities. This will help local people themselves to demand an education for their children, and aims to bring policymakers to commit to provide girls and boys with access to high quality education. This will help to bring about lasting change across Niger, which will continue long after project activities end.

Financial Report

Activities	Full year budget (£)	Full year spend (£)
Enhance school facilities	59,664	60,394
Improve sanitation and public health	22,905	21,230
Encourage high-quality teaching and productive learning	28,543	30,854
Promote girls' education	8,472	7,508
Support communities to lobby for increased government support	30,436	33,985
Project management, monitoring and evaluation	49,980	46,846
Total	200,000	200,817

Zeinabou’s Story



Zeinabou Wankoye, 40. Photo Mounkaila Daouada Timidria.

Zeinabou Wankoye, 40, is president of the Mothers Education Association.

Zeinabou recounts how, in the past, after afternoon classes no child would open their exercise books, and many children would leave all of their books at school, meaning they had no intention to learn outside of class.

“Since the implementation of the reading clubs the life of the Bongouro Bégorou’s school took on a new shape. Every evening, our children meet up in groups to learn more about their lessons, as well as to practice reading. In each group, children make every effort to improve their performance, to the point where reading has become a real passion for our children.

“The desire to learn to read has become a reflex for all pupils. What amazes me even more is the reading competitions organised every month in the village. Competitions take place in front of the whole community and every pupil wants to represent their club at the competition. The competition lasts around two hours, but parents and pupils often try to prolong it.

“This tempts us too, as parents, to learn how to read and write.”