



# Integrated Country Strategy

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NIGER

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## **1. Chief of Mission Priorities**

A landlocked country about twice the size of Texas, Niger is the largest country in West Africa. Niger was ranked 187 out of 188 in the 2016 UN Human Development Index and has the fastest population growth rate in the world at 3.9 % per year. More than half the population of 20 million is under the age of 15. The literacy rate is below 30 % among all adults and even lower among women. Studies show that by 2050, Niger's population will balloon to approximately 55 million if no concrete measures are taken to slow population growth.

Despite these challenges, Niger is strategically important for its central location. It is a linchpin for stability in the Sahel and a reliable counterterrorism partner against ISIS-West Africa, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram, and other regional violent extremist organizations.

Through an approach emphasizing the use of diplomacy, development, and defense as strategic axes, Mission Niger partners with Niger to help the country: (1) develop as a stable democracy with increasingly accountable governance; (2) become an increasingly capable partner against regional threats; and (3) advance social and institutional development and broad-based economic growth. U.S. Government (USG) policies are centered on concerted diplomatic engagement, broad and well-targeted development assistance, and a commitment to work with Niger to help it overcome challenges from regional insecurity, food insecurity, poor governance, inadequate provision of health care and education, steadily increasing desertification, and galloping population growth.

In regard to governance, the United States remains engaged through democracy and governance programs, aiming to strengthen the capacity of Niger's non-governmental organizations, political institutions, and parties, and promoting increased participation of women and youth in Niger's political discourse. Since the restoration of democracy in 2011 after a 2010 coup, Niger has made strides in democracy and institution building. The Government of Niger (GoN) has become a more open and active partner with the United States. The 2016 presidential and legislative elections, while imperfect, represented a continuation of democratic development. As partners, we will continue to work with Nigerien institutions to ensure the GoN employs transparent, non-partisan efforts to combat corruption. We will promote capacity-building, professionalism, transparency, and responsiveness of Niger's justice sector. Additionally, we will continue to strive to improve the quality and professionalism of Niger's media.

Helping Niger to become an increasingly capable partner against regional threats is a critical goal. Niger's security forces are an effective partner against regional violent extremist

organizations and USG military-to-military cooperation has grown substantially, particularly our security assistance. We will continue to train and equip them to help maintain stability in the region. We will also continue to participate in the construction of a second Nigerien air base in Agadez. In addition, we will continue to support major training engagements for Niger's military, professional exchanges, and civil-military support activities. With regard to policing, we will continue supporting programs to improve their capacity in protecting citizens and enhancing border security. Niger is also one of six African countries participating in the Security Governance Initiative (SGI), which focuses on defense institution building as a complement to our train-and-equip programs. Moreover, recognizing that long-term solutions to security threats must incorporate non-military initiatives, we will increase efforts in countering violent extremists, with the goal of decreasing the number of youth vulnerable to radicalization; fostering political and economic inclusion at the community level; and improving access to livelihood and job opportunities in at-risk communities. And finally, we will continue to support Niger's participation in UN peacekeeping missions.

In the area of promoting social and institutional development and broad-based economic growth, U.S. assistance will continue to strengthen resilience, build increased resistance to the effects of climate change, reduce food insecurity, and provide humanitarian food assistance. We will promote women's empowerment as a cross-cutting development goal, which is a prerequisite to achieving all of the Mission's objectives. Building Niger's health sector capacity, particularly improving access to and use of family planning services, will be a priority.

Additionally, we will continue to support increased early-grade reading in local languages, and access to education for girls to help reduce the incidence of early marriages. We will utilize public diplomacy programs to underpin efforts that increase socio-economic development. The \$437 million Millennium Challenge Account compact will focus on large-scale irrigation infrastructure development and community-based, climate-resilient agriculture, while promoting sustainable increases in agricultural productivity and sales. To foster long-term economic growth, the Mission will assist Niger in improving its business climate and increasing awareness of social entrepreneurship which will boost Niger's prosperity and create opportunities for U.S. exports and investment in Niger.

With all these efforts, rapidly increasing U.S. assistance and engagement in Niger has stressed the Embassy's management platform and USDH has grown 75% over the past five years. We will continue to see significant increases in personnel, outreach activities, procurements, and other Mission programs. Although this expansion is welcome and needed, Niger's austere environment, including extreme heat and dust storms, a very limited service sector, a lack of skilled labor, and an erratic electricity supply present additional challenges for maintaining

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services. Additionally, supporting employee morale is a top priority, both for our current staff and for maintaining top talent. Many of the positions throughout the Mission are significantly under-graded; therefore, Post will advocate for increasing grade levels, which currently reflect responsibilities and workloads from when Embassy Niamey was a much smaller post in a region with limited U.S. strategic interests.

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## 2. Mission Strategic Framework

### **Mission Goal 1:** Strengthen Democracy, Human Rights, and Good Governance in Niger

**Mission Objective 1.1:** Government institutions are more transparent, accountable, and responsive to citizen needs.

**Mission Objective 1.2:** Respect for fundamental human rights improves, focusing on freedom of the press and expression, civil liberties, and rights of the most vulnerable.

**Mission Objective 1.3:** Democratic institutions provide for free and fair national and local elections in 2021.

### **Mission Goal 2:** Strengthen Niger's Capacity to Counter Regional Threats and Criminal Activity

**Mission Objective 2.1:** Increasingly professionalized Nigerien security forces counter violent extremism, provide internal stability, and enhance regional security in accordance with democratic norms.

**Mission Objective 2.2:** Niger's government institutions, security forces, and civil society collaborate to reduce vulnerability to violent extremism.

### **Mission Goal 3:** Increase Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth

**Mission Objective 3.1:** Investment and broad-based employment are increased, leading to growth and diversification of Niger's economy.

**Mission Objective 3.2:** Niger's government institutions improve delivery of public services and programs that reinforce livelihoods of the rural poor, viability of key productive sectors, and sustainability of natural resources.

**Mission Objective 3.3:** Chronically vulnerable communities and communes more effectively manage shocks and stresses and reduce their levels of poverty.

**Management Objective 1:** Embassy Niamey recruits and develops qualified staff, increasing the capacity of its management and diplomatic platform to a level commensurate with the Mission's growing diplomatic, development, and defense activities.

### 3. Mission Goals and Objectives

#### **Mission Goal 1 Strengthen Democracy, Human Rights, and Good Governance in Niger**

**Description and Linkages:** As stated in the Joint Regional Strategy, the United States helps advance democracy in Africa by promoting the rule of law, respect for human and civil rights, credible and legitimate elections, a politically active civil society, and accountable and participatory governance. Post continues to pursue this effort, advocating for greater transparency and inclusiveness, better delivery of services, and the assurance of civil freedoms. An indication of the effectiveness of our efforts will be the fairness and inclusiveness of the 2021 presidential elections.

#### **Mission Objective 1.1 Government institutions are more transparent, accountable, and responsive to citizen needs.**

**Justification:** Over the past two decades, despite increasing amounts of official development assistance (ODA) and relative success in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), particularly in the mining and telecommunications sectors, Niger remains stalled at the bottom of the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI). While the GoN response to exogenous factors such as violent extremism (VE) and terrorism has burdened the country's budget and disrupted the national economy in many regions, decreasing government performance is also attributable to government ineffectiveness, lack of citizen voice and government accountability, and corruption. The current environment cultivated by the GoN's lack of responsiveness and transparency adversely impacts citizens' daily lives, increases dissatisfaction in the state, and deters private investors from engaging in long-term partnership. For the USG and other Nigerien partners, these issues are also a constraint to development and security sector efforts that attempt to improve the country's stability, security, and long-term economic development.

#### **Mission Objective 1.2 Respect for fundamental human rights improves, focusing on freedom of the press and expression, civil liberties, and rights of the most vulnerable.**

**Justification:** The past several years has seen erosion of human and civil rights, as evidenced by the GoN breaking up demonstrations, restricting freedom of assembly, threatening and jailing journalists, attacking political opposition, and arresting civil society activists. The media must do a better job of informing the public. Additionally, many citizens who lack literacy skills must become better informed and familiar with their rights protections. Our efforts will assist Niger to safeguard the fundamental elements of democratic institutions by supporting freedom

of the press, opening spaces for reformers, and ensuring the general public has a voice in improving its future. At risk are basic civil liberties, along with essential partnership agreements, including the Millennium Challenge Account.

**Mission Objective 1.3 Democratic institutions provide for free and fair national and local elections in 2021.**

**Justification:** The last presidential and parliamentary elections, held in early 2016, went off peacefully but were marred by the jailing of major opposition leaders and other alleged irregularities (i.e., ballot switching). Since then, dissatisfaction with the election result has persisted among people who identify with the political opposition. In addition, last-minute alterations to the 2017 Electoral Code meant that what was intended to be a consensus-driven deconfliction and modernization of election laws instead became a partisan dispute regarding the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI). Since its passage, opposition parties and even some members of the ruling coalition have objected to parts of the law, especially the make-up of the CENI voting board, and the opposition coalition has boycotted participation. We will support the CENI in undertaking robust and transparent preparations for the 2021 election. Additionally, we will offer training both in Niger and abroad on best practices for political diversity and pluralism.

**Mission Goal 2 Strengthen Niger's Capacity to Counter Regional Threats and Criminal Activity**

**Description and Linkages:** In line with the National Security Strategy, the Joint Strategic Plan for State and USAID, and the Joint Regional Strategy, our Mission priority is promoting a stable, peaceful, and democratic Niger that serves as a force for regional peace, stability, and development. Achieving this policy priority calls for professional, well-trained security forces that avoid political entanglements, accept civilian authority, and respect citizens' rights under the constitution. Additionally, there must be active, autonomous civil society organizations able to engage effectively with the government with a shared commitment to peace, countering extremism, terrorism, transnational crime, and advancing development and democracy.

**Mission Objective 2.1 Increasingly professionalized Nigerien security forces counter violent extremism, provide internal stability, and enhance regional security in accordance with democratic norms, while promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.**



**Justification:** Security is essential to achieve all Mission strategic goals in Niger, and is the top priority of the Nigerien government. However, threats to national security abound as Boko Haram terrorizes the southeast; the transit of fighters and weapons to and from Libya destabilizes the region; and traffickers using traditional trade routes across the Sahara bolster criminal and terrorist organizations. This scenario jeopardizes democratic governance, impedes international investment and development, undermines good governance, and jeopardizes the safety of the Mission and Americans in Niger. Mission, through its array of train-and-equip and institution-building efforts at both bilateral and regional levels, will work with the GoN's security and rule-of-law institutions, such as the national defense, interior and justice ministers and security forces, to enhance their capacity to deal effectively with the pressing security challenges facing the country so as to promote internal and regional peace and stability. Failure to respond effectively to these challenges – whether in the form of terrorism against ordinary citizens, assaults on government institutions and forces, or transnational crime – undermines peace and stability and could eventually lead to the state's progressive loss of legitimacy and ability to govern.

**Mission Objective 2.2 Niger's government institutions, security forces, and civil society collaborate to reduce community vulnerability to violent extremism.**

**Justification:** The threat of violent extremism (VE) in the Sahel and Niger has increased in recent years due to a confluence of socio-economic, political, and environmental factors. In fact, USAID-funded community risk and vulnerability assessments conducted in Diffa and northern Tillaberi in 2017 found that the primary drivers to VE are economic (e.g. easy access to financial and personal gain by joining a VE organization) and social (e.g. the impression of attaining a position of respect and a decline in traditional educational values). On the other hand, communities with a strong culture of non-violence, existence of inter- and intra-community dialogue and possessing a religious conviction that opposes violent ideology were found to be most resilient to VE. Nigerien support for violent or extremist ideology is not widespread, but if the roots causes of VE are not addressed and resiliencies are not strengthened, it is likely to increase in geography and strength. In this environment, the Mission will focus on critical areas such as strengthening social cohesion across different ethnic groups, expanding existing dialogues between communities, providing income and employment opportunities, increasing the quality of judicial and other accountability mechanisms, promoting civilian-military coordination in addressing security concerns, and establishing more participatory decision-making processes between citizens and GoN and security forces.

### **Mission Goal 3 Increase Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth**

**Description and Linkages:** In line with Joint Strategic Plan Objective 2.2 and the Joint Regional Strategy Goals 2 and 4, the Mission will work to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth. The GoN has a stated policy of promoting the private sector, both internally and by attracting foreign investment and sales. A vibrant private sector can help alleviate chronic poverty, promote GDP growth, and support domestic funding opportunities, which will enable a reduction in international assistance. Furthermore, the U.S. supports private sector growth as it provides opportunities for the U.S. private sector to invest.

**Mission Objective 3.1 Opportunities for trade, investment, and broad-based employment are increased, leading to increased growth and diversification of Niger's economy.**

**Justification:** Although improving its World Bank Doing Business for each of the past three years, investment remains stagnant and domestic enterprises still suffer from lack of funds. The GoN, however, is committed to improving its business climate and to working with the international community in this regard. Coordinating with like-minded organizations will provide a consistent message to the host government and support private sector liberalization. Lack of private sector development will result in a government that continues to rely on external assistance and will continue to provide extremist organizations opportunities for recruitment among an impoverished population.

**Mission Objective 3.2 Niger's government institutions improve delivery of public services and programs that reinforce livelihoods of the rural poor, viability of key productive sectors, and sustainability of natural resources.**

**Justification:** Strengthening the GoN's capacity to deliver public services to the population and spur economic development require better targeting and in some cases, significant reform. Services such as access to water for production of goods and transportation networks to access markets are critical and foundational investments for economic growth and are also GoN national priorities. Assistance is needed to plan, coordinate, operationalize, maintain and sustain public service investments and protection of natural resources.

**Mission Objective 3.3 Chronically vulnerable communities more effectively manage shocks and stresses and reduce their level of poverty.**

**Justification:** Water security<sup>1</sup> and land management are the two highest priorities of the GoN, reflecting the fundamental and urgent need to restore degraded land and water sources for a land-dependent population with rapidly dwindling access to resources. As such, both MCC and USAID will prioritize improved water security and enhanced sustainable productive land use through commune-led approaches, recognizing that governance is essential to all aspects of risk management. To enhance social support systems, USAID will strengthen household capacities and social capital. To strengthen risk management systems, USAID will coordinate access to multi-hazard early warning and climate information services and enhance the functioning of national early warning systems, strengthening responsive linkages between national, subnational, and local levels.

Boosting the profitability in markets is another key element of poverty reduction. The approach is to 1) enhance the capacities of the poor, especially women and youth, 2) expand the opportunities available to them to engage in markets, and 3) facilitate their entry into those markets. Building livestock assets is considered a key pathway out of poverty for Niger. As such, USAID and MCC will strengthen value chains for small ruminants and poultry, as well as supportive sectors such as finance, animal feed, and veterinary services. Cash for work interventions will contribute to the reclamation of degraded land, which can eventually be used for fodder production, resulting in increased income for farmers. Improved human capacity is also recognized as a critical element for change, considering the reality that widespread illiteracy is the single greatest constraint. It is assumed that the government and other donors will invest in infrastructure enhancement where USAID is active.

Additionally, improved health, family planning, and nutrition outcomes are essential to reducing stressors, managing shocks, and enabling chronically vulnerable populations to pursue sustainable pathways out of poverty. Family planning is prominent in USAID programming within the health and nutrition development objective. Nutrition-specific interventions and services implemented through the health system will be well-aligned and coordinated with nutrition-sensitive interventions to ensure impact.

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<sup>1</sup> Water security includes access to drinking water for human and animal use, as well as for productive use.

## 4. Management Objectives

**Management Objective 1 Embassy Niamey increases the capacity of its management and diplomatic platform and its ability to recruit and develop qualified staff commensurate with the Mission's growing diplomatic, development, and defense presence and responsibilities.**

**Justification:** In addition to the diplomatic, foreign assistance, security, and humanitarian policy challenges and opportunities described in this strategy, the U.S. Government's activities in Niger will be affected by several managerial and operational developments over the course of the next few years. We do not expect the budgetary situation to improve significantly; therefore, it is unlikely that we will receive substantial increases in human resources in the coming years. As a consequence, achieving the ambitious goals and objectives laid out in this document will require optimal use of limited financial and personnel resources, as well as the ability to attract and retain highly qualified staff. As a result, the Mission must focus on making use of technology, cross-training staff, and most importantly, establishing, attracting, and retaining qualified staff. We will look to staff development and training opportunities; technology and tools for efficient performance; and high quality ICASS services that elicit strong customer support in a challenging location, ultimately enhancing Embassy Niamey's reputation as a desirable place to work.