

Presentation summary

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1. Presentation of Niger

Located in the Sahel region in the heart of the continent, Niger is one of the largest countries in Western Africa. It occupies an area of 1,267,000 square kilometers, three-quarters of which are quasi-desert. The country faces serious natural handicaps: landlocked (the nearest port is more than one thousand kilometers from the capital Niamey), with an arid climate, drought and poor in natural resources, Niger struggles to meet basic social needs (such as education and health), which often leads the country to request the aid from donors.

Basic social indicators reveal a low level of human development. According to the Human Development Index (HDI), in recent years the country has consistently ranked amongst the bottom five in the world.

The low level of principal education indicators partly explains the country's position in the HDI ranking: in 2002-03, the gross admission ratio (GAR) was 51%, gross school enrollment ratio (GER) 45% and school completion rate 25%. These numbers hide significant disparities between girls and boys on one hand and between urban and rural areas on the other.

Faced with this situation, Niger undertook an analysis of its educational system. This analysis revealed that the principal causes of the poor educational situation were linked not only to the lack of resources invested by the state for the educational development, but were also and especially a product of the extreme centralism of a school management system that rendered the school a 'school IN the village'; that is to say, an institution considered by the community as something belonging exclusively to the state, and of which the development is not at all up to the community. The Parents' Association (*Association des parents d'élèves* or APE), charged with maintaining communication between school and community, did not work either.

2. What measures were taken by the government of Niger?

To overcome the identified problems, the Ministry of National Education (*ministère de l'éducation nationale* or MEN) elaborated and implemented a decade-long program of educational development (*Programme décennal de développement de l'éducation* or PDDE, 2003-2012) with the principal strategy of decentralizing school management through the institutionalization of community based organizations called the School Management Committee (*Comités de gestion des établissements scolaires* or COGES). The idea was to delegate certain authorities of school management to the community at the most basic level.

The Ministry of National Education was thus aiming, through the introduction of the School Management Committee(COGES), to establish functional organizations that could promote the community participation for the educational development; then the school was supposed to be a 'school OF the village', a school belonging to the village, for the community.

Unfortunately, when creating the School Management Committee (COGES) the Ministry of National Education did not consider what approaches would allow these organizations to function. Consequently, the School Management Committees (COGES) were as inactive as their predecessors, the Parents' Associations (APE).

3. How did Niger make the School Management Committee (COGES) functional?

To overcome the situation described above, in 2004 JICA's "School for All" project (*Ecole pour tous* or *Projet EPT/JICA*)—in partnership with the Ministry of National Education (MEN)—introduced an approach that allowed the School Management Committee (COGES) to function; this, in turn, encouraged greater community participation in improving education in Niger. This approach is based upon the "MINIMUM PACKAGE" with three key components:

▪ Democratic elections (by secret ballot) of committee members

The base of community participation lies in the choice of the community through the vote with a secret ballot. That generates a greater transparency in the establishment and the management of the COGES.

First, it is necessary to remind the reader that the various community based organizations which existed before in Niger consisted of the people appointed by a village chief, a religious leader or another influential person against the will of the majority. Consequently, these organizations couldn't mobilize the community members at all, because they had never won their confidence. Today, thanks to the democratic process initiated by JICA's School For All Project (EPT project), all School Management Committees (COGES) in Niger (approximately 13,000) have been established by secret ballot: these elected committee members represent the will of the people.

▪ Formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of 'School Action Plans'

The school action plan initiated by JICA's EPT project is based on the participative process and constitutes the *very frame for community participation and communication amongst community members. The plan is also the embodiment of transparency in the implementation of School Management Committee (COGES) activities.*

Unlike classic action plans, the specificity of this school action plan can be summarized in four points:

- All decisions are made at the general assembly of the village (the general assembly to identify problems and seek out solutions, to ratify action plans and to assess the annual results). In other words, the entire process requires the community participation and consent of the entire community (self-management).
- Communities choose the activities that can be realized by themselves: the activities programmed in these action plans are thus always completed.
- Resources necessary to the implementation of action plans are mobilized by the communities themselves. - Communities carry out the self-assessment

▪ Integrated monitoring system

The monitoring system established with the technical cooperation of JICA's School For All Project (EPT project) is unique in that it involves local education administrators while at the same time giving responsibilities to the community. It is a two-level system: the monitoring of the COGES (first level) is carried out by a community based organization called the Communal Federation of the school management committees (*fédération communales des COGES* or FCC) which are established in the democratic way by the representatives of all the School Management Committees

(COGES)in a municipality, “commune”-the lowest administrative unit in Niger. The Communal Federation of COGES (FCC) carries out the monitoring of COGES activities through its General Assembly, organized periodically by the Communal Federation itself. These General Assemblies serve as a venue for sharing the experiences among the COGES as well as for monitoring and evaluation. Expenses for the General Assembly are covered by funds of both the COGES and the Communal Federation of COGES (FCC). In turn, the monitoring of the Communal Federation of COGES (FCC) (second level) is carried out by the education administrators.

The “MINIMUM PACKAGE” guarantees the transparency in the activities of community based organizations. It also provides the community with substantial capabilities of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating their own activities.

4. Examples of the results of School Action Plan activities

The introduction of the “Minimum Package” led to a substantial community mobilization, one that has resulted in the implementation of numerous diverse educational improvement activities. These activities are spread across several fields. An analysis of SchoolAction Plans in Niger shows the completion rates by field. This distribution, as demonstrated in the chart below, reflects priorities in terms of school/community needs.

Fields	Percentage of Activities Realized	Comments
Infrastructure and furniture	29.71%	This rate can be explained by the critical lack of classrooms, leading communities to construct straw huts.
School performance	27.19%	The improvement of school performance is still weak.
Hygiene and health in school	9.73%	
School safety	6.60%	
Environment	4.05%	
Practical and productive activities	4.28%	Strengthening the bond between school and its environment; profitability
Promotion of education		
Functioning of COGES	13.92%	Operated by COGES themselves.

The implementation of these activities was successful thanks to a substantial financial mobilization. For example, in order to carry out their activities communities in the regions of Tahoua and Zinder invested 349,525,795 f CFA in 2006-07. To economically advanced countries this amount may appear insignificant; however, in the context of the standard of living in Niger it represents a large contribution to the resolution of school-related problems. In fact, the minimum monthly wage in Niger has not yet reached 30,000 f CFA. Incidentally, the monthly salary of a contract teacher is 59,000 f CFA. *These results simply show that, with functional organizations, communities are capable of a very high level of mobilization when it comes to tackling educational challenges.*

5. Did the community participation/mobilization have an impact on education in Niger?

The graph of the evolution of indicators brings to light a correlation between the evolution of the three indicators (the gross admission ratio GAR, the gross school enrollment ratio GER, and the school completion rate) and the evolution of the number of functional School Management Committee (COGES) in Niger. What the graph reveals clearly is that the different ratios increased significantly after the advent of the functional School Management

Committee (COGES). Furthermore, one can see that the leap forward was substantial from 2006-07, from the year of the generalization of ‘functional School Management Committee (COGES)’. For example, Niger reached 98.69% of GAR and is aiming for 100% by 2015. Thus, the existence of functional School Management Committee (COGES) enabled Niger to significantly improve its principal educational indicators.

The community participation in educational development actions has greatly contributed to the improvement of the principal indicators used to measure education in Niger.

6. What alternatives exist to promote greater and more efficient community participation?

While it is true that the activities carried out by School Management Committees (COGES) through their School Action Plans have had a visible and positive impact on education in Niger, in order to further maximize mobilization and increase impact at the regional level communities have developed—with the support of JICA’s School for All Project (EPT project)—a strategy called the “forum approach.” This approach gives communities the possibility of exchanging/sharing ideas, over the course of a whole day, related to a specific educational topic with all the other actors involved in the education field: school administration, municipal boards, administrative authorities, traditional chiefs, religious leaders, teachers unions and associations in the field of education.

- An example of the outcomes of such forums on girl’s education in the Tillabéri and Maradi regions: in 2008-2009, both regions organized a forum respectively on girl’s education. The efforts at the awareness raising by the communities have brought the gender parity ratio from 0.742 to 0.8831 in Maradi and from 0.868 to 1.001 in Tillabéri. Here we must specify that the goal set by Tillabéri was to reach a gender parity ratio of 1 (i.e. the same number of girls and boys in school), so the results exceeded expectations.
- Outcomes of forums in the Zinder region: the region organized two successive forums (2008 and 2009) on the improvement of the final exam results. Communities carried out activities such as organizing remedial classes, evening group tuitions, mock exams, monitoring of pupil’s school attendance, etc., thus enabling substantial progress: the regional pass rates exceeded 13.9 % the national average in 2008, and then again 14.2 % in 2009. The goal of the two Zinder forums was to bring the region to the top in terms of exam results; in the end, the region obtained the highest scores in Niger over the past two years. That shows how fruitful this strategy is.

Results attained by different regions in Niger allow us to say the “Forum Approach” is a valid option for greater and more efficient community participation in the development of education.

7. Factors in the success of community participation in Niger

The triggers of success in promoting community participation for the improvement of education in Niger are:

- Creating community based organizations that are trusted by others members of the community (democratic elections of the board members of COGES)
- Capacity development of the members of those organizations (training them in the fields of planning and monitoring/evaluation)
- Community initiatives maximizing the mobilization of all actors (forum strategy)
- Training approach adapted to the society (these communities being mostly illiterate, the training is done in national languages using materials such as images and role-playing)
- Applicability: the applicability of the minimum package is now certain. In fact, after having experimented with this approach in 23 schools it was progressively applied to all schools in the Tahoua region and then in the entire Zinder region. The external evaluation sponsored by the Ministry of National Education (MEN) confirmed the

effectiveness of this approach (short time needed for training, high cost-effectiveness). It is exactly for this reason that Niger has generalized this approach to the entire country. This approach also has been applied in other Western African countries. We were personally invited to Mali and Burkina Faso in order to share this approach with actors working towards the decentralized school management. Today, the forum approach is used in all the regions of Niger and has produced good results. That is why delegations from Senegal and Burkina Faso came to Niger to follow this forum strategy with the prospect of applying it in their respective countries.

8. Conclusion

Niger's experience allows us to assert that communities can be the very leading actors for the development of education in their own country provided that they are formed into functional organizations.

9. Perspectives

Now that the access to education has increased significantly, communities in Niger decided this year to tackle the challenges in the quality education. In order to do so, all COGES in Niger have elaborated the School Action Plans for improving the quality of the education. The main activities of these plans aim at having an impact on the three factors that influence the quality: study hours, learning environment and the quality of teaching/learning.

Experience of Niger Educational Development Through Community Participation: “The Community Changes the School!”



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General context: Introduction of NIGER

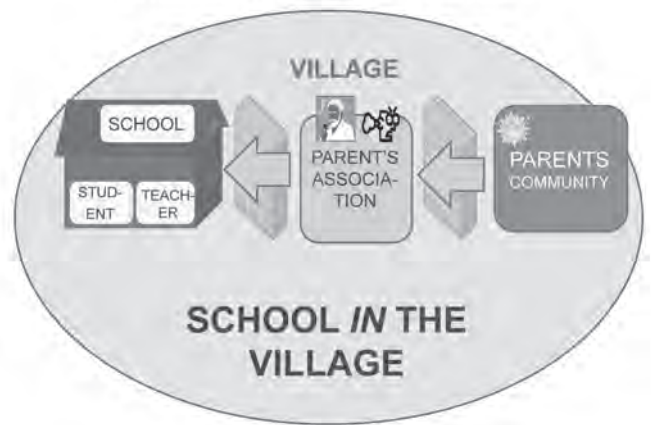
- A country of the Sahel region confronted with serious natural handicaps: arid climate, drought, lack of natural resources and no access to the sea
- A low level of human development indicators (HDI): consistently ranked amongst the bottom five in the world
- Lacks the resources to support social sectors, notably education

Educational situation

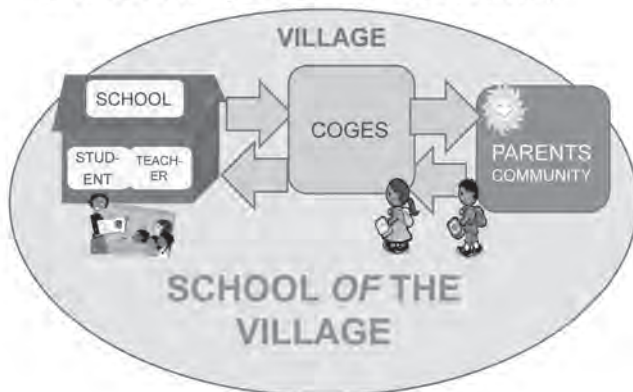
- Low level of principal education indicators in 2002-2003
 - Gross intake ratio in 1st grade 51%; gross school enrollment ratio 45%; school completion rate 25%
- Inequality: Boys and girls; urban and rural areas

		TOTAL	Boys	Girls
TBA	Total	51	59,5	42,5
	Urban	87,1	90,2	83,8
	Rural	44,3	53,6	35
TBS	Total	45,4	54,2	36,5
	Urban	52,7	55,8	49,5
	Rural	42,6	53,4	31,7

Environment around school:

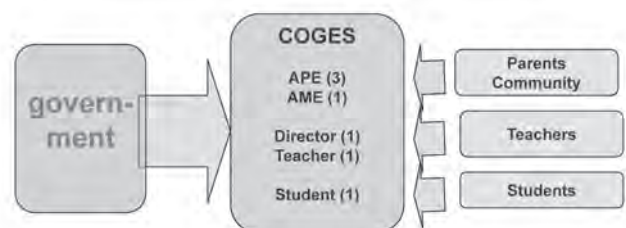


School environment after the establishment of School Management Committee (COGES)



Composition of the School Management Committee(COGES)

Decentralized school management Community participation



Strategies for functional COGES: Minimum package initiated by the EPT/JICA project

Key Components:

Democratic election of APE
et COGES members

Formulation,
implementation, monitoring
& evaluation of School
Action

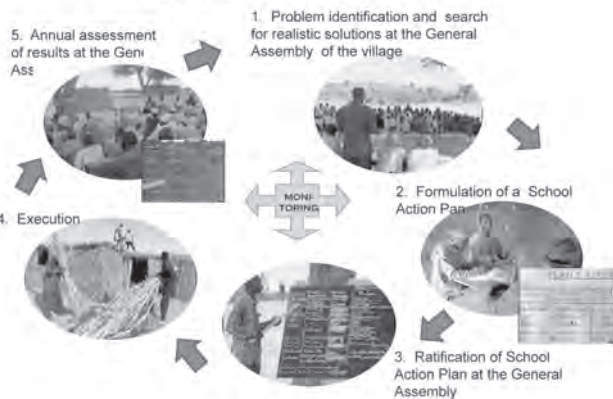
Monitoring of COGES
activities by local education
administrators & Communal
Federations of COGES



Democratic election: The basis of community participation



How does the community participate in educational improvement? The process of School Action Plan



Examples of "School Action Plan" Activities



Infrastructure and furniture



Evening Group Tuition



Promotion of education

Examples of "School Action Plan" Activities



Hygiene and health



School Security

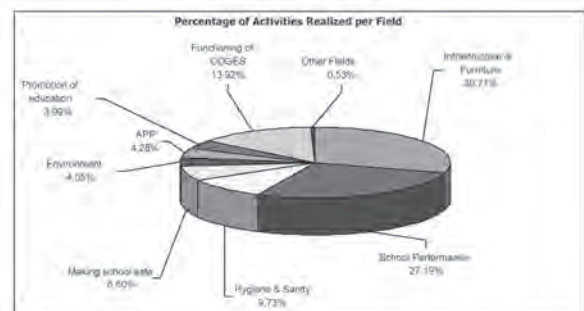


Environment



Practical and productive activities

Results of the School Management Committee (COGES) Activities

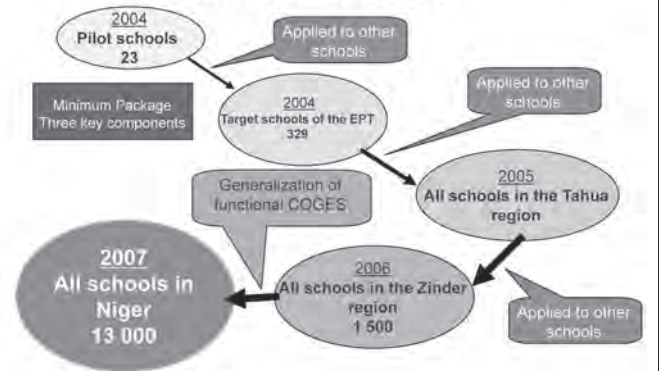


Results of the School Management Committee (COGES) Activities

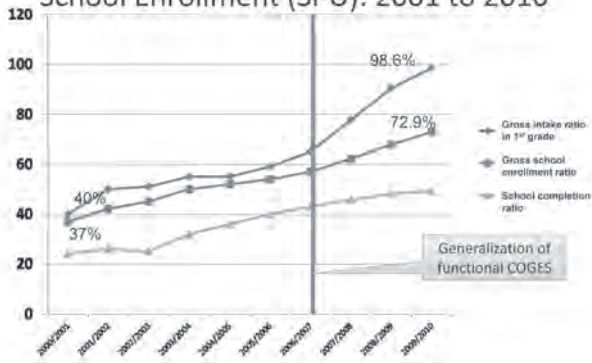
Results of local COGES activities in the Tahoua at Zinder regions (2006 – 2007)

Region	Number of schools (results of action plans)	Number of activities realized	Average number of activities per school	Amount raised (Fcfa)	Average amount raised per school (Fcfa)	Average amount raised per student (Fcfa)
Tahoua	1 061	4 513	4.25	159 377 248	150 214	1 049
Zinder	1 549	4 867	3.14	190 148 547	122 756	1 031
Total	2 610	9 380	3.59	349 525 795	133 917	1 040

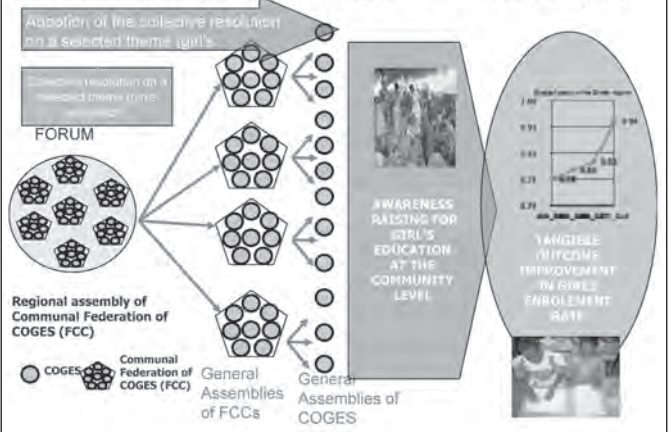
Evolution of the number of functional COGES



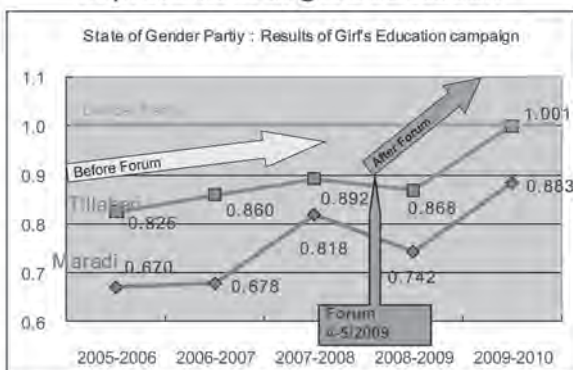
Evolution of indicators: Universal Primary School Enrollment (SPU): 2001 to 2010



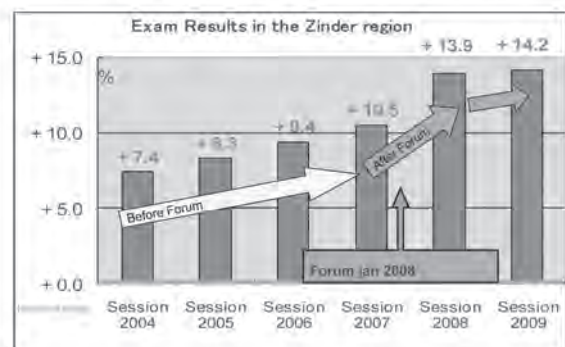
Forum strategy (with the support of EPT/JICA Project)



Example of the Forum outcomes: Improvement of girl's education



Example of the Forum outcomes: Improvement of exam results



Conclusion

- Niger's experience allows us to assert that communities can be **the very leading actors for the educational development** in their own country, provided that they are formed into functional organizations.

***Activate COGES !
Empower the population !
Future for the children !***

Thank you

