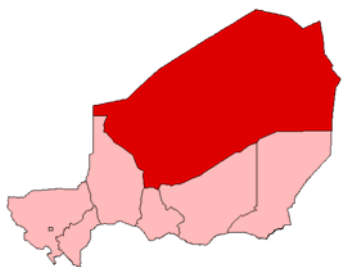


Case: the SKYE Project in Niger

(a reference when working on the ACTIVITY on page 5)



Youth

Youth represent the largest and most dynamic segment of the population in Niger. Seventy-five percent of Niger's total population of 15 million is under 30, and approximately 25% of the population is between the age of 15 and 30 years. In the past few decades an increasingly large number of youth in Niger have migrated to urban centers in search of employment and

Agadez Region (SKYE)

services, leaving behind traditional forms of livelihoods that are failing and entering an arena where family support networks are already over-extended. For decades, a one-time 'adventure' for young men before marriage, migration has recently become an annual coping mechanism, now involving men, women, children and entire families.

Youth in the region have rarely been invited to participate in governance structures and have become impatient with the rhetoric and lack of tangible benefits in their communities. It is also apparent that the youth of Agadez Region are confronting numerous problems, including a lack of education and access to economic opportunities, and are struggling to determine their role in society—all of which are contributing to a decreased sense of self-worth and lack of hope for the future. Youth have become disillusioned, and disenfranchised in general, and increasingly vulnerable to extremism.

Economic Factors

In the Agadez region much of the business is controlled by "Arab or Mauritanian" family clans and only 20% is controlled by Hausa merchant families. While there may be jobs for youth, they are often limited to day labor. It is very difficult for outsiders to move into or to be promoted within these businesses. Agriculture, shepherding and gardening are other economic activities that youth are currently participating in but they are limited by the lack of access to water, arable land and range land and by the harsh environment of Agadez Region.

As a result of these constraints, the majority of youth interviewed are earning money in the informal sector through petty trading, small shops, hair salons, barbershops, and as physical day laborers or domestic help. Additional survival strategies outlined by youth during the assessment include: out migration in search of work, prostitution, theft, and begging (for the very poor).

Existing Youth Organizations

Fadas (traditional local youth groups) are becoming more organized and sometimes called upon for community service. For example, in Agadez and Tchirozerine, individual fadas have joined together to form an association of fadas.

Table 1: Youth Associations and Fada groups in Targeted Urban Areas

Location	Youth Associations	Fadas			Total Number
		Male	Female	Total	Associations & Fadas
Agadez, Urban Commune	14	38	23	61*	75
Tchirozerine, Urban Commune	6	38	2	40	46
Arlit, Urban Commune	15	34	2	36	51
Program Total					172**

Note: *Only three were identified as exclusively Tuareg youth. ** With an estimated average of 15 members per association and fada, this total represents about 2500 youth.

SKYE Results and Lessons Learned

Life Skills Modules

There were strong results from the Life Skills curriculum, with 89% of participating youth able see the relevance of and explain 60% of the principal elements of each module well after the training. Peer Educators, who were in charge of the training of their fada members, held more than the planned number of trainings and on the life skills modules to their peers.

Effects of Life Skills Trainings and Restitutions on Beneficiaries

Additional data was collected by the final survey to understand what effects the life skills trainings had on Peer Educators. Final survey results indicate that:

- 96% of the Peer Educators surveyed affirm their capacity to initiate change positively within their family or among a group of friends.
- 97% of the Peer Educators surveyed feel that the life skills subjects are important.

Analysis of survey data also found that:

- At the beginning of the project (initial assessment), 37% of surveyed youth deemed that the Peer Educators were able to make healthy decisions.
- At the end of the project (final survey), 82% of youth surveyed deemed that the Peer Educators are able to make healthy decisions.

These findings lead to the conclusion that for many Peer Educators, SKYE's life skills strategy helped them to assume new leadership roles and to influence their peers.

Economic and Income Opportunities

There was an expectation that both Peer Educators and members of the fadas would increase incomes and participate in new earning activities, Peer Educators had much stronger result in this area.

- 82% of Peer Educators surveyed deem they are capable of demonstrating increased skills due to vocational trainings.
- 73% of Peer Educators surveyed reported that they had increased their income due to acquired vocational skills.

Apprenticeships were organized primarily with the private entrepreneurs and workshops which provided training to Peer Educators. In most instances, the entrepreneurs welcomed the youth post-training and the program was not solicited to cover costs. The members of the commune-based monitoring committees were the primary mobilizers of the local entrepreneurs who provided training and took on apprentices.

While the initial assessment identified 30 different vocational trainings, insecurity in Agadez region during Year Two of the program reduced the profit opportunities available in tourism (guides, drivers, and transit agents). Youth having earlier identified trainings in these areas redefined their training needs. Other Peer Educators redefined their training needs after the pre-tests or initial classes indicated that they were not suited for a specific discipline. Also, although the program planned to provide all Peer Educators an apprenticeship experience, this was not appropriate for all Peer Educators, since some were hired or set up their own business directly after training.

Entrepreneurship trainings were conducted once Peer Educators had completed their vocational trainings. These were organized through local economic interest groups (*Groupements d'Intérêt Economique* – *GIEs* – the most flexible form of private enterprise in Niger) whose members offered the trainings in four phases. The longer entrepreneurship/ vocational trainings were provided to 91% of Peer Educators.

After the entrepreneurship trainings, 133 Peer Educators accessed loans from financial service partner *Banque Régionale de Solidarité* – BRS. The project provided BRS with a loan grantee fund Loan Program (representing 43% of 308 Peer Educators remaining at the end of the program). The Loan Program was operational in January 2008. Not all Peer Educators wanted or needed a loan:

- low start-up costs for their businesses were obtained from other sources
- employment after vocational training
- continued apprenticeship
- some Peer Educators were still in training at the time of the survey and were not ready to apply for loans
- hesitancy to engage with a formal lending institution
- issue of interest in an Islamic context

Of those who did take loans, a very small number are meeting their repayment requirements and most report satisfaction with the lending process. Considerable difficulties were encountered with the lending process and with the financial services partner *Banque Régionale de Solidarité (BRS)*. BRS was unable to design loan terms tailored to youth's business start-up needs, miscalculating interest rates and repayment schedules and having difficulty rolling out products in a timely way. This created a great deal of frustration and disillusionment from the youth. Finally, while the product was finally designed and offered, the whole process, including the vocational and business management training, was rolled out late. This did not allow for sufficient time for the project to follow up with youth who took loans and help ensure the new businesses were supported and able to meet repayment deadlines.

Program Design

The initial design of SYKE was ambitious for a two year program given the minimal capacity in the environment and security concerns in the region. In addition, primary assessments did not adequately review the capacity of the vocational training centers, local staff and youth prior to implementation, which led to delays in the initial start-up of the training programs. Training centers did not have the equipment necessary to offer training for the program's cohort and their locations, all in Agadez town, were not convenient for Peer Educators living in Arlit and Tchirozerine. Insecurity in the region exacerbated the problems when Mercy Corps' entire staff was forced to move to one office in Tahoua, prohibiting staff from traveling to and visiting training site locations. All combined, these challenges led to continued delays in the start-up of the income generation and enterprise development activities, which for many youth were the motivating factor for participating in the program.

Community Involvement

Despite escalating violence and relocation of the entire SKYE staff to Tahoua, the program was still able to function. This accomplishment can be attributed to the deep links and partnerships that had been built over time between program staff and the community along with the creation of communal monitoring committees, monitoring assistants and a joint staff committee. The communal monitoring committees enabled program staff to maintain contact with Peer Educators and to monitor restitution activities, trainings and sub-grants, despite the distance between the three towns and the limitations to travel due to insecurity. Monitoring assistants, short-term local youth contractors, served as logistics assistants, communicators, and liaisons and worked closely with the CCST members once SKYE program staff was relocated to Tahoua. And the Joint Bridge3/SKYE Staff Committee ensured transparency and completeness in publicizing calls for bids, reception and analysis of offers and attribution of contracts.

ACTIVITY: Design a “NEW” programmatic response. Answer Questions 1-3 below based on the information in the SKYE case and the context description below. After participants are finished, results will be posted and everyone can take a “tour” of the room to see what their colleagues came up with. After, a facilitated discussion will highlight similarities, differences, justifications and the actual Mercy Corps project will be presented.

Context for the “NEW” Project in Niger



Tahoua Region now added

Niger faces many challenges, among them drastic reductions in traditional livelihoods due to unaddressed land tenure issues, climate change, population increase, geographic isolation, and increased youth migration to urban centers. An important potential for destabilization exists from the sense of alienation felt by youth in Niger, which comprise over 70% of the population and, by sheer numbers alone, create extreme pressure on government’s ability to provide public services and economic opportunities. In Mercy Corps’ Youth Diagnostic conducted in October 2007, youth in Niger

expressed a sense of hopelessness about the future and a lack of access to educational and economic opportunities. For youth, at the age of identity-seeking and risk-taking, groups espousing violence or extremism may be perceived as viable alternatives to civic engagement or traditional authorities. Choices made and loyalties formed at a young age may have long lasting repercussions. Thus, youth engagement provides a critical opportunity to positively influence political and economic stability.

In response, Mercy Corps proposes supporting a youth program in the Agadez and Tahoua regions of Niger. Mercy Corps’ approach builds on the successes and lessons of the USAID-funded Bridging Collective Responsibility and Development Goals through Effective and Inclusive Decentralization (Bridge) and Skills and Knowledge for Youth Empowerment (SKYE) projects, implemented between August 2006 and September 2008. By partnering with communes to improve opportunities for youth and increase their participation in commune affairs, the proposed 24-month intervention will increase youth engagement in their immediate social and economic context and improve their livelihoods.

1. **Key Activities:** (fill in with small group work)
2. **Key Expected Results:** (fill in with small group work)
3. **Key Partners:** (fill in with small group work)

Moving forward from SKYE: What Mercy Corps did....

(A handout after the participants' designs have been shared and discussed)

The strategies applied by the SKYE project focus on the accomplishment by targeted youth in participation in i) life skills trainings and restitutions of these trainings to their peers and others, ii) vocational and business management training, and iii) access to the formal financial sector. Some SKYE project results that will easily link to the new programming are:

Facilitation of life skills training: In Agadez region, many Peer Educators now have the facilitation skills necessary to serve as trainers of various life skills modules.

Fada membership and life skills restitutions: In Agadez region, fada members informed by SKYE's life skills restitutions will be among the youth most interested in the new program, as they have benefited from the messaging and witnessed the opportunities offered to their peers.

Bankable projects: Youth trained as Peer Educators and provided vocational training in Agadez region are currently prepared to submit loan applications for funding bankable projects.

Young entrepreneurs: Youth who have received start-up funds and are functioning successfully in Agadez region will testify to youth engaged in the new program of the requirements for initiating a business either as an individual or as a groupe d'intérêt économique (GIE).

Commune committees: In Agadez region, the contributions of the comités communaux de suivi technique (CCST) allowed for continued implementation and monitoring of trainings for youth even in the absence of Mercy Corps' Agadez-based staff. The active participation of commune-based youth extension services and youth representatives promoted transparency, responsibility and ownership.

Banking partnership: In Agadez region, Mercy Corps has worked with the Banque Régionale de Solidarité (BRS) to pilot a Loan Guarantee Fund through which the bank is increasing the number of responsible youth clients. This partnership has been managed through a joint MC-BRS committee on which participate members of the CCSTs, in order to ensure that all applications are handled transparently and efficiently. The lessons learned through this partnership informs Mercy Corps of the requirements for establishing a similar successful partnership in Tahoua region, and the joint management mechanism is a precursor to the local Guarantee Fund to be established.

Local Training Organizations: Mercy Corps recognizes the expertise of local organizations specialized in youth training – including basic and advanced vocational training, apprenticeships, business plan development and management. Mercy Corps will work with the providers who offer the best comprehensive quality training and ensure that each youth is accompanied through successful implementation of their income-generating activity.

Anticipated Results

- **2,000 trained youth, including:**
 - 200 Peer Educators receiving basic 3-month vocational training
 - 410 youth receiving 1-3-month advanced vocational training
 - 1,390 youth with bankable projects trained in business plan design and management
 - 2,000 youth receiving Business Plan and management training
- **800 (minimum) youth accessing small business loans**
 - 2 Loan Guarantee Funds (1 per region) functioning and with sustainable management mechanisms tested
- **200 Peer Educators restituting life skills modules to their peers**
 - 30,000 people reached by Peer Educator-led restitutions
- **Target communes have committees which monitor youth progress and support project M&E activities**