

PROFILE: NIGER



The largest country in West Africa, Niger has an austere beauty which masks some of the highest poverty levels in the world.

The country lies on the fringes of the Sahara desert, and its harsh environment and frequent droughts pose ongoing challenges for its people.

In 2010, the UN's Human Development Index (using criteria of life expectancy, education and health) ranked Niger as 169th out of 171 countries.

Less than half the population have access to a safe water supply, and communities often lack food for part of the year. Children are vulnerable to diarrhoea, malnutrition and stunted growth.

Primary school attendance is the exception rather than the rule. Girls especially drop out long before they learn to read or write.

Niger is home to an array of ethnic groups who largely co-exist in harmony. However, nomadic pastoralists – such as the Tuaregs – are being drawn into conflict with cultivators as land becomes scarce through population growth and desertification.

Families are defined by male dominance. Women have little say in community life. Girls are often forced into marriage early, which puts lives at risk during childbirth. However, newly emergent women's groups are beginning to fight for equality.

Niger's church, meanwhile, represents a small minority but is tolerated by the secular state and the dominant Islamic majority.

TEARFUND'S WORK IN NIGER

Tearfund started work in Niger more than two decades ago. We currently work through two partners in the country. Here is a brief selection of their work.

Since 1990, **JEMED** has been working with Tuareg pastoralists in the Abalak region. An integrated development programme has been helping them adapt to a more sedentary lifestyle and overcome drought, disease, desertification and lack of access to education.

Activities include: supply of clean water, animal restocking, health training, literacy training, erosion control and land reclamation, pasture improvement, natural resources management and primary school education.

During recent food crises, JEMED has met the emergency needs of 40,000 beneficiaries.

An association of 25 local congregations in south Niger, **UPEEPN (Union of Evangelical Protestant Churches Niger)**, has been tackling food scarcity and poor sanitation in the Dosso region. Communities have been helped to start market gardens, set up grain banks, install latrines and reforest land to halt soil erosion.

Meanwhile, UPEEPN has brought food relief in crisis periods and established management committees to ensure fair distribution at village level.

As in other places where we work, Tearfund is increasingly promoting self-help approaches in Niger. Supported by the church, some of the country's poorest communities are encouraged to devise their own solutions to poverty.

- **Pray for people living in poverty in Niger.**
- **Please pray for our partners in Niger as they seek to help others.**
- **And pray for Niger: for justice, peace, good health and hope for everyone.**