



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Revue à mi-parcours du programme indicatif de coopération (PIC III, 2016-2020) entre la République du Niger et le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg

Rapport de revue globale

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Background

Niger is a vast landlocked country in West Africa with a surface area of 1,267,000 km². In 2018, the population was estimated at 21.5 million. The country is currently facing numerous challenges of great magnitude. The main ones concern: i) The population growth rate, which is depressing the standard of living¹ and exerting very strong, often excessive, anthropogenic pressure on the natural resources (land, water, pasture, forests, fauna, etc.); ii) Heightened insecurity, primarily in the Diffa region (Boko Haram) and in the areas bordering on Mali and Burkina Faso (jihadist movements); iii) The governance and quality of public action; iv) Recurrent humanitarian crises caused by a variety of factors and v) the damaging effects of climate change on the land.

Objectives, conduct and method of the Mid-Term Review

The development cooperation relations between the Republic of Niger and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg date back to 1989. This report presents the findings of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the third Niger – Luxembourg Indicative Cooperation Programme (ICP III, 2016-2020), which was endowed with an initial envelope of 67 million euros. Because the budgets allocated to certain operations have since been increased, the current indicative value of ICP III is 85 million euros. ICP III's overall objective is to help build the capacity of the stakeholders in charge of the sectoral policies it supports, with a view to accelerating inclusive growth, social development and sustainable natural resource management. It includes three core sectors: i) education and vocational training; ii) agricultural and rural development, and iii) water and sanitation.

Three specific objectives were set for this Mid-Term Review: i) on a strategic level, analyse the degree of achievement of the objectives set by ICP III, and check whether ICP III is relevant to and in line with the Nigerien government's development policies; ii) on an operational level, analyse the appropriateness of the actions taken and the degree of achievement of the outcomes defined in the programming documents; and iii) analyse the suitability of the ICP III implementation, monitoring and evaluation system, including the methods and instruments used to deliver aid. Note that, apart from humanitarian action, the components of Luxembourg's cooperation with Niger not included in the ICP (contribution to the EUCAP Sahel Niger civilian mission, regional cooperation and NGO funding) do not lie within this MTR's scope of analysis.

The MTR was conducted in two phases. After an initial start-up stage in September 2018, the first phase was conducted from October 2018 to February 2019². It gave rise to six evaluation reports, which were presented and discussed at feed-back workshops held in Niamey on 11 and 12 February 2019. The second phase was conducted from February to

¹ According to the World Bank, GDP per capita in 2018 is approximately a third lower than its 1960 level.

² See the review calendar in Appendix 1.

May 2019. This report is the MTR's overall report; it draws on all of the information collected during both phases³ and on the analyses contained in the six Phase 1 reports.

Relevance

The cooperation strategy, as described in and implemented by ICP 2016-2020, focuses on several of the major challenges facing Niger. Accordingly, it is closely aligned on the development strategies defined by the Government of Niger: the Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth Strategy, and the Economic and Social Development Plan for 2017-2021. The various interventions address the final beneficiaries' needs (access to education, access to potable water, youth employment, especially in agriculture, young girls' empowerment, etc.) and those of the primarily-public entities supported. Strategy formulation factored in the lessons learnt from the previous cooperation cycle and, throughout its implementation, was adjusted to changes in the context. The switch to a programme approach is justified: it characterises a large part of ICP III, notably through aid that depends heavily on the Common Sectoral Fund for Education in the education sector and through the Common Funding Mechanism in the water and sanitation sector. Even if there are weaknesses in the national public finance management system (justifying the prudential measures adopted), there are a number of conditions in favour of adopting a programme approach: i) the existence of policies that address each sector's goals and policies: Sectoral Programme for Education and Training and the Sectoral Programme for Water, Hygiene and Sanitation; ii) the State's commitment to funding these policies on a long-term basis; iii) the implementation of a public finance reform in response to the directives of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), mainly through objective-driven programme budgeting in a reform widely supported by the international community.

Consistency

There is a lack of consistency among the various "channels" or methods used for Luxembourg's cooperation with Niger and this is detrimental to the overall effectiveness. This lack of consistency is evident in: i) insufficient consideration of the humanitarian-development nexus in terms of the design and especially the operationalization of the actions (in each of the two fields) and exchanges among the various stakeholders; ii) the lack of connection between bilateral cooperation interventions on one hand and multilateral cooperation interventions and regional (or international) programmes on the other; iii) the divergences that exist between certain NGO actions co-funded by the humanitarian aid division and the support provided for Niger's crisis prevention and management policy (the national food crisis prevention and management system, DNP/GCA, and the ministry of humanitarian aid and disaster management, MAH/GC); iv) insufficiently developed bridges between some of the bilateral cooperation interventions carried out by LuxDev, particularly in terms of synergies between the actions (for example, between NIG/025 and NIG/024)⁴. These flaws in the consistency of cooperation strategy stem from a combination of factors. More specifically: i) the process of formulating the various components of ICP III; ii) the wide variety of entities in charge of appraising funding within the Luxembourg government's

³ See the list of people interviewed in Appendix 2 and the list of documents consulted in Appendix 3.

⁴ There are nevertheless synergies between certain interventions, in particular those between NIG/023 and NIG/024, which eased the establishment of the Common Sectoral Fund for Education.

Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs; iii) LuxDev's mandate, which is focused on bilateral interventions; and iv) understaffing of the Embassy's Niger office.

The cross-cutting "gender equality" theme is central to the ILLIMIN initiative (the 1st section of the Luxembourg - United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) programme). It is handled proactively by NIG/025, which manages to achieve gender parity among its beneficiaries. Regarding interventions based on a programme approach, while numerous capacity-building initiatives have been undertaken to improve the way the gender issue is addressed in sectoral policies, the results are not perceptible yet, mainly because sectoral Ministries are not very committed to these subjects. The cross-cutting "environment/climate change" theme is included in several operational components of NIG/025; it is also part of the institutional support provided under NIG/026 to the water and sanitation ministry with a view to rational management of the country's water resources.

Since ICP III began, a number of initiatives led by the pooled support unit have stepped up efforts to learn from the successes and difficulties recorded by bilateral cooperation interventions. These are useful initiatives, but it is proving necessary to clarify the objectives and expected outcomes of each of them (communication, visibility, institutional memory, experience sharing, community of practice).

Policy dialogue between Niger and Luxembourg

The programme approach requires substantial involvement in dialogue with the Government on the sectoral policies supported (and certain cross-cutting policies) and in consultation with the other technical and financial partners. Luxembourg's involvement in dialogue and consultation/coordination bodies in Niger is undeniable and very much appreciated (by both the national institutions and the other technical and financial partners). However it appears that the cooperation scheme's current organisation is not totally commensurate with the issues at stake. The main weakness is understaffing of the Embassy's Niger office. This is especially so as, apart from the two sectors (including the very extensive education sector) supported through a programme approach, Luxembourg's Cooperation stakeholders⁵ operate in three other fields: rural development, controlled population growth and humanitarian aid.

Effectiveness

The degree of achievement of the desired outcomes varies from one sector to another. In the "water and sanitation" and "education" sectors, the application of a programme approach results in lesser short-term effectiveness (by comparison with what could have been achieved with a project approach under direct government management), but lays the groundwork for greater medium and long-term effectiveness. In both sectors, it took time for the stakeholders to become accustomed to this approach and the associated mechanisms (Common Funding Mechanism and Common Sectoral Fund for Education), but the foundations are now in place. Nevertheless, the ownership of both mechanisms by the stakeholders is not yet acquired. Moreover, the achievement of the desired sectoral outcomes could be compromised by a lack of capacity in the private sector (to carry out all

⁵ Luxembourg's Cooperation stakeholders include all of the institutions that steer and/or implement the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg's development cooperation policy, in particular the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (central and devolved services) and LuxDev (head office and country offices).

of the planned projects⁶) and by a deterioration in the security situation. In the water and sanitation sector, results can already be seen in the engineering structures built, which will shortly improve access to potable water and sanitation. In the education sector, the effects of the support provided on the final beneficiaries (children and youth) are not yet perceptible. Whether the effects will become evident by the end of the ICP depends of the absorption and management capacities of the ministries (MEP, MES and MEP/T), which, for the moment, are far from ideal. The concern with effectiveness is particularly strong in relation to the sector of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), where three issues are insufficiently addressed at present: the decentralisation and deconcentration of actions; openness to economic stakeholders (demand-led approach); socio-economic integration as an essential complement to training. Moreover, the expected outcomes in terms of access to and quality of training, though targeted by the sub-sectoral policy, are still far from being achieved. In the "rural development" sector, the degree of achievement of the outcomes specified by NIG/025 is satisfactory and some indicators have even topped the target values. Regarding support for the cross-cutting "controlled population growth" policy, the ILLIMIN initiative has not yet yielded the expected outcomes⁷, while the initial outcomes of institutional support for the Population Ministry are promising.

Capacity building

The very heavy focus on capacity building under ICP III is relevant, given the many weaknesses still apparent in the programming, performance and monitoring of public policies in Niger. The procedure tested by LuxDev Niger, even before a methodology was available from head office, is based on in-depth organisational diagnoses of each entity supported. The actions taken on the basis of these diagnoses have yielded more or less significant results, depending on the cooperation sectors. In the field of TVET, and in the field of water and sanitation, the approach consisting in supporting the development of sectoral capacity-building plans, their implementation and their monitoring is appropriate insofar as it should facilitate coordination and synergies between the various technical and financial partners in capacity building, and also limit the risks of confusing capacity-building plans and technical support assignments. Generally speaking, capacity-building actions do not sufficiently involve local authorities for the moment, whereas the scope of responsibilities exercised by the latter has considerably expanded in recent years. Moreover, there is insufficient focus on private stakeholders, since the interventions (except for NIG/025) are mainly aimed at public bodies' capacity building.

The outcomes and sustainability of the capacity-building activities currently carried out under ICP III could be undermined by: i) certain limitations on the technical assistance schemes set up (and in particular substantial staff turnover⁸. This results in a lack of continuity in the support and guidance provided, and, for certain programmes such as

⁶ In the "water and sanitation" sector, a drilling company has gone out of business. In the education sector, the question is whether the companies will be able to carry out the building construction programmes to the required quality standards and deadlines.

⁷ As things stand, it is impossible to judge from the ILLIMIN initiative's monitoring and evaluation data to what extent the beneficiary teenagers learnt new skills and, if so, to what extent these acquisitions have changed their living conditions, in particular in terms of pushing back the age of marriage and first pregnancy.

⁸ This applies more specifically to the technical assistance for NIG/026 and NIG/024, and Common Sectoral Fund for Education technical assistance.

NIG/024, insufficient targeting of their assignment, given the size of the teams); ii) the lack of commitment and willingness to change on the part of the national institutions (with the possible exception of the MHA) with regard to the issues of human resource management (in the broad sense). Regarding the technical assistance scheme for the Common Sectoral Fund for Education, it appears that the aim of lowering the risks of poor operational and fiduciary performance overshadowed that of guiding and supporting capacity building within the ministries.

Efficiency

The cooperation system (in the broad sense) is not yet completely suited to the change of direction taken by Luxembourg's cooperation in Niger. In particular, there is a discrepancy between the number of sectors covered and the number of staff members at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. This limits the possibility of involvement in dialogue with the Government (on a bilateral basis and, especially, in coordination with the other technical and financial partners). Moreover, the various instruments available (budgeted aid, management, Operational Partnership Agreement) have, on the whole, been used appropriately. More specifically, in the education sector and in the water and sanitation sector, the activities carried out under direct management have made it possible to guide and support the establishment of two common funds by financing a series of capacity-building initiatives. Even so, in the case of the education sector, the proportion of the Common Sectoral Fund for Education budget allocated to programme management and capacity building seems relatively high by comparison with the situation in the water resources sector⁹.

Sustainability and impact

It is too early yet to be able to appraise ICP III's contribution to the desired impacts in the various areas of cooperation. In the "rural development" and "water and sanitation" sectors, the contribution will undoubtedly be visible in a few years (even if the pace of population growth is set to "absorb" the progress made). As regards sustainability, the emphasis placed on capacity building is a positive factor for maintaining the current or future outcomes on a permanent basis. However, there are four factors likely to greatly undermine that sustainability: i) the communes and regions lack sufficient human and financial resources to exercise their new authorities; ii) the high turnover among government department executives, which is depriving the institutions concerned of the long-term benefits of their employees' capacity building; iii) the difficulties encountered in completing the reform of public finance management; iv) the fragility of the microfinance sector and the banks' reluctance to become more actively involved in financing farms or small and micro-enterprises in general.

Thoughts and proposals concerning the next cooperation cycle

Given the positive mid-term review of ICP III, we recommend pursuing an ambitious programme of cooperation between the two countries beyond 2020. However, the next cooperation cycle will need to pay particular attention to two challenges. The first of these is to achieve the best possible match between the available resources and the demands of

⁹ Bearing in mind that the Common Funding Mechanism comes under a single ministry whereas the Common Sectoral Fund for Education concerns six ministries.

policy dialogue. This implies a degree of sectoral concentration. The second challenge is to make the various components of cooperation more consistent with each other in a context where questions of the nexus between humanitarian and development, and the nexus between security and development, are becoming increasingly important.

After 2020, cooperation between Niger and Luxembourg could be planned as part of any of the following four options: a) an extension of the current ICP; b) a new ICP; c) a multi-stakeholder "country strategy", or d) a two-year interim phase (2021 and 2022) before the country strategy starts up in 2023. Before a choice can be made between one or other of these options, a variety of criteria have to be taken into consideration, some of which relate to the operational aspects of Luxembourg's cooperation with Niger. Accordingly, the choice of an option does not lie within the designated sphere of this evaluation. However, we make a number of suggestions and recommendations below, which should be taken into consideration whatever the option finally chosen:

1. Allow some flexibility of financing between the humanitarian, relief and development components so that strategy can be adjusted to cater for a potential deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the country. For humanitarian action in particular, adjust the balance between strictly emergency actions and relief actions, and encourage humanitarian and development stakeholders to coordinate their actions.
2. Structure a future ICP, or the "development cooperation" pillar of a future country strategy, around the following lines: i) water and sanitation: continue contributing financially to the Common Funding Mechanism and providing technical support for the regional authorities; ii) basic schooling: make a (relatively modest) financial contribution to the Common Sectoral Fund for Education and end technical assistance; iii) TVET: combine a programme approach and a project approach to test or encourage "innovative" approaches; iv) rural development: continue in the Dosso¹⁰ region, while at the same time stepping up coordination with the national level with regard to agricultural financing policy (the FISAN investment fund for food and nutritional security) and support and advisory services for farmers; v) curb population growth: continue with UNFPA and the ministries concerned and, if possible, support the establishment of a common fund.
3. For a number of these sectors, the programme approach should be continued, while paying particular attention to the decentralisation process, implementation of the budget reforms and reinforcement of the national public-finance management system.
4. Step up Niger – Luxembourg cooperation's efforts to more effectively coordinate humanitarian initiatives and development initiatives by encouraging the introduction of suitable information, consultation and financing mechanisms in the sectors concerned and in particular the water and sanitation sector.
5. Regarding policy dialogue: maintain Luxembourg's role as lead technical and financial partner in one of the cooperation sectors (either "water and sanitation" or another sector); step up Luxembourg cooperation's involvement in the dialogue on decentralisation; support the introduction of a "State – private sector" consultation framework in the "water and sanitation" sector and in the "vocational and technical teaching and training" sector; step up

¹⁰ Without ruling out the possibility of extending the intervention zone to include the neighbouring departments situated in the Tillabéry region.

high-level dialogue on staff mobility issues in the public service and ensuring profile/job suitability.

6. In relation to knowledge building, continue the LuxDev Niger office's initiative by making greater use of knowledge-building actions to build capacity in the institutional stakeholders receiving support.

7. Boost the opportunities for "bridges" between Luxembourg cooperation's interventions and sectors of cooperation, to provide input for the ongoing discussion and planning on national sector-specific strategies in the fields receiving support (in particular rural youth, and initiatives to help young people who have dropped out of or never been to school to enter the workforce, etc.).

8. Strengthen the link between risk monitoring and sectoral dialogue and, if appropriate, general policy dialogue between Luxembourg (and the other TFPs) and the Nigerien government. As risks and especially security risks become more acute, a greater effort should be made to share the risk analyses carried out by the EU and the risk mitigation measures being considered within the framework of its budget support.

9. Consider upgrading Luxembourg's representation in Niger. This could mean i) increasing the staff of the Embassy's office and ii) adapting LuxDev's *modus operandi* so that the agency can help build bridges between bilateral cooperation interventions and the other components¹¹.

¹¹In the humanitarian field, LuxDev's contribution to building bridges would concern relief measures and institutional support rather than emergency responses.