USAID/NIGER GENDER ANALYSIS REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS 1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5
1. INTRODUCTION 14
1.1 BACKGROUND 14
1.2 REPORT STRUCTURE 14
1.3 METHODOLOGY AND DATA LIMITATIONS 15
2. COUNTRY LEVEL GENDER EQUALITY OVERVIEW 17
2.1 COUNTRY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND 17
2.2 LAWS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES 18
2.3 CULTURAL NORMS AND BELIEFS 20
2.4 GENDER ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND TIME USE 20
2.5 ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER ASSETS AND RESOURCES 21
2.6 PATTERNS OF POWER AND DECISION-MAKING 21
2.7 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE 22
3. CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 23
3.1 CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS 23
3.2 CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS 38
3.2.1 GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES 39
3.2.2 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE 39
3.2.3 INCLUSIVE TARGETING FOR PROGRAMMING 40
3.2.4 SLAVERY AND CASTE SYSTEMS 40
4. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 1: COMMUNITIES STRENGTHENED, EMPOWERED, AND MORE RESILIENT 41
4.1 ABOUT DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 1 41
4.2 DO 1 GENDER ANALYSIS FINDINGS 41
4.3 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 1 RECOMMENDATIONS 48
5. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2: INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IMPROVED 50
5.1 ABOUT DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2 50
5.2 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2 GENDER ANALYSIS FINDINGS 50
5.3 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2 RECOMMENDATIONS 59
6. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3: PERFORMANCE AND RESPONSIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IMPROVED 61

6.1 ABOUT DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3 61
6.2 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3 GENDER ANALYSIS FINDINGS 61
6.3 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3 RECOMMENDATIONS 67
ANNEX A: ILLUSTRATIVE INDICATORS 70
ANNEX B: USAID/NIGER GENDER ANALYSIS SCOPE OF WORK 73
ANNEX C: LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED 84
ENDNOTES 99

ACRONYMS

ADS	Automated Directives System
AGYW	Adolescent Girls and Young Women
ASI	Anti-Slavery International
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CEFM	Child, Early, and Forced Marriage
CEFMU	Child, Early, and Forced Marriage and Unions
CENI	*Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante* (National Independent Electoral Commission)
CFA	CFA franc; *Communauté Financière Africaine* (African Financial Community)
CI	Counterpart International
CNDH	*Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme et des Libertés Fondamentales* (National Human Rights Commission)
CNJN	*Conseil National de la Jeunesse du Niger* (National Youth Council of Niger)
COFOB	*Commission Foncière de Base* (Land Commissions)
COFOCOM	*Commission Commission Foncière Communale* (Communal Land Commissions)
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DHS	Demographic Household Survey
DO	Development Objective
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FFP	Food for Peace
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting
FJN	*Femmes Juristes du Niger* (Women Lawyers of Niger)
FP	Family Planning
GALS	Gender Action Learning Systems
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GBVIMS	GBV incidence data collection system
GCPEA	Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
GE	Gender equality
GoN	Government of Niger
GRB	Gender-Responsive Budgeting
GSI	Global Slavery Index
GTA	Gender Transformative Approach
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IGA	Income-generating Activity
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
INS	*Institut National de la Statistique* (National Institute of Statistics)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IP	Implementing partner

IPV	Intimate partner violence
IR	Intermediate Results
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex+
MJS	*Ministère de la Jeunesse, du Sport et de la Culture* (Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Culture)
MMD	*Mata Masu Dubara*
MOF	*Ministère de la Finance* (Ministry of Finance)
MOH	*Ministère de la Sante (*Ministry of Public Health)
MOP	*Ministère du Plan* (Ministry of Planning)
MPFPE	*Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant* (Ministry for Promotion of Women and Protection of Children)
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
MSPPAS	*Ministre de la Santé Publique, de la Population, et des Affaires Sociales* (Ministry of Public Health, Population, and Social Affairs)
NAP	National Action Plan
NGM	National gender machinery
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NSSI	USAID Niger Stability Support Initiative
OCHA	See: UNOCHA
ONPG	*Observatoire National pour la Promotion du Genre* (National Observatory for Gender Equality)
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
PNG	*Politique Nationale Genre* (National Gender Policy)
PNJ	*Politique Nationale de la Jeunesse* (National Youth Policy)
PSI	Population Services International
RC	Reproductive Coercion
RISE II	Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced
RPNQG	*Reseau des Parliamentarism Nigeriens sur les Questions du Genre* (Niger Parliamentarians Network on Gender Issues)
SBC	Social and Behavior Change
SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SH	Sexual harassment
SILC	Saving and Internal Lending Community
SLG	Savings and Loans Groups
SNPRVBG	*La Stratégie Nationale de Prévention et de Réponse aux Violences Basées sur le Genre (VBG) au Nige*r (National Strategy on GBV Prevention and Response)
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SOW	Scope of Work
SRGBV	School-Related Gender-Based Violence
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
UN	United Nations

UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VC	Value chain
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WEPs	Women's Empowerment Principles
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the requirements of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Automated Directives System (ADS) 201.3.2.9 and ADS 205, USAID/Niger contracted Banyan Global to undertake a countrywide gender analysis to inform the Mission's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) for July 2022 to July 2027. This analysis identifies gender advances, constraints, and recommendations related to information gaps on the following three Development Objectives:

(1) Communities Strengthened, Empowered, and More Resilient
(2) Inclusive Economic Opportunities Improved
(3) Performance and Responsiveness of Government Institutions Improved

The report addresses the cross-cutting themes of gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response and women's economic empowerment (WEE), with attention to the intersecting variables of age, region, ethnicity, and marital status.

Banyan Global prepared this report after a multi-stage process that included a review of secondary data sources followed by primary data collection, through 151 semi-structured interviews and 2 focus groups, with a total of 176 key stakeholders. Stakeholders included representatives from USAID, USAID implementing partners (IPs), other donors, national and subnational government, national and international non-governmental organizations, local civil society, traditional (or customary leaders), and private sector enterprises, including agricultural cooperatives.

Table 1 presents the most relevant findings and recommendations identified through the analysis of primary and secondary data. Content is organized by cross-cutting themes and USAID/Niger Development Objectives.

TABLE 1. GENDER ANALYSIS KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Gender Integration within USAID/NIGER and IPs	
Despite the inclusion of gender and rights-focused approaches in a number of USAID-funded programs, few projects have specific gender-equality objectives and there is little evidence on their impact.	• *For USAID IPs:* Develop and model organizational policies, processes, and capacity-building for gender equality and inclusion, including embedding gender equality roles and responsibilities across job descriptions and performance evaluations for all staff. Develop gender action plans that inform work planning and monitoring, evaluation, and learning. For new projects, include a gender-specific programming budget and gender advisor with adequate authority and expertise to address key gender barriers through gender transformative approaches (GTAs), as programs with dedicated staff and budgets have better gender equality and inclusion outcomes. **(PRIORITY)**
Gender-Transformative Approaches	
Traditional and religious leaders have a significant impact on the outcome of inclusive development initiatives, especially for culturally-sensitive topics such as gender equality. Programs report working with community influencers to promote gender-equitable objectives around women's participation and leadership in community structures and the economy; however, more evidence is needed to understand their impact on women's empowerment, decision-making power, and GBV.	• *For All Stakeholders:* Systematically partner with community influencers and gatekeepers, including men, traditional and religious leaders, and mothers-in-law, to collaboratively design approaches that shift social norms and empower women. Intentionally engaging family and community support is critical for doing no harm when seeking gender transformative change. **(PRIORITY)** • *For USAID:* Fund evaluations to assess whether gender-transformative objectives are being achieved in current IP programming that utilizes the Husband School approach. This approach is being applied in health, economic development, and GBV programming but has only been evaluated for Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) objectives. **(PRIORITY)**
Women, especially young women in rural areas, are marginalized socially, politically, and economically. Women have reduced physical mobility, must seek permission to participate in activities outside the home, and disproportionately spend time on unpaid care work. Fear of women's sexuality and beliefs around the importance of female purity impede women's and girls' ability to engage in the public space, the economy, educational opportunities, and essential services.	• *For All Stakeholders:* Design and implement gender transformative approaches (GTAs), including those that specifically target younger men and women (segmented by life cycle), that focus on dismantling harmful norms of femininity and masculinity. For example, given the popularity of the Husband Schools, stakeholders could pilot, adapt, and scale similar GTAs working with men and boys for the specific objectives of reducing the acceptance of gender-based violence (GBV) and supporting women's economic empowerment. Sample approaches include Equimundo's (previously Promundo) Journeys of Transformation and Program H, The Living Peace Group, Sonke Gender Justice One Man Can, and Engender Health's Men As Partners. **(PRIORITY)**
Implementing partners (IPs), civil society organizations (CSOs), private sector representatives, and government employees cited a lack of literacy and numeracy skills as a primary reason for women's low participation in leadership roles across sectors.	• *For USAID:* Integrate women-focused functional literacy programs within all sectoral programming and within other "women-focused" approaches (i.e., care groups or Savings and Loans Groups). If literacy is not a specific program component, within humanitarian response programs, for example, ensure referrals for participants to available literacy programs. Ensure IPs integrate rigorous M&E mechanisms to monitor the quality and effectiveness of functional literacy approaches.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	
Both men and women place a high value on having a large family, and 28 percent of girls are married before age 15 according to the most recent data from 2012.[1] Community leaders and Government of Niger (GoN) stakeholders frequently mentioned Child, Early, and Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) as a key issue in their communities in relation to girls' education.	• *For All Stakeholders:* Implement approaches to change attitudes and expectations around marriage age and fertility in order to reduce CEFMU. Include a specific focus on reducing CEFMU through social and behavior change (SBC) seeking to promote girls' education. SBC efforts should highlight the positive aspects of continuing girls' education and delaying girls' marriage instead of taking a negative and shame-inducing approach. **(PRIORITY)** • *For USAID:* Work with traditional and religious leaders to speak out against CEFMU in context-appropriate ways. Identify and provide support to CSOs and other organizations to advocate to the GoN to apply a minimum marriage age, first to respect the 15-year-old threshold for girls and then to work towards the international human rights standard of 18 years old.
Domestic and intimate partner violence (IPV) is a hidden phenomenon that is widely accepted as normal by both men and women in Niger. The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as ongoing conflict in Diffa and Tillabéri, has exacerbated risks of GBV.	• *For USAID:* Analyze the major drivers of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), including cultural and religious justifications. Work with traditional and religious leaders to identify culturally appropriate behavior-change approaches that include both men and women. **(PRIORITY)**
Although GBV is a chronic and escalating issue in Niger, prevention and response programming is not prioritized by donors, resulting in underfunding (less than 1 percent of development funding and 1.2 percent of humanitarian funding). Donor and GoN efforts to address GBV are disjointed and require consolidation and coordination.	• *For USAID:* Support a stand-alone GBV program; incorporate GBV requirements into more solicitations and proposal evaluation criteria. Improve GBV integration in sectoral programming by requiring all programs to identify and mitigate GBV risks. Provide resources, expertise, and support for IP staff to identify and address GBV in their work, including specialized training for staff in positions to provide referrals or entry points to GBV response services. **(PRIORITY)** • *For all stakeholders:* Promote the exchange of experiences and lessons learned in GBV prevention and response programming, with the aim of identifying and replicating best practices and replicating them. In close collaboration with the GoN (and potentially facilitated by the existing national GBV Sub-Cluster) create a collaborative framework for GBV prevention and response programming to harmonize resource mobilization efforts for a holistic response.
Inclusive Targeting for Programming	
Young, unmarried, and childless women, regardless of background, have less social status and power than women who are married and have children. Stakeholders reported an increase in young girls migrating to regional city centers and working on the street, where there is also a noted increase in sexual harassment and transactional sex.	• *For All Stakeholders:* Dedicate culturally sensitive programming across sectors that focuses specifically on the rights and needs of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW), including migrants, out-of-school AGYW, and newly married but childless women—populations who are often left out of current programs. Capacity-building for AGYW should include out-of-school learning opportunities, including financial literacy and microenterprise skills with the intention of enhancing access to savings. Life skills development and SRH knowledge should also be emphasized across all age groups.
Current programming does not always account for or collect disaggregated data on polygamous households, despite 31 percent of Nigerien households being polygamous.[2] There is a knowledge gap in how to work with polygamous households to support more equitable household power dynamics, as there are often power imbalances not only between husband and wife but also	• *For USAID and IPs:* Analyze successful programs, both within Niger and the region, that work with polygamous households. Ensure that program data collection tools are adapted to better understand and work with intra-household power dynamics. During program design, collect data that will allow for a flexible do-no-harm approach that can reach the most vulnerable members of a household.

among co-wives.	
Recruitment of project participants and beneficiaries is often conducted in collaboration with local leaders of sedentary populations or through a household census. Although partnering with local leaders or heads of household secures a level of buy-in for programs, this recruitment method reproduces existing exclusion and marginalization within communities.	• *For Donors:* Prioritize the inclusion of nomadic groups within service-delivery projects with GoN. Identify and analyze best practices for working with nomadic populations, including with marginalized groups within these populations (women, youth, persons with disabilities, etc.). **(PRIORITY)**
Slavery and Caste Systems	
Speaking about slavery and caste systems is extremely taboo, but these harmful practices continue covertly, particularly in isolated rural regions. There is very limited information about the individuals living within these systems, and most existing programming does not reach them.	• *For Donors:* While working diplomatically with the GoN, support in-depth analysis of slavery and the caste system and assist with the dissemination of findings. Support GoN to strengthen enforcement of the 2003 anti-slavery law. • *For Donors:* Support human rights-focused programs that provide resources and support to local activists and CSOs who are working with individuals in slavery and caste systems. Possible areas of intervention include: economic and social reintegration for former slaves; legal support for slaves seeking freedom or family reunification; legal support for lower caste people and slave descendants who are facing discrimination; provision of social services, especially health and education; and protection for advocates who speak out about slavery.
DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 1: COMMUNITIES STRENGTHENED, EMPOWERED, AND MORE RESILIENT	
Although the quota system is an excellent step in institutionalizing women's participation and leadership in government, the law is not always applied, especially at decentralized levels, due to a dearth of qualified female candidates, watchdogs who lack authority to enforce the quota, and ministries who do not take it seriously.	• *For USAID and IPs:* Support watchdogs analyzing the application of the quota law, such as the National Observatory for Gender Equality (ONPG), to widely disseminate their findings to diverse audiences and improve advocacy for increased adherence to quotas.
GoN officials recognize that women, even when present, are not participating in community meetings or decision-making.	• *For USAID IPs:* Work with decentralized GoN officials and local leaders to emphasize the importance of hearing diverse and representational views. Train these groups on inclusive facilitation techniques to be used during community meetings. • *For USAID IPs:* Explore participatory decision-making models that solicit input from women-only and youth-led stakeholder groups, as an intermediary step before community-wide consultations.
Promoting equitable participation and leadership of women and girls in project activities is a challenge because of low levels of literacy, restricted mobility, need for spousal approval for activities outside of the home, and norms restricting women's leadership roles to certain sectors and community decision-making structures. A number of IPs and local CSOs, however, have developed best practices for	• *For USAID IPs:* Seek deliberate measures to reach women for leadership positions who have not had the opportunity, including working with men to demonstrate the benefit of their wife's participation. Identify women in targeted communities who are keen to learn and participate but may not have adequate resources and/or skill sets. Solicit the support of the existing cadre of women leaders to identify, engage, and provide mentorship to potential women leaders.

overcoming these barriers to participation. USAID IPs report that projects tend to engage the same few women for leadership positions. These women are reportedly older, of higher socioeconomic status, and/or have connections to traditional leaders.	
Factors influencing access to formal and customary justice for women and young girls are complex. Stakeholders indicated women have better access to and prefer customary forms of justice, despite outcomes that frequently do not respect women's human rights. It is unclear how barriers to accessing justice influence women's choice of customary or religious justice systems over formal systems.	• *For USAID and IPs:* Commission a study to understand women's preferences regarding avenues for justice around key areas of conflict (i.e., land tenure and divorce), examining barriers to accessing justice as well as the extent to which outcomes uphold women's rights. IPs who work with customary, religious, and formal justice systems should continue training justice actors, including religious and customary actors in particular, on women's human rights and the importance of neutrality and confidentiality when responding to issues of GBV.
Despite the recent emphasis on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), women continue to have a limited role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, especially at the community level. Conflicts related to assets and natural resources are managed by men. Female justice representatives are called upon to address "women's conflicts." There is little evidence of investments in, or implementation of, GoN's National Action Plan (NAP) for WPS.	• *For USAID:* In line with WPS' core pillars, fund a standalone GBV prevention program in conflict-affected regions that aligns with national efforts to implement WPS action plans. • *For USAID:* Sponsor forums for organizations using gender-specific approaches that increase women's role (and visibility) in conflict mediation, such as the Women Mediator programs, to share best practices and lessons learned.
Youth-serving associations in Niger tend to be led by men (not always young) and focus on serving the needs of young men. The needs of young women are not well-defined or prioritized within these associations.	• *For USAID:* As young women are often underrepresented in youth-serving organizations, ensure youth-focused programs and approaches are not gender-blind and inadvertently designed to meet only the needs of young men.
When women hold decision-making roles in CSOs, it is almost exclusively within local organizations with a gender-related mission (i.e., GBV, women's economic empowerment, etc.), which are concentrated in urban areas. Networks or federations of CSOs working on gender are few. The more prominent CSOs in urban centers are perceived as not inclusive of particularly marginalized women, including conflict-affected women, nomadic women, rural women, and women IDPs.	• *For USAID IPs:* Address key barriers to women's effective participation in decision-making positions in local CSOs and agricultural cooperatives through functional literacy and GTAs that seek to identify and address harmful gender power dynamics within groups. For example, Oxfam's Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS) approach seeks to transform unequal power relations in community-based groups. • *For USAID and IPs:* 1) USAID and IPs should model principles of equity and inclusion by staffing project teams with women in leadership positions across sectors (including potentially applying project team gender quotas). 2) Deliver capacity-building for CSOs to become more equitable and inclusive through their missions, governance structure, HR systems, strategic planning, and outreach, using approaches such as the Toolbox for Gender Mainstreaming in Member-based Organizations. Provide training on gender integration in programs and on how to design, plan and budget for, and implement GTAs. **(PRIORITY)**
DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2: INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IMPROVED	
Women are concentrated in the value chains (VC) that are considered to be culturally-appropriate "women's crops,"	• *For USAID:* Commission context-specific, gender-responsive VC analyses designed to: better understand women's and men's roles across agricultural VCs; identify key barriers to women's participation in any VC

including vegetables, peanut, sesame, nutgrass, and cowpea. Some stakeholders noted there are growth opportunities in these VCs, especially peanut and sesame, because current production does not meet domestic demand. Women are heavily concentrated in agricultural "transformation," that is, post-harvest processing. This includes (but is not limited to) production of edible oils and condiments, nutritionally enriched flours, and animal fodder.	(such as time constraints, challenges commanding on-farm labor, lack of finance, and limited access to inputs and transportation); and identify opportunities to increase women's visibility and economic gains. These analyses should, first, identify women's unique constraints in production, processing, and commercialization in VCs with high levels of female participation; and second, identify specific strategies to address key barriers to women's engagement in traditionally male-dominated VCs (such as staple crops) and promote women's visibility and participation in these VCs in a context-appropriate manner. **(PRIORITY)**
As conflict and migration adjust traditional social patterns, more women are engaging in agricultural practices that are traditionally the domain of men, specifically, the cultivation of staple crops. However, despite shifting gender roles in agriculture, women's rights, decision-making power, and control over assets are not necessarily changing.	● *For USAID and IPs:* Programs working with women in agricultural processing activities should obtain buy-in from husbands and broader community influencers in order to avoid creating household conflict. Possible approaches at the community level include Community Conversations or Dimitra Clubs, which allow for reflection and participatory action to address harmful power dynamics that hinder women's access to and control over resources for nutrition and food security. Household-focused approaches, such as Farming as a Family Business or Individual Household Mentoring, promote collaborative management of household income and harvest. **(PRIORITY)**
The Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock's agricultural extension services have limited ability to address gender gaps in agricultural knowledge and productivity, because most extension workers are men.	● *For USAID:* Work with the Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock to develop a long-term recruitment strategy to hire more female agriculture extension agents, including by removing unnecessarily prohibitive criteria (e.g., ability to ride a motorcycle) that can be addressed through on-the-job training. ● *For USAID and IPs:* Pilot context-appropriate approaches to recruit and train more female extension agents. Improve access to knowledge for rural men and women by piloting or up-scaling new approaches, such as identifying lead farming couples (husband/wife) who can be trained by agricultural extension agents to provide technical support to their community. Seek to better understand the agricultural information needs and constraints of nomadic groups and develop a program to provide tailored extension services.
Although women are reportedly inheriting land more often, they are pressured to cede the land to their family.	● *For USAID:* Identify and pilot best practices for increasing women's land tenure, such as: providing incentives for joint land titling, which creates a stepping stone to female ownership of household assets; community land demarcation, with collective titles for women's agricultural cooperatives; and creating gender quotas for women's participation in land management committees. To develop a context-appropriate approach, conduct in-depth consultations with women (including CSOs, cooperatives, and networks) and negotiate support from traditional leaders as well as the formal justice sector. **(PRIORITY)**
While women are quite active in culturally acceptable SLGs, which are based on the traditional West African *tontine* and frequently used in USAID IP activities, fewer women participate in agricultural cooperatives.	● *For USAID IPs:* Build the capacity of rural women's associations, cooperatives, and producer organizations. Facilitate networks and mentorship relationships among women's cooperatives with varying levels of capacity, connecting smaller groups to larger groups to improve market linkages. Consider providing small grants and functional literacy and/or business training to individuals and groups to upscale their businesses.
Despite legal provisions against gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the	● *For USAID and IPs:* Provide technical support to GoN entities working with and regulating the private sector, such as the Ministry of

workforce, private sector employers and CSOs of all sizes usually do not have human resource policies in place to support non-discrimination and employee protections. Stakeholders reported discriminatory hiring and firing practices, lack of transparency, underreporting of sexual harassment (SH) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and underrepresentation of marginalized groups within employment.	Employment, Labor, and Social Security, on strategies to monitor and promote non-discrimination in the workplace and effectively apply Labor Code rights. Work with these entities to increase the knowledge and understanding of staff at central and decentralized levels on the relevance and benefits of labor policies to support non-discrimination and gender equality. **(PRIORITY)** ● *For USAID IPs:* Projects that engage directly with the private sector should consider promoting private sector company adherence to the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), a set of UN-developed principles offering guidance to businesses on how to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace, and community.
Women's limited business skills, literacy, unpaid work burden, and lack of mobility and self-confidence in the public domain are major factors that negatively impact women's employability and ability to formalize a business.	● *For USAID and IPs:* Prioritize engagement with women-led and person-with-disability-led businesses. Through this engagement, identify barriers to growth for these businesses, develop context-appropriate approaches to overcome these barriers (such as providing improved access to information and functional literacy, numeracy, and business skills training), facilitate business formalization, and support recruitment strategies that target other members of marginalized groups. ● *For USAID IPs:* Consider supporting a network of women-owned MSMEs, by sector, to foster mutual progress towards formalization and navigating GoN systems.
DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3: PERFORMANCE AND RESPONSIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IMPROVED	
The GoN national gender machinery (NGM) comprises some of the most underfunded governmental institutions—in particular, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection (MPFPE) and ONPG. These institutions are rarely engaged with development partners in other sectors, especially sectors related to economic development. The ONPG's mandate is critical to holding sectoral ministries accountable in respecting quotas and integrating gender across their policies and programs; however, there is low awareness of the ONPG across sectoral ministries at all levels. The ONPG is not a permanent institution but rather an initiative tied to the Prime Minister's office.	● *For USAID:* As the various institutions comprising the NGM are frequently, if inadvertently, excluded from international donor programming, elevate their work by establishing formal technical partnerships. USAID can thus emphasize the importance of gender mainstreaming across sectoral ministries. USAID can also help the NGM advocate for the ONPG to be recognized by the National Assembly as a permanent institutional authority. **(PRIORITY)** ● *For USAID and IPs:* There is significant potential to support the integration of gender into decentralized development plans (*plans de développement communal ou régional*) and their budgets. The GoN is usually more available and willing to focus on cross-sectoral coordination at decentralized levels, which offers unique opportunities for successful gender mainstreaming. **(PRIORITY)**
Despite capacity-building efforts by a number of international and national NGOs, gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is not institutionalized across GoN sectoral ministries, perpetuating low levels of gender integration in sectoral programs. There are very few permanent advocacy platforms enabling CSOs to engage with the GoN to ensure gender mainstreaming into policy, program, or budget decisions. In cases where they do exist and are functional, they are frequently led (and	● *For USAID:* Partner with the NGM to support the MoF to develop budgeting directives to respond to government priorities with regard to gender equality and women's needs. Work with GoN and international partners to allocate a minimum budget percentage for addressing gender-specific barriers within GoN sectoral policies and programs. In this process, the ONPG can support monitoring for adherence to directives. ● *For USAID IPs:* Deliver capacity-building for CSOs to conduct advocacy for GRB across sectors. Consider supporting CSO-exchange platforms, allowing CSOs from other African countries with better institutionalized GRB practices to share best practices and lessons learned. ● *For USAID:* Work with UN Women to revitalize a gender donor working group that can establish funding mechanisms accessible to a wide range

<table>
<tr><td>financed) by international organizations.</td><td>of CSOs, not only the strongest or the largest. UN Women in Niger has a long-standing relationship with women-led CSOs and can be a priority technical partner for engaging with these groups.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Though Gender Focal Points (GFP) and cellules genre/gender units exist in certain ministries, GFPs do not fully understand their responsibilities, nor do they have adequate training, resources, or support to create and manage gender units.</td><td>● For All Stakeholders: Support the MPFPE to establish a standard job description and selection process for GFPs, including minimum qualifications, a minimum seniority level, and encouragement to consider qualified male candidates. Provide support to establish an in-depth permanent training program for GFPs across sectoral ministries, including monitoring and evaluating the program's effectiveness in improving GFP performance.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">The availability and quality of data related to gender equality is generally poor in Niger due to weak institutions, people's reticence to openly discuss issues related to gender. Even where data are disaggregated by sex, in-depth analysis of that data is not always undertaken. When data and its gender analyses are available, they are not systematically shared.</td><td>● For All Stakeholders: Integrate training for the GoN on inclusive management, maintenance, and reporting related to data and advocacy platforms, such as the Platform to End Child Marriage, to ensure ownership and long-term sustainability. This training might also include IT support and management.</td></tr>
<tr><td>● For USAID and GoN: As the results of the Demographic Household Survey (DHS) were disputed due to poor data quality, prioritize funding for a new DHS – to include the standard modules on women's status, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) – and provide for adequate training and preparation in order to ensure acceptable implementation. (PRIORITY)
● For All Stakeholders: Support the MPFPE and ONPG's advocacy efforts to integrate three national women's empowerment indicators into the national data collected by the National Institute of Statistics (INS).
● For USAID: Work with relevant GoN Institutions, including the ONPG, and with other international organizations to create research dissemination plans. As part of this, USAID could provide technical support to the GoN to create a "gender data portal" which, at a minimum, could be a repository for gender-specific data documents and analyses. For example, the Government of Rwanda has established a gender monitoring office which maintains online data portals for gender; this might be considered as a model to replicate.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Although GBV data is collected by health centers and humanitarian partners, accurate measurement is difficult given the cultural context.</td><td>● For USAID: Actively participate in and support the national Sub-Cluster on GBV to explore and advocate for initiatives to improve nationwide GBV data.</td></tr>
<tr><td>GBV response services vary widely among regions: better services are available in regions with more humanitarian response programs (such as Tillabéri and Diffa), because there are more international organizations operating with strong GBV response expertise. In all regions, however, holistic GBV services are needed that draw on multi-sectoral coordination, supportive attitudes of service providers (especially as it relates to confidentiality), and adequate psychosocial care.</td><td>● For USAID: Design and fund a specific GBV-focused program that aligns with GoN strategies (including the National Action Plan to End Child Marriage and the National Strategy to Reduce GBV) and focuses specifically on GBV "one-stop-shop" centers. (PRIORITY)
● For all Stakeholders: Support GBV-focused CSOs to establish a permanent and comprehensive "formal justice" legal aid program for GBV survivors, including the following elements: training for justice actors, including police, on neutrality and confidentiality; a permanent fund to cover fees, including legal, transportation, lodging, health, etc.; and a widespread dissemination campaign, including information on types of GBV as well as information on how to confidentially seek formal justice, including for those who are illiterate.
● For USAID and USAID IPs: Work with all relevant GoN institutions (MPFPE, Ministry of Public Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defense/National Gendarmerie, and Ministry of the Interior/National Police) as well as GBV-focused CSOs to define minimum standards of GBV response; develop and apply harmonized SOPs, such as those developed by UN Women. Coordinate with</td></tr>
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	organizations engaged in GBV programming (and specifically the Spotlight Initiative program) to avoid duplication and to promote adherence to global best practice.
Women face numerous barriers as political candidates, including a lack of input regarding electoral candidate lists (which are monopolized by the male-dominated political elite) and a lack of necessary campaign financing. Some elected women have even been removed from office by the nominating political party to be replaced by a man.	● *For USAID IPs:* Work directly with political parties to discuss the importance of including and supporting female candidates. Working with these parties, develop incentives to include women and frame culturally appropriate explanations demonstrating that having female candidates can bolster a party's political power.
Some USAID-funded programs have successfully trained and supported female candidates to develop leadership skills that helped them get nominated and elected. However, once female candidates are nominated, they may face ongoing pushback from male colleagues, sexist behavior, and sexual harassment. More programs are needed to support women after they are elected.	● *For USAID and IPs:* Support capacity-building interventions for women political leaders within established women's parliamentary caucuses; provide women leaders with skills and knowledge to be effective and successful. Meaningful (substantive and visible) representation from women leaders reinforces role-modeling and meets voters' demand for performance accountability, which increases the public's acceptance and support for women's political leadership. ● *For USAID IPs:* Work with the Women's Parliamentary Network to propose an amendment to existing laws on GBV to criminalize violence against women in politics, or pass standalone laws to prohibit and criminalize these acts. These provisions are needed to provide adequate protection and support to women in politics, to create the conditions for reporting such violence, and to establish a framework for holding perpetrators accountable.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Per requirements in the USAID Automated Directives System (ADS) 201.3.2.9 and ADS 205, USAID/Niger hired Banyan Global to undertake a countrywide gender analysis to inform the Mission's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) for July 2022 - July 2027, as specified in the Scope of Work (SOW) in Annex B. The gender analysis aligns with the USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy (2012), U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV (2016), the Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment (WEEE) Act (2018), and the United States National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality.

A gender analysis is used to identify, understand, and describe gender differences and the relevance of gender-specific roles, responsibilities, rights, opportunities, patterns of decision making and leadership, and access to resources and services in a given context. It is a tool for examining the causes and consequences of inequality and for identifying gender program priorities for more impactful and equitable development interventions. Additionally, this study integrates inclusive development analysis to the extent possible by identifying, analyzing, and explaining barriers and processes that exclude certain people from participating fully in society and development programs. The USAID/Niger Gender Analysis identifies gender gaps, developing data to enhance the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment, and provides recommendations to better address gender and inclusion-related inequalities, constraints, advances, and opportunities.

As the basis for this gender analysis, Banyan Global carried out an in-depth literature review to identify data gaps and define lines of inquiry. The literature review found significant literature specific to Niger, the Sahel, and the Lake Chad Basin relating to education and health, especially on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and family planning (FP). Less literature is available on women's participation in community decisional structures, on the effectiveness of civil society organizations (CSOs)[3] working on gender and social inclusion issues, or on opportunities for women's employment in the private sector, particularly in agro-industry. This report is designed to fill these gaps in the existing literature; it does not include detailed analysis of health and education. For more information on gender and inclusion analysis relating to health and education in Niger, see the List of Sources Consulted in Annex C.

1.2 REPORT STRUCTURE

This gender analysis report is organized in three parts, with three accompanying Annexes, as summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1. REPORT STRUCTURE OF USAID/NIGER GENDER ANALYSIS		
REPORT SECTION	DESCRIPTION OF SECTION	ORGANIZING ELEMENTS OF GENDER ANALYSIS
Section 2: Country Level Gender Equality Overview	A **country level overview** of gender equality provides background about Niger, along with analysis following the gender analysis domains delineated by the USAID Automated Directives System 205 gender directive.	• Laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices • Cultural norms and beliefs • Gender roles, responsibilities, and time use • Access to and control over assets and resources • Patterns of power and decision-making • GBV
Section 3: Findings and Recommendations: Cross-Cutting	**Cross-cutting findings and recommendations** address common challenges identified for advancing gender equality and social inclusion across all sectors.	• Barriers to gender-transformative programming • GBV prevention and response, including child, early, and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) • Inclusion of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), nomadic populations, and persons in slavery and caste systems.
Sections 4-6: Findings and Recommendations by Development Objective	**Findings and recommendations are presented for each Development Objectives (DO)** of the anticipated CDCS. Each of the three DO sections examines intersecting variables of age (youth and children), rural/urban/nomadic residence, and ethnicity.	• DO 1: Communities Strengthened, Empowered, and More Resilient • DO 2: Inclusive Economic Opportunities Improved • DO 3: Performance and Responsiveness of Government Institutions Improved
Annexes		• Annex A: Illustrative Indicators • Annex B: Gender Analysis Scope of Work • Annex C: List of Sources Consulted

1.3 METHODOLOGY AND DATA LIMITATIONS

This report is based on a desk review of nearly 270 sources supplemented by primary data collection through 151 semi-structured interviews and 2 focus groups that engaged a total of 176 stakeholders. Key stakeholders were first identified through an initial list provided by USAID and key implementers. Additional informants were then identified via snowball sampling.

The research team conducted primary data collection May 9–June 9, 2022 with stakeholders that included USAID staff, prime and local implementing partners (IPs), other donors, national and subnational Government of Niger (GoN) officials, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs and INGOs), local civil society, traditional (or customary) leaders, and private sector enterprises, including agricultural cooperatives. Of the 176 key stakeholders consulted, 72 (41 percent) were women and 104 (59 percent) were men. See Table 2 for the number of stakeholders consulted by region and Table 3 for the number of stakeholders consulted by group.

TABLE 2. STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED (BY REGION)	
REGION	NUMBER OF STAKEHOLDERS
Niamey	43
Tillaberi	20
Tahoua	38
Zinder	24
Maradi	25
Dosso	25
TOTAL	**176**

TABLE 3. STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED (BY GROUP)	
REGION	NUMBER OF STAKEHOLDERS
Local CSOs	41
Agricultural Cooperatives	18
International Organizations and Donors	16
USAID/Niger	8
Traditional (Customary) Leaders	20
Subnational Government Officials	39
National Government Representatives	5
Private Sector	13

With the helpful assistance of the USAID NSSI, through the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), the research team was able to collect extensive data outside of Niamey through a team of Nigerien interviewers who met with traditional leaders, subnational government officials, local civil society, and private sector entities in five regions. The Banyan Global team traveled with the NSSI team to collect data in Tahoua, Zinder, Maradi, and Dosso, but was not able to travel to Tillabéri to directly oversee data collection. The Tillabéri interviews included fewer follow-up questions and less detail compared to other regions, presenting data limitations but not quality concerns. The team faced difficulties arranging

meetings with national government representatives, some of whom did not respond for several weeks, canceled meetings, or provided a lower-level representative in their place. Because of these scheduling challenges and resource limitations, representatives from all relevant ministry sectoral directorates could not be interviewed for the study.

Because some lines of inquiry involved sensitive topics, certain stakeholder groups – specifically traditional leaders and GoN representatives – may have been reticent in their responses. The accuracy of quantitative and qualitative data on gender-based violence (GBV), in particular, is limited due to the sensitivity around and normalization of GBV. More generally, recent demographic data for Niger is unavailable, as the last valid demographic household survey (DHS) was conducted in 2012. In many instances, the research team cites this data only because there is no more recent data available. Throughout the report, we have highlighted where we believe more research is needed. Furthermore, while the report integrates inclusive development analysis to the extent possible, further detailed analyses per region and ethnic group would be required to fully capture the rich diversity of Niger.

2. COUNTRY LEVEL GENDER EQUALITY OVERVIEW

2.1 COUNTRY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The Republic of Niger (Niger) is a landlocked country in francophone West Africa. The largest country in West Africa, 80 percent of Niger is covered by the Sahara Desert,[4] and 84 percent[5] of the population of 24.2 million[6] lives in rural areas. Nearly 85 percent of Nigieriens are engaged in agriculture.[7] Niger is ranked as the most vulnerable country in the world to climate change.[8]

Niger is predominantly Muslim (more than 98 percent); the two primary ethnic groups are the Hausa (53 percent) and the Zarma/Songhai (21 percent),[9] followed by the Tuareg (11 percent), Fulani/Peulh (6.5 percent), Kanuri (5.9 percent), Gurma (0.8 percent), Arab (0.4 percent), and Toubou (0.4 percent).[10]

Niger ranks last in the world (189 out of 189) on the United Nations (U.N.) Human Development Index,[11] and more than half of the population lives below the poverty line.[12] UNESCO estimates a 35 percent literacy rate (44 percent male, 27 percent female),[13] and only 51 percent of students complete primary school (54 percent male, 49 percent female).[14] Although Niger has dedicated significant efforts to improving health outcomes over the past several decades, maternal and child mortality rates remain high:[15] maternal mortality is 535 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births;[16] under-five, infant, and neonatal mortality is 127, 65, and 24 deaths, respectively, per 1,000 live births.[17] The population suffers from malnutrition (44.5 percent of girls and 46.7 percent of boys below 5 are stunted),[18] as well as a variety of infectious diseases, including a high prevalence of malaria.[19]

Niger ranks 45 out of 52 African countries on the African Development Bank's African Gender Equality Scale,[20] and has the highest rate of child marriage in the world.[21] These elevated rates of child marriage contribute to Niger's high fertility rate, estimated at 6.7 children per woman in 2020.[22] Moreover, according to the most recently available data, nearly one-third of married women in Niger are in polygamous unions.[23] At the current annual 3 percent growth rate, the population will double in the next 15 years.[24] Two-thirds of the population is younger than 25, and 60 percent is below 18.[25]

Niger faces a combination of quick onset and protracted humanitarian crises. The rise of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin has increased insecurity, especially in

the regions of Tillabéri and Diffa, leading to population displacements in a country that is already vulnerable to climate-related disasters,[26] multiple epidemic outbreaks,[27] and nutritional crises.[28] The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA, or OCHA) estimates that there are more than 264,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri regions; women and children are reported to make up the vast majority of IDPs – in certain places, over 80 percent.[29] Niger is also host to roughly 260,000 refugees from Mali, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso. The ongoing situation has created a protection crisis that predominantly affects women and girls, as escalating violence and displacement have heightened the risk of GBV and harmful practices while disrupting access to basic services, especially education and healthcare.

The following sections present crosscutting analysis of gender equality considerations relevant to all USAID/Niger DOs. Based predominantly on secondary data and validated through interviews, the findings are organized by domain (identified in USAID ADS 205 as required domains of gender analyses): 1) laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices; 2) cultural norms and beliefs; 3) gender roles, responsibilities, and time use; 4) access to and control over assets and resources; and 5) patterns of power and decision making. Additionally, a sixth domain of analysis has been included: 6) GBV, as a key cross-cutting theme. Further detail on each domain is found in Sections 3–6.

2.2 LAWS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES

Text Box 1 provides an overview of the legal framework relating to gender equality in Niger.

Text Box 1. Niger's Legal Framework and Mechanisms for Gender Equality

- **Constitution.** The Constitution of the Republic of Niger includes a provision on equality before the law, without discrimination of sex, or social, racial, ethnic, or religious origin.[30]
- **International and Regional Agreements.** Niger ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1999 and the Optional Protocol on violence against women in 2004.[31] However, substantive reservations remain representing implementing legislative action as contrary to "existing customs and practices," in effect maintaining customary law.[32] Niger has signed, but not ratified, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on Women's Rights in Africa.[33] In 1990, Niger ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and renewed its commitment to full implementation in 2019.[34] Niger has not ratified the Maputo Protocol outlawing early marriage.[35]
- **Women's Quotas**. Niger has a legislated quota requiring 30 percent of appointed positions and 25 percent of elected positions in the National Assembly to be held by women. For more information, see below, Section 2.6 Patterns of Power and Decision-Making.[36]
- **National Gender Machinery (NGM).** The Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection (*Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant,* MPFPE) is charged with addressing gender equality.[37] The National Observatory for Gender Equality (*Observatoire National pour la Promotion du Genre,* ONPG) is charged with working with institutions for monitoring gender-related issues through the collection and analysis of gender data.

The Republic of Niger's Constitution provides for equality of sex regardless of social, religious, or ethnic origin,[38] but some statutory laws and regulations render women and girls subordinate. For example, although the Labor Code prohibits gender discrimination, certain provisions limit women's employment in line with cultural norms. The different sources of law—statutory (modern), customary, and religious (Islamic Sharia law)—create legal uncertainty, with no established hierarchy among them. As more than 98 percent of Nigeriens are Muslim,[39] Islamic religious law often, though not always, governs family life

(marriage, divorce, child custody). Men are considered heads of household under Niger's Civil Code.[40] Niger has no national Family Code, and under customary law, women who are divorced or widowed are not entitled to be head of household even if they have children. In instances of divorce, women are only granted custody of children younger than seven years old.[41] Inheritance is governed largely by customary and Sharia (Islamic) law, with Sharia law often granting women more access to inheritance than customary law. More information on women's ability to inherit assets under Islamic law is discussed below in DO 2. Under customary law, women typically inherit much less than men, especially in regards to landed property.[42] Polygamy is permitted under religious and customary law, with men able to take up to four wives.[43]

There is no specific law criminalizing GBV in Niger, including CEFMU, and the country has not ratified the Maputo Protocol outlawing early marriage.[44] The Civil Code prohibits marriage before age 18 for boys and before 15 for girls, but customary and religious laws may be given precedence over the Civil Code, creating a loophole for marriage of girls under age 15.[45] Indeed, nearly one in three girls (28 percent) were married before the age of 15 in 2012.[46]

Previous attempts to change Niger's laws related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance to improve women's rights have met with strong opposition, especially from conservative religious groups. In 1994 and 2011, efforts to reform marriage and divorce laws were opposed by Islamic associations, who denounced the proposed changes as being against Islam and (in a Muslim-majority country) against democracy.[47] In 2012, the GoN tried to increase support for a law that would have forced school principals to declare when child marriages have taken place, in an effort to encourage keeping girls in school.[48] However, parliamentarians ultimately did not vote on it after the proposed provision sparked a public outcry with opposition from religious leaders.[49] Issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) are extremely sensitive in Niger, politically, culturally, and religiously.

The GoN established the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection/*Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant* (MPFPE) in 1998, which is charged with addressing gender equality. There is no parliamentary committee responsible for gender equality.[50] Niger adopted a National Gender Policy (PNG) in 2008, which was revised in 2017 with a five-year action plan (2018-2022).[51] In 2015, the GoN created the National Observatory for Gender Equality/*Observatoire National pour la Promotion du Genre* (ONPG), charged with working with institutions specifically for monitoring gender-related issues through the collection and analysis of gender data.

Youth—defined within Niger's National Youth Policy as individuals of the "two sexes" between ages 15 and 35[52]—are protected under the Constitution, specifically from exploitation and abandonment, and with an emphasis on the promotion of training and employment opportunities.[53] Niger has ratified all international conventions concerning child labor.[54] Though Article 106 of Niger's Labor Code sets the minimum age of work at 14, it is challenging to enforce this, due to the informal nature of the economy and especially in rural areas.[55] The Ministry of Youth and Sports/*Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports* (MJS) is the main governmental agency responsible for youth. The National Youth Council of Niger/*Conseil National de la Jeunesse du Niger* (CNJN) is an independent, non-partisan advisory body under the supervision of the MJS and undertakes diverse capacity-building projects with its members. The GoN adopted its first National Youth Policy/*Politique Nationale de la Jeunesse* (PNJ) in 2011 and recently validated a second strategy for 2022-2035.[56]

2.3 CULTURAL NORMS AND BELIEFS

Despite the ethnic diversity of Niger, with differences in belief systems and practices, there are generally similar divisions of gender roles and power dynamics among men and women in households. Men's primary role is seen as economic providers. As the head of the household, the husband controls most assets.[57] Wives are expected to obey and submit to their husbands, as well as to cook, clean, fetch water and firewood, and raise children. Most rural married women, especially those who are young, face societal pressure that limits their mobility beyond their homes and the homes of their family and friends.[58] This societal pressure limits women and girls' mobility and restricts their ability to access educational opportunities, particularly after marriage. Though some Nigerien men may accept women's financial contributions, others may see their own status as "provider" threatened by an economically powerful wife.[59]

A woman's greatest perceived asset in Nigerien communities is her fertility.[60] Both men and women report a strong desire for many children in Niger. These norms are discussed below in cross-cutting findings.

There are other internal inequities between household members in Niger. Once married, women in rural areas typically move in with the husband's family, where mothers-in-law have strong intra-familial power.[61] Polygamy is common, complicating household power hierarchies. While certain polygamous families may provide extra household support to women through shared labor and assets, in other instances polygamy creates jealousy and conflict among family members. Wives occupy different hierarchical levels within the family, with first (older) wives having typically more power regarding control over household food sources or other assets.[62]

2.4 GENDER ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND TIME USE

In Niger's mostly traditional patriarchal culture,[63] a man's role is to be the household leader and decision-maker, economic provider, and community participant.[64] The women's role is to bear and care for children and manage and maintain the household, including cooking, cleaning, and obtaining water, firewood, and other household supplies.[65] The gendered prioritization of marriage and domestic responsibilities for AGYW contributes to low educational attainment, especially in rural areas.[66]

Ethnographic research from Maradi showed that 79 percent of husbands agreed that their only role in caregiving is to be the financial provider of their household, and 63 percent of husbands agreed that husbands should *not* participate in caregiving tasks such as bathing or feeding their child.[67] Women and girls have also internalized these roles. The Girma[68] activity's 2020 gender analysis (performed for the USAID Food for Peace (FFP) project in Zinder) found that "the internalization [by women and girls] that men should provide for their families' . . . needs [is] tied to women's and girls' submissive role."[69]

Women in Niger on average work 14 to 18 hours a day (especially in rural areas) performing multiple competing priority tasks, including food processing, childcare, household maintenance, and engaging in farm labor and/or petty trade (often from the home).[70] Additionally, marriage obligations contribute to a dramatic increase in girls' workload,[71] although unwed AGYW also experience a time burden as they help their mothers (and her co-wives) in their domestic chores and occasionally in market activities. In Maradi, the vast majority of husbands agreed that boys should have more free time than girls (88 percent),[72] and this sentiment seems to be prevalent across regions in Niger.

2.5 ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER ASSETS AND RESOURCES

With Niger's strong population growth rate and resulting land fragmentation through inheritance, it is challenging to obtain a clear picture of women's land ownership. In 2012, in Tillabéri and Zinder, less than 18 percent of women owned land, compared to 47 percent of women (age 15-29) in Maradi.[73] These differences likely reflect differing culturally acceptable practices and differing applications of Islamic law that allows for female land inheritance, although typically half that granted to a male.

Inheritance issues are likely different among nomadic Fulani populations. The Tuaregs have a matrilineal tradition, and more information is needed to understand how their gender norms affect women's and men's inheritance as well as intra-household decision-making.[74] More information on inheritance is included in the Section on DO 2 Findings; women's inferior status in property disputes is described in DO 1 Findings.

When women have the opportunity to control income—typically generated from agriculture, trade, handicrafts, or domestic labor (discussed in Section on DO 2)—they generally use it for household consumption purposes as well for investments in food production, child's education, or healthcare.[75] In some households, with basic needs assumed to be provided by husbands, women are able to dedicate some of their income to saving for their daughter's wedding, for the maintenance of social networks through gift exchanges and mutual support, and to reinvest in their own income-generating activity (IGA).[76]

There are few formal and informal banking services or savings mechanisms, with 89 percent of Nigerien women financially excluded, as are 86 percent of people living in rural areas. Most women lack the funds to begin a business.[77] Women are more likely to face challenges in providing collateral (such as land) to gain access to loans. Financial institutions tend to grant loans to married women only with their husband's authorization.[78] Some women receive start-up capital from their husbands or families, but many women, especially young women, do not have access to such resources.[79] Women often seek to overcome this challenge through *tontines,* a local form of savings and loan groups (SLGs), though participation usually requires the husband's consent.[80] (See Section on DO 2 Findings for more information on participation in SLGs.)

2.6 PATTERNS OF POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

In Niger, men hold decision-making power at all levels—from the household level, including on matters of reproduction, to all levels of political leadership. In Nigerien politics, women's participation is limited due to gender stereotypes, misconceptions about their leadership skills, women's workload burdens, and their lack of awareness of their right to participate in these roles.[81] The GoN's PNG promotes women's political participation, and Niger has voluntary party quotas as well as legislated quotas for the single/lower house and at the sub-national level.[82] A quota law has been in place since 2000; as of 2019, the quota for appointed positions became 30 percent and for elected positions 25 percent.[83] However, these quotas are often not respected, nor do they guarantee that women can participate equally once elected or appointed to cabinet positions (discussed in DO 1 Findings).[84] Nomadic groups, including the Fulani, are underrepresented in elected positions and indeed have difficulty registering to vote.[85]

At the household level, men are the primary decision-makers, including decisions around housing, subsistence food, clothing, health costs, and school fees.[86] The most recent national scale data is through the DHS (2012), but there are more recent qualitative studies and small-scale quantitative studies that confirm the limited involvement of women in household decision-making. In the 2012 DHS, only 20

percent of women in Tillabéri, 16 percent of women in Maradi, and 21 percent of women in Zinder reported participating in decisions related to important household purchases.[87] Women seem to have more control over decisions related to the use of any money they earn (82, 92, and 83 percent of women in Tillabéri, Maradi, and Zinder, respectively).[88] Men also make decisions around their wives' healthcare, and only 12 percent of women reported to have the sole decision-making authority in regard to their own health.[89] Interestingly, the Girma gender analysis found that women in polygamous households in Zinder have slightly more decision-making authority than women in monogamous relationships. This is likely due to a lower degree of interaction with husbands in polygamous households.[90]

Relatedly, in many contexts in Niger, women are required to ask permission to participate in any activities outside of the home, which limits their ability to participate fully in formal economic or educational activities.[91] Young women, however, are increasingly engaging in income-generating activities to support families. In a study of youth inclusion in the world of work in Niger, Da Corta Lucia et al. observed that "the need for income and participation in new livelihoods push young people into conflict with their elders and spouses, forcing rapid changes in gender and generational norms in a difficult context."[92] As young women and girls are in more public-facing roles, household norms tend to shift, weakening rigid gender roles inside the family.

2.7 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Women and girls in the Central Sahel face one of the highest rates of GBV in the world,[93] with survivors often accepting it as a normal way of life. Because GBV is culturally acceptable and taboo to discuss, it is difficult to quantify and address through development initiatives (as discussed further in the crosscutting findings). A 2021 study on GBV prevalence, commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the European Union (EU)-funded Spotlight Initiative in collaboration with the MPFPE, estimates that 38.2 percent of women (and 16.3 percent of men) have experienced GBV in their lifetime. The regions with the highest reported levels of GBV include Dosso (18.5 percent), followed by Niamey (17.8 percent), Maradi (15.6 percent), Zinder (14.6 percent) and Tillabéri (14.3 percent). Despite the chronic conflict related to Boko Haram, reports of GBV are lowest in Diffa, at 5.6 percent.[94] It is challenging to assess the prevalence of different forms of GBV because it is chronically under-reported, due to a lack of knowledge and access to support services as well as social repercussions and general cultural normalization.

Although CEFMU is considered to be a type of GBV according to international standards, this designation, as well as the age when a girl can make her own decisions about marriage, is a contentious and sensitive matter in Niger. Demographic Household Survey (DHS) data from 2012 estimated that nationally 76 percent of Nigerien girls marry before the age of 18 (compared to 6 percent of boys), and 28 percent of girls are married before the age of 15 (the age minimum defined by Niger's Civil Code).[95] Overall, the median age for first marriage and for childbearing is 15.7 years and 18 years, respectively, for Nigerien women—the youngest in the region.[96] CEFMU is more common in rural areas than urban areas of Niger.[97] In some rural areas, there are reports that families enter into agreements where girls aged 10–12 join their future husband's family under the guardianship of the mother-in-law.[98] In Niger, CEFMU is more prevalent among the Hausa ethnic group (the majority ethnic group in Niger, at 53 percent).[99] Higher rates of polygamy are also linked with a higher proportion of CEFMU.[100] More recent qualitative research indicates that CEFMU remains common,[101] although additional quantitative data is needed to assess the impact of efforts to reduce CEFMU.[102]

3. CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS

Misconceptions about the meaning and intention behind gender equality initiatives contribute to local resistance that reduces the impact of programming. From local community to national government levels, primary research demonstrated that the concepts of "gender equality" and "women's empowerment" are conflated with "just adding women." Stakeholders view gender considerations as requiring simply increasing the percentage of female participants, not holistically addressing gender gaps and power imbalances across key domains. Furthermore, gender equity approaches are perceived to promote women's rights and opportunities at the expense of men in a zero-sum situation that threatens to reduce men's power and destroy traditional societal and religious structures.

Interviewees stressed the importance of engaging husbands and traditional and religious leaders, who act as the "gatekeepers" to Nigerien women; they stated that programs that only engage women can be perceived as deliberately excluding men. For example, interviewees noted that directly providing women with emergency cash transfers or distributions of materials for IGAs can produce backlash, resulting in the seizure of the cash/materials or even in GBV, including intimate partner violence (IPV).

Multiple stakeholders noted that the inclusion of women in decision-making structures or in the economy is viewed negatively, especially in rural areas. Spindler et al. confirmed these findings, noting that almost all husbands (91 percent) agreed that giving more rights to women meant that men could lose out.[103] Rarely are "gender equality" and "women's empowerment" understood as beneficial and relevant to all members of the community, regardless of gender.

Gender programming is also viewed primarily as a Western priority that attempts to change local culture or to create a revolution among women. One human rights and governance-focused IP explained that working through local partners is critical because otherwise, "we get accused of making the women revolt."[104] Some stakeholders shared a frustration that donor-funded gender-equality efforts are not always aligned with cultural and religious structures, reminiscent of the colonial history in Niger when externally imposed institutions and beliefs were viewed as counter to local traditions and knowledge. Some interviewed representatives from international organizations and IPs noted that resistance to gender programming contributes to limited change on gender issues.[105]

Discussions with a variety of stakeholders demonstrated that program gender strategies often focus only on the number of women participants, without addressing or acknowledging the gender barriers related to the project objectives. This misunderstanding is evident also within the local government and CSOs, and even with INGO local staff who do not have a clear understanding of what "gender integration" means.

The concept of "social inclusion," similarly, is often reduced to working specifically with persons with physical disabilities.[106] When youth are targeted as a marginalized group, programs often do not differentiate between young men and young women; thus, youth programs are inadvertently gender-blind, designed and implemented narrowly around the realities of young men.

Despite the inclusion of gender- and rights-focused approaches in a number of USAID-funded programs, there are very few projects that include gender-equality or rights-

focused objectives for women or girls. Although Niger is cited frequently as one of the worst places in the world to be a woman, funding to specifically advance the rights and status of women and girls is not commensurate. Across all sectors, IPs focus narrowly on removing barriers to women's participation in project activities. In some sectors, the focus on women's participation includes a broader gender-sensitive approach, such as in SRH programming that also addresses harmful gender norms such as inequitable decision-making, limited mobility, and stereotypes. However, outside of a few sectors, the emphasis on increasing women's participation is rarely accompanied by a gender-sensitive approach.

USAID FFP programs include strict donor requirements for gender equality and inclusion. IPs are required to integrate gender and inclusion into activity objectives, which has promoted gender transformative approaches (GTAs); see Text Box 2.[107] However, this is not done systematically across USAID programming. The USAID, IP, and GoN stakeholders interviewed indicate that agriculture-focused programming in particular needs a more deliberate focus on gender and inclusion. Unfortunately, a majority of these programs are either gender-blind or define a gender strategy as merely increasing the percentage of women participating in project activities.

Text Box 2. Gender-Transformative Approaches

Gender transformative approaches (GTA) **create opportunities for individuals to actively challenge gender norms, promote positions of social and political influence for women and girls in communities, and address power inequities between persons of different genders**. In sum, GTAs seek to transform harmful or inequitable gender relations to promote gender equality and to achieve program objectives. Transformative approaches can be applied to change unequal gender dynamics and power relations across different levels—households, communities, systems, institutions, and policies.

Gender-transformative approaches work. Evidence shows that programs and trainings that include a gender and power perspective are substantially more effective, especially in tackling difficult issues such as GBV.

Women in Niger, especially young women in rural areas, are marginalized socially, politically, and economically. This marginalization is frequently justified through religion and tradition, and manifests in limitations on women's physical mobility, norms requiring women to ask for permission to participate in any activity outside of the home, and excessive time burden related to household work.[108] Women's marginalization persists across regions and ethnicities and, to some extent, socio-economic groups, although wealthy, educated women are more likely to participate in formal employment.[109] Societal attitudes and values place men as economic providers and decision makers and women in supporting roles as domestic caregivers.[110] The belief that women are less capable to participate in economic and political activities outside the household, and that these activities would take away from their domestic responsibilities, reduces opportunities for women to establish themselves in respected positions outside the home.[111] To engage women in programming, strategies must overcome women's (1) reduced mobility outside the home, (2) unpaid care burden, and (3) internalization of patriarchal norms. These barriers are generally greater for women in rural areas and younger women. Women in rural areas have less exposure to education, economic opportunities, and women leaders as role models. For both men and women, age can bring greater authority and decision-making power.

Reduced mobility outside the home. Women must ask permission of their husbands (or other male figure, if unmarried, such as father or elder brother) to participate in training, attend community events, or engage in economic activities outside the home. Certain ethnic groups in Niger such as the Arabs

practice wife seclusion, forbidding wives from leaving the house—though prevalence data is unavailable on the practice.[112] As discussed in a cross-cutting finding below, mobility is most controlled for women in slavery systems. Stakeholders noted that, even if they know that women are present within the household, it is impossible to include them in project activities or to even discuss their potential participation.[113]

Unpaid Care Burden. When women do engage in activities outside the home, it is expected that those activities will not interfere with their household responsibilities. As described in Section 2.4, Gender Roles, Responsibilities, and Time Use, women on average work 14 to 18 hours a day, divided among multiple competing priorities including food processing, childcare, household maintenance, and engaging in farm labor and/or petty trade (often from the home).[114] Social attitudes prohibit husbands from engaging in or contributing to these tasks, and women's unpaid care burden limits their availability even for short-term skill-building activities. Women who are professionally successful are expected to prioritize their husbands and children. Educated women with careers are perceived to have a difficult time finding and keeping a husband.[115]

Internalization of Patriarchal Norms. Women are perceived as dependents who are unable or unsuited to meaningfully contribute outside of their reproductive and domestic responsibilities. Male family members are expected to influence women to conform to expected behavior, and women also internalize and maintain this system.[116] To explain why women do not seek leadership opportunities, some stakeholders interviewed said that women were simply not interested, while others cited a lack of self-confidence or an internalized belief that women should not hold such roles. One stakeholder noted, "Women are the silent majority who are scared of changing society—if you complain you will be targeted by the community and the religious leaders."[117] The inferior status of women is reinforced by the belief that questioning the system or seeking change will result in social ostracization.

Fear of women's sexuality and beliefs around the importance of female purity greatly impede women's and girls' ability to engage in the public space and the economy or to access educational opportunities and other essential services. Societal beliefs around sexuality are used to control the behavior of women and girls; allowing women and girls to be in public spaces, where there may be men who are not family members, is seen as a risk to their sexual purity, their marriage value, and the family's honor. This risk is tied to beliefs that men cannot control their sexual impulses and behavior, and also to a fear that women, if given more autonomy, cannot control their sexuality. Attitudes around women's sexual purity and men's sexual desires are documented in in several studies. Perlman et al. (2019) found that 87 percent of young husbands (aged 15 to 24) and 85 percent of older husbands (aged 25 or older) believe a woman who has sex before marrying does not deserve respect; 66 percent of young husbands and 61 percent of older husbands believe that a woman, including their own wives, should not initiate sex. Seventy-six percent of young husbands and 73 percent of older husbands agreed that men need sex more than women.[118]

Beliefs around sexuality influence women's participation in programs across all sectors. One study found that Nigerien men fear that, if they migrate for work and their wives use FP methods, their wives will be inclined to engage in extra-marital sex because they do not have to fear pregnancy.[119] Some men do not allow their wives to attend training outside of the village because of concerns that she will be "seduced" and thus "spoiled" (as a marriage prospect). Women who leave home, for example to engage in economic or political activities, may be labeled as prostitutes by both men and women.[120]

The role of both men and women in enforcing behaviors to safeguard purity points to the importance of engaging specifically with religious leaders, community influencers, and husbands and parents, to promote gender-equitable masculinities. Programming should engage reference groups to shift social norms to decrease fear of women's sexuality, increase school attendance, support participation in income-generating activities, and expand control over FP choices.

Young, unmarried, and childless women, regardless of background, have less social status and power than women who are married and have children. This section examines three profiles of AGYW in terms of control over their time and mobility and their access to health, education, and social services: (1) unmarried adolescent girls; (2) newly married AGYW; and (3) AGYW who work as domestic labor for other households. It is important to note that AGYW, specifically those who are out-of-school and/or newly married, are often overlooked by development programs, which typically target girls in school or pregnant and breastfeeding women. Moreover, recent research indicates that AGYW are more at risk for GBV. The 2021 GBV report commissioned by UNFPA found that women aged 20–24 were the group the most impacted by GBV in the last 12 months (followed by women aged 10–14 and 25–29). Adolescent girls in particular (aged 10–14) experienced high levels of physical aggression (21.8 percent).[121]

Unmarried adolescent girls. Girls who have gone through puberty but have not yet had children are perceived as not yet adding value to the community. Instead, in their position between "girl" and "mother," they are viewed as posing a threat to the honor of the family, as described in the finding above. In insecure areas, girls' mobility is particularly restricted.[122] The increasing conflict in Tillabéri and Diffa has spiked family fears of their daughters being "spoiled" (*gatée*, a French word frequently used to describe female survivors of GBV) if they venture beyond the household.[123] The conflict has also closed schools, one of the few sometimes permissible reasons for girls to leave the house. As a driver of CEFMU, traditional ideas of social capital and family honor deem it safer for daughters to marry rather than either continue their education or work outside the home. In fact, one stakeholder noted that a 14-year-old girl might beg her family to get married, as she understands that this is the main way to acquire social status.[124]

Newly married AGYW. Young women who are either unmarried or newly married but without children have low social status, especially in rural areas.[125] When a young woman is married, she may have little power within the dynamics of a polygamous household where older wives often dictate chores to younger wives. Mobility during the first year of marriage is more restricted for AGYW than during any other period in their lives.[126] During this period, they are isolated from their previous social circles, are expected to serve their mothers-in-law and older co-wives, and are at the bottom of the household hierarchy. Once they start to bear children, or if and when a husband takes an additional (likely younger) wife, these relationships and power dynamics evolve.

AGYW who work as domestic labor for other households. Some wealthier families employ young girls under age 18 to provide domestic labor in their household in exchange for food, clothing, shelter, and potentially education. Stakeholders noted that families may "sell" their daughters as domestic laborers, as it is also viewed as a mutually beneficial relationship: the impoverished family has one less mouth to feed, and the wealthier family benefits from inexpensive labor in exchange for providing a certain level of care for the girl.[127] However, stakeholders also note that the girls have little say in these transactions; they may not be free to leave or be given enough to eat, and may potentially be exposed to GBV or be

engaged in the *wahaya* practice (discussed below).[128] Stakeholders indicated that the situation can become exploitative enough to amount to a potential form of indentured servitude.

Stakeholders reported an increase in young girls migrating to regional city centers and working on the street, where there is also a noted increase in sexual harassment and transactional sex. This observation referred to Tahoua and Dosso in particular, where researchers were able to speak directly with "street girls" who do not have families able to support them. The girls can be very young (ages 10-15) and may sometimes engage in harmful survival strategies, including sex work and transactional sex. They are particularly vulnerable to GBV and cannot return to their families or communities because they have lost one of their most valued assets—their sexual purity.

Primary research conducted by Nigerien doctoral students found that young women between the ages of 12 and 23 sometimes receive approval from their families to migrate to urban areas to seek work, in order to send money back home.[129] These may be young women who wish to stay in school, but whose families cannot afford to pay for school fees, uniforms, or supplies. By migrating to urban areas to work during the summer months, they are able to cover these costs.[130] Money earned may also be given to their parents, occasionally to hire farm labor that these young women would have otherwise provided, or it might be set aside to make up their marriage dowry.[131]

Secondary data indicate that sexual harassment and transactional sex may be increasingly common for AGYW in Niger. "Hawking," the informal sale of goods in markets or public spaces, may be one contributing factor, as it is a reportedly common activity for girls who are expected to help their mothers, aunts, or other female relatives sell food or goods in the market.[132] In addition to its adverse effects on school performance and retention, hawking makes girls vulnerable to exploitation by men they encounter.[133] Girls and their parents say that sexual harassment is "all too often part and parcel of hawking."[134] Another reason is the ongoing insecurity situation in Niger, which compounds the already limited access to livelihoods. AGYW may deploy negative coping mechanisms for survival, including being married off by their families or engaging in transactional sex.[135] Sexual exploitation is also reportedly commonplace especially among IDPs, including by the security forces and authorities, often involving transactional sex in exchange for access to food and non-food items.[136] Adolescent girls from Lake Chad Basin said they were frequently forced into sexual relationships with men to survive.[137] Family separation increases the likelihood of other forms violence, including abuse and mistreatment at home.[138] More information is needed to understand the complex factors affecting the migration of young women in Niger.

The ongoing conflict in Tillabéri and Diffa is shifting gender norms, particularly around women's economic role, which—coupled with climate change and conflict—has precipitated female migration. While it is well-documented that Nigerien men (especially young men) engage in migration, both primary and secondary research demonstrates that women are increasingly migrating as well, whether for economic or security reasons. Stakeholders noted that men are not always capable of providing for their family due to less arable land, low agricultural returns, or reduced land access due to conflict. Men who migrate to seek employment may not succeed in making enough to support their families, or they might depart to join in the conflict. Due to economic hardship, Nigerien women are increasingly obliged to undertake new livelihood strategies to feed their families.[139] After men migrate, women may also need to migrate to find paid (primarily domestic) work. Typically, women do not migrate far for work, traveling as little as 10-15 km, and they bring their young children.[140]

Women may also migrate for security reasons, becoming displaced when they flee the conflict. Female IDPs may go to live with a relative in a safer part of the country or may travel to encampments near urban areas where they might find work.[141] Female IDPs, and especially adolescent girls, who travel with their husbands or move in with relatives may find their economic opportunities further curtailed, given restrictions on their mobility coupled with the insecurity of living outside of their communities.

The hardships men face in providing for their families and resulting migration patterns have resulted in evolving gender roles. One stakeholder noted that in Diffa, women can be seen working in the fields, which was not common before. As households are struggling economically, women are called upon to earn money for the household.

The ongoing conflict in Niger has worsened the situation of marginalized groups in regard to economic opportunities and access to services such as education, especially for young women, nomadic groups, young men and women, and persons with disabilities. One stakeholder noted that "the IDP crisis is worsening the already critical situation of women. They are the biggest victims of this displacement."[142] Multiple stakeholders explained that women and youth are disproportionately affected by conflict but are not represented in the peace-building processes. Displacement disrupts the established social fabric, eliminates traditional income-generating activities, and reduces access to social services. These challenges are faced not only by refugees and IDPs but also by host communities. In that regard, multiple IPs mentioned the importance, when working with displaced communities, of considering the needs of the host communities as well, which may in turn affect protection risks for IDPs.

Access to education is one of the key services affected by the conflict in Niger, as the presence of VEOs makes the journey to school more dangerous for students—especially for girls.[143] Both boys and girls are affected, but families may keep girls at home at higher rates for fear they will be sexually assaulted. Research conducted by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) finds that in the Central Sahel, "attacks on education, including sexual violence, often have differentiated impacts on women and girls, including forced marriage, forced pregnancy due to rape and premature pregnancy, and stigma which reduces the likelihood of girls returning to school after an attack."[144] GCPEA also found that, while attacks on schools decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic because many schools were closed, as schools began to reopen, the attacks resumed.[145]

Women also report that insecurity makes it more difficult and dangerous to access healthcare, especially if they need to travel long distances or along insecure routes.[146] While this insecurity also affects men's access to care, women are particularly vulnerable because of potential exposure to GBV enroute, because they need to access health services for maternal health (specifically pre- and ante-natal services), and because they are normally responsible for their children's health care needs.[147] Similarly, hospital closures in regions with already inadequate access to healthcare, attacks on and intimidation of healthcare providers, and insecure routes to hospitals are factors that disproportionately affect women.[148]

In terms of marginalization of certain ethnic groups, multiple interviewees noted that the Fulani are perceived to be particularly likely to join VEOs and that many people believe that VEOs are primarily made up of Fulani.[149] This creates a vicious cycle in which Fulani are suspected and targeted by security forces, creating a stronger likelihood that they become disillusioned with the state and move towards the VEOs. Some scholars trace the rise of the Islamic State in Greater Sahara to inter-ethnic conflict

between the Fulani and Tuaregs, blaming the increase in violent extremism on ethnic tensions. However, it is likely that these ethnic tensions, both among herders (who, in Niger, are predominantly Fulani and Tuareg) and between herders and farmers, are exacerbated by competition over natural resources, a widespread phenomenon across the Sahel.[150] VEOs take advantage of resource scarcity and ethnic tensions to add to their recruits, telling each ethnic group that they will support them against the other, especially when the group is under-represented or the GoN is slow to respond to their complaints.[151]

Domestic and intimate partner violence (IPV) is a hidden phenomenon that is widely accepted as normal by both men and women in Niger. The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as ongoing conflict in Diffa and Tillabéri, has exacerbated risks of GBV. GBV within families is "hidden" because it is not spoken about or denounced. As explained by one stakeholder, "It is taboo to talk about when a husband beats his wife, does not give her food, or mistreats her, because it is considered shameful to denounce one's husband, the father of one's children."[152] Survey results show that one in four men and six in 10 women in Niger believe it is justifiable in at least one situation for a husband to beat his wife.[153] Ethnographic research from Maradi in 2019 found similar levels of acceptance among married adolescent girls and their husbands: 54 percent of adolescent wives and 57 percent of husbands felt that people in their village think there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten.[154] Over three-quarters of the same set of respondents agreed that if a woman refuses to have sex with her husband, he has the right to get angry and reprimand her.[155] Over half of adolescent wives also justified the use of physical violence if she uses a method of contraception without her husband's permission, compared to 30 percent of husbands.[156] Men also mentioned sexual satisfaction and coercion in the qualitative study as both a "marital expectation and an obligation."[157] In fact, it is widely believed that men have the right to have sex with their spouse whenever they desire and by force if necessary. Marital rape is not explicitly criminalized under law.[158]

A review of secondary data indicates that conflict, militarization, and insecurity in Tillabéri and Diffa have exacerbated pre-existing risks of multiple forms of GBV—including IPV, sexual exploitation, and CEFMU; the primary research has confirmed these findings.[159] The COVID-19 pandemic has also contributed to increased rates of GBV.[160] Although country-level evidence remains limited, a regional study conducted in six Sahelian countries showed that domestic violence, whether physical or verbal, increased from 40.6 percent before the COVID-19 crisis to 52.2 percent during the pandemic crisis.[161] In addition, there is reporting that CEFMU, sexual exploitation and abuse, and human trafficking are on the rise due to the pandemic.[162]

Community leaders and GoN stakeholders frequently mentioned CEFMU as a key issue in their communities in relation to girls' education. Stakeholders at multiple levels shared concerns about CEFMU because girls drop out of school to be married; they consider staying in school as a way to delay marriage. The link between education and the prevalence of CEFMU is particularly evident in Niger: According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 81 percent of women aged 20–24 with no education, and 63 percent with only primary education, were married or in union at age 18, compared to only 17 percent of women with secondary education or higher.[163]

Many of the interviewed GoN officials were aware that the transition between primary school and secondary school is a particularly critical window when girls tend to drop out to get married, especially in rural areas. The rate of girls transitioning to secondary school is extremely low in rural as compared to urban areas. Twenty-five percent of girls who passed their primary school exams in Niamey did not go on to secondary school, and 43 percent of girls who passed their exams in Dosso did not go on to

secondary school.[164] However, although interviewed GoN officials acknowledged that CEFMU and education are inextricably linked, CEFMU was rarely framed as a form of GBV or as a human rights issue.

Stakeholders reported that when Niger renewed its commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which specifies a minimum marriage age of 18 for both men and women, this change was supposed to be ratified into law in 2017 through a vote by the National Assembly. However, the proposed change to raise the marriage age from 15 to 18 for girls was viewed as culturally unacceptable, and traditional leaders successfully pressured to prevent the vote from happening.

Given that in Niger, nearly one in three girls (28 percent) are married before the age of 15—which is the legal marriage age for girls, according to Niger's Civil Code—more work is needed.[165] Moreover, some stakeholders suspect that CEFMU might actually be on the rise in rural areas. This could be for a variety of reasons, including poverty, food insecurity (worsened by climate change), conflict, and the increased reach of radical Islam. More information is needed to understand whether this is the case and, if so, what are the contributing factors. Meanwhile, traditional leaders communicate that school is the primary vehicle to delay marriage, and that teachers play an important role in both encouraging girls to stay in school and convincing their parents of the value of girls' education. This work is vital, given that CEFMU places them at greater risk for IPV and reproductive coercion (RC).[166]

Both men and women place a high value on very large families, and many men prefer multiple and young wives to maximize opportunities for having children. Paying bride price[167] is customary in most of Niger, and young men often migrate abroad to earn money for marriage. As noted, the social standing of both men and women in Niger is tied up in their fertility; both men and women report a strong desire for many children. The 2012 DHS shows that the desired number of children is 9 for Nigerien women and 11 children for men. Ethnographic research in Maradi similarly found that adolescent wives desire approximately 8 children, and their husbands desire 9.[168] Spindler et al. found that most husbands in Maradi perceived strong social norms around the importance of having children for status: about 69 percent of young husbands (aged 15-24) and 65 percent of older husbands (aged 25 and older) agreed that people in their village would perceive them as more powerful if they have more children.[169] Masquelier suggests that women who want to limit the number of children anger men, "not only because women 'are sneaking behind their backs' to purchase contraceptives but also because by limiting the number of offspring they produce, women are striking at the heart of their identity [as a provider]."[170]

There are strong social expectations that wives become pregnant within their first year of marriage.[171] One regional (Maradi) study found that Nigerien AGYW perceived unmarried adolescent girls (age 15-18) as "old maids."[172] Many view procreation as the primary object of marriage, and they believe that a girl should marry at the age when she is "most fertile" to make the most of her reproductive period.[173]

For men to generate as many children as possible, polygamy is a preferable option, and selecting young wives allows greater opportunities for childbearing. In Niger, men must pay a bride price to the family of the woman he wishes to marry, and younger brides attract higher dowries.[174] Given the limited income-generating activities in rural areas, coupled with climate-change and insecurity reducing agricultural productivity, young men (aged 35 and below) often migrate to earn money, either abroad or to urban centers of Niger.

Most GBV survivors who have the courage and support to bring a formal complaint of GBV to relevant authorities are forced to withdraw it, often to have the issue "resolved" informally between families. More generally, it is too costly, both financially and socially, for survivors of GBV (especially sexual violence) to seek justice. GBV is dramatically underreported in Niger, not just because of its normalization but also because of the shame and monetary costs associated with pursuing justice, whether through customary or formal justice channels. While women have the right to seek redress for violence in either customary or formal courts, few do so due to their lack of knowledge about the law and fear of repercussions: spousal or familial repudiation, further violence, or stigmatization.[175] Women who bring a case for resolution, especially against their husband, are subject to discrimination and ostracization. One stakeholder discussed the discrimination women faced in customary tribunals: "It is very difficult for women to go in front of a tribunal because of the prejudices they would encounter—for example, if a woman is raped and she goes before a tribunal, they will ask her what she did to deserve it or attract it."[176] This stigma leads many survivors to keep silent about their experiences.

Women in rural areas who seek justice usually first go to local traditional leaders, usually the *chef de quartier* (neighborhood chief) who will typically seek "reconciliation" between the perpetrator and the victim. These chiefs have little understanding of GBV, its manifestations, or survivors' rights under the law. As one stakeholder put it, "mediation for GBV can make it worse, especially if they do the customary mediation—customary is about reconciliation and not about justice."[177] Other stakeholders hold more optimistic views of traditional leaders: "Women find themselves between a rock and a hard place with GBV and any other conflicts; traditional leaders don't give them many opportunities to be right. Now, the chance we have is that the traditional chiefs we have now are of very high quality. They are educated—they are starting to manage things in a different way. If they make a decision that favors the woman, they explain it to the community so they understand why the woman would win."[178] This indicates there are opportunities to work with these leaders to promote human-rights-based and survivor-centered approaches to GBV conflict resolution.

During customary hearings, any monetary fine extracted from the perpetrator first goes to pay the fees of the local leaders and other justice actors.[179] The remainder is given to the victim's family. There is a widespread perception that cases are not kept confidential; the risk of the community learning that a woman's sexual value was violated results in women and their families keeping quiet rather than pursuing justice.[180]

Very few survivors of GBV seek justice through either customary or formal justice mechanisms. One report from 2021 found that only 0.5 percent of survivors of GBV sought formal justice.[181] If a woman chooses to seek justice in a modern court, it may be to avoid the stigma and potential social ostracism that might result in pursuing justice in a customary court—or she might not favor the reconciliation approach adopted by customary courts.[182] However, modern courts are often only found in urban areas, and they require money to pay for transportation and lawyers that few women have. Other barriers include a general distrust of judicial systems and the slowness of judicial proceedings.[183] While certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local CSOs seek to cover those costs, there are not permanent programs and women often are unaware of these initiatives.

In sum, to avoid having the community learn about their victimization, and deterred by the financial costs of seeking justice in a distant (urban) modern court, most women who have experienced GBV do not report it. The economic and social costs outweigh the potential benefits of pursuing justice.

Although GBV is a chronic and escalating issue in Niger, prevention and response programming is rarely prioritized or funded by donors, amounting to less than 1 percent of development funding and 1.2 percent of humanitarian funding.[184] Donor and GoN efforts to address GBV are disjointed and require consolidation and coordination. The GBV Sub-Cluster—a working group on GBV comprising representatives from government, donor, and international organizations to coordinate their work, including data collection—meets at the national level, but inconsistently. In 2020, only six organizations in Niger received funding to address GBV in the humanitarian setting.[185] Total funding for GBV in humanitarian response was just over $1 million USD, whereas OCHA estimated the cluster requirements for 2020 at nearly $6 million USD.[186]

Besides limited integration and coordination, there is a lack of specific programming for GBV prevention and response. When asked if their programs contain integrated GBV prevention activities, the majority of stakeholders answered with a resounding "no." For the few programs that seek to prevent GBV, primary research showed that those efforts are often limited to sensitization or awareness-raising.[187] The potential shortcomings of sensitization-focused approaches are apparent across sectors, especially regarding their ability to overcome harmful gender norms, promote gender-equitable masculinities, and result in behavior change. Certain partners mentioned integrating GBV prevention in their approaches, often through modified Husbands Schools methodologies; however, more study is needed to evaluate their GBV-related outcomes.[188]

A few INGOs and CSOs provide piecemeal support to GBV survivors, such as by providing health services, psychosocial support, legal services, or economic support (either through grants or training on income-generating activities—see DO 3 for more information).[189] However, these programs are not nationwide, and they face funding limitations that threaten their continuing operation and expansion.

IPs, CSOs, private sector representatives, and government employees cited a lack of literacy and numeracy skills as a primary reason for women's low participation in leadership roles across sectors. Education was consistently mentioned as a primary reason that very few women/girls are active in leadership roles and in community decision-making structures. Increasing the number of women participants or establishing representational quotas does not solve this problem, as there are few women with the minimum skills required for these positions. One example, cited multiple times, was a Ministry of Public Health (MoH) initiative to identify one male and one female health focal point in each village to provide basic prevention, treatment, and referrals to community members. The MoH and IPs both noted that it was difficult to find women who were literate—able to keep accurate inventory records and write simple reports.[190] Moreover, particularly in rural areas, it is extremely difficult to find literate women who have enough time to participate (e.g., older women with older children). As discussed below, programs and community structures end up drawing on the same few women who are literate, well-connected, and available to participate.

Current programming does not always account for or collect disaggregated data on polygamous households, despite nearly one-third of Nigerien households being polygamous.[191] There is a knowledge gap in how to work with polygamous households to support more equitable household power dynamics, not only between husband and wife but also among co-wives. Only one IP discussed the importance of working specifically with households, including those with polygamous unions, through their Harmonious Families methodology.[192] The methodology focuses on building practical skills for household budgeting and inclusive household decision-making by striving to give equal voice to all household members.[193]

However, they also noted the sensitive nature of this work in the community and emphasized the importance of working with all members of the household, including all wives and also mothers-in-law—especially in economic empowerment projects, because the household power dynamics are complex, and working with one member instead of another might do more harm than good.[194] The limited number of approaches for working with polygamous households indicates a need for more, and better, GTAs within this unique context.

Many programs report working with community influencers (such as husbands, traditional leaders, and mothers-in-law) to promote gender-equitable objectives around women's participation and leadership in community structures and the economy. However, despite anecdotal reports suggesting the effectiveness of these approaches, more evidence is needed to understand their impact on women's empowerment, decision-making power, and GBV. Multiple IPs noted that it is challenging to work directly with women without the buy-in of community influencers, who are often the women's "gatekeepers," and without this buy-in, working directly with women can in fact exacerbate IPV. This is one reason why Husband Schools have become increasingly popular. Adapted for use across different sectors, they demonstrate some of the rare results in improving women's mobility and participation.[195] However, there is rigorous data only to demonstrate the impact of working with husbands to increase women's access to SRH, not for other outcomes, and no data on the impact of working with couples or polygamous households in Niger. Although IPs have anecdotal evidence and project reports indicating that their approaches have had positive impacts for women, independent evaluation would be valuable for establishing evidence-based models that can be expanded and replicated.

In addition to working with husbands, USAID IPs noted the importance of working with mothers-in-law and/or grandmothers to promote girls' education and to prevent (and indeed refrain from) GBV. This approach was only mentioned by select partners and requires further study.

Traditional and religious leaders have a significant impact on the success or failure of inclusive development initiatives globally, especially in culturally-sensitive areas such as gender equality (GE). In the Nigerien context, the power of traditional leaders and institutions frequently trumps formal institutions and political authorities. Multiple stakeholders stressed the importance of working with traditional and religious leaders, who can either significantly help or hinder gender equality-related program impacts. The willingness of traditional leaders to work on gender equality issues varies with the individual. There are anecdotal examples of high-level influential traditional leaders who are ready and willing to work with INGOs and CSOs on GE programming, including by convening lower-level traditional leaders for training and sensitization activities and by empowering the female member of the Sultanate (the *tambara*) to assist women in the region.[196]

Traditional leaders also have significant influence over the actions of the government, including on its willingness to pass laws promoting human rights and facilitating access to social services for women and marginalized groups. As discussed above, traditional leaders hindered GE programming by mobilizing to block the National Assembly's vote on the marriage age. Furthermore, certain stakeholders noted that traditional leaders are the primary reason why the GoN is unwilling to acknowledge and act on the slavery and caste systems (further discussed below). People in government positions are typically descendants or relatives of traditional leaders; giving these traditional leaders significant lobbying authority. One stakeholder summed up: "Moving the needle requires working with traditional leaders.

The state is aware of [gender and social inclusion] issues, but they are beholden to the traditional leaders."[197] Multiple stakeholders noted that the GoN is caught between a rock and a hard place: they must forever balance the demands of traditional leaders, who have authority over the local population, and the demands of the international community, who provide funding for development and humanitarian programs.

Recruitment of project participants and beneficiaries is often conducted in collaboration with local leaders of sedentary populations, or through a household census.[198] These recruitment practices overlook nomadic and marginalized groups. Although partnering with local leaders or heads of household secures a level of buy-in for programs, this recruitment method reproduces existing exclusion and marginalization within communities. Some programs have put in place complaint mechanisms for recruitment, but vulnerable community members may not be able to access them, or may risk further marginalization if they question the decisions of the local leaders or heads of household.[199] Most stakeholders believe that their existing targeting strategies are sufficient: "no one is excluded" was a frequent response. However, they do not necessarily conduct context-specific vulnerability or gender-sensitive assessments to identify the most vulnerable and/or marginalized. Due to limited understanding of social inclusion concepts, inclusion strategies often focus only on youth (mainly young men) and on persons with disabilities (mainly those with physical disabilities). IPs often rely on local leaders to determine who within the community is most vulnerable, or they ask members of households to self-select into programs. Without carrying out a vulnerability assessment that also examines household mobility and time use, self-selection will exclude those who have the least mobility or time (such as young wives). IPs noted that they are aware of completely secluded wives and indentured girls who provide domestic labor to households, but they do not know how to reach them, or they are told "there are no women here." Finally, when partners target participants based on officially designated geographic locations, nomadic populations living in encampments beyond the village borders are often excluded (as discussed below).

Nomadic groups are rarely included in development or humanitarian-focused programs. Relatedly, they are frequently overlooked when discussing marginalized groups; both IPs and GoN lack strategies for how to best work with these groups. Nomadic persons may be included in programs if they happen to be present at the time of its inception, but there are no strategies to follow their movements to ensure continuity in accessing programs or social services. Only a handful of INGOs and local CSOs are working with or have worked with nomadic groups, and no long-term sustained programs or models could be identified. One INGO representative mentioned an education project that targeted nomadic youth utilizing a boarding school model, but the project was discontinued after several years despite some success.[200]

Traditional representatives from the Fulani noted that Fulani leaders have power over their people that is independent of control over physical assets, unlike traditional leaders of sedentary populations, who have authority through land. Fulani adults pay annual taxes to the chief of their tribal group, much as sedentary adults pay annual taxes to the chief of their village.[201] Because of these parallel governance structures for the nomadic and sedentary populations, there may be reluctance on the part of the local sedentary leaders to provide services to the Fulani.[202]

Nomadic groups are stereotyped as participating in VEOs. Some Fulani may be more likely to participate in VEOs because of their systematic exclusion from both traditional and formal governance systems.

Because of the perception that many Fulani are troublemakers and likely to join VEOs, police and security forces might treat them with additional suspicion, exacerbating the problem and further pushing them away.[203]

Conflicts over natural resources (land and water) often occur between the sedentary Hausa or Zarma majority and the Fulani minority, as well as between different nomadic populations such as the Fulani and Tuareg. Nomadic groups who have become sedentary due to economic necessity may face disdain and ostracization from those who remain nomadic.[204] These conflicts have worsened in recent years, as land that was once open pasture is now cultivated by sedentary groups, likely without any consultation with the pastoralists to help them find alternative resources for their livestock.[205] In Tillabéri, although the Fulani view themselves as the original inhabitants of the land, they do not control it, often facing conflict with other ethnic groups. To prevent conflict and resolve disputes, the Fulani, not trusting the ambiguity of customary laws, are more inclined to bring their cases to the formal courts. As Fulani women's lack direct ownership of cattle and have limited decision-making authority, they are unlikely to participate in dispute resolution processes.[206] Corruption, collusion, and discrimination in the courts are perceived as disadvantaging the Fulani in Tillabéri; indeed, in the past the courts have failed to address issues of theft of Fulani cattle by other ethnic groups.[207] This biased system leads to lack of trust in local systems and government officials, gradually degrading social cohesion.

Female pastoralists face complex intersectional issues in relation to natural resource competition, ethnic tensions, and conflict. Different sources report varying levels of women's community participation. Women in Fulani and Tuareg communities in Maradi have reported fewer barriers than women in Hausa communities, with regard to participating and voicing their opinions in community forums;[208] however, men and women in Fulani communities in Zinder agree that women may not participate or give their opinion unless they receive permission from men. There is little known about how other vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities or LGBTQI+, are potentially marginalized within nomadic communities, although one stakeholder noted the use of slaves by the Fulani and Tuareg for maintaining the camps and leading the migrating herds of animals.

Speaking about slavery and caste systems is taboo, even though these harmful practices continue covertly, particularly in isolated rural regions. There is very limited information about the individuals living within these systems, and most existing programming does not reach them. Forms of slavery persist in Niger across all ethnic groups and in all regions—primarily in rural areas—despite its prohibition in the 1999 Constitution and penalization through updates to the Penal Code in 2003.[209] Niger did not prosecute any slavery cases until 2014.[210]

Estimates of the number of persons in slavery in Niger vary widely, as there have been few quantitative studies; data is politically sensitive and challenging to collect, especially in conflict areas. In 2004, Anti-Slavery International (ASI) and Timidria estimated there were 840,000 slaves in Niger, based on qualitative data collected throughout the country. [211] However, a number of GoN representatives denounced this number as an overestimation. In 2018, the Global Slavery Index (GSI) derived a vastly lower estimate of 133,000, using Walk Free's methodology developed with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). [212]

This section presents three types of slavery that continue to exist in Niger, as categorized by Timidra, a well-established local anti-slavery CSO dedicated to providing legal, economic, and advocacy support to current and former slaves. Due to the topic's sensitivities, as well as conflict that prevents access to

many rural areas where slavery persists, there is limited data on the details of these slavery forms. The general forms of slavery, however, are confirmed by Anti-Slavery International and by a report from the U.N Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, based on a country visit to Niger in 2014.[213]

Active Slavery. Referred to as '*pur et dur*' (pure and hard) or active, this form of slavery is the most concealed as well as the most controlling and violent. People live with their "masters," are forced to work against their will, and are subjected to violence, including GBV.[214] This form of slavery psychologically enslaves persons from birth by inculcating the belief that it is their duty to serve their "masters" (both in the household and in the fields), that religious texts support the claim of ownership, and that physical punishment is a form of religious sanction and atonement. This type of slavery is primarily practiced, historically, by Fulani, Tuareg, Arab, and Toubou groups.[215] Stakeholders stressed that more information is needed to understand whether the 2003 law has curbed the practice.

Passive Slavery. Passive slavery is also referred to as descent-based slavery, as the victims are born into slavery. They do not live with the "master,"[216] but they farm the land of the "master's" family. Although these slaves are typically not subjected to violence, they, too, undergo psychological indoctrination, being taught from birth that they are subordinate to and must serve the "masters." They must give a portion of what they grow to the "master," and the land will never belong to them. They may also pay a yearly tax to the "master" on top of their other yearly taxes and may also give gifts or other forms of tribute. In return, the "master" is responsible for providing for certain needs of the slaves; traditionally, this includes protection, but it is unclear if this is still the case.[217] Passive slavery also exists within nomadic populations, where slaves and their descendants are in charge of caring for livestock and maintaining the camps.[218] Tahoua and Tillaberi reportedly have the largest slave populations, mainly in passive slavery.

Advocacy led by Timidria has produced important progress over the past two decades, resulting in approximately 6,000 people leaving their "masters" and relocating to form their own villages of "descendants" (former slaves).[219] ASI cited that former "masters" have sought legal action to force the return of some of these descendants, but after 17 years the formal courts finally ruled in the favor of the former slaves.[220]

Wahaya. The third type of slavery is called *wahaya:* a man purchases a girl or woman under the guise of a fifth wife,[221] who is obliged to bear his children and carry out household responsibilities. Timidria noted that *wahaya* is particularly serious in an area of Tahoua where three districts meet, known as the "triangle of shame," where young women continue to be bought and sold as concubines.[222] Tahoua government representatives claim that the practice ended once slavery became illegal; however, some stakeholders say that the practice continues, especially in this area.[223] *Wahaya* is a particularly sensitive issue as, reportedly, well-connected men engage in the practice—while the police and judicial system turn a blind eye.[224]

ASI noted that poverty may be an additional driver of the persistence of *wahaya*, with fathers offering to sell their daughters in exchange for money or debt relief. *Wahaya* also has cross-border implications: an unknown number of Nigerien AGYW are trafficked into northern Nigeria,[225] where *wahaya* also exists.

Text Box 3. Advocacy Against *Wahaya*

One former *wahaya* bride, Hadizatou Mani, with the assistance of Timidria, fought for and secured her freedom after being sold at the age of 12. She became an anti-slavery advocate, launching a high-profile lawsuit in 2008 and eventually earning the U.S. State Department's International Women of Courage Award.

In a recent case, Dame Fodi was given to her master's sister as a wedding present at the age of eight, trafficked out of Niger to Burkina Faso, and forced to marry a male slave in order to reproduce. Timidria took Dame Fodi's case before a Nigerien formal court. Due to the court's inaction, Timidria was able to elevate the case to the West African Court of Justice in 2021, which ruled against Niger for its negligence in handling the case.

The results of both of these cases are not widely known. Stakeholders noted that if successful cases were better publicized, more slaves might seek freedom, and courts might feel compelled to hear their cases.

In general, slaves often live in isolated rural areas where they are not able to access services or inherit assets, and they typically hold no or few rights within the community. Slaves from all three groups often lack birth certificates and are not able to access health and education services. In areas where water is limited, communities limit when they can collect water and how much.[226] Slaves are rarely identified to participate in development projects; however, certain IPs and local CSOs try to work with these groups through advocacy and social services interventions, such as the USAID-funded Access to Justice and Human Rights "Adalci" Program, as well as ASI and Timidria's program. (See Text Box 3: Advocacy Against Wahaya.[227])

Slavery is an extremely sensitive topic due to its ties to traditional chiefdom structures. As traditional leaders have such strong ties to the government, government representatives—even if they disagree with the practice—are unwilling to speak out or take action and face backlash if they do.[228] However, advocacy efforts have resulted in a few successful cases and has led the GoN to implement certain anti-slavery initiatives, such as declaring a National Day Against Slavery in 2019.

Finally, in addition to the three types of slavery, there is also a caste system in Niger, though there is limited information on its extent within specific ethnic groups. Multiple stakeholders listed butchers, blacksmiths, and *griots* (oral storytellers) as three distinct lower castes of people in Niger. These groups are typically prevented from marrying outside of their caste or taking employment outside their family's traditional practice. Multiple stakeholders shared anecdotes of families blocking marriages after discovering the fiancé's ancestry as either a descendent of a slave or someone of lower caste, including a female butcher who described facing this discrimination herself. These marriage limitations do not seem to apply as strictly to traditional leaders, as they can marry lower caste women through *wahaya*, and there were well-known accounts of high-level traditional leaders marrying women from lower castes,

whose children would later hold positions of authority in the traditional leadership structure. It is not clear whether people from lower castes have the same access to social services and resources, nor whether they are represented in government—although stakeholders noted that the last time a "descendant" or a lower-caste person was represented at a high level of government was prior to Niger's Independence from France. However, some believe that times are changing. One male butcher in Zinder explained, "There are more and more young people and women who embrace this profession [of butcher] even though they have not inherited it. Women have been able to ensure their financial autonomy thanks to this profession."[229]

Issues related to SOGI are widely considered to be a "western" construct and reflect a personal choice. Sexual minorities are among the most socially, politically, and economically marginalized in Niger. LGBTQI+ persons are one of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in Niger, and gay men and trans people are at particularly high risk of harassment and violence, including from security forces such as the police. According to the U.S. State Department Country Report from 2020, there were no documented cases of discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or access to education or health care. The report indicates that this is most likely because of the danger and stigma associated with filing such discrimination complaints.[230]

A challenge for support programs is finding ways to serve LGBTQI+ persons without exposing their identities and thus creating additional risk. A few small programs offer health and legal services to LGBTQI+ persons, but legal services in particular are reportedly inadequate. These programs may also offer a way for participants to connect with one another, to provide solidarity and psychosocial support. More support is needed for local LGBTQI+-led organizations, such as through grants, emergency assistance, and capacity-building.

3.2 CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS

3.2.1 GENDER INTEGRATION WITHIN USAID/NIGER AND IPS

- *For USAID:* Hire a full-time gender advisor with authority and resources to support integration of gender within all Mission programming. Strengthen a gender community of practice among IPs to exchange locally relevant strategies and lessons learned for addressing resistance and building support for gender equality. In keeping with the USAID Administrator's recent commitment to double the level of gender-based programming globally,[231] as well as requirements under the 2018 Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Act and ADS 205, ensure that all IPs receive guidance on gender integration requirements. Ensure that these commitments are highlighted in annual performance statements and embedded in key steps of the project cycle, such as solicitations and performance monitoring processes. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For USAID IPs:* Develop and model organizational policies, processes, and capacity-building for gender equality and inclusion, including embedding gender-equitable roles and responsibilities across job descriptions and performance evaluations for all staff. Develop gender action plans that inform work planning as well as monitoring, evaluation, and learning. For new projects, include a gender-specific programming budget and a gender advisor with adequate authority and expertise to address key gender barriers through GTAs, as programs with dedicated gender staff and budgets have better gender equity and inclusion outcomes. **(PRIORITY)**

3.2.1 GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

- *For all Stakeholders:* Systematically partner with community influencers and gatekeepers, including men, traditional and religious leaders, and mothers-in-law, to collaboratively design approaches that shift social norms and empower women. Intentionally engaging family and community support is critical for doing no harm when seeking gender-transformative change. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For All Stakeholders:* Design and implement GTAs, including those that specifically target younger men and women (segmented by life cycle), that focus on dismantling harmful norms of femininity and masculinity. For example, given the popularity of the Husband Schools, stakeholders could pilot, adapt, and scale similar GTAs working with men and boys for the specific objectives of reducing the acceptance of GBV (prevention) and supporting women's economic empowerment. Sample approaches include Equimundo's (previously Promundo) Journeys of Transformation and Program H, The Living Peace Group, Sonke Gender Justice One Man Can approach, and Engender Health's Men As Partners. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For USAID:* Fund evaluations to assess whether gender-transformative objectives are being achieved in current IP programming that utilizes the Husband School approach. This approach is being applied in health, economic development, and GBV programming, but has only been evaluated for SRH objectives. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For USAID:* Integrate women-focused functional literacy programs within all sectoral programming and within other "women-focused" approaches (i.e., care groups or SLGs). If literacy is not a specific program component (for example, within humanitarian response programs), ensure referrals for participants to available literacy programs. Ensure that IPs integrate rigorous M&E mechanisms to monitor the quality and effectiveness of functional literacy approaches.[232]

3.2.2 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- *For All Stakeholders:* Implement approaches to change attitudes and expectations around marriage age and fertility in order to reduce CEFMU. Include a specific focus on reducing CEFMU through social and behavior change (SBC) seeking to promote girls' education. SBC efforts should highlight the positive aspects of continuing girls' education and delaying girls' marriage, instead of taking a negative and shame-inducing approach. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For All Stakeholders:* Provide education alternatives to out-of-school youth, especially girls aged 10–15 who are not yet married, given their risk of CEFMU.

- *For USAID:* Work with traditional and religious leaders to speak out against CEFMU in context-appropriate ways. Identify and provide support to CSOs and other organizations to advocate to the GoN to apply a minimum marriage age, first to respect the 15-year-old threshold for girls and then to work towards the international human rights standard threshold of 18 years old.

- *For USAID:* Support a standalone GBV program and incorporate GBV requirements into more solicitations and proposal evaluation criteria. Improve GBV integration in sectoral programming by requiring all programs to identify and mitigate GBV risks. Provide resources, expertise, and support for IP staff to identify and address GBV in their work, including specialized training for any staff in a position to provide referrals or entry points to GBV response services. See *The Foundational Elements for Gender-Based Violence Programming in Development* for more specific guidance on how USAID development programs can prevent, mitigate, and respond to GBV, as well as sector-specific guidance for addressing GBV in 12 sectors. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For USAID:* Analyze the major drivers of IPV, including cultural and religious justifications. Work with traditional and religious leaders to identify culturally appropriate behavior-change approaches that include both men and women. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For all stakeholders:* Promote the exchange of experiences and lessons learned in GBV prevention and response programming with the aim of identifying and replicating best practices. In close collaboration with the GoN, and potentially facilitated by the existing national GBV Sub-Cluster, create a collaborative framework for GBV prevention and response programming to harmonize resource mobilization efforts for a holistic response.

3.2.3 INCLUSIVE TARGETING FOR PROGRAMMING

- *For All Stakeholders:* Dedicate culturally sensitive programming across sectors that focuses specifically on the rights and needs of AGYW, including migrants, out-of-school AGYW, and newly married but childless women—populations who are often left out of current programs. Capacity building programs for AGYW should include out-of-school learning opportunities, including financial literacy and microenterprise skills. Life skills development and SRH knowledge should also be emphasized across all age groups.

- *For USAID and IPs:* Carry out locally-based vulnerability assessments in potential project areas with the goal of informing targeting strategies. IPs should be explicit when describing their targeting approach to include the most vulnerable, and USAID should require that all relevant indicators are disaggregated by type of marginalized group, not just by gender, age, and disability.

- *For USAID and IPs:* Analyze successful programs, both within Niger and the region, that work with polygamous households. Ensure that program data collection tools are adapted to better understand and work with intra-household power dynamics. During program design, collect data that will allow for a flexible do-no-harm approach that can reach the most vulnerable members of a household.

- *For Donors:* Prioritize the inclusion of nomadic groups within service-delivery projects with GoN. Identify and analyze global best practices for working with nomadic populations, including with marginalized groups within these populations (women, youth, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+, etc.) **(PRIORITY)**

- *For USAID IPs:* Carry out participatory consultations with nomadic groups to better understand their desires and needs relative to accessing and participating in programming, and implement strategies to facilitate their inclusion. Ensure that women are provided opportunities through the consultative process to share their priorities openly.

3.2.4 SLAVERY AND CASTE SYSTEMS

- *For Donors:* While working diplomatically with the GoN, support in-depth analysis of slavery and the caste system and assist with the dissemination of findings. Support GoN to strengthen enforcement of the 2003 anti-slavery law.

- *For Donors:* Support human rights-focused programs that provide resources and support to local activists and CSOs working with individuals in slavery and caste systems. Possible areas of intervention include: economic and social reintegration for former slaves; legal support for slaves seeking freedom or family reunification; legal support for lower caste people and slave descendants who are facing discrimination; provision of social services, especially health and education; and protection for advocates who speak out about slavery.

4. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 1: COMMUNITIES STRENGTHENED, EMPOWERED, AND MORE RESILIENT

4.1 ABOUT DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 1

Development Objective (DO) 1 seeks to empower the people of Niger, including women, youth, and those from marginalized groups such as nomadic populations, to act as grassroots-level agents of change to unlock local solutions. Lines of inquiry for primary data collection focused on civil society collective action and advocacy as well as the quality of participation in community decision-making structures. Analysis under this DO focuses on gaps and opportunities for engaging women, youth, and marginalized groups to participate within community structures, including subnational (decentralized) government, water-user associations, Citizen Watch Committees/*Committee de Veille Citoyenne* (CVC), Community Development Committees/*Committees de Developpement Communautaire* (CDC), land commissions/*commissions foncieres*, and various forms of civil society. This section also examines aspects of inclusion within civil society, in terms of who is represented, the missions of organizations, and organizations' engagement with women, youth, and marginalized groups.

4.2 DO 1 GENDER ANALYSIS FINDINGS

Although the quota system is an excellent step in institutionalizing women's participation and leadership in government, the law is not always applied, especially at decentralized levels.[233] This is due to a dearth of qualified female candidates, officials lacking the authority to enforce the quota, and ministries' lack of commitment.[234] The current GoN gender quota requires that 30 percent of appointed positions and 25 percent of elected positions be held by women.[235] In part due to this quota, women's representation in the (unicameral) parliament increased from 14.6 percent in 2014 to 25.9 percent in 2020; currently, out of 166 of current members, 43 are women.[236] There are eight parliamentary seats reserved for ethnic minority groups and no electoral quota for youth in parliament.[237] Only seven out of 42 government ministers are female, which is lower than the 25-percent quota for high level government appointments.[238]

At the decentralized level, there are currently only two female prefects out of 63; six female mayors out of 266; and no female regional governors.[239] Women's low levels of representation at this level of governance is due in part to a low bar set in the quota law, requiring only that 15 percent of electoral lists, elected positions, and nominated positions be female.[240] Enforcement of the quota also is weaker at the decentralized levels, because of less awareness and buy-in for the quota and smaller pools of female candidates.

One of the main reasons the quota is not respected is the absence of accountability mechanisms that could penalize institutions who fail to adhere to the law. As noted above (Section 2.2 Laws, Policies, Regulations, and Institutional Practices), the GoN established the ONPG to monitor implementation of the quota law.[241] The ONPG produces regular reports on the adherence to the quota law across all ministries and presents these findings to the cabinet of ministers.[242] However, the ONPG does not have power or authority to impose penalties on institutions not adhering to the law.[243] Stakeholders also noted that various ministerial representatives view quota reporting as a nuisance, rarely taking it seriously.[244] A number of GoN officials, especially at the decentralized levels, echoed this sentiment, indicating that adherence to the law is low and considered of little importance.[245]

The incomplete application of the quota law contributes to an ongoing cycle: women and young people lack the skills they need to increase their political representation and participation, and the political and social environment tends to exclude them from opportunities to gain relevant skills, experiences, and networks.[246] One USAID IP study found that women in Niger severely lack the communication, advocacy, and negotiation skills needed to effectively participate in local decision-making.[247] They also lack access to relevant information, such as eligibility criteria for candidacy, election campaign management, and fundraising to stand as a candidate in an election.[248] In general, politics is viewed as the realm of men in Niger. As was seen in their opposition of enforcement of the quota in the 2020 elections, traditional and religious leaders promote the idea that politics is inappropriate for women, based on patriarchal traditions or misogynistic interpretations of religious precepts.[249]

Promoting equitable participation and leadership of women and girls in project activities is a challenge because of low levels of literacy, restricted mobility, the need for spousal approval for activities outside of the home, and socio-cultural norms that discourage women and girls from engaging in leadership roles in certain sectors and community decision-making structures. A number of IPs and local CSOs, however, have developed best practices for overcoming these barriers to participation. As noted above, women are more likely to be illiterate[250] and economically dependent on others, limiting their opportunities for participation in decision-making and leadership at all levels.[251] Moreover, women's participation in community structures is limited due to the requirement that women must seek their husband's (or father's) approval to participate in activities outside of the home, to occupy a leadership position, or, in some instances, to speak in public.[252] Other common barriers include mobility constraints for women and girls (depending on the location of an event or meeting) as well as women's workload.[253] Lastly, young women in Niger have limited women models in leadership compared to young men, as most leadership positions in community development structures and associations are held by men, especially in rural areas.[254] Where young women recognize role models, these role models are likely to be leaders within women-only settings (such as trainers or leaders in women's groups) or women working in rural communities who come from urban areas.[255]

Women's participation in groups deemed "appropriate" for women increases their quality of participation, including taking on leadership roles, but this does not necessarily translate into increased participation in other community structures.[256] One study found that women feel they can express their needs and interests better in community structures dealing with health and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and in their SLGs, but less well in governance structures of other types, including farmers' groups.[257] In mixed-gender structures, men typically occupy senior-level positions (president and vice president) while women usually occupy stereotypically female and more junior positions (secretaries or treasurers).[258] Lastly, women's responsibilities in mixed groups at the community level are typically limited to mobilizing other women for activities deemed gender-appropriate (such as sweeping community water points).[259]

The majority of USAID IPs recognize that one key to engaging women and girls in their project activities is to engage men (i.e., husbands or fathers) to ensure that women and girls are allowed to participate. For example, SFCG has been able to achieve parity in targeting youth by engaging specifically with fathers to obtain their support for their daughters' and wives' project participation. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) engages men through couple-strengthening approaches (*La famille hamonieuse* – Harmonious Families) which emphasizes couple (or polygamous household) decision-making for more equitable practices at the household level. Only one USAID IP mentioned that they strive for *quality*

versus *quantity* of women's participation.[260] Quality, in this instance, means that women are able to engage in group governance (leadership) structures, to voice opinions openly, and to have a voice in key group decisions.

IPs have also recognized the importance of wider gatekeeper and community-level approaches. Counterpart International (CI) engages men at the community level through a "community champions" network that promotes gender-equitable participation. Community champions are influential community members trained on the benefits of including more women in various activities and structures. These champions act to promote this idea to other community members. CI also works with traditional leaders and members of decision-making structures (i.e., *Committee de Veille Citoyenne* and *Committees de Development Communautaire*) to set quotas, which has resulted in major increases to women's participation within these committees.[261] These quotas also stipulate requirements for gender equity in leadership positions (e.g., if the president is male, the vice-president should be female, and vice-versa). CRS also works with older women (mothers-in-law and grandmothers), recognizing their power and influence in households especially regarding issues of marriage, child health and nutrition, education, and FP.[262]

USAID IPs acknowledge that the low literacy rate for women is a key barrier to their participation in community structures, and some programs have integrated functional literacy components or education-focused activities. For example, large, multi-sectoral food security programs (funded by FFP) include literacy centers.[263] More information is needed to learn whether integrating functional literacy in multi-sectoral programs contributes not only to positive sectoral impacts, but also to increased women's participation and leadership.

Some USAID IPs use a guide (developed by the MPFPE with UNFPA, in collaboration with important Islamic religious networks) called the *Islamic Argument for Gender Equity*. The guide provides Quranic quotes that support more equitable roles for women and girls, thus challenging interpretations of Islamic texts that justify women and girl's marginalization, including exclusion from decision-making and leadership roles.[264] Though the document was developed in 2008, it is reportedly regularly updated.[265]

Lastly, some USAID IPs work through existing networks of women leaders. For example, SFCG has worked with Women Lawyers of Niger/*Femmes Juristes du Niger* (FJN) to encourage continued professional growth and to hopefully develop a new generation of female magistrates in Niger; currently, only 0.9 percent of magistrates in Niger are women. However, the program has struggled to find interested participants—possibly due to entrenched norms of women's inferiority.[266] To engage with existing women SLG leaders, CARE International leverages the *Mata Masu Dubara* (MMD) network, consisting of roughly 26,445 SLGs with over 600,000 female members.[267] In fact, CARE found that these MMD groups have formed associations or agricultural cooperatives and have evolved their activities to engage in advocacy for a broader women's rights agenda, serving as a platform to facilitate women's collective action and leadership.[268]

GoN officials recognize that women, even when present, rarely participate in community meetings or decision-making, citing women's low self-confidence as the main barrier. Due to various socio-cultural barriers (discussed above), adult women and young women and men are underrepresented in decision-making committees at the community level. GoN officials recognize this as a barrier to inclusive development, but they tend to view it as an issue out of their control. For example, stakeholders expressed a sentiment that either it is impossible to find "qualified" women to participate

in community structures or leadership positions, or state that women do not seek out these opportunities because they lack self-confidence. Indeed, some respondents said it is women's fault that they are not better represented.[269] This type of thinking allows officials and decision-makers to ignore the root causes and structural inequities that underlie women's fear of stepping forward.

USAID IPs report that existing projects tend to engage with the same set of female community members for leadership positions. These women are reportedly older, of higher socioeconomic status, and/or have connections to traditional leaders. Many community leadership positions (for example, within community development or natural resource management (NRM) committees, or as community health focal points) require participants to have a certain level of basic literacy in order to carry out their duties. Because of these requirements, a number of USAID IP's reported difficulties in engaging a diverse and inclusive set of female leaders. Other difficulties relate to identifying women who have their husband's permission, acceptable social standing, and enough time to actively participate in community groups or positions of responsibility, especially in traditionally male-dominated groups. USAID IPs working on literacy (whether implementing community-based literacy programs or collaborating with existing literacy opportunities) noted that once a woman in a rural community becomes functionally literate, she is in high demand by development and humanitarian partners and is likely to become engaged in multiple project structures.[270]

Social status and wealth also play a role in a community's acceptance of female representatives. The women who are able to access more senior-level positions of leadership and decision-making frequently have higher social status, education, and wealth.[271] In addition to being wealthier, women represented in development partner "women's groups" are frequently connected or related in some way to the village chief, the *marabout* (Muslim Cleric), or other decision-makers.[272] Similarly, for youth, family ties to and support from the village chief are necessary to obtain a leadership position in the community. In fact, it is rare to see a committee without a relative of the village chief (often a child or a wife) in a leadership position.[273]

Age affects women's ability to participate in community decision-making structures. Not only are older women participating at higher rates than younger women across all community groups, but they are also more likely to express themselves publicly on certain topics. USAID IPs report that older women are more readily able to participate actively, not only because of the respect afforded to them due to age, but also because they are usually free from childcare burdens.[274] They also have more mobility, in large part because they are no longer seen as a threat for attracting the sexual attention of men. Conversely, communities view young women who participate in community meetings as "disrespectful," particularly if they are unmarried—which is also reflected in women's participation in the private sector (as discussed below in DO 2).[275] Though there is greater acceptance of young men's participation than young women's participation, young men also report being frequently ignored in community meetings.[276]

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) is well recognized by international organizations and the GoN as a resolution that promotes women's participation in conflict prevention, conflict management, and sustainable peace efforts. There is less awareness of the GoN's own National Action Plan (NAP) for WPS, and little evidence of investments in or implementation of the NAP. More specifically, the GoN's WPS NAP is lacking an operational coordination mechanism, dedicated resources, and institutional ownership across relevant GoN institutions.

The GoN has made policy commitments to enhance women's political participation by prioritizing their role in the overall strategy for security and development, both in the country and regionally. Accordingly, Niger adopted its second NAP implementing UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on WPS for the period 2020–2024.[277] Stakeholders mentioned WPS multiple times, but gave few details on progress on the NAP's implementation. There is extremely limited ownership of the NAP beyond the MPFPE, despite its relevance to the multiple GoN institutions named in the NAP document.[278]

Despite these challenges, Niger's first NAP report indicates that the GoN supported the establishment of the G5 Sahel Women's Platform, which helps elevate the voices of women in peacebuilding.[279] USAID IPs confirmed that this platform is operational; in certain cases, IPs are working with it to showcase successful women's leadership models.[280] The NAP has very little focus on GBV prevention or response, despite data showing that the regional conflict has exacerbated pre-existing risks of multiple forms of GBV—including IPV, sexual exploitation, and CEFMU.

Despite the recent emphasis on WPS, women continue to have a limited role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, especially at the community level. Conflicts related to assets and natural resources are managed exclusively by men; female justice representatives are called upon solely to address "women's conflicts." Typically, even though women and youth are most affected by conflict, their role in conflict mediation and peacebuilding occurs not in the public sphere but instead behind closed doors.[281] Displaced women, in particular, do not participate in decision-making or processes related to conflict resolution and peacebuilding conflict mitigation.[282]

VEO-driven conflict is exacerbated by chronic tension around access to natural resources in Niger, particularly land and water, which is also the cause of most intra-community and farmer-herder conflicts in rural areas.[283] Farmer-herder conflict typically involves sedentary populations in competition with nomadic (and ethnic minority) groups.[284] However, while Nigerien women are often responsible for collecting water for households and cultivating arable land, they are typically not viewed as primary managers, decision-makers, or owners of these resources. Women's low access to and control over resources and assets is then used to justify their exclusion from conflict mediation processes. For example, when asked how a woman would resolve a conflict with a herder encroaching on her agricultural field, one stakeholder noted that the field probably would not belong to the woman anyway, so the men would settle the conflict.[285]

When women are participating in peacebuilding and mediation efforts, they are limited to issues involving their households (e.g., older women mediating an issue between younger women in their own family), their female networks, or other "women to women" conflicts (e.g., issues between co-wives).[286] Some informants acknowledge that women may influence conflict resolution via their husbands. As one stakeholder puts it, "although women do not have decision-making power in our traditional society, they participate in the mediation of conflicts by giving advice to their husbands."[287] However, even when a conflict directly impacts a woman, she is usually represented in customary justice processes by male family members.[288] This includes conflicts related to GBV. Conflicts over inheritance are usually solved within families, though stakeholders noted that unresolved cases are typically elevated to traditional leaders.[289]

Certain IPs and international organizations are working to engage women in community conflict-resolution and peacebuilding processes. In Dosso and Maradi, UN Women partnered with a local CSO, *Reseau des Femmes pour la Paix* (REFEPA)/Network of Women for Peace, for a project focusing on women mediators (*Femmes Mediatrices)*.[290] Women were first trained in conflict prevention and management of rural land conflicts, and were then linked with relevant administrative and customary authorities to support mediation specifically around conflicts between farmers and herders.[291] Although the program trained women specifically in land-related conflicts, the vast majority of conflicts the women went on to mediate related to social conflicts or conflicts within and between families.[292] These included mediations between co-wives, between husbands and wives, and between youth.

The *Femmes Mediatrices* project saw several major successes. First, traditional chiefs provided personal testimonies to the positive role women played in preventing conflicts from requiring traditional leader involvement. Traditional leaders also reported that women showed more confidence to speak in public in their role as a mediator. Importantly, groups of women mediators also nominated women to become representatives in formal structures for the prevention and management of national resources: the Basic Land Commissions (*Commission Foncière de Base* – COFOB); Communal Land Commissions (*Commission Foncière Communale* – COFOCOM*);* and Regional Land Commissions. At the end of the project in 2020, 278 women were represented in 60 commissions.[293]

Factors influencing access to formal and customary justice for women and young girls are complex. Stakeholders indicated women have more access to and in fact prefer customary forms of justice, despite outcomes that frequently do not respect women's human rights. It is unclear how much the barriers to accessing justice may influence women's choice of customary or religious justice systems over formal systems. Formal justice systems are typically situated in urban or semi-urban areas, requiring additional resources, time, and mobility to access.[294] Customary justice, in contrast, takes place within communities led by traditional leaders who have a long history with the community.[295] Traditional leaders, even if they support remedies that do not uphold women's rights, are familiar and thus more trusted than formal justice actors. Furthermore, customary justice may be a more socially acceptable form of conflict resolution, depending on particular regional and ethnic norms. Rural women from sedentary populations may face pressure to utilize trusted customary systems, while formal justice is more acceptable in urban areas and is also often preferred by the nomadic Fulani.[296]

Local CSOs may adapt their mandates specifically to attract available funding related to gender equality, leading traditional leaders to feel that CSOs do not adequately represent the marginalized groups they claim to represent.[297] Local CSOs in Niger, like NGOs the world over, can only function with funding. With a large number of local CSOs competing for resources, coupled with donors' and IPs' belief that many CSOs lack transparency and competency, there is a perception that CSO leadership is focused primarily on winning funding—including for activities beyond their mandate or competence.[298] In fact, many CSOs do not have a clear and fixed mandate or a clear area of expertise, and few have the capacity to engage in gender equality or social inclusion-focused programming. Because donors and IPs provide little funding for gender-specific programming (including GBV prevention), there are very few local CSOs with gender equality mandates, especially in rural areas.[299] Moreover, community leaders tend to perceive local CSO leadership (i.e., president and treasurer) as pursuing their personal interests through their CSO activities instead of the interests of those they claim to serve. However, as community leaders themselves engage in nepotistic practices when assisting projects with participant selection and stakeholder mapping, this perception may be a manifestation of competition between different community power structures.

When women hold decision-making roles in CSOs, it is almost exclusively within local organizations that have a gender-related mission (e.g., GBV, WEE) and that are concentrated in urban areas. In general, women's representation in local CSOs is very low, from community-based organizations to local NGOs. When women are represented, they are usually active in organizations that focus on "women's issues" such as GBV or women's participation in politics.[300] Stakeholders noted that this also holds true for CSOs representing persons with disabilities: while they may have female members, women do not hold positions of authority, other than possibly as secretary or treasurer. Additionally, the majority of women-led CSOs are concentrated in urban areas and are not viewed as inclusive of rural or poor women. However, certain women-led CSOs (for example, Berandi) have established regional offices outside of Niamey and seek to hire women from the region in these field offices.[301] These CSOs recognize the cultural, time, and literacy constraints for these women, and are thus including activities to work through gatekeepers, as well as providing capacity-building support. However, women in the most remote rural areas are unable to participate or to have their needs well represented.

Youth-serving associations in Niger tend to be led by men (not always young) and they focus mainly on serving the needs of young men. The needs of young women are not well-defined or prioritized within these associations. The GoN applies the definition of youth developed by the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), limited to people aged 15–35.[302] However, stakeholders observed that some leaders of youth-serving organizations are older than 35.[303] Moreover, high-profile and GoN-affiliated youth associations, such as the National Youth Council of Niger/ *Conseil National de la Jeunesse du Niger* (CNJN)[304] are viewed as political (i.e., responding to the priorities of politicians, especially in regard to vote mobilization) and as not inclusive, especially of rural and younger youth.[305] Youth associations in Niger, interviewed as part of USAID's youth analysis for the Sahel, expressed frustration that the Council is not functional or effective.[306] Young women, in particular, are largely underrepresented or absent altogether from youth-serving organizations.[307] Unfortunately, Nigerien youth-serving organizations rarely include gender equity-related objectives, programs, or advocacy.[308]

Networks or federations of CSOs working on gender are few, but those in urban centers are viewed as powerful and well-connected. However, these networks and federations are not inclusive of particularly marginalized women, including conflict-affected women, nomadic women, rural women, and women IDPs.[309] These CSO networks are long-standing and well-established, and are often called upon by the GoN to represent a wide variety of women's views across Niger. Indeed, the women-led CSOs who participate in these networks were largely responsible for the adoption of the first law on gender quotas. Some GoN stakeholders and other CSOs view these networks as benefiting from a preferential relationship with the GoN—which may have been earned over many years of advocacy and working together to improve policies. In some instances, however, they are viewed as political and not representative of the marginalized groups of women they claim to represent, including specifically rural women.[310]

There are also gender-related advocacy platforms (i.e., voluntary association of individuals or CSOs that act as a unified voice for active promotion of gender equality), created specifically around the fight against CEFMU and GBV as well as for program coordination more broadly. For example, UNICEF and UNFPA, in collaboration with the MPFPE, established the Platform to End Child Marriage and the National Framework for Concerted Action Against GBV/*Cadre de Concertation des Intervenants en Matière de Lutte contre les VBG*. However, the functioning of these platforms is dependent on donor funding, and

they are managed by international organizations and not by the GoN. Stakeholders also note that these platforms' online presence is still very basic and will require technical upgrades and training, as well as ownership from the GoN, to ensure long-term sustainability.[311]

4.3 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- *For USAID and IPs:* Support watchdogs analyzing the application of the quota law (such as the ONPG) to widely disseminate their findings for diverse audiences and to improve advocacy for increased adherence to quotas.
- *For USAID IPs:* Work with decentralized GoN officials and local leaders to emphasize the importance of hearing diverse and representational views. Train these groups on inclusive facilitation techniques to be used during community meetings.
- *For USAID IPs:* Explore participatory decision-making models that solicit input from women-only and youth-led stakeholder groups, as an intermediary step before community-wide consultations.
- *For USAID IPs:* Seek deliberate measures to reach women for leadership positions who have not yet had the opportunity, including working with husbands to demonstrate the benefit of their wife's participation. Identify women in targeted communities who are keen to learn and participate but who may not have adequate resources or skill sets. Solicit the support of the existing cadre of women leaders to identify, engage, and provide mentorship to potential women leaders.
- *For USAID and IPs:* Commission a study to understand women's preferences regarding avenues for justice around key areas of conflict (e.g., land tenure and divorce), while also examining barriers to accessing justice and evaluating how well actual outcomes uphold women's rights. IPs who work with customary, religious, and formal justice systems should continue training justice actors (religious and customary actors in particular) on women's human rights and the importance of neutrality and confidentiality when responding to issues of GBV.
- *For USAID:* In line with core pillars of WPS, fund a standalone GBV prevention program in conflict-affected regions that aligns with national efforts to implement WPS action plans.
- *For USAID:* Sponsor forums for organizations using gender-specific approaches that increase women's role (and visibility) in conflict mediation (such as the Women Mediator programs) to share best practice and lessons learned.
- *For USAID IPs:* Address key barriers to women's effective participation in decision-making positions in local CSOs and agricultural cooperatives, through functional literacy and GTAs that seek to identify and address harmful gender power dynamics within groups. For example, Oxfam's Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS) approach seeks to transform unequal power relations in community-based groups.
- *For USAID:* As young women are often underrepresented in youth-serving organizations, ensure that youth-focused programs and approaches are not gender-blind and thus, inadvertently, designed to meet only the needs of young men.
- *For USAID IPs:* Identify, incentivize, and support CSOs that demonstrate sustainable inclusive behavior that results in high-quality female participation and representation in positions of authority. Make diversity of CSO leadership and membership an evaluation consideration for awarding small grants.

- *For USAID and IPs:* First, USAID and IPs should model principles of equity and inclusion by staffing all project teams with women in leadership positions across sectors (including potentially applying project team gender quotas). Then, deliver capacity-building support for CSOs to become more equitable and inclusive through their missions, governance structure, HR systems, strategic planning, and outreach, using approaches such as the Toolbox for Gender Mainstreaming in Member-based Organizations. Provide training on gender integration in programs, including how to design, plan and budget for, and implement GTAs. **(PRIORITY)**

5. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2: INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IMPROVED

5.1 ABOUT DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2

DO 2 seeks to strengthen the foundations for a more healthy, productive, and qualified workforce with sustainable economic opportunities by applying an integrated focus on nutrition, agriculture, climate adaptation, education, health, resilience, and economic growth. Lines of inquiry for data collection included agricultural market systems and private sector engagement. Analysis under this DO focuses on gaps and opportunities for engaging women, youth, and marginalized groups to participate in agriculture and employment opportunities. Underlying barriers related to education and health are integrated throughout the analysis but were not a focus of primary data collection, due to the depth of existing literature on these topics in Niger.

5.2 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2 GENDER ANALYSIS FINDINGS

Women are heavily concentrated in agricultural "transformation," that is, post-harvest processing. This includes (among other activities) producing edible oils and condiments, nutritionally enriched flours, and animal fodder. Women and men in Niger have distinct roles in agricultural production, harvest, processing, and commercialization. Multiple stakeholders noted that women in agriculture are most active in the post-harvest processing (*transformation,* in French) of a variety of crops, including peanuts and sesame (edible oils, meal, paste, or cakes), horticultural crops (dried or for condiments), certain staple grains (nutritionally enriched or regular flours, couscous, biscuits, and local delicacies), cowpeas (dried or cooked), rice (parboiled and sold to merchants), and nutgrass (grass for animal fodder). Pastoralist women, especially among Fulani, are charged with collecting, processing, and selling milk and butter from their cattle, often selling the raw milk to local dairy processing facilities and selling other animal products at market.[312] One stakeholder noted that, "While some people might frown on women selling their products in the market, no one can say anything about women in 'transformation' (of agricultural products). This is the woman's role and they are gradually improving their knowledge and techniques."[313]

Artisanal production of peanut oil is reportedly particularly lucrative, although profits vary according to the fluctuating cost of peanuts. When considering the gender roles related to peanut oil transformation, several female respondents noted that men are never involved—this is the domain of women. This was echoed by a male stakeholder in Zinder who noted that, while he believes women's role in agricultural production to be "negligible" in general, there is a long history of women participating in production of peanut oil.[314] Nevertheless, it is more socially acceptable for women to conduct their processing activities away from public view. One female leader of a peanut oil production cooperative in Dosso noted that, because they only have an outdoor work location, "When some people see us outside doing this work, they think it's because our husbands have lost control over us. Apparently, we're the kind of women that a husband can't control."[315] The strict gender roles around agricultural processing activities may not extend to young, unmarried sons, at least in southwestern Niger, who may assist their mothers with tasks related to peanut oil processing, for example.

Certain types of agricultural processing, especially the production of oils and flours, requires equipment or machines which can present a financial barrier to women seeking to enter into processing.[316] Stakeholders report that programs like the GoN's 3N (Nigeriens Nourish Nigeriens) successfully

distributed post-harvest processing equipment to women across Niger.[317] However, it can be difficult to maintain this machinery, and women reported lacking the right parts to fix broken machines. Moreover, women who did not receive these machines may have to rent them from male owners. In many cases, women do not have any access to labor-saving machinery and continue to use traditional manual processing methods that require significant time and labor.[318]

Finally, stakeholders reported that women sell their agricultural products in local marketplaces, whether fresh market garden vegetables or processed food. However, they also noted that married women must first obtain their husband's approval to participate in marketplaces, while unmarried women must obtain their parents' permission. It is generally not viewed as socially acceptable for women to sell their products in marketplaces outside of their own villages. Women may also send their out-of-school daughters to sell in the local market on their behalf. Women without out-of-school adolescent children, and who cannot obtain their husband's permission, often sell their products directly from their household. Overall, female interviewees remarked favorably on how women have increased their participation in markets, noting that they are able to use the money they make to send their children to school and to pay for healthcare. However, though women have expressed significant interest in increasing their agro-industrial income-generating activities, they note that they have limited financial resources to do so, particularly to purchase labor-saving technologies and high-quality inputs.

Despite some studies pointing to a defeminization of agriculture in Niger, qualitative data indicates that women are not becoming less involved in agriculture. Several secondary sources noted that a "defeminization" of agriculture has gradually taken place, due to reduced access to arable land.[319] There is no consensus on the exact percentages, but literature indicates a decrease in women working in agriculture, from 40 percent of women in 2006 to just 24 percent[320]—or even 11 percent[321]—in recent years. As these figures may overlook women participating in agricultural processing, more studies are required to determine how men's and women's participation in agriculture is changing.

When women do participate in agriculture, their level of involvement depends on a variety of factors, including age and marriage status. Young girls may work in family plots and sell agricultural products in marketplaces. Older women and widows are most active in agricultural VCs, including in both all-women and mixed agricultural cooperatives.[322] Young, recently-married women are the least likely to have the freedom to participate in agricultural VCs. Women still must obtain permission from the male head of household to participate in any type of agricultural activity outside the home.[323] One male stakeholder in Zinder explained, "A woman is under the responsibility of her husband. Some husbands do not give their wives permission to do an agricultural activity or give her the time to do it."[324] Text Box 4 describes one atypical practice that allows women to work alongside men in agriculture.

Women are concentrated within specific VCs that are considered culturally-appropriate "women's crops," including vegetables, peanut, sesame, nutgrass, and cowpea. Some stakeholders noted there are growth opportunities in these VCs, especially peanut and sesame, because current production does not meet domestic demand.[325] While men may cultivate some of these crops, women are more active in these VCs. Some women, usually of educated, urban, well-connected backgrounds, lead formal agro-enterprises within these VCs, such as *Niger-Lait* (Niger Milk)—the largest dairy supplier in the country—and the third biggest seed-producing cooperative, which primarily produces sesame and peanut seed.[326]

Text Box 4. The Practice of *Barema* in Maradi

One village in Maradi has a common practice called *Barema*, which roughly translates to "agricultural labor." In this village, many people do not have land of their own, but both men and women approach large landowners as day laborers to assist in clearing, planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting crops. In a stark contrast to Zinder, where it is less culturally appropriate for women to be involved in agricultural production, women in this Maradi village work alongside men in the fields.

When asked what kind of work women do in the fields, a female stakeholder replied, "The same work as the men. The women do everything." As in other parts of Niger, she noted that women are primarily active in agricultural transformation in this village. One male interviewee in Maradi reported that men do not necessarily view women's participation in *Barema* as something positive, but instead as something women need to do out of economic necessity.

Today, likely thanks to many years of food security-focused programming by INGOs and the GoN, many women cultivate "market gardens," small plots typically near the household that they use to feed their family or generate household income. One stakeholder noted that this is a significant change: in the past, there were few women cultivating market gardens as they were either an unknown concept or less culturally acceptable, especially in northern Niger. Now, women may even be perceived as better at growing vegetables because of the time and care required.[327] Tomatoes, onions, potatoes, corn, peas, green beans, peppers, cabbage, parsley, celery, lettuce, okra, and moringa are commonly grown by women, although men also grow moringa, cowpea, onions and potatoes, especially in larger-scale production areas such as Birni-N'Konni.

Compared to seasonally-grown crops, livestock products offer a steadier stream of income throughout the year and thus improved food security.[328] Women and men are both involved in livestock production, with 37 percent of female heads of households and 51 percent of male heads of household reporting raising some livestock. Generally, men are involved in raising large livestock (cows, camels, horses, and donkeys), while women raise poultry and small ruminants (sheep and goats).[329] One stakeholder in Zinder noted that "It's rare to find a woman who doesn't raise small ruminants"; he claimed that women are better suited for this activity than growing crops because less physical labor is required.[330] However, especially in minority Fulani communities, women also manage cattle, including fattening activities and processing milk and butter, and on average these women tend more cattle than men: 51.2 versus 32.[331] Men, both young and old, are responsible for taking livestock to pasture. While women might raise small ruminants and manage cattle, they are not the primary decision-makers around the purchase or sale of these animals. [332] Gender-specific roles are also found within the (inherited and typically disparaged) butcher caste, who work in livestock processing.[333]

As conflict and migration adjust the traditional social patterns, more women are engaging in agricultural practices that are traditionally the domain of men, and specifically in the cultivation of staple crops. When male economic migrants are not able to send back enough money

to support their families, women may be forced to step in and cultivate land that would have traditionally been cultivated by men, and to grow crops that are typically not acceptable for women to grow (millet and sorghum, in particular).[334] This is becoming increasingly common in regions such as Dosso, where stakeholders note that when one travels to the fields, there are few men present. However, these shifting gender roles in agriculture do not necessarily indicate a positive impact on women's rights, decision-making power, or control over assets.[335] One stakeholder noted, "The man migrates and the woman has to take care of the whole family. I find it very unjust that the women do all of this work and yet the woman has no rights in the village. Women have an invisible community – they build up their assets, and yet the man has the right to manage it."[336]

Other stakeholders noted that conflict has also changed women's role in agriculture, especially in Diffa, where they have been forced to become more autonomous, given conflict-related market failures and men's participation in the conflict. More research is required to accurately assess the impact of conflict on women's role in staple crop production in both Diffa and Tillabéri.

Finally, widowed women are also active in the production of staple crops. One stakeholder in Tillabéri noted that in the past, women never would have participated in rice production. However, a government irrigation project targeting heads of household includes some women, though very few (100 out of 1200). These women are almost always older, as "society would look down on a young woman working in a rice field."[337] This stakeholder noted that these female heads of household face significant barriers in agricultural production, as compared to men: their domestic responsibilities do not allow enough time to dedicate to their fields; certain cultivation tasks are very labor intensive (noting that men also need to occasionally hire outside labor); and women do not have access to animal traction or transportation for their harvest.[338] This is confirmed by a World Bank study, which notes that there are four main drivers of women's lower levels of productivity in Niger: lower levels of fertilizer use, lack of access to and ability to manage farm labor, lack of land ownership, and childcare responsibilities.[339] Therefore, despite women's increasing participation in staple crop cultivation under certain conditions, their productivity suffers, and they often must spend additional money to obtain the help they need.

Key USAID partners, as well as select GoN officials working in agriculture, recognize the limitations of a male-dominated agricultural extension service. Although some projects are working with women extension agents, some interviewees believed that women are less suited to be extension agents because the work often requires riding motorcycles—and, in any case, agriculture is regarded as a "man's domain."[340] A 2012 analysis of the Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock extension personnel in the eight regions of Niger showed a workforce of 622 people, including 78 women (12.5 percent).[341] Extension work involves functions that are not considered appropriate for women: traveling to distant villages, working out of doors, engaging with strangers and male colleagues, and typically using a motorbike to reach different farmers.[342] These job requirements may limit the number of women who seek out and are "allowed" by their husbands to do this work.[343] No information could be collected on the demographics of existing female extension agents, but this would be helpful to understand profiles of women who may be more likely to engage in the role.

The Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock are training more women to be agricultural assistants or auxiliaries—key resource personnel within remote villages who can provide support to the community on topics such as animal health, especially when formal extension agents are unable to regularly access these villages.[344] Female auxiliaries are important for being able to reach female farmers who may be less comfortable or not "allowed" to receive training from men.[345] A GoN Ministry of Livestock

representative explained, "We have a large number of female auxiliaries, especially for poultry, because women have more opportunities than men to enter households. Men might deny a male auxiliary's access to his home [because he does not want a strange man to be in contact with his wife and daughters]. But a woman, she has the possibility of going into a house to see women and advise them. When we don't hire women auxiliaries and only have men, we are limited."[346]

Women in agriculture face significant barriers affecting productivity, post-harvest processing, and commercialization. Multiple people cited a lack of access to finance, inputs, and machinery (including replacement parts) as the most significant barriers along agricultural VCs that affect both men and women.[347] Women's output is limited by lack of access to labor-saving technologies, such as machines to extract oil, as well as lack of a covered and well-ventilated place to process products. Women also noted that certain primary agricultural products are prone to price fluctuation, making it difficult to stabilize incomes and processing activities.[348] One driver of price fluctuation is a lack of adequate post-harvest storage. Women also lack access to information and formal training, with many noting that they learned their skills from older family members, not from agriculture extension workers or project staff.[349] A lack of transportation options and markets is also a constraint. Finally, female farmers are also predominantly affected by the increasing population and climate-change pressure on natural resources, including water and arable land.[350]

This review found differing accounts of the role of youth in agriculture and the barriers they face. Most stakeholders agreed that young men are frustrated that they have to wait for their parents or grandparents to stop working the land, or pass away, before they can take over an activity—and that there is not enough land, given the prevalence of polygamy and high number of children per woman. However, another stakeholder said, "Young people do not yet have this love of the land like we did when we were children,"[351] and accordingly, village leaders and agricultural cooperatives are trying to encourage youth (young men) to learn farming and form farming groups.

Although women are reportedly inheriting land more often, they are pressured to cede the land to their family. Stakeholders from Maradi, Zinder, Dosso, and Tahoua noted that women are increasingly able to inherit land, due to communities more frequently and systematically applying Islamic law. Although the national Rural Code also allows women to inherit land, stakeholders only mentioned the application of Islamic law (where a woman receives half as much land as her brothers) and customary law (where a woman typically receives nothing). Despite women's formal or Islamic legal inheritance rights, it is common for a woman's brothers to take her land inheritance for themselves in order to keep the land within the family.[352] Land is an important ancestral legacy, and if it is inherited by a woman, it leaves the family when the woman marries and joins a new family, especially as customary law may deem the woman's land the property of her husband. A female stakeholder in Maradi noted that the only way a woman can fight the seizure of inherited land by male family members is to present her case to the traditional chief.[353] However, women inheriting and keeping their land is not unheard of: one female member of an agricultural cooperative in Maradi said that she was able to inherit a piece of land when her father died, and again when her husband died.[354]

Although most women do not own land, they have the responsibility of using and managing their husband's land if he migrates for work.[355] Because the woman's name is not on the land title, she is not allowed to sell this land or use it as collateral for a loan. Another challenge is that some maternal grandchildren of landholding patriarchs protest that they do not inherit ancestral land because their mother is excluded from inheritance.[356] Multiple stakeholders noted the underlying challenge posed by

the high population growth rate: both women and men are inheriting less land, because there are so many children among whom land must be divided.

Thus, access to land is one of the highest barriers to agricultural production for Nigerien women. Because women rarely own land, those wishing to engage in cultivation must "borrow" or rent some.[357] Formally renting land requires multiple administrative steps, including approval from the traditional village leader, the community land management committee, and the commissary—and there is not always land available near the woman's household. Informally borrowing land seems to be a common practice, usually in an informal rental agreement that would not hold up in a court of law, possibly granted by an "owner" who has no official land title—and it is also widely used by landless men.[358] One stakeholder noted that women borrow land less often than men: they fear that the landowner will change his mind, reseizing the land from the woman once she has cleared and prepared it for planting; and they know that male landowners might look down on or gossip about her.[359] This land "borrowing" often creates problems for producers when the landowner dies and the landowner's heirs come to claim their inheritance. There is also a risk that rented land does not qualify for official transhumance (livestock movement) restrictions, creating the possibility for conflict between farmers and herders.

While women are quite active in culturally acceptable SLGs, which are based on the traditional West African *tontine* and frequently used in USAID IP activities, fewer women participate in agricultural cooperatives. SLGs have been used by NGOs in Niger as a popular and effective method to increase women's financial inclusion, many with USAID support. They also serve (as explained under DO 1) as an opportunity for collective action and women's leadership. SLGs often have the best result when combined with technical training, such as training on agricultural production or post-harvest processing. When women participate in an SLG that promotes the application of loans to agricultural activities, coupled with training in agricultural productivity methods, they are more likely to invest their small loans in IGAs. [360]

However, while women are active in SLGs, fewer participate in agricultural cooperatives, groups, unions, or federations. Studies from other countries show that women's empowerment is improved by both men and women joining a farmers' group, although the effect is larger if the woman joins. A study in Kenya found that women experience greater impacts from joining a "bargaining" group (to collectively market their products) than a processing group; the degree of empowerment depends on the groups' functional characteristics.[361]

Despite the potential for these benefits, few Nigerien women participate in farmers' groups—and those who do are typically older or widowed. For example, in Zinder, CRS reported that only 4.6 percent of female respondents were a part of a farmers' group, and generally not in leadership positions.[362] Women are more likely to join all-women cooperatives, while men usually form the majority, and the leadership, in mixed-gender cooperatives.[363] One male stakeholder in Tillabéri shared that, after women expressed frustration at their lack of representation in a mixed-gender rice cooperative, the cooperative created a women-only group in rice processing and gave them a mill as well as a rotating fund to purchase rice.

Some women-led cooperatives have established a positive reputation, even if they are not always as professionalized as men-led cooperatives. One female leader of a large seed cooperative prefers to source her seed from women's cooperatives because, although women's cooperatives may have less literacy skills, business training, and financing, they are more likely to follow agreement terms and

provide timely reimbursement of inputs that were loaned to them. Multiple stakeholders, across sectors, noted that Nigerien women "*ne trichent pas,*" which is translated to "do not cheat"; women are known for their honesty, attention to detail, and work ethic.

Women's limited basic business skills, illiteracy, unpaid work burden, and lack of mobility and self-confidence in the public domain are major factors that negatively impact women's employability and ability to formalize a business. More recent reliable employment data is lacking, but in 2012, 57.3 percent of the working-age population in Niger was employed (80.1 percent of men, 36 percent of women). There are significant regional differences, with 55.2 percent of women employed in Maradi, 47.9 percent in Dosso and 39.6 percent in Diffa. Tahoua, Tillabéri, Zinder and Niamey have the lowest female employment rates, at 23.9 percent, 29.6 percent, 33.2 percent, and 22 percent, respectively.[364] However, other GoN sources estimate high levels of women's participation in informal enterprises in urban areas, so women's employment rate in Niamey is likely higher than 22 percent. For example, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) estimates that 49 percent of women in urban areas work in commercial enterprises compared to 45 percent of men, but this rate is high compared to other data and should be verified.[365]

When women are employed, it is typically informally and within micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), often within the agriculture sector. Women in MSMEs primarily sell agricultural products, small livestock, animal products such as milk or eggs (especially in Fulani communities), non-food items that they buy and resell, and artisanal handicrafts. Ninety-seven percent of employed women participate in the informal economy, 2.2 percent are employed in the public sector, and a slim 0.8 percent work in the private sector (i.e., for a registered business with a tax number).[366] Overall, stakeholders confirmed that women are under-represented within formal private sector businesses, including within large enterprises. One labor inspector noted, "Women's representation at the company level is not quite what we want, that is to say, not quite the level that international organizations want."[367]

Barriers to women's employment that were cited by multiple stakeholders include: lower levels of education and literacy than men; heavy domestic responsibilities, amounting to 14-18 hours each day in rural areas; cultural expectations that limit their mobility and ability to work (especially if a woman is married and her husband has not migrated); and discrimination from family, financial institutions, or public institutions when seeking to launch a business.

Finally, as women and girls are cloistered from an early age and systematically taught that they are inferior to men, they may lack the self-confidence to launch an IGA. These limitations vary—by age (older and widowed women typically have more freedoms), by ethnic group (Fulani and Tuareg women are freer to engage in activities outside the home and speak out), and by region (urban women are more likely to participate in the labor market than rural women).[368]

For communities that practice wife seclusion, employment outside the home is shunned; however, mothers may utilize other family members to buy and sell goods. Widowed and divorced women have less access to productive resources (land, credit, etc.) and thus face particular constraints when seeking to expand their IGAs in the private sector, despite having greater responsibility to provide for themselves and their families.[369]

Some women start an IGA out of the need to support their family, especially if they are divorced, widowed, or deserted (when their husband migrated). Once a woman launches such an activity, especially if it requires leaving the house unaccompanied, she may experience discrimination from her

neighbors. For example, one illiterate female SME owner who aggregates and sells moringa in Niamey set up a network of rural moringa suppliers and urban market buyers, defying the obstacles. This stakeholder noted that she had to find an IGA once her husband died, and she has now become successful enough to support a "*vingtaine*" (about 20) children.[370] Nevertheless, this woman desires to find an IGA that would allow her to work from home, because her female and male neighbors gossip that she must be a former prostitute—a stereotype often applied to single women active in the market.

This example demonstrates the importance of developing GTAs that target not just women directly, but their household and community as well. One review of rigorous evaluations of interventions that seek to empower women economically included data from Niger. It found that family and social pressures—such as how socially acceptable it is for a woman to earn and control her own money—affect the success of interventions aimed at boosting women's productivity and earnings.[371] One study within this review found that the negative impacts of social constraints can be countered by providing capital transfers through secure mobile phone programs,[372] or by providing secure savings accounts that give women more privacy and discretion in using the funds.[373] However, as noted above, it is crucial to work directly with husbands of married women engaged in IGAs, to ensure that the wives will be allowed to keep these assets and that the intervention does not increase the risk of IPV.

Finally, regarding women's ability to formalize a business, stakeholders noted that despite the GoN's successful efforts to reduce the time and steps required, women-led MSMEs typically remain informal.[374] This is due to several factors. First, a lack of literacy and training means that women struggle to fill out the paperwork necessary to formalize. Second, many women face limited mobility, and in many villages there is no government office to register a business. Finally, there is a widespread perception, among both men and women, that remaining an informal business is more advantageous than formalization to avoid the taxes applied to formal businesses. However, informal MSMEs cannot formally access credit or benefit from certain development programs, and they may lack credibility as they grow.

There is a gender gap in earnings between men and women, but when women participate in traditionally male-dominated sectors, this earnings gap decreases. Gender inequalities also cause women to produce less (and therefore earn less) than men, and there are significant gender gaps in monthly profits across the private sector. Even accounting for regional differences, owner characteristics, and enterprise inputs, monthly profits of female-owned enterprises are still 55 percent lower than male-owned enterprises in Niger.[375] Key drivers of these profit gender gaps come from the informal nature of their businesses, as men are 10 times more likely to have a formal business.[376] Women also have lower returns on electricity than men: when a woman has access to electricity, it does not cause as significant of an increase in her profits. Finally, the larger the woman's household, the lower her profits—likely because her work time must be dedicated to childcare.[377]

Gender gaps in earnings are smaller for women who participate in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as crop and animal production, hunting (and related service activities), wholesale and retail trade, motor vehicle and motorcycle repair, and transportation and storage.[378] One stakeholder noted that urban women are becoming more involved in male-dominated sectors, and she encouraged more women in rural areas to build skills in areas that are not considered women's work for which there are not enough skilled technicians, such as auto mechanics, electricians, cell phone repair, and solar panel repair.[379]

Despite legal provisions against gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workforce, private sector companies and CSOs of all sizes rarely have human resource policies in place to support non-discrimination and employee protections. Stakeholders reported discriminatory hiring and firing practices, lack of transparency, underreporting of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and underrepresentation of marginalized groups within employment.[380] Gender discrimination in employment is prohibited under the Labor Code; nevertheless, there are discriminatory prohibitions in the Code against women taking on work that "exceeds their strength or damages their moral character"—although these criteria are not clearly defined.[381] Additionally, Niger's Civil Code provides that married women cannot pursue employment without their husbands' permission.[382] Regional labor inspectors noted that, for the most part, employers and employees are not familiar with the Labor Code, and employees usually work without formal contracts.

Interviewees from both the public and private sectors noted that nepotistic and discriminatory hiring processes are common. Both formal and informal businesses are less likely to hire women, as women are perceived to ask for more time off and special exceptions. A labor inspector shared that some companies discriminate against hiring women because of a concern that they will become pregnant.[383] Female employees are entitled to 14 weeks of paid maternity leave (of which six are compulsory), paid equally by the employer and social security; male employees are entitled to only one day of paternity leave.[384] Hiring women is seen as potentially disruptive to work as well as costly, if maternity leave is required, although it is unclear to what extent businesses respect these requirements—and unlikely, if they are not formal and in urban areas.[385] Furthermore, there is an understanding that a woman's husband might not allow her to work and that she might quit after becoming married.[386]

Protections against sexual harassment are included in Niger's Penal Code and Labor Code, but these are not applied in most businesses, whether formal or informal, large or small. Under the Penal Code, sexual harassment is punishable by imprisonment of 3–6 months and a fine of CFA 10,000–100,000 (approximately 17–170 USD), or, if the violator is in a position of authority, imprisonment of three months to one year and a fine of CFA 20,000–200,000 (approximately 34–340 USD).[387] The Labor Code also includes a definition of sexual harassment that covers sexual harassment in the workplace.[388] Stakeholders described that internal policies against sexual harassment, although promoted by donors as an important step to professionalize a business, are not a priority of either owners or staff because of the normalization of sexual harassment.[389] Sexual harassment, although reportedly widespread, is rarely documented or reported and often not prosecuted.[390] *SOS Femmes et Enfants Victimes de Violences Familiales*, a local NGO, estimates that eight of 10 young female workers in small shops face sexual harassment, but only two in 10 report it.[391] Women in poverty are especially vulnerable to harassment in the workplace because they cannot afford to lose their job as a result of reporting.[392]

Systems for reporting and responding to cases are similarly lacking for other forms of GBV in the workplace. It was not clear to stakeholders what types of GBV cases are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labor and what types must be handled by the police, and what are the employer's responsibilities.[393] Employers lacked knowledge of strategies to prevent and respond to GBV; several mentioned their prevention strategy is to keep men and women workers separate from one another.[394]

Some places of work lack any infrastructure to support an inclusive workforce. For example, some workplaces do not have separate toilets for men and women, and wheelchair accessibility is rare.[395] A

few stakeholders noted that they have heard of businesses offering daycare and lactation rooms, suggesting that some businesses are trying to provide accommodations to support working mothers.[396]

Labor inspectors noted that employees are generally unaware of their rights or that they can lodge a formal complaint with labor inspectors.[397] Many businesses have no formal complaint mechanisms in place; employers interviewed recounted receiving informal complaints in a haphazard way, mostly related to annual leave or personal conflicts within the workplace. If a formal complaint is documented and filed with the Ministry of Labor, however, it may be elevated to a formal tribunal.[398]

Business owners' responses showed that adding gender and social inclusion-sensitive policies, practices, and infrastructure was perceived as uninteresting ("We didn't create a business to achieve gender equality"), or out of reach ("We are not yet at this stage"), or too costly ("Most businesses don't want to pay to improve their employees' working conditions").[399] Certain owners and labor inspectors emphasized that this is clearly a priority for international organizations and INGOs, and that perhaps in the future Nigerien businesses could seek to intentionally hire more women. Others believe that they already have completely equitable human resource practices.

5.3 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- *For USAID:* Commission context-specific, gender-responsive VC analyses to better understand women's and men's roles across agricultural VCs. Identify key barriers to women's participation in specific VCs (such as time constraints, challenges in commanding on-farm labor, lack of finance, and limited access to inputs and transportation), as well as opportunities to increase women's visibility and economic gains. These analyses should:
    - Identify women's unique constraints in production, processing, and commercialization in VCs with high levels of female participation.
    - Identify specific strategies to address key barriers to women's engagement in traditionally male-dominated VCs (such as staple crops), and promote women's visibility and participation in these VCs in a context-appropriate manner. **(PRIORITY)**
- *For USAID and IPs:* Programs working with women in agricultural processing activities should obtain buy-in of their husbands and of community influencers, in order to avoid creating household conflict. Possible approaches at the community level include Community Conversations or Dimitra Clubs, which promote reflection and participatory action addressing harmful power dynamics that hinder women's access to and control over critical resources for nutrition and food security. Household-focused approaches, such as Farming as a Family Business or Individual Household Mentoring, promote collaborative management of household income and harvest. **(PRIORITY)**
- *For USAID and IPs:* Pilot context-appropriate approaches to recruit and train more female extension agents. Improve access to knowledge for rural men and women by piloting or up-scaling approaches such as lead farming couples (husband and wife), who are trained by agricultural extension agents to provide technical support to their community. Seek to better understand the agricultural information needs and constraints among nomadic groups and develop a program to provide tailored extension services.
- *For USAID:* Work with the Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock to develop a long-term recruitment strategy to hire more female agriculture extension agents, including by removing

unnecessarily prohibitive criteria (e.g., ability to ride a motorcycle) that can be addressed through on-the-job training.

- *For USAID:* Identify and pilot best practices for increasing women's land tenure, such as: providing incentives for joint land titling, which creates a stepping stone to female ownership of household assets; community land demarcation, with collective titling for women's agricultural cooperatives; and creating gender quotas for women's participation in land management committees. To develop a context-appropriate approach, conduct in-depth consultations with women (including CSOs, cooperatives, and networks) and seek support from traditional leaders as well as the formal justice sector. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For USAID IPs:* Build the capacity of rural women's associations, cooperatives, and producer organizations. Facilitate networks and mentorship relationships among women's cooperatives with varying levels of capacity, connecting smaller groups to larger groups to improve market linkages. Consider providing small grants and functional literacy and business training to individuals and groups to upscale their businesses.

- *For USAID IPs:* SLGs can also provide an excellent platform through which IPs and CSOs may provide training on other relevant topics, such as agricultural techniques, literacy, or basic business skills. These groups may also serve as an opportunity to address issues such as gender barriers to agricultural productivity, women's control over income, and preventing GBV. Studies have shown that integrating additional technical training in SLGs can result in a variety of positive impacts.[400] For example, CRS' Saving and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) disseminate the SILC+GTA curricula (created in partnership with Promundo and WorldFish) to address harmful gender norms through the SLG.

- *For USAID, IPs, and CSOs:* Advocate to amend the Labor Code to require the human resource policies of all formalized businesses to include specific provisions such as minimum requirements for paid parental leave, clear salary scales, affirmative action plans, and sexual harassment policies.

- *For USAID and IPs:* Provide technical support to GoN entities working with and regulating the private sector (such as the Ministry of Employment, Labor, and Social Security) relating to strategies to inspect and promote non-discrimination in the workplace and to effectively apply Labor Code rights. Work with these entities to increase the knowledge and understanding of staff at both central and decentralized levels on the relevance and benefits of labor policies to support non-discrimination and gender equality. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For USAID IPs:* Projects that engage directly with the private sector should consider promoting private sector company adherence to the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), a set of UN-developed principles offering guidance to businesses on how to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace, and community.

- *For USAID and IPs:* Prioritize engagement with women-led and person-with-disability-led businesses. Through this engagement, identify barriers to growth for these businesses, develop context-appropriate approaches to overcome these barriers (such as providing improved access to information and functional literacy, numeracy, and business skills training), facilitate business formalization, and support recruitment strategies targeting other members of marginalized groups.

- *For USAID IPs:* Consider supporting a network of women-owned MSMEs, by sector, to share progress towards formalization and other lessons learned in regard to navigating GoN systems.

6. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3: PERFORMANCE AND RESPONSIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IMPROVED

6.1 ABOUT DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3

DO 3 seeks to bolster government systems to deliver key services while advancing improved oversight and anti-corruption measures. As the objective aims to improve the delivery of services such as education, health, and justice, analysis under this DO focuses on cross-cutting methods for improving the GoN's ability to develop and implement targeted strategies to meet the needs of women, young men and women, and marginalized groups. Lines of inquiry for primary data collection focused on the responsiveness of government institutions to the needs of marginalized groups. This section focuses on Niger's national gender machinery (NGM), advocacy platforms for CSO engagement, the role of women in politics, and services for preventing and responding to GBV.

6.2 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3 GENDER ANALYSIS FINDINGS

The GoN national gender machinery (NGM) comprises some of the most underfunded governmental institutions—in particular, the MPFPE and ONPG—and these institutions are rarely engaged with development partners in other sectors, especially sectors related to economic development. Three public entities have a mandate to promote and coordinate gender equality and inclusion within the GoN: the MPFPE, the ONPG, and the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). (See Text Box 5 for a summary of each institution.) There is also the Niger Parliamentarians' Network on Gender Issues/*Le Réseau des Parliamentarism Nigériens sur les Questions du Genre* (RPNQG), which supports advocacy for an enabling environment for gender promotion; however, this network is not institutionalized, nor does it function as a Parliamentary committee. The analysis below focuses on MPFPE and ONPG, as there is limited information available on CNDH.

Text Box 5. National Gender Machinery Institutions in Niger

Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection (MPFPE): Established in 1998, it is charged with addressing gender equality, developing the National Gender Policy, and overseeing its implementation.

National Observatory for the Promotion of Gender (ONPG): Established in 2015 and organized under the Prime Minister's Office in 2017, it is charged with monitoring gender equity. To ensure the accountability of state institutions vis-a-vis gender equality commitments, it monitors and evaluates the implementation of public policies and encourages institutions to report on gender statistics and to make decisions based on the data.

National Human Rights Commission (CNDH): Established in 2008 as an independent administrative authority designed to ensure the effectiveness and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms, it has staff (or focal points) working in each region.

For more than two decades, the MPFPE has served as the body responsible for coordinating activities on gender equality and social protection in Niger, especially in relation to child protection. The MPFPE is specifically charged with supporting the implementation of the PNG and offers decentralized services to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate activities at the regional and commune levels.[401] However, the general capacity of MPFPE officials varies significantly across decentralized levels and regions, with differing levels of expertise regarding gender equity and inclusion.[402] Another major problem is the inadequate financing of MPFPE activities nationwide, and the ministry's low capacity for resource mobilization.[403] The MPFPE

receives financial support primarily from European donors and the UN system, with limited budget allocations from the central government.[404] This underscores the finding that gender equity is more an international priority than an issue championed by the GoN.

The majority of USAID IPs do not have a formal partnership with the MPFPE at the national level, and only a few are working with the regional directorates of the MPFPE.[405] This may in part reflect the fact that USAID programs frequently prioritize working through sectoral ministries, including for questions on gender and inclusion. However, as discussed below, sectoral ministries are not adequately integrating gender into their programs, policies, or budgets, nor are they actively soliciting support for gender integration from the MPFPE.

A significant shortcoming of the institutional framework for gender equality and social inclusion in Niger lies in the vague definitions of the MPFPE's responsibilities and power vis-à-vis other institutions. This contributes to the piecemeal promotion of gender in sectoral policies, programming, and budgeting. The PNG first defined the framework for gender equality interventions in 2008 and was later revised in 2017; its national ratification was an essential step in making gender equality initiatives a permanent fixture within the GoN.[406] A number of CSO members and GoN officials reported that the PNG is currently being "updated," but there is little additional information available on this.[407] A lack of political will across GoN institutions has been a barrier to effective implementation of the PNG since its inception.[408] In fact, a majority of sectoral ministries cannot articulate the priorities of their sectoral work vis-à-vis gender equality, with some noted exceptions in the health and education sectors. Instead, when asked specific gender-related questions, GoN representatives frequently recommend talking to the MPFPE, rather than taking ownership for addressing gender-barriers relevant to their sector.[409] To address this lack of integration across sectors, the MPFPE has spearheaded efforts to nominate Gender Focal Points (GFP) within each GoN sectoral ministry. The GFPs are supposed to manage *genre cellule*/gender units within each ministry.[410] However, the PNG does not adequately describe the mandate of gender units or their interface with the MPFPE, nor does it specify the requirements for these structures at the decentralized level—which have mostly not been operational, as discussed below.

The MPFPE also has no real authority over the gender mainstreaming efforts of the sectoral ministries and their GFPs or gender units, and there is no mechanism to systematically hold sectoral ministries accountable for their commitments to gender equity.[411] The ministry's work is also frequently viewed as irrelevant to certain sectors. For example, one sectoral GoN official said, "We do not collaborate with the MPFPE. They are a separate service, and we are a separate service, too."[412] There is currently no broad consultative framework with technical and financial partners and CSOs that would promote such coordination and provide support for MPFPE capacity building and staffing.[413]

Another weakness is the MPFPE's lack of a specific mandate to address issues of social inclusion. Though there is supposedly a committee on social protection under the MPFPE,[414] the actual responsibilities related to social inclusion have very recently shifted to the Ministry of Public Health, Population, and Social Affairs/*Ministre de la Santé Publique, de la Population, et des Affaires Sociales* (MSPPAS).[415] This change seems to have created some tension between the two ministries, which impedes effective ministerial collaboration on issues related to inclusion.[416] Furthermore, social inclusion issues have not yet been integrated within any other sectoral ministries. One Ministry of Agriculture representative noted that social inclusion is a new topic that they do not know how to address. Similar attitudes are found within

local government structures: someone working in a mayor's office responded, "What can we do for [persons with disabilities]? It is the responsibility of NGOs to work with them."[417]

Though GFPs and *cellules genre*/gender units exist in certain ministries, GFPs do not fully understand their responsibilities, nor do they have adequate training, resources, or support to create and manage gender units. The MPFPE views the creation and support of gender units as a key priority.[418] Reportedly established by Ministerial Order,[419] the MPFPE has GFPs who are supposed to create gender units within sectoral ministries, under the MPFPE's supervisory authority.[420] GFPs are responsible for providing technical advice on gender mainstreaming in sectoral development policies and programs.[421] In addition to the sectoral ministries, there should be GFPs across a number of key institutions, including the Office of the Presidency, the Prime Minister's Office, and the ombudsperson. In practice, however, GFPs are not functional in a majority of key GoN institutions. As one sectoral GoN stakeholder reported, "I have heard that there is supposedly a GFP for the Ministry of Gender, but there is none here."[422] This indicates a level of confusion existing among GoN officials regarding the existence and role of GFPs. Representatives of other Ministries, however, indicated a high-functioning GFP system. One stakeholder working with the Ministry of Livestock said, "Our Ministry itself has given us a lot of training on gender issues. Personally, I attended at least three to four trainings that were conducted on this. We even have pilot gender units who have been trained in gender issues."[423]

Additionally, where GFPs do exist, they are too junior to have influence over decision-making in the highly hierarchical ministries.[424] Relatedly, women officials working in sectoral ministries are typically named as the "de-facto" GFP only because of their gender.[425] One GoN stakeholder stated, "No man is implicated when we talk about gender. It is the woman who is supposed to be the representative. That is why all ministries send women to be focal points." As women often hold junior positions in GoN institutions, this perpetuates the low respect afforded to GFPs. Additionally, GFP job descriptions are not formalized; in other words, GFPs are primarily responsible for fulfilling their regular job description, and any GFP duties are additional, secondary work.

As noted, GFPs are supposed to create and manage *cellules genres*/gender units in each ministry (although it is unclear if this is only at national level or also applies at the decentralized level); these units are responsible for monitoring systematic gender mainstreaming in development policies, programs, and projects.[426] In most sectoral ministries, the gender units are either not operational or lack sustainable institutional anchoring, since they are not included in ministries' organizational or management charts.[427] The gender units also do lack financial resources as well as qualified human resources with technical expertise on gender equality, despite receiving training from the MPFPE; details on the type, length, and frequency of these trainings is not available.[428] Frequent turnover of trained staff contributes to the lack of qualified human resources.[429] Some GoN officials believe that this turnover is because trained GFPs are able to attract better paying jobs, in part due to the gender-related competencies they acquired.[430]

Despite capacity-building efforts by a number of international and national NGOs, gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is not institutionalized across GoN sectoral ministries, which perpetuates low levels of gender integration in sectoral programs. The MoF (national level) and the Ministry of Planning (MoP) (decentralized level) are responsible for ensuring that planning, programming, management, financing, and monitoring-evaluation mechanisms are gender-responsive.[431] However the MoF and MoP are not fulfilling this aspect of their mandates, despite numerous capacity-building efforts by multiple international organizations.[432] General low capacity for gender mainstreaming, as well as perceptions of gender as unimportant (or irrelevant in certain sectors), are

barriers to GRB in Niger.[433] Allocating a budget for programming that would integrate GBV prevention, for example, is viewed as uniquely the responsibility of the MPFPE, instead of something that would improve outcomes across all sectors.[434]

There are very few permanent advocacy platforms for CSOs to engage with the GoN to ensure gender mainstreaming into policy, program, or budget decisions. Those that exist and are functional are frequently led (and financed) by international organizations. Though certain ministries report regularly coordinating and collaborating with local CSOs, this is not an institutionalized process, with the exception of parliamentary committees. Interviewees indicated that the GoN engages frequently with well-established women-led CSOs/networks, and only to a lesser extent with CSOs working specifically with socially marginalized groups, including nomadic groups.[435]

The ONPG's mandate is critical to hold sectoral ministries accountable in respecting quotas and integrating gender across their policies and programs; however, there is extremely low awareness of the ONPG across sectoral ministries at all levels. The ONPG is not yet a permanent institution but rather an initiative tied to the Prime Minister's office that has not been officially established under law by the National Assembly. The ONPG is charged with monitoring and evaluating gender-equality commitments across GoN institutions. With the support of UN Women, they also reportedly create tools to mainstream gender into sectoral policies and programs. The ONPG creates frequent reports that indicate which GoN institutions are complying with the quota law (see DO 1). The ONPG also trains enumerators to collect the high-quality, unbiased data needed to create gender-related knowledge products. For example, the ONPG partnered with the MPFPE and UN Women (with EU funding) for the 2021 GBV study in Zinder, Maradi, Tillabéri, and Tahoua.[436]

The ONPG has also had recent notable successes in ensuring minimum standards of gender integration in other institutions—for example, leading the National Independent Electoral Commission/*Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante* (CENI) to develop newly sex-disaggregated reports showing women's participation in elections, both as candidates and as voters.[437] The ONPG also ensured greater attention to gender inequalities in the new national Economic Development Plan (*Plan de Développement Économique et Social 2022–2026,* PDES), an important and well-known document within the GoN. For example, during the PDES process the ONPG successfully lobbied for indicators to measure gender-related progress.[438] Although ONPG is committed to ensuring the integration of gender-specific indicators throughout sectoral ministry programs and policies, it does not currently have the authority, resources, or power to influence this level of change. The ONPG is also lobbying to integrate three national women's empowerment indicators into the national data collected by the National Institute of Statistics (*Institut National de la Statistique,* INS). The ONPG reports that they need more gender experts and lawyers on their team, but they cannot find qualified people because they do not have adequate financial resources to offer attractive salaries.[439] Instead, they rely heavily on interns and volunteers.[440]

The availability and quality of data related to gender equality is generally poor in Niger, due to weak institutions, people's reticence to openly discuss issues related to gender, and the government's tendency to question any unfavorable data. Even where data are being disaggregated by sex, in-depth analysis of that data is not always undertaken. When data and its gender analyses are available, they are not systematically shared. A number of institutions are in charge of data collection and analysis in Niger. The National Institute of Statistics (INS) is the central body for the collection, processing, and dissemination of statistics at the national

level, including the production of gender-disaggregated statistical data and study reports. However, GoN stakeholders indicate that the INS does not regularly disaggregate its reports by sex, unless an international organization has sponsored the report and provided technical support in its finalization.[441] Disaggregation of GoN data by other social factors, including age and ethnicity, is very rare. The last published DHS survey is from 2012, as the survey administrator deemed the 2017 DHS unusable due to data quality issues.[442] Though other sectors have published reports on key sex-disaggregated indicators related to education and health, a number of crucial gaps in the data remain, particularly around IPV and domestic violence.

Another key barrier to collecting quality data is the general reticence to speak openly about issues related to GBV, CEFMU, and other harmful practices such as slavery, especially in remote parts of the country and among certain ethnicities.[443] As one GoN stakeholder explained, "Niger is so big, it's very difficult to send people out to collect data. Certain [gender-related] questions can be shocking, so we have to be very sensitive. … I don't want to create cultural shocks. People want to change, but it's about finding the right approach."[444] GoN officials and USAID IPs confirm that reliable data on these sensitive subjects is difficult to obtain.

When data is available, it is unclear to what extent the GoN analyzes and systematically shares them to inform its own policy and public program design, or how it is shared with donors or IPs.[445] In fact, there is likely confusion over whose role it is to promote the use of appropriately disaggregated data for policy and programming. For example, although the ONPG produces reports on gender gaps in certain sectors, it might expect the MPFPE to promote those reports with relevant line ministries, or it might be the responsibility of sectoral ministries to promote their own gender-related research. Regardless, this type of institutional confusion frequently results in siloed approaches, with the sectoral ministries expecting the MPFPE to produce and promote gender-related reports across all sectors.

Although health centers and humanitarian partners attempt to collect GBV data, it is difficult to measure given the cultural context. Instances of GBV are dramatically underreported due to the social stigma attached to survivors of GBV, as well as high levels of societal tolerance for GBV in all its forms (as discussed above in cross-cutting findings).[446] Additionally, the available GBV data is typically bundled, without distinguishing among the many forms of GBV. More specific data is needed to understand the issues of IPV and domestic violence, which are hidden phenomena and likely severely underreported.

According to stakeholders, the GBV Sub-Cluster has established a GBV incidence data collection system (GBVIMS), but this is only functioning in two regions (Tillabéri and Diffa) where there are regional GBV working groups who collect and report this data.[447] Stakeholders reported that these working groups are in fact more functional and active than the national Sub-Cluster. Aside from the GBVIMS, there is no national centralized system in place to gather and analyze data on incidents of GBV, and no harmonized case management system for GBV survivors.[448] Lastly (as discussed in cross-cutting findings), survivors of GBV face tremendous barriers to reporting GBV and accessing GBV response services, hindering the ability of service providers to collect accurate data.

GBV response services vary widely among regions, with better services available in regions where more humanitarian response programs operate (such as Tillabéri and Diffa) including international organizations with strong GBV response expertise. Even those regions, however, lack holistic GBV services with cross-sectoral coordination, supportive

service providers respectful of confidentiality, and adequate psychosocial care. Data on the clinical management of GBV services is limited or missing altogether. There is little information regarding the availability of health center commodities, equipment, and supplies to respond effectively to GBV, and very little analysis of the availability and use of management tools such as registers, referral forms, and medico-legal forms. Numerous stakeholders indicated that conflict-affected regions, who have had more humanitarian assistance, have better GBV response services in place.[449]

Nationwide, only four centers for survivors of GBV reportedly provide the standard package of holistic and survivor-centered services. These centers are run by CSOs or international organizations (supported by the Spotlight Initiative) and are typically dependent on outside financial assistance to function. More information is needed on the standard of care of these centers and the level of GoN investment into the model. However, as a way of addressing the major financial barriers for individuals to receive adequate and holistic care, this model should be explored for potential scaling—with all essential services provided by trained professionals, in a "one-stop-shop" center. Other government-provided "free" survivor services are reportedly not actually free and are typically not found in rural areas. One stakeholder noted the high cost of transportation to areas with centers, as well as cases of victims being presented with expensive medical bills.[450]

Public providers, including those working in justice and health, are not adequately trained to keep information confidential or to remain neutral when encountering a case of GBV. As the 2021 Spotlight Initiative GBV report indicates, "several respondents have raised the issue of confidentiality, even in cases where the violence suffered is serious or [if shared, could] lead to stigmatization within the community."[451] The lack of female care providers across GBV service sectors is another key issue, as women in this context are not comfortable discussing such personal issues with men.[452]

Though it appears that some humanitarian actors have tried to establish regional GBV Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and referral pathways, it is unclear to what extent these are institutionalized and applied systematically across regions.[453]

Women face numerous barriers as political candidates, including a lack of decisional power regarding electoral candidate lists (which are monopolized by the male-dominated political elite) and a lack of necessary campaign financing. Some elected women have even been removed from office by the nominating political party to be replaced by a man. Within Nigerien politics at all levels, the predominantly male and older elites have maintained their monopoly on power; the token inclusion of women, as opposed to their meaningful representation, is common. Older men usually control political parties and are responsible for controlling electoral lists, perpetuating the underrepresentation of women and youth.[454] If women manage to be named on electoral lists, they are frequently viewed with suspicion and assumed to be puppets "dancing to the tunes of male leaders."[455] In some cases, parties presented women on candidates' lists in positions where they were unlikely to be elected, demonstrating that they do not take the quota seriously.[456] There are also instances of corruption, where women are required to pay to be listed as candidates—in contrast to their male counterparts, who instead receive campaign funds from political parties.[457] Multiple informants related stories of women being elected and then rapidly replaced by men, or political parties refusing to include women on their list of candidates even when women were available and willing.[458] Well established politicians often argue that young political leaders lack experience, contributing to their political marginalization. On the ground, however, youth (especially young men) frequently help with voter mobilization and the day-to-day running of political parties.[459]

Some USAID-funded programs have successfully trained and supported female candidates to develop leadership skills that helped them be nominated and elected. However, once female candidates are nominated, they often face pushback from male colleagues, as well as sexist behavior and sexual harassment. More programs are needed to support women after they are elected. Female elected officials face discrimination across all levels of government. For example, one USAID IP noted that when a community elected a female mayor, she struggled to collaborate with the male-dominated city council, who did not demonstrate a level of respect commensurate with her position in government. This IP noted, "Women members of government don't face issues with the community, they face them with other elected officials."[460] This can create issues for female elected officials, as bodies such as the city council can remove them through a vote of no-confidence. This stakeholder also cited instances of municipal-level female candidates being elected and then removed by their political party and replaced by a man.[461]

Women also face sexist behavior and sexual harassment at higher levels of government. A 2021 survey on sexism, harassment, and violence against women in parliaments in Africa (conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and African Parliamentary Union) found rampant abuse of women parliamentarians in Africa, including in Niger. Forty-five percent of the female parliamentary staff interviewed across Africa reported experiencing sexual harassment at work. The perpetrators were identified as male parliamentarians (53 percent of cases) and male colleagues or parliamentary staff (48 percent of cases).[462] Eighteen percent had received requests for sexual favors in exchange for a benefit, either from parliamentary colleagues (56 percent of cases) or from parliamentarians (44 percent of cases). Fifty-six percent were the target of sexist remarks made by male colleagues working in parliament.[463]

The African survey found that incidents of harassment and violence are more prevalent among women parliamentarians living with disabilities, young women under 40 years of age, unmarried women, and women from minority groups. Women parliamentarians from the political opposition are even more vulnerable to all forms of violence, as ruling-party male parliamentarians are the primary perpetrators of all forms of violence affecting women parliamentarians, including sexual, physical, and economic violence.[464]

Distilling data specific to Niger would be valuable for highlighting the salience of these findings and identifying context-specific recommendations. These efforts should be handled sensitively. Most often, women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff who have experienced violence do not talk about or report abuse for several key reasons: 1) the institutional environment tolerates this type of behavior or deems it unimportant; 2) there are no parliamentary mechanisms for reporting harassment or abuse; 3) women are fearful of reprisals, including not being believed or being blamed for the harassment.[465]

6.3 DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- *For USAID:* As the various institutions comprising the National Gender Machinery (NGM) in Niger are frequently and inadvertently excluded from international donor programming, elevate their work by establishing formal technical partnerships. In this way, USAID can use its influence and recognition to help elevate the importance of gender mainstreaming across sectoral ministries. USAID can also help the NGM advocate for the recognition of the ONPG by the National Assembly to become a permanent institutional authority. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For USAID:* Work with international organizations to ensure that, during the development and validation of GoN sectoral policies, programs, and budgets, a minimum percentage of budgeted funding is allocated to addressing gender-specific barriers in that sector.

- *For USAID and IPs:* There is significant potential to support the integration of gender into decentralized development plans (*plans de développement communal ou régional*) and their budgets. The GoN is usually more available and willing to focus on cross-sectoral coordination at decentralized levels, offering unique opportunities for successful gender mainstreaming. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For USAID:* Partner with the NGM to support the MoF to develop budgeting directives to respond to government priorities regarding gender equality and women's needs. While adequate funding for public services remains a challenge in Niger, gender-responsive budgeting is a vehicle for ensuring that gender-oriented goals receive adequate consideration in competing for scarce funds and motivating better program design. In this process, the ONPG can support monitoring for adherence to directives.

- *For USAID IPs:* Support and scale up capacity-building for CSOs to conduct advocacy for GRB. CSOs will need training in GRB and how to effectively advocate for it across sectors. Consider supporting CSO-exchange platforms, where CSOs from other African countries with better institutionalized GRB practices can share best practices and lessons learned in relation to government advocacy.

- *For All Stakeholders:* Support the MPFPE to establish a standard job description and selection process for GFPs, including minimum qualifications, a minimum seniority level, and encouragement to consider qualified male candidates. Provide support to establish an in-depth permanent training program for GFPs across sectoral ministries, including monitoring and evaluating the program's effectiveness in improving GFP performance.

- *For All Stakeholders:* International organizations should integrate training for the GoN on inclusive management, maintenance, and reporting related to data and advocacy platforms (such as the Platform to End Child Marriage) to ensure ownership and long-term sustainability. This training might also include IT support and management.

- *For USAID:* Work with UN Women to revitalize a gender donor working group that can establish funding mechanisms that are accessible to a wide range of CSOs—not only the strongest or the largest. UN Women in Niger has a long-standing relationship with women-led CSOs and can serve as a priority technical partner for engaging with these groups.

- *For USAID and IPs:* Consider support for learning platforms and exchanges to allow CSO networks to engage groups representing marginalized women outside of Niamey or other urban areas, including nomadic and rural women, IDP women, and women with disabilities. These learning visits and exchanges can help strengthen CSO networks while highlighting key representational gaps.

- *For USAID and GoN:* As the results of the 2017 DHS were disputed due to poor data quality, prioritize funding for a new DHS, to include the standard modules on women's status, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C)—and provide for adequate training and preparation to ensure acceptable implementation. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For All stakeholders:* Support the MPFPE's and ONPG's advocacy efforts to integrate three national women's empowerment indicators into the national data collected by the National Institute of Statistics (INS).

- *For USAID:* Work with relevant GoN Institutions including the ONPG and with other international organizations to create research dissemination plans. USAID could provide technical support to the GoN to create a "gender data portal" to serve, at a minimum, as a repository for gender-specific data documents and analyses. For example, the Government of Rwanda has established a gender monitoring office which maintains online data portals for gender and which could be considered as a model to replicate.

- *For USAID:* Actively participate in and support the national Sub-Cluster on GBV to understand and advocate for initiatives to improve nationwide GBV data.

- *For USAID:* Design and fund a specific GBV-focused program that aligns with GoN strategies (including the National Action Plan to End Child Marriage and the National Strategy to Reduce GBV), focusing specifically on creating GBV "one-stop-shop" centers. **(PRIORITY)**

- *For all Stakeholders:* Support GBV-focused CSOs to establish a permanent and comprehensive "formal justice" legal aid program for GBV survivors, including three required elements: training for justice actors, including police, on neutrality and confidentiality; a permanent fund to cover women's associated fees (legal, transportation, lodging, health, etc.); and a widespread dissemination campaign including information on types of GBV as well as on how to confidentially seek formal justice, including for those who are illiterate.

- *For USAID and USAID IPs:* Work with all relevant GoN institutions (MPFPE, Ministry of Public Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defense [National Gendarmerie], and Ministry of the Interior [National Police]) and with GBV-focused CSOs to define minimum standards of GBV response and to develop and apply harmonized SOPs (such as those developed by UN Women). Coordinate with organizations engaged in GBV programming, and specifically the Spotlight Initiative program, to avoid duplication and promote adherence to global best practices.

- *For USAID IPs:* Work directly with political parties to discuss the importance of including and supporting female candidates. Incorporate incentives to include women, and offer culturally appropriate explanations to demonstrate how female candidates can bolster a party's political power.

- *For USAID and IPs:* Support capacity-building interventions for women political leaders within established women's parliamentary caucuses; provide women leaders with skills and knowledge to be effective and successful. Seeing substantive representation by women leaders reinforces role-modeling and also meets voters' demands for performance accountability, which can increase public support for women's political leadership.

- *For USAID IPs:* Work with the Women's Parliamentary Network to propose an amendment to existing laws on GBV to criminalize violence against women in politics, or, alternatively, pass new standalone laws to prohibit and criminalize such acts. These provisions are needed to address the specificity of violence against women in politics—by providing adequate protection and support to them, creating the conditions for reporting such violence, and establishing a framework for holding perpetrators accountable.

ANNEX A: ILLUSTRATIVE INDICATORS

Tables A1–A3 present U.S. Government standard foreign assistance (F) indicators that USAID/Niger may consider for use in monitoring, evaluation, and learning, organized by Development Objective.

TABLE A1. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 1: KEY ILLUSTRATIVE INDICATORS BY KEY ISSUE	
KEY ISSUE	ILLUSTRATIVE INDICATORS
Civil Society Strengthening	**GNDR-4** Percentage of participants reporting increased agreement with the concept that males and females should have equal access to social, economic, and political resources and opportunities.
	DR.4-1 Number of USG-supported activities designed to promote or strengthen the civic participation of women.
	DR.4.2-2 Number of civil society organizations (CSOs) receiving USG assistance engaged in advocacy interventions, disaggregated by groups working on LGBQTI+ issues, women's rights, indigenous people's rights, disability rights, and religious freedom.
	DR.6.1-1 Number of USG supported national human rights commissions and other independent state institutions charged by law with protecting and promoting human rights that actively pursued allegations of human rights abuses during the year.
	DR.6.1-2 Number of human rights defenders trained and supported, disaggregated by sex, participants self-identifying as a member of the LGBTQI+ community, youth, persons with disabilities, ethnic minority, and religious minority.
	DR.3.1-2 Number of groups trained in conflict mediation/resolution skills or consensus-building techniques with USG assistance, disaggregated by women's groups, groups working with LGBTQI+ issues, and indigenous groups.
Women, Peace, and Security	**GNDR-9** Number of training and capacity-building activities conducted with USG assistance that are designed to promote the participation of women or the integration of gender perspectives in security sector institutions or activities.
	GNDR-10 Number of local women participating in a substantive role or position in a peacebuilding process supported with USG assistance.
Natural Resource Management	**EG.10.2-3** Number of people with improved economic benefits derived from sustainable natural resource management or biodiversity conservation as a result of USG assistance, disaggregated by sex and ethno-linguistic group.
	EG.11-6 Number of people using climate information or implementing risk-reducing actions to improve resilience to climate change as supported by USG assistance, disaggregated by sex.
	Custom Percentage of respondents who agree that women and men should have equal decision-making power related to management of water resources.
	Custom Number of women representatives in citizen watch committees, water-user associations, community development committees, and land commissions.

TABLE A2. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 2: KEY ILLUSTRATIVE INDICATORS BY KEY ISSUE	
KEY ISSUE	ILLUSTRATIVE INDICATORS
Agriculture	**EG.3.2-2** Number of individuals in the agri-food system who have applied improvement management practices or technologies with USG assistance (disaggregated by sex, age, disability status, and ethno-linguistic group). **EG.3.2-27** Value of annual sales of producers and firms receiving USG assistance [IM-level], disaggregated by sex of producers and firms. **EG.3.2-27** Value of agriculture-related financing accessed as a result of USG assistance [IM-level], disaggregated by sex of persons accessing financing.
Employment and Self-Employment	**GNDR-2** Percentage of female participants in USG-assisted programs designed to increase access to productive economic resources (assets, credit, income, or employment). **YOUTH-3** Percentage of participants who are youth (15–29) participating in USG-assisted programs designed to increase access to productive economic resources [IM-level]. **EG.6-12** Percent of individuals with new employment following participation in USG-assisted workforce development programs, (disaggregated by sex, age, disability status, and ethno-linguistic group). **EG.6-15** Percent of individuals with better employment following participation in USG-assisted workforce development programs, (disaggregated by sex, age, disability status, and ethno-linguistic group).
Small and Medium Enterprise Support	**EG.5-12** Number of small, and medium-sized enterprises supported by USG assistance, disaggregated by sex of enterprise owner. **EG.5-3** Number of microenterprises supported by USG assistance, disaggregated by sex of enterprise owner.
Access and Control over Assets	**EG.4.2-7** Number of individuals participating in USG-assisted group-based savings, micro-finance, or lending programs [IM-level], disaggregated by sex. **EG.10.4-7** Number of adults provided with legally recognized and documented tenure rights to land or marine areas, as a result of USG assistance, disaggregated by sex.
Education	**ES.1-51** Number of learning environments supported by USG assistance that have improved safety, according to locally defined criteria. **Custom** Number of learning environments supported by USG assistance that have improved use of accommodations for students with learning differences, according to locally defined criteria, disaggregated by locale (urban/rural, and upland/lowland).

TABLE A3. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE 3: KEY ILLUSTRATIVE INDICATORS BY KEY ISSUE	
KEY ISSUE	ILLUSTRATIVE INDICATORS
Gender-Mainstreaming in the Public Sector	**GNDR-8** Number of persons trained with USG assistance to advance outcomes consistent with gender equality or female empowerment through their roles in public or private sector institutions or organizations. **GNDR-4**, **Custom Disaggregation.** Percentage of government officials reporting increased agreement with the concept that males and females should have equal access to social, economic, and political resources and opportunities. **Custom** Number of gender focal points appointed with official job descriptions.
Political Processes	**DR.3.3-2** Number of USG-assisted political parties implementing initiatives to increase the number of candidates and/or members who are women, youth and from marginalized groups **DR.3.1-3** Number of consensus building forums (multi-party, civil/security sector, and/or civil/political) held with USG Assistance. **YOUTH-2** Number of laws, policies or procedures adopted and implemented with USG assistance designed to promote and improve youth participation at the regional, national or local level.
Legal Aid	**DR.6.3-1** Number of individuals from low-income or marginalized communities who received legal aid or victim's assistance with USG support.
GBV	**GNDR-6** Number of people reached by a USG-funded intervention providing GBV services (e.g., health, legal, psycho-social counseling, shelters, hotlines), disaggregated by sex.

ANNEX B: USAID/NIGER GENDER ANALYSIS SCOPE OF WORK

1. PURPOSE

The USAID 2021 Automated Directives System (ADS) 205.3.3 requires a gender analysis as part of the design of country strategies. The gender analysis must be completed prior to completing a revised CDCS so that its findings will appropriately inform strategic decisions about each DO and intermediate result. The analysis must provide country and sector-level quantitative and qualitative information on the key gender gaps in each of the domains described in section 205.3.2 at the country level and in specific sectors where Mission resources are likely to be concentrated. The mission in Niger has recently conducted a number of activity- and sector-specific gender assessments focused on providing additional context and moving into the CDCS process the mission is eager to further advance a social inclusion lens across the USAID portfolio.

Banyan Global will carry out an analysis under the Gender Integration Technical Assistance (GITA) II Task Order to analyze and identify opportunities around gender equality, youth and women's empowerment and social inclusion across the mission's proposed technical focal areas to inform its July 2022–July 2027 CDCS.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 GENDER EQUALITY/WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

President Bazoum of Niger recently opened the African Union Commission Special Summit on African Girls by emphasizing how important it was for Niger to host the event as Niger is one of the countries in the world where practices opposing the rights of girls are most prevalent. Women in Niger face many deeply ingrained gender norms and socio-cultural factors that make it difficult to adequately participate in the social and economic development of the country. According to a gender analysis conducted under the Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE I)I Activity, women in Niger are disproportionately affected by poverty and grossly excluded from opportunities to assume decision-making roles in society or participate in income-generating activities. Three out of four people in poverty in Niger are women. Women demonstrate higher rates of illiteracy and lower rates of education, comprising only 1percent of students in higher education. While the laws and regulations in Niger recognize equal rights of access to services and resources, women and girls face complicated social, religious, customary, and institutional practices that compound barriers. Although national quotas are in place, women's political participation in Niger is limited. Women face barriers to participation due to gender stereotypes, misconceptions about their leadership skills and the lack of awareness among women about their right to participate. Child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) and high levels of normalized GBV continue to be persistent issues for women, as further described below.

2.2 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

GBV is normalized throughout many communities in Niger and takes on many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse. In addition, GBV and sexual assault are documented tools of violent extremist (VE) groups. Forms of GBV prevalent in Niger include female genital mutilation/cutting, domestic violence, imposed polygamy, child, early and forced (CEFM)marriage, non- or unschooling of girls, etc. It is widely believed that men have the right to have sex with their spouse whenever they desire and that a man retains the right to beat his wife.

Women and girls in the Central Sahel face one of the highest rates of GBV in the world with women and girls largely survivors of such violence often accepting it as a normal way of life. Niger has outdated

statistics on GBV prevalence. Its most recent 2012 Demographic and Health Survey indicates that roughly 36 percent of women (and 25 percent of men) experienced some form of GBV in the last 12 months. The regions with the highest levels of GBV include Niger (45 percent), Maradi (36 percent). Tahoua (22 percent), and Tillabéri (28 percent).[466] Tillabéri also has the highest level of FGM/C at 13 percent (compared to a 2 percent national average).[467]

In Niger, CEFM is widespread. The 2012 DHS indicates that 76 percent of girls are married before 18 and nearly one-quarter (24 percent are married before their 15th birthday). In Maradi, Zinder, Tahoua and Tillabéri- the rates of CEFM are, respectively: 89, 87, 76, and 75 percent.[468] The prevalence of CEFM varies from rural and urban communities. In rural areas, 64 percent of girls are married before 15 compared to 14 percent in urban areas. As a result, Niger has the highest adolescent fertility rate globally. Negative outcomes associated with early (and inadequately spaced) childbearing including maternal, infant, and under 5 mortality, often related to low birth weight. Obstetric fistula is also another common consequence of CEFM. Adolescent girls aged 15–19 make up 34 percent of maternal deaths in Niger. CEFM is also associated with poor educational outcomes. Though the statistics presented above are outdated, there is little indication that rates of CEFM have reduced significantly in the last ten years, and, in fact, times of crises linked to the humanitarian crisis in Niger as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have likely worsened the situation.[469]

There are no national statistics available on rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Niger, however, norms around the acceptability of GBV suggest that the rates are high. Data from the 2012 DHS shows staggeringly high levels of GBV acceptance across the country and for both men and women. Specifically, nearly 60 percent of women in Niger agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one reason (and 26 percent of men). The range varies widely by region. In Tillabéri this rate is 84 percent for women (and 46 percent for men), 55 percent (36 percent for men) in Niamey, and 22 percent (9 percent for men) in Agadez.[470] More recent (2019) ethnographic research from Maradi found similar levels of acceptance among married adolescent girls and their husbands: 54 percent of adolescent wives and 57 percent of husbands felt that people in their village think there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten.[471] Over three-quarters of the same respondents in Maradi agreed that if a woman refuses to have sex with her husband, he has the right to get angry and reprimand her.[472] Forty-six percent of adolescent wives agreed that in this same scenario, the husband has the right to use force and have sex with her compared to 30 percent of husbands.[473] Over half of adolescent wives also justified the use of physical violence if she used a method of contraception without her husband's permission compared to 30 percent of husbands.[474]

In the same study in Maradi, there were similarly low levels of reported IPV: only 12 percent of married adolescent girls self-reporting experiences of IPV. At the same time, a high percentage of husbands reported having witnessed or heard of male friends engaging in spousal physical violence (72 percent). Moreover, in the same study, men mentioned sexual satisfaction and coercion in the qualitative study as both a "marital expectation and an obligation."[475]

Lack of criminalization of GBV and ineffective implementation of laws and strategic frameworks create an enabling environment for GBV in Niger. There is not a comprehensive legal framework on protection from GBV in Niger. According to the Penal Code, perpetrators of domestic violence are punishable by three months to 30 years in prison and a fine of franc CFA 10,000. Women often do not report GBV because they are unaware of their rights, fear retribution and stigmatization, and lack legal redress in customary courts.[476] Similarly, the coexistence of modern, customary, and Muslim law; the latter two, patriarchal and unequal, take precedence in matters of family and personal status of which GBV is classified.

To date, there is no law prohibiting CEFM in Niger. Under the Civil Code 1993, the minimum legal age of marriage is 15 years for girls and 18 years for boys.[477] However, minors can be married before those ages with parental consent, and the President may grant age exemptions for serious reasons.[478] The GoN has signed on to international commitments in favor of reducing the extremely high levels of CEFM and in 2018, developed the First National Action Plan to End Child Marriage.[479] However, as of early 2022, there is limited information on the implementation of the National Action Plan.

Niger developed the 2017-2021 Strategy to Reduce GBV, which includes a goal to reduce the prevalence of violence from 28.4 to 15.4 percent by 2021.[480] Though, due to a lack of national-level prevalence data, tracking progress is difficult. There is no available literature on the progress of the strategy and/or plans for renewal.

GBV themes will be integrated throughout the report.

2.3 HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Niger is facing a combination of quick onset and protracted humanitarian crises. Increasing insecurity is leading to population displacements, in a country highly vulnerable to climate-related disasters,[481] affected by multiple epidemic outbreaks[482] and by nutritional crisis.[483] The ongoing situation has created a protection crisis for women and girls. Escalating violence and displacement have heightened the risk of GBV and harmful practices and disrupted access to basic services, including SRH care. In Niger, where climate-related hazards pose an additional concern, millions of people have been affected. Violence related to the activities of armed actors in the country and surrounding areas in Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria has led to aggravated chronic food insecurity and malnutrition. This is caused by the effects of climate change as well as limited access to essential social services in a context of high-level poverty in certain areas.

The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has increased from 2.3 million in 2019 to 3.8 million (including 2.1 million children) in 2022. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimates that there is more than 264,000 IDPs in Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri regions with estimates that women and children make up the vast majority of IDPs (in certain places, over 80 percent).[484] Niger is host to roughly 260,000 refugees from Mali, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso.

Like other countries in the Sahel, Niger's multiple security crises exacerbate gender inequalities, particularly along the border regions. Research shows that VE and human rights abuses committed under the guise of counterterrorism measures are an obstacle to the promotion of women's and girls' rights and women's participation in public decision-making processes.[485] Common human rights violations include issues of GBV (discussed more under DO 1), forced displacement, abductions, and the destruction of infrastructures (such as schools and healthy centers).[486] Additionally, crises are affecting the economic activities in the informal sector where women constitute the majority of actors, especially in activities related to the fish trade, agriculture, and small businesses.[487]

For more on the humanitarian crises and response, please see DO 1.

CHILD MARRIAGE

According to UNICEF, despite a presidential decree making 18 the legal age of marriage, Niger has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world with 76 percent of girls married before the age of 18. Certain regions demonstrate even higher trends than the average cited above. For example, the rate of child marriage in the Zinder region is among the highest in the country, at 87 percent. Girls' socio-

culturally defined roles and domestic responsibilities mean that they face skill gaps, time poverty and low access to training, information, financial capital, FP services, and even nutrient-rich foods.

CHILD LABOR

Niger is among the youngest countries in the world, 49.8 percent of the population is less than 15 years old. Within that demographic there are large groups of children excluded from access to primary school or unable to graduate. One key barrier to increasing educational attainment and resilience is forced child labor, which may demonstrate linkages to forced early child marriage and educational attainment. Although increases in youth employment have shown no negative impact on educational attainment, the question of forced child labor is not equally clear. The reality of communities in Niger is that many children participate in work activities; child labor is a forced assumption of responsibility upon a child in a way that endangers the child or prevents that child from attending school. Child labor is persistent problem. The GoN has ratified all related key international conventions, but enforcement remains a major issue. Child labor can take many different forms and may affect population groups differently, particularly rural versus urban groups. Child labor can take place under conditions of hereditary slavery, because of early marriage and assumption of household labor, and as a result of human trafficking or exploitation. Across Niger, children contribute to a number of economic sectors including agriculture, cattle herding, and even mining. Forced labor in urban settings, often forced begging, is another common occurrence.[488]

CONFLICT

The security context in Niger is evolving rapidly. Violent extremist organizations are gaining ground and influence in rural communities, while banditry and trafficking are increasing along border zones. Niger is the only country in the world with ISIS on multiple borders. Attacks by these groups have led to population movements in the regions of Tillabéry and North Tahoua with a significant number of internally displaced peoples seeking shelter in urban centers. In response to these attacks, the Nigerien government declared a state of emergency in these areas and increased the resources allocated to the defense and security forces. As a result of these displacements, subsistence agricultural production has been affected and emergency humanitarian assistance is on-going. Although recent research[489] suggests little evidence of women taking up arms, women and girls are deeply affected and implicated in the evolving conflicts in ways that resonate across the context of this proposed analysis.

3. OBJECTIVES AND TIMELINE OF THE GENDER ANALYSIS

3.1 OBJECTIVE

To conduct a holistic USAID/Niger mission-level Gender Analysis that considers opportunities for gender equality and women's empowerment in Niger to inform the mission's CDCS and provide insights across the following anticipated Development Objectives (DOs):

- **Strengthen and Empower Communities**: Enable men, women, and youth to gain control over the factors and decisions shaping their communities and to gain access and voice in order to advance social and political change.
- **Inclusive Economic Growth**: Connect community-based livelihood efforts to market-driven economic systems to promote sustainable economic well-being.
- **Social Service Delivery and System Strengthening**: Improve institutional ability to deliver a range of public and non-public services to meet the needs of all Nigerians, including the most vulnerable.

TABLE B1. KEY ELEMENTS OF THE GENDER ANALYSIS			
MISSION DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES	USAID ADS 205 GENDER ANALYSIS DOMAINS	CROSS CUTTING THEMES	INTERSECTIONAL VARIABLES
• Strengthen and empower communities • Inclusive economic growth • Social service delivery and system strengthening	• Laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices • Cultural norms and beliefs • Gender roles, responsibilities, and time use • Access to and control over assets and resources • Patterns of power and decision-making	• Gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, including CEFM • Educational attainment • Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)	• Youth and children • Rural/urban/nomadic • Ethnic minorities •

The gender analysis will build off previous analyses of gender equality and women's empowerment advances and gaps in Niger across USAID technical sectors to identify key gender advances, inequalities, and constraints across the mission's portfolio. The following cross-cutting themes and key populations will guide the gender analysis within each draft DO in order to develop an inception report.

- GBV prevention and response will be a key cross-cutting focus area addressed under all DOs, including child, early and forced marriage.
- Youth and children will be key population priorities across each DO and the analysis will examine the intersection between gender and youth. The analysis will also present findings around the condition of boys and girls as related to child marriage and child labor, including the relationship to educational attainment, early marriage, and resilience at the community and family level.
- The analysis will also examine differences between persons living in urban and rural environments and those living nomadically.
- Opportunities and recommendations (programmatic and partnerships) will be presented for integrating gender and women's empowerment in USAID/Niger's CDCS, including opportunities related to the analysis's cross-cutting themes. Furthermore, recommendations will include lines of inquiry to be addressed by future programming and analyses.

Informed by gaps within existing research and alignment with draft DOs, Banyan Global will coordinate with USAID/Niger to determine up to three cross-cutting themes to prioritize within primary data collection and confirm geographic priorities. Anticipated geographic priorities are Maradi, Zinder, Tahoua, Dosso, and Tillaberi.

The gender analysis will comply with ADS Chapter 205 requirements for gender analysis, which includes gathering and providing data on the following gender analysis domains:

- Laws, Policies, Regulations, and Institutional Practices
- Cultural Norms and Beliefs
- Gender Roles, Responsibilities, and Time Use
- Access to and Control over Assets and Resources
- Patterns of Power and Decision-making

Recommendations will also propose USAID Standard Foreign Assistance (F) and custom indicators in the Gender Analysis Report. The key stakeholders, or the primary audience for the analysis results, will be USAID/Niger and USAID/Washington. At the same time, the analysis (or public version of it) will be accessible to all interested parties in the development community and beyond.

4. METHODOLOGY

The gender analysis will comprise a combination of primary and secondary data collection structured around six key deliverables:

- Inception Report (including a comprehensive literature review of secondary data sources, proposed methodology, work plan/schedule, a list of key stakeholders to interview, and research questions guides)
- In-briefing with USAID/Niger Mission Staff
- Primary Data Collection (in-person)
- USAID/Niger Mission-level Gender Analysis Presentation of Preliminary Findings and Recommendations
- Draft mission-level Gender Analysis Report
- Final Mission-level Gender Analysis Report (incorporating written feedback from USAID/Niger)

The section below speaks primarily to the methodology for the inception report, in-country primary data collection, and presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations, and deliverables.

1. **Inception report**: The inception report will include the methodology, work plan, a preliminary list of key stakeholders to interview, and research questions guides. It will also include a comprehensive desk review of secondary data and literature, by DO, including of national and regional statistical databases. Banyan Global will create a secured Google Drive Folder for the mission to share any pertinent reports or documentation that are not available publicly online (i.e., USAID/Niger ICS. RISE II PAD, BRIDGE PAD and activity-level gender analyses, as well as any other relevant reports and information). Documents may include the following:

USAID/Washington documents including, but not limited to:

- The Automated Directives System (ADS) 201 and 205
- USAID's 2020 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy
- U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally (2016)
- USAID Vision for Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children (2012)
- U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security;
- USAID Vision for Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children;
- USG 2018 Act on Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act
- U.S. Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls (March 2016)
- Counter-Trafficking in Persons Policy (2012)
- USAID's Youth in Development Policy (2012)
- USAID Disability Policy Paper (1997)
- Advancing Disability-Inclusive Development
- USAID Policy on Non-Discrimination (2011)
- 2021 Executive Order on Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation

USAID/Niger mission documents, such as, but not limited to:

- The 2020 West Africa Gender Analysis
- The RISE II PAD and the BRIDGE PAD
- Activity-level Gender Analyses/Assessments (available here) and others including:
    - The 2018 RISE Gender Analysis
    - The 2021 Gender Analysis for the Resilient Governance in Niger Activity

- Save the Children Niger WADATA Program: Gender and Youth Analysis
  - The 2020 USAID/Niger COVID-Specific Gender Analysis
  - The draft 2021 Gender Differentiated Drivers of Violent Extremism in the Central Sahel Report
- The Niger Mission's Integrated Country Strategy
- Studies, analyses, and assessments concerning gender equality conducted by donors, UN agencies, NGOs, national governments, regional organizations, and the academic community; CRS and others;
- Appropriate data and statistics as available *(the National statistics on women from the Demographic and Health Survey may be outdated as last completed in 2012)*, the UNDP Human Development Index Reports, and the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index.

2. **In-Country Primary Data Collection:** The research team will carry out in-country primary data collection to inform the in-country presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations, and the draft and final gender analysis reports. The primary data collection will include a survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with USAID staff, implementing partners, government counterparts, United Nations (UN) agencies, national NGOs, program ben2. In-Country Primary Data Collection: The research team will carry out in-country primary data collection to inform the in-country presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations, and the draft and final gender analysis reports. The primary data collection will include a survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with USAID staff, implementing partners, government counterparts, United Nations agencies, national NGOs, program beneficiaries, and key civil society stakeholders. The research team will consider the following:
- Key stakeholder interviews and focus groups with USAID/Niger and gender points of contact with implementing partners' staff involved in developing the Mission program. These will include where possible:
  - Interviews with the Gender Point of Contact, the Program Office, the Front Office.
  - Interviews with mission office teams and implementing partners on specific sectors and areas of interest to identify possible entry points for the incorporation of gender equality and women's empowerment into ongoing and future activities, taking into consideration the current context of Niger.
- Interviews with selected key expert stakeholders, beneficiaries and other community members involved in current and proposed programs; site visits to selected program activities as time permits to identify gender equality and women's empowerment priorities and potentialities for improving attention to gender in USAID activities. Locations for site visits will be selected in coordination with USAID in part based upon discussions following the initial literature review.

Primary data collection locations will be chosen in consultation between the contractor and USAID based on the outcomes of the literature review.

3. **Presentation of Preliminary Finding and Recommendations:** The research team will present an in-country presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations to USAID/Niger staff. The presentation will also include a question and answer/discussion to validate key findings and recommendations to inform the gender analysis report.

For all deliverables, Banyan Global's home-office technical staff will provide consistent and regular technical guidance to the research team to ensure that the methodology and deliverables meet USAID and internal Banyan Global quality standards.

5. DELIVERABLES AND GUIDELINES

5.1 KEY DELIVERABLES

The associated work will include the following deliverables:

	DELIVERABLE/TASK	CONTENT
1	Inception Report	Inception report, including methodology, workplan, interview question guides and literature review of secondary data
2	USAID/Niger shares list of key stakeholders	USAID will share names, organizational affiliation, and contact information for individuals who it is recommended that the research team meet with. This list will be incorporated into the Stakeholder List the Inception Report Annex.
3	In-country briefing with USAID/Niger Mission Staff	Presentation to mission on the purpose of the Gender Analysis; proposed research questions; methodology; suggested time frames for field work; proposed key respondents
4	USAID provides feedback on inception report	Feedback on inception report, any recommended changes to the interview guides or data collection plan
5	Primary Data Collection	Collection of primary data in target regions in Niger
6	Debriefing with mission staff - Presentation of Preliminary Findings and Recommendations	Presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations to USAID/Niger
7	Draft Gender Analysis Report	
8	Mission review of draft report	
9	Final Gender Analysis Report (incorporating USAID/Niger feedback)	Final report taking into account USAID/Niger's feedback on the Draft Gender Analysis Report

5.2 REPORTING GUIDELINES

The Gender Analysis report (36 pages excluding Executive Summary, Table of Contents, Acronyms and Annexes) should follow the format below and be submitted electronically in Microsoft word and PDF versions:

1. Executive Summary (4 pp.)
2. Table of Contents (1 pp.)
3. Acronyms (1 pp.)
4. Introduction (1 pp.)
5. Background (2-3 pp.)
6. Methodology (2 pp.)
7. Country Context: Findings, by USAID ADS205 gender analysis domain (5 pp)
8. Findings and Recommendations, by DO, (including the proposal of 2 gender equality and women's empowerment intermediate results (IRs) and indicators per ICS Mission Goal and Objective) This section will be organized by DO and incorporate analysis for the cross-cutting themes and key populations within each DO. Recommendations should include lines of inquiry and knowledge gaps for future activities and analyses to address. (35 pp)
9. Annexes
    - Mission-Level Gender Analysis SOW
    - List of Key Documents
    - List of key stakeholders and organizations consulted

Note: The recommendation in #8 above will point to linkages with the Journey to Self-Reliance sub-dimensions and women's economic empowerment (using a tagging system).

6. TEAM COMPOSITION

A four-person team is planned, with three consultants to lead primary data collection in-country. If COVID-19, travel, and/or security conditions change, the team structure may be adjusted in order to conduct in-country data collection to the fullest extent possible.

Team Leader (International) (Task Order Labor Category: Senior Consultant (expat)) with the following qualifications:

This position seeks an international consultant with core experience working with and knowledge of USAID programs and must be an experienced social scientist with expert level knowledge in conducting gender analyses in Sub-Saharan Africa (required), preference given for relevant Niger or Sahel experience. Other qualifications include:

- Minimum of 10 years 'experience in research, policy formulation and program design in gender and/or social inclusion.
- At least 6 years of experience in gender analysis– including a focus on GBV prevention and response.
- Familiarity with USAID strategic planning and program management is strongly desired.
- Excellent speaking and writing English language skills are required.
- Exceptional interpersonal and intercultural skills.
- Excellent leadership skills.
- Expertise in one of the priority DOs/sectors.
- Formal studies in gender and/or social inclusion and a minimum of a master's degree in sociology, anthropology, economics, or relevant social science field.
- Experience with other donors is highly desirable.
- Fluency in English and French.
- U.S. nationality.

Senior Gender Expert (International) (Task Order Labor Category: Senior Consultant (expat) with the following qualifications:

- Minimum of 10 years 'experience in research, policy formulation and program design in gender and/or social inclusion.
- A minimum of 5 years of experience in gender analysis–including a focus on GBV prevention and response.
- Expertise in one of the priority DOs/sectors.
- Experience in the drafting and implementation of qualitative research instruments.
- Familiarity with USAID strategic planning and program management is strongly desired.
- Excellent speaking and writing English language skills are required.
- Formal studies in gender and/or social inclusion and a minimum of a master's degree in sociology, anthropology, economics, or relevant social science field.
- Fluency in English and French.
- Experience working in Sub-Saharan Africa, experience in the Sahel preferred.
- U.S. nationality.

National Gender Expert (2) (Task Order Labor Category: Senior Consultants (local) with the following qualifications:

The team includes two Gender Experts who exhibit complementary skills to the Team Lead and Senior Gender Expert and core experience conducting thorough evidence-based research on gender issues in Niger. Qualifications include:

- Minimum of 10 years' experience in conducting evidence-based research and expert knowledge on gender and women's economic empowerment issues in Niger.
- Expertise in one of the priority development objectives/sectors.
- Excellent speaking and writing French is required.
- Knowledge of a mix of local languages including Hausa, Djerma and others is required. Strong English language skills are preferred.
- Must be conversant with socio-cultural beliefs and practices in Niger.
- Exceptional interpersonal and intercultural skills.

Examples of past analysis reports produced under the direction of the proposed team leader and National Gender Expert may be requested as well as character and professional references. Other team members can be considered if the need presents itself.

7. ANALYSIS MANAGEMENT

7.1 LOGISTICS

A USAID focal point will be assigned to assist the team to gather relevant contact information from those groups, organizations and individuals identified for interviews.

7.2 SCHEDULING

The expected period of performance for the analysis will be roughly 120 days per the deliverables schedule above (extended timeframe due to end of year holidays).

The team will have 3.5 weeks (25) working days after completing the fieldwork to submit a preliminary draft to USAID/Niger.

Due to office space constraints the team will need to identify an ideal workspace and will have to occasionally schedule meetings with USAID/Niger staff for interviews and to discuss issues.

Note that this work order includes a six-day work week; therefore, LOE and salaries are calculated on that basis.

7.3 INTERVIEW NOTES AND RESOURCE DOCUMENTS

The Contractor must provide summaries of all key meetings, workshops, discussions, and any data collection exercises conducted during the course of the analysis. These summaries must be submitted to USAID/Niger Activity Manager, along with copies of any background documents and reports gathered in the course of the assessment. All information must be provided in an electronic format, organized, and fully documented for use.

7.4 DATASETS

Should the Contractor use quantitative data, all datasets generated during the performance of the assessment must be submitted in a machine-readable, non-proprietary format and excluding any personally identifiable information, with supporting documentation describing the dataset, such as code books, data dictionaries, data gathering tools, notes on data quality, and explanations of redactions. All datasets created during the performance of the task order must be submitted to the Development Data Library per open data requirements found in ADS 579, USAID Development Data, and per the instructions outlined in ADS 302mas (302.3.5.22). The Contractor must submit the Dataset and

supporting documentation within thirty (30) calendar days after the Dataset is first used to produce an Intellectual Work or is of sufficient quality to produce an Intellectual Work.

8. SUBMISSION TO THE DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE CLEARINGHOUSE (DEC)

The final approved report must be a public document, unless otherwise specified to be submitted to the Development Experience Clearinghouse (www.dec.org) (DEC) following the required Office of GenDev format. The contractor must make the final gender analysis report publicly available through the Development Experience Clearinghouse within 30 calendar days of final approval of the formatted report.

9. TASK ORDER PACKAGING, BRANDING, AND MARKING

Task Order packaging and marking shall be performed in accordance with Section D of Advancing the Gender Integration Technical Assistance II Task Order: 47QRAA18D00CM.

The Contractor shall comply with the requirements of the policy directives and required Marking shall comply with the USAID "Graphic Standards Manual" available at www.usaid.gov/branding or any successor branding policy.

ANNEX C: LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED

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