

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIAMEY AND NIGER: YOUNG PEOPLE'S HOPE FOR THEIR PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Niger has unprecedented demographics: the average citizen's age is 14.8 years; the fertility rate is 7.8 children per woman; and though the infant mortality rate is decreasing, 1 in 4 children die before the age of 5. One strategy for families in the villages is to choose a male to migrate to the capital (or elsewhere) in hopes of earning a living to save toward a dowry while also sending money back to the family in the village. The reality is these young men arrive in Niamey with nowhere to live, no job, and little money to survive on. It takes time, hard work, and a little good fortune for them to begin to make progress toward their goals. Therefore, our objective was to explore the new life encountered by young Nigerien males who migrate from their village to the capital city of Niamey.

We chose five of the poorer neighborhoods in Niamey where young people are known to live and work. We randomly approached males who appeared to be in their

twenties and asked if they would participate in our study. We conducted a total of 22 interviews during a 15 day period. The questions were from a semi-structured interview guide where all respondents were provided the same prompts.

The average age of respondents was 25, and they had lived in Niamey for about 6 years with either friends or family they met (or on the street next to their vending stand). They relocated about once a year. They typically were selling some sort of inexpensive item alongside the road (tea, coffee, flip flops, etc.). They were earning just enough to make ends meet and sending a small amount back to their family in the village. If they were frugal, there actually was a small amount left toward saving for a dowry (\$25/yr). They thought about their future regarding marriage, family, and their country, but they could not imagine one day being a person who impacts the development of their community or country.

The government has an underrepresented (voiceless) majority on its hands, and that majority demands to be heard. It

would seem to behoove the government to seriously implement an advisory commission comprising young people from all sectors of Niger, especially from the poorer working class. This sector does not seem to feel empowered enough to effect meaningful positive change in its future, and that is not only demoralizing but also poses a potential risk to Niger's future.

If young people could be incorporated into the political voice of the government such that they feel empowered, they might become more of a productive component of society. Sometimes the mere feeling of knowing you are "part of the team" is sufficient to cause you to "come to practice and work hard" until your opportunity arises. Otherwise, it is easy to become disillusioned with a sense of abandonment and drift apart from the goals of the team.

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