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Organization of the
United Nations



THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES: SECURING OUR RIGHTS **NIGER**



Success stories



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Trees provide shelter against the strong sun for people and animals on the road from Niamey to Dosso.



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NIGER CASE STUDY

Highlights



In 2017, the *États Généraux du foncier rural* were organized with over 300 stakeholders from all regions of the country under the aegis of the President of the Republic.



From 2018 to 2020, Niger initiated a participatory process with stakeholders from all regions of the country to formulate a national land policy document inspired by **Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT)** principles.



A series of seminars was organized which targeted stakeholders including traditional chiefs, women and youth as well as parliamentarians to engage in the preparation of a land policy draft.



A **National Transhumance Committee (CNT)** was established in Niger by ministerial decree on 20 November 2019.



Four **Regional Transhumance Committees (CRT)** were established and made operational, and two others benefited from capacity development support.



An exchange visit was organized between local stakeholders in the region of Zinder, Niger and local authorities of Jigawa, Nigeria (October 2020) to build the foundation for a bilateral agreement between the two countries on peaceful transhumance across borders.



A local **VGGT inspired image-guide** to improve governance of pastoral land was prepared by the pastoral civil society organization, *Réseau des Organisations des Pasteurs et Éleveurs du Niger (ROPEN)*.



A national evaluation of SDG indicator 5.a.2 on **women's access to land** in Niger was successfully completed in 2020.

1. INTRODUCTION

- **Niger is a landlocked country, covering a land area of almost 1 270 000 km² (490 000 sq mi), making it the largest country in West Africa.**
- **Arable land (percent of land area) in Niger was reported at 13.97 percent in 2018, according to the World Bank.**
- **Over 80percent of its land area lies in the Sahara Desert.**

INTERESTING FACTS

38percent of the GDP comes from agriculture and provides more than 80percent of employment.

87.5percent of agricultural production is food crops and consist mainly of millet, sorghum, rice, fonio and maize.

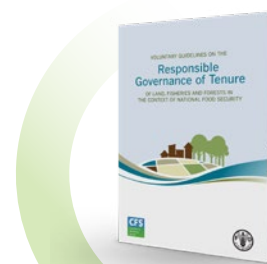
32percent of the total population, or 3.7 million people, is undernourished.

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) were endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security in May 2012. These Voluntary Guidelines have been described as a catalyst leading to improvements in conditions under which land is held or occupied in agricultural sectors. The Voluntary Guidelines address problems of weak governance of tenure and the growing pressure on natural resources, providing the basis for countries to achieve food security for all.

Since 2012, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has provided technical assistance, training and capacity development, as well as support to the assessment, formulation and implementation of relevant national policies and laws in 58 countries. In these processes, FAO has been working in close collaboration with the national authorities, civil society, pastoralist organizations, traditional chiefs and other technical and financial partners to build a participatory approach for improving governance of tenure.

In Niger, FAO supported the preparation process of the *États Généraux du foncier rural*, which

took place in February 2018. The *États Généraux* were the result of a remarkable participatory approach to take stock of the land tenure situation 25 years after the endorsement of the Rural Code (land law) and build a common vision for the way forward. One of the main outputs of this high-level forum led to the agreement to prepare a national policy based on the recommendations and principles of the VGGT and the Framework and Guidelines for Land Policy in Africa (F&G). Shortly after the *États Généraux*, a ministerial decree established and coordinated an inclusive multi-stakeholder committee with the participation of all relevant stakeholder groups and sectors.



Rome, 2012
ISBN 978-92-5-107277-6
40 pp., 177 × 250 mm
Paperback

Available in:
Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Lao,
Nepali, Russian, Spanish



Source: UN. 2018. Map of Niger modified [online].
 [Cited 1 January 2018]. un.org/geospatial/content/niger



This was considered a milestone since the country's overlapping and sometimes obsolete laws and regulations often hamper the realisation of coherent actions to improve governance of tenure. It was also the first time that a broad range of civil society actors and women's representatives were fully engaged in a national policy process.

Another achievement in Niger has been the support towards improving the governance of pastoral land,

a result of the establishment of Transboundary Committees at both national and local level.

FAO has also contributed to building the foundation for improving women's land tenure rights in Niger. One example is FAO's support to an evaluation made on the country's progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicator 5.a.2 on woman's access to and control over land, undertaken based on a participatory approach in 2020.

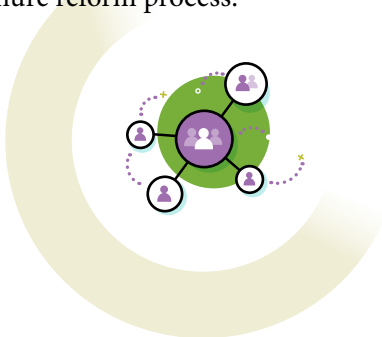
“ The process of organizing the *États Généraux* in Niger, followed by the preparation of the rural land policy document in a participatory, inclusive and recurrent way is a new, inclusive governance model to tackle tenure challenges. This approach is now inspiring other countries in the sub-region. ”

DR ABOUBA SAIDOU,
 Former Deputy Secretary General, Ministry
 of Agriculture and Livestock

2. TENURE CHALLENGES IN NIGER

In Niger, land and natural resources are being degraded and are suffering increasing pressure. This situation challenges access to land, occasionally causing violent conflicts, especially between farmers and herders. In response to these pressing challenges, in the 1990s the government adopted *Ordinance 93-015*, establishing the “Principles of Orientation of the Rural Code”.

A first assessment of the implementation of the Rural Code was conducted in 2013. It highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the legal arsenal and the institutional arrangement for land governance, which was under the responsibility of the Permanent Secretariat of the National Committee of the Rural Code (CNCR). Consequently, in October 2014 the CNCR stressed the need to organize the *États Généraux du foncier rural* to recommend a direction for the land tenure reform process.



Preparation of the land policy: National seminar with focus on prevention of conflicts related to national resources.

38%

OF THE GDP COMES FROM AGRICULTURE AND PROVIDES MORE THAN 80% OF EMPLOYMENT.

87.5%

OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IS FOOD CROPS AND CONSIST MAINLY OF MILLET, SORGHUM, RICE, FONIO AND MAIZE.

32%

OF THE TOTAL POPULATION, OR 3.7 MILLION PEOPLE, IS UNDERNOURISHED.

15 million

HECTARES POTENTIALLY CULTIVABLE, REPRESENTING LESS THAN 12% OF THE COUNTRY'S TOTAL AREA.

94.2%

TOTAL INCREASE OF CULTIVATED AREAS SINCE 1975

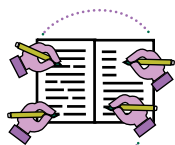
47.6%

OF THE POPULATION IS UNDER 15 YEARS OLD

3. THE ROLE OF THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES IN NIGER

MAINSTREAMING VGGT PRINCIPLES IN THE NATIONAL REFORM PROCESS

The Voluntary Guidelines activities in Niger started in 2014 with a first national VGGT workshop funded by the European Union and the French Cooperation. One of the key recommendations of the workshop, echoed a few months later by the CNCR, was that the preparation of the *États Généraux du foncier rural* should be based on VGGT principles. Shortly hereafter, the Government of Niger requested FAO's support. To ensure a participatory process, in line with article 26.2 of the VGGT, the Minister of State, Agriculture and Livestock established a multi-stakeholder committee composed of representatives from ten government ministries, academia, traditional chiefs, notaries, the private sector, civil society and technical and financial partners.



THE ÉTATS GÉNÉRAUX DU FONCIER RURAL: UNPRECEDENTED CONSULTATION AND REMARKABLE CONSENSUS

The participatory process of preparing the *États Généraux* allowed stakeholders at both national and local level to take part in a stocktaking exercise to identify the main challenges and solutions for improving the country's land tenure situation. FAO provided support from the beginning of the process, specifically through capacity development for different stakeholder groups to make use of the VGGT as a tool to analyse their own country context.

In order to allow a larger number of stakeholders to engage more equally in the preparation of the *États Généraux*, FAO paid special attention to supporting the most vulnerable groups. This included support through a Letter of Agreement with the Nigerien NGO *Plateforme Paysanne*, to the "Civil society consortium", which is a network established by Civil

Society Organizations (CSOs) that allows civil society actors to engage in the preparation of the *États Généraux* and the broader tenure debate. The network played a key role, mobilizing over 3 000 stakeholders across the country involving them in the process. The CSO network also played an active role in training local actors on the VGGT and building consensus among the different actors throughout the whole process.



The *États Généraux du foncier rural* gathered more than 300 participants from all sectors and regions of the country. It was one of the largest platforms for exchange between actors ever mobilized in the sub-region. It provided a forum to openly discuss the Rural Code of Niger, its implementation over the last 25 years and the way forward to improve governance of tenure in the country.

Another key success factor was the proactive engagement of technical and financial partners, who meet on a regular basis to coordinate their actions in support of this process.

The *États Généraux* were held from 13 to 16 February 2018 and brought together more than 300 participants from different sectors and regions of the country. It was a unique and unprecedented opportunity to extensively discuss

complex tenure related challenges and to build a consensus around the concrete steps forward. The *États Généraux* confirmed the need to prepare a national land policy with a strong common vision inspired by the principles of the VGGT and the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa (F&G). These tools led to the formulation of the overall guidelines and a roadmap to prepare future land policy in a participatory manner.

“ The introduction of the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy and the Voluntary Guidelines in Niger was a trigger for the development of a land policy document, desired since the founding of the Rural Code in Niger in 1992. ”

ALHOU ABEY BAZOU

Permanent Secretary of the National Committee of the Rural Code of Niger

PREPARATION OF A DRAFT LAND POLICY

In the wake of the preparation of the *États Généraux*, the process of drafting the land policy document was conducted in a participatory process with a series of debates at national and local levels, involving a broad range of stakeholders. The formulation of the land policy was led by a technical committee in collaboration with a team of four consultants, one international tenure expert and three national consultants (a lawyer, an environmentalist and a land management specialist).

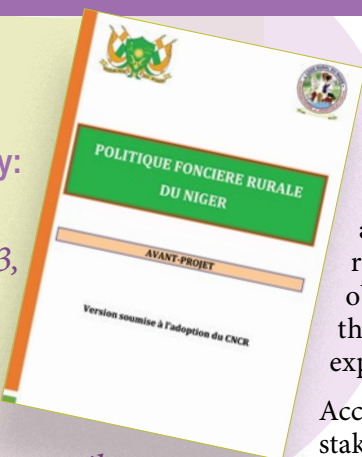


The Vision of the land policy:

“ In Niger where, by 2063, rural actors will benefit from fair and secure access to land, which contributes to creating conditions favourable to the development of responsible investments allowing the achievement of food security and sovereignty, strengthening the resilience of populations and more broadly sustainable and harmonious socio-economic development, guaranteeing the maintenance of social peace. ”

The Four Political Directions of the land policy:

- 1 Reorganize the institutional and legal framework and improve its performance.
- 2 Strengthen efficiency and standardize the securing of legitimate land tenure rights for rural populations and operators.
- 3 Improve the management of territories and shared resources.
- 4 Put in place efficient and effective mechanisms for regulating land markets and land dynamics that foster inequity or conflicts.



The government launched the land policy process by ministerial decree as a response to the need to revise and update some of the obsolete text, as concluded in the 2013 assessment of 20 years' experience of the Rural Code.

According to the national stakeholders, this process towards the draft land policy is seen as an important commitment to respect international and regional standards for land tenure governance.

The land policy document and its action plan were presented to the CNCR on 25 June 2020. The nine ministries, members of CNCR, under the Presidency of the Minister of State, endorsed the document during the session that gathered 40 participants, including civil society representatives and technical and financial partners (FAO, European Union, GIZ, the French Cooperation, the Belgian Development Cooperation, United Nations

Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women [UN Women] and Millennium Challenge Corporation [MCC-USA]).

The land policy document was further discussed during a governmental session chaired by the Prime Minister on 5 October 2020, a few days before the launch of the presidential election campaign. The document led to an intense debate among national authorities. While recognizing that the document was prepared based on a long participatory process, the Prime Minister considered that this complex issue would require more time for debate within the government. Therefore, the discussion, interrupted during the presidential elections all along the 1st quarter 2021, continued

Endorsement of the national land policy document by the National Committee of the Code Rural on 25 June 2020.



©FAO/Abouba Saïdou

after April among the members of the new government. This decision made by the national authorities, demonstrates once again how land tenure is a complex and a highly sensitive issue, especially during election periods.

STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITIES OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

The preparation of the *Etat Généraux* and the land policy document had a strong focus on strengthening the capacities of all categories of actors at both national and local level, to ensure their fair and effective involvement. The process included targeted capacity building trainings of different stakeholder groups, such as government representatives, traditional chiefs, CSOs, parliamentarians, women's group and pastoralist organisations.

These training sessions helped to strengthen the capacities of the national stakeholders on how to make use of the VGGT in their own context. It also allowed the different stakeholder groups to openly discuss and agree among themselves on their recommendations. The trainings thus enabled the different actors to be well prepared for participating in the debate during the meetings of the multi-

stakeholder committee in charge of preparing the land policy.

Civil society organisations

The civil society trainings supported by FAO led to active engagement of the CSOs who played an active role in the preparation of more than 65 meetings and seminars, bringing together a diversity of stakeholders throughout the process of preparing the *États Généraux* and the land policy draft.

In February 2018, the CSOs organized a national “pre-forum” right before the *États Généraux*.

This forum allowed for:

- discussion about the stocktaking report and about reaching common ground on the recommendations;
- preparation of tenure case studies in the light of the VGGT to be presented at the *États Généraux*;
- learning from experiences in four other countries (Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Benin).
- consensus building on the key recommendations to be presented at the *États Généraux*.

The “pre-forum” was opened by the Minister of State, Agriculture and Livestock who recognized the important work undertaken by the civil society organizations in the preparation of the *États Généraux*.

In November 2019, CSOs also organized a seminar to discuss the land policy draft. This seminar led to an in-depth debate on the results of the regional workshop conducted in all regions of the country. Based on the consensus reached by the CSOs during this seminar, a set of recommendations was integrated in the document.

Crucial involvement of traditional chiefs

In Niger, traditional chiefs play a key role in the day-to-day decisions on tenure matters. They are guarantors of customary land rights and hold conciliation power to resolve rural land disputes. The chiefs have therefore been an important strategic group to engage in the process of preparing the *États Généraux* and the land policy document.

In June 2018 and June 2019, the European Union and FAO supported the engagement of customary chiefs in the preparation process of the *États Généraux* and land policy through targeted capacity development seminars. These seminars strengthened the capacities of chiefs from all regions of the country to make active use of the VGGT to strengthen their role and the local authorities' role in improving governance of tenure in Niger.

The seminar, organized in June 2019, with financial support from the European Union Land

“ The traditional chiefs in Niger are proud of playing an active role in the national process of improving governance of tenure in Niger. The chiefs in Niger are primarily concerned by land issues and therefore will be among the first ones to implement the land policy on the ground. ”

Honourable AMURU ALHASSANE ALBADE

Permanent secretary of the Association of Traditional Chiefs in Niger (ACTN)



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Governance Programme, led to a set of recommendations that was included in the land policy document. The customary chiefs expressed that they would play an active role as change agents to improve tenure governance in Niger by mobilizing other local authorities (mayors, village chiefs, etc.). They also stated that the chiefs would play a key role in ensuring the effective implementation of a new land policy.

The importance of involving parliamentarians

Parliamentarians have been another strategic group that was targeted in the process of preparing the *États*

Généraux and the land policy. To sensitize this important category of actors, who will play a pivotal role in any reform attempt, two seminars were organized with respectively 35 and 55 members of the Parliament.

In addition, a series of seminars were organized to focus on specific themes addressed in the land policy document, such as land grabbing, management of pastoral areas and access of young people and women to land. These seminars were technically and financially supported by FAO, GIZ, European Union and the French Cooperation.

A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH TO ENGAGE LOCAL RURAL STAKEHOLDERS

To ensure effective participation of local rural stakeholders in the land policy process a series of three regional workshops, part of 21 regional workshops in total, - were organized to engage stakeholders in all the regions of Niger. The workshops had the following main objectives: 1) preparation of the *États Généraux*; capacity building on the VGGT and the F&G in the

stocktaking experience on the land tenure situation in the country; 2) debate on the key themes to be addressed in the land policy document; and 3) enrichment of the first land policy draft.

An innovation in this process was the establishment of regional mechanisms (four representatives per region) to closely follow the national land policy process. The members of the regional mechanisms led the national committee in charge of preparing the land policy and helped to ensure regular information sharing between the national and local levels during the whole process.

To summarize, the capacity development activities rolled out in Niger at national and local level enabled the stakeholders to:

- take stock of the tenure situation in the country based on participatory approaches;
- debate and analyze specific tenure issues, challenges and initiatives of tenure governance in the light of the VGGT;
- build a participatory process and inclusive approach for the preparation of *the États Généraux* and the preparation of the land policy document.

COORDINATION AND SYNERGIES BETWEEN TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL PARTNERS

The success of *the États Généraux* and the process of preparing the land policy in Niger can be attributed to a large degree to the strong will of different stakeholders to build synergies and coordinate their activities. Since the preparation of the *États Généraux* accelerated in 2017, a group of technical and financial partners has met on a regular basis to coordinate their support to the national process of improving governance of tenure in Niger. In addition to FAO, contributions came from the Italian Cooperation, the European Union, the Belgian Cooperation, the Swiss Cooperation, the German Cooperation (ProMAP/GIZ), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank, UN Women. Several international non-governmental organization (NGOs) such as

Cooperazione Per Lo Sviluppo Dei Paesi Emergenti (COSPE), Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) and Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International, also played an active role in supporting the process.

National stakeholders in Niger often describe FAO's support to the process of improving governance of tenure in Niger as catalytic in the role of mobilizing several partners.

“ FAO, through its technical and financial support, but also its capacity to bring other partners on board, has played an important role in the success of the participatory process that led to the preparation of the *États Généraux* and the land policy document in Niger. ”

DR ABOUBA SAIDOU

Former Deputy Secretary General, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in Niger

4. CHANGES AND KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Major achievements deriving from FAO's support in Niger are:

- mainstreaming of the VGGT principles, and in particular the participatory approach, when dealing with land tenure issues in Niger;
- strong political support and buy-in from the government to improve governance of tenure through the organization of the *États Généraux* and preparation of the land policy document;
- strong capacity building of state and non-state actors on the use of the VGGT and F&G to ensure effective participation in the *États Généraux* and preparation of the land policy document;
- FAO's role as a "neutral convener" and capacity to bring different stakeholders together and coordinate actions to improve governance of tenure in Niger;
- re-galvanizing the group of technical and financial partners on land to engage in the process of supporting the preparation of the *États Généraux* and the land policy;
- support to women's land rights through the first national evaluation of Niger's progress in

achieving SDG 5.a.2 on women's access to and control over land;

- support to improved governance of pastoral lands in Niger, in particular through the support to the establishment of National Transhumance Committees, which are expected to play a central role to prevent conflicts.

A FOCUS ON IMPROVING ACCESS TO PASTORAL LANDS

Niger is one of the Sahel countries where pastoralism and cross-border transhumance are vital but face major challenges. The Sahelian context of the last decades is characterized by increasing pressure on and competition over access to natural resources. This has amplified the number and extent of violent conflicts between different user groups (herders, pastoralists, farmers, etc.) and this is an increased threat to social stability and national food security. It is in this context that FAO has placed emphasis on the improvement of governance of pastoral land in Niger.

Review of the pastoral code in the context of preparing the national land policy

During the process of preparing the land policy in Niger, national stakeholders often emphasized the need to draw on the lessons learned from the country's history in relation to the pastoral code. Consequently, with the aim of providing a space to reflect on this important achievement, FAO conducted a study, providing technical and financial support, to capitalize on the experiences and lessons learned from the preparation and implementation of the pastoral code in Niger.

The study enabled the national stakeholders to discuss the previous challenges and success related to the pastoral code. The findings were debated during a national validation workshop under the aegis of the Minister of Livestock in September 2020.

One of the main recommendations was the need to ensure that previous achievements of securing pastoral lands in Niger, would be included in the land policy. National stakeholders reiterated the important link between the land policy and the improvement of pastoral lands and conflict prevention.

“The land policy in Niger will be a fundamental tool to ensure more equitable access to natural resources - land, water, forests and pasture - and to resolve conflicts between different user groups.”

AMADOU HALILOU

President of the *Réseau des organisations des pasteurs et éleveurs du Niger* and Vice-President of the National committee in charge of the preparing the land policy

The establishment of Transhumance Committees in Niger

On 20 November 2019, the President of the Republic of Niger signed a decree for the establishment of a National Transhumance Committee (CNT). This is a historic step - not only for Niger - but for the whole sub-region, as this is expected to be an important mechanism to address the increasing number of transhumance conflicts in the Sahel. The establishment of the CNT, which took place on 16 January 2020, is in line with the transhumance regulations between

the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) member states recommending the need for each country to establish a CNT to support a peaceful cross-border transhumance.

The CNT in Niger has a multi-stakeholder composition that includes government representatives, traditional leaders, local authorities and pastoralist organizations.

One of the key success factors in this process was the close collaboration between the Ministry of Livestock and the *Réseau des Organisations des Pasteurs et Éleveurs du Niger* (ROPEN), which is the legal national structure of the *Réseau Billital Maroobé* (RBM) in Niger.

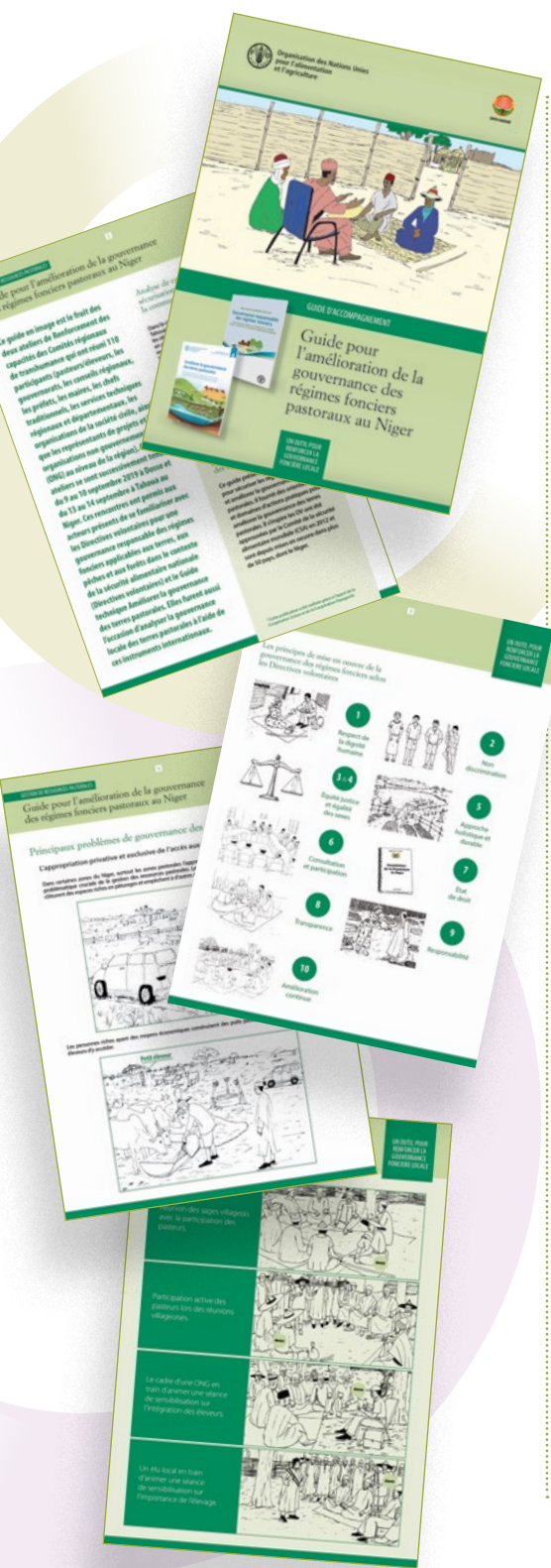
This collaboration has not only been successful at national level but also at local level where a total of six regional transhumance committees (CRT) have been established, two of which (Dosso and Tahoua) were established

thanks to financial and technical support from FAO. In four other regions (Maradi, Agadez, Zinder and Tillabery) the committee members benefited from the use of development material jointly prepared by FAO and ROPEN (see next section).

Amadou HALILOU, President of the *Réseau des organisations des pasteurs et éleveurs du Niger* (ROPEN) and Vice-President of the national committee for the preparation of the land policy is being interviewed by journalists during a high-level meeting for a peaceful transhumance.



©FAO/Najim Ataka/RBM



Capacity development tools in support of a peaceful transhumance

During a series of capacity development sessions, prepared within the framework of a letter of agreement between FAO and ROPEN, the VGGT and the technical guide “*Improving Governance of Pastoral Land*” were adopted to strengthen the capacities of the Regional Transhumance Committees members across the country. With the objective of developing a tool that better reflects the concrete challenges faced by the different user groups on the ground, ROPEN and local stakeholders contextualised the technical guide for developing their own guide. The result was a comprehensive guide to help actors find solutions to reduce the growing number of conflicts in cross-border areas.

During local training sessions, ROPEN successfully trained other actors to make use of the guide during local activities organized along with pastoralist organisations and local leaders in cross-boundary communities in Dosso, Tahoua, Maradi, Tillabery, Agadez and Zinder. It is also worth mentioning that since its co-publication by ROPEN and FAO in 2019, the guide has been used as a tool to strengthen capacities of the regional transhumance committees by several partners in most of the regions of the country.

Sensitization the local population on the VGGT and the image guide for improving pastoralist lands at community level in Makalondi, in the region of Tillaberi



© Moussa Tambari Ismael





“ In Niger, we made use of the Voluntary Guidelines to operationalize the transhumance committees and strengthen the capacities of the members to solve disputes related to access to land. We are extremely proud of the results. ”

MR DIAMOITOU G. BOUKARI

Secretary General of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and President of the National Transhumance Committee in Niger



It in this regard, that the process of establishing the regional transhumance committees in Niger has triggered synergies and coordination among different partners and initiatives. Among others, at the local level, strong partnerships were built with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the World Bank through the Regional Sahel Pastoralism Support Project (PRAPS), with the objective to coordinate initiatives for a peaceful transhumance in the Sahel.

Exchange of experiences with other countries

The experience of Niger in establishing transhumance committees was shared by ROPEN during the sixth high-level meeting for “Peaceful transhumance and livestock mobility in the Sahel and West African coastal countries” held in Ghana in October 2019 and

the high-level meeting for “Peaceful transhumance and livestock” organized in Chad in November 2019.

Moreover, a delegation of national authorities and CSOs from Burkina Faso visited Niamey in December 2019 to benefit from the Nigerien experience of establishing the CNT.

Finally, an exchange visit between authorities and CSOs from the Zinder region of Niger and Jigawa in Nigeria was organized in October 2020 with the objective to find concerted solutions to reduce the growing number of conflicts between different user groups from the two countries. During a series of meetings held in Jigawa, a framework for consultation was established between the stakeholders at both sides of the border. The mission also laid the foundation for a signature of a bilateral agreement between the respective authorities in the two countries.

SUPPORTING WOMEN’S ACCESS TO LAND - CONTRIBUTING TO THE SDGS

Another achievement due to FAO’s support for improving governance of tenure in Niger has been its contribution to awareness raising about women’s land rights.

The first steps for improving governance of tenure at local level in Niger was the preparation of a series of capacity development “training of trainers” sessions on the VGGT in 2015. These sessions were organized by the women’s network “*Femmes du Rassemblement Démocratique du Niger*” (RDFN) in the region of Tillabery. FAO’s support, organized within the framework of a Letter of Agreement with RDFN, helped to strengthen the capacities of women to speak about their land rights in the national land tenure debate. The women’s network played a particularly active role in bringing women’s rights to the national agenda as a result of the inclusion of women representatives in the national multi-stakeholder committee in charge of preparing the *États Généraux* and the land policy document.

In 2019, a national evaluation was undertaken to assess the legal frameworks in place to secure

Exchange visit between authorities and civil society organizations from Zinder, Niger and Jigawa, Nigeria.



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women's access to and control of land, in line with SDG indicator 5.a.2. This was led by the *Ministère de la promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant* with financial and technical support from FAO. Since women's access to land is a priority of the land policy document, this evaluation was conducted in the framework of a Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) facility established at

country level to support the preparation of the land policy.

The evaluation was based on an inclusive and participatory methodology, which included four main steps: 1) data collection and interviews with a broad range of stakeholders; 2) desk review and validation with experts; 3) validation meeting hosted by the Ministry in charge of promoting women's rights, with participation of experts and

leaders of women's organizations; and 4) preparation of a narrative report with recommendations for future actions to improve women's access to land in Niger.

Niger was the first country in Francophone Africa to successfully complete this evaluation. It is expected that this exercise will be undertaken on a yearly basis to help monitor the progress in achieving SDG 5.



HUMAN INTEREST STORY

With the objective to increase the participation of women in the process of preparing the land policy the initiative “women’s access to land” was established on 25 September 2019. This initiative started as a group of 15 Nigerien female leaders, including a female member of the National Assembly. The idea behind the initiative was to allow representatives of women’s organizations and their members to prepare themselves to actively take part in meetings at national level.

As expressed by one of the initiators, Fatimatou Djibo Moumouni, female leader of the women’s network, *Femmes du Rassemblement Démocratique du Niger* (RDFN):

“This initiative allows us to share our experience and develop common positions to actively participate in the formulation of the land policy. The strong commitment of women, who produce most of the food in Niger, is extremely important for effective implementation of the new land

policy. However, this is not an exclusive women’s club. We all need to work together to make equal land rights a reality in Niger, not only for women, but also for other groups, such as youth and people with disabilities who face many obstacles to accessing land”.

FAO and UN-Women provided technical support to the first meeting of the women’s initiative. Fatimatou Djibo Moumouni explains how the initiative expanded over time and allows to advance the agenda on Niger’s commitment to achieve SDG 5 in Niger:

“Women now engage in the national process of preparing a land policy and have taken part in the evaluation to improve women’s access to land in Niger. This has helped to anchor equal tenure rights in the national tenure debate. We will need to continue to raise this agenda to ensure that measures are taken so that we in Niger can improve the reality on the ground and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”.

PREPARATION OF A NATIONAL LAND OBSERVATORY

The land policy draft refers in its Article 5.4.1 to “the undertaking of a feasibility study for the creation of an independent multi-stakeholder national land observatory”. The effective establishment of a multi-stakeholder land observatory was also a recommendation of the assessment of the 20-years of implementation of the Rural Code and of the *États Généraux*.

The land observatory was proposed by national stakeholders as a monitoring system for improved governance of tenure in Niger. Therefore, it has been included as one of the central elements in the roadmap of the multi-stakeholder committee in charge of preparing the land policy.

It is in this context that FAO supported the national committee with the recruitment of two national consultants to prepare the ground for the land observatory in Niger. First, a feasibility study for the establishment of a land observatory was undertaken. This study was discussed and endorsed by the multi-stakeholder committee in charge of preparing the land policy during a national workshop on 17 February 2020. A second study was undertaken to propose its design, mandate and operational modalities.



First meeting of the initiative to improve women’s access to land. Niamey, 25 September 2019.

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LESSONS LEARNED

- The willingness of key state actors to play a lead role in the process is a crucial success factor.
- Capacity building of the various categories of stakeholders on the VGGT is key to ensure a participatory, inclusive and informed process.
- An inclusive approach, with the participation of all concerned stakeholders from the very beginning of the process, is essential to build strong national ownership.
- Building coordination and synergies between different actors and partners is crucial to the sustainability of the process achievements.

Support to the establishment of National and Regional Transboundary Committees for Peaceful Cross-border Transhumance

The support to the establishment and strengthening of a national as well as six regional transhumance committees was provided by FAO. This helped to address transborder issues, to build trust and reduce conflicts.

IMPROVEMENT SEEN IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS

A A national transhumance committee established by Ministerial decree in line with recommendations of the Decision A / DEC / 5/10/98 on regulation of transhumance agreed by between ECOWAS Member States.

B Political buy-in from national authorities to prioritize and facilitate a peaceful transhumance.

C Support the establishment of two regional transhumance committees (Dosso and Tahoua) and members of four other (in the region of Zinder, Tillabery, Maradi, Agadez) benefited from capacity development.



E A VGGT inspired capacity development guide in images prepared with and for local actors to be used as a tool to find peaceful solutions to tenure-related issues on the ground.

G Exchange of experiences facilitated between countries (involving stakeholders from Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania) to increase knowledge-sharing on ways to build a peaceful transhumance.

F Capacities of more than 250 stakeholders strengthened at the national and local level to make use of VGGT principles and the local image guide to address tenure-related conflicts.

D Trust built between a diversity of stakeholders (pastors, headers, local chiefs, mayors etc.) thanks to the multi-stakeholder mechanisms build to find solutions to common challenges related to transboundary issues, in particular conflicts access to natural resources.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

FAO's role in the improvement of governance of tenure in Niger has helped to build strong support for a new multi-stakeholder model to address land tenure issues, in line with the principles and recommendations of the VGGT.

The successful preparation of the *États Généraux* and the participatory process of preparing the land policy document in Niger are important achievements for engaging all relevant stakeholders in building a common vision for land tenure. This experience in Niger has inspired other countries in the sub-region. As previously mentioned, an exchange mission was organized by stakeholders from Guinea between 10 and 13 February 2021, with the objective to learn from Niger's experience of preparing the *États Généraux*.

Another success for Niger is the work done to improve governance of pastoral land. In particular, the experience of establishing a national and regional transhumance committee in Niger raised interest from other countries. Stakeholders from Mali and Mauritania recently expressed an interest in learning more about this process and requested more information in order to adapt it to

their own countries for improving governance of pastoral land. A seminar to share the experience from Niger with other countries was organized in March 2021.

In Niger, the next step will be to advocate for the adoption of the land policy and its concrete implementation. The process revealed that land tenure remains a highly sensitive topic, in particular during election periods. An important task will be to sensitize and engage new members of the government in future activities to improve responsible governance of tenure in Niger. In this regard, it is important to continue supporting the change agents (CSOs, women's leaders, traditional chiefs, etc.) who have already engaged in VGGT trainings and can be important "champions" to train and mobilize others to take concrete action to improve governance of tenure.

It will also be extremely important to continue to build synergies and concerted actions to support the broader reform process, which includes revision of laws and potentially the operationalization of the national land observatory, already under preparation as a mechanism to help monitoring and evaluation of improved governance of tenure in Niger.





THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES: SECURING OUR RIGHTS NIGER

“ In Africa, Niger is a pioneer in the application of the Voluntary Guidelines. After successfully organizing the *États Généraux du foncier*, new mechanisms and tools were developed, such as the National Transhumance Committee, a land policy document as well as a framework for the establishment of national land observatory. ”

MR ALI BETY

Minister and High-Commissioner to Niger's 3N Initiative ('Nigériens Nourishing Nigériens')

Success stories

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