

Evaluation of Denmark's development cooperation with Niger, 2009-18

Summary, management response & follow up note, November 2019

1. Introduction

This note summarises the main findings and conclusions from an evaluation of Denmark's development cooperation with the Republic of Niger undertaken from January to September 2019. The note includes the management response and follow up proposals drafted by the Danish Embassy in Ouagadougou. EVAL commissioned and managed the evaluation, which was carried out by an independent team of international consultants working with ADE.

2. Summary of the evaluation

The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) entrusted ADE with the task of evaluating Danish bilateral cooperation with Niger over the 2009-2018 period. The objective of this evaluation, which is formative in nature, was to assess Denmark's overall contribution to Niger in terms of peace, stability and democracy. This work was guided by the MFA's Evaluation Department in Copenhagen, in close collaboration with the Danish Embassy in Ouagadougou as well as a multi-stakeholder reference group, which met at each of the key stages of the evaluation.

The evaluation team anchored its analytical framework on a theory of change that traces the overall intervention logic of Danish cooperation, associated with a detailed evaluation matrix. Two missions to Niger were organized as well as three working sessions in Ouagadougou with the services of the Danish Embassy. To explore specific aspects of Danish cooperation in more depth, five "case stories" have been developed on global and sectoral aspects. These "case stories" made it possible to complete the answers to the evaluation questions on key issues.

Context

Cooperation between Denmark and Niger began in 1974. Since the early 2000s, this cooperation has focused on three sectors of intervention:

- Water, hygiene and sanitation
- Agriculture and rural development
- Good governance

Denmark is unanimously appreciated for its long-standing and significant contribution to Niger's development. Danish cooperation continued to increase in absolute terms between 2009 and 2018. In addition, the Sahel region is a priority for Danish development, foreign affairs and security policies. Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world and ranks last in the Human Development Index (HDI) with a very difficult economic, climatic, political and security situation.

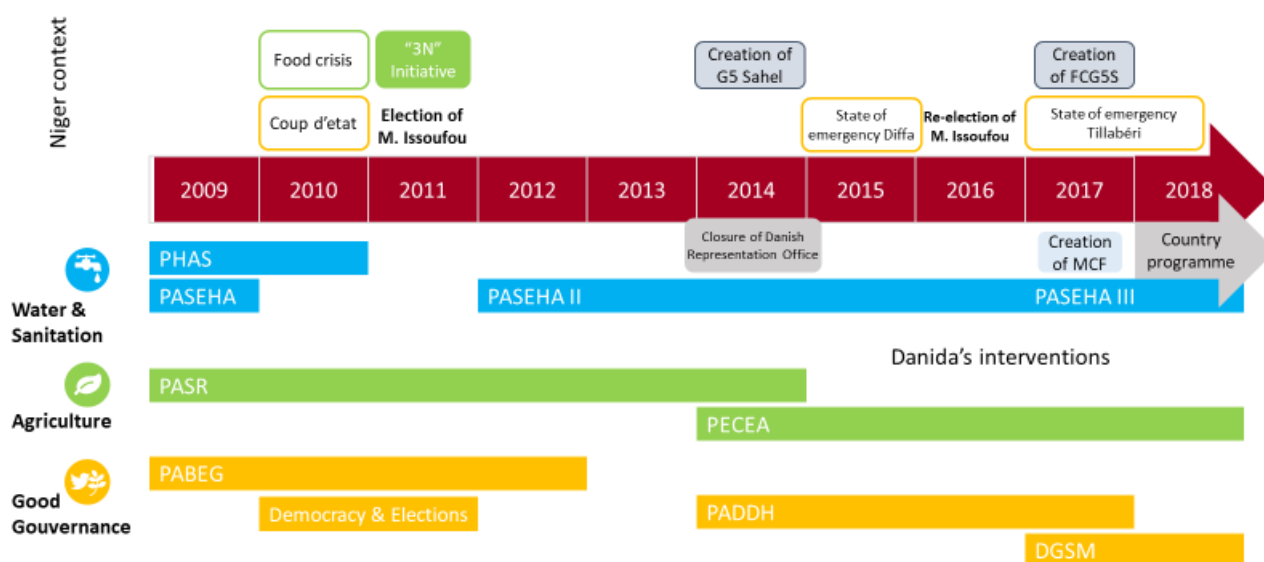
In the water sector the Danish strategy has recently led to the establishment of a joint financing mechanism (*Mécanisme Commun de Financement*, MCF) managed directly by the Government

of Niger (GoN). In the agriculture sector, Denmark has contributed to the development of the National Network of Chambers of Agriculture. Finally, in the governance area, Denmark has intervened on many interrelated themes, including stability and peace, human rights, gender and the promotion of girls' and women's rights.

Overview of Danish bilateral cooperation with Niger, 2009-2018

The timeline below summarises the key events that occurred in Niger in relation to the commitments of Danish bilateral cooperation over the evaluation period for the three priority sectors of intervention.

Figure 1: Key events and commitments of Danish bilateral coopération in Niger over the 2009-2018 period



Total Danish bilateral cooperation disbursements to Niger over the 2009-2018 period amount to DKK 641 million, not including direct funding to Danish NGOs or contributions to regional programmes. The water and sanitation sector has the largest portfolio with 47% of the budget spent on projects active during the evaluation period, followed by agriculture (30%) and governance (23%). While the transition between some programmes has impacted the pace of disbursements, the amounts disbursed annually through Danish cooperation between 2009 and 2018 have increased, despite the constraints linked to the political and security context in Niger.

Main findings and conclusions

Relevance, alignment & coherence

Danish cooperation intervention in Niger has been coherent, aligned and, to a very large extent, relevant. It has been fully in line with national and international priorities over the evaluation period, and Danish cooperation itself supported public policy development in Niger. This is largely due to the programme approach, at the heart of Danish cooperation, which ensures maximum alignment with national priorities. With respect to fragility, which is a major concern in Niger,

the intervention of Danish cooperation has been relevant on all dimensions without being a main “structuring framework” of its intervention.

Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and climate change

Danish cooperation has taken into account the key dimensions of the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) but this has not been strongly reflected in the definition, implementation and monitoring of programmes. Human rights is still not integrated as a “structuring framework” for Danish cooperation with Niger.

Climate change issues have been less well addressed. Mitigation was taken into account but only marginally; interventions contributed more to adaptation. It is also a pity that climate change concerns were not more present in the agriculture and the water and sanitation sectors.

Influence of other strategic priorities over the country programme design

Other Danish strategic priorities have significantly influenced the design of the country intervention, particularly over the period 2014-2018, which began with the closure of the Representation Office in Niamey and the transition to delegated cooperation arrangements. In addition, and as a result of the evolution of Danish policies, the migration crisis and Danish and European public opinion, more emphasis was put on migration-related aspects. This evaluation was not able to establish the contribution of the Danish intervention to the reduction – or to a better management – of migration flows, as the effects are not yet perceptible in the country.

Achievement of results and sustainability

The programmes have generally achieved their expected results, although the massive use of delegated cooperation after 2014, combined with security issues, has affected the achievement of the results of some components in the three sectors of Danish cooperation in Niger. Sustainability is a constant concern of Danish cooperation, but it is difficult to document and it is strongly constrained by the country's fragility. This difficulty is linked in particular to the general weakness of monitoring and evaluation systems in Niger and the lack of monitoring by government entities.

Contribution to peace, stability, democratic values and visionary solutions to development challenges

Danish cooperation is known for its ability to innovate and take risks. It has placed at the heart of its approach the support of pilot and innovative initiatives that are measured and adapted to the context of fragility. Capacity building of government entities is also a constant feature of Denmark's bilateral cooperation and it is now recognized by other development partners as a major challenge in Niger.

While the contribution to the spread of democratic values has been strong over the evaluation period, the contribution to peace and stability has been more limited. The latter would have benefitted from a cross-sectoral vision (across all three priority sectors of intervention) for a more synchronized contribution to peace and stability.

Coherence and coordination of the country programme with other Danish support and with other Technical and Financial Partners (TFPs)

The coherence and coordination of the bilateral intervention with other Danish support could have been improved because the mutual knowledge of the different interventions is limited and the management modalities are very different according to the types of support.

With regard to TFPs, coordination has been made more difficult by the remote monitoring of programmes from the Ouagadougou Embassy. The participation of Danish cooperation in formal coordination bodies at programme and sector level has been made more difficult after 2014, as has its weight in the policy dialogue.

Effectiveness of the implementation of the country programme

Danish cooperation has maintained a good level of effectiveness in the implementation of country programmes throughout the evaluation period, despite a more difficult situation since 2014. The limited financial and human resources have not made it possible to maintain a meaningful political dialogue during the implementation of the programmes.

Recommendations – general

Recommendation 1

Continue Danish development cooperation programmes in Niger, including in the agricultural sector in order to extend the positive effects of prior interventions. The relevance of the programmes was found to be very good and efficiency has remained good despite the fragile context in Niger, which has made intervention difficult but not impossible, provided that there is flexibility and a pragmatic approach.

From this perspective Danish development cooperation has demonstrated that it is possible to work in the context of a fragile state such as Niger and to achieve results while remaining faithful to intervention principles. On the other hand the evaluation has noted the beneficial effects of “project clusters”, which consolidate results over time. This particularly applies for the water and sanitation as well as the agricultural sectors, but in the future there is nothing to prevent reinforcing this through the projects and programmes concerning governance too.

Recommendation 2

Strengthen the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation, both at the level of Danish funded programmes and in the sector frameworks, which have demonstrated their limitations. The ability to produce reliable data is essential in order to reinforce the relevance, the efficiency and effectiveness as well as the sustainability of infrastructure and services established. From this point of view the mobilization of a monitoring and evaluation service provider is a very good initiative. Additional resources could be provided, for example through low cost and lightweight arrangements to undertake “sustainability checks”¹ in the sectors with significant infrastructure and service provision such as agriculture as well as water and sanitation.

Recommendation 3

Compensate for the negative effects of remote follow up from the Embassy in Ouagadougou. If a physical presence is still not envisaged, then it would be appropriate to strengthen the human resources available to follow the programmes in Niger from Ouagadougou; either with Ministry personnel or through contracts with consultants: (including as many local personnel as possible in the company contracts, able to ensure follow up on the ground in the intervention zones).

¹ A standard measure (in the form of a partial evaluation) of the sustainability of results achieved on the basis of precisely determined indicators at the formulation stage and (if possible) initialized through a baseline study. This type of control has been promoted on a large scale by UNICEF, particularly through funding agreed with British (UK AID) and Dutch (DGIS) development assistance.

This recommendation is closely linked to the concern about strengthened monitoring and evaluation, also at the sectoral level; but is also a response to the evaluation's observations about involvement in policy dialogue.

Recommendation 4

Define a framework for the analysis of delegated partnership agreements with a view to emphasizing agreements with bilateral partners which share as many strategic considerations as possible and whose operational approaches are similar. This might include a specific audit of the delegated partnership agreements in force, which would make it possible to thoroughly examine questions of procedure, dialogue, strategy and reporting. A check list could be produced following this work, which would serve as a guide for Danish development assistance when negotiating delegated partnership agreements (and would be applicable not only in Niger but also in other contexts/countries).

Recommendations - specific

Concerning the agricultural sector

Recommendation 5

Couple the value chain approach to a territorial approach with a view to inclusiveness and to better adapting to the context of fragility (at least for future action).

Recommendation 6

Carry out preparatory studies and deeper assessments; notably analyses of production systems and activities as well as value chain studies taking into account the cross-border character of the agricultural economy.

Human rights based approach (HRBA)

Recommendation 7

Consider integrating key indicators of those HRBA principles judged relevant, in order to develop, document and illustrate how key HRBA features are taken into account, which are also bearers of the democratic values promoted by Danish development assistance.

Peace and stability dimension

Recommendation 8

Ensure that the M&E team – that will have a global view of all the engagements through the different thematic components of the country programme – plays a role in the identification of a strategic and well-documented approach to reach the objectives of the country programme in so far as peace and stability are concerned.

M&E system

Recommendation 9

Ensure that the global M&E system currently being developed connects the different sectors and that the implementing partners take the system on board regardless of their contractual relations with Danish development assistance.

Recommendation 10

Define indicators that describe the expected effects, not the activities. In sectors where intervention dates back some time, undertake impact evaluations with baselines for the preparation of the next country programme (and if possible the resources required for precise evaluation of impact, using counterfactuals).

Coordination with other Danish support

Recommendation 11

Dialogue and collaboration with other support provided by Denmark could be strengthened upstream, either when signing agreements with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or during the design of the country programme.

Downstream a greater involvement by NGOs in national and/or regional sectoral consultative frameworks could be encouraged. Denmark could ensure that the NGOs coordinate within the sectoral clusters, going beyond urgent humanitarian efforts in order to integrate their development actions.

Facilitate, possibly through an annual meeting, networking and information sharing between the partners involved in the different thematic programmes and if resources allow, with the partners of Danish civil society organisations undertaking programmes in Niger.

Coordination with other donors (financial and technical partners)

Recommendation 12

Regardless of the funds provided through bilateral Danish development assistance in the different sectors, the evaluation has shown that policy dialogue has suffered due to the absence of a permanent representative of Denmark in Niger who could do advocacy work. In the country programme for the period from 2017 to 2022 Denmark has again stressed the intention to harmonise international aid to Niger in the spirit of the Paris Declaration. Such an ambition is worth supporting through meetings and frequent discussions with the financial and technical partners active in Niger. This recommendation is linked to the need to strengthen human resources at the Embassy in Ouagadougou.

Intervention in the context of fragility

Recommendation 13

Strengthen the use of administrative and financial procedures adapted to a fragile context and in particular take into account the limited provision of banking services in fragile zones where Danish assistance is intervening. This recommendation concerns very specific problems related to the availability of funds for activities on the ground, noted for all three current sector programmes.

Recommendation 14

If there are sufficient resources at the Embassy, explore the possibility of participating in annual review meetings of engagements which do not have steering committees, in order to promote the strengthening of relations and direct transmission of information from the partners on the ground which include relevant Ministries for policy dialogue.

3. Management response

Overall observations

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) welcomes the findings and recommendations of the independent evaluation of Denmark's development cooperation with Niger, 2009-2018. In particular the MFA welcomes the conclusion that Denmark's development cooperation has been – and continues to be – “coherent, aligned and to a large degree, pertinent”, and that Denmark is lauded for its long-term and significant contribution to Niger's development. The Sahel is a priority area for Denmark and the evaluation underlines the fact that Denmark through its development cooperation can make a positive difference in one of the world's poorest countries.

The MFA also welcomes the observation that Denmark's development cooperation has been innovative, flexible and ready to pilot new ways of achieving results in a fragile and challenging context. This has in particular been the case in terms of national alignment, where Denmark has sought to empower national systems, actors and institutions. A case in point is the development of a joint financing mechanism (the MCF) in the water sector, which has allowed other partners (such as the Netherlands, UNICEF and the EU-Trust Fund) to channel funds through national systems to priority areas identified by Niger in partnership with the Sahel Alliance.

Comments on the recommendations

The MFA welcomes recommendation 1, which highlights the benefits of a cluster approach and going forward the MFA will consider learning from the experience from Niger.

The MFA also agrees with recommendation 2, which focuses on the need to reinforce and strengthen M&E systems and going forward the MFA will try to learn from the experience in Niger. It should however be noted that many of the engagements in Niger are implemented through delegated partnerships, which means that any adjustments will depend on the willingness of partners to do so.

The MFA agrees with recommendation 3, which highlights the need to allocate adequate resources to manage a country programme from another country. It should, however, be noted

that the Embassy in Ouagadougou has been strengthened with one additional posted staff who is part of the team working on Niger. With regard to M&E (recommendation 2) it is also worth pointing out that the Embassy in Ouagadougou has contracted a monitoring, evaluation and communication (MEC) team to help with monitoring and evaluation related to the implementation of the current Country Programme for Niger. Finally, the delegated partners in Niger have ample resources to ensure adequate reporting on the pace of implementation.

The MFA acknowledges the need to improve understanding of why some delegated partnerships work better than others (recommendation 4). With its mix of bilateral and multilateral delegated partnerships Niger offers a potentially rich (insightful) test case in order to better understand why the former seem to work more easily than the latter.

The MFA agrees that the agriculture programme has had to adapt to the situation of fragility (recommendation 5). One of the principles of the programme is flexibility to adapt to a rapidly evolving environment. Indeed, after a thorough analysis, market gardens were included in the value chains eligible for support in 2016. Also, programme activities were extended to the region of Maradi in 2017. The security situation in the region of Diffa has significantly worsened in recent years and has undermined the strategic approach of the programme. Youth employment has become a structural issue to be tackled. Support under component 1 has now been oriented towards the training and insertion of young farmers and provision of grants for equipment.

The Embassy notes the proposal to undertake analytical and diagnostic studies of the agricultural sector (recommendation 6) and in concert with the World Bank and the Swiss Development Cooperation who manage delegated cooperation the MFA will assess the priorities for additional analysis. The Embassy will also ensure that the upcoming Mid-Term Review of the current 2021-2025 Country Programme for Niger, scheduled to take place in early 2020, can also provide concrete recommendations on this issue.

The MFA agrees with recommendation 7 concerning the need to define clear Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) indicators. In this regard, the upcoming Mid-Term Review of the Country Programme for Niger, 2017-2022 could provide further guidance. Again, it should however be noted that the wide-spread use of delegated partnerships means that it will be important to frame what HRBA entails and means for each specific partner.

The MEC-team has recently hired a peace and stability specialist. The MFA agrees that it would be valuable to have more strategic approaches to how peace and stability issues are addressed and documented throughout the country programme (recommendation 8). The Monitoring, Evaluation and Communication (MEC) team could contribute to these efforts. The Embassy has already agreed with the contract holder that a peace and stability specialist will join the MEC team in early 2020. The need to focus on cross-cutting integration of peace and stability issues will be highlighted in the scope of work of this specialist.

The MFA agrees with the need to look into how to strengthen the M&E links between the various sectors and engagements of the current Country Programme for Niger (recommendation 9).

The MFA also agrees with the focus on outcomes (recommendation 10) and notes that it could however be considered to look into full-scale impact evaluations in preparation for the next country programme.

The MFA agrees with the need to look at ways of strengthening the coordination with other Danish supported engagements in Niger (recommendation 11), in particular with the Danish NGOs that have strategic partnership agreements with the MFA. The Embassy in Ouagadougou will try to have annual meeting with the relevant NGOs and is already engaged in a good bilateral dialogue with most of these strategic partners.

The MFA agrees with the importance of having a political dialogue with the Government of Niger (recommendation 12), and the fact that Denmark no longer has a permanent representation in Niamey does provide a structural challenge in terms of engaging in a regular, day-to-day dialogue. However, the Embassy staff in Ouagadougou who cover Niger do strive to meet with partners in Niger. In addition, the Embassy has instigated an annual political dialogue with the authorities in Niger, including partners under the current Country Programme. Finally, the Embassy also takes part in the annual article 8 dialogue between the EU Member States and the Government of Niger.

The MFA acknowledges that cash management can be a challenge when working in a fragile and sometimes difficult context such as rural Niger (recommendation 13), and that the MFA's own financial systems are not always suited to such a context. In this regard, the Embassy in Ouagadougou will continue its dialogue with partners in Niger to find a practical solution to overcome this challenge. Given that many of the engagements in Niger take the form of delegated cooperation, the MFA also depends on the sound financial and administrative systems of its partners. As far as the agriculture programme is concerned, the volatile security context coupled with the financing of an already risky sector requires measures that would facilitate programme implementation. The security situation in Diffa has led to a significant increase in the cost of infrastructure investments and has distorted financial provisions.

Finally, the MFA agrees with the need to take part in annual reviews in the sectors where Denmark is engaged (recommendation 14). The fact that many of these events are often planned shortly before they take place and that they have been prone to cancellation or date changes at short notice does pose an additional challenge for the Embassy in Ouagadougou.