

Niger



The Republic of Niger is located in sub-Saharan West Africa. This means about 80% of its land is desert. Niger (pronounced nee-ZHER) is ranked as one of the poorest, least developed countries in the world. Its capital city is Niamey. The



Nigerien desert (photo courtesy of saharaconservation.org)

country is almost twice as large in area as the state of Texas; their population is about two-thirds the size of that state's. The official language of Niger is French.

Though most Nigeriens have access to running water, regular sanitation continues to be a

problem, even in the more developed areas of the country. This means that food water borne diseases are a major health concern. Also because of unreliable food supplies, more than a third of children in Niger are underweight.

Roughly three quarters of their people live on less than \$2 a day. A person born today in Niger can expect to live to be 41, compared to 78.5 in the United States. Most people in the country are Muslim – over 98%. The majority of their population lives with no access to education. Until recently they were ruled by a military dictatorship which means very few people made the laws for everyone to follow. With the recent start of democracy, the country has begun to address their educational troubles.

There are about 16,000 Catholics (less than 1% of the population) in all of Niger, split into 2 dioceses, Maradi and Niamey. Despite being such a minority, they are guaranteed religious freedom by the government and they are not ill

MCA in Niger

treated by their neighbors. In 2008, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Niamey, Michel Cartatéguy (seen here at a local baptism)



was quoted as saying that Niger is one of the "best examples" of cohabitation and cooperation between Christians and Muslims."

As it is with wherever the Catholic Church is at work in the missions, education of children is one of the most important tasks. Niger is no different, but is one of the more challenging places in which to do this work. Primary education is compulsory between ages 7 to 15, but attendance is very low.

Some studies estimate that only 25% of Nigerien children go to school but even gathering accurate numbers is



difficult. Because of a mistrust of the government, many parents do not register the birth of their newborns so it is hard to know how many unregistered children are not attending school.

Most people in Niger are subsistence farmers – they grow their own food to survive. Many children do not attend school because they are needed to work on the family farm, especially during planting and harvesting seasons. In addition, many Nigerien people who live in the northern part of the country are nomads – they are constantly moving from place to place – so their children have no opportunity to go to school as they travel seeking work to support the family. Of those children who do attend school, girls rarely go for more than a few years – 60% of the students who finish primary school are boys.

There is little chance for higher education as well – Niger has only two colleges within its borders, one of them public, one private.



National Director of **The Missionary Childhood Association** in Niger, Fr. Oscar Zoungrana thanks you for your support. He wants you to know that he is working hard to help his children become missionaries as well. *"The missionary*

dimension is very present in our Church. We have gained a rich missionary experience in just a few years."

Last year through the sacrifices of member of **The Missionary Childhood Association**, \$15,073.84 was sent to the children of the Republic of Niger. The funds were used to for faith formation activities including Bible Camps and vocational camps.

Missionary Childhood Association

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