

Liana Moldovanu

Country: Niger

Committee: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization(UNESCO)

Topic: Literacy in Developing Countries

The country of Niger believes that as a right to education is defined as a human right, developing countries should be assisted in the fight against illiteracy. Almost all developed countries, especially those in North America and Europe, have high rates of access to education and literacy. However, this is starkly different to many undeveloped countries grappling with famine, disease, and conflict, who cannot focus their policies and funds solely on education. Niger has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world with only 19 percent of adults literate, accompanied by a larger gender gap in literacy, with 27.3 percent of the male population and only 11 percent of the female population being literate. Schools in Niger are also taught in French, which is not the first language of many students, making learning even more difficult. Worsening the situation, Niger was forced to make cuts to their education budget in 2010 due to food and financial crisis. Food insecurity and extreme poverty also make it difficult for students to attend school, as they often must find work to help their families instead, contributing to a major child labor problem within Niger. Many students who do attend primary school in Niger graduate without learning how to read or write. However, due to actions taken by UNESCO, the literacy rate in younger generations(those from 15 to 25 years old) has remarkably improved, with the literacy rate going from 19.1 percent in 2001 to 43.5 percent in 2018 within the country of Niger.

Niger has been able to address its poor literacy rates with multiple programs and support from UNESCO, UNICEF, and more. Most recently, in late March 2020, the UNICEF office in Niger received \$70,000 to support the Ministry of Education and help them continue to educate children in Niger during the Covid-19 pandemic. The government of Niger also created the Education Training and Sector Plan for 2014-2024, targeting the quality of education, including increasing supply of teachers and materials, recruitment of more state-paid teachers, relocating schools and teachers to rural areas, building new schools, and improving the learning environment. Directly addressing the issue of expanding literacy among older generations, the plan also implemented literacy and non-formal education programs for those who never attended or dropped out of school. For 2020 to 2021, UNICEF and AFD granted 11 million USD to Niger to begin distance learning on radios, provide alternative education in areas where formal schooling is not available, and address gender disparities in schools and literacy by providing menstrual hygiene kits for girls this school year. Possible solutions that Niger would support would include helping build the capacity of teachers to improve the overall quality of learning, paying teachers more to prevent strikes, building schools nearer to rural homes, incentivizing girl's enrollment, providing hygiene kits for girls, teaching in the mother tongue of students, as well as creating programs that will bring educational content into the homes of students during the Covid-19 pandemic and reaching children displaced by war too.

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Topic: Access to Information in Rural Areas

Access to information anywhere in the world is an important goal of the 21st century, as access to information not only entails having access to basic information on the internet, but also freedom of expression and freedom of press. Without access to information and the internet, the government of a country has the ability to censor and manipulate information, making it the media's role to provide information to citizens. The country of Niger specifically struggles with slow internet speed, leading to only 5.25 percent of citizens using the internet as of July 2018. Further showcasing the lack of internet access, there are only 8,650 fixed broadband subscriptions in the entire country. Urban and rural areas also have a huge gap when it comes to internet access and even telephone coverage. As literacy rates are also low, the main form of access to news in Niger is through radio. The government of Niger is classified as a developing authoritarian country, with the government censoring information even with the lack of access to the internet. Most radio programs are government run, contributing to censorship, but there are a few privately owned radio stations as well. These stations tend to struggle financially, and even face police violence and detention. In 2018, the government created new taxes for private media companies as a form of intimidation and censorship. Companies such as Google, Microsoft, and SpaceX have all tried to work with the government of Niger to expand accesses to the internet, but the government has thus far refused to cooperate. Through this, it is easily seen that the country of Niger wishes to continue censoring information, they due wish to modernize their systems and bring censored information to rural areas.

Within Niger, there are few significant policies that have been created to expand internet connection and modernize the country as a whole, which could in turn lead to a greater access to information among rural areas. The Smart Villages project was recently created, and it aims to increase digital connectivity in rural areas and modernize farmer's work in villages, benefiting around 1.2 million people. This project, along with Niger's Economic and Social Development Plan and the \$100 million USD given to Niger by the World Bank, wish to not only bring digital networks to the poorest and most rural areas of Niger, but to encourage the use of these networks as a form of access to information and modernize its economy. Niger also has several laws dictating the rules to access public information and government documents, although many of them allow the government to further censor information. Possible UNESCO policy proposals would include expanding internet access and giving funds to undeveloped countries in order to both modernize their economy and bring some information to rural areas, but not approving of any laws concerning censorship on the internet or through the media.

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