
**STRENGTHENING LINKS BETWEEN
THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND THE PRE-COMMUNES
ON PRSP IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING**

**FINAL REPORT AND
PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS**

Submitted by
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SECTION I

Executive Summary

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has been involved in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process (PRSP) in Niger since initial decentralization legislation was introduced in the National Assembly in 2001. With support from the World Bank Institute (WBI) from February to June 2003, NDI conducted a series of consultations designed to explore the opportunities for engaging the Nigerien National Assembly and local officials in the PRSP process. This report details how NDI's activities built on previous programs, including programs funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to fulfill WBI's stated objectives: 1) increasing Nigerien deputies' and pre-commune councilors' exposure to information on the PRSP; 2) providing opportunities for deputies and pre-commune councilors to discuss the involvement of local government structures in PRSP implementation; and 3) supporting the National Assembly PRSP Steering Committee in developing recommendations for donor representatives.

Principal activities relevant to this program are consultations in Niamey among National Assembly deputies, donors, and the PRSP steering committee; two series of public consultations in the Dosso and Tillabéri regions conducted in conjunction with an ongoing UNDP legislative assistance grant; and the set of consultations between National Assembly Deputies and local pre-commune councilors in the Mayahi department of the Maradi region supported solely under this contract. The Mayahi mission included meetings with pre-commune councilors and citizens in four communes, establishing important initial links between the councilors and deputies.

As Niger moves forward concurrently with decentralization and implementation of the PRSP, clarification regarding the roles of each level of government in poverty alleviation initiatives will become increasingly important. Done transparently, the gradual creation of a local government system will foster an environment that creates opportunities for capacity building of both Assembly and commune officials. While the consultative missions to Mayahi and other regions established an important link between the National Assembly deputies and the pre-commune councilors and generated much good will, expectations and roles still need to be clarified to ensure that elected officials are able to deliver citizens' access to effective poverty reduction initiatives.

In particular, the consultations suggested that with local elections anticipated in late 2003 or 2004, a number of activities to promote the flow of information between citizens, communes, and National Assembly and other government agencies could be undertaken.¹ These could include commune efforts to gather and document feedback from residents regarding the implementation and impact of poverty reduction projects, transmitting this feedback to National Assembly deputies, and the promotion of periodic meetings and/or constituency visits to specific

¹ Some activities could take place before the elections while others would be more appropriate for a post-election environment.

communes to collect feedback and information gathered by pre-commune officials. To accomplish this, pre-communes will need to develop the capacity to administer and monitor specific projects and a program of capacity building activities will be necessary. One approach would be to integrate National Assembly members into this program of capacity building, in order to further promote the links between National Assembly members and local councilors.

SECTION II

Program Context

POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The Nigerien National Assembly is comprised of 83 deputies from five political parties. Seventy-five deputies are elected to the National Assembly from eight electoral districts—the country’s seven administrative regions and the capital district of Niamey. These constituencies each choose multiple deputies from their district by a party-list system of proportional representation. The eight remaining deputies are selected via majority voting by eight special constituencies that were established to ensure the representation of national minorities. Each legislature has a five-year mandate.

The current breakdown of seats in the National Assembly of Niger is as follows:

Mouvement National pour la Société de Développement (MNSD)	38
Convention Démocratique et Sociale (CDS)	17
Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme (PNDS)	16
Rassemblement pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (RDP)	8
Alliance Nigérienne pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (ANDP)	4

The MNSD and ANDP constitute the ruling coalition. This is a recent development, however as the MNSD formerly governed in partnership with the CDS. The remaining parties comprise the opposition alliance. The President of the Assembly leads the CDS. Of the 83 deputies, 59 are holding national office for the first time. The National Assembly includes one woman, three former speakers, three former prime ministers and 36 businessmen.

Following NDI’s work with the National Assembly on the 2001 decentralization legislation, the Assembly increasingly has demonstrated an interest in incorporating citizen input into legislative activities. Historically, however, the National Assembly’s ability to do this has been constrained by several factors. Obstacles include scarce financial resources and poor management of the Assembly’s human resources and legislative calendar, as well as the difficulty and cost of travel. In addition, committee hearings historically have remained closed. Deputies often argue that the Assembly’s internal rules prevent open hearings even though at least partially open hearings have been held in the past.

Such obstacles also inhibit National Assembly oversight of PRSP implementation. As a result, the general public has little knowledge about the deputies’ role in overseeing government initiatives. Likewise, parliamentarians traditionally have possessed little knowledge or understanding of the concerns, opinions and priorities of average Nigerien citizens. Involvement of the National Assembly in educating local officials and the public about Niger’s PRSP, and

ultimately in monitoring and evaluation of these activities, could become an important tool for ensuring that PRSP projects are effective, timely, and oriented toward the true needs of the people. Until implementation of the decentralization law and the holding of local elections, the National Assembly may be in the most logical position to communicate local needs and feedback to central authorities. The opportunity to build linkages with nascent local institutions and to build oversight capacity in the Assembly will be important to successful PRSP implementation in Niger.

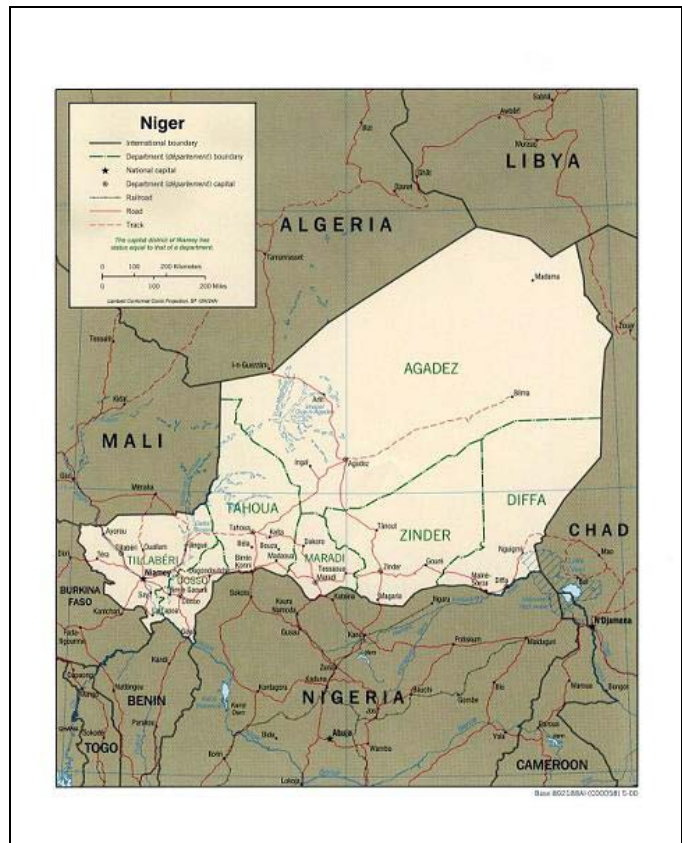
LOCAL GOVERNMENT STATUS AND CAPACITY

Decentralization has been a recurring and important topic in Nigerien political history. Repeatedly, decentralization plans have been proposed but not implemented. One of the promises the government made to settle the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s was to give localities more autonomy by pursuing a regional decentralization plan. After Niger's first attempt to hold local elections in 1999, dictator Mainassara Baré cancelled the election results, an act that many believe led to his subsequent assassination.

President Tandja's government proposed an ambitious decentralization plan in 2001. The plan differed fundamentally from the Baré government's plan. It proposed creating new communes nationwide before holding elections, whereas the previous plan would hold elections in the few then-existing communes first, then implement a decentralization program for the rest of the country.

Niger is divided into seven regions—Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri, and Zinder—plus the urban region of Niamey. Government-appointed prefects administer the regions, which are in turn divided into 36 arrondissements, governed by sub-prefects. In remote regions, the state is represented by one of 27 administrative posts. The 2001 decentralization program proposed to further subdivide these districts into 230 new communes.

The government introduced its decentralization legislation to the Assembly in the spring of 2001. Two of the bills were controversial: one specified the boundaries of the new communes, and the other designated the seat of each commune. Having heard numerous complaints from their constituents, deputies were well aware of potential problems with these two bills. Seeking to defuse these tensions, the National Assembly resolved to collect more information from citizens



before considering the legislation. Accordingly, the legislation was set aside until the budgetary session, and during the interim the deputies committed to an NDI-assisted public outreach campaign. During the campaign, deputies participated in 30 town hall meetings and 10 national radio shows across the country.

In many ways, this campaign represented one of the most important political developments in Niger since the resumption of civilian rule. Between those who attended the forums and many others following the events through the media, NDI estimates that the consultations reached over one million people. They also gave many deputies a new understanding of local problems and concerns. As the deputies approached voting on the ambitious decentralization plans, they repeatedly referred to the public consultation mission as their single greatest source of information.

After numerous debates analyzing citizen input and proposed amendments, the National Assembly passed the decentralization plan in May 2002. In the process, however, the National Assembly significantly modified the proposal, something still rare in Nigerien history. For example, deputies substantively amended the bill regulating the transfer of authority to the communes 15 times, and significantly amended the bill delimiting the communes as well. The National Assembly's management of the decentralization legislation represents an important benchmark in the institution's development. In the end, 265 new communes were created by the 2001 plan. The communes are currently referred to as "pre-communes," because they are in the awkward stage between creation and having an elected leadership. Despite the fact that the first nationwide local elections will not be held until late 2003 or early 2004, the pre-communes now provide local communities the opportunity to start debating priorities and making decisions at the local level.

NIGER'S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPER

In January 2002, the Government of Niger published its Full Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which was found to present a credible poverty reduction strategy and to provide a sound basis for concessional assistance and debt relief. A particularly important aspect of Niger's PRSP is its emphasis on decentralization and good governance; specific objectives include consolidating democracy and good governance at the local level, and empowering grassroots communities in local development and local government.

"The following objectives are being pursued as part of the decentralization and the establishment of sound local governments: (i) expanding, strengthening and consolidating democracy and good governance at the local level; (ii) organizing local elections and establishing the future local governments; (iii) empowering grassroots communities in promoting local development, bringing government closer to the people; (iv) creating homogenous economic, social and cultural development centers."²

² Section 3.3.7.3 of the Nigerien PRSP, January 2002.

Through a series of World Bank Community Action Projects and UNDP “pre-commune” pilot projects (collectively referred to as pre-communes), a structural foundation for democratic local governance has been established in Niger’s new communes. The country’s first official local elections are anticipated in late 2003 or early 2004. Niger must now establish mechanisms to integrate democratic local and national structures in a way that maximizes efficient PRSP implementation and monitoring.

The PRSP program represents an unusual opportunity for the Assembly to develop as an institution, while aiding the country’s development process. It can motivate deputies to continue to encourage citizen input, with a focus on oversight rather than legislation. Additionally, since deputies generally maintain closer links to affected populations than the executive branch, they can become a valuable source for feedback and evaluation of PRSP projects. Finally, deputies have an unprecedented opportunity to interface with local elected officials and to explore the differences and overlaps in their roles.

NDI and the WBI agreed to implement this pilot project to identify ways to assist Niger and Nigeriens in achieving the PRSP’s goals of institutionalizing local democratic and good governance practices, and empowering affected populations in the design and implementation of poverty reduction projects. The pilot project aimed to build linkages between the Nigerien National Assembly and emerging local government structures, particularly on PRSP implementation and monitoring; to develop recommendations for further outreach activities between the Assembly and local governments; and to build a foundation for these, more extensive, future activities.

NDI’s work supporting democratic government in Niger has included support to the National Assembly’s PRSP Steering Committee. With help from UNDP, NDI has been encouraging outreach by the Steering Committee to affected populations. The WBI pilot project sought to utilize NDI’s previous work and experience with PRSP and legislative outreach efforts, with the particular aim of reaching out to pre-commune structures and to identify ways to build on these activities for effective cooperation between national and elected local leaders on PRSP implementation and monitoring.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STEERING COMMITTEE

The National Assembly Steering Committee on the PRSP was established in December 2001 following the National Assembly outreach campaign and the Steering Committee has played an important role in supporting deputies as they design intervention strategies and learn how to respond to new legislative challenges. The Steering Committee consists of representatives from civil society, NDI and two additional deputies. As the vanguard of Niger’s PRSP process, the PRSP Steering Committee seeks to assist the deputies with their legislative responsibilities related to the PRSP, namely overseeing the executive branch’s implementation of the PRSP, communicating with the constituents to understand local concerns and raising those concerns on the national level. The PRSP Steering Committee has been instrumental in winning the support of the National Assembly leadership and putting PRSP activities and legislation on the agenda.

The PRSP Steering Committee has also been providing public information about the PRSP and in eliciting public input to the PRSP process. In April 2002, the steering group began working

with theater troupes to design public service announcements to educate the public on the role of the National Assembly in the PRSP process. Recorded in Hausa and Djerma, these theater pieces were played on state radio as well as *l'Hemicycle*, the National Assembly radio station. In November and December, three radio debates on the role of deputies in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process were broadcast on the state radio network in French and Hausa. Tapes were made of the programs for distribution to community radio stations. Deputies also led public consultations to four areas of the country in 2003 – Zinder, Tahoua, Dosso and Tillabéri. The missions to Dosso and Tillabéri included consultations with pre-commune councilors and were useful in developing the recommendations for future programming contained in the report. The Steering Committee also managed the consultations in Mayahi.

SECTION III

Program Design and Objectives

The project was designed to increase federal and local collaboration on PRSP initiatives by leveraging Nigerien deputies' interest in continued constituency outreach, their desire to remain constructively engaged in the PRSP process, national concern about decentralization efforts and interest in the upcoming local elections. Based on these factors, all activities (pre-travel briefings and consultations, constituency tours, and follow-up sessions) were designed to promote mutual legislative/pre-commune understanding of the PRSP and to establish a foundation for future collaborative efforts.

Constituency visits were selected as the main focus of this pilot project, as a way of promoting dialogue between local officials, constituents and elected officials. In addition to establishing preliminary links for later legislative-commune coordination, the constituency consultations were designed to build awareness of PRSP content and initiatives among elected representatives, within an overall context of accountability to citizens. NDI's approach to this portion of the program built on the Institute's previous facilitation of a series of activities with National Assembly deputies on poverty reduction and public outreach to encourage participating deputies to extend their basic knowledge of the PRSP itself to critical thinking about possible links to constituencies through the pre-communes.

In the design, the role of the PRSP Steering Committee of the National Assembly was critical. For individual consultations, the PRSP Steering Committee selected participant deputies based in part on their previous engagement with the PRSP itself, their expressed desire to participate in the integration of poverty reduction and decentralization efforts, and their links to the constituency being visited.

Applying this methodology, the specific objectives of this program were the following:

- Increase, through organized supplemental briefings, Nigerien deputies' and pre-commune councilors' exposure to information regarding Niger's PRSP status; the approach taken in pre-commune initiatives and lessons learned; and key similarities and differences between pre-commune/community action projects and planned local councils.

- Provide opportunities for deputies of the National Assembly and pre-commune councilors to discuss the involvement of pre-communes in PRSP implementation and monitoring; establish relationships between the National Assembly and pre-commune leaders; and/or identify target locations for potential pilot projects.
- Facilitate opportunities for a planning meeting between the National Assembly PRSP Steering Committee deputies and donor representatives to explore opportunities for engagement by the National Assembly in promoting local involvement in PRSP implementation and monitoring.
- Provide WBI with a final report and work plan that details mechanisms to: mobilize the skills and experiences of National Assembly deputies to train members of newly elected commune councils and integrate poverty reduction strategies into the programs of newly elected commune councils; promote regular participation of elected representatives in developing, implementing and evaluating poverty reduction strategies by establishing a precedent for citizen interaction with locally and nationally elected officials; and increase citizen awareness of the poverty reduction strategy process and its relevance to local and national democratic governance.

SECTION IV

Report of Activities

Under this contract, consultations between deputies of the Nigerien National Assembly and pre-commune councilors were prepared in Niamey. A series of consultations were held in Dosso and Tillabéri, in conjunction with NDI's ongoing program funded by the UNDP. Subsequent consultations were also conducted in Mayahi, in south-central Niger, funded solely under this contract. Because the conduct of the consultations, and the conclusions drawn, are based in part on precedent established in previous NDI work with Assembly deputies, relevant details regarding those activities have been included in this report.

RECENT CONSULTATIONS IN DOSSO AND TILLABÉRI REGIONS

In April 2003, delegations led by National Assembly deputies conducted public consultations in the Dosso and Tillabéri regions of Niger. Deputy Allah Gouzaye led the mission to Dosso and the Assembly's sole female member, Deputy Aissata Mounkeila, headed the mission to Tillabéri with visits also to Téra and a pre-commune in Niamey.

Dosso

In addition to deputy Gouzae, the Dosso delegation was composed of the secretary general of the prefecture, the regional directors of rural management, water and public works and NDI program officer Mamadou Mamane. Over the course of three days, the delegation conducted meetings with pre-commune councilors and civil servants. In each meeting, the delegation held an open dialogue with pre-commune councilors and civil servants based in the community, and then engaged the local population in discussions of public initiatives such as school health centers and dams and the extent of their support for these activities. In Niger, the sustainability of many

public works projects entails responsibility of the local population for the maintenance and repairs of school buildings and wells, and housing for civil servants.

The Dosso mission revealed both successes and failures in the areas of education, health and well construction. In several locations, the mission discovered that the local population was dissatisfied with the placement of schools. Some schools had been built in remote locations, thus creating a disincentive for children to attend classes. Further, the mission observed that poor construction of some schools jeopardized their future utilization. On the other hand, most health centers were operational though the mission discovered that in some cases the nurse was often absent and that the local population had not fulfilled its promise to construct a house and other outbuildings for the nurse.



Tillabéri

Over a similar three-day period in April 2003, the Tillabéri mission met with leaders and constituents in 14 villages near the cities of Tillabéri and Téra and in one Niamey commune. The mission, consisting of Deputy Mounkeila, Téra Deputy Halidou Soumeila, Assembly staff member Sidikou Aminata, and NDI representative Alou Fati, were joined in each location by representatives of the prefecture and civil administration. In Niamey Commune III, deputies Soumana and Kanguéy also participated.

Through these consultations, the mission discovered a wide variety of situations. Some villages had built strong partnerships with public works such as health centers and contributed funds to equip them. In others, lapses on the part of both the local population to provide upkeep and the government to pay salaries had caused health centers, schools and roads to decay. The mission played a crucial role in allowing the local population to air grievances and encouraged the two sides to work together to resolve disputes, revive unfinished construction projects and maintain existing ones.

Under Deputy Mounkeila's guidance, one particular focus of the mission was the status of women, especially the importance of education for girls and the expansion of business opportunities. Deputy Soumeila praised one community in particular where 26 of the 51 students in the primary school are girls. The mission met with ten women's collectives that had received small loans from the government to engage in agribusiness such as raising dairy cattle. The women expressed their thanks for the opportunities that the loans provided and advised the mission of further prospects for investment. One village chief from Téra noted that this was the first time he had observed the government concern itself with the needs of rural farmers.

The public consultations motivated the deputies to summon the Minister for Community Development to appear before the PRSP Steering Committee. In addition, deputies that participated in the Tahoua and Zinder public consultation exercises followed up on the

deficiencies they discovered. For example, the Tahoua deputy arranged for outstanding salaries to be paid to civil servants. In one instance a nurse had resorted to marking up the price of medicines in replacement of her salary. Similarly, the Zinder deputy worked with the President's office to reallocate a large amount of unused and deteriorating Italian equipment he found at one site. According to the Prime Minister, the consultations have compelled the government to work on better equipping existing structures such as schools and health clinics.

The PRSP Steering Committee has submitted reports from the Tillabéri and Dosso missions to the National Assembly and plans to make follow-up visits to evaluate whether their recommendations have been acted upon.

CONSULTATIONS IN MAYAHI

The Mayahi region was chosen as a focal point for consultations because the pre-communes there were formed very recently – only since the May 2002 passage of the decentralization legislation – and thus provide an illustrative model for the entire PRSP effort. According to UNDP officials, the pre-communes in the region have been among the more active of those supported by UNDP programs. Mayahi's population, estimated at 330,000, is distributed among 342 villages divided into 7 rural pre-communes and the Mayahi urban pre-commune.

In preparation for the consultations in Mayahi, NDI held briefing sessions with each of the selected deputies. Prior to their travel, the deputies also met with representatives of UNDP, the PRSP Steering Committee, the President and Secretary General of the National Assembly, and with other deputies who participated in the previous missions to Tahoua, Zinder, Tillabéri, and Dosso. These meetings permitted the deputies to sharpen the objectives and themes of the mission and draw upon the experiences and lessons learned during these previous missions.

From June 9 to 12, a nine-person mission led by four National Assembly deputies conducted a series of consultations in the Mayahi department of the Maradi region, visiting the urban precommune of Mayahi and the rural pre-communes of Sherkin Haoussa, Maïreyeye and Kanambakaché. Representatives of the *Haut Commissariat à la Réforme Administrative et à la Décentralisation*, the PRSP Secretariat, and NDI, as well as an Assembly staff member accompanied the Deputies on the mission. Two deputies had participated in the missions to Tahoua and Zinder.

Issues covered in Mayahi consultations

- The structure, functioning and composition of pre-communes;
- Means available to the pre-communes to promote poverty reduction;
- The composition of pre-communal councils including the decreed gender ratio of one-third women;
- Role played by women in poverty reduction;
- Participation of the population in decision making and direction of pre-communal activities;
- Transparency in the management of funds allocated to pre-communes and their sustainability after the withdrawal of donors;
- Relationships between the pre-communes, the state government, and the National Assembly deputies;
- Capacity needs and skills transfer to pre-communes.

During each of the four consultations, the team held lengthy meetings with pre-commune councilors and representatives of the sous-prefecture and other department government agencies. The consultations represented the first direct contact between these pre-commune councilors and National Assembly deputies.

The councilors' knowledge of local conditions and their ambitions for future projects impressed the deputies. Deputies were astonished by the quality of the discussions as well as the meetings and expressed support for councilors' efforts and pledged to report back to the National Assembly on the problems that surpassed the capacities of local governments.

Each pre-commune comprises nine committees, which oversee various aspects such as local commerce, development, finances, and inter-agency cooperation and is supported by a permanent secretariat. The number of elected pre-commune councilors varied between 11 and 25, depending on the size of the pre-commune. Each one also retains a number of appointed honorary councilors who also contributed to the consultations. These non-voting members

include village and canton chiefs, the sous-prefet and National Assembly deputies.

**ADVANTAGES AND OBSTACLES OBSERVED
IN MAYAHI PRE-COMMUNES**

Advantages:

- Consultations established a precedent for open exchange regarding poverty reduction between citizens and elected officials at multiple levels;
- Citizens feedback included possible solutions to identified dilemmas;
- Pre-commune councilors expressed gender-consciousness and concern for transparency in decision making;
- The deputies and the councilors demonstrated a sense of partnership; and
- Departmental government agencies are supportive of the pre-commune's activities in issues of health, schools, wells and other public works.

Obstacles

- Microfinance activities are nearly nonexistent in pre-communes;
- Internal financial resources are weak and pre-communes may only initiate expenditures. Disbursement of funds require approval of the *Projets d'Appui au Développement Local*, often with delay;
- Currently, councilors possess neither the capacities nor the finances to design projects of broad scope;
- Local councilors lack adequate education or instruction, and have few opportunities for skill transfers from trained instructors; and
- Honorary councilors outnumber those elected 60 to 25. Their presence may inhibit the voice of the elected representatives.

For their part, councilors described their experiences in the fledgling communes and highlighted problems. Overall, the councilors described the mobilization of resources as their major challenge, contributing to their inability to visit and communicate with their constituents and combat illiteracy. Though cognizant of the PRSP, the councilors admitted that they lacked management experience and training to facilitate project implementation. They identified several projects administered by the government agency charged with reducing poverty, *the Projet d'Appui au Développement Local*, such as the provision of milling machines to lighten women's workloads. The pre-communal councilors were pleased with the composition of the parliamentary team, the open and frank debates, and specific recommendations made by the deputies. One woman in Kanambakaché recounted that she initially was afraid to meet with authorities, but by the end of the meeting she was holding face-to-face discussions with the deputies and sous-prefect.

The mission selected a follow-up committee from among themselves to consider concrete actions to improve the involvement of deputies in the PRSP at the local level and further evaluate the government's strategy for poverty reduction. The committee proposes to conduct further consultations to verify if the councils and the government agencies have implemented their recommendations.

SECTION V

Synthesis of Consultations and Program Recommendations

As Niger moves forward with concurrent decentralization and implementation of the PRSP, clarification regarding the roles of each level of government in poverty alleviation initiatives will become increasingly important. These responsibilities must be clarified so that citizens can direct their concerns and expectations appropriately, but also so that each of Niger's still nascent levels of government can improve their capacity for good governance and efficient response to citizens' needs. Niger is pursuing this decentralization in stages, and the gradual creation of a *system* of local government creates an environment in which the clarification of these roles may also create opportunities for capacity building of both Assembly and Commune officials. If approached as a joint, strategic process, then it may also afford an opportunity to build collaborative interaction amongst Niger's elected officials on poverty reduction efforts.

The activities conducted under this grant worked to establish a precedent for interaction between deputies of the National Assembly and pre-commune councilors, and to enhance both groups understanding of issues addressed in Niger's PRSP. Based in part on a comparison of the feedback received during these activities and previous experience working with Nigerien Assembly deputies in already established communes, NDI believes that opportunities to build clear, collaborative relationships exist, and may be pursued through a combination of the following interventions.

1. SELECT PILOT PRE-COMMUNES FOR PRE-ELECTION SKILLS BUILDING

Based on an analysis of the feedback from missions by National Assembly deputies to Mayahi, NDI proposes the selection of target pre-communes in which links between local and national government may be established early. It appears that in some pre-communes there may be a significant continuity of councilors pre- and post-election, particularly if current honorary pre-councilors are included. Pilot pre-communes could be used to develop and test councilor orientation programs for post-election activities, as well as to develop a pool of local councilors for use in training. There is the potential for difficulties in communes where local elections are likely to yield local councilors with different political party affiliations than the corresponding Deputy. Strategies for dealing with the issue could also be explored and refined using a targeted group of pre-communes for pre-election skills building. Selection of pre-communes would also depend heavily on budget resources, given high travel costs.

2. IDENTIFY SKILLS NEEDED BY PRE-COMMUNE OFFICIALS WHICH CAN BE DELIVERED TO NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS BY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

Local elections are anticipated in late 2003 or early 2004. As pre-communes prepare to make the transition from administrative pre-cursors to elected local officials, specific skills or areas of

expertise will take on additional importance. Gradually, commune councilors will need to develop the capacity to administer and monitor specific projects, communicate the results of those projects with relevant central authorities, and, as necessary, request alterations or adjustments in future plans based on local needs and responses. Because commune level government is new to Niger, local officials are expected to lack the skills or knowledge base needed to execute these tasks. A preliminary step in the facilitation of collaborative commune-Assembly relationships would be to work directly with the pre-commune councilors to determine the organizational, capacity, or information issues that most challenge their effectiveness, and to develop appropriate orientation and training materials.

While in many cases the skill set needed will require training by administrative or local government experts, some of the skills and knowledge required may be delivered by deputies of the National Assembly who have already been active in national level PRSP initiatives or processes. Deputies who are particularly interested in monitoring and evaluation of specific PRSP projects may also find that their participation in the initial briefing of pre-commune officials creates a more collaborative relationship in the long run by defining the ways in which commune officials and Assembly deputies can collaborate to assess and improve the quality of poverty alleviation projects in their mutual constituencies from the outset. Identifying the specific needs of pre-commune councilors would allow deputies to introduce themselves and provide targeted assistance in keeping with the pre-communes' self-assessments.

Based on NDI's work under this grant, the capacities sought by pre-commune officials that can be at least partly delivered by deputies of the National Assembly include:

- Information regarding local PRSP initiatives: location, duration, anticipated outcome, etc;
- Pending policy changes and national initiatives that will affect communes;
- Explanation of the roles played by various actors in PRSP implementation and review;
- Methods for evaluating the impact of poverty reduction initiatives, focusing specifically on mechanisms for citizen participation and feedback;
- Mechanisms for communicating this information to central authorities (particularly through legislative channels).

3. CLARIFY PRE-COMMUNE AND DEPUTY EXPECTATIONS REGARDING ROLES AND TARGET MISCONCEPTIONS WITHIN AN ORIENTATION PROGRAM.

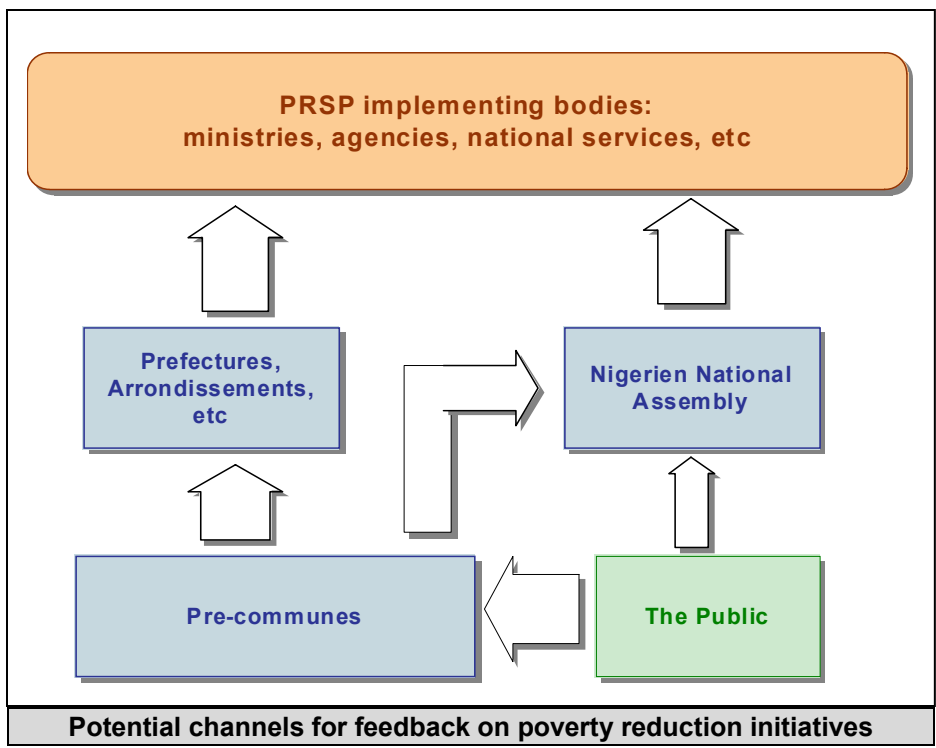
Through the impact of decentralization legislation in Niger was carefully studied when the legislation was considered, individual expectations of national and commune level officials vary widely. The consultations indicate a need to clarify these roles in an effort to help to avert some of the power-struggles seen in neighboring states between local and federal figures. The consultations indicated this uncertainty specifically in the area of oversight of PRSP implementation and oversight of development projects. Although there are separate responsibilities to be undertaken by federal and commune officials, personalization of politics, corruption, and traditional hierarchies pose a threat to the development of a collaborative relationship between the levels of government.

Several of the deputies with whom NDI works see the PRSP as something that the central government brings to the country; this is reinforced by the tendency of rural citizens and leaders

to see the deputy as their “*grand type*” in Niamey. Notions of community empowerment and community-driven development needs to be strengthened, and the role of the parliamentarians needs to shift from expectations of delivering individual projects to providing a legal and regulatory framework conducive to development, including an environment of oversight and scrutiny on government implementation of PRSP programs. Programs to address misconceptions regarding respective roles should be incorporated into any orientation programs for local councilors.

4. JOINT CONSULTATIONS AND WORKSHOPS TO CLARIFY ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Pre-commune officials and National Assembly deputies both have a vested interest in ensuring that the citizens in their constituencies have access to effective poverty reduction initiatives. In light of the limited capacity and technical support presently available to either the National Assembly or nascent local structures in Niger, this mutual interest implies that close collaboration with regard to monitoring and evaluation of PRSP-based initiatives would benefit both bodies. Though the National Assembly will not (and should not) be the sole channel of communication available to pre-commune administration, the phased evolution of the local/regional government system suggests that a pre-commune’s ability to communicate its findings with National Assembly deputies (through constituency visits, public hearings or other methods) may serve as the most consistent, sustainable means by which feedback can be gathered from local administrations. The efforts of deputies to seek constituent feedback needs to be replicated at local levels. As deputies’ travel to their constituencies is limited by resource constraints, information gathered by pre-commune officials would significantly buttress a deputy’s ability to communicate critical information regarding the impact of poverty initiatives to relevant implementing bodies.



Despite this mutual interest, mechanisms by which the two levels can collaborate effectively are not apparent to either deputies or pre-commune officials. This could be addressed through a series of joint sessions to clarify the roles and responsibilities and of each actor, establish communication channels or mechanisms, and identify issues of shared concern or interest. Although collaborative mechanisms to ensure that PRSP evaluation and feedback from citizens at point-of-delivery will depend in part on location, literacy levels, and infrastructure, the consultations suggested the following priority channels for communication between local and national elected officials:

- Commune efforts to gather and document feedback from residents regarding the implementation, reach, and impact of specific anti-poverty initiatives;
- Documentation of events, needs, and changes at the commune level to relevant deputies by way of couriers or regular trade-route travelers. Updates from Assembly deputies regarding pending changes or reforms returned by same methods;
- Periodic meetings between commune officials and the deputy to exchange information regarding policies, projects, or events affecting the district/commune (in Niamey or district administrative capitals);
- Periodic constituency visits by deputies to specific communes to collect the feedback and information gathered by pre-commune officials (verbally or in writing); or
- Deputies' efforts to channel monitoring and evaluation information gathered by communes to appropriate executive officials, or others directly involved in evaluating and adjusting PRSP implementation activities.

5. TARGETED STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSIONS TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC POVERTY-RELATED ISSUES

In addition to establishing general roles and methods of coordination between local and federal elected officials, there appears to be interest and support for coordinated action on specific poverty-related issues. Although resource constraints of both the National Assembly and local councils will limit the range of options, there may be some actions that could be taken jointly by local and federal elected officials to influence government policy. For example, in a commune where desertification is a serious issue, strategic collaborative actions might include commune-level discussions or surveys to determine specifics of need, (i.e. do local farmers need training on specific techniques, or are they in need of particular supplies/ pieces of equipment) and may include the provision of a national forum by deputies, through the use of public hearings and the parliamentary radio, to raise awareness of the issue, influence government policy and educate the public on potential solutions. Deputies may also be able to facilitate a dialogue with the national government or international donor efforts to address desertification to determine what resources - technical, mechanical, or financial - are available and how existing resources could be better directed.

Conclusions

The consultations held in Dosso, Tillabéri and Mayahi demonstrated that, despite a lack of training or clear information regarding the Nigerien PRSP at pre-commune levels, mutual interest in implementation of the PRSP has created significant potential for a collaborative relationship between Nigerien National Assembly members and local officials. Because both levels of government have quite limited resources, and are still evolving, many stakeholders are interested in establishing mechanisms by which Assembly members and (pre-)commune councilors may cooperate to improve the implementation of the PRSP through improved communication about monitoring and evaluation. This not only affords an opportunity to improve the Nigerien PRSP, but also to strengthen the Assembly's ability to fulfill representative and oversight responsibilities while building commune capacity to implement and evaluate specific PRSP initiatives.

Post-election training of local councilors is likely to be critical to the success of decentralization, as well as the ability of local councilors to contribute to successful PRSP implementation. In preparing for this, work with selected pre-communes to test orientation approaches would be helpful. In addition, there is a need for clarification and education regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of national and local elected officials, as well as development of mechanisms for exchanging information regarding recent (or pending) federal poverty alleviation initiatives, and develop communication channels for citizen feedback. Strategic planning for federal and local officials to address selected specific poverty-related issues provides another option for promoting increased cooperation of local and national officials on specific aspects of PRSP implementation.