The Challenge
In 2010, Niger stood at 167 out of 169 countries on the UN human development index. Although primary school enrolment had reached 57 per cent, completion rate was only 41 per cent. Less than a third of adults can read and write, and over a million children (60 per cent of them girls) are out of school. Communities are often forced to choose between immediate food security and their children’s education.

Whether in school or not, Niger’s young people also face a near total lack of SRH awareness and services. With SRH recognised as the largest contributor to gender inequality around the world, this is particularly damaging to the lives of girls and young women. Niger’s patriarchal society accentuates these problems. Girls are likely never to attend school or to be withdrawn so they can help with domestic duties or be married at an early age (often with the groom or his family paying a ‘bride price’ to a girl’s parents).

Young people, especially girls, have little or no say in their own life decisions. Cultural and social taboos prevent discussion of children’s rights, especially around sex or sexuality. Both boys and girls face high levels of social pressure around sexual identity and activity from adults and peers. This means high levels of fertility, HIV and AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, early and forced marriages of girls, maternal mortality, injuries from giving birth, and genital mutilation. The lack of adequate knowledge among young people about their rights to education and to SRH means they cannot access or demand services to fulfil those rights. This unnecessary lack of knowledge destroys many young lives.

My Rights, My Voice In Niger
• Children and young people in Niger have huge potential to transform their lives and communities. With the right skills and support, they can be a driving force to break the cycle of poverty so many are born into.

• To help them achieve their potential, their rights to health and education must be fulfilled. That is why Oxfam is running a three-year project in Niger as part of the international My Rights, My Voice programme, to empower children and young people (especially girls and women) to claim their rights to education and to sexual and reproductive health (SRH).

• Delivered with our local partners, the project combines education and training for young people in the Tillabery region with community awareness-raising and national-level advocacy, so grassroots changes are reflected in policy change.

• Working with children and young people, and those who influence their lives, My Rights, My Voice is empowering them to achieve lasting changes in policies, practices and beliefs, so their health and education needs are met – now and in the future.
**OUR SOLUTION**

My Rights, My Voice is empowering children and young people in Niger – especially girls and young women – to demand their rights to education and SRH. Working with our local partners Dimol, VIE and ASO-EPT in communities and schools in three districts in the Tillabery Region, we are reaching 7,000 children and young people (60 per cent of them girls) with information about their rights to SRH and education. To achieve sustainable change, the project takes a three-pronged approach:

**Empowering youth groups and leaders**

In schools and youth-led groups known as *fadas*, we are training young people aged 11–25 on their right to SRH and on concrete aspects such as the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, early and forced marriages of girls, obstetric injuries and genital mutilation. They will also be trained in how to spread the word among their peers through child-to-child techniques. We will develop an existing ‘school parliament’ scheme to build pupils’ experience in governance issues, participation and decision-making. The *fadas* will organise community discussions, drama and radio programmes on young people’s rights to education and SRH, emphasising the needs and involvement of girls and young women and mothers. Dedicated phone-in discussions enable youth leaders to discuss issues with each other. Questions raised through these conversations will inform national advocacy to press the government to improve the school curriculum on SRH and gender equity.

**Changing community attitudes**

My Rights, My Voice works with community leaders, parents’ associations, school management committees and mothers’
committees, holding meetings to increase awareness of young people’s rights to education and SRH. We identify and train community ‘change leaders’ who can promote young people’s rights.

Reinforced by the local drama and radio programmes organised by young people themselves, this will help improve school enrolment and completion rates, reduce sexual violence and shift attitudes on early marriage for girls. Community groups that speak out for young people’s rights help not only young people in their districts but across Niger, by strengthening our national advocacy for change.

Driving policy change
Bringing together grassroots civil society and national-advocacy coalitions, we are working to ensure changes at community level are reflected in national policy. Together, drawing directly on young people’s experiences, we are producing briefings and policy papers on SRH rights and inviting representatives from regional and national ministries to visit project areas. With the national Education For All coalition, we are demanding improvements to the national curriculum, so it includes citizenship and rights to education and SRH. We will highlight our case during the global Education for All week, as well as on international days for women and youth and against gender-based violence.

A LASTING LEGACY
My Rights, My Voice means young people – especially girls and young women – will be empowered to speak up for their rights to SRH and education. Using their training, they will share their knowledge among their peers, parents, school management committees and community leaders, fuelling change within their communities and beyond. At national level, they will drive improvements to Niger’s school curriculum, including coverage of citizenship and SRH rights. This way, the project will have a ripple effect, helping all Niger’s children and young people stay healthy and get the education they need to transform their lives and communities.

FIND OUT MORE
My Rights, My Voice is a three-year programme which aims to engage marginalised children and youth in their rights to health and education services. It is being jointly implemented by Oxfam GB and Oxfam Novib, and involves Oxfam Quebec in Niger. Working through our local partners in eight countries, My Rights, My Voice has significant funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

To find out more about the programme please mail us at: mrmv@oxfam.org.uk or visit us at www.oxfam.org.uk/myrightsmyvoice

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