



# Niger crisis: empowering communities through effective communication and engagement

Key considerations and priorities for responders

August 2023

On 26 July 2023, a military junta seized power in Niger with a coup d'état, drawing global condemnation. In response, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imposed sanctions, restricting trade, banking and borders, intensifying existing humanitarian needs. With an impending rainy season and the potential for further military intervention,<sup>1</sup> effective information and communication are a lifeline for people in Niger.

Effective communication, community engagement and accountability (CCEA) empower people to make informed decisions affecting their safety, well-being and livelihoods in the face of restricted humanitarian access. Meanwhile, inadequate CCEA can fuel rumours and misinformation, exacerbating suffering, raising expectations and inflaming conflict.

As the situation continues to unfold in Niger, CDAC Network recommends the following key considerations and priorities for responders to meet the growing CCEA needs of affected people.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 For more on the humanitarian situation, see UNHCR (2023) [Niger: operational update, July](#); UNICEF (2023) [Niger humanitarian flash update no. 1](#), 10 August; WFP (2023) [Niger: preliminary analysis on the impacts of the political crisis and sanctions on food security and markets](#), 12 August.
  - 2 These messages were developed based on the outcomes of the CDAC Network Community of Practice on In-Country Collaboration and Coordination for Niger.

## 1 People need actionable information to make well-informed decisions now

In a context marked by uncertainty and limited access to assistance, actionable information that helps people make decisions and cope with challenging realities can make a life-changing difference. People are struggling to access accurate information on the ongoing political situation, which is compounded by existing humanitarian needs, the upcoming rainy season and the impact of sanctions on people's daily lives. Increased protection concerns, including child recruitment into armed groups, family separation and gender-based violence,<sup>3</sup> underscore the importance of effective CCEA to mitigate risks.

### Recommendations

- Communicate clear, actionable information on critical topics to support people to manage their daily lives. Work with other sectors to get the messaging right.
- This information should be accessible and shared using people's preferred formats, channels and languages, including local languages – Hausa at minimum, and other languages such as Tamashek, Fulfulde and Zarma depending on the location. Written and spoken information in French is likely to be inaccessible to the majority of the affected population but may be used to cross-check information and counter rumours.
- Work with diverse and trusted local actors to disseminate messages widely, including in hard-to-reach communities.

## 2 Use the channels that people use and trust the most

Community radio is the primary information source for people in Niger. In the wake of ECOWAS sanctions, disruptions to electricity have impacted the broadcasting capabilities of community radio stations. While social media use is still considerably low, 13% of the population uses WhatsApp. Community-led channels are already sharing and fact-checking information circulating online. Meeting people where they are listening and sharing information, both offline and online, can help to strengthen flows of trusted and accurate information.

### Recommendations

- Prioritise community radio as a means to disseminate accurate information to communities, ensuring consistent messaging across levels and languages, while also understanding and mapping the full spectrum of channels that people use.
- Engage with messaging and social media channels by pushing key messaging and occupying the social media landscape, particularly in local languages.

### 3 Counter mis- and disinformation with collective monitoring and consistent, accurate information

There has been a surge of post-coup mis- and disinformation in Niger. Media partners have noted extensive fake news with high online engagement and sharing at the community level, which is overwhelming the fact-checking capacity of local actors. The low literacy rate in Niger also affects monitoring, as many use voice messages and radio – channels which lack systematic or automated methods for monitoring, and little to no capacity to do so in languages other than French and English.

Mis- and disinformation festers in uncertainty and inconsistency of messaging, creating undue suffering, falsely raising expectations and provoking unsafe behaviour. Consistent communication of clear and verified information across all levels and languages is critical to stop harmful rumours in their tracks.

#### Recommendations

- Enhance collaboration with media and media development actors to verify and circulate fact-checked humanitarian information via online media and radio. To support this, develop key messages on humanitarian actors and activities in local languages and without humanitarian jargon.
- Refer to analyses of communication channels and be prepared to monitor rumours in multiple languages.
- Ensure a cycle of listening and conversation to identify rumours; verifying and triangulating facts; and engaging with communities to share verified information. Building on existing and trusted relationships is key.

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CDAC is a network of more than 35 of the largest humanitarian, media development and social innovation actors – including UN agencies, RCRC, NGOs, media and communications actors – working together to shift the dial on humanitarian and development decision-making – moving from global to local.

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