



# THE CONSEQUENCES OF REDUCED USAID FUNDING IN THE DIFFA REGION OF NIGER

## INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, the security crisis in the Lake Chad Basin has disrupted the link between populations and resources, owing to military actions in the area and limits on movement and trade (Magrin & Pérouse de Montclos, 2018; RESI-LAC Project, 2020; Mahamadou Moudi et al., 2024). In this context, the Diffa region has received strong support from USAID, which has helped with development, resilience, and governance.

From 2022 onwards, USAID reduced its funding in West Africa, including in Niger. This decline intensified under President Donald Trump's 'America First' policy, leading to the suspension of 83% of programmes in January 2025 (VOA, 2025). This decision undermines aid and development efforts and exacerbates fragilities in health, education, food security, and governance in an already unstable region (Herrera, 2025). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this cut in funding is leading to a fall in vaccination coverage and access to mosquito nets and antimalarial treatments, causing a return of malaria and other epidemics (Kevin, n.d.).

Studies, notably that of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS, 2025), estimate that this reduction could push an additional 5.7 million Africans into deep poverty by the end of 2025. In Niger, the suspension of funding has resulted in cuts to vaccination programmes and the discontinuation of education projects. The Nigerien authorities, already facing economic and security constraints, are struggling to make up for this loss of funding—a situation that threatens to undermine the progress made in the social sectors (APAnews, 2025). This study analyses the consequences of the reduction of USAID funding in the Diffa region of Niger.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to analyse the consequences of the reduction of USAID funding in the Diffa region. It seeks to:

- establish an overview of the projects that have been funded;
- assess the direct and indirect effects of the suspension of US funding on development programmes;
- analyse the effects on the actors involved;
- identify the measures that have been put in place to mitigate the loss of funding;
- and propose ways to strengthen the resilience of social institutions.

## METHODOLOGY

The research is based on a literature review covering scholarly publications and research reports relating to USAID funding, in order to map the state of knowledge and guide the approach. It is supplemented by a survey in Diffa involving the central administration, NGOs, projects, and the University of Diffa:

### a) Field survey: study area, study population, and sampling

The study covered the municipalities of Diffa, Bosso, Kabléwa, and Gueskerou. The target group included representatives of municipal authorities, NGO leaders, public service officials, village or neighbourhood chiefs, and project beneficiaries. A purposive sampling approach was used (Table 1).

**Table1: Summary of interviews**

Categories of actors	Data collection technique	Data collection tool	Number of respondents
International and local NGOs	Individual interviews	Semi-structured guide	5
State	Individual interviews	Specific guide	10
Village/neighbourhood chiefs	Individual interviews	Specific guide	10
Beneficiaries (women, young people)	Focus groups / Questionnaire	Simplified guide / survey forme	10 focus groups + 70 survey respondents

Quantitative data were collected using KoboCollect, and qualitative interviews were recorded with participants' consent.

### b) Data analysis

The analysis combines a qualitative approach (content analysis) and a quantitative approach (simple statistical processing). Quantitative data were processed using KoboToolbox and XLSTAT, and interviews were transcribed using F4 software.

## 1 OVERVIEW OF USAID-FUNDED PROJECTS IN DIFFA

### 1.1 SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF PROJECTS

Cross-checking the literature review (US Department of State, 2023; USAID, 2024) with surveys conducted with NGOs, beneficiary populations, municipal authorities, and state technical services shows that, over the last two decades, USAID has been one of the main funders in the Diffa region. Its interventions have mainly targeted the municipalities of Diffa, Bosso, Kabléwa, and Gueskerou in the eastern strip, which have been severely affected by climate shocks and insecurity linked to armed groups.

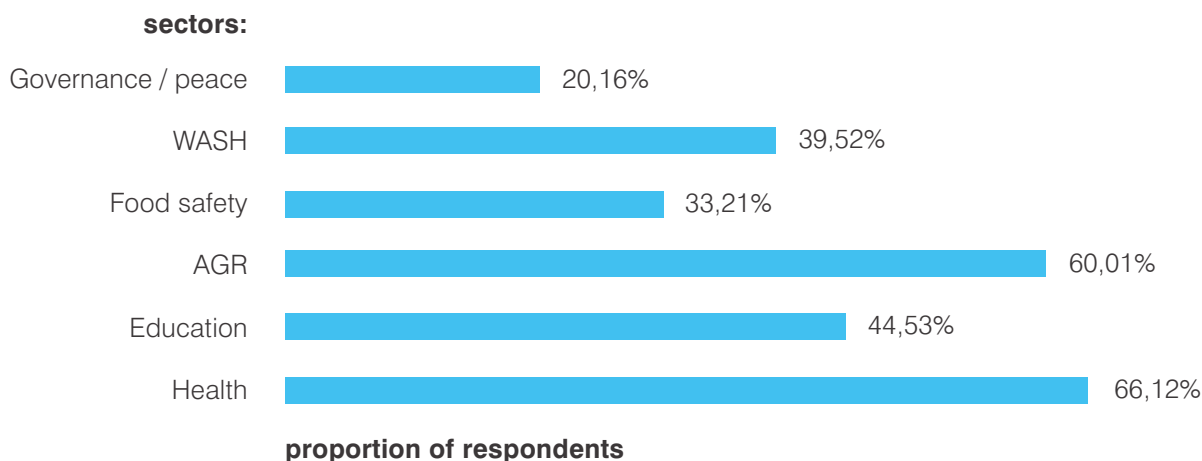
Before funding was halted, USAID supported integrated development projects combining emergency aid with the strengthening of community resilience. These projects covered several key sectors<sup>1</sup>: health and nutrition, education and child protection, food security, governance and social cohesion, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). These findings are consistent with the conclusions of the Projet de redressement économique et social du lac Tchad (Lake Chad Economic and Social Recovery Project, RESILAC) regarding USAID's major role in vulnerable areas of the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin (RESILAC Project, 2020).

### 1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF PROJECTS AS PERCEIVED BY BENEFICIARIES

The interviews<sup>2</sup> demonstrate the positive impact of USAID-funded projects on people's living conditions, particularly in hard-to-reach areas such as Gueskerou, Kabléwa, and Bosso, which are affected by insecurity. These projects have benefited local populations as well as refugees from Nigeria and Chad. Figure 1 shows the main observed direct effects on the living conditions of the populations surveyed.

<sup>1</sup> According to interviews with municipal authorities, customary leaders, beneficiary populations, and state technical services interviewed in Diffa on 12 and 13 October 2025. <sup>2</sup> Interviews with project beneficiaries, customary and municipal authorities, and state technical services (agriculture, empowerment of women, and child protection), 10 to 14 October 2025.

**Figure 1: Sectors receiving USAID funding**



**Source:** Survey of beneficiary populations, September 2025.

The data show that 66% of respondents mentioned positive effects in health, including a reduction in child mortality due to vaccine drives, reduced child malnutrition through the distribution of nutritional products (Plumpy), and improved maternal health. In addition, 60% of respondents reported improved incomes thanks to income-generating activities (IGAs) supported by USAID partner NGOs, as well as an increase in girls' enrolment in school in rural areas. Furthermore, 45% and 40% of respondents highlighted the effects of funding in the areas of education and WASH respectively. Finally, 33% and 20% of respondents said that USAID-funded activities, conducted through civil society organisations (CSOs), had contributed to improved food security and governance.

The interviews also show that USAID, acting through partner NGOs, indirectly supported child protection through prevention actions, care for children affected by conflict, and assistance to vulnerable families.

Despite the scale of investment, the levels of intervention varied across sectors and localities. The municipalities of Bosso and Kabléwa, close to the Nigerian border, were often limited to emergency interventions owing to chronic insecurity, contributing to the persistence of various vulnerabilities, exacerbated by internal displacement and pressure on social services.

### 1.3 CHANGES OVER TIME IN USAID'S PRESENCE

USAID stepped up its activities in the study area between 2013 and 2022, against the backdrop of a major humanitarian crisis linked to Boko Haram. This trend is consistent with information published by the US Department of State (2023), stating that Niger had benefited since 2013 from the US Feed the Future programme, which supports food security, water management, sustainable farming, and market access.

In 2022, the United States provided £135.4 million in aid, making USAID Niger's main financial partner, and providing vital help to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and host communities affected by conflict (US Department of State, 2023). From 2022 onwards, a gradual reduction in funding was observed, until the reduction of 80% of programmes was announced in 2025 (VOA, 2025), marking an abrupt change for local groups.

## 2 EFFECTS OF THE SUSPENSION OF USAID FUNDING IN DIFFA

### 2.1 EFFECTS ON PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Since 2022, the reduction in funding has mainly affected health, nutrition, food security, education, WASH, and gender equality programmes. Interviews<sup>3</sup> show that the consequences of these cuts include reductions in free food distributions to vulnerable households (mainly IDPs) and reduced support for health facilities in the form of nutritional foods for children and other vital services. This situation undermines improvements in the nutritional status of populations, especially children.

In the agricultural sector, a representative of the agricultural services stated that:

The impacts can be seen in the sudden suspension of certain activities at some market gardening sites in the Diffa region. These activities mainly consist of providing support to producers in terms of inputs, and strengthening their technical capacities.

<sup>3</sup> Interviews with project beneficiaries, customary and municipal authorities, and state technical services (agriculture, empowerment of women, and child protection), 10 to 14 October 2025.

In the education sector, there has been a drop in school attendance<sup>4</sup>, particularly in remote rural areas, linked to the cut in school support programmes and school canteens. With regard to the empowerment of women and young people, the suspension of funding has slowed the development of IGAs, owing to the break-up of some groups, insufficient capital, and reduced capacity-building.

However, actors reported only a limited impact on child protection, as other sources of funding are available for this sector. According to a representative of the regional department for the promotion of women and child protection in Diffa, the existence of community-based protection mechanisms allows committees to be formed to deal with the effects of funding cuts and policy changes.

## 2.2 EFFECTS ON LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Interviews with local and international NGOs show that the suspension of USAID funding has profoundly disrupted the work of partner groups. This withdrawal has led to staff reductions, redundancies, and the cessation or scaling-back of activities by local groups that rely on this aid. A former employee of a local NGO confirmed that he had been laid off following the cessation of funding in the area. According to the NGOs interviewed, the suspension has also reduced training initiatives and capacity-building work, especially in planning, accountability, and monitoring and evaluation, which has led to a decline in technical skills and a loss of know-how. At the same time, the reduction in USAID's financial leadership has left a gap in humanitarian coordination, which alternative partners are struggling to fill because of their more complex and less flexible rules. This situation demonstrates the fragility of the aid system in Diffa and highlights the need to sustainably diversify funding sources.

Finally, repercussions have been observed for local and regional public institutions. The state's decentralised technical services (in health, education, humanitarian action, and agriculture), which were previously supported indirectly by USAID via NGOs, have had to reduce their missions and activities, which slows down local planning owing to a lack of up-to-date data and methodological support.

## 3 ADAPTATION MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO REDUCED FUNDING

### 3.1 DIVERSIFICATION OF PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDING

The interviews<sup>5</sup> show that several NGOs, associations, and women's groups have reorientated their fundraising strategy towards new financial partners, while revising their geographical and thematic priorities. This repositioning concerns in particular the World Bank, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and private foundations. For example, one of the funding sources accessed by NGOs is the *Projet de gestion intégrée du paysage du Niger* (Niger Integrated Landscape Management Project, PGIP), funded by the World Bank with a budget of \$150 million and implemented since April 2023 (World Bank, n.d.). This shift is accompanied by a reorientation of project proposals in line with the themes favoured by the new partners, notably with an increased focus on community resilience, local governance, and social cohesion<sup>6</sup>. Multi-actor groups bringing together local and international NGOs are being formed to pool expertise, networks, and implementation capacities, as well as to increase funding opportunities.

### 3.2 NEW WAYS OF WORKING WITH THE STATE

In the context of national reform and the suspension of funding, particularly from USAID, several actors have reviewed their ways of working with the Nigerien State, integrating decentralised services more closely into the planning and execution of activities. This change is mainly seen in:

- the signing of partnerships with municipal authorities and prefectures to integrate community projects into *Plans communaux de développement* (Municipal Development Plans, PCDs). Projects and micro-projects must therefore align with the objectives set out in the CDPs of the municipalities in question. This is particularly concerned with: (i) the recovery of degraded land to increase agro-sylvo-pastoral production; (ii) the development of infrastructure facilitating access to basic social services; and (iii) the strengthening of local governance to improve populations' socio-economic conditions<sup>7</sup>;
- increased participation in regional consultation frameworks in order to better integrate community needs into the state's priorities.

This partial relocation of aid governance aims to anchor interventions in the national institutional fabric and limit dependence on external assistance.

## SOCIAL INNOVATION AND COMMUNITY ADAPTATION

Faced with a reduction in humanitarian funding, communities have developed forms of social adaptation, or coping strategies, based on strengthening traditional mutual aid mechanisms, such as *tontines* and collective work, in order to preserve community solidarity. In the municipalities studied, researchers observed two kinds of *tontines*. The 'in kind' *tontine*, based on contributions in the form of goods (cloth, sheets, utensils, food), is, according to the Nigerien press, a means for women to maintain access to

<sup>4</sup> According to the parents of children interviewed in Diffa on 14 October 2025. <sup>5</sup> Interviews with NGOs, associations, and women's groups, Diffa, 16 October 2025. <sup>6</sup> Interviews with representatives of local NGOs and associations, Diffa, 14 October 2025. <sup>7</sup> Communal Development Plans for Gueskerou (2022-2026), Kablewa (2022-2026), and Bosso (revised from the 2019-2023 plan).

household supplies and meet daily needs (Boulama, 2025). The classic savings tontine, on the other hand, is based on members making regular contributions, and withdrawing from the accumulated sum when necessary, thus constituting a form of solidarity-based savings scheme. These schemes are described as follows by Nafissatou Hassan Alfari (2020):

A practice deeply rooted in our customs, the Nigerien tontine or 'Adashé' is a kind of informal savings fund between friends, family members, or colleagues. It is a symbol of mutual aid, solidarity, and trust between members of the same tontine. Tontines have existed in Niger since time immemorial and are most often practised by women-only groups. But today, tontines have become more widespread as a cultural practice because they have also been embraced by men.

At the same time, local projects such as grain banks, solidarity funds, and inter-village cooperation have increased as a way of building group resilience<sup>8</sup>. Some communities have undertaken the repair of public infrastructure, including schools and wells, through community days organised by village chiefs, with financial and technical support from municipal authorities. Young leaders have mobilised to monitor key services such as hygiene, schooling, and nutrition, in collaboration with village committees<sup>9</sup>.

Finally, according to municipal authorities and a representative of the agriculture department, the creation of the Fonds de Solidarité pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie (Solidarity Fund for the Protection of the Homeland, FSSP) in 2023<sup>10</sup> has been successful in generating funding, reflecting a growing awareness of the need for national financial sovereignty. Despite the weakening of the aid system, these strategies show that internal resilience can emerge, on the condition that they are supported by suitable public policies and institutional recognition.

A municipal representative emphasised that:

Through technical services and even other sources of funding, the state is making efforts to minimise the consequences of this suspension of funding. This can be seen in the development of participatory approaches in several key development sectors.

Similarly, a representative of the child protection service indicated that:

The Nigerien State has further developed the community-based approach to protection that existed well before the suspension of USAID funding. This approach ensures the delivery of community-based protection, which does not necessarily require funding. In addition, the protection system offers a synergy of action to ensure quality care. In the Diffa region, we have trained more than 200 functional protection committees, each with 12 members.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL MECHANISMS FOR FINANCING AND MAINTAINING ACTIVITIES**

In response to the reduction in funding, local NGOs and municipal officials in Diffa have set up self-funding plans to keep key services running. In many villages in Gueskerou and Kabléwa, school and health boards have asked for community contributions to pay for drugs or to repair school infrastructure. The local diaspora, particularly those based in Zinder, Agadez, and abroad, have also provided ad hoc financial support. Some participants in IGAs have pooled their earnings in order to help maintain their activities. Although not very formalised, these mechanisms reflect genuine dynamics of local ownership and a strengthening of community solidarity.

## **OPTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE RESILIENCE OF COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS**

Interviewed actors suggested several measures for building the resilience of communities and social groups<sup>11</sup>:

- Strengthen the technical and logistical capacities of technical services to ensure national autonomy and sovereignty, while cooperating with international partners aligned with the objectives of national rebuilding, such as the African Solidarity Fund.
- Invest in large-scale irrigation to ensure food sovereignty, and diversify funding sources by strengthening local taxation, involving the private sector through corporate social responsibility (CSR), promoting community projects, and mobilising the diaspora. Develop varied skills among community agents through continuing training, the use of digital tools, the creation of local networks, and incentive systems.
- Consolidate social and institutional resilience: integrate resilience into public and private policies by aligning sectoral plans with a national resilience framework, create a national observatory, encourage the private sector to invest in sustainable social services, and set up a national emergency fund, co-financed by the state and international partners.

<sup>8</sup> Based on interviews with traditional authorities and beneficiaries, Diffa, 15 October 2025. <sup>9</sup> Based on interviews with municipal authorities and customary leaders, Diffa, 15 October 2025. <sup>10</sup> Ordinance No. 2023-18 of 21 December 2023, amending and supplementing Ordinance No. 2023-13 of 11 October 2023, relating to the creation of the Fonds de Solidarité pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie in Niger. <sup>11</sup> Project beneficiaries, customary and municipal authorities, and state technical services (agriculture, empowerment of women, and child protection), 10 to 14 September 2025.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the high vulnerability of Sahelian aid and development systems. It shows that dependence on a single partner, despite the socio-economic benefits it may provide, undermines the continuity of local actions in the event of withdrawal. The reduction in funding from USAID has led to deteriorating access to social services, fewer aid programmes, job losses in NGOs, and weaker institutions. In response, adaptation initiatives have emerged, including community mobilisation, diversification of partnerships, and the strengthening of local resilience. Finally, the study highlights the importance of strengthening institutions, diversifying funding sources, and integrating community resilience in public policies to support sustainable, self-reliant development in Diffa.

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