

Coordination of Fistula Programming: The Experience of the Fistula Eradication Network (REF) in Niger

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Niger – The Facts



Population 14 million

Total Fertility Rate
7.1 children/woman

Median female age
at first marriage 13.5 years

Female literacy 15.1%

Female primary school
attendance 43%

Only **26%** of women delivering in health facilities and **648 maternal deaths** per 100,000 live births, Niger has some work to do to make motherhood safer.

Obstetric Fistula

Given the limited access to timely emergency obstetric care, women in Niger are at risk of developing **obstetric fistula**, a birth injury that results in chronic incontinence and is reparable only by surgery.

- Fistula can be **prevented**
 - Improved access to emergency obstetric care
 - Skilled birth attendance and appropriate referrals
 - Delayed pregnancy, improved nutrition
- Fistula can be **treated**
 - Surgical repair can close fistula and restore woman's health up to 90% of the time.
- Fistula survivor **reintegration**
 - Women who have had a fistula repair must reintegrate back into their communities



Goals of the Fistula Eradication Network

Recognizing the public health problem of fistula, in 2003 the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Women's Promotion created the Fistula Eradication Network (REF) whose aims are to:

- Bring together institutions, organizations, partners, and donors who are working to address the problem of fistula.
- Ensure monitoring and evaluation of all programs working on the prevention, treatment, and reintegration of women with fistula.
- Coordinate and implement research studies.
- Cultivate links and synergies between partners.
- Facilitate information sharing and communication.



**RESEAU POUR
L'ÉRADICATION DES
FISTULES**

Who is REF?

A diverse network of 40+ member groups, including:

- Nigerien Ministry of Health and Ministry of Women's Promotion
- Public hospitals
- Community associations
- Professional associations
- Women's groups
- Schools of Health (Nursing, Medicine, and Midwifery)
- International development donors

REF and the Niger National Strategy

- Niger developed a national strategy for fistula services, prevention, and reintegration in 2005.
- One key role for REF is to ensure that all organizations' work plans fit within the national strategy.
- The Ministry of Public Health directs all institutions, organizations, and individuals who want to work on fistula to collaborate with REF in their planning process.



REF Funding

REF currently receives funds from the Niger Ministry of Public Health, UNFPA, and USAID via EngenderHealth's Fistula Care Project.

In the past, support has also come from FADII, Fonds Communs, UNICEF, and USAID via EngenderHealth's AWARE-RH.

The orchestration by REF:

- Ensures that donors are clear about who is doing what.
- Avoids double-counting of repairs.

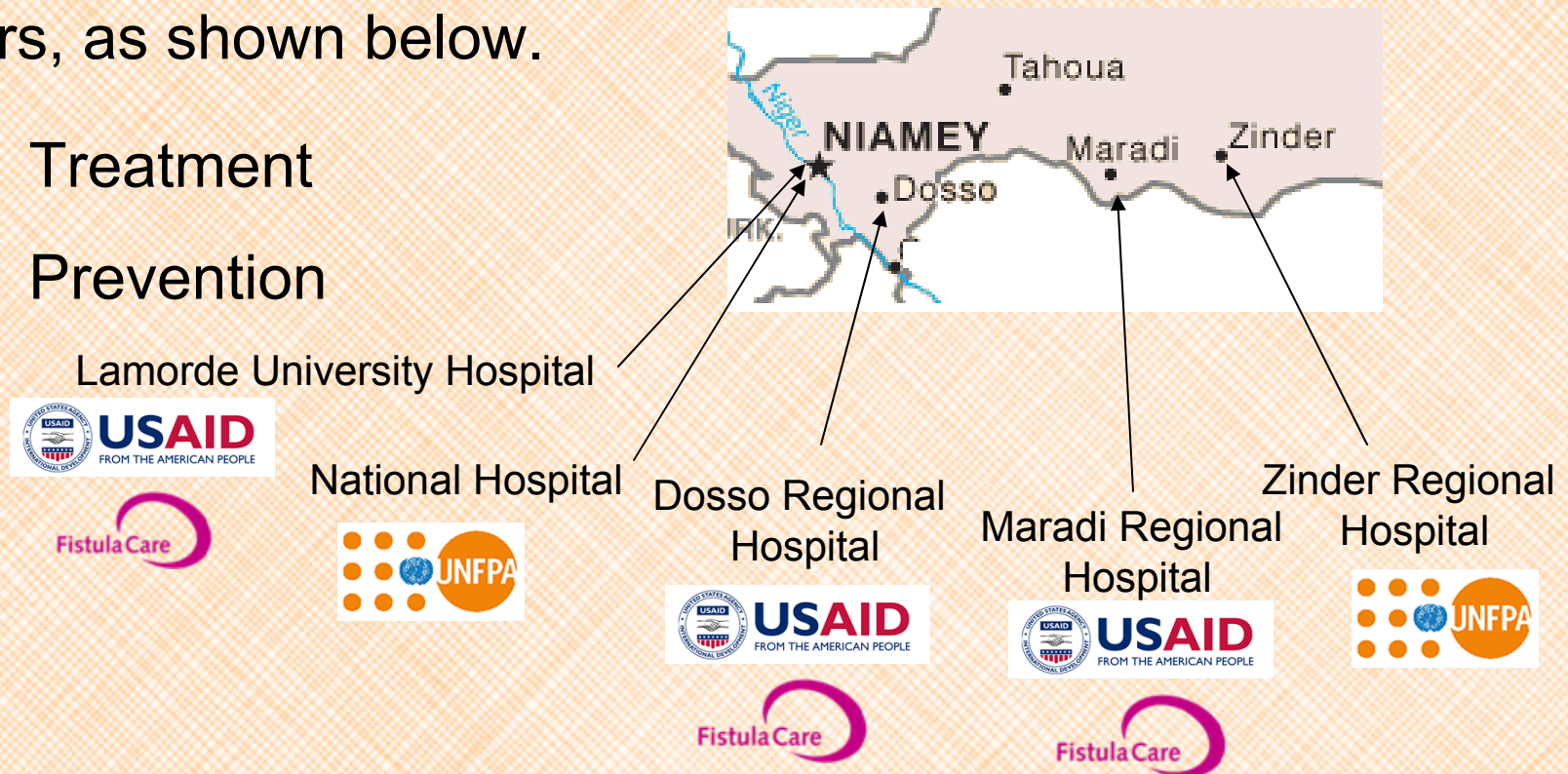


Activity Implementation

In addition to coordinating the work of all donors, REF also implements activities with USAID and UNFPA funding.

Supported sites/intervention areas are shared between donors, as shown below.

- Treatment
- Prevention



Note: UNFPA funds social reintegration work nationwide.

Results Thus Far

Pre-2003, there were **2** surgeons in **2** hospitals providing fistula repair. In 2010, there are **10+ surgeons** in **7 hospitals** transforming women's lives through fistula repair.

Under REF's coordination:

- 3,000+ women have been identified, of whom 2,457 received surgical fistula repairs.
- 21 surgeons trained (14 currently conduct repairs).
- 10 outreach trips have been made to strengthen repair services outside of the capital city.
- 1,104 repaired women have been trained on revenue-generating activities.

Lessons Learned

- Political support from the highest levels of the Ministries of Public Health and Women's Affaires provided REF with authority to act.
- Raising awareness about the problem of fistula requires the involvement of political, administrative, traditional, and religious leaders.
- Periodic meetings at institutions providing fistula repairs provide useful discussion and can enable staff to resolve issues locally.
- National strategies should ensure that fistula repair services are available in different geographic areas and not uniquely in the capital city.
- Efforts to prevent fistula require the sincere involvement of the entire community.
- Combining partners into a network allowed for us to avoid the duplication of efforts and ensure good coordination.

Thank you!



S.Ganda

**Le Réseau pour
l'Éradication des
Fistules
vous remercie de
votre attention**

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