Enabel

Executive Summary

Evaluation of the Cooperation Program Between Niger and Belgium

Niger

Aide à la Décision Économique (ADE s.a.)

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Presentation of the evaluation

Since 2020, Niger has been going through a phase of systemic fragility marked by the accumulation of structural vulnerabilities and external shocks. The country remains one of the poorest in the world, ranking 188th out of 193 on the Human Development Index (HDI) in 2023, with one of the fastest-growing populations globally (27 million inhabitants in 2024, of whom 47% are under the age of 15).

In addition to this demographic pressure, there are increasing climate shocks, with a projected temperature rise of +3°C by 2050, intensifying droughts, floods, and food insecurity; persistent security deterioration linked to the activity of non-state armed groups, leading to a 45% increase in internal displacement in 2024 (nearly 500,000 people); as well as a major political upheaval following the events of July 26, 2023, which resulted in sanctions, the suspension of international funding, and a reconfiguration of regional alliances.

In this context, Belgium—through Enabel—is one of the few Western partners to have maintained an operational presence, strengthening its credibility and strategic role.

The Niger–Belgium Bilateral Cooperation Programme 2022–2026, implemented by Enabel, is structured around two pillars: (1) social protection and reduction of inequalities (health, education) and (2) agropastoral development, entrepreneurship, and employment. Cross-cutting themes underpin the entire programme: digitalization, gender, inclusion, climate, and natural resource management.

The evaluation pursued a dual objective: (1) strategic—assessing the relevance of Enabel's positioning, the quality of the bilateral partnership, and complementarities with other technical and financial partners; and (2) operational—analyzing results, programme management, and lessons learned for the next cycle. It covered the entire 2022–2027 portfolio across all intervention areas.

The users of the evaluation include the Enabel Niger Programme team, Enabel headquarters, Nigerien institutional partners, the Belgian Embassy in Niger, technical and financial partners, as well as programme beneficiaries and target groups.

The methodology adopted was participatory, involving national and local stakeholders. It was also theory-based, relying on a reconstructed and tested Theory of Change. It was mixed-methods, combining qualitative and quantitative data; aligned with OECD-DAC criteria; and forward-looking, oriented toward future strategic decision-making.

Findings and conclusions

The programme shows strong alignment with national priorities, Belgian priorities (at the time of formulation), and those of technical and financial partners (TFPs). The “stay engaged” approach has helped maintain relevance despite successive crises. The PASS Sutura, Sarraounia 2, and REEL Mahita projects are directly aligned with national sectoral strategies (PDSS, education policies, dairy/meat plans). Internal coherence has improved through better coordination but remains incomplete. The Belgian political refocus requires a major strategic realignment for the next programme cycle. (QE1)

Enabel is perceived as a reliable, credible, and exemplary partner, having maintained high-level institutional dialogue, facilitated by embedding experts within ministries. This has supported gradual ownership despite significant staff turnover. Participation in coordination structures is active, but Enabel’s presence remains limited in certain sectors (climate, environment). Knowledge capitalization efforts (Sarraounia 2, REEL Mahita, PASS Sutura) have helped influence national policy guidelines. (QE2)

Enabel has played a leading role within Team Europe, but synergies often remain opportunistic rather than planned. Operational partnerships are strong, but co-financing can lead to strategic dilution. A formalized complementarity framework from the design phase is needed. (QE3)

Technical and organizational capacities have been strengthened, but sustainability remains fragile. In the health sector: notable capacity-building (results-based financing, health information systems, district surgery), but strong dependence on Enabel. In education: improved governance, training of managers, strengthening of school management committees (COGES). In agropastoralism: professionalization of value chains, innovations (short training courses through FAFPA), but continued financial dependence. Ownership is strong at the local level, more limited at the central level. (QE4)

The programme has had a significant impact on access to, retention in, and completion of schooling, particularly for girls, with transition rates from CM2 to 6th grade of 34.53% for girls versus 28.8% for boys, and dropout figures showing 70 boys compared to only 1 girl leaving school. Gender-sensitive infrastructure, menstrual kits, and monitoring committees have played a decisive role. Persistent limitations remain: social norms have changed little, and female participation in decision-making bodies is still low. (QE5)

Access to economic opportunities has increased, but decent jobs remain scarce. More than 1,300 young people have been trained (60% women), and 163 jobs were created in 2024 (71% temporary). Support mechanisms (incubators, advisory services, cooperatives—SCOOPS) are relevant, but the labor market has limited absorptive capacity. Self-employment, although prioritized, remains fragile. Gender integration is real but constrained by social norms and limited access to resources. (QE6)

Observed positive effects include the spontaneous diffusion of innovations and strengthened social cohesion. Negative effects include overburdened attractive services, frustration among non-covered communities, and security risks linked to the visibility of constructed or rehabilitated infrastructure. (QE7)

The evaluation noted strong agility but overly optimistic initial planning. There was rapid adaptation after July 2023; increased use of direct management (implementation by Enabel) to secure funds, though this generated partner frustrations; delays in activity rollout with limited impact on results;

and a solid but improvable monitoring and evaluation system (rigid indicators, insufficient feedback loops). (QE8)

Digitalization has made a structural contribution, but uptake remains uneven. In health: health information systems (SIH), OpenIMIS, and maintenance management systems (GMAO) have improved efficiency and data quality. In agropastoralism: drones, platforms (SIT Lafia), WhatsApp, RECAel. In education: connected infrastructure, ICT in education (TICE), administrative tools. Common cross-cutting limitations include low digital literacy, insufficient equipment, and the absence of a national interoperability strategy. (QE9)

Relevance	**A**	The programme is strongly aligned with national priorities in the health, education, and agropastoral sectors. The PASS Sutura, Sarraouina 2, and REEL Mahita projects directly respond to Niger's sectoral strategies. The interventions are considered highly relevant by communities, although their scale remains modest compared to needs. Alignment with Belgian priorities was strong at the time of formulation, but the current political refocusing implies a strategic readjustment for the next cycle.
Coherence	**B**	External coherence with other technical and financial partners (TFPs) is generally strong but remains mainly operational rather than strategic. Synergies have often emerged opportunistically, due to the absence of a formalized complementarity framework from the design phase. Enabel plays a key leading role within Team Europe. Internal coherence, initially limited by siloed operations, has improved thanks to coordination efforts, resource pooling, and the creation of platforms such as the Cercle Synergie Dosso, although room for improvement remains (internal governance, capitalization, geographic concentration).
Effectiveness	**B**	Despite constraints, the programme has generated significant results: • **Health:** capacity strengthening, improved data quality, innovations (AMD, results-based financing/FBR). • **Education:** complete and gender-sensitive infrastructure, increased enrolment and retention, notable improvement in academic outcomes. • **Agropastoralism:** structuring of value chains, skills development among technical services and producers. • **Professional insertion:** relevant training, but jobs created remain mostly temporary. • **Digitalization:** structural contributions, especially in the health sector. These results demonstrate robust effectiveness, even though some initial ambitions proved overly optimistic.
Efficiency	**B**	Programme management has been characterized by strong agility, effective institutional anchoring, and rapid adaptation after July 26, 2023, which helped maintain operational continuity. However, delays linked to overly optimistic initial assumptions, workload pressures on teams, increased reliance on direct implementation modalities, and internal divergences regarding the use of third-party funding have affected efficiency. The

		monitoring and evaluation system is strong but would benefit from a greater focus on learning.
Sustainability	C	The achievements are real, particularly at regional and local levels, where institutional capacities have been strengthened. Introduced innovations (educational models, health systems, digital tools) are recognized and sometimes adopted by authorities. However, sustainability remains fragile: limited central ownership, financial dependence of supported organizations, staff turnover, infrastructure and digital maintenance challenges. The durability of results will depend on strengthening national capacities and securing necessary resources.
Impact	B	The programme has generated positive impacts: improved access to and quality of services, empowerment of youth and women, dissemination of good practices, and strengthened local governance. Unintended effects are mostly positive, despite some risks observed (service overload, security concerns).

Conclusion 1: The portfolio of cooperation programmes between Belgium and Niger shows very strong alignment with Niger's national priorities, Belgian policy orientations at the time of its design, and the strategies of technical and financial partners (TFPs). This alignment has further strengthened over time thanks to a strong capacity for adaptation. However, the absence of a formal framework for discussing complementarities from the design stage limits overall strategic coherence and the ability to anticipate sectoral developments.

Conclusion 2: Enabel is perceived by government authorities, other development partners, and United Nations organizations as a reliable, technically credible, and resilient actor, particularly due to its institutional anchoring and continuous presence despite crises. The partnership dialogue is considered exemplary. Its proactivity in building partnerships, particularly within Team Europe, is an important added value. However, synergies have often been identified on a case-by-case basis and in a non-structured manner, and some co-financing arrangements are exposed to a risk of strategic dilution. The sustainability of the partnership will depend on the ability to further institutionalize coordination mechanisms, capitalization, and knowledge transfer.

Conclusion 3: The interventions have strengthened technical skills, sector governance, and value chain structuring, but these gains remain fragile due to staff turnover, reliance on external expertise, and uneven local capacities. In education and youth employment, progress is tangible (access, school success, engagement, skills), but without leading to major structural transformations: social norms remain largely unchanged, community mechanisms are insufficiently institutionalized, and the labour market has limited absorption capacity. Sustainability remains uneven and depends on local leadership, the formalization of mechanisms, and institutional capacity to finance and govern innovations. Digitalization efforts have been relevant but limited by uneven uptake, weak infrastructure, and the absence of an intersectoral vision. Their sustainability depends on the internalization of skills and their integration into institutional systems.

Conclusion 4: Enabel has demonstrated remarkable operational agility, enabling continuity of activities despite a volatile context. However, some initial assumptions were overly optimistic (with a monitoring and evaluation system and indicators insufficiently adapted to needs), leading to delays and costly adjustments.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1	Conclusion	Targeted actor	Level	Priority	Type
Formalize a strategic framework for inter-donor complementarity: Develop a multi-stakeholder framework from the design phase of the next programme, including harmonization of models (AMD, results-based financing/FBR, digitalization), coordinated geographic planning, and mechanisms for co-design and co-financing, in order to strengthen alignment of actions and improve collective effectiveness.	1, 2	Nigerian government in collaboration with : • Enabel Niger and corporate • Belgian Cooperation Ministry • Other cooperation agencies • United Nations Agencies • Gates Foundation • Nigerian Government • Belgian NGOs	2, 3 and 4	Medium term	Strategic

Narrative: More specifically, explicitly integrate, from the design phase of the next portfolio, all inter-donor cooperation arrangements likely to be mobilized. This implies that whenever an area of intervention suggests a need for co-financing or technical complementarity, this perspective should be directly embedded in the programme design in order to anticipate partnerships, align contributions, and secure synergies from the outset. For example:

- Make anticipated partnerships visible in action sheets or concept notes;
- Identify relevant technical and financial partners by area (financing, expertise, advocacy, innovation);
- Provide coordination mechanisms from the formulation phase (working groups, preliminary commitments, co-financing windows);
- Ensure coherence with existing frameworks (sector groups, coordination platforms, joint strategies).

Recommendation 2	Conclusion	Targeted actor	Level	Priority	Type
Structure an insertion–training–financing continuum: • Create an integrated system linking vocational training, access to financing (FISAN, microfinance), and	3	Enabel Niger and corporate, in collaboration with : • Nigerian Government • Microfinance institutions in Niger • Belgian and Nigerian private sector	2 and 3	Long term	Strategic

post-insertion support; • Rethink target groups (vulnerable populations versus entrepreneurs); • Review value chains and clarify the boundaries between development and humanitarian approaches					

Narrative: More specifically, consider:

- Conducting a thorough risk analysis aimed at challenging existing mechanisms and determining whether they provide a sufficient level of reliability to support operational objectives;
- Reconfiguring this continuum by refining the selection of target groups, clearly distinguishing between vulnerable situations and entrepreneurial profiles, and integrating the real financial capacity of young people as a determining criterion in financing mechanisms;
- Revising value chains according to market dynamics and real economic opportunities;
- Strengthening post-insertion support;
- Establishing a clear articulation with national mechanisms (FAFPA, ANPE, FISAN) and increasing the involvement of the private sector.

Recommendation 3	Conclusion	Targeted actor	Level	Priority	Type
Continue playing a leading role vis-à-vis development partners by seeking increased third-party funding to support high-leverage actions, strengthen alignment with national priorities, and enhance the overall impact of interventions on the ground.	1, 2	Enabel Niger and corporate, in collaboration with : • Belgian Cooperation Ministry • Belgian Embassy in Niger	2, 3 and 4	Short term	Strategic

Narrative: More specifically, recent experience has shown that Enabel benefits from a particular anchoring and a recognized ability to maintain dialogue in sensitive contexts. To maximize this comparative advantage, it is recommended to consolidate its role as lead coordinator among development partners by structuring, from the design phase of the next portfolio, a proactive strategy for alignment and coordination.

Recommendation 4	Conclusion	Targeted actor	Level	Priority	Type
Strengthen internal coherence of the portfolio to avoid the fragmentation observed and increase overall impact.	1, 2	Enabel Niger and corporate, in collaboration with : • Nigerian Government • Other cooperation agencies	2 and 3	Medium term	Strategic

Narrative: Synergies between projects, particularly around cross-cutting areas such as climate and health, agriculture and employment, digitalization, gender, or local governance, must be designed from the outset. More specifically, consider:

- Institutionalizing inter-project synergies around cross-cutting axes such as the climate–agriculture–employment nexus, the climate–health nexus, digitalization, gender, and local governance;
- Better articulating intervention areas, target groups, and governance mechanisms, which would help increase the overall impact of the portfolio and avoid fragmentation observed in certain sectors;
- Overall, developing a more integrated design from the formulation stage; for example, ensuring unified governance (harmonized sectoral steering committees).

Recommendation 5	Conclusion	Targeted actor	Level	Priority	Type
Move from a gender-sensitive approach to a transformative gender approach in order to sustainably impact gender relations and embed equality within systems, practices, and decision-making processes.	3	Enabel Niger and corporate, in collaboration with : • Nigerian Government	2 and 3	Long term	Strategic

Narrative: While current actions are gender-sensitive, they do not yet sustainably influence the social norms that structure inequalities. A transformative approach would involve explicitly integrating these norms into project design, engaging religious and community leaders, creating community dialogue spaces, and strengthening women's leadership in local and school-level decision-making bodies. However, this transition must be gradual and context-specific, taking into account sociocultural sensitivities and national priorities. A preliminary conceptual clarification (gender, equality, social roles) adapted to the context should be established beforehand.

Recommendation 6	Conclusion	Targeted actor	Level	Priority	Type
Strengthen the sustainability of digital innovations to ensure their integration into existing systems, guarantee service continuity, and maximize long-term organizational, social, and economic benefits.	3	Enabel Niger, in collaboration with : • Nigerian Government • Other development partners (Switzerland, …)	2	Long term	Strategic

Narrative: The projects supported by Enabel have enabled the development of relevant tools, but their sustainability remains limited by the absence of a national interoperability strategy, weak technical capacities, and insufficient maintenance and connectivity budgets. More specifically, consider:

- Developing a national interoperability strategy, progressively transferring technical skills (health information systems, maintenance management systems, educational platforms), and securing maintenance and connectivity budgets;
- Supporting the development of a national framework ensuring the continuity of digital solutions, including progressive skills transfer, securing necessary financial resources, and creating a private ecosystem capable of ensuring tool maintenance;
- Integrating digitalization into initial and continuing training curricula, which would also contribute to strengthening national capacities.

Recommendation 7	Conclusion	Targeted actor	Level	Priority	Type
Strengthen the institutionalization of governance and capitalization mechanisms in order to consolidate and harmonize existing frameworks, ensure their ownership, and promote the systematic integration of lessons learned into policies, practices, and organizational processes.	2, 3	Nigerian Government in collaboration with: • Enabel Niger (especially on the section on capitalisation / inter-country exchanges)	2	Medium term	Operational

Narrative: Technical committees, steering committees, cross-visits, and capitalization tools are essential levers for strengthening national ownership and ensuring continuity of learning. Their integration into national administrative routines, with methodological and organizational support from Enabel, would promote better sustainability of achievements and smoother coordination among stakeholders.

Lessons learnt

Lesson learned 1: Continuous presence and institutional anchoring strengthen the relevance, credibility, and resilience of the programme. The “stay engaged” approach and the integration of experts within ministries have helped maintain smooth dialogue, operational continuity, and strong legitimacy, even in a politically unstable context. Institutional proximity and field presence are major strategic assets for preserving relevance and partner trust.

Lesson learned 2: Strategic alignment and internal coherence must be anticipated and institutionalized. The programme was initially well aligned, but changes in Belgian and national priorities highlighted the need for continuous adjustment. Internal and external synergies improved over time but often too late or in an opportunistic manner, due to the absence of a formal framework. A structured governance, planning, and coordination mechanism is essential to maintain coherence, avoid silos, and maximize systemic effects.

Lesson learned 3: Strengthened capacities and innovations remain fragile without institutionalization and proactive risk management. Technical gains are real but vulnerable to staff turnover, reliance on external expertise, uneven capacities, and access constraints. Innovations (digitalization, technical models, community-based mechanisms) are relevant, but their uptake remains uneven. Sustainability requires transfer strategies, continuous training, standardization, and rigorous risk analysis from the design stage.

Lesson learned 4: Transformative approaches (gender, governance, digitalization, economic inclusion) must be consolidated to produce lasting effects. The interventions have generated visible results, but structural transformations remain limited: social norms are only slightly changed, decent employment is difficult to achieve, digital tool uptake is uneven, and territorial disparities persist. Cross-cutting approaches must be strengthened, supported by long-term community and institutional engagement, and integrated into public policies to amplify their impact.