Welcome to Spotlight. I’m Liz Waid and I’m Bruce Gulland. Spotlight uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand no matter where in the world they live.

When do you think of a school, what do you imagine?

Young students learning Math or Science? University students preparing for the future? But there is another kind of school. A school for husbands. These schools in Niger are only for married men. The men go here to learn about reproductive care: care for healthy pregnancy and birth. When husband knows about family planning it improves their communities.

Today’s spotlight is on the school for husbands in Niger.

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world. Much of this West African country is desert. There is not enough land to feed everyone. And the number of people who need to eat is growing quickly. Niger has the highest birth rate in the world. The average woman in Niger gives birth to 7 babies and it is difficult to feed and educate so many children.

Eday Jemocojay works for the local NGO in Niger. She tells IRIN News the result of this: “This is Asian humanitarian emergency. We have no future without birth control. The government cannot cope. The population is poor. The health system is weak. There is no land for farming. We are already unable to feed, uneducated our population”.

Many countries have used family planning as a way to control their birth rate. Some countries encourage families to have only 2 children. Others like India, even offer free family planning services. Most experts agree that planning for children is necessary to control population growth. But the world health organization says limiting family size is also better for family health. Women stay healthier if they have fewer pregnancy. They and their babies are usually stronger if they wait 3 years between births. Family planning has been a good solution for many countries. But it has been difficult in Niger. Having many children is part of Nigerian tradition and lifestyle. Many people believe that having more children means more health with the work. A local Nigerian chief Maidanda saidu explains to NPR: “in our culture, having a large family which seen as a gift from God. It was a great thing. If you have many children, you were among the gifted. So a large family is still seen as something positive. This is not what is needed for the country to develop, the fast growing population slows birth development of the country “

The Nigeria government along with the United Nation Population Fund or UNPF have tried to slow population growth in Niger. At first, they tried a solution like India. They provided free education to women about their health. Doctors taught women that it was important to leave time between births. They taught methods to plan family size but it did not help much influence. This is because women in Niger do not have much control over their family. The web page of the UNPF says: “Niger is the country where men hold power traditionally. Most women cannot read and are married before they are 18 years old. The women do not always agree to being married. Violence against women happens often and it’s accepted”.

Because of this, women in Niger could not do very much with their education about family health. The program for women did not have an effect.

Then in 2004, the United Nations Population Fund or UNPF created an interesting solution the school for husbands. The school was an attempt to teach Nigerian men about family issues especially how they affect women. Husbands would gather with an experts two times every month. They will discuss women health problems. The UNPF wanted husbands to understand how important family planning is and birth control too. They hope the men would encourage their wives to visit the doctor.

In the beginning of the program, there was not many meetings. The UNPF was not sure how most men would react. Instead they invited the most important members of a few communities. These work traditional cheap and Ekman Islamic religious leaders. These people had a lot of influence If a chief or an Ekman attended school for husbands, other would follow his example. The process began very slowly but soon people began to ask what their leaders were doing and wanted to join.

Today there are over 164 schools for husbands open in the country. The UNPF said the use of family planning services has multiply by three times. The number of people using birth control has double. Slowly family are talking about their family size. They are planning way to keep their families healthy.

But the school for husbands does more than teach about women health. It gets man think differently about their wives and women in general. Fasumo husband attends the school. She told the Inter press news agency.

Before the school of husbands, men did not discuss things with their wives. But now there is an issue in which they are very interested. Has a women you can now find a space where you can talk, you can share with your man. It is a great side effect. The UNPF think that this increase communication will reduce the birth rate. The UNPF reports husbands and wives say that they are now talking to each other more. For the first time husbands are attending the birth of their children at the health center. So husband from the school act as guides for their families. They also help families that would normally find it hard to get to a health center. When the school for husband first started. People would not sure it would change Nigerian society. There were many ideas about how to solve the issues of over population. People thought that one of the other ideas could bring more chance. But the school for husbands was a success that no one expected. The process is slow now but people are hopeful that education will help families in Niger be healthier. The school for husbands also aims to improve the country for everyone. Mazua educated about women issue have a new view. They can help to plan a healthy family and they can encourage the wives and daughter to get an education too. Then women will begin to have more control over their life. And this expert says is the best hope towards a better future for all of Niger.

The writer of this program was Dan Chrisman. The producer was Bruce Gallon. The voices you heard were from the United States and the United Kingdom. All quotes were adapted for this program and voice by spotlight. You can listen to this program again and read it on the Internet at [www.radioenglish.net](http://www.radioenglish.net/) this program is called A school for husbands.

We hope you can join us again for the next spotlight program. Goodbye.