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Commission on the Status of Woman: *Niger*

Even if multiples advancements had been made in Niger to grant equal rights, regardless the gender, there is still a lot to be made. Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world due to its geographical location, it suffers of its hostile environmental conditions due to its unstable weather causing chronic food insecurity. Because women are the most affected by climate change, Nigerian women have a very high rate of inequality. In Niger what limits women is not the law but the culture. Women’s family life (inheritance, marriage, divorce, child custody) and land tenure is regulated largely by Islamic religious culture.

Section 1: *Women and Sustainability*

Women in Niger have limited rights to ownership or possession of land and non-land assets, because as with matters pertaining to marriage and divorce, inheritance and ownership are governed primarily by customary law[[1]](#footnote-1). Islamic law accords women the right to inherit property but rural Muslims rarely follow this practice due to due to stereotypes. Because women access land through their husbands and male relatives, they risk losing the land when the relationship ends due to death or divorce.[[2]](#footnote-2) Furthermore, in this country women rarely have access to land, as ownership is most often passed on through inheritance, and under customary laws, women rarely inherit land[[3]](#footnote-3). Under the civil code, husbands have the right to manage and administer property belonging to their wives.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Section 2: *Elimination of Gender-Based Violence*

Most marriages are conducted according to custom, proceed without the spouses’ consent and are never registered.[[5]](#footnote-5) While marriageable age for persons with customary status is 14 for girls and 16 for boys, generally women are understood to be ready for marriage with their first menses and the practice of dowry payment is common.[[6]](#footnote-6) In rural areas, families sometimes enter into an agreement whereby a young girl (aged between 10 and 12 years) joins her husband’s family under the guardianship of her mother-in-law.[[7]](#footnote-7) There are also cases where their families, under the guise of an arranged marriage, effectively sell girls into domestic and sexual slavery.[[8]](#footnote-8)

There is no legislation in place specifically addressing domestic violence[[9]](#footnote-9), women can report violence to customary or official courts, but seldom do.[[10]](#footnote-10) While domestic violence against women is reportedly widespread, there are no reliable statistics as to prevalence rates.[[11]](#footnote-11) There is evidence to suggest that Niger is a country of low concern in relation to missing women due to elevated child sex ratios.

Section 3: *Women in Education and Employment*

Married women may not, however, pursue a trade or profession in the same was as a man, but must get permission from her husband (Civil Code, Art. 223).[[12]](#footnote-12) Gender discrimination in employment is prohibited under the labor code (Art. 5), although there are potentially discriminatory prohibitions on women taking on work that ‘exceeds their strength or damages their moral character. [[13]](#footnote-13)

Extreme poverty is the central impediment to girls’ education. Parental illiteracy is a significant problem as 43% of men and only 15% of women are literate. Also, cultural traditions limit educational and other opportunities for women and girls. [[14]](#footnote-14)

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1. FAO (n.d.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. FAO-Dimitra (2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. FAO (n.d.) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. World Bank (2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cooper (2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Idem [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. US Department of State (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Purdy (2013) p.887 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Idem [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Purdy (2013) p.887 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. US State Department (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Idem, World Bank/IFC (2014) pp.16-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. CEDAW (2005) p.19, 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. UNGEI, info by country, Niger [↑](#footnote-ref-14)