



EPICENTRE NIGER

In Niger, infectious diseases and child malnutrition are the principle causes of mortality. In 2009, Epicentre, MSF's research and training arm, established its third research center in Niger to develop a viable West African hub to develop implementable solutions to clinical and public health problems. Since then, the Niger Research Center has developed a strong research portfolio and built capacity to investigate epidemics, implement alerting and monitoring systems, conduct clinical trials and prevalence surveys while working with Niger's Ministry of Health and evaluating impact. However, Niger and the Sahel, remain one of the least developed regions in the world with poor academic, research and health infrastructure. Our partnership supports the training of Epicentre's African staff with the goal of eventually running the Center autonomously. Key scientific staff such as field investigators, laboratory technicians, epidemiologists and clinical statisticians have received advanced individual and institutional training in technical areas and have been able to present at Epicentre's Scientific and Medical Days in Paris and Niger, travel for courses and conferences, build their international networks and take up other training assignments in MSF programs and African research centers.



Beneficiary group

Directly: Epicentre staff in Niger.

Indirectly: participants and communities in Epicentre research studies, as well as policy makers in the region.

Budget

\$100,000

Location

Niger (Niamey and Maradi)

Primary outcome

The partnership focuses on building the capacity of Epicentre Niger's medical and scientific staff, reinforcing Epicentre's ties to the provincial authorities to guarantee optimum rapid response to health crises.

Goals

- Provide opportunities outside of Niger for medical and scientific staff at the Center to receive additional training to further their careers.
- Encourage medical and scientific staff from Niger and surrounding countries to be mentored and mentor others to sustain a vibrant research culture.
- Provide opportunities for staff to promote Epicentre's visibility and encourage discussion on pressing medical research issues in Africa.
- Improve the quality of clinical studies in the long term.

Milestones

- The benefits of support for Epicentre Niger have been transformative. Key scientific staff has been able to travel for trainings, connect with international scientists and expand their skill sets.
- The Epicentre Medical Day in Niamey, 21 January 2020: researchers, public health experts and government officials were brought together discuss best practices in dealing with meningitis, malaria and malnutrition for Niger and the Sahel region.
- 7 medical and scientific staff members have participated in the response to the Ebola outbreak in DRC - participating in seminars, trainings and the development of a novel vaccine trial for Ebola in Zaire.
- Participation in international seminars and trainings, as well as conferences in Niger.

Level of evidence

Level 1	Quasi-experimental
Level 2	Pre-post or cross-sectional
Level 3	Point-in-time study
Level 4	Performance metrics/stats
Level 5	Anecdotal evidence

The measurement of Epicentre Niger's capacity-building and professional development activities is also complemented by statistics on staff retention and rates of project volunteering.

Future plans

- Support the participation and development of seminars in Niger.
- Host SONIMI, the Nigerien internal medicine seminar for staff to present their work and opportunities for knowledge sharing from Epicentre and Elsevier.
- Participation of staff in the Women Leaders in Global Health conference in Kigali.
- Development and convening of a scientific day in Conakry, Guinea.



Above: Epicentre staff at the Maradi Research Center, Niger.



Left: From left to right: Yvonne Mburu (Founder of Nexakili and co-founder of the French-African Foundation), Yap Boum (Regional Representative of Epicentre Africa), John McConnell (Editor-in-chief of *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*) and Ylann Schemm (Director of the Elsevier Foundation) in Niger while attending the Epicentre Medical Day in January 2020.

“The support from the Elsevier Foundation has been instrumental: from trainings to opportunities to attend and present at conferences, to access to journals and latest research. ”

— ROCKYIATH MAKARIMI, Head, Monitoring Department, Epicentre Niger.

Challenges

Given the ongoing instability in the country and region, the most pressing challenge for staff remains security. In order to provide consistent and adequate support, long distance communication capacity has become increasingly important. MSF/Epicentre’s response to the Ebola outbreak in DRC provided an important opportunity for clinical trials training, but also delayed many plans for staff to undertake formal continuing education.

