

# YEP NIGER - REPORT

Youth Empowerment Project ( YEP ) Niger involved 18 young participants, equally divided between nine girls and nine boys, aged 15 to 18. They hailed from diverse regions of Niger, half from various regions and the other half from Niamey, the capital. They were selected based on their motivation and willingness to participate actively. For four weeks, from July 9th to August 7th, 2023, we worked closely with these young people, covering leadership, entrepreneurship, mental health, and humanitarian activities. Our mission was to empower them with skills and knowledge that extend beyond traditional academic success, preparing them to thrive in life and make positive contributions to their communities and country. In the first week, our focus was on leadership. During this week, we encouraged young individuals to develop their leadership abilities, with guidance from experienced mentors and trainers. We also welcomed guest speakers to inspire and guide them. The second week was all about entrepreneurship. Here, we introduced young people to the world of business startups and innovation. Experts in the field shared their knowledge, and we visited local businesses led by young entrepreneurs to provide practical insights. During the third week, we tackled the often-neglected topic of mental health. Through a combination of discussions, activities, and expert guidance, we helped young participants understand the importance of mental well-being and equipped them with tools to manage stress and emotions effectively. The fourth and final week was dedicated to humanitarian activities. We collaborated with the community to engage in projects like clean-up efforts and crafting trash bins. Additionally, we explored creative activities inspired by UWC schools and spent time with orphaned children. This week emphasized the importance of giving back and making a positive impact. Throughout this journey, we received invaluable support from experienced mentors, trainers, and experts in various fields. Their guidance was instrumental in shaping our program and ensuring its success. We also depended on the active involvement of the local community, whose collaboration enriched our humanitarian activities.

# 1. How we think we've made a difference

We believe we made a real difference because no program in Niger emphasizes all the points we chose to address. We broke the cultural cocoon by dedicating an entire month to create an environment where both genders, while learning, were free to express their ideas and feelings creatively. We spent an intensive week on leadership, with a strong focus on one of its components, public speaking, which was extensively discussed thanks to a qualified trainer who practiced techniques with our students. In line with leadership, we organized group debates and presentations followed by facilitated discussions led by each of the YEP participants. We also conducted interviews with ALA ( African Leadership Academy ) students who agreed to share their experiences and some tips for the 2023 applications. During the entrepreneurship week, we hosted trainers for several days who explained and provided advice on best practices for starting a business, including the case of a startup. Others discussed the theme of "How to change the world through entrepreneurship," etc. We also visited businesses run by young Nigeriens, such as 2M Invest, Cabinet Leader d'Afrique, Leadcom, Niger Lait and Iqra Orientation. Furthermore, we had a guest speaker who shared his extraordinary journey as the CEO of Novatech, focusing on information technology, and who left his job in front of everyone to pursue his dream. Additionally, we explored business branding with a young entrepreneur. The third week aimed to break the taboo around mental health, during which we had the honor of welcoming a psychologist and a trainer on emotional management. In parallel, one of us also led sessions on many themes among which "I Belong" and also helped our participants to perform theatrical pieces addressing microaggressions. Finally, during our last week, we engaged in community activities, one of which involved visiting an orphanage, which we did almost every week, spending time with the orphans and providing them with donations. The other activity was focused on cleaning a part of Niamey, the surroundings of the school where we lived, and then creating trash bins that we placed in various locations.

## What we are specially proud of

We're incredibly proud of our participants, watching them transform and draw inspiration from role models who started as young as they are and faced many challenges before succeeding. A significant highlight was during our final visit to the orphanage, where we empowered our students to lead sessions on the topics we'd covered over the four weeks. They divided into groups, each with a leader, and creatively shared what they'd learned to the Orphans of SOS Village d'enfants. This moment was truly special, as we witnessed them step out of their comfort zones with boundless energy. It was heartening to see their enthusiasm, even in the face of some orphans teasing them for discussing "taboo" topics in our country. Furthermore, it was comforting to see how much the manager of the orphanage liked our last activity and encouraged us to come back.

# 2. How we think that the project impacted our participants

We believe that our project had a profound impact on the students, particularly those from

regions outside the capital, who often have limited access to information. They were able to learn about valuable opportunities like UWCs and ALA, and every participant decided to apply for both opportunities. Furthermore, at the end of our four weeks, during our closing ceremony, we gathered testimonials from each participant. It was remarkable to witness students who had once been hesitant to speak now delivering heartfelt speeches. One standout example of the impact we had is a girl from the Agadez region who decided to start a business reselling international women's fashion items. Additionally, a **mixed** duo from Maradi founded their own association called "Youth Impact Niger," with the aim of organizing activities and fundraising for orphans in Maradi. These students not only aspire to continue spreading the values of YEP in their home regions but also have broader ambitions. Some are already considering projects like plastic waste recycling, and thanks to the connections they made during the program, they are well on their way to making these projects a reality.

### 3. How the project has made a difference to us

This project has undeniably been incredibly beneficial for both of us. Not only did we enhance our leadership skills, but we also gained a wealth of knowledge. We learned the importance of listening to one another, providing support, and maintaining unity even when faced with challenges.

#### ● Lessons we have learned from the project

What we've learned from this project mainly revolves around being smart with money, staying organized, and having a backup plan for unexpected situations. A month before the project, we realized we might not have enough money to cover everything, but one of our us knew how to get more funding from local organizations. We've also learned to believe in ourselves and keep going even when people doubted us. When we told some friends and family about our project, they didn't think we could do it, especially because it involved both girls and boys, which isn't common in our country. This experience taught us the importance of supporting each other when things get tough like for example when our YEP participants got sick. Finally YEP showed us how crucial it is to help each other with different tasks.

#### ● What we would do differently if we ran the project again

If we were to do something differently, it would involve revising our weekly schedule. Perhaps reducing the weekend outings to once every two weeks, as our YEP participants expressed a preference for this. Additionally, we would aim to include more activities during the week, such as sports and creative pursuits like painting or dancing. We would also intend to incorporate a week dedicated to computer science and information technology, as this is an area that many individuals in Niger, especially girls, are hesitant to explore. Moreover, we would improve our organization. We aim to be more coordinated and efficient as organizers, and we won't hesitate to involve the students in various tasks, like setting up tables, clearing dishes, and handling trash, by forming teams for these responsibilities.

#### Where the money has been spent

The majority of the funds were allocated to covering the expenses of food for our 18 participants during the three weeks, including ourselves.