

# Hope in the midst of overwhelming need, in Niger and beyond

Jun 12, 2019 · By Joel Witwer · [News](#)



Even under the best of circumstances, Niger is a tough place to live. The UN developed a metric called the Human Development Index (HDI) that takes basic national data like life expectancy, education, and standard of living into account. Almost without fail, [Niger takes last place every single year](#). (189th place out of 189 for 2018.) The life expectancy for the average Nigerien is only 60 years old. It's anticipated that Nigeriens will complete a total of only five years of school compared to the expected 16 years of school the average American will complete.

Furthermore, 44% of Nigeriens live [below the poverty line](#), with more being pushed into extreme poverty every day [due to seeking out necessary, elusive, and expensive health care](#). The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates the minimum threshold for the number of medical professionals (doctors, nurses, and midwives) to maintain basic health care is 23 for every 10,000 people. [Niger has 2 for every 10,000](#). People travel for days to see these few medical professionals, who are overworked, under-resourced, and overwhelmed. When those in need do arrive, they often find they cannot afford the basic costs of healthcare, and many opt to continue untreated as best they can. Lack of affordable, accessible healthcare is problematic in a country where CURE estimates (based on data from [UNICEF](#)) that over 600,000 children are living with disabling conditions, many of which are completely treatable.



Hadiza was one of the 600,000 children in Niger with a disability.

The worst part of Niger's healthcare situation is that it is not unique to Niger. CURE has hospitals around the world in places like Malawi, Zambia, Kenya, and Ethiopia, [none of which reach the threshold for minimum medical professionals](#) set by the WHO of 23 per 10,000 people. All of our hospitals operate in countries that fall in [the bottom 40% of the UN's Human Development Index](#), meaning low levels of education, low life expectancies, and low standards of living for the population at large, but especially for the millions of children living with treatable, disabling conditions in these countries.

All these numbers paint a bleak picture and still miss the reality of life with a disability in a country where medical care is both scarce and out-of-reach for the vast majority of the population. If not killed at birth, children with disabilities are most often viewed as a burden on their families and communities. They are more likely to drop out of school, if they even attend at all, due to difficulties getting to school (like [Anduaem](#), whose mother carried him miles to and from school every day) or discrimination from both their peers and teachers once they are there. Girls are more likely to be "sold" as a child bride, their dowry seen as their only contribution to their family's plight. Due to their disability lowering their "worth," their husbands are not likely to be of a high caliber but are often old or unreliable. Boys almost invariably become beggars, trying to survive off the scraps of a society already barely scraping by. As [Hadiza](#)'s mother once explained to us, being born with a disability is seen as only marginally better than death.

There are hundreds of thousands of children living this life only marginally better than death in Niger—millions across the countries in which CURE operates.

Are you feeling overwhelmed yet?

In [Deuteronomy 15](#), God tells us the poor will always be with us, which is kind of a discouraging thing to read.

It sounds like, “Go on and try, but you’ll never succeed.” Read closer, though, and it’s a quiet passage of encouragement: encouragement to love for the sake of love itself; encouragement to give and care and love in the face of insurmountable odds.

The odds do seem insurmountable. The hundreds of surgeries we provide every year aren’t going to propel Niger from #189 on the HDI to #1. Your [monthly hero](#) donation is not going to catapult Niger from two medical professionals per 10,000 people to the minimum threshold of 23. Your [get-well message](#) isn’t going to raise 63% of Nigeriens out of extreme poverty.

The thing is, Jesus came to turn this world upside down. The last shall be first, and the blessed are the insulted, the mourning, the meek, and the poor. He upended systemic poverty, both physical and spiritual, and did so one life at a time. As Christians seek to follow in the footsteps of Christ, this is how we need to look at it as well. We might not be able to eliminate these overwhelming statistics single-handedly, but we can make a life-changing difference for one child—a child like [Mary Ann](#), who wants to grow up and be a policewoman and now has a shot at meeting the physical requirements after having her legs treated at CURE Kenya, or like [Salifou](#), who is now a local teacher, a contributing member of society, and an avid footballer in his spare time.

We believe that every life matters and that little actions can snowball into world-changing events. Because of [heroes like you](#), [Andualem](#) had his legs straightened, and he can finally walk to school all by himself. Now, he is even less likely to drop out and is thus contributing to increasing Ethiopia’s HDI rank.

Because of [heroes](#) like you, [Hadiza’s](#) legs were treated, which means she will also be able to stay in school longer. As such, if she chooses to marry, she’ll be able to find a higher caliber husband and, together, they can work to lift their family out of poverty, making things better not only for themselves but for their community and nation, too.



Now, Hadiza’s knock knees have been corrected at CURE Niger, and she is healing at home!

Because of heroes like you, [Evelista](#) has been able to spend a significant amount of the time in the hospital where she not only had her condition treated but discovered a brand new world of medical careers. She now has her heart set on being a nurse and might one day contribute to getting Malawi closer to the threshold of 23 medical workers per 10,000 people.

The numbers are overwhelming, but remember: the numbers represent very real people—very real children, who overwhelm us with their love of life and hope for the future. They overwhelm us with their simple faith and [joyful giggles](#). By investing our time, energy, and resources in these little ones, we slowly but surely begin to change the world.