BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Girls and women’s education and training have always been a development issue of paramount importance in Niger. Despite the impressive improvement particularly in terms of primary education participation since 2000, gender disparities persist at all levels of education in Niger with regards to educational opportunities and outcomes.

In terms of gender equity, disparities grow more pronounced as students evolve in educational and training cycles. The low representation of girls in secondary and higher education is a result of the low school survival rate of girls at the primary level.

From May 2015 to June 2016, UNESCO Dakar executed the pilot project “Tackling gender inequalities in Niger’s education system” funded by the Japanese Funds-in-Trust for the Capacity-Building of Human Resources (JFIT-CBHR) ($162,000) and implemented by the Ministry of Primary Education, Literacy, Promotion of National Languages and Civic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education.

The overall objective of the project was to improve girls and women’s participation in education in order to strengthen Niger’s educational system for sustainable socio-economic development.

Given the magnitude of gender disparities in all education levels in Niger, this project was implemented on a pilot scale in 10 primary and 4 lower secondary schools in the Torodi District in the Tillabéri Region. The project was not expected to solve all the issues that were identified by the needs assessment, but was expected to contribute to the implementation of national plans/strategies. The achieved results at the selected schools provided evidence for further guidance to the decision makers on the implementation of the Sector Programme for Education and Training 2014-2024 as well as information to reflect upon for future interventions at a country level. Furthermore, special attention was given to advocacy to promote girls and women education.
SUCCESSFUL PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

The activities of the project were developed based on an analysis of girls’ education and learning conditions in the selected schools in the Torodi district as well as on interventions implemented by education partners to promote girls’ access, retention and performance in school.

The implementation of the project led to the following achievements and lessons learnt:

**Expected result 1:** Intervention gap identified regarding the improvement of the learning environment and detailed project implementation plan developed in order to make schools more girl-friendly and conducive for girls' learning

**Achievements:**
Consultations with local education stakeholders enabled to have an accurate insight of challenges for girls’ education and main intervention gaps in the improvement of learning environment (infrastructures, latrines, canteens, teaching and learning materials, water and electricity supply, teachers’ capacity building on gender issues and communication, organization of remedial courses for low performance students, awareness raising of all categories of stakeholders).

**Lessons learnt:**
Consultation with local education stakeholders was essential to collect useful information on the needs and expectations.

**Expected result 2:** Female classroom teacher’s capacity developed to make them role models for girls

**Achievements:**
- The 85 female teachers assigned in the pilot schools as well as 6 pedagogical advisors were trained on gender-responsive approach, communication and organization of remedial courses
- They were provided with basic materials, a dictionary and the curricula
- As a result, girls’ punctuality, regularity and participation in class overall improved and gender equality was noticed in the tasks assignment in the classroom

**Lessons learnt:**
Some male students remained reluctant to work with female students in the classroom and would require continuous efforts.

**Expected result 3:** Strengthened institutional capacity of school administration to ensure implementation of plans / strategies, policies and programmes related to gender equality

**Achievements:**
A tool to monitor the project implementation at school level was developed in a participatory and instructive way by school administration (pedagogical advisors, school directors and inspectors) under guidance by experts from the Ministries.

**Lessons learnt:**
The participative development of the tool was not sufficient to ensure regular and effective monitoring. Results were not reported to the national project team. Further resources should be invested in this area.
**Expected result 4:** Enhanced awareness about gender-sensitivity among decision makers and selected key stakeholders through advocacy and information

**Achievements:**

- Awareness raising activities that reached more than 1,500 people in the communities were organized before or at the beginning of the school year 2015-2016: wide advocacy event on girls schooling in the presence of all categories of education stakeholders in Torodi, awareness-raising caravan in 3 different locations in the surrounding of selected schools targeting local education stakeholders, key messages disseminated through community radios.

- Strong commitment of local education personnel to promoting girls’ access to and retention in school, increase of participation of girls and boys in pilot schools between 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 (tables 1 and 2), as well as decrease in the number of early marriages during the project period.

- Advocacy materials were developed: a poster illustrating the benefits of girls’ education, an advocacy document targeting decision-makers and partners on the importance of girls’ education, including recommendations and a collection of good practices, and a 4 minute-video on main achievements.

**Table 1: Male and female students’ enrolment growth rate in the pilot primary schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary schools</th>
<th>Number of students in 2014-2015</th>
<th>Number of students in 2015-2016</th>
<th>Enrolment growth rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>% female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daoundou</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>42,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dioga</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>43,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dioga Deba</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>52,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobagou</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>44,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pengona</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>46,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torodi centre</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>47,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allareni</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>48,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gmpalma</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambounti</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>47,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilliki</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>49,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL/AVERAGE</strong></td>
<td><strong>1137</strong></td>
<td><strong>956</strong></td>
<td><strong>45,7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Male and female students’ enrolment growth rate in the pilot lower secondary schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lower secondary schools</th>
<th>Number of students in 2014-2015</th>
<th>Number of students in 2015-2016</th>
<th>Enrolment growth rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>% female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES Torodi 1st cycle</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>47,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES franco-arabic Torodi 1st cycle</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>31,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEG Turudi</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>41,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEG Kobagou</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>43,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL/AVERAGE</strong></td>
<td><strong>852</strong></td>
<td><strong>660</strong></td>
<td><strong>43,7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lessons learnt:**

- Testimonies of leader women were key in the change of local population’s perception on girl’s education
- Further awareness raising is required to reach reluctant parents and male students and to sustain the project achievements
**Expected result 5:** Project contributed to enhancing girls’ school retention

**Achievements:**
- The 36 most successful girls in 2014-2015 were offered school kits to encourage them to continue education
- Learning of about 1,300 students, mostly girls, at last grade of primary level and first grade of secondary level, was supported through remedial courses (French and mathematics), which contributed to the improvement of their performances.

**Lessons learnt:**
Strong commitment of the teachers despite very difficult teaching conditions: overcrowded classes (up to 104 students per class), lack of textbooks, school furniture and pedagogical materials, poor electricity supply, poor financial support for the teachers

**Expected result 6:** Project coordinated effectively and efficiently (timely and effective implementation and disbursement of all the contracts and direct payments to service providers according to the plan, as well as necessary interventions and modifications of the plan)

**Achievements:**
A national technical project team (12 members and 1 supervisor) as well as UNESCO-Dakar coordination team were established. Two school visits were undertaken by the national team to monitor project implementation. Monthly, progress and external final evaluation report available.

**Lessons learnt:**
The Government’s request to assign a national supervisor rather than hiring a national coordinator allowed allocation of more funds for project activities.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION**
The pilot project resulted in formulating some recommendations for consideration in designing and implementing future interventions:

- Identified needs regarding the school environment (infrastructures, latrines, water, electricity supply, etc.) shall be urgently addressed to sustain the level of commitment of all the stakeholders, including school directors, teachers, parents, girls, etc.
- Awareness raising and remedial courses should be strengthened and consolidated in the School Management Committees’ annual action plan and budgets, and teachers capacity development programmes should be further supported by the government
- An operational system to monitor and evaluate the promotion of gender equality shall be established in school, involving all relevant stakeholders
- Synergies among partners should be reinforced to achieve higher impact and sustainable results
- Sustaining perception changes requires longer implementation duration to reach reluctant parents and male students
- Implementation of such a project shall be aligned with school year to enable the measurement of effects on learning outcomes through assessments.