Respecting the Rights and Responding to the Needs of Adolescent Girls in Niger

In cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Zonta International began supporting the Niger project in the 2014-2016 Biennium. This project is part of a five-year global initiative in which 25,000 girls will be reached over two years, with 400,000 members of their community benefiting from increased awareness.

GOALS

• Reduce early marriage and early pregnancy in a critical mass of communities and departments in four regions of Niger
• Adolescents will:
  o Develop health, social, and economic assets
  o Know their rights and be in a stronger position to defend them
  o Be safer and have a measure of protection against violence

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The program is designed to provide skills, health knowledge, and economic and social empowerment to teenage girls, as well as creating a favorable local and national environment for girls to exercise their rights, specifically by:

• Improving adolescent girls' health
• Providing education for adolescent girls
• Protecting adolescent girls against teenage violence and creating safe spaces for girls within their communities
• Encouraging leadership of adolescent girls, providing them access to mentors and women leaders, while giving them the opportunity to build social networks that integrate them in their communities, and encourage their participation as citizens
• Use the data collected for decision-making and advocacy for adolescent girls and to guide investment decisions in regions and communities with the highest concentrations of young populations and where the socio-demographic indicators are the worst
RESULTS

• **16,000 girls** were enrolled by December 2015 and are expected to complete the program in August 2016

• **8,912 girls** have completed the program, leading to 1,129 cases of abandonment (11 percent), and have developed assets and gained knowledge

• **56 girls** said “NO” to child marriage during the program, and credited the program for giving them the skills and confidence to negotiate with their families to postpone marriage until after 18 years old.

• More than **300,000 community members**, including the girls’ families, have benefited from the program

• **153 modular sessions** carried out with a 79 percent participation rate

• Participants gained a better knowledge of sexual and reproductive health rights: **44 percent** of married adolescents use modern contraceptive methods but **more than 50 percent** of them prefer pills.

• Recruitment and training of staff undertaken: In total, **160 mentors, 160 literacy program trainers, 18 literacy training teachers, and five regional supervisors** were recruited.

• In total, **five regional workshops** were organized simultaneously throughout the country and **160 safe spaces** were created for cycle 2

• **984 community dialogue** sessions held in 2015 with **45,635 people** reached.

• Health check-up: Out of the 8,912 adolescents who completed cycle I, **5,787 (64.94 percent)** agreed to undergo the health check. In **more than 80 percent** of cases, the results of the various medical consultations are normal. There were 23 cases of adolescents testing HIV positive (<1 percent), 223 girls (4 percent) who were exposed to the hepatitis virus, 190 girls (3 percent) with traits or major syndrome of sickle cell anemia, 75 girls (1 percent) were infected with syphilis.

• Parents speak to the positive changes they have observed within their daughters as a result of the participation in the program

• Program effectively involved some traditional chiefs in bringing about awareness of the program, ownership and boosting social mobilization against child marriages and pregnancies

• Project monitoring: To measure the impact of this program, which included a pilot phase from August 2013 to April 2014, and cycle I, which ran from September 2014 to June 2015, it was decided to conduct an impact assessment study in two phases, a baseline study and an end-line study. Major conclusions from the end-line study include:
  - Adolescent girls in the program showed their ability to stand up for their rights and speak out for their choice when it comes to marriage
  - The program has helped to strengthen the social capital of the girls involved
  - The program has contributed to strengthening the confidence of adolescent girls while decreasing shyness, weakness and vulnerability, and increasing the proportion of adolescents who consider themselves able to resist peer pressure
  - The adolescent safety framework has been strengthened as the number of adolescents who feel safe walking in their neighborhood during the day and those who feel they have a secure place in their neighborhood has significantly increased
  - Improved level of knowledge about the risks of teenage pregnancy
  - Significant increase in the level of knowledge of modern methods of contraception, a sharp rise in the proportion of teens aware that methods of contraception may cause infertility or malformations in newborns
  - Adolescent girls’ knowledge on FGM and its consequences has increased considerably
  - Increased knowledge about symptoms of sexually transmitted infections, the importance of getting tested for HIV and HIV testing places for young people
  - Improved attendance at health centers as girls take precautions in hygienic matters such as preventing breast cancer and managing menstrual cycles
  - Girls gained passion to create financial independence and set short-term and long-term financial goals
  - Increased awareness of gender issues and gender-based violence and a desire to have access to information regarding family planning, pregnancy and child birth before deciding to marry

NEXT STEPS

• Recruit and train mentors for girls and facilitators of community dialogue in new program sites

• Create a safe space for girls in program communities

• Organize weekly sessions of girls with thematic modules on leadership, life skills, health and hygiene, violence; literacy training to girls; monthly community dialogue; health checkup to participating program

• Put in place a strong mechanism and detailed tools to collect monitoring data, and develop an impact evaluation plan