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.

GOAL

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

PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Program interventions are planned at three levels with the following objectives:

Adolescent Level
Adolescent girls are healthy, educated and reinforced with essential life skills, knowledge and resources, allowing them to defend their rights, reduce vulnerability, and participate in the socioeconomical development of their communities.

Community Level
Traditional leaders, religious leaders, parents and others who have power are involved in positive change in social norms in their community, and actively promote later marriages and pregnancies.

National Level
The existing laws on marriage age (currently 14 for girls) are revised and enforced, and the multidimensional needs of adolescents are addressed in national policies and programs.
PILOT PHASE RESULTS
After the pilot phase assessment workshop in June 2014, preparations for Cycle One Scale-up began. It was necessary to recruit adolescent girls and identify safe spaces. Regional workshops were then organized for mentors, trainers and community facilitators and used as a tool to recruit program staff. The following results were achieved:

Regional workshops and recruitment
• 5 workshops were held across the country to share the results of the pilot phase with the participants and present how the first year of scaling-up will be implemented;
• 127 safe places selected;
• 122 mentors and 21 community facilitators recruited.

Trainings
• 15 trainers and 5 regional supervisors trained;
• Mentors’ guide and community facilitator guide finalized;
• Reporting tools and recruitment techniques finalized;
• 12 trainers and 127 facilitators received literacy training.

Recruitment of adolescents
• More than 10,000 adolescent girls in 7 of 8 regions of the country recruited;
• 127 safe places established.

STUDY RESULTS
A post-cycle survey found:
• A high proportion of married adolescents are an average age of 14;
• The measurement of all indicators that contribute to the confidence of adolescents shows heavy dependence on parents and husbands. Men decide for them;
• Adolescents and their communities justify early marriage for social protection, social honor or religious reasons;
• Findings reveal that as adolescents age, they tend to stand up for their beliefs and voice their opinions about marriage;
• The vast majority of adolescents are not gainfully employed. Opportunities decrease with age and marriage for the minority of adolescents who work.

ACTIVITIES
The following activities are underway and will continue until end of July:
• Provide literacy and numeracy training, including financial literacy, in a safe place.
• Give girls assets, such as identification documents, that are important prerequisites for citizenship and leadership.
• Use data to guide decisions on investing in regions and communities with the highest concentrations of the youngest populations at the greatest risk of poor outcomes as indicated by the latest Demographic and Health Survey and the 2012 Census.
• Continue community dialogue on the rights of adolescent girls, their value to communities, and the dangers and losses associated with denying girls their rights.
• Continue rigorous monitoring and processing evaluation to document successes and challenges in the implementation.
• Complete an endline study to collect data on girls recruited to the program and measure the added value and impact of the initiative.
• Begin year two project activities in August 2015, which will reach 16,000-20,000 girls.
• Create a multimedia package highlighting the adolescent girls who say “NO” to early marriage.

SITE VISIT
After a visit to program sites in Mirriah and Magaria and a study tour of UNFPA Headquarters and Population Council, the following action items emerged:
• Prepare girls to live independently, including access to a savings account;
• Establish a married girls club to create a bond and social network between the girls;
• Improve the program content;
• Diversify implementing partners with a regional distribution.