

NIGER: ACCELERATING THE MDGS IN 48 VULNERABLE MUNICIPALITIES¹

United Nations Development Programme
United Nations Capital Development Fund

POVERTY REDUCTION AND MDG ACHIEVEMENT



NIGER



Background

Niger is a landlocked country with an estimated population of 14.7 million (2009) growing at an annual rate of 3.3%. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 167th of 169 countries in the 2010 Human Development Index (HDI). The population living below the poverty line declined from 63% in 1993 to 59.5% in 2008. Niger's economy is based largely on subsistence crops, livestock, as well as uranium deposits. GDP growth reached 9.3% in 2008-2009 due to a good harvest, but turned negative (-1.2%) in 2009-2010. The haphazard rainfall patterns pose high volatility on agricultural outputs, and led to a food crisis in 2010, severely impacting 7.1 million people, especially women and children. According to the preliminary results of a national survey, 47.7% of the population is estimated to be severely or moderately food insecure. Security and socio-political vulnerability pose additional challenges to progress in the MDGs.

Under current trends, only the targets related to child mortality and HIV/AIDS prevalence may be achieved by 2015. Limited social services and lack of basic infrastructure pose chronic obstacles to improving productivity and livelihoods in rural areas. Although the primary education enrolment rate increased from 62.6% in 2008 to 67.8% in 2009, high regional disparities persist. The child mortality rate declined on average by 6.4% per year, reaching 198 per 1,000 in 2006. Despite significant improvements in the rate of prenatal care, maternal mortality remains high at 648 per 100,000 births. As of 2005, 68.7% of the population had access to safe drinking water (96.7% in urban and 60.3% in rural areas).

MDG Localization and Local Development Programmes

A number of initiatives have been under implementation to support the consolidation and strengthening of the decentralization process, while empowering local authorities and communities. A National Agency for financing municipalities Agence Nationale de Financement des Collectivités Territoriales (ANFICT) was created in June 2008. Additionally, the guide for elaborating Communal Development Plans has been reviewed with a particular focus on improving monitoring and evaluation processes.

A pilot MDG localization programme was implemented in Mayahi, Tahoua 1, Niamey 5 and Damagaram Takaya through the UNDP-SNV Partnership. The main objective of the programme was to strengthen local stakeholders' capacities for MDG-based planning, monitoring and evaluation, as part of the operationalization of the national Poverty Reduction Strategy. The programme engages civil society organizations in monitoring, evaluation and budget tracking at regional, departmental and local levels, as well as encourages the private sector participation in employment creation (especially for women) through the municipal strategies for poverty reduction.

The pilot experience in the four municipalities yielded promising results. The new MDG-based Communal Development Plans have integrated gender and human rights approaches. Based on public consultations, municipalities have raised their allocations for MDG expenditures up to 40% of their total budgets, which resulted in

increased investments in health and education facilities, sanitation infrastructure, and employment projects for women. The programme also improved public access to reliable and updated information on the activities and programmes funded by the local governments, improving local governance through enhancing transparency and accountability.

More recently, Niger applied the MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) to address main bottlenecks that prevent progress in food security. The comprehensive Action Plan includes increased access to inputs and equipment, agricultural research and improvement of the access and quality of food in rural and suburban areas. Local governments together with communities can manage the following interventions: rural schools for basic extension services, the implementation and rehabilitation of wells and boreholes with pumps for irrigation, and the application of appropriate technologies for storage, preservation and processing of agricultural products.

Opportunities for Scaling Up

Building on the results and lessons learned from the UNDP-SNV pilot experience, the proposed scaling up initiative aims at accelerating MDG progress in 48 vulnerable municipalities by addressing the MDG



THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN ACHIEVING THE MDGs:

The country, which has engaged in the decentralization process for the last two decades, is currently divided into eight regions, 36 departments and 266 municipalities (214 rural and 52 urban). The municipal elections of 2004, coupled with transfer of the decision-making power to Local Governments, as well as the establishment of the Local Authorities High Council (HCCT) have been key milestones in the decentralization process. Given the transfer of power in the areas of agriculture, infrastructure, social development and health, municipalities have the potential to operationalize poverty reduction strategies and implement actions towards achievement of the MDGs.

As of 2010, 197 municipalities had prepared Communal Development Plans (CDPs). However, institutional, human and technical capacities at the local level to effectively plan, implement, monitor and evaluate development projects remain limited. Very low tax revenues and insufficient financial support from the central government are also impeding local developments' efforts on poverty reduction.

needs of more than three million people. Specifically, the proposed initiative will support targeted municipalities in the implementation of a set of socially prioritized projects for most disadvantaged groups.

The selection of municipalities will be based on income poverty and food insecurity profiles evidenced by national surveys. Technical and financial support by development partners and the Government will be extended in light of the priorities set forth in the participatory MDG-based Communal Development Plans approved by the local councils. As identified in the country's MAF Action Plan, food security and nutrition are the areas that may yield the highest impact across MDGs, and thus, the scaling up opportunities in Niger will focus on the proven interventions, especially in domestic agricultural research and development, and sustainable agricultural practices through extension services.

As in the pilot phase, MDG-based planning, budgeting and implementation capacities of local governments and civil society organizations will be assessed and strengthened. Continued emphasis will be placed on communities' involvement in monitoring and evaluation systems, while deepening partnerships with the private sector.

The scaling up initiative also involves the establishment of local investment funds in the targeted municipalities as a mechanism to institutionalize MDG focused investments. The funds would be allocated for productive and social projects to be selected by local councils, in line with the priorities set in the Communal Development Plans and MAF Action Plan. Each municipality will be responsible for managing the funds, setting up mechanisms for community involvement in the audit and monitoring in order to ensure sound management and accountability.

Implementing partners include UNDP, UNCDF, SNV, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the Ministry of Urban Development and Territorial Planning and the National Statistical Institute.

1 The ultimate selection of the 48 municipalities will be based on the prioritization of the most vulnerable and food insecure municipalities jointly identified by UNDP and the Government of Niger.