



1. Project Data

Project ID P132405	Project Name NE-Support to Quality Education Project	
Country Niger	Practice Area(Lead) Education	
L/C/TF Number(s) TF-16565	Closing Date (Original) 30-Sep-2018	Total Project Cost (USD) 80,046,124.97
Bank Approval Date 07-Jul-2014	Closing Date (Actual) 30-Jun-2019	
	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	84,200,000.00	84,200,000.00
Revised Commitment	84,200,000.00	80,046,124.97
Actual	80,046,124.97	80,046,124.97

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The project development objective (PDO) as stated in the Global Partnership for Education Fund Grant Agreement, dated July 19, 2014 (p. 6), was **to improve access to schooling, retention of students in school, and the quality of the teaching and learning environment at the basic education level in the Recipient's territory**. The PDO stated in the Project Appraisal Document (PAD), dated July 2, 2014, was identical. It remained unchanged throughout the life of the project.



b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

1. Extending Equitable Access to Schooling and Retention of Students in School (original cost of \$55.0 million, actual cost of \$45.0 million):

- **Infrastructure:** construction and equipment of about 1,245 primary school classrooms and 330 lower secondary school classrooms to extend basic education to about 75,000 additional children in rural, low enrollment areas;
- **Girls' access:** information campaigns, training of mothers of young and adolescent girls in functional and financial literacy; tutoring programs for poor performers and ceremonies and rewards to good performers; and
- **School feeding and health:** feeding programs; school health and hygiene activities, including deworming; training for teachers and administrators.

2. Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning (original cost of \$23.0 million, actual cost of \$25.5 million):

- **Pedagogical inputs:** provision of teaching and learning materials and support for a curriculum and textbook review for primary education;
- **Teacher training:** more and better teacher preservice and in-service training to increase availability of trained contractual teachers and improve all teachers' skills and practices; and
- **Learning outcomes:** development of better tools for the measurement and improvement of learning outcomes, especially literacy at the primary level.

3. Strengthening Management Capacity (original cost of \$18.0 million, actual cost of \$16.1 million):

- **Basic education ministries:** technical assistance; professional development for relevant MEP (Ministry of Primary Education) personnel; human resource management and ministry development strategy;
- **Education system management:** sector planning and management, school planning and management, school grants, information systems and data; and
- **Project management and coordination.**

Contingencies (\$4.0 million).

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

The total estimated cost of the project at appraisal was \$100 million. It was to be financed by a pooled fund (*fonds commun*) made up of an \$82.2 million grant from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Fund, administered by the World Bank, and a grant of approximately \$15.8 million (up to a maximum of EUR 12



million) from the French Development Agency (AFD). There was scope for expansion of activities in the event of additional available funding for the pool. The actual project cost was 86.6 million (ICR p. 65), or 87 percent of the original estimate, of which \$80 million was financed by the GPE and \$6.6 million was financed by other contributors to the pool fund: AFD, and the Swiss Cooperation, which committed 2.65 billion FCFA (about \$4.5 million equivalent) to the pool fund as of January 1, 2017 (Restructuring Paper). There was no explanation in the ICR of the substantial difference between the commitments of the French and the Swiss (the equivalent of about \$20 million) and their actual combined contribution of \$6.6 million, nor is there a breakdown of the relative contributions of each bilateral to that \$6.6 million of actual financing. No Borrower contribution was planned or provided.

The project was restructured on February 12, 2018. This involved a nine-month extension of the closing date, from September 30, 2018 to June 30, 2019, to allow more time to: (i) complete the construction program of primary and secondary schools; (ii) extend the provision of grants to girls in lower secondary school for an additional year so they could complete the basic education cycle in June 2019; (iii) support the experimentation of the revised Grade 2 curriculum during the 2017-18 school year and its extension to the following year; and (iv) develop a national system for large-scale standardized student assessments. Restructuring also involved the reallocation of \$9.5 million (11 percent of the initial grant) from the construction component (due to overestimated costs and simplified construction management) to activities supporting school feeding and student health, the quality of teaching and learning, ministry capacity building, and project management. The results framework was not changed, except to reflect the extended closing date.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

The PDO was highly relevant to country conditions, including: a lack of school infrastructure and consequent use of straw hut (*paillette*) classrooms by many students; a substantial number of out-of-school children, especially adolescent girls; poor student performance; limited access of teachers, especially contractual staff, to in-service training; low quality pre-service training; and weak ministerial capacity. The PDO was aligned with the government's strategic agenda, as outlined in its education sector plan for 2014-24 (emphasizing coverage of under-served, rural areas, quality of teaching and learning, equity in access, and school and sector management). The PDO is also consistent with the Bank's current Country Partnership Framework (CPF) (FY18-22), which prioritizes attention to the role of women and girls, and addressing near-term risks of conflict and fragility. Its three focus areas are: (i) increased rural productivity and incomes; (ii) improved human capital and social protection; and (iii) better governance for jobs, service delivery, and growth. The CPF focuses on regions with the highest levels of poverty and fragility: Tillabery and Diffa, home to over 300,000 displaced persons and vulnerable to regional conflicts; and Maradi and Zinder, where many of Niger's poor live.

Rating

Substantial



4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Improve access to schooling at the basic education level

Rationale

Activities financed by the project were designed to reinforce each other. Construction of classrooms, including latrines, along with school feeding and school health and hygiene interventions, were envisioned to improve access to schooling, retention of students in schools and an improved learning environment. Support for girls' education, including reduced cost of schooling for girls and awareness-raising regarding the benefits of educating girls, were intended to improve both access by and retention of girl students. Pedagogical inputs included review of textbooks/curriculum and the design and distribution of new textbooks. These, along with improved student assessment (made possible by development of assessment tools) were envisioned to lead to improved retention and quality. Teacher training was envisioned to contribute to all three objectives: improved access, retention, and quality of teaching and learning. Likewise, capacity enhancement for ministries and the decentralized level were also envisioned to contribute to the achievement of all three objectives.

Outputs that contributed to outcomes:

- MEP built 1,187 primary level classrooms, achieving 95 percent of the target of 1,245. The ERA (alternative rural schools) component experienced significant implementation challenges linked to Niger's difficult geography, with some very remote locations and insecurity in several areas, which culminated in the abandonment of 58 classrooms. The classrooms that were built made it possible to improve learning conditions for nearly 60,000 students (about 50 pupils per classroom built). There were shortcomings in efforts to render classrooms accessible to disabled students (ICR p. 21).
- The project built and equipped 330 classrooms at the lower secondary level, including corresponding latrines, meeting the target of 330.

Outcomes:

- Total enrollment in primary education rose from a baseline of 2,050,656 to 2,599,390, exceeding the target of 2,400,000.
- The primary education gender parity index in areas targeted by the project increased from a baseline of 0 in April 2014 to 0.03 (0.028 rounded up to 0.03) in June 2019, achieving the project target of 0.03.
- The lower secondary education gender parity index in areas targeted by the project increased from a baseline of 0 in April 2014 to 0.09 in June 2019, achieving the project target of 0.09.
- There were 3,033,915 direct project beneficiaries, but it is not clear who is counted in this group. The ICR indicated that, at appraisal, direct beneficiaries were defined as people or groups who directly derived benefits from the project, including primary and lower secondary school pupils and teachers, staff from MEP and MES (Ministry of Secondary Education) at the central and decentralized levels, as well as parents. But elsewhere in the ICR (p. 11, paragraph 14), the target/beneficiaries were defined more narrowly, i.e., 2.1 million students. IEG's follow-up interview of the Bank's team (TTL, ICR



author, and technical team member) requested a breakdown of the 3 million beneficiaries ultimately reached: primary students, secondary students, teachers, ministry staff. This would have permitted a more accurate assessment of beneficiary students reached. The team promised to consult end-of-project documentation and provide additional detail to IEG, if this information was indeed available. The team did not get back to IEG on this.

- The share of all beneficiaries who are female was 45.4 percent, not achieving the target of 47 percent and barely moving from the baseline of 45 percent. IEG's follow-up interview with the Bank's team requested clarification of the numerator and denominator for this indicator, if it can be found in ICR documentation, but thus far no additional information has been provided.

Program data suggest that functional literacy increased for women participating in activities to promote girls' education. Activities sought to raise women's awareness of the importance of educating girls, while also building their income-generating skills to reduce the need to keep daughters working at home.

Rating

Substantial

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

Improve retention of students at the basic education level

Rationale

As envisioned in the project's theory of change (described in more detail above, under the Rationale for Objective 1), activities to promote and incite improved retention in school included the availability of latrines, school feeding and health programs, campaigns and other activities to promote girls' education, and scholarships and tutoring for selected girls in lower-secondary schools to support their retention.

- Information campaigns to improve hygiene were conducted with school management committees, whose involvement is expected to ensure maintenance of school latrines built under the project.
- A total of 351,978 girls, boys, parents, and teachers were reached with activities promoting girls' education, of which 55 percent were female. (Pages 59 and 22 of the ICR stated that 351,978 girls benefited from the project. The project team indicated that they would look into this apparent discrepancy and report back to IEG any clarifications they could find. The team did not get back to IEG.) Of these girl beneficiaries, 322,176 were reached with activities for primary schools and 29,802 for secondary schools. This achievement exceeded the target of reaching 100,000 girls (ICR p. 22) by a factor of more than three.
- Activities to promote girls' education, including the teaching of functional literacy and income-generating skills to mothers, operated in 199 centers (out of a target of 200) in 32 municipalities in Priority Intervention Zones, spread over six regions.
- A total of 700 girls in 39 lower secondary schools received scholarships.

Outcomes:



- The primary completion rate increased from a baseline of 54.6 in April 2014 to 60 percent (Niger Country Status Report), slightly exceeding the target of 58.6 percent. (MEP's estimate at project completion is 64.4 percent.) The World Development Indicators showed a gain of between 2.7 to 3.1 percentage points per year depending on the period (2003-13 or 2004-14).

Among the 700 girls who received scholarships at the lower secondary level, 479 (or 68 percent) were still enrolled by the end of the project (after four years), well above the one-fifth retention rate for girls not receiving the scholarships in the same schools.

Outputs that contributed to outcomes:

- A total of 99,577 students, of whom 48,237 (48 percent) were girls, benefited from school lunches, through school feeding programs (ministry data), exceeding the target of 90,000. The program involved 559 schools and achieved these results despite starting one year late (in 2016 instead of 2015).

Rating

Substantial

OBJECTIVE 3

Objective

Improve the quality of the teaching and learning environment at the basic education level

Rationale

As envisioned in the project's theory of change (described in more detail above, under the Rationale for Objective 1), the project financed pedagogical inputs (textbooks and teachers guides in national languages), teacher training, and investments in student assessments to better measure learning, all with a view to supporting improvements in the quality of the teaching and learning environment, especially with regard to literacy at the primary level.

Outputs that contributed to outcomes:

As part of the curriculum review, curricula were revised and new materials were developed in accordance with curriculum guidelines. The programs were adapted into six national languages, and manuals, guides, and charts were produced accordingly.

- A total of 8,160 contract teachers were trained under the project, of which 5,500 were for primary school and 2,660 for lower secondary school. This was more than double the target of 3,500, of which 2,500 were for primary school and 1,500 for lower secondary. (IEG notes that target subtotals add up to 4,000, not 3,500.)
- With project support, MEP trained 20,350 teachers in grades 1-3, or 84 percent of all grades 1-3 teachers, exceeding the target of 75 percent.
- A total of 6,145 teacher trainers, inspectors, and pedagogical advisors were trained under the project, exceeding the target of 800 by a factor greater than seven.



- The project financed the construction of three teacher-training colleges and provided training to 1,674 teachers, including 929 women.
- A national assessment of reading fluency for grades 2 and 3 was conducted and the results were shared widely, as planned.
- The project financed Niger's participation in the regional mathematics and science initiative (Math and Science for Sub-Saharan Africa Initiative), for which it had been competitively selected as one of the regional nodes.

Outcomes:

- The textbooks and teacher guides, developed for early grades in six national languages, were a product of the completed curriculum review for the first cycle of primary school. This pedagogical material was distributed on a pilot basis for grades 1 and 2 to about 500 primary schools. These tools and materials were focused on improving reading in the early grades and were adopted by MEP and extended to a total of 5000 schools before project closing.
- The ICR admits that the effect of substantial teacher training provided under the project was not fully assessed (ICR p. 31). Nevertheless, it did document a significant outcome. At MEP's initiative, all contractual teachers were tested on their subject knowledge; and contracts for those performing below a (very low) minimum threshold were not renewed. Those testing at low levels, but above the required minimum threshold, were provided remedial education. Four in five contractual teachers placed in this remedial education program passed the exam at the end of the training provided under the project, suggesting stronger mastery of the material they need to teach (ICR p. 24).
- The basic elements of a primary-level learning assessment system have been put into place. The system is capable of generating data that could be used for education policy and practice. The MEP benefited from the support of the Conference of Ministers of Education of States and Governments of La Francophonie/Education Systems Analysis Program for the establishment of the National Evaluation System (NES) in 2018, including a ministerial order setting up the NES, two capacity building workshops for NES members, and continued strengthening of NES at regional levels.
- A national student assessment for grades 2 and 3 was conducted and financed under the project. At the time of ICR preparation (2019), the government had undertaken data collection for a new assessment with support from the Conference of Ministers of Education of States and Governments of La Francophonie/Education Systems Analysis Program. However, the student assessment system remains relatively weak, and additional efforts are needed to ensure more widespread use of data for policy formulation and project design.
- Results from the national assessment of student performance conducted under the project revealed that performance in mathematics in the schools that participated in the curriculum reform and piloted pedagogical materials developed under the project was higher than for students in non-pilot schools. But those same schools had lower performance on reading, compared with other schools, even though pedagogical materials in local languages focused on improving reading in the early grades. This is at least partially attributable to implementation issues, including: delays in delivery of materials to the schools (the majority of schools receiving the textbooks more than six months after the start of the school year); additional delays (on average about 50 days) to distribute the textbooks to students; and feedback from schools that quantities were insufficient to meet needs (ICR p. 30). Moreover, some teachers did not speak the local language of the communities they were serving, and there was an adjustment period as teachers and students switched from old to new materials (follow-up interview with task team). This may mean that the timing of the assessment was premature. Overall, school principals were satisfied with the quality of the textbooks they received.



- While still in need of further improvement, enhanced capacity for assessing student learning built under this project, combined with the candor and transparency of the early results of the reading materials pilot, indicate that national assessment capacity is able to provide data for tracking performance and outcomes of investments and for informing the need to review and revise approaches and strategies for improved teaching and learning.
- While the project allocated substantial resources to the reform under the project, significant additional resources are needed to complete the reform, assess its effectiveness, and implement its scale-up.

Strengthened Management Capacity:

While not specifically included in the PDO, this intermediate outcome, as reflected in the theory of change, was critical to supporting, overseeing, and sustaining gains achieved under the project's objectives.

- MEP and MES each developed human resources management strategies that have been validated by government, as planned. Support was provided to human resources departments of both ministries for improved coordination of all activities, including for teacher management and training.
- An institutional review of MES was undertaken and subsequently validated in a workshop of stakeholders, held in April 2018. Moreover, follow-up interviews with the Bank's team indicate that the findings of the institutional review are being used to guide further institutional strengthening.
- Four annual sector reviews were carried out during implementation, as planned, in keeping with a Partnership Framework between the government and development partners, validated and signed on July 19, 2013.
- Ministry staff benefited from a large number of trainings.
- A total of 6,966 school management committees were strengthened under the project. Of these, 6,584 were at the primary level, more than triple the target value of 2,000, and 382 at the lower secondary level, less than half of the target of 800. Strengthening involved the provision of school grants to cover expenditures approved by the committees and training of these committees to manage and oversee the use of these grants. There is scope for streamlining disbursement and assessing the impact of these much-needed grants on beneficiaries.

About 1.5 years into the project, a team of four international experts supported project coordination and implementation in both ministries and helped to build capacity in relevant disciplines and enable the transition from original (contracting out) arrangements to contracting-in arrangements, which reduced delays and costs. The new arrangement also helped build in-house capacity.

Rating
Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale



Achievement of Objective 1 is substantial. Primary school enrollment exceeded targets by almost 200,000 students and gender parity improved. However, there was a shortfall in the number of primary classrooms built. Achievement of Objective 2 is substantial. Primary completion rate slightly exceeded targets, and girls in lower secondary schools receiving scholarships and other supports had retention rates well above rates for girls in the same schools who did not receive those supports. Achievement of Objective 3 is rated substantial. Pedagogical material in local languages was developed and distributed to the schools, contractual teachers trained under the project are reported to have better mastery of the subjects they are teaching, and assessment capacity has been strengthened culminating in more concrete and actionable information on student performance. Overall achievement is rated substantial. The ICR provided reasonable evidence that the activities and outputs supported by the project were linked to or supported the outcomes achieved. Rather than support different projects/interventions, three sources of financing (GPE Grant administered by the Bank, AFD, and Swiss Cooperation) were pooled into this single project, whose results chain plausibly culminated in the above-cited outcomes.

Overall Efficacy Rating

Substantial

5. Efficiency

The ICR assessed economic, implementation, and resource use efficiency in detail, devoting ten pages in an Annex (ICR Annex 4).

Economic Efficiency. The ICR reviewed the assumptions, estimates, and results in a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) conducted at the time of appraisal and considered them to be reasonable. It simulated potential benefits under scenarios considering both gains in educational attainment (completion rates) and gains in learning, both of which would result in higher earnings in adulthood. The focus was on Component 1, especially the construction and equipment of classrooms. The net present value (NPV) of the different scenarios ranged from \$46.8 million to \$241.4 million and the internal rate of return (IRR) ranged from 11 to 12 percent, showing a consistent, positive payoff from investments across all scenarios.

The ICR did not undertake a new CBA, but it did develop a range of estimates, based on actual data, of the benefits from education and the cost-effectiveness of school construction and other project investments. The analysis corroborated the PAD's assessment that many of the supported activities would generate a high NPV and substantial IRRs. National data show that investments in basic education generate substantial earnings gains in adulthood and improvements in household wealth and well-being through higher levels of educational attainment for beneficiaries. The ICR assessed several activities as being cost-effective. Given international experience, the cost of classroom construction was fairly reasonable for the Niger context. The initial cost of textbooks was high, but a shift to international procurement culminated in much lower unit costs. The cost of scholarships for girls in lower secondary education was found to be low relative to the benefits of girls' completion rates. The cost-effectiveness of teacher training was less clear, as much of it was residential.

Implementation efficiency and resource use. Not all of the funds available under the project were used. This was due to: lower-than-estimated construction costs and simplified management costs; a change in the exchange rate that led to more resources for the project than anticipated; and a substantial contribution to the



pool made by the Swiss Cooperation around the project's mid-point, unanticipated at the time of design. There were initial delays in a number of the project activities, including the construction program. Construction activities experienced further delays due to the challenges of Niger's geographic terrain and distances, and to growing insecurity at some of the sites. Delays were encountered in delivering manuals. Some students in second grade had to repeat a full year of materials taught in first grade because manuals in national languages did not arrive on time (ICR p. 36). Ninety-five percent of the GPE fund was disbursed. Preparation work for an extension of the project closing date determined that completion of the construction program would require an additional 12 months. However, the government and its education partners insisted on a nine-month extension to avoid the complication of too many pooled funds. This curtailed timeframe ultimately caused a shortfall in reaching the target for classrooms built. Substantial turnover in both ministries, especially MEP, may have affected consistency in implementation and ability to achieve synergies across activities.

Efficiency Rating

Modest

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

The PDO was highly relevant to country conditions and substantially relevant to the government's priorities and strategies, as well as to those of the Bank, both country- and sector-specific. The objectives of improved access to schooling, improved retention, and improved quality of the teaching and learning environment were all substantially achieved. Ninety-five percent of the classroom construction program was completed, enrollment exceeded the target, and gender parity targets were achieved. The target for the primary completion rate was achieved, and girls receiving scholarships stayed in secondary school longer than girls not receiving scholarships. Pedagogical materials for early grade reading in six local languages were developed and provided to schools. Training of contractual teachers improved their mastery of subjects taught. A learning assessment system at the primary level, developed with project support, revealed that reading performance in schools piloting new learning materials was lower than in non-pilot schools. This assessment may have been premature in light of the very late availability of this material to teachers and students. While this result is disappointing, it is an indicator of improved focus on learning and its measurement. It also suggests candor in reporting. Efficiency is rated modest mostly because of delays and difficulties during implementation. Nevertheless, the project's investments in primary and lower secondary education and their particular focus on girls' education and neglected, disenfranchised communities were found to be cost-effective. In sum, the project experienced



moderate shortcomings in preparation and implementation, consistent with in an overall outcome rating of Moderately Satisfactory.

a. Outcome Rating
Moderately Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The government's commitment to the education sector is strong, as reflected in a high share of the budget allocated to the sector. At the time of the ICR, macroeconomic projections for Niger are positive, with higher expected growth rates in the coming years, especially in light of increasing oil production. World Bank-IMF analysis rates debt distress as moderate, and Niger is expected to maintain WAEMU convergence criterion (fiscal deficit as a share of GDP) from 2020 onwards. Donors are also committed to the education sector, which bodes well for sustainability of project-supported activities and initiatives. The next project funded by GPE in the amount of 77.3 million euros will be led by AFD. An IDA operation of up to \$100 million is under preparation, focusing on quality improvements; multigrade classrooms to remedy school discontinuity; and strengthening the evidence base and developing an alternative mode of quality education for out-of-school children, who make up half of all children between 7 and 12 years of age. Together, the commitment and financing of government and donors should substantially lower financial risk to development outcomes.

On the other hand, Niger's security situation has become more challenging in recent years and poses a critical risk to development outcomes. The regions of Diffa, Tahoua, and Tillabery are particularly affected, with attacks by armed groups and extremists, as well as inter-ethnic violence resulting in displacement of populations. More than 100 schools have been closed due to terrorist threats. Since October 2018, 30 schools were closed in Diffa due to insecurity, preventing 114,300 children from attending school. Fifty-one schools in Tillabery have suspended their activities due to attacks targeting security forces and the civilian population along the border with Burkina Faso. These school closures are likely to affect educational attainment and achievement in substantial parts of the country.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

The project design was of good quality. The results chain was well constructed, including activities and outputs that were logically linked to the PDO. Moreover, the PDO was pitched to the country's most salient needs as well as to the government's priorities and strategies for education, also reflected in the Bank's sector strategy, which embraces a strong focus on learning. The process of project design was consultative, involving key education stakeholders and development partners, of which two ultimately co-financed the project. It was also grounded in analysis carried out by the Bank, and in the compilation of lessons learned from previous World Bank support to Niger as well as relevant lessons from Bank experience in other countries. However, there were weaknesses in M&E design (see Section 9).



Due attention was paid to implementation arrangements and the project's thrust to use existing structures both to build capacity and ownership. This was supported through the incorporation of institutional strengthening activities into the project design. There was a strong evidence base for supporting early learning in the language spoken at home (which is shown to lead to better learning outcomes). However, the cost and complexity of the curriculum reform supported by the project, as well as the capacity required to implement it, were underestimated, especially given the multiple languages spoken in Niger. A reassessment of the reform to review progress and assess next steps was planned after the project's closing.

Quality-at-Entry Rating Moderately Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

The project was adequately supervised and monitored, despite a limited supervision budget. This was thanks to the presence of a senior education specialist based in the country. Supervision missions were regular and focused on problem identification and resolution. The missions also served as a platform for government and donors to discuss project progress and sector issues more broadly. ISRs and aides-memoire were clear, candid, and action-oriented and tracked progress towards results as well as obstacles. This permitted the team to reallocate resources during the course of implementation based on progress, challenges, actual costs, and evolving needs. The PDOs remained relevant throughout, and there was no change in the results framework.

Over and above the regular responsibilities of project supervision and oversight, this particular project placed additional demands on the Bank's team, associated with the continued coordination, collaboration, and dialogue with other donors (especially, but not limited to the two project cofinanciers), and in its capacity as the lead partner overseeing this project on behalf of all three financiers. Collaboration between the Bank and AFD was further intensified during the last nine months of the project to track progress and ensure that targets would indeed be met. All of this was done with a very modest budget, which did not account for this incremental responsibility.

More attention could have been given to assessing systematically the impact of activities implemented under Components 2 and 3. This being said, the Bank was constrained, as some of the M&E activities suggested by the Bank's team were not approved by the government.

Quality of Supervision Rating Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating Moderately Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization



a. M&E Design

M&E design was appropriately built around the project's results chain, with intermediate and PDO-level indicators that traced the project outputs and outcomes, for the most part. There were some weaknesses and gaps in the choice of indicators. Specifically, the design did not provide for the adequate tracking of sector and school capacity building efforts and their intermediate outcomes (e.g., the effects on sector management and efficiency of the human resource management strategy; and the effects on school financing, resource allocation, and efficiency of strengthened school management committees, among others). Another shortcoming was the absence of indicators of the effectiveness (or intermediate outcomes) of training of teachers and other critical actors and inspectors (e.g., did inspectors produce more constructive, higher-quality reporting, including monitoring/follow-up of interventions?). Indicators were chosen to rely on administrative data, given long time gaps between, and marginal quality of, household surveys. While this was a pragmatic choice, lack of robust household survey data undermined the rigor with which project impact could be assessed. The indicator tracking whether annual sector reviews were undertaken might have been more qualitative in nature, including: tracking of the quality of documents and presentations, quality of the M&E work undertaken, conclusions and plans emanating from the meetings, attendance, and policy decisions, among other things.

The ICR noted that under the Support to Contracting Authority arrangement, introduced 1.5 years into the project, an M&E specialist was hired to help generate bi-annual reports with detailed information based on administrative data on progress made towards PDO-level and intermediate results indicator targets. However, nothing was said about M&E activities and capacity at the central, regional, district, and school levels.

Some targets (primary completion rates) were set on the basis of projected increases that were lower than actual increases achieved during the years leading up to the project. These conservative targets reflected the team's consideration that historical trends may be more difficult to maintain, given Niger's increasingly fragile context.

b. M&E Implementation

Bi-annual reports provided detailed and reliable data on PDO-level and intermediate indicators. However, adequate metrics for measuring benefits from some activities were not always available. Nevertheless, the project's M&E system was sufficiently sound to track its main outcomes and outputs. The ICR reported that schools receiving grants had to carry out self-evaluations and school development plans on a regular basis, but their results and use for improving performance was not mentioned.

Additional data collection activities were undertaken that proved useful for assessing implementation. The project undertook a survey to assess the distribution and use of new textbooks and teaching guides developed under the curriculum reform, under which topics in the early grades would be taught in national languages. Data were collected in 458 primary schools in all regions. The survey collected and analyzed data to assess whether the types and quantities received by the schools were sufficient, actually given to students, and within what timeframes. The survey also collected feedback from principals about the project, the utility of the textbooks and teacher guides, and the adequacy of teachers to teach in local languages.



c. M&E Utilization

Data generated through project M&E was useful in tracking progress, highlighting delays and issues, and calling for additional efforts to make sure activities would be implemented and targets achieved. Observed school construction delays, captured in the M&E, precipitated actions to accelerate procurement and reduce costs.

The project funded Niger's national student assessment in primary schools. Results were disseminated at the regional level and among policy-makers, and workshops have been organized to build capacities of education staff at the central level on tools for learning assessment and on data processing and analysis. A second round of PASEC (education systems analysis) financed by the project in 2019 is expected to provide up-to-date information on student performance in grades 2 and 6 and should allow for thorough analysis related to identifying factors associated with improved student performance. Implementation of the project M&E system, the conduct and analysis of various assessments, and training provided under the project have, together, built data collection and analysis capacity at central and local levels.

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

The project was classified as Environmental Category B. Environmental Assessment (OP/BP 4.01), Physical Cultural Resources (OP/BP 4.11), and Involuntary Resettlement (OP/BP 4.12) were triggered under the project. An Environmental and Social Management Framework and a Resettlement Policy Framework were prepared and approved during preparation and disclosed on time. Regular assessments by MEP during implementation and strong Bank oversight combined to ensure strong compliance with environmental and social safeguards, rated satisfactory throughout the project.

b. Fiduciary Compliance

Procurement is rated Moderately Satisfactory in the ICR. (IEG does not rate procurement.) It was supported by the AMO (support to contracting authority), which included an experienced international procurement expert and a national procurement specialist. While the shift from the contracting out to the contracting in approach meant that a large number of contracts had to be processed, especially for school construction, this shift did accelerate and improve implementation. Bank procedures were followed, but files processing was delayed due to a shortage of experienced financial controllers and difficulties in obtaining clearances for contracts by the national authorities.



Financial management (FM) is rated Moderately Satisfactory in the ICR. (IEG does not rate financial management.) Four of the five external audits undertaken during the project were unqualified, revealing no irregularities. The qualified opinion issued in the external audit commissioned in 2016 was due to poor financial bookkeeping, addressed by the Bank and the government. Interim financial reports were generally submitted on time and of acceptable quality. FM staff were sufficiently experienced. There was an issue of unjustified advances, including CFAF 227 million transferred by the project to a microfinance company that supported school grant activities. The government's suspension of the firm's activity and close monitoring of the situation culminated in the full reimbursement of that company's contract.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

Beyond their success in keeping girls in school at the lower secondary level, scholarships for selected girls may have contributed to the strengthening of school management committees (given their role in selection of beneficiaries) and to the fight against child marriages (given the demonstrative effect that a higher proportion of girls completing their secondary education may have). In the areas targeted by this pilot program, teachers received training related to the program specifically, and on gender-sensitive approaches in general.

The creation of linguistic maps of the different languages spoken in the different regions of the country as part of the preparation of the curriculum reform was an important achievement. The atlas of national languages spoken in different areas will be beneficial for the curriculum reform, and could also potentially be used in other ways in future programs and policies related to national languages beyond the education sector.

d. Other

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	
Bank Performance	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

The following lessons are drawn from the ICR and summarized by IEG:



- **The provision of technical assistance to the Ministries through an AMO (support to contracting authority) arrangement can be effective both in ensuring project implementation and in building national capacity.** The staffing of an AMO with knowledgeable experts (including for procurement, financial management and M&E) helped ministries manage the complex tasks required, including overseeing the construction of classrooms and curriculum reform implementation, among others.
- **The financing of scholarships for girls who live far from secondary school can be a viable, cost-effective approach to improving the retention of girls in schools.** Much cheaper than building boarding schools and/or covering the cost of transportation, these scholarships finance the costs of girls staying with host families. Additional interventions (e.g., interventions to support life and social skills and remediation support) may further enhance girls' retention rates.
- **The establishment of a robust M&E system is important to enable the assessment of efficacy of investments in pedagogy and capacity building, among others.** While the project's M&E system did support the tracking of progress towards PDO achievement, some aspects of the project could not be assessed. These included the impact of school feeding, and training and capacity building provided to the ministries and teachers.
- **The factoring of a country's evolving fragility and conflict situation into a project's design and implementation can support more context-appropriate design and more accurate cost estimates.** Niger's fragility and conflict situation have deteriorated substantially over the last few years. Construction costs in low security areas will incur higher costs (as in the case for the Diffa region). A number of creative interventions may be appropriate for girls' safety and security (including technology and lodging with host families), in areas where schools may be closed due to insecurity or where girls cannot go safely to school. This calls for flexibility in project design in fragile contexts.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR was well written and sufficiently detailed, follows the guidelines, and provides good analysis based on the available evidence. Lessons were insightful and emanated from the ICR's analysis and findings. The deteriorating context of the country was appropriately reflected in the analysis and lessons, and well woven into the assessment of the project. There were a few issues of conflicting indicator definitions and values encountered by IEG in this review, but these were largely clarified or corrected during a joint interview with the TTL, the ICR author, and a technical member of the Niger education team.

a. Quality of ICR Rating

Substantial

