

NIGER
Second Rural and Social Policy Reform Grant – RSRC-2 (Grant No.H308-NIR)
Release of the Second Tranche – Full Compliance

Tranche Release Document

I. Background

1. This Tranche Release document informs the Executive Directors that the Government of Niger (Government) has made satisfactory progress overall in implementing the program (the Program) supported by the Grant as set forth in its Letter of Development Policy (the LDP), and has met the eleven prior actions for release of the second tranche.
2. On June 19, 2007 the Board approved the Second Rural and Social Reform Operation (RSRC-2) of SDR33.1 million (US\$50 million equivalent) to continue supporting the Republic of Niger in implementing its program to promote growth and achieve a sustainable reduction of poverty. The RSRC-2 is part of a series of Development Policy Lending Operations and follows the first Rural and Social Policy Reform Credit approved in June 13, 2006.
3. Within a medium-term framework, the RSRC-2 focuses on overcoming policy constraints and institutional bottlenecks in public sector management, agricultural and rural development, and human development (including demographic growth and gender issues). The specific results that the RSRC series (1 and 2) are trying to achieve are to: (i) accelerate the implementation of reforms in public expenditure management and related fiduciary systems, essential for the success of Niger's broader reform agenda; (ii) promote rural growth through implementing rural medium-term expenditure framework, supporting the decentralization of land administration, increasing the contribution of irrigation to agricultural GDP, and improving the efficiency of existing food security policies; and (iii) improve the efficiency of spending and human resource management, and effectiveness of service delivery in basic education and health sectors, while also tackling the challenge of rapid population growth and women's rights.
4. The first tranche of RSRC-2, amounting to SDR 16,550,000.00 (equivalent to US\$25 million at the time of disbursement) was disbursed in August 2007. The conditions of release of the second tranche of SDR 16,550,000.00 (about US\$26.9 million equivalent) as listed in the Financing Agreement that have been met are as follows: (i) the progress achieved by the Recipient in carrying out the Program is satisfactory; (ii) the macroeconomic framework of the Recipient is appropriate; and (iii) eleven prior actions have been carried out in material respects. Progress achieved for the release of the second tranche of SDR 16,550,000.00 is presented in this memorandum. Since December 2000, the government's macroeconomic and financial program has also been supported by a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) of the IMF in the amount of SDR 59.2 million (90 percent of quota) and a subsequent PRGF II was approved by IMF's Board in January 2005 (amount of SDR 26.32 millions equivalent to 40 percent of quota). The fifth review of the PRGF was approved by the IMF Board in November 2007 and the sixth and last review was conducted in March 2008 and will be discussed at IMF Board on May 30, 2008.

II. Recent Economic Performance

5. The Government's second PRSP covering 2008 through 2012, endorsed by donors at a Roundtable meeting in Brussels in October 2007, takes into account lessons learned from PRSP I, emphasizing the priority of creating an enabling environment for accelerated economic growth, with strong support from the development partners, leading to equitable poverty reduction. The seven strategic objectives of PRSP II are: (i) pursuing strong, diversified, sustainable and equitable growth that creates jobs;(ii) developing infrastructure;(iii) creating equal access to quality social services;(iv) gender empowerment and social protection;(v) slowing population growth;(vi) promoting Good Governance and Capacity-Building; and (vii) efficient implementation of the PRSP.

6. Despite annual variability due to shocks, Niger's real economic growth averaged 3.9 percent from 2002 to 2006. At an estimated rate of 5.6 percent, real GDP growth in 2007 has confirmed the economic recovery since the drought and locust invasion induced contraction of 2004. Good rains in the last three years have strengthened agriculture and improved food security. Investment in the mining, telecoms and construction has also supported economic activity. In particular, gold production has recorded an upturn with the reopening of the principal mine and a major investment program is in progress for uranium. Average inflation was 1.8 percent during 2002-2006 and in 2007 is expected to be close to zero. Trends in the balance of payments in 2007 showed a strong increase in the value of uranium exports, reflecting a 58 percent revaluation of the export price. This has been accompanied by a strong increase in imports of capital goods, both for the mining sector and for infrastructure projects, in addition to the replenishment of the stocks of petroleum and grain products. Thus, the current account deficit has increased from 8.6 percent of GDP in 2006 to 11 percent of GDP in 2007.

7. The basic fiscal deficit for 2007 has reached 3.6 percent of GDP, compared with the initially programmed 4.1 percent. Revenues are expected to turn out above program projections, i.e., 12.6 percent of GDP against an initial objective of 11.5 percent, largely due to the favorable performance of the VAT, the increase in mining royalties and permits, and the exceptional dividends expected from mining companies. Expenditures, excluding externally funded investments, are expected to be 16.3 percent of GDP. A Priority Investment Fund was created in May 2007 to channel the exceptional mining receipts received in late 2006 (1.5 percent of 2007 GDP) towards priority expenditures related to security, rural development, infrastructure, and development support. Progress is also being made in the planned reduction of government domestic arrears, reduced to 9.0 percent of GDP in 2007 from 10 percent in 2006. Domestic payments arrears are expected to decrease to 7.5 percent of GDP in 2008.

8. Budget allocations in the three priority areas covered by the RSRC II (Rural development, Education and Health) represent respectively 19.4; 20.1 and 9.9 percent of total Budget in 2008, compared to 22.5, 18.8 and 9.8 percent in 2007. The decrease in Budget allocations for rural development is due to lower externally financed investments in the sector. However, a draft revised Budget Law is expected to be presented to the Parliament in third quarter of 2008 to integrate exceptional revenues from mining and telecoms sectors received by the end of December 2007 (equivalent to about CFAF 70 billions). It's expected that 35 percent will be earmarked to the rural sector and about 14 percent to the Health sector (including about CFAF 8 billions for subsidized health services). The share of poverty related expenditures (excluding externally financed investment) currently represent 47.5 percent of

the Budget, compared to 48.7 percent in the 2007 Budget Law and a target of 53 percent in the program. Nevertheless, given the revenue increase, the share of pro-poor expenditures is also expected to increase in the revised Budget Law that will be presented to the Parliament in fall 2008.

9. Regarding Budget execution in the three sectors (current expenditure excluding wages and salaries for contractual workers), the rates are respectively 91, 73, and 72 percent for the education, health and rural development sectors, under the targets of 90 percent for the two last sectors. The low budget execution rates are mainly due to uncertainty and dependence to the external financing. To increase the involvement of sectoral ministries in Budget regulation, IDA will continue to support the Government to strengthen the public finance management.

10. In *public finance management*, with the Bank's support, the Government has concentrated its efforts on budgetary reforms, in particular in the area of public expenditure, cash management system, and financial controls. In this context, the government has continued to align budget allocations in the budget 2007 with the objectives of the PRSP and the MTEF of the priority sectors (education, health, rural). Other policy measures have also been adopted, based on the 2005 PEMFAR action plan shared with the donor community. In 2006, the coding of the pro poor expenditures agreed with the donors has been adopted; this coding has been implemented in the budget 2007. The cash management plan adopted in 2004 remains to identify and protect prior expenditures, but the linkage between this cash plan and the commitment of budget expenditure needs to be strengthened to better secure these prior expenditures. The modernization of the minister of finance has also been decided in December 2006 with a new organization of the Treasury, including the adoption of the organizational chart satisfactory to IDA, and the creation of a Direction of the Financial Control independent from the General Direction of Budget. The manual of procedures of financial control has been created, adopted, and disseminated among the financial controllers and the staff of Court of Accounts.

11. In *agriculture and rural development*, the sector continues to progress with the implementation of the action plan of its national Rural Development Strategy (SDR), which also feeds into the sector MTEF. The effort is led by the inter-ministerial *Comité de Pilotage*, who oversees the *Sécretariat Exécutif de la SDR*. The vast majority of donor funded activities in the sector are now directly aligned with the SDR and contribute to the targets of one or several of the SDR action plan. Regarding the 2007-08 agricultural campaign, despite the delay of the rainfalls starting, the flooding in some areas and the abrupt and early stop of the rainfalls, the national agriculture statistics confirm the tendency of a favorable agricultural year. Nevertheless, shortages of, and difficult access to, agricultural production inputs (high yielding seed varieties, fertilizer) are likely to prevent a sustained growth in irrigated agriculture. On the institutional side, substantial progress has been made in rural development and the transition to a budget-program approach has now been successfully completed.

12. While reaching any of the MDGs by 2015 is unlikely given the scarce resources and low capacity, with substantial technical and financial support from development partners, and based on the second Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP II, 2008-2012), the performance in service delivery for social sectors has improved.

13. Implementation of the ten-year development plan of the *education sector* (PDDE 2003-2013) is satisfactory, even though learning improvement remains a challenge. The

primary gross enrollment rate increased from 54 percent in 2005/06 to 57 percent in 2006/07, and the provisional results for 2007/08 indicate a GER of at least 60 percent. This happened in spite of the freezing of the resources in the Pooled Fund, and is due in large part to a more efficient use of budget resources and a prioritization of its expenditures. To address the low level of learning achievements, the Government has adopted a comprehensive strategy focused on two areas: the first consists of improving the learning and teaching environment by the acquisition of didactic materials, the increase of the instructional time and the reform of teacher pre- and in-service training. The second level consists of improving quality in post-primary education in order to provide well-prepared candidates for teacher training institutions. Beyond the results in terms of schooling, the Government has taken measures to improve management, including enhancing procurement procedures, to ensure the more transparent use of resources. As a result, the donors agreed to unfreeze the Pooled Fund in February 2008.

14. In February 2005, the Government adopted the five-year National *Health* Development Plan (NHDP, 2006-2010) which has helped to harmonize and coordinate the external donors (e.g., the SWAP for the Institutional Strengthening and Health Sector Support Project (ISHSSP) in 2006). There is now a broad agreement on health sector policies and clear government commitment to consolidate the program approach. However the health sector lags seriously in progress toward the MDGs, particularly in child and maternal mortality and the accomplishments are very limited in some rural areas. The country needs to more aggressively pursue the implementation of the NHDP, notably in (i) enhancing/strengthening the management of human and financial resources to improve quality of health services, (ii) improving services in basic health centers services in remote areas and (iii) pursuing the effort on deconcentration/decentralization through strengthening capacity and improving efficiency in spending at the local levels).

15. Niger's *population*, estimated in early 2008 at 14 million, grows at 3.3 percent per annum – this represents almost half a million more people every year. This rapid rate of demographic growth is explained primarily by declining mortality levels and sustained high fertility. At such a rate of growth, the population might quadruple to reach 56 million by 2050. The Government is well aware of this huge challenge. In its Declaration on National Population Policy, as well as in its PRSP II, the Government recognizes that the acceleration of the demographic transition and the reduction of the demographic rate of growth through the decline of fertility is a *sine qua non* condition to improve the overall development prospects of Niger, ensure food security and achieve sustainable results in the social sectors (especially education and health).

III Progress Achieved in Carrying out the Program

16. The Government has made significant progress in implementing its Rural and Social Policy Reform Program. In particular, the eleven actions to be carried out prior to the release of the second tranche listed in the Financing Agreement and additional activities for the implementation of the Second Rural and Social Policy Reform Program (RSRC-2) have been implemented as summarized below.

Prior action 1: Appoint, by Presidential decree approved by the Council of Ministers and duly published in the Official Gazette, the managers in charge of the new structures created at the Treasury (Directeur Général, Agent Comptable Central du Trésor, Payeur Général du Trésor, and Receveur Général du Trésor). Prior action met in

substance. In the context of the modernization of the minister of finance, the Government has adopted in December 2006 a decree re-organizing the Treasury with modern structures in line with the WAEMU rules. In November 2007, the public servants in charge of these new Treasury structures have been appointed, including the Agent Comptable Central du Trésor, Payeur Général du Trésor, Receveur Général du Trésor) (Decree No. 2007 519/PRN/MEF, November 22, 2007). Moreover, by letter of May 13, 2008, the Minister of Economy and Finance has confirmed to IDA that the current Niger “Trésorier Général - TG” has been requested by the Minister of Economy and Finance to act as General Director of the Treasury until complete implementation of the on-going reform. As evidence of this designation, the GoN is sending to IDA a copy of the contract as well as an addendum to the contract referring to the Decree re-organizing the Treasury (December 2006), and confirming the TG as the new General Director. Therefore, the implementation of this prior action is satisfactorily to IDA.

Prior action 2: Adopt and begin implementation of guidelines and audit techniques to be applied by the Chamber of Accounts. Prior action met in substance. To improve budget controls, a number of important measures, such as the adoption of a manual of procedures for financial control and PFM training sessions for financial controllers and staff of the judge of public accounts, have been implemented. Based on the Public Expenditure Management and Financial Accountability Review (PEMFAR), the Government has also undertaken the elaboration of guidelines and audit techniques for the Chamber/Court of Accounts, which was reviewed by the IDA. These guidelines and audit techniques have been adopted, satisfactorily to IDA. As planned, the Chamber of Accounts has been replaced by the new Court of Accounts, which has been created and its responsibilities have been defined in the Law No. 2007-22 of July 2, 2007 and published in the official Gazette in October 2007 (JO No. 20 of October 15, 2007). IDA has received the copy of a letter from the President of the Chamber of Accounts (dated January 28, 2008) informing his staff that the new guidelines and audit techniques are adopted and will be implemented once the Court of Accounts will become operational. Staff of the Court of Accounts, who are the staff of the ex-Chamber of Accounts, now have a relevant technical tool to undertake in-depth controls on budget execution. The guidelines have been adopted and will be implemented by the Court of Accounts. IDA has received a letter from the Ministry of Economy and Finance (dated May 13, 2008), confirming the commitments of the GoN to strengthen the Court of Accounts on line with IDA’s recommendations. Moreover, the technical staff of the Court of Accounts is expected to receive training sessions to strengthen the technical skills in controls of public financial management of the state and other public entities. Currently the GoN is contemplating financing options for this training (e.g., EU). In this context, since there is need for some “reinterpretation” of the meaning of this prior action, IDA considers that this measure is satisfactorily implemented.

17. **Prior Action 3: Adopt by Presidential decree approved by the Council of Ministers and duly published in the Official Gazette the regulatory texts for the organization and operation of the Recipient’s Direction of Control of Public Procurement (*Direction Générale du Contrôle des Marchés Publics - DGCMP*), and appoint the two central directors (Director of Information and Director of Statistics) for said Direction by Presidential decree approved by the Council of Ministers and duly published in the Official Gazette. Prior action met in substance.** A Procurement Directorate (DGCMP – *Direction générale du contrôle des marchés publics*) whose mandate includes the ex-ante review of contracts awarded by the contracting authorities has been established. To make this directorate of control of public procurement (DGCMP) operational

(staffing, budget allocation, and equipment), the GoN has taken the necessary steps, satisfactorily to IDA, to adopt relevant regulations related to its organization and functioning. Given the strong commitment of the authorities and despite substantial political difficulties, the Government has revised the regulatory texts for control of public procurement, has approved them by the Council of Ministers (January 30, 2008), has adopted the new texts, and published it in the Official Gazette (Ordonnance No. 2008-06, February 21, 2008, Journal Officiel, March 27, 2008). The decree on organizational functions of the DGCMP was signed by the President (May 9, 2008) and published in JO (dated May 16, 2008). Given that the nomination of the two Directors of DGCMP is of strategic importance and due to difficulties to identify qualified candidates, by internal decision (note de service #000780, dated May 16, 2008), the Ministry of Economy and Finance has nominated one Acting Director for Control and Regulation and one Acting Director for Information and Statistics. Moreover, to ensure the functioning of the DGCMP, the 2008 budget has allocated financing to DGCMP. In this context, IDA considers that this prior action is satisfactorily met and particularly agrees that it is more prudent to allow sufficient time to the authorities for selecting the appropriate technical candidates. IDA will follow up closely to ensure that the DGCMP is concretely functional and appropriate decrees are adopted.

18. Prior Action 4: Adopt by Presidential decree approved by the Council of Ministers and duly published in the Official Gazette a multi-annual plan for the development of statistics (2008-2012). Prior action met. Since 2006 the Government is strengthening the national statistical information system for improved monitoring of social and economic indicators. During 2007, the *Institut National Des Statistiques* (INS) has prepared, with the technical and financial support of the Bank (Statistical Capacity Trust Fund), a medium-term statistical master plan which includes an action plan for 2008-2012. This multiyear Action Plan was adopted in January 2008 (Decree No. 2008-002/PRN/MEF, January 16, 2008). IDA has reviewed this multiyear Action Plan and found it satisfactory in form and substance. It is expected that the nomination of the President of the Board of Directors of the Statistical office, will facilitate the implementation of the plan. To strengthen the capacity of its staff, the INS has already implemented a training program included in the Action Plan, with support from the Statistical Capacity Trust Fund. Moreover, for 2008, the Government has aligned the INS Budget allocation with the multiyear and training plans, and it is expected that this measure will help the development of a monitoring and evaluation system of social and poverty indicators.

19. Prior action 5: Adopt the revised National Contingency Plan for the management of food crises by Presidential decree approved by the Council of Ministers and duly published in the Official Gazette and begin implementation of pre-required activities. Prior action met. The *Cellule de Crises Alimentaires* (CCA) at the Prime Minister's office led the participatory efforts in the elaboration of a contingency plan to better manage food crisis and mitigate their severity and their intensity. IDA had been consulted on earlier drafts of the report and its observations were subsequently incorporated. The participatory process with stakeholders resulted in a validation workshop held October 18, 2007. The National Contingency Plan provides an operative framework to: (i) define Government and development partners interventions to respond to emergencies, (ii) determine levels for response triggers, depending on nature and importance of the crisis (type, coverage, intensity), (iii) analyze the response capacity and define the actions to be undertaken, (iv) define various contingency scenarios, (v) outline the decision making channels and coordination for the various crises types, and (vi) organize the partnerships to be in place for implementing the emergency responses. The final National Contingency Plan

was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2008 and adopted (Decree No. 2008-003/PRN/PM, January 16, 2008). To begin implementation, a comprehensive vulnerability survey has recently been completed with the support of various donors, as part of the pre-required activities. A copy of the survey has been sent to IDA.

20. **Prior action 6: Adopt, by *arrêté* from the Recipient's relevant Minister duly published in the Official Gazette, an action plan, in form and substance satisfactory to the Association, for the improvement of irrigation on the perimeters of ONAHA (Office National des Aménagements Hydro-Agricoles), and begin its implementation on the basis of the recommendations of the report on the assessment of the ONAHA perimeters. Prior action met.** IDA was consulted on several occasions and provided feedback on earlier drafts of the report, which were largely incorporated in subsequent versions. The validation workshop for stakeholders (including IDA) was held November 6, 2007. The final report, including a revised action plan with a timetable and the proceeds of the workshop, was transmitted to IDA on November 23, 2007 and was adopted (Arrêté No. 032/MDA/ONAHA du 14 mars 2008) and published in the Official Gazette (March 27, 2008). The analysis indicates that 70 per cent of the *Aménagements Hydroagricoles (AHA)* are classified as below average with respect to performance. The Government has informed IDA that the action plan implementation has been launched by initiating activities linked to the rehabilitation of irrigation perimeters. The report therefore suggests that, beyond rehabilitation of the irrigation infrastructure, a comprehensive, holistic program be developed and implemented in order to preserve the livelihoods of 26,000 households living directly or indirectly from the ONAHA perimeters. The IDA team recognizes that the full implementation of the report's recommendations will require funding and it is key that Ministry of Agricultural Development (MDA), in consultation with the Executive Secretariat of Rural Development Strategy (SE-SDR), identifies partners and donor funded programs/projects (incl. PIP2 project) which could cover the required resources.

21. **Prior action 7: Finalize and adopt by Presidential decree approved by the Council of Ministers and duly published in the Official Gazette a strategic framework for the expansion and the sustainable development of post primary education. Prior action met.** Two principal reasons led the Government to undertake the development of a strategic framework for the expansion of post primary education. The first consists of the growing pressure from students completing primary education. The second reason is related to the poor learning outcomes at primary level, which is explained partly by the low quality of the primary teachers who are recruited from middle schools into teacher training institutions. In response to these two concerns, the Government has prepared and adopted a decree that sets out a coherent strategy that allows for the quantitative and qualitative development of the education sector as a whole (Decree No. 2008-004/PRN/MESSR/T, January 16, 2008). This strategic framework sets out the 2009-2011 program budget integrating basic and post primary education. IDA has reviewed this strategic framework and found it satisfactory in form and substance.

22. **Prior action 8: Implement effectively the program of transfer of resources and grants in favor of selected schools and provide for the Association the evidence of the payment of the corresponding funds to the schools, and the report of a field visit. Prior action met.** To improve the accountability by communities' involvement in the resources management, the Ministry of Education (MoE), with IDA's support, has prepared a plan for transferring grants to 500 randomly selected School Management Committee (COGES) on an experimental basis in two regions (Tahoua and Zinder). Furthermore, appropriate allocations

have been made under the 2007 Budget and fiduciary management arrangements along with fund transfer modalities are finalized by MoE and MEF. Each selected school has received an amount between a minimum of 50,000 FCFA and a maximum of 402,500 FCFA based on school size through its COGES. In this context, to ensure that the program of transfer is implemented and that designated schools in the selected regions have received effectively their respective grants, the Government has provided, satisfactorily to IDA: (i) documents signed by the COGES acknowledging the receipt of the grants; and (ii) the report of a field visit drawing lessons from this first year of the program implementation. Both reports are found to be satisfactory to IDA. The preliminary lessons from the field visit are showing that communities are well-informed about the received grant and the amount. Moreover, in many cases the grant is used to supplement resources already mobilized by the COGES to finance the action plan worked out by communities to address the main issues of the school. In addition, with the support of the IDA, a rigorous impact evaluation is underway to measure the effects of the school grants on school management and quality and to draw lessons for a potential scaling up of the program. The preliminary report of the impact evaluation is expected to be ready by fall 2008.

23. Prior action 9: Start the preparation of a national health map, through the completion of the following tasks, each in form and substance satisfactory to the Association: (i) a map of hospitals and health centers by district (departments) and by region, (ii) an organizational chart of the Recipient's ministry in charge of health, and (iii) a computerized human resource management system. Prior action met. The preparation of the National Health Map (NHM) is underway. The first stage in the development process is completed (i.e a detailed inventory of existing means for hospitals and health centers for each district (PDSO) and each region (PDSO and PDSR)), and a synthesis note, satisfactory to IDA, has been prepared with clear timetable for various necessary steps towards completion of the NHM. In respect to the second measure (i.e. implementation of the organizational chart), which is an important step toward the design of the national health map, a working group was officially established by the Minister of Health (Arrêté No. 319/MSP/DGR/DRH/DGP, October 24, 2007) to: (i) validate the already prepared chart of the MSP at the Central level and (ii) define the organization chart of the MSP at the decentralized levels (regions and districts). The implementation of these organization charts will help more accurate monitoring of human resources, and will strengthen accountability at all levels (central, regional and districts), as well as defining responsibilities in terms of relationships among personnel or departments. Finally, in respect to the third measure, the process of improving the human resource management system of the MSP has started and is expected to be followed up by the upcoming DPL-3 as well as the ongoing Health operation. Originally the Government was expected to merely purchase a new human resource management (HRM) software, but based on more detailed evaluation of the existing system by IDA, it was noted that the drawbacks were mainly related to the accuracy of the information system and there was no urgency to update the existing computerized system. In this context, IDA suggested to redefine this measure (Aide-mémoire of the supervision mission of December 2007) because steps toward improving the quality of information are more appropriate at this stage and should be considered as part of a high quality computerized human resource management system. Subsequently, the Government has launched two complementary activities to improve the information system on human resource (HR): (i) preparation of a note on information flows on human resources between the Ministry of Health and MEF that has been completed in mid-April, 2008, and based on which a partial update of the computerized system is currently being prepared, satisfactorily to IDA; and (ii) preparation of a Health workforce census that will be completed

by June 2008, and which will allow a more comprehensive update of the computerized system on Human resources based on more accurate information. IDA is expecting the preliminary results of the Census before end of May 2008. For IDA these steps are much more ambitious than the original prior action and IDA is fully satisfied.

24. Prior action 10: Based on the results of the study on usage of health services costs, the Recipient, taking into account budgetary constraints, shall include in the draft Budget law for 2008 the costs of services and products fully subsidized (contraceptives, delivery by c-section, pre-natal consultations, health care for children under five), in an amount satisfactory to the Association. Prior action met. The Government has allocated in its 2008 budget law (Loi de Finances) an amount of 4 billion FCFA to cover the costs of services and products fully subsidized. This allocation has been based partly on the results of two recent studies conducted both by the World Bank and the Ministry of Public Health (MSP) to estimate the cost of removing fees for the reproductive and preventive services mentioned above. However, to ensure that sufficient funds are available to cover the costs of all services and products fully subsidized, and based on the request of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) has allocated in its revised 2008 budget (Budget complémentaire) an additional 3.8 billion FCFA, bringing the total allocation for 2008 to 7.8 billion FCFA (cf. Letter of MEF dated March 18, 2008). Based on the existing estimates, IDA considers that the total allocation of 7.8 billion FCFA is satisfactory and adequate for 2008.

25. Prior Action 11: Organize and hold a National Forum to build consensus on demographic growth, gender issues and the African Charter on women's rights. Prior action met. To reduce the fertility rate and improve the status of women, the RSRC-2 has mainly focused on concrete results in the areas of advocacy, information, education and communication (IEC), and behavior change communication (BCC). This is supporting in-country efforts to gradually implement measures designed in the Declaration on National Population Policy (D-PNP) adopted in February 2007. The Government: (i) has prepared and adopted an action plan for improving women status and to re-launching family planning efforts; and (ii) has organized a National Forum (February 26-28, 2008) to build consensus on demographic growth, gender issues, and to facilitate legal reforms that will help increasing the age at marriage. These steps are expected to facilitate Niger's efforts to ratify and subsequently implement the Protocol to the African Charter on women's rights (the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa). The Government has communicated to IDA a detailed report on the principle results of the National Forum and next steps that will be closely followed up by the ongoing Multi-Sector Demographic operation (PRODEM).