REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT TECHNICAL ADVISORY PANEL (ITAP)

ASSESSMENT OF ENABLING FACTORS[1]

NIGER | FEBRUARY 3, 2023

Background

In line with the GPE 2025 operating model, the government and country partners have analyzed country progress in the four enabling factor areas for system transformation. The *Contextualized Enabling Factors Analysis* completed by the local education group and supporting documentation were shared with the ITAP, tasked by the Board with providing an assessment of country status against the enabling factors.

The ITAP assessment seeks to contribute to country policy dialogue on the partnership compact. The ITAP considers the extent to which challenges in enabling factor areas act as bottlenecks to country education system transformation goals. Based on this assessment, it classifies each area as a low, medium, or high priority for action. A designation of high indicates that identified challenges may act as significant bottlenecks to transformation goals.

The ITAP report is shared with the government and country partners to collectively review for any major factual errors that may have affected the ITAP assessment.The ITAP report is ultimately shared with the Board and feeds into Board decision-making on the system transformation grant allocation, with special attention given to how challenges in the high priority enabling factors are resolved in the country compact.

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[1] The ITAP operates as an independent advisory body to the GPE Board. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the ITAP country panel.. ITAP country panel members for this report: Susy Ndaruhutse (Chair), Sonia Languille, Richard Sack, and Michel Welmond.

Part A: Main Panel Conclusions

Data and Evidence

Education Management Information System (EMIS)-generated education statistics are produced annually; the Statistical Yearbooks (*Annuaires statistiques)* since 2003/04 are available online for basic education. The quality of data collection methods has recently been upgraded. However, these yearbooks are not available to many staff in the five education and training ministries, and measures have been suggested aimed at improving the yearbook's presentation with easier accessibility for greater impact. Learning assessments have been regularly conducted since 2005. They provide reasonably detailed information on the state of learning outcomes, which are poor: a minority of pupils attain minimal levels. An evaluation of a major curriculum reform program is also available. It finds that a scaled-up pilot (*écoles expérimentales d'extension*) was associated with a decline in learning outcomes. This result was attributed to poor implementation and, yet, the ITAP notes that there is no structured evidence concerning institutional/organizational implementation capacities, such as a functional analysis of the overall management and administration of the sector. In addition to this, there are challenges when it comes to the communicability and broader understanding of statistics and research results, which is often needed for successful policy implementation. As a result, the ITAP is rating this enabling factor as a **MEDIUM priority**.

Gender-Responsive Planning, Policy and Monitoring

The replacement of the ten-year 2014–2024 Education and Training Sectoral Program (*Programme sectorial de l'éducation et de la formation*) (PSEF) with an interim three-year 2020–2022 Transitional Plan (*Plan de transition du secteur éducatif et de la formation*) (PTSEF) and the development of a new financial simulation model in 2019, has considerably improved the country's planning framework. The execution of the program over the last two years has been relatively successful considering the ongoing crises (security, health and climate). It has been hampered, however, by weak implementation capacity. The most important gap that the ITAP noted is that aside from the 2023–2025 Multi-Annual Expenditure Program (*Programme document de programmation pluriannuelle des dépenses*) (DPPD), there are no sector planning documents currently in place to guide future interventions in the sector that take into consideration lessons learned during the implementation of the 2020–2022 PTSEF. However, the ITAP notes that high-level policy discussions have been taking place on important issues such as (i) the reduction of contract teachers; (ii) the construction of more permanent classrooms to replace straw huts; (iii) school feeding; (iv) out-of-school children; and (v) curriculum reform. In addition, the financial simulation model is not based on the most recent education and budget data which is a gap which will need to be addressed going forward

in the next planning cycle. Gender is a central consideration in all planning documents, operational documents and national strategy documents that were reviewed by the ITAP. Niger has also made strong commitments to addressing gender-based violence. Taking all these things into consideration, the ITAP is rating this enabling factor as a **MEDIUM priority**.

Sector Coordination

Inclusive Sector Dialogue and Coordinated Action:

There are comprehensive frameworks in place for inclusive dialogue and coordinated action at the national and regional levels. These enable effective interagency and intergovernmental coordination at national level and between national and regional levels, though it is less clear to what extent coordination mechanisms are fully operational in each of Niger's regions. Given the overall strength in this area and that the vast majority of financing is being spent at national level, the ITAP is rating this enabling factor as a **LOW priority.**

Coordinated Financing and Funding:

There is coordinated financing and funding through the pooled donor fund (*Fonds commun sectoriel éducation*) (FCSE), but in 2021 58.8 percent of external funds flow through projects and programs outside of the FCSE and there are challenges with the predictability of these funds. Given that some new partners have committed or expressed interest in providing funds through the FCSE from 2023, this suggests a move towards greater alignment, accountability and aid effectiveness. As a result, the ITAP is rating this enabling factor as a **MEDIUM priority**.

Volume, Efficiency and Equity of Domestic Financing

The government's high-level political commitment to education is being translated in remarkable financial commitments. Over 2023–2025, it will dedicate annually 22 percent of government expenditure (excluding debt service) to the sector and significantly increase the domestic envelope for investments. However, the country's persisting vulnerability, low domestic resource mobilization and rapid demographic growth will continue to limit the education fiscal space severely. The country's education system is characterized by wide geographical, social and gender inequalities, which are underpinned by a very unequal distribution of education resources, especially for teachers. This is compounded by very low efficiency in the use of available resources. The government has engaged important reforms to address major sources of inequality and inefficiency and increase the funding to cater for the educational needs of girls and other vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, given the magnitude of the foreseeable implementation challenges, the ITAP is rating this enabling factor as a **HIGH priority**.

Part B: Assessment of Enabling Factors

1. Data and Evidence

Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)

The EMIS, which has been operational for at least ten years, provides the database infrastructure from which the Statistical Yearbook (*Annuaire statistique)* is generated and available online. The 2021/22 school year issue was published in June 2022 (in print and online; the Yearbooks are available online for issues dating back to 2003/04 for basic education). However, these statistics are not available to most staff of the five ministries concerned with education. Several aspects of this latest Yearbook took into account observations and recommendations made by the 2019 External Evaluation of the First Phase of the 2014–2024 Education and Training Sectoral Program (PSEF) (*Eléments d'évaluation externe de la première phase du PSEF-Niger*) including revision of the school (preschool through secondary) census questionnaires in order to better take users' needs into account; and of the database platform in order to accommodate the questionnaire modifications. The National Statistics Institute provided advice in order to improve data quality. In addition to student statistics, always disaggregated by sex and region, the Yearbook includes information on teachers (disaggregated by sex and status), pedagogical and didactic materials, infrastructure and equipment (including for children with a disability). The Yearbook also includes statistics for each region that are disaggregated by type of school, sex and rural/urban. In other words, the Yearbook is voluminous and comprehensive – perhaps overly so according to the 2019 External Evaluation which finds that its impact would benefit from streamlining, sharper focus, and more analytical statistics. In addition to production of the Yearbooks, the EMIS data provide the basis for more analytical studies, such as the 2020 Education Sector Analysis (*Rapport d'état du système éducatif national*) (RESEN) and studies on education for girls.

Statistical yearbooks for technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and for higher education – both of which correspond to separate ministries – are not as recent as that for preschool through secondary levels. Both are available online. Technical issues, which are being addressed, have been identified regarding data quality for TVET.

Learning Assessment Systems

There is ample evidence concerning the levels of learning outcomes: assessments were carried out in 2005, 2007, 2011 and 2018 by the Ministry of National Education's (*Ministère de l'Education Nationale*) (MEN) Directorate for Assessment (*Direction de l'évaluation scolaire et des concours professionnels*) (DES/CP). This provides a clear indication of MEN's capacities for conducting such assessments. CONFEMEN's Programme for Education System Analysis (*Programme d'analyse des systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN*) (PASEC)

analyses were published in 2014 and 2019 (the latter as part of a multi-country comparative analysis).

Overall, the most recent assessments (2018 by the national team; 2019 by PASEC) find that learning outcomes are weak. The findings are disaggregated by sex, region, type of school program (*type d'expérimentation*), rural/urban, and public/private. The 2019 PASEC assessment has similar results:

A particularly noteworthy finding concerns the outcomes for the "bilingual" schools (*écoles curriculum*) which consistently outperform all other types of schools in CP. The assessment study's econometric model estimates the relative contributions of factors to pupils' learning outcomes in CE2 and CM2. It found that the largest and most positive contribution is attendance at a bilingual curriculum school. A number of evaluative studies of the Nigerien experimental/pilot bilingual schools (introduced in the early-1970s) found that pupils in these schools performed well above those in the more traditional schools (entirely in French) in mathematics, sciences and alertness (*éveil*). However, a 2021 External Evaluation of the Curriculum Reform Program (*Evaluation externe de la réforme curriculaire au Niger*) of a scaled-up (to about a quarter of all schools) iteration of these bilingual curriculum school found that the effects of this new curriculum were "quasi-disastrous" (*quasi-désastreux*) with significantly lower learning outcomes in the bilingual curriculum schools.

Poor implementation was the reason given for these poor results, and yet there is no analytical work on implementation capabilities and capacities – work such as a functional analysis of the sector's institutional/organizational capabilities, capacities, and dysfunctionalities. Implementation issues identified by the 2021 External Evaluation of the Curriculum Reform Program included "qualitative weaknesses"; poor monitoring and planning; and lack of a public information (*sensibilisation*) campaign. The 2019 External Evaluation of the First Phase of the PSEF also points to issues in the realm of the more qualitative capacities needed for effective implementation by pointing out a lack of policy and administrative responsiveness to information about issues such as primary school completion rates and over-recruitment of teachers; lacunae when it comes to adjusting policies and practices when information indicates that expected targets are not being met; overlapping responsibilities of the five ministries that manage the sector; and real-world practices and behaviors of all actors in the sector that stray from the policy and regulatory norms, and are not corrected because they are not detected. In sum, this evaluation noted the need for an institutional culture change from the current one focused on the administration of resources to a more functional guiding logic focused on results and outcomes.

The 2020–2030 National Strategy for Accelerating the Education and Training of Girls and Women in Niger (*Stratégie nationale d'accélération de l'éducation et de la formation des*

filles et des femmes au Niger) (SNAEFFF) also notes variants of poor implementation as a potential liability for its realization. It singles out weak enforcement of regulations concerning girls' education, and insufficient synergy and coordination between actors concerned with implementation of this strategy.

Evidence Production and Use

The EMIS data are put to use for the usual and expected purposes: production of the education sector analysis (RESEN); construction of a financial simulation model; policy formulation and the elaboration of plans; evaluations and other research. The latter include studies concerning girls' access and retention, as well as gender-based violence, which provide some causal insights and indications for these issues. Recommendations concerning the improvement of data quality have been implemented. However, those concerning the presentation of statistical information in more streamlined and analytical formats, that could facilitate the communication of pertinent issues and challenges both within the sector and with the greater public, have not been implemented. Several studies provide evidence concerning the impact of curriculum issues (language of instruction, didactic approaches) on learning outcomes, along with indications of possible causes for the disappointing outcomes. Taken together and over time, their results present a conflicting picture. This is to be expected, as different methodologies and varying objectives of study can provide apparently diverse results. Taken all together, however, a close, critical, and synthetic examination of the wealth of information from these all of these studies could have significant positive and sustainable returns.

Conclusion: Challenges of implementation – dysfunctionalities and impediments from within the implementing structures, as well as lack of clear communication of the issues to be tackled by policies and reforms – are identified as major reasons for poor results associated with major policy options. The ITAP notes that the good supply of descriptive statistics has enabled analytical studies, for example on learning outcomes and girls' education. However, the limited number of analytical statistics and an overall synthesis of the existing studies that is easily accessible and understood, compromises effective policy formulation and implementation. Given this, the lack of detailed understanding of the challenges constitutes a significant gap in the overall evidential environment. Considering these gaps and the overriding importance of effective implementation of policies and reforms (which would be truly transformative), the ITAP concurs with the country's self-analysis and is rating this enabling as a **MEDIUM priority**.

2. Gender-Responsive Sector Planning, Policy and Monitoring

Strategic Planning Frameworks and Practices

Niger has put in place a comprehensive legal framework that provides a solid basis for the development of its sector. Article 23 of its 2010 Constitution clearly articulates the State's commitment to free and quality education. The 1998 Education Law (*Loi d'Orientation de l'Education*) (LOSEN) establishes education as a basic right of all Nigerien citizens and guarantees access to all children from the ages of 6 to 18, regardless of sex, social origin, race, ethnicity or religion. Furthermore, it states that education is a national priority – which has been confirmed by the present president, who placed it at the same level as national security. Niger ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990 and the prime minister publicly renewed the country's commitment to the full implementation of the CRC in 2019. Niger has also accommodated international commitments and agreements, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Education for All goals, particularly those linked to gender equity.

Niger's principal planning document, the 2014–2024 Education and Training Sectoral Program (*Programme sectorial de l'éducation et de la formation*) (PSEF), was replaced in 2020 by a 2020–2022 Transitional Plan (*Plan de transition du secteur éducatif et de la formation*) (PTSEF) which has since been extended by a year. This followed the publication of a formal assessment of the existing program and of a 2020 Education Sector Analysis (*Rapport d'état du système éducatif national*) (RESEN) that indicated that the 2014–2024 PSEF was overambitious and based on incomplete and erroneous data. The 2020–2022 PTSEF is more focused, has fewer programs, and is based on better data. It has served Niger well in orienting and framing the education sector development interventions over the last couple of years. The 2020–2022 PTSEF is aligned with the 2017–2021 Economic and Social Plan of 2017-2021 (*Plan de développement économique et social*) (PDES). It has been implemented with some success despite a difficult context. The COVID-19 pandemic, the drought, and military conflict have constituted formidable challenges in 2021 and 2022. The 2020–2022 PTSEF has also served as an effective framework for partner coordination.

Niger has also developed other planning documents addressing the education needs of specific populations (the one on gender is discussed in the sub-section on Gender Mainstreaming Across the Policy Continuum below). For example, in 2015, it developed a national strategy on addressing the education needs of children with disabilities, but was not able to fund many of the planned interventions. In addition, Niger has a comprehensive strategy to provide access to education to all refugee children. Finally, a National Strategy to Reduce the Vulnerabilities of the Education System in Niger (*Stratégie nationale de réduction des vulnérabilités du système éducatif Nigérien*) has been developed. This lays out several options to better protect education provision when facing crises (for example, regrouping schools).

The 2014–2024 PTSEF has a chapter dedicated to addressing possible threats to the education system. Looking to the future, it should be noted that there is currently no official plan or program in place to frame future interventions starting in 2023. Niger is expected to begin a new planning exercise for the education sector this coming year, but has yet to put in place the institutional apparatus necessary for this initiative.

Operational Planning Instruments and Practices

Niger systematically prepares annual operational planning documents, which translate the 2020–2022 PTSEF into action plans and budgets. The link with the overall strategic plans is clear and coherent. The ITAP was not provided with a copy of the 2023 plan.

Budget Programming and Monitoring

In 2018, Niger put in place a reform that institutes national program-based budgeting. Ministries establish rolling three-year programs through the Multi-Annual Expenditure Program (*Programme document de programmation pluriannuelle des dépenses*) (DPPD), as well as annual programs within an indicative budget envelope. Each ministry presents a limited number of programs and presents the financial needs to accomplish these. The government published the 2023–2025 DPPD in October 2021 which presents targets for the three-year period following the PTSEF. It is essentially a continuation of the 2020–2022 PTSEF.

Niger has developed a robust and sophisticated financial simulation model. Furthermore, program costing has apparently been done in a meticulous manner. The financial model, however, is not based on the most recent education and budget data. Going forward the ITAP remarks that it will be particularly important to update the financial simulation with new data and implementation challenges in the choice of an optimal scenario.

Sector Monitoring Mechanisms and Practices

Sector monitoring at the national level consists of an annual statistical report and an annual report coupled with an annual joint sector review meeting (*revue sectorielle*). Whereas the 2021 Annual Execution Report on the Annual Action Plan (*Rapport annuel d'exécution du plan d'actions annual*) (RAE) was very detailed, the ITAP remarks that it did not contain sufficient analysis of why certain programs were more successful than others. Most of the report presented the percentage of completion of activities and budgets without going into greater depth and could benefit from greater analysis. Although general information on the progress of marginalized groups in attaining education results was proposed, this area was not sufficiently addressed in monitoring documents.

It should be noted, however, that annual plans have indicated that implementation capacity has been weak throughout the education system, making many of the activities of even a "streamlined" PTSEF difficult to implement. The 2023–2025 DPPD and the 2021 RAE point to several implementation challenges, including institutional instability, the limited capacity of many actors particularly at decentralized levels, the implementation of non-

programmed activities, insecurity in conflict zones, and the lack of data to help with monitoring.

Gender Mainstreaming Across the Policy Continuum

Gender is a central consideration in all planning documents, operational documents and national strategy documents that were reviewed by the ITAP. Niger has made a firm political commitment to gender equity, both in terms of access and quality. The country has established a far-reaching planning framework to promote gender equality in the education sector based on a 2017 Decree. The 2020–2030 SNAEFFF proposes targeted interventions to increase school enrollment, attendance and completion of girls and women. Its approach and interventions are well integrated into the 2020–2022 PTSEF, which includes gender-disaggregated indicators and objectives. Niger has also made strong commitments to addressing gender-based violence.

Conclusion: Niger's legal framework reflects a commitment to free basic education for all. However, there are serious concerns that human rights abuses may have been committed during the ongoing conflict that could have a direct impact on the rights of children to education, an area that the ITAP notes will need further investigation and consideration in the development of any future plans for education sector development. The decision to replace the 2014–2024 PSEF with an interim transitional plan in the 2020–2022 PTSEF was a wise decision and this latter document is a considerable improvement. Although its execution has been relatively successful, the challenges facing Niger and the state of implementation capacity are a particular constraint currently. The most important gap that the ITAP noted is that aside from the 2023–2025 DPPD, there are no sector planning documents currently in place to guide future interventions in the sector that take into consideration lessons learned during the implementation of the 2020–2022 PTSEF, despite some high-level policy discussions on key issues. Based on these observations, the ITAP concurs with the country's self-analysis and is rating this enabling as a **MEDIUM priority**.

3. Sector Coordination: Inclusive Sector Dialogue and Coordinated Action and Coordinated Financing and Funding

3.1 Inclusive Dialogue and Coordinated Action

Coordination Functions and Practices

Niger has a clear structure and process for education sector dialogue and coordinated action. Building on the original 2013 Partnership Framework *(Cadre partenarial*) between the government and external partners, which was updated in 2019 to include civil society, there are various coordination committees at both central and regional levels with broad representation. For the central level, this includes representation from the Prime Minister's Office, the five ministries having some responsibility for education and training, external partners, civil society and since 2022, the Bureau de *l'Association des Municipalités du Niger* and the Bureau de *l'Association des Régions de Niger* – to ensure representation from sub-national actors.

The Education Sector Program Implementation and Monitoring Support Unit (*Cellule d'Appui à la Mise en Œuvre et au Suivi du PSEF*) (CAMOS) was created under the Prime Minister's authority to serve as the body responsible for coordinating the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 2014–2024 PSEF. This includes responsibility for preparing for the education sector review and supporting elements of the education sector dialogue between technical and financial partners and the government. CAMOS also oversees spending through the pooled fund.

The Local Education Group (*Groupe des partenaires locaux de l'éducation***)** (GPLE) brings together government, technical and financial partners, and civil society and includes representation from teacher unions, parents' associations and the private sector. It supports the Government in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the 2014–2024 PSEF in line with the Partnership Framework. The GPLE has not undertaken a self-assessment of the effectiveness of its work.

Capacities for Coordination

There is provision for interministerial and interagency coordination among development partners at the national level through both the National Steering Committee (*Comité National de Pilotage*), the GPLE, as well as through the annual sector review process (*Revue sectorielle*), and at regional level through the Regional Steering Committee (*Comité Régional de Pilotage*). The Decree 002-2022 (*Arrêté no 002-2022 Schéma institutionnel PSEF*) clearly outlines the roles, responsibilities and members of each of these coordination mechanisms and sets out how frequently they should meet. The ITAP was not able to ascertain whether these groups have met as regularly as set out, as the documents shared only seem to indicate annual or biannual meetings of the National Steering Committee and the GPLE over the last few years. It was not clear to the ITAP whether the Regional Steering

Committees are yet operational. From the Aide Memoire of the 2021 Joint Sector Review (*Aide-memoire de la revue sectorielle Gouvernement-PTF-Societe Civile au titre de 2021*), it was clear that there is meaningful engagement from each group of stakeholders and that coordination is leveraging complementary strengths, knowledge, insights, and resources.

Strategic groups were established in February 2022 with the mandate to document, frame and ensure monitoring and evaluation of all interventions of the 2020–2022 PTSEF's priority projects so this should provide deeper technical capacity for coordination.

There is an Education Cluster in Niger and it has produced a 2021–2023 Strategy (*Stratégie du Cluster Education du Niger sur l'éducation en situations d'urgence*) in consultation with 37 organizations including United Nations organizations, non-governmental organizations, technical and financial partners and government ministries along with the Prime Minister's Office. Within it, there is a commitment by the MEN to set up an emergency unit for proper coordination of emergency actions. It is not yet clear whether this has been established.

Conclusion on 3.1: There are comprehensive legal and policy frameworks in place for inclusion and coordination at the national and regional levels and for education in emergencies. At national level, these coordination mechanisms seem to be well established and holding regular meetings that enable interagency and intergovernmental coordination. However, the ITAP was not able to assess to what extent these coordination mechanisms are operational in each of Niger's regions. Overall, as a large proportion of financing is being spent at national level where the coordination mechanisms are in place and operational, the ITAP concurs with the country's self-analysis on this enabling factor and rates it as a **LOW priority.**

3.2 Coordinated Financing and Funding

Availability of Aid Alignment and Joint Financing Mechanisms

Niger receives external financing in support of the 2020–2022 PTSEF, through projectized funding, a joint financing mechanism, and budget support from the European Union (EU) which includes some earmarked educational disbursement-linked indicators. The Aide Memoire of the 2021 Joint Sector Review (*Aide-mémoire de la revue sectorielle Gouvernement-PTF-Société Civile au titre de 2021*) reported that in 2021, 16.5 percent of education expenditure was externally financed – 7.5 percent through projectized funding, and 9 percent through the joint financing mechanism

The pooled donor fund, the *Fonds commun sectoriel éducation* (FCSE), was established in 2017 to channel funds in support of the 2014–2024 PSEF. The fund became operational in 2018 and six development partners currently provide funding including the Agence Française de Développement (AfD), Canada, Luxembourg, GPE, Norway, Switzerland and UNICEF. Development partner funds are fungible but kept in a separate Treasury FCFA

account opened in the West African Central Bank (*Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest*). It has nine sub-accounts – one central and 8 regional ones to fund relevant activities in the 2020–2022 PTSEF. All funds that flow through this account are highly aligned and used in accordance with Government of Niger public financial management procedures.

In addition to the pooled fund, 19 development partners[2] provided projectized financing for education through projects in 2021 including AfD who is also providing funding via FCSE. Given the substantial volume of these projectized funds (58.8 percent of the total contributions of external partners), this results in increased transaction costs for the government and suggests to the ITAP that more could be done to coordinate and align these projects.

Accountability and Dialogue Around Aid Effectiveness

Annual planning of FCSE funds is integrated into the PTSEF Annual Operational Plan (*Plan d'Actions Opérationnel du PTSEF*) and the PTSEF Annual Action Plans (*Plans d'Actions Annuel*) (PAPs) and reported on in the Annual Execution Report (*Rapport Annuel d'Exécution*) (RAE). The majority of FCSE funds are allocated to MEN activities. The ITAP notes that in the 2017 signed protocol, development partners committed to provide three-year forecasts and commitments creating some predictability of resources for FCSE

For externally financed projects and programmes outside of the FCSE, some of them are included in the PAP and others in the Annual Budgetized Action Plan (*Plan d'actions annuel budgetisé*) (PAAB) which is produced after the PAP to include the partners' resources that are not included in the Finance Law (*Loi de finances*). Others are off-budget.

The ITAP notices that there have been year-on-year improvements in the execution rate of FCSE reaching 93.1 percent in 2020. However, for externally funded projects and programs, the execution rate in 2020 was only 38.7 percent rising to 47.6 percent in 2021. Execution rates of development partner funded recurrent activities were higher than those for capital activities. The ITAP concludes that this points to a need for more timely expenditure on these projects and a deeper understanding of the reasons why the execution rates have been low over the last few years.

Commitment Towards Greater Aid Effectiveness Practices

The establishment of the FCSE as a joint financing mechanism provides a good foundation for coordinated financing for the education sector that is on plan, on budget and using the government's financial systems. The ITAP welcomes the plans for the FCSE to expand to

[2] AfD, the Dutch Embassy, Enabel, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Agency (ECHO), the French Embassy, the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, the Islamic Development Bank, Italian Aid, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), UNESCO, UNGEI, UNHCR, USAID, the World Bank, the World Food Programme and several non-governmental organizations.

include more partners and funding from 2023 – including the EU (delegated to AfD), Spain, Belgium (from 2024) and possibly Denmark – and notes that this is likely to create greater efficiency and accountability for external funds.

Conclusion on 3.2: While there is strong potential for coordinated financing and funding through the FCSE, in 2021 58.8 percent of external funds flow through projects and programs outside of the FCSE and there are challenges with the predictability of these funds. As the interest and commitment by some partners to provide future funding through the FCSE indicates a direction of travel towards greater alignment, accountability and aid effectiveness, the ITAP concurs with the country's self-analysis and is rating this enabling factor as a **MEDIUM priority**.

4. Volume, Equity, and Efficiency of Domestic Public Expenditure on Education

Volume

The government's high-level political commitment to education is being translated into remarkable financial commitments. While the education budget steadily increased in volume between 2019 and 2021, the initial budget for 2022 represents a significant quantitative leap with this past trend and meets GPE benchmarks (Table 1): it allocates 20 percent of government expenditure (excluding debt service) to education. The government has confirmed this financial ambition for 2023–2025: over this period, it plans to dedicate annually 22 percent of government expenditure (excluding debt service) to the sector,[3] maintaining a priority to basic education (from pre-primary to secondary education and literacy), a commitment that is welcomed by the ITAP. The initial budget for 2023, voted by the National Assembly in November 2022, already reflects this commitment. The ITAP also commends the substantial increase in the domestic envelope for capital expenditures in education given the country's traditional high dependency on external aid to finance school construction.

However, the ITAP remarks that Niger's ambitious financial framework for 2023–2025 needs to be examined with caution. The government implements a prudent public debt policy and, in the past, has protected education expenditure from the relatively moderate increase in the debt service. Nevertheless, sustaining such a budgetary priority for education will be challenging given the country's persisting economic, security and ecological vulnerability. Between 2015 and 2021, the government never succeeded in meeting their stated policy objective of 20 percent of government expenditure to education due to competing demands on public finance arising from security and food crises. Moreover, with a tax revenue rate at 10.2 percent of GDP in 2021 (far below the West African Economic and Monetary Union regional benchmark of 20 percent), Niger's low level of domestic resource mobilization even if high forecasted economic growth is achieved, structurally limits the country's education fiscal space which is already under pressure due to the rapidly expanding school-age population and enrolment at every level.

Table 1: Share of education expenditure in GDP and in total government expenditure (%)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
	Act.	**Act.**	**Act.**	Est.	Est.	Target	Target
Education as a percentage of GDP	2.5%	2.9%	3.4%	5.9%	6.2%	5.8%	5.6%

[3] As stated by the President of the Republic at the Transforming Education Summit in September 2022 and reflected in the "GPE Domestic financing matrix" completed by the country.

Education as a percentage of government expenditure (excluding debt service)	12%	12.9%	14.18 %	19.9%	22%	22%	22%
Recurrent education expenditure as a percentage of public recurrent expenditure (excluding debt service)	25.3%	26.8%	21.2%	36.8%	46.9%	37.3%	37.3%

Source: Taken from "Domestic financing matrix" completed by the country[4]

Equity

Niger's education system is characterized by wide geographical, social and gender disparities, in terms of access and learning outcomes, which are underpinned by substantial inequalities in the distribution of education resources (infrastructure, pedagogical materials, and teachers). The imbalance is particularly pronounced for teachers. While, since 2010, the government has undertaken intense recruitment efforts, the deployment of teachers across the country has remained extremely unequal. Student-teacher ratios vary greatly between and within regions, both at primary and secondary levels.

Addressing these inequalities constitutes a key priority for the government, which is actively engaged in reforming the policy and regulatory framework that governs the distribution of education resources. The design of a programming tool to rationalize the distribution of resources based on updated norms and school mapping (*carte scolaire*) is underway. Criteria have been developed to rationalize the deployment of teachers and the construction of new schools and classrooms according to educational indicators. However, it remains unclear to the ITAP whether formulae that integrate equity elements have been established to allocate recurrent grants to schools or allowances for girls in priority intervention zones.

More generally, it seems that all these emerging formulas and allocation criteria have not yet stabilized into a clear and transparent integrated policy framework. Moreover, repeated failed attempts at reforming school mapping in the past, demonstrate that the effective and consistent implementation of these new equalizing mechanisms will be extremely challenging and requires sustained leadership and determination to overcome resistance and the prevailing politization of the administration. In addition, efforts to re-balance the distribution of resources in favor of some areas are undermined by the flow of displaced populations they experience. Challenging living conditions in rural areas compounded by the rising insecurity, also limit the government's room for maneuver to rationalize teacher deployment.

[4] The ITAP notes that the country submitted revised domestic finance figures for 2019 to 2021 for the three indicators in Table 1 but these could not be fully validated and therefore the ITAP could not consider them.

The ITAP commends government efforts to dedicate resources to address education inequalities of girls and other vulnerable groups. Scholarships and school allowances for poorer children, especially rural girls, are classified as "sensitive expenditure" in the national budget and therefore relatively ring-fenced from potential public finance shocks. In current terms, their envelope is projected to increase by 35 percent between 2021 and 2023. Also, families' financial contributions at primary and secondary levels remain significantly lower than in other African countries. The substantial planned increase in the envelope for education investments in 2023 will support the construction of lower secondary boarding schools for girls and the continuation of education provision in crises-affected zones. However, domestic resources remain insufficient to implement other key measures of the SNAEFFF, to cater for the growing number of internally-displaced and refugee children and to address the needs of children with disability. Moreover, given the high number of out-of-school children (50 percent of children aged 7–12 and 60 percent aged 13–16 are out of school), the scarce domestic funding for non-formal education and literacy is problematic.

Efficiency

Niger's education system is characterized by very low internal efficiency. High levels of dropout and repetition throughout the system result in low internal efficiency coefficients (82 percent at primary, 51 percent at lower secondary and 74 percent at upper secondary level in 2016–17). As noted earlier, learning outcomes are also particularly unsatisfactory.

An important source of inefficiency lies in the low effective teaching and learning time. This is in part related to the unequal allocation of teachers mentioned above – in urban centers, teachers' effective teaching load often falls behind the legal norm. The prevalence of school infrastructures in non-permanent material (*paillotes*), which cannot be used all year long, also contributes to the effective school time. In addition, a significant proportion of primary schools (40 percent in 2015–2017) do not offer the full six-grade cycle.

While the global execution rate of the education budget is satisfactory (92.5 percent in 2020), the low execution rate for investment (53.8 percent in 2020) represents another significant driver of inefficiency and means that important planned programs of school construction, maintenance and equipment do not actually materialize. The ITAP highlights this as a concern given the government's budgetary priority for investment in 2023–2025.

Weak capacity at sub-national levels to accompany the on-going decentralization and deconcentration processes raises important challenges to the efficiency of the sector. In 2016, the responsibility for the recruitment and management of contractual teachers and for school infrastructures was formally decentralized to regions for secondary education, and to local communities (*communes*), for primary education. However, the effective

devolution of competences and resources has been slow. Overlapping competences and intricate financial transfers create a complex and unstable framework for all the actors involved in the education expenditure chain. The very low execution rates of communes (9.3 percent) and regions (6 percent) in 2020 reveals the magnitude of the challenges to improve the efficiency of education expenditures in a decentralized context. Territorial communities' needs for capacity strengthening in public finance management are wide-ranging while deconcentrated education services lack adequate operational means to provide them with effective support. The performance of the public agency in charge of the financing of territorial communities (ANFICT) so far has been disappointing, in part due to stakeholders' lack of familiarity with new and complex institutional setting and procedures.

In addition to school mapping mentioned earlier, the government has already taken pertinent measures to address various sources of inefficiency. It has started to prioritize the allocation of resources for the first grades of primary education and for schools with the highest proportion of *paillote* classrooms. It has set up mechanisms to monitor and manage teachers' effective teaching time. The payment of teachers' salaries through the bank/postal system should improve its timeliness and regularity. Legal texts and procedures are being adopted to guide the implementation of the new school mapping at regional and local levels. Nevertheless, their effective implementation will require time and resolute involvement of all stakeholders.

Finally, despite the laudable wealth of financial information, including on execution, analyses of trends and underlying factors still remain limited. Existing data is not conducive to a systematic assessment of the contribution of domestic resources and various external financing sources (FCSE, on-budget and off-budget projects) to categories of expenditures (transfers, good and services, investments). Data is also limited on local authorities' education finance.

Conclusion: Given the significant challenges in the volume, equity and efficiency of domestic resources, the ITAP concurs with the country's self-analysis and is rating this enabling factor as a **HIGH priority**. Despite remarkable commitment by the government to dedicate 22 percent of public expenditure to education for 2023–2025 and increase the investment budgetary envelope, the country's persisting vulnerability, low domestic resource mobilization and rapid demographic growth severely limit the education fiscal space. There is, however, significant room for improvement in the equity and the efficiency of domestic resources. The government has engaged a series of complex and demanding reforms to address major sources of inequality and inefficiency; their effective implementation will be challenging but they have a high transformative potential.

Part C: High-Level Summary of Enabling Factors Assessed as High Priority

Enabling Factor	Challenges and Rationale for High Priority Rating
Volume, Equity, and Efficiency of Domestic Public Expenditure on Education	**Challenge:** Niger experiences constrained education fiscal space, wide disparity in resource allocation and a particularly low efficiency in the use of resources. **Rationale for high priority:** While the government has made remarkable financial commitments to education, the country's persisting vulnerability, low domestic resource mobilization and rapid demographic growth significantly limits the education fiscal space. Moreover, there is significant room for improvement to address the substantial inequalities and inefficiencies in the allocation of resources. The government has engaged important reforms to address these challenges and increase funding to cater for the educational needs of girls and other vulnerable groups. Their effective implementation will be demanding but they have a high transformative potential.