

MNCH Donor Review: World Bank

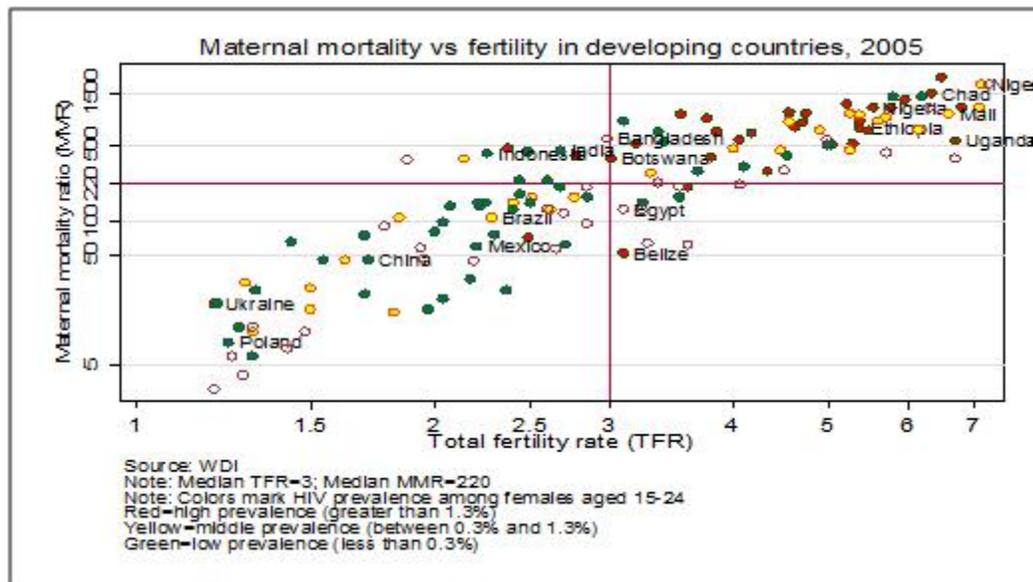
World Bank Group's Reproductive Health Action Plan - Missed Opportunities in Nations with High Maternal Mortality

Ensuring access to quality reproductive health and family planning services is a top priority of the World Bank's overall Health Development Strategy. With the looming 2015 completion date of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), achievement related to maternal health lags far behind target outcomes. This brief explores the Bank's development strategies in Reproductive and Maternal and Child Health (MCH), particularly through the Bank's Reproductive Health Action Plan. Despite the Action Plan's stated focus on high burden countries, review of World Bank projects uncovered project gaps in countries with a very high maternal mortality burden such as Chad and Niger. This brief takes a closer look at Niger as an example of one such gap.

Approved in 2010 and active through 2015, the primary objective of the Reproductive Health Action Plan is to help client countries improve reproductive health outcomes, emphasizing poverty alleviation and health systems strengthening. [1] In line with the Action Plan, the proportion of World Bank Country Assistance Strategies and projects that address reproductive health in high burden countries has increased since 2010. The Bank reports that more than half of all ongoing health projects include reproductive health components or indicators, and 70 percent of ongoing projects in countries with high maternal mortality and/or high fertility include a reproductive health focus. There are currently 287 projects that address some element of MCH, 63 of which are active, 215 closed, 5 dropped, 4 in the pipeline. [2]

The Reproductive Health Action Plan seeks improve reproductive health outcomes through focus on five core areas: 1) health systems strengthening, 2) poverty, 3) youth, 4) working with partners, and 5) high burden countries. A "high burden country" is defined by

having a maternal mortality rate of 220/100,000 live births or above and a total fertility rate of three or higher. [3]



The Action Plan strives to prioritize these high burden countries. However, upon review of active and closed projects, we see that some of the highest burdened countries have received little attention to reproductive and MCH improvements during the Action Plan timeframe.

Niger, a landlocked country in Sub-Saharan Africa, has a population of 16 million and is growing at one of the fastest rates in the world (3.4% per year). With a poverty rate of 56%, Niger was ranked last among all countries worldwide in the 2012 Human Development Index. The country has maintained political stability since its military transition in 2011, though neighboring Mali and Libya pose some security threats. According to the World Bank's 2013 Country Partnership Strategy Report, the Niger government remains highly committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, though progress is very slow. [4]

Niger performs poorly in most social indicators, including those for Population and Reproductive Health. World Bank Data from 2010 shows a maternal mortality rate (MMR) of 560/100,000 live births and a total fertility rate over seven, both of which place it as among top of The Bank's most highly-burdened countries. [5] However, despite Niger's perceived

commitment to development and particularly high MMR, it has not received any additional support under the Reproductive Health Action Plan.

In 2007, Niger received funding under the auspices of the The Bank's Reproductive, Maternal and Child Health sector for the Multi-Sector Demographic Project. This low-budget, \$10 million government-sector project was ended in March, 2013, and was largely successful in meeting its target goals. 29 percent of the budget was dedicated to "population and reproductive health" and another 29 percent to "gender." Of the three primary indicators upon closing of the project, one was exceeded (increased contraceptive use among women aged 20-24), one was met (number of work plans prepared and adopted), and one missed by 0.7 percentage points (of a targeted 28% gain in contraceptive knowledge among women). [6]

Considering Niger's strong performance on this project, high MMR and total fertility rate, and the government's expressed desire for development coupled with relative political stability, Niger seems to be a likely candidate for support under The World Bank's Reproductive Health Action Plan. Why then, has it been largely ignored, with just one relatively low funded project throughout the five year Action Plan and no additional funds approved during the actual Action Plan timeframe? It appears as though The Bank has missed a ripe opportunity in Niger.

1. The World Bank. Health, Nutrition, and Population. (last updated 7/20/2011)
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTHEALTHNUTRITIONANDPOPULATION/EXTPRH/0,,contentMDK:22519791~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:376855,00.html>
2. The World Bank. Reproductive and Maternal Child Health Overview.
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/reproductivematernalchildhealth/overview>
3. The World Bank. Health, Nutrition, and Population. (last updated 7/20/2011)
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTHEALTHNUTRITIONANDPOPULATION/EXTPRH/0,,contentMDK:22519791~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:376855,00.html>

[NDPOPULATION/EXTPRH/0,,contentMDK:22519791~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:376855,00.html](http://www.worldbank.org/NDPOPULATION/EXTPRH/0,,contentMDK:22519791~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:376855,00.html)

4. The World Bank. Country Partnership Strategy for the Republic of Niger. March 29, 2011. http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/04/10/000356161_20130410122506/Rendered/PDF/762320CAS0P127050Box374366B00OUO090.pdf

5. The World Bank. Indicators: Maternal Mortality Rate. http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.MMRT?order=wbapi_data_value_2010%20wbapi_data_value%20wbapi_data_value-first&sort=desc

6. The World Bank. Indicators: Projects, Niger. <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P096198/multi-sector-demographic-project?lang=en>