



United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim have pledged to strongly support the initiative of Niger's "Call to Action" for improvements in women's reproductive health and girls' education, and to invest \$200 million in a new regional project aimed at improving the regional response to maternal and reproductive health and adolescent girls' issues.

"Too many children still die, too many mothers are lost to complications of childbirth, and too few girls are in secondary school," said Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou. "So we need to do much more."

During an historic trip to the region by leaders from five international organizations – the UN, World Bank, African Union, African Development Bank, and the European Union – Kim announced the \$200 million Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographics Project.

The initiative, which is additional to the Bank's existing \$150 million in commitments over the next two years for maternal and child health programs in the Sahel, will work across the region to improve the availability and affordability of reproductive health commodities, strengthen specialized training centers for rural based midwifery/nursing services, and to pilot and share

knowledge on adolescent girls' initiatives.

While Niger and most of the countries in the Sahel have reduced child mortality significantly in recent years, maternal and child mortality levels remain high, as do fertility rates.

“This call to action on Women's Empowerment and Demographics is not simply about numbers. It is about people. When women and girls have the tools to shape their own future, they will advance development for all,” said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

“As we work towards ending poverty across the developing world, we know that educating adolescent girls and getting health services to women will lead to greater prosperity not just for individual families but also for entire economies,” said World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim.

Speaking as both parent and president, Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou highlighted the strong family values shared across the Sahel, and called for urgent coordinated regional action to ensure that children in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal have the best possible opportunities for the future.

The heads of the World Bank Group and the United Nations are on their second joint mission to the continent, signaling their deep commitment to peace and economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Photo: UN Photo/Evan Schneider