THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION POLICY FORMATION IN AFRICA

The Case of Benin

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1 - EARLY REFORMS (1975–89)

1.1 Like other African countries, Benin participates in the community of nations, with all the consequences that flow from that status, including a rich exchange of technology casting Benin in the role of passive consumer. Competition among nations carries with it the need to train an ever more qualified labor force, and this has implications for its education system. Events in the life of the nation prompt the education system to address specific problems in response to development issues raised by the society at large.

1.2 By 1989, Benin had negotiated its Structural Adjustment Program with the Bretton Woods institutions. National economic conditions were disastrous, and social problems acute. 1990 saw a change both in the government and in the political system as the country moved from a 17-year-old militarist-Marxist regime to a multiparty democratic system. Establishing the rule of law created conditions ripe for change of all kinds. The weight of the past, the utter bankruptcy of the dictatorial regime, and Benin's grave economic difficulties made the social repercussions of the Structural Adjustment Program particularly significant. Protest movements became inevitable, forcing an inherently repressive government to begin contemplating a change in its basic philosophy.

1.3 This report discusses the events that have taken place to reform education in Benin, particularly those surrounding the time of its crisis in 1989.

The legacy of colonialism

1.4 Independence resulted from negotiations between the French and the nation's elite. This reinforced the mission and social role of an education system that had become profoundly influential. But academic institutions were soon revealed to be bastions of conservatism inherited from colonialism. The new regional leaders structured education along the lines of the French model, kept French as the only official language, adopted the French academic curricula, and established a social and educational context far removed from traditional Dahomean education. The choice of French indefinitely postponed efforts to reassert the value of the national languages—fundamental elements of culture disdainfully referred to as dialects.[1]

1.5 An elitist policy uses academic exams as its basis for selection. But professional life does not always mirror the conditions that determine success on an exam, so we should not be surprised if some professionals—or quite simply some graduates—were unable to apply the theoretical formulas taught in school to real-life situations.

1.6 All in all, the concept of post-colonial Dahomean education based on the French model was an alienating one. Its design was imposed from the outside, and its operation and objectives made a distressing spectacle. The system remained ineffectual because it reached only a small number of students. By 1975, the number of children in school was actually less than 60 percent.

1.7 A military coup in October 1972 ushered in a revolutionary regime, which commanded a radical change in the Beninese education system.[2] The regime established the New School, based on the theories of an elite that had never suffered imperialist exploitation.[3]

The New School

Objectives

1.8 The New School reform was organized around several guiding principles: to abandon elitist-influenced education; to establish equality of opportunity, to build an education system with ties to everyday life, to transform the schools into a driving force for economic and social development, and so on. The members of the National Commission on Education Reform gave the New School the task of promoting economic and social development. It would be built as a production unit and would pay for itself, with the support of students, parents, and local government.

1.9 Dahomean intellectuals expected the schools to form the intellect, to encourage personality development, to educate and to prepare the student for professional life. They also wanted the schools to impart a certain culture to students. But the population as a whole viewed the schools as the sole means of social advancement, a beacon that enjoys massive support among Dahomeans. Education was once their pride; they did brilliantly on tests and were famous for their performance in competitive examinations. It was difficult to adapt this image of the education system to meet the demands of revolutionary changes in the economy and society. That is why the new regime developed a campaign to strip academic degrees of their mystique and disparage degree holders.

1.10 Fierce competition, a corollary of elitism, operates on the basis of inequality. The reform's provisions were to eliminate regional disparities and strengthen rural areas that were poorly equipped with schools and instructional materials. This would offer justice to rural students who faced their counterparts in relatively well-supplied urban schools.

1.11 The social prejudices standing in the way of the emancipation of women and preventing girls from attending school would be smashed in order to establish equal opportunity for both sexes. Free and compulsory education would break the barriers between the children of wealthy parents and their counterparts from poor families and would allow for a maximum number of Beninese youth to attend school.

1.12 School counseling would make it possible for all children to learn a trade. Linking the school system to the environment would provide the tools to shape a generation of intellectuals quite different from their predecessors educated in the colonial schools.

1.13 The decision to bring national languages into the schools constituted a veritable revolution. This highly political gesture would prove that African languages are entirely capable of adapting to the scientific process.

1.14 And so the New School was expected to have every possible virtue. It remained to be seen whether intentions could be appropriately translated into action.

Implementation

1.15 Government created several institutions to ensure that the reform would actually go into effect. It named a vice rector responsible for implementing the reform, designated several expert commissions, created a committee responsible for monitoring implementation of a new academic calendar, and so on.

1.16 These authorities constituted an enormous administrative machine that stifled initiative rather than fostering decisive action. The impossibility of coordinating decisions and actions doomed the reform to immediate failure. The mistakes that followed took on the air of a disaster, to the extent that they seriously compromised the future of several generations of young people.

1.17 The New School grew out of the insights of a few individuals, although some represented one organization or another, and as a result, it was a set of decisions imposed on the people, who had no means of evaluating them. In addition, people were unable to judge the intrinsic value of the changes, because haste—the Original Sin where reform is concerned—contributed to misrepresent the spirit of good will behind the effort to improve the Beninese education system.

1.18 In fact, the public information campaign announcing the advent of the New School was not launched until after the legislation governing the reform had already been adopted. Since the population had been presented with a *fait accompli*, the information came across as propaganda. The sequence of events made it difficult to give the population a role in setting up the New School with an eye toward running it better. An effort of this magnitude should go through experimental stages in pilot locations. After all, Article 42 of the General Principles Act stipulated that "the present reform shall be implemented progressively beginning at the start of the 1975–76 school year, and in accordance with a schedule established by executive order of the Cabinet as proposed by the National Education Minister."

1.19 What happened to the financial support intended to promote the New School? The significant contributions required from local governments, parents, and even the students themselves bear witness to the contradiction among the New School's objectives. It was meant to be free of charge; for the first time, an official document[4] had announced free and compulsory education, and respecting this principle would boost the regime's prestige. But the sweat equity invested by the various actors (parents took part in the construction of buildings in some rural areas, and students spent a large part of the school day working in the cooperative's fields) in no way contributed toward reducing tuition for families enrolling their children. This was essentially the result of maintaining the framework of an economy dominated by international capitalism.

Results

1.20 Like the Republic of Dahomey, the Republic of Benin retained the characteristics of peripheral capitalism. As a result, the worldwide crisis disrupting the economies of the industrialized countries had repercussions in Benin, where it reached dramatic proportions. Economic inequality grew and, in turn, established inequality of opportunity in the schools. In fact, the complete elimination of private schools—primary and secondary—provoked a mass exodus among the children of the wealthy, who went abroad to continue their studies in the hope of finding higher academic standards. Children from less fortunate backgrounds either accepted their fate or gave up when the burden became too great; for those who gave up, there was no legal penalty to discourage violation of the New School's guiding principles.

1.21 De facto, compulsory education remained a purely theoretical concept. After six years of implementing reform, an evaluation concluded that the new system was a complete failure. The results of this evaluation were kept quiet. A precautionary crackdown reminded everyone of the need for silence. The damage control measures that followed clearly reflected the ruling political regime's panic and its ipso facto inability to solve the system's underlying problems, which surged to the surface in short order.

1.22 Despite the system's potential richness and the political courage that had marked the change, the reform as a whole appeared as an infinite series of half-measures, incoherent and therefore impracticable in light of the economic, political, and social conditions in Benin. The New School was trapped in a financial dead end.

1.23 Results were disappointing despite the allocation of 30 to 40 percent of the national operating budget to education since 1975.

(a) The number of students rose in absolute terms, but the percentage of children attending school declined.

(b) The internal effectiveness and quality of primary education declined.

(c) The average student-teacher ratio was relatively low (33 to 1) and not affordable, given the country's financial and human resources capabilities.

(d) Fewer than 50 percent of students reaching their final year of basic instruction succeeded in passing the exam marking the end of their studies.

1.24 Teacher salaries represented 87 percent of spending for primary education, leaving scarce resources for instructional materials. Irregular salary payments were killing teacher motivation.

1.25 Conditions were poor at the lower-level secondary education. The student population grew approximately 280 percent between 1975 and 1983, then fell roughly 27 percent between 1983 and 1988. The number of candidates for the lower-level secondary education exam (the *brevet d'études du premier cycle* between the first and second parts of secondary education) declined approximately 35 percent between 1986 and 1988, and the average success rate for the last three years was 18.5 percent. The number of students taking the *baccalauréat* exam dropped roughly 37 percent between 1983 and 1988.

1.26 In higher education, the number of students at the National University of Benin had grown rapidly. Although students in higher education represented only 2 percent of the students in the entire education system, they received roughly 28 percent of the sector budget. Scholarships and subsidies consumed 50 percent of the available resources, while 30 percent went to administrative expenses and only 20 percent to salaries. In addition, secondary and higher education saw poor external effectiveness.[5]

1.27 Private contributions (from families and communities) represented a significant portion of unit costs in primary and secondary education, while private costs disappeared for scholarship recipients in higher education. Nonetheless, there was a persistent tendency to identify "lack of resources" as the main trouble with the system.

1.28 Under this bleak picture simmered a crisis that was seen both by the Beninese authorities and by international organizations, who agreed to attempt a rescue effort.

2 - ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CRISIS (1989)

2.1 At the end of 1989, Benin's poor economic performance began to aggravate an already difficult situation. The industrial sector had seen negative growth since 1985. The lack of liquidity in the banking sector, continued growth of foreign debt, tripling of the government payroll as the number of civil service employees rose from 29 thousand in 1980 to 47 thousand in 1987, and finally the dysfunctional relationship between the labor market and the education and training system all combined to plunge Benin into an unprecedented crisis.

2.2 By the time the new decade arrived, the country was facing bankruptcy. As government went into debt with the banks, salary payments were delayed by several months. The social consequences of the Structural Adjustment Program and the recession's negative impact on all areas of society sparked a protest movement, which began at the National University of Benin and gradually spread throughout the civil service. The government saw the crisis coming, but a final Cabinet reshuffle enlisting experts to address the nation's problems could not stop the headlong rush toward challenge and protest.

2.3 Union leaders, students and teachers of all sorts were arrested; the military appeared in impressive numbers in the streets, in public places and in the schools; the media broadcast overblown threats in all the national languages; but nothing could defuse the crisis. Every day the gigantic administrative machine of the single-party government lost a little more of its power to control and repress. The isolated strikes appearing in the third quarter of 1988 took on unusual scope and vigor throughout 1989. Street protests proliferated, heralding the failure of the dictatorial regime that had presided over the country's fate for 17 years.

2.4 Against its will, government began to contemplate superficial reforms, but political crisis was inevitable. In 1989, a new, democratic government replaced the Marxist regime that had entered 17 years earlier.

3- KEY EVENTS IN POLICY REFORM (1989–91)

3.1 Beginning in 1989, a series of events, some overlapping in time, characterized the formulation of policies in education that promoted reform. These were

(a) The Education Policy Analysis project, which was instigated in September 1989 and ran through early 1991;

(b) The National Conference (Conférence nationale des forces vives), held in February 1990;

(c) The Etats Généraux for Education, held in October 1990;

(d) The comprehensive audit of the education sector by the National Education Ministry, which began in June 1992 and ran for ten months.

(e) The Declaration of Education Policy in January 1991.

The Education Policy Analysis project

Project goals and plans

Within the larger context of structural adjustment, the Beninese government hoped to develop an adjustment policy for the education sector and investment strategies to allow implementation of this policy. In mid-1989, before the change in regime, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) planned to arrange two Round Tables to develop this policy and strategy: the first in June 1990 in Geneva, where Benin would meet with its main donors to discuss overall financing of its (macro) structural adjustment program; and the second in early 1991 in Cotonou, where sector-specific investment strategies and financial needs would be presented. Benin was to undertake a series of policy studies to serve as a basis for these two Round Tables.

3.2 In response to an appeal from the Beninese government and UNDP representatives in Cotonou, UNESCO proposed a project aimed at finding solutions, within the scope of the country's economic constraints, to the following problems:

(a) Declining quality and internal effectiveness in all subsectors of the system, particularly primary education;

(b) Decreasing numbers of students in primary and secondary education and the lack of apprenticeship facilities for students who had dropped out or never attended school;

(c) Relatively low enrollment and success rates for girls in some regions;

(d) Harm inflicted on primary education from bias in the sector's financing structure and accompanying inefficiencies in allocating resources;

(e) Poor external effectiveness in lower-level secondary and technical education and in higher education, where costly curricula were poorly adapted to working life. The marked discrepancy between the

training provided and the needs of the economy was particularly striking in the technical and farm sectors.

(f) The need to develop planning and resource management capabilities;

(g) Weak capability for analyzing the policies needed to develop a viable strategy for sector development within the context of current constraints;

(h) The need for thorough reflection on the education and training system required for the country's development.

3.3 The Education Policy Analysis project (also called the UNDP/UNESCO project) was designed to involve those concerned with the education and human resources sector. This included not only the National Education Ministry and the Planning and Statistics Ministry, but also multilateral agencies (the World Bank, and the African Development Bank) and bilateral agencies (France, Germany, and Switzerland). A Beninese coordinator was to manage the project, and qualified Beninese nationals were to do the studies with qualified expert assistance provided and coordinated by UNESCO. Although largely financed by UNESCO, the project was to lay the groundwork for ongoing dialogue among donors in order to promote dialogue between them and the Beninese authorities.

3.4 Sector studies began in September with one on the quality of primary education, which revealed that the operation of the Beninese school system was breaking down. Contributing factors to poor academic performance, however, seemed difficult to affect directly by policy changes, since they involved the personal characteristics of both students and teachers.

Project activities

3.5 It is important to summarize briefly the work performed by the Project, because it serves as the foundation for programs designed to correct the sector's problems. The position occupied by the Project has earned it often contradictory and occasionally justified criticism. While it is true that most people acknowledge that the work was necessary and well founded, no one accepts the *de facto* authority that grew out of the Project's dynamism.

Sector studies

3.6 The study on primary education in Benin yielded interesting conclusions: The system went awry because government no longer fulfilled its role as monitor and supervisor. Policies aimed at improving quality and efficiency in primary education would require trade-offs in cost and effectiveness. Recommendations focused on pedagogical and institutional changes: Raise the student-teacher ratio to 45 to 1; develop a book policy; sever the link between teachers' salaries and the possession of academic degrees such as the *baccalauréat*, which do not reflect professional competence; provide continuing education for teachers; give absolute priority to reorganizing administrative machinery, monitoring and supervision, and employee motivation and retraining programs.

3.7 The study examining general secondary education offered a complete assessment of that subsector and recommendations for the first steps toward modernization.

(a) Teachers were poorly qualified. Nearly half were teaching interns, while only about 40 percent of teaching positions were held by certified teachers and assistant teachers (with a *brevet d'aptitude à l'enseignement moyen*).

(b) The curricula often seemed inappropriate, and teaching supervision was undeniably clumsy. The lack of textbooks and the dilapidated state of the laboratories accurately reflected the condition of the facilities in general.

(c) It was something of an admission of failure for the secondary education system to spend 36 student years per lower-level graduate and 19 student years per upper-level graduate and to lose more than a quarter of its students in the space of several years without preparing the dropouts for out placement. It was therefore urgent to re-evaluate the overall structure of the subsector. Recommendations focused on objectives, access, regulating the student flow, school counseling, curricula, career preparation, and supervision.

3.8 Vocational and Technical Training (ETP) is the only branch of education (before the *baccalauréat*) that prepares young people to hold skilled jobs and the only one to teach professional expertise. Here the causes of poor performance lay not with the students but with the poor state of material and human resources in the schools:

(a) The majority of schools were in considerable decay, and the absence of workshops and equipment made it physically impossible to provide any real vocational training.

(b) Curricula were inappropriate; long, cumbersome, and obsolete, they offered career paths that were too specialized in light of the uncertain job market.

(c) Instructor training levels were poor.

(d) Unit costs were very high, with the cost for each level two graduate reaching 14 times the cost for a *baccalauréat* graduate in general education.

The study recommended implementing measures with a three-pronged focus on overall policy, internal organization, and financial assistance.

3.9 The study on higher education highlighted the following points:

(a) The student body at this level represented barely 2 percent of Benin's entire student population. While the rates of primary and secondary attendance had been falling for the previous ten years, however, the number of students in higher education had grown considerably in the same period, rising from 3,390 in 1979 to 9,545 in 1989, for an increase of 282 percent. This sector alone enjoyed 28 percent of the education budget (1989), or 7 percent of the national budget.

(b) However, internal performance was mediocre, with costs that seemed disproportionate in relation to the results. The opportunities offered by higher education were increasingly limited, if for no other reason than the freeze on recruiting by the civil service, which had served as the principal supplier of jobs for higher education graduates in the past.

(c) The priority was to redistribute the resources assigned to higher education so as to improve its quality and bring it into closer conformity with the national job market.

3.10 A study on job market conditions synthesized numerous studies and seminars of various administrative entities. It showed that the job market presented a fairly gloomy outlook: the structured modern sector offered few opportunities, and job prospects were largely limited to the informal sector. No one, however, had given much thought to developing the sector or undertaking a detailed analysis of it.

3.11 A study on the costs and financing of education concluded that any new education policy or development strategy that failed to take resources into account was doomed to failure, like the New School launched in 1975. This concerned not only the marshaling of financial resources made available to the system but also their complete, efficient, and economic use. The report made recommendations consistent with this analysis.

3.12 Tools for analysis, planning, and steering were developed to help evaluate situations and rapidly identify the appropriate action. The two management tools developed were a financial simulation model and the computerization of education statistics.

Seminars on the sector studies

3.13 The majority of these studies were finished off in seminars designed both to provide information to school system users and to ratify the work that had been done. The partnerships and teams made up of national and international consultants reflect the project's dual concern of building national expertise and producing scientifically valid work. Two other issues were constantly raised: integrating the data from various sources and ensuring that all of the actors would abide by the implications of those data. Exchanges among political authorities, experts, teachers, students, parents, employers, and others gave people the sense they were participating in a common task.

3.14 Seminars were held on the following topics: higher education, the financial simulation model, vocational and technical schools, general secondary education, and primary education.

3.15 The overall objectives for these seminars were the same everywhere, but because they were held in different parts of the country, they offered an opportunity to inform and hear from people in rural areas, often isolated from the flow of information at central offices.

The National Conference

3.16 The National Conference (La Conférence nationale des forces vives) was called for on February 19, 1990. Government was on its last legs, and the National Conference stepped in to begin the arbitration that led eventually to the removal of the existing regime. Trade and professional groups, religious congregations, the newly founded political parties and development associations[6] all sent representatives to the National Conference. The outpouring of opinion was unrestrained, since there was no agenda formalizing which issues would be discussed when. Only committee work was ordered by such guidelines.

3.17 The conference addressed issues much broader than education. Though intellectuals had a monopoly on many of the conference's process and many political issues, education issues drew everyone's interest—intellectuals, religious leaders, craftsmen, and people from rural areas. The New School was thoroughly condemned, and all agreed that its poor performance had been poor.

> Our children can't manage to read or write letters anymore. They spend most of their time working in the teachers' fields. Why send them to school when we have our own fields to tend? We are now building the schools and equipping them, and sometimes we even house the teachers, and our children are not getting anything out of these schools.[7]

A man sporting a beautiful Western-style suit commented that "today's lower-level secondary education graduate [*brevet d'études du premier cycle*] can't express himself as well as students in the sixties who left school with a basic primary studies certificate [*certificat d'éudes primaires élémentaires*]."

3.18 There were pathetic moments in the trial of the New School and its advocates. The judgement of many participants echoed this question: "If the schools were good, why did government dignitaries send their children to be educated abroad?"

3.19 In fact, people were comparing education that had been provided under two very different sets of circumstances. The political, economic, and social changes affecting Beninese communities since Independence in 1960 were enormous. When they said, "Our children have more resources for education but are less successful. Have they suddenly become backward?" the speakers were expressing ill-founded nostalgia. Yet this outlook influenced the conference's work on education.

3.20 The resolutions reached by the Education, Culture, Science, Sports, and Environment Committee began with these words: "It is not necessary to invent a completely new education system, but to draw on past experience in an effort to improve existing programs and encourage their implementation by providing adequate financial support."

3.21 Thus, the conference did not challenge what already existed but proposed reworking structure and content. The participants declared primary education to be free and compulsory and demanded that secondary education emphasize vocational training and at the same time be more open to private initiatives. The preference for elitist education emerged; an entity responsible for academic counseling was created, which would select the best students and send them to top-level boarding high schools entirely financed by government. The desire for an extensive boarding-school system was expressed by many speakers, returning again and again like a leitmotif.

3.22 The new curricula would turn away from the New School to restore the importance of morality and the artistic disciplines. They would be modeled on the curricula used in French-speaking countries, but with a twist: knowledge and protection of the environment would also be taught.

3.23 Where was the funding for this all-encompassing, irresistibly noble, and particularly ambitious project? The government seemed to be the primary financier, though Benin had just begun its painful journey down the path of structural adjustment. True, the conference recommended that regional and international cooperation be developed to bring in financial help, but abstract economic rhetoric without hard figures can produce nothing more than vague desires and mere declarations of intent.

3.24 Unfortunately, the new policy directions did not provide for any study of the scope and cost of these proposals or how to implement them. Were we destined to repeat the problems that ultimately brought the New School to a standstill?

The Etats Généraux for Education

3.25 The spirit of consensus built at the National Conference inspired the Etats Généraux for Education (EGE), held in October 1990. This was the only event of this kind recommended by the conference. The poor performance of the 1975 New School reforms and Benin's economic, political and social problems had raised the question: What kind of education system for what kind of development? The social, economic, and political effectiveness of the Beninese education system instituted by the militarist-Marxist regime urgently required a review and some policy decisions. Broad-based dialogue seemed like the first step toward improving the Beninese school system's public image.

3.26 The National Conference and the Education Policy Analysis project had begun without any plan to connect their efforts. The first was spurred by financial difficulties aggravated by the authorities' inability to pay civil service salaries. The second was designed to address the acknowledged failure of the education

system. Although they ran parallel at the start, the two processes ultimately converged to solidify the Etats Généraux for Education.

Preparations

3.27 High hopes for the EGE required that the National Education Ministry give special care to its planning and preparation. The minister accurately assessed the scope of his responsibility and mounted an intensive effort to ensure the EGE's success. The ministry formed four teams that traveled to the Côte-d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, Senegal, Mali, Nigeria, and Ghana to talk with leaders and experts and gather information on their respective education systems, education policies, and particularly strategies for revitalizing and improving the education system.

3.28 The reports of the Beninese emissaries revealed a rich diversity that reflected the serious problems confronting West African education systems still seeking to define their images. The Beninese recognized that the French colonial school system had left an indelible mark on French-speaking African countries. Their diseases presented the same symptoms and the cures were similar. But Benin would have to design its own specific solution.

3.29 Other participants prepared in different ways. Many national and departmental offices of the ministry did not arrange for any preparatory consultations in advance of the EGE. Only the National University of Benin produced three documents. The labor unions were confident that they knew the education system's problems and negotiated grimly for their right to participate in the EGE. Teachers identified with their unions and held no meetings to mark the event as something out of the ordinary, though preliminary working sessions would have allowed them to frame the debate and to reflect in advance on solutions. Civil society—Parents' Associations, employers, craftsmen, and so on—had little or no information, and they too limited themselves to an improvised contribution based on the facts available.

3.30 Although the National Education Minister had hoped to convene the EGE in July 1990, it was postponed in order to allow the Education Policy Analysis project time to complete more of its sectoral studies. The minister's advisors asked the project to prepare a summary of each study, and these documents were featured among those presented at the EGE.

3.31 The UNDP agreed to finance fact-finding trips as part of the EGE preparations, room and board for Beninese coming from outside Cotonou, and production of the proceedings. UNESCO and the French also contributed. It was this enormous mobilization of material, financial, and human resources that made it possible to convene the EGE.

Convening the Etats Généraux

3.32 The EGE took place October 2–9, 1990. Nearly 400 people attended, representing every ministry and central and outlying office of the National Education Ministry, selected teaching establishments, all trade associations, development partners, students at all levels, representatives of parents—in short, the entire nation.

3.33 Since preliminary meetings had not been held among groups of participants, neither the delegates from organized entities nor those from the informal sector held any specific, clearly defined mandate. The mandates that had been articulated and recognized were reflected in the opening remarks made by the National Education Minister and the Prime Minister. The National Education Minister commented:

> The EGE will need to focus on these problems and many others as well. I hope that the delegates will take a calm and responsible approach to their deliberations, bearing in mind both our legitimate desire for collective advancement and the limitations imposed on us by particularly difficult

economic conditions. . . . If we are to shape transition in the education sector, we cannot be content with maintaining a holding pattern. We must make it possible to move progressively, and in fairly short order, from one type of school system to another; away from the schools as refuge, as asylum, as alibi; away from a system that is going nowhere and operating in a vacuum with no other end than itself, and toward a system that actually leads to something else and prepares students for the job market with renewed confidence and hope.

3.34 The Prime Minister (and future President) concluded his opening remarks by saying:

> This competition will be won by those with the best technical, technological, and scientific assets, those who turn resolutely toward basic and applied research. All of this, I hope, has been taken into account, and I am convinced that the project you will present to us will contain all the elements needed to restore the value of our education system.

3.35 Quite clearly, these instructions represent both objectives and ultimate goals whose scope could be measured by the extent of the real problems in need of solution. But did such a heterogeneous collection of individuals possess the necessary technical expertise to encompass the depths of this eminently political and strangely complex issue? The composition of the special committees did not leave much room for optimism.

3.36 Each of six committees addressed one of the following topics: General principles and organization, preschool and primary education, general secondary education, vocational and technical schools, higher education and scientific research, and financing, managing and renewing the status of the teaching profession.

3.37 The committee on general principles and organization made a thorough assessment of the Beninese education system and reiterated the conclusion of the National Conference that what was needed were not new policies but resources to rehabilitate and consolidate what already existed. Considering that a good third of government's budget had been devoted to education for 15 years, we could comment at length on this mentality. Two theories can be offered:

(a) The feeling of nostalgia expressed in repeated references to "Dahomey, Africa's Latin Quarter" was so strong that it obscured the need for reforms that could be adapted to the various changes in the world;

(b) The committee members subconsciously accepted the idea that no bureaucrat would agree to radical changes in a system where he had made a comfortable niche for himself. Teachers feared that civil society would interfere with their old and prestigious institution, though its image had become deeply tarnished; parents saw the schools as having the clear mission of providing a toehold in the civil service.

3.38 The other, more specialized committees listed problems and offered solutions resembling catalogs of wishful thinking or labor union demands. All of them emphasized the "lack of resources," in complete contradiction with government's financial efforts. Prudent use of resources did not interest the committee members at all; they were quite willing to take shortcuts that left many questions unanswered. It could hardly have been otherwise, given the diversity of interests and the conflicts that had to be handled. Such conflicts are inevitable in a dialogue where interest parts company with responsibility.

Outcomes

3.39 In reality, government was seeking legitimation and support to reinforce its credibility in confronting the demands of its international partners. Government seized upon the limits of dialogue with the people, prompting the National Education Minister to say, "it is important to remember that the EGE delegates made recommendations, not decisions....It belongs to government to make decisions according to the means at its

disposal and the goals it is pursuing."[8] Yet some participants believed that they had made decisions, not merely recommendations. This difference in understanding endured beyond the event.

3.40 In the EGE, union leaders discovered a forum for presenting their lists of grievances, with the whole nation as witness. Nor was there a better opportunity for students to allow youthful confusion and helplessness to explode in protests demanding scholarships and academic assistance. Less heavily represented and less active, civil society denounced its habitual exclusion from the debate, despite its apparent lack of interest in continued involvement. There remained the silent majority, which is also a part of civil society, and which so many public bodies claimed to represent.

3.41 Special interests were very much in evidence. Conflicting opinions left an indelible mark on relations between the unions and the National Education Minister. Teachers would never tire of using EGE decisions to support protests of every kind. The National Education Minister would always be compliant in talks because of his conviction that the EGE's conclusions were only recommendations. The EGE follow-up committee's unwillingness or inability to act allowed the parties to reach a *modus vivendi*, but the dialogue remained fruitless.

3.42 All of these perfectly understandable conflicts raise the issue of how to manage democracy. The permanent nature of the conflicts grew out of the frame of reference each party brought to the EGE in defending its cause. Nonetheless, the sector studies and the results of the audit that followed were disquieting to many.[9]

3.43 Actions to be taken based on the general assessment of the education system and the analysis of each major issue were scheduled (short-, medium-, and long-term). For the immediate future, priority was given to improving vocational and technical training. In spite of the importance assigned to primary education in the Constitution of December 11, 1990, the measures envisioned by the EGE were aimed at improving self-employment training and restoring excellence.

3.44 A Council created to follow up on the EGE's decisions would have guaranteed effective action, but it was never convened—a negligence that no one has ever deplored.

3.45 The slogans issuing from the EGE were seductive, but at the same time they raised enormous problems. Indeed, how it is possible to maintain an education system that is both selective and democratic? What exactly does "self-employment training" mean? Would everyone who left the Beninese education system be capable of self-employment? Moreover, the institutional and financial groundwork for meeting such goals was never laid.

3.46 The EGE's official conclusions implied a complete reworking of society as a whole.

> The EGE's mission is to translate the Conference's social project into an education project with the three objectives of general education, job training, and character development.[10]

But it is society that creates and defines schools, not the reverse, and social change has a long development cycle.

Impact

3.47 We interviewed heads of school districts, political-administrative authorities (sub-prefects and mayors, for example), primary and secondary schoolteachers, parents, civil servants, people living in rural areas, and so on. Most of these people have never seen the *Proceedings of the Etats Généraux for Education*. Clearly, no public information or awareness campaigns had focused on the political, economic, and social stakes in the outcome of the dialogue. One might conclude that neither the National Education

Minister, the unions, the press, nor the EGE delegates have done their respective jobs of providing information and reports. Poor circulation of information limited the scope of an official document that, *a priori*, defined government's willingness to work with the people.

3.48 The legal value of the EGE has yet to be proven in the eyes of the general public, whose members feel that they are involved in an adventure about which they know almost nothing. This is the eternal problem of practicing "modern" democracy in a largely illiterate population. Given these conditions, we might ask whether the reforms launched by the EGE are consistent with the will of the people, and whether national dialogue has a truly democratic character.

3.49 Nevertheless, the issues specific to Benin demand appropriately nuanced decisions. And the prerequisites for bringing about change are slowly but surely falling into place.

Comprehensive audit by the ministry

3.50 Included in the Beninese government's commitment to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in connection with the Structural Adjustment Program were audits of several ministries, National Education among them. The key working elements of the Beninese education system brought to light by the study on personnel management in national education constituted the beginnings of an audit that called for a broader and more comprehensive examination. In addition, the report on this study, begun in June 1992 and lasting ten months, served as a preliminary document for the ministry's audit on human resources.

3.51 The terms of reference presented to the various donors were the subject of endless discussion. The World Bank expressed skepticism, due to its desire to see the audit lead to a rapid assessment of the number of possible cuts in civil service personnel. It viewed the terms of reference as too ambitious and believed that the operation had little chance of surviving in a ten-month time period. The other donors wanted to obtain additional information on the actual objectives and procedures for the audit. This was true for France and for the German cooperation agency (GTZ).

3.52 Talks among the National Education Ministry, UNDP, and the World Bank led to an agreement authorizing the Education Policy Analysis project to carry out the National Education Ministry audit after presenting proposed terms of reference to all of the parties concerned. The terms of reference were to take several factors into account:

(a) Considerations related to the Structural Adjustment Program involved: (i) streamlining and increasing efficiency in the central offices: (ii) improving both the quantity and quality of investment in human capital; (iii) strengthening management capabilities by reducing unproductive personnel; (iv) improving use of personnel; and (v) reinforcing discipline on budget issues.

(b) Then came objectives specific to education sector policy. Areas requiring close scrutiny included: (i) assessing the quality, relevance and cohesiveness of instruction; (ii) revitalizing primary education, (iii) examining curricula and pedagogical factors; and (iv) regulating the flow of teachers and students.

(c) Sector study results were to serve as the foundation for the work performed under the comprehensive audit.

3.53 The audit concerned all of the functions at work in the "education enterprise," particularly strategic management functions and the operational management functions involved in implementing, monitoring and evaluating the measures outlined in the plans of action that had been approved. The audit was expected to identify malfunctions and their causes, propose methods, tools, and organizational measures to be put into

place, and arrive at an overall organizational blueprint for the "education enterprise." Three families of sub-audits emerged: the strategic management subsystem, the pedagogical subsystem, and the operations subsystem. Each family contained several operations.

3.54 Ten months after work began, a seminar was held to ratify the results of the audit. Present at this seminar were Beninese executives, representatives of Career Public Servants, union representatives for all branches of teaching, national and international consultants, donors, and the Project team.

3.55 The seminar had two purposes: to inform school system users of the audit's results, and to build consensus on the evaluation and simultaneously point toward the path to renewal. The best possible description of this seminar is summarized in the opening remarks by the National Education Ministry representative, who said essentially that the Beninese authorities sought to use the audit to streamline administration of the education system and rehabilitate the system as a whole. The minister stressed the his staff's special interest in the audit and expressed delight that the consensus reached by the seminar participants would make it possible to take a dispassionate approach to the next phase, which would focus on pursuing a better understanding of ideas that had been mentioned but not developed during the presentations. In this way, the audit's outcome was appropriated by the ministry.

3.56 There followed a series of workshops on the problem of the teaching force. The primary objective of these workshops was to clarify ideas on managing the budget; the workforce, personnel, and the organizational framework (job descriptions). These workshops were designed primarily for officials in the head office of the National Education Ministry, officials at the finance and civil service ministries, decision-makers in the area of human and financial resources allocation, departmental directors of education (the top decentralized level of the National Education Ministry's operational management of these resources) and leading officials in the departmental offices of education.

3.57 The results of the workshops can be grouped into several types: (i) issues that met with consensus at the level of the decentralized offices; (ii) operational issues requiring further study without need for dialogue outside the National Education Ministry (for example, outsourcing a position, revising regulations on transfers); (iii) issues requiring further study in cooperation with other ministries (regionalized recruiting, delegating to the National Education Ministry, authority to sign certain official documents); and (iv) issues requiring additional work (tools and data storage media for projecting teacher needs; adaptation of the financial simulation model for use at the department level).

3.58 The next step was to develop action plans. Initially the Education Policy Analysis Project was to develop an investment program, allowing the Beninese government to attend an donors' Round Table meeting. The entry of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank in the sector, however, moved Benin into a different process that no longer led to a traditional Round Table.

3.59 Plans of action with cost estimates needed to be developed. In particular, it was urgent to prepare plans of action on primary education to accompany government's letter of intent to USAID on launching its project. This plan of action was broken down into three major sub-plans: planning, pedagogical methods, and institutional reforms. In addition, to prepare for a World Bank evaluation mission, the education ministry staff asked the Education Policy Analysis project to work on plans of action for implementing the audit recommendations.

The Declaration of Education Policy

3.60 Moving the changes along a clearly defined path would required a policy document approved by all the parties. Once again, the donors played a decisive role. As part of its conditionality, the World Bank required a Declaration of Education Policy for its second Structural Adjustment Program and a sector

adjustment project (which was ultimately replaced by a traditional investment project). To produce this blueprint for policy, government tasked the project with providing technical support to a Select Committee set up by the National Education Minister.

3.61 While the project's national and international consultants began studies on organization and methods and personnel management, the project also assisted the Select Committee in laying the groundwork for a Declaration. This document drew on the broad guidelines set by the Etats Généraux for Education and the National Education Minister's contribution, detailing his staff''s projects as well as the materials produced by the sector studies and ratified by the national and regional seminars. After several revisions by National Education Ministry staff, the minister finally presented the document to the Cabinet, which adopted it in January 1991.

3.62 Then the conflicts among donors began. The declaration adopted by the Cabinet was held up as an expression of the will of the Beninese government. Although the World Bank had participated in working sessions of the Select Committee (as part of the preconditions for setting up its program), it would not vouch for the document's technical legitimacy. It demanded greater detail, dwelling on issues of both form and content. Whether deliberately or not, the World Bank sought to block the declaration in order to justify its objections to that document.

3.63 The French Cooperation Agency (*Coopération Français)*], which had remained indifferent after helping to finance the study on higher education, rushed to join the World Bank in its struggle with the Education Policy Analysis project over the Declaration. Minor incidents, indicative of the tension among the donors, arose during the bargaining process.[11] In addition, the community of donors grew to include Germany's GTZ, Switzerland, and, in the summer of 1991, USAID.

3.64 Whatever views expressed to the contrary might have been, the summary of the Cabinet meeting actions reflected the adoption of this important document. This summary was not usually published, and the World Bank, seeing this as an opportunity to quibble, maintained that the document had not been adopted. Yet it was recognized and referenced by ministry experts involved in the effort to develop dossiers for the donors in the sector.

3.65 In the absence of a General Principles Act, the National Education Ministry was obliged to mount a broad information campaign via seminars, television appearances, articles in the press, and so on.[12]

3.66 The Cabinet's consideration and approval of the Declaration of Education Policy gave it official status. This document represented a legitimate agreement by government for the entire National Education Ministry, which could now make commitments on Benin's behalf in talks with donors, in strict compliance with the terms of the Declaration. Donors could use the document as the basis for negotiating their programs.

3.67 Then there was the Beninese population. It had rightfully taken part in the dialogue through the information and ratification seminars organized around the conclusions of the sector studies, and through their representatives at the Etats Généraux. Government's affirmation of the Declaration constituted the completion of a democratic process.

3.68 The declaration consisted of three sections:

(a) An assessment of the sector, its strengths and weaknesses;

(b) A description of the process leading to education reform (a national dialogue to disseminate the results of the sector studies; sector talks with donors where government's strategy and investment program would be presented; the National Education Ministry audit);

(c) The fundamentals of the new education policy; particular emphasis was given to equality of opportunity, quality instruction at every level, and training students for self-employment.

Reforms in place

3.69 One thing is beyond dispute: During and after the EGE, the Beninese school system reestablished its pedigree. The desires expressed by professionals and users of academic institutions and the concerns and issues raised proved the Beninese people's renewed interest and confidence in the school system. Thus, it is easy to see that immediate steps marked the start of a new era.

3.70 Of course, the changes affected structures first. The new organizational chart put in place by the National Education Ministry took into account the recommendations produced by the audit to improve management of the reform. The minister's staff, which had been the sole locus of decision-making, was broken up to make way for other decision-making hubs, both local and national.

3.71 The reforms in place can be credited with producing stronger institutions. The National Education Ministry's adoption of a new organizational chart required giving real responsibility to the staff. All but one of the National Education Ministry officials who took part in coordinating the Education Policy Analysis Project received appointments raising them to outposts in the executive body of the overall reform.[13] Outside the National Education Ministry, in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Reform, three staffers who worked on the project were given significant responsibilities. Finally, another official showed outstanding performance at the Ministry of Finance. In their current posts, these officials represent the institutional memory of the key events in the overall process of change that has begun and is inexorably following its course.

3.72 Content reform is slowly taking shape through important changes in the development of new curricula. This burdensome and complex task is moving patiently toward its goal, supported by increased responsibility among the people involved and financial assistance that is unprecedented in the history of Benin's academic institutions.

3.73 The National Education Minister is gradually gaining more control over his budget, a concrete budget based on a schedule of activities. Budget support from USAID, implementation of a World Bank project (which is somewhat slow to be implemented), Canadian involvement in vocational and technical education, and the work of the French Cooperation Agency are likely to make it easier to administer the reform.

4 - ANALYSIS

4.1 Pedagogical considerations, which are certainly subject to debate, lead us to devote a special chapter to a more thorough examination of the questions raised during the description of the policy-formation process. This kind of analysis protects the reader against easy conclusions and gives the proper weight to each step in the process.

Strengths of the process

4.2 Before we examine the Beninese case more closely, we invite the reader to set aside any theoretical frameworks of democracy, the better to understand the merit of the actions proposed by the Beninese in their search for a new socio-political balance.

4.3 The National Conference, the Etats Généraux for Education and the development of a national education policy formed the Beninese leadership's response to pressure exerted in various ways by the entire nation. The new regime had no choice but to seek popular loyalty and support. In a democratic system, decisions come from the people, and that was the justification for the national dialogue. These meetings, broadened to include national and international partners and the entire civil society, were important events in a country where the majority of an illiterate population seems to have been shaped by a long succession of dictatorial regimes. Government set itself the task of soliciting the opinions of the silent majority and involving it in the decision-making process without considering at the outset how well informed that majority was. Of course, the deputies representing them were intellectuals, though one wonders to what extent the people saw their own views reflected in the debates at the National Assembly.

4.4 A strength of the policy-making process was its furtherance of democratic ways. Government restored confidence by reconciling the concerns of the people with goals for the education system. At the same time, it provided itself with the wherewithal to negotiate with the development partners, who pressured it to consider the interests expressed by Beninese citizens. Policy-making took on a national character that demanded concurrence of all parties, local and international. In this way, government made use of a legitimacy that reassured the donors. The information-sharing and dialogue that shaped the process must thus be seen as an effort toward consolidating democracy.

4.5 Any list of the strengths of the process must include the background documents. By 1991, Benin possessed a wealth of documents that had been debated and approved by at least a fringe of the population.[14] These documents set the conditions for informed choice. They also preserved information and analyses for others who enter the education sector. USAID, for example, benefited from them when it entered the education sector in mid-1991.

4.6 In sum, the first advantage resulting from the changes was a political context that allowed for criticism; it shaped the involvement of the users, who were anxious to express their desiderata. It cannot be denied that the National Education Ministry felt societal pressure, but was the message clear enough to make the ministry accept rigorous compliance with the popular will?

Weaknesses

4.7 The Etats Généraux assumed a national and democratic character, even if the level of representation raised the problem of the participants' technical expertise in academic issues. The major weaknesses of the

EGE were the circulation of information before and after it and the aftermath of the decisions reached during its course. Officials from the ministries and teachers from the cities of Cotonou and Porto-Novo were over-represented, to the detriment of civil servants in areas removed from the decision-making centers.

4.8 Nevertheless, the information shortage affected delegates both from the interior and from cities near the capital to such an extent that the preliminary debates with the potential to chart new directions and to support deep-rooted change were dominated by lists of demands. This narrow focus on special interests imposed a regrettable myopia among ministry employees (teachers included, of course). All parties agreed to make "lack of resources" the decisive factor in explaining the failure of the Beninese education system, obscuring the significance (repeated incessantly in the background documents) of the financial efforts made by government, communities, and families. By courting special interests, National Education Ministry staffers and students ultimately lost the sense of solidarity that should have been the key to redistributing financial benefits within the system. That sense of solidarity never emerged. The link between resource issues and the decline of the political system is well beyond the scope of the education sector.

4.9 While people who participated directly in the policy-making events generally had easy access to the information they produced, this was not the case for most people, especially those in rural areas. This is not entirely the fault of the National Education Ministry, as it could do little in the absence of any modern communications infrastructure. Using the telephone is impossible in most of the school districts, and using a fax is unthinkable. Mail postmarked in Cotonou reaches its recipient in a northern school two or three weeks later. In the northern departments, national radio news broadcasts cannot be heard during certain hours of the day. Most disquieting is that schools do not have copies of the *Proceedings of the Etats Généraux,* the document containing the fundamental principles of the reform.

4.10 Although the education sector has little choice but to welcome the support of donor and donor agencies, their involvement raises problems of sovereignty, effectiveness, philosophical orientation, and money.

4.11 Implementing the reform reaffirms the usual inertia of any educational system. Structures are easy to change, and content can often be modified, but attitudes remain rigid. As a result, institutional issues slow the march of change to some degree. The key words of the reform, deconcentration and decentralization, collided with the power of habit and the comfort of routine. The result was half-measures that the minister himself has been unable to influence. Goals have been set, but the General Principles Act has spent the past three years gathering dust in the National Assembly. In fact, the National Education Ministry staff shows signs of opposition to actually implementing decentralization, which is nonetheless proceeding step by step.

4.12 When asked about the legal problem raised by the absence of a General Principles Act on National Education, one donor said, "The General Principles Act is a Francophone concept; its absence doesn't bother me at all." In fact, this legal vacuum may be seen as giving the National Education Ministry the latitude to ignore some demands by the people, to drag its feet on long-awaited decisions, or simply to appoint itself the sole spokesman on fundamental issues.

4.13 People continue to vacillate on what were considered decisive actions. Two examples illustrate:

(a) A National Education Minister asserted during a working session that the National Education Ministry staff did not consider itself bound by the decisions of the EGE.

(b) Student representatives invited to the seminar ratifying the study on higher education expressed complete agreement with the conclusions and proposals for resolving issues at the National University of Benin. Several months later, the same students launched a strike to denounce the minister and the study's author and to condemn the recommendations.

4.14 In the final analysis, the National Education Minister can hardly behave like a pocket of revolution in his dealings with partner ministries such as Civil Service and Administrative Reform, Rural Development and Finance. The National Education Minister is a link in the chain. While he may be able to set an example of decentralization and significant change, he will only be able to complete the process when the other ministers are in full cooperation.

4.15 How these problems are resolved dictates the pace and the realities of the process now under way. We must resist the temptation to rush to the conclusion that nothing (or almost nothing) is actually happening.

4.16 In conclusion, we can see that the leaders, who, after all enjoy unaccustomed financial comfort, must bear greater responsibility for managing the decision-making process in this complex context. Their comfort exacerbates the conflicts between government and the unions on the one hand and between government and civil society on the other. In urban as well as rural settings, there is a recurring leitmotif: "Government has announced that it is injecting billions of francs into the education sector. We don't see the effect of this huge inflow of money, either on our standard of living or in our classrooms. The bosses are the only ones who benefit from this money." What lies behind these words? Perhaps it is inadequate dialogue and involvement among partners in the reform (teachers, teacher unions, students, and civil society). Whatever it is, change seems slowly to be taking place, even if it has not yet reached every subsector.

Coordination among the donors

4.17 Where shaping education policies is concerned, the donors operate as independent agents, each exerting what pressures it can on various Beninese institutions. From time to time they shoot one another in the back. The National Education Ministry staff never mediates these disputes and sometimes exploits them, since the cacophony among the donors allows the ministry to drag its feet on changes that it is not anxious to implement. A picture is emerging of a patient with numerous doctors at his bedside, a common diagnosis, but no agreement on the treatment. Each donor issues demands or conditionalities. Whatever the justification for these demands, they are nonetheless a source of pressure, disrupting habits and imposing disciplines that are incompatible with the national temperament. Meanwhile, each institution hastens to assert that it is only contributing financial support, while key issues come under the sovereignty of government receiving the assistance.

4.18 Diversity among the donors in their views on what the goals and priorities of the reform should be cannot be overcome, a situation that reflects the broad scope of opposing interests and raises the question of the effectiveness of their involvement.

4.19 The relative autonomy of the Education Policy Analysis project and its isolation from the ministry staff has caused problems in implementing recommendations that resulted from studies in that project. Procedural flexibility that disregarded administrative orthodoxy paid off in the short term, but showed flaws in the long run, since the Project's dynamism ultimately engendered indifference in those who used its services. This is not to be regretted, as the project became too dominant, took up too much room, and consequently deprived other institutions of living space.

4.20 At the implementation level, however, the National Education Ministry remains in control of program implementation and coordinates external contributions, taking into account the philosophies and procedures proper to each donor. This explains in part the relatively slow pace of implementing the reform. The strong points and difficulties of the process are visible just below this surface of this slow pace, which could provide material for any number of commentaries.

4.21 Finally, the introduction of foreign money has had a fatal influence on philosophical and economic orientation. At least 90 percent of the Beninese population does not now and perhaps never will understand

structural adjustment measures or the well-known scope of the CFA franc devaluation. As a result, no action within this larger framework will guarantee easy or complete success. With these issues, the full concept and the full reality of democracy suddenly return to the surface.

Compromise

4.22 The national capacity for managing strengths and weaknesses simultaneously will be a determining factor in the success of the process, which remains a long-term task.

4.23 The choice of information methods, the discreet involvement of all actors, and the subdued but effective presence of foreign aid will strengthen the nation's convictions and smooth the continuing process. The invasive presence of foreign technical assistance reflects a lack of confidence, resulting in an attitude of rejection and refusal among nationals. The procedural differences among the donors do not help. For example, USAID makes extensive use of national facilities and expertise after having shaped them. UNDP hopes to use a Round Table to define the terms of its involvement. The French Cooperation Agency insists on offering largely unwanted assistance. UNICEF's program is based on the sections of the Declaration of Education Policy on improving school attendance among girls and is recruiting local managerial staff. The World Bank is in agreement with the USAID method but is dragging its feet because it insists on obtaining assurances that its project funds will in fact be administered by the National Education Ministry.

4.24 Formation of a Parents' Association can compensate for the limitations of dialogue in a country that is 75 to 80 percent illiterate. By making this a priority, the process is laying the groundwork for success and longevity. In the meanwhile, however, we must keep in mind that conflict is part of the process; it acts as both restraint and catalyst.

Education in the national debate

4.25 If we consider the geographic dispersion of all of the various types of teachers around the country, and if we remember the profoundly influential role of education, then we may say that education has yet to find its place in the national debate.

4.26 As the second estate, established in April 1991, after the EGE had been held, the National Assembly has seemed to limit itself to a strictly legislative role, remaining unaware of the realities confronting the nation and gathering information on issues requiring urgent legislation.

4.27 The fourth estate, the press, is supposed to take an interest in everything. It cannot wait until information is brought to it; its role is to seek out information. The Beninese press is thriving, but it nonetheless has serious gaps. As one moves away from Cotonou and Porto-Novo, newspapers become scarce and eventually disappear altogether in the rural areas. It is impossible for the press to consolidate democracy under these conditions. In addition, television is a luxury, and radio broadcasting is made ineffective by its programming and its national coverage.

4.28 The most recent legislative campaigns revealed the limits of each of these institutions. Issues related to the advancement of education were extremely rare. What is more, several ministers created political parties designed to strengthen their position within government. The National Education Minister relied on his ministry's political machinery, and people and facilities were pressed into service in the sole cause of gaining seats for the minister in the Beninese Parliament. The results were disastrous.

5 - CURRENT STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Reform policies are being implemented largely in one subsector, through USAID's program supporting primary education reform. This program is assisting the Beninese government establish an effective, efficient, fair, and viable system of primary education. Other subsectors have plans of action in place but are still waiting for them to be carried out. The difference lies in financial structures and provisions connected with the priorities identified by the donors in the Declaration of Education Policy.

5.2 Under the impetus of USAID, implementation is progressing in curriculum reform, improved training and pedagogical supervision for teachers, strengthened capabilities for producing, acquiring, and distributing textbooks and teaching materials, and development of a system for evaluating student knowledge. Various groups are working to ensure that the National Education Ministry's central and departmental offices improve their ability to plan and coordinate sector activities.

5.3 In light of the conclusions of the study on school attendance among girls, the ministry announced the elimination of school fees for girls in rural areas, beginning at the start of the 1993–94 school year. This action met with a mixed reception. Some school district heads refused to apply the measure. They told us the measure represented lost profits for local decision-making bodies. Whatever the case, the measure does not take into account the specific problems of each region, though it had an immediate effect in departments where girls do not go to school because their families cannot afford the fees. This phenomenon has yet to be seen in departments where girls are kept at home for cultural reasons.

5.4 USAID has undertaken surveys to measure the real impact of the ministry's action. Whatever results or information these surveys may produce, a question remains: Will the girls encouraged by schooling without fees stay long enough to finish primary school?

5.5 Another issue is the effect on secondary and higher levels of the present focus on primary education. USAID says its interest is limited to primary education. Yet teachers in higher education see this as an international plot against their institution. Consider the following remarks:

> The donors have chosen higher education as their target and are working to eliminate it. Since cutting-edge expertise is no longer being developed here, the guardianship of the old scientific research institutions in Europe will be perpetuated.

The indictment is lengthy. We have retained only its essentials to show that, in spite of the efforts to begin implementation, the imbalance that it has created within the sector may dampen spirits and raise insurmountable obstacles.

6 - CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Benin had at its disposal a body of knowledge adequate to provide a basis for dialogue. Throughout this document, we have acknowledged that education policy formation is a cycle sustained by daily activity. An enterprise such as this requires a well-charted path, defined by a knowledge base that serves to facilitate the playing out of the process. There is something in it for everyone. The donors are certain to appreciate the logic and discipline of this step and will commit themselves with full knowledge of the facts. National policy-makers will make informed decisions and have access to reliable information for talks with both civil society and the development partners.

6.2 The National Education Ministry's innovations have had an impact on procedures in other ministries. To prevent the education reform from remaining a half-measure, we must find a mechanism capable of inspiring these ministries to support change.

6.3 In moments of euphoria or distress, we do not always weigh the consequences of declarations of principles. By writing into the Constitution that primary education would henceforth be compulsory, the Beninese adopted a philosophy that has served as a guide, certainly for the donors in making their decisions. Dealing with the difficulties inherent in this philosophy demands real commitment on the part of our leaders. The principles that serve as the focus of consensus must outlive the politicians, who by definition are transitory but are nonetheless charged with safeguarding the national interest.

6.4 Just as dialogue marked the beginning of the process, it is important to maintain it through the key steps of the reform, involving all parties by training those who need it and giving real responsibility to officials and to parents.

6.5 Responsibility for coordinating donors falls entirely under the authority of government.

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1. In the language of linguistics, the word dialect is not pejorative. It refers to a sub-group or variant of a language spoken in a given geographic region.

2. The administrative and territorial reform of 1975 changed the country's name; Dahomey became the Popular Republic of Benin

3. Rural workers resigned to the daily struggle for survival never preach about imperialism; they live it. They are Benin's exploited class.

4. Edict No. 75-30 of 23 June 1975 on the General Principles Act on National Education. Article 33 of the first chapter specified: the New School is democratic and popular, compulsory and free of charge, public and secular.

5. According to estimates by the Planning Ministry, job openings represented roughly 18 percent of demand among holders of technical degrees and less than 10 percent among holders of all other degrees in secondary and higher education.

6. Development Associations were the only mass organizations allowed under the "militarist-Marxist" regime. As the government had become unable to fulfill its responsibilities in every area, communities organized in an effort to find solutions for local development problems such as building schools, opening rural runways, and sinking wells. These organizations gathered all of the natives of the respective regions, be they civil servants, craftsmen or farmers.

7. Remarks by a rural worker from Borgou at the National Conference

8. *Proceedings of the EGE:* Preface by the National Education Minister, Contonou, February 20, 1991, p.7.

9. Our enquiries yielded some incredible admissions, but anything that is not said publicy and written down remains fragile because no one is committed to it.

10. *Proceedings of theEGE*, page 147.

11. During a courtesy visit to UNDP, a World Bank mission complained of incompetence on the part of an official who had been praised to the skies by the same mission several months earlier. The mission also criticized the attitude of an international consultant, and finally forgot to invite the Project's national officer to the working dinner for all of the national and international players working on the various efforts to rehabilitate the education system.

12. It was not until March 1994 that a summary of the declaration appeared in a UNICEF publication: *Aujourd'hui et Demain: Bulletin de liaison de l'UNICEF* No. 005, January, February, March 1994, pp. 5-6.

13. For example, one heads the "Organization and Methods" department, another heads the "Budget Coordination" department of the Office of Vocational and Technical Education, a third heads the "Follow-up and Evaluation" department, and a fourth holds the very important position of Departmental Director of Education.

14. Because it was rare for sector studies to reach the school districts.

The formation of an effective national education policy is central in the approach adopted by many African countries to reform the education sector.

The DAE, in close cooperation with the U.S. Agency for International Development, has supported six case studies on the process of education policy formation in Africa. The case studies, written by African researchers, reflect a variety of experiences in the cycle of policy formation, articulation, dissemination, and implementation in the following countries: Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritius, Mozambique, and Uganda.

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