

SD Publication Series
Office of Sustainable Development
Bureau for Africa

Kids, Schools & Learning:
A Retrospective Study of USAID Support to Basic
Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Philip Christensen
Aly Badra Doukouré
Peter Laugharn
Talaat Moreau
Jeanne Moulton
Joshua Muskin
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Technical Paper No. 56
July 1997

Health and Human Resources Analysis for Africa Project

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Foreword

These are stories of progress and events in sub-Saharan African countries where the U.S. Agency for International Development is supporting primary education reform. This report especially targets readers who would like to learn more about U.S. development efforts in this region of the world, particularly in the education sector.

The first chapter (“Introduction”) gives an overview of the progress sub-Saharan African countries are making, particularly in education. This view contrasts with accounts of troublesome incidents and trends we so frequently encounter. The chapter also provides a sketch of each of the six case studies that follow.

The final chapter (“Conclusion”) summarizes USAID’s insights from its work in the six case-study

and other countries. Discussion addresses the challenges Africans face in providing universal primary education, and presents strategies that are beginning to bear results.

We hope you can make time to read at least one of the case studies. Because each case is unique, however, a fuller reading is necessary to savor the complexity and dynamism that make Africa such an awesome and fascinating place to work.

Julie Owen-Rea
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Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AED	Academy for Educational Development
AFR/SD	Africa Bureau, Office of Sustainable Development
ANC	Africa National Congress
BEEP	Basic Education Expansion Program
BND	<i>Budget National de Développement</i> (National Development Budget)
CAAA	Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CLEF	Children's Equity and Learning Foundations
CMRN	<i>Comité Militaire de Redressement National</i> (Military Committee for National Recovery)
CTRN	<i>Comité Transitoire de Redressement National</i> (Committee for National Recovery)
DAAF	<i>Direction des Affaires Administratives et Financières</i> (Directorate for Financial and Administrative Affairs)
EGE	<i>Etats Généraux de l'Éducation</i> (General Assembly on Education)
ELRU	Early Learning Resource Unit
EMIS	Educational Management Information Systems
EPMT	Educational Policy, Management, and Technology project
EPP	English Proficiency Program
ESST	Education Support Services Trust
FAC	<i>Fonds d'Aide et de Coopération</i> (French Cooperation Agency)
FQEL	Fundamental Quality and Equity Levels Schooling project
FQL	Fundamental Quality Level
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
IDA	International Development Association
IEB	Independent Examination Board
IEC	Information, Education, Communication
IIR	Institute for International Research
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMU	Instructional Materials Unit
ITEK	Institute for Teacher Education, Kyambogo
MIET	Media in Education Trust
MIS	Management Information Systems
NEF	<i>Nouvelle Ecole Fondamentale</i> (New Basic Education School)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NLC	National Literacy Cooperation
NPA	Non-Project Assistance
NPERPMC	National Primary Education Reform Program Management Committee
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NRM	National Resistance Movement

OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OLSET	Open Learning Systems Education Trust
PAS	<i>Programme d'Ajustement Structurel</i> (Structural Adjustment Program)
PASE	<i>Programme d'Ajustement Sectoriel de l'Education</i> (Education Sector Adjustment Program)
PIP	<i>Programme d'Investissements Publics</i> (Public Investment Program)
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
PLE	Primary Leaving Examination
ProDec	Program for the Development of Education
PTA	Parent Teacher Associations
SAAF	<i>Services des Affaires Administratives et Financières</i> (Administrative and Financial Affairs Offices)
SUPER	Support for Ugandan Primary Education Reform
TDMS	Teacher Delivery and Management System
TIDC	Teacher Innovation and Distribution Center
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Scientific, Cultural, and Scientific Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

An Optimistic View of Africa

In the age of high technology bad news travels fast. We learn from the morning paper and breakfast news on television of disastrous events in Africa, half a world away: a mass rebellion in Rwanda, anarchy and slaughter in Liberia, and a bloody countercoup in Zaire. These incidents stick with us a long time. We are continually reminded of the agonizing decisions U.S. leaders had to make on Somalia and the frustration of the United Nations mediation efforts in Angola.

Other bad news, less flashy but more insidious, is not so well-publicized. Robert Kaplan published first an *Atlantic Monthly* article and then a book on the complex of environmental, social, and political problems smoldering in Africa and other developing parts of the world. Kaplan's is one of a number of recent analyses accessible to the broad group of readers on trends and events that, sooner or later, will affect the security and living standards of most people on the globe. Spreading ethnic and racial conflicts, diminishing natural resources, degradation of the environment, and poverty that seems impossible to check have caught the attention of more and more technical analysts and more than a few political leaders in the international community.

But these phenomena should not define Africa, a continent that is huge and diverse. Over fifty countries make up sub-Saharan Africa. A cutout of the continental United States easily fits three times on a map of Africa. Africans do not share the homogenized consumer culture and far-reaching mass media networks that Americans are used to. Technology does not yet allow Africans to "reach out and touch," even within the same town. A phone call from Niger to bordering Senegal may be directed through Paris, and one does not easily fly from West Africa to East Africa. The humid coastal cities of West Africa are foreign to people from the mountains of Lesotho, and, unless they share a mother tongue, visitors from Anglophone Nigeria cannot communicate with neighboring Francophone Benin. Altogether, over eight hundred languages are spoken among Africa's five hundred million people.

Diversity is also apparent in African countries' movement toward political liberalization, macroeconomic reform, private sector development, institutional development, and human capacity development. The World Bank points out that along these dimensions, statistical averages and generalizations about the continent "increasingly hide more than they reveal." Each country does not progress at the same rate in the political, economic, and development spheres. The result is a "mosaic" of countries, each with different patterns of progress.

In the political sphere, a number of governments in Africa have struggled out from under military dictatorships or Marxist regimes. They are stabilizing as democratic, sometimes multiparty systems. Since 1992, states the World Bank's 1996 Annual Report, as many as thirty countries have held multiparty elections. South Africa and Namibia have abolished apartheid. Freedom of the press, judiciaries, and other institutions of democratic governance are gaining strength in more countries.

In contrast to earlier years, many African countries have growing economies. According to the World Bank's report, thirty countries, holding over 60 percent of the region's people, recorded a positive change in per capita income in 1995. That year, about one-third of the countries showed growth in per capita income, ranging from Mauritania's .2 percent increase to Botswana's healthy 6.6 percent. Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Uganda all showed growth rates of better than 1 percent. Botswana and Gabon have been among the world's top economic performers in the past two decades. This was a significant improvement over the 1991-94 period, when most countries had negative changes.

Improvements in social services—education and health care—are the low drumbeat of the campaign against poverty. In the education sector, progress toward universal primary education is occurring at a steady pace: in at least a dozen countries, more children are getting a better education. This trend is especially heartening after the lapses across the continent

during the early 1980s. According to USAID's 1993 report to Congress on the Development Fund for Africa, between 1960 and 1983, the primary enrollment rate for sub-Saharan Africa increased from 36 percent of the age-eligible population to 75 percent. Thereafter, a growth in population that out paced that of schools and economic crisis in most African countries detracted from the gains of earlier years. By 1997, however, the direction of movement is once again forward.

Improvements in education systems are not without a significant impetus from outside of Africa. While the value of education to individuals and their communities has long been recognized, only in the past decade has the critical role of an educated population in forestalling global crises become impossible to ignore. Today most international agencies concerned with development realize that sustainable development is impossible without investment in education, particularly basic education and girls' education. Since 1989 the U.S. Congress has committed over \$700 million to basic education assistance in twelve countries in Africa. Other bilateral donors and multilateral institutions of the United Nations, as well as the World Bank, work side by side with USAID in supporting the reform of education systems.

These investments, however, have much more likelihood of success when a government is willing and able to foster widespread public involvement in reforming education. This generally requires some form of democratic processes that allow all groups of people, including teachers and parents as well as government officials, to express their needs and interests. Education reforms also require a commitment to a growing economy that can support more schools and more teachers. Finally, investments in education will pay off when the country's leaders are willing to fight corruption in government offices, to take the lead in instituting change, and to convince the thousands of civil servants in education that it is they themselves, not foreign donors, who are responsible for what happens in schools.

More and more countries are moving in this direction. While Rwanda, Liberia, and Somalia struggle to emerge from chaos, Uganda and Mozambique have pulled themselves out of political anarchy. Though some countries are still in the hands of dictators, Benin,

Guinea, Mali, Central African Republic, and Malawi have instituted democratic governments. No country in Africa continues to enforce apartheid policies. Zimbabwe, Namibia, and, most recently, South Africa, have committed to universal suffrage. Other countries such as Swaziland, Botswana, Lesotho, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana continue with years of stable government and economic progress, and have more recently shown signs of economic growth.

The following chapters of this report offer a retrospective view of primary education reforms in countries where USAID's assistance has been substantial. These stories aim to show how various reforms have evolved in the context of a country's political and economic development. Though common goals, issues, and events appear across these cases, each is unique and features the particular events that make it especially interesting.

■ **Uganda** was called the "pearl of Africa" by Winston Churchill in his prediction for its bright future. Sadly, a generation of people suffered brutal tyranny under Idi Amin and Milton Obote. Now the government has emerged from chaos and ushered in democratic elections. Economic growth in 1996 was 10 percent. USAID is enabling the government to raise the salaries and improve the living conditions, skills of teachers, and the quality of schools.

■ **Guinea** has also made a transition from a socialist government to a multiparty democracy. The government has instituted reforms to pull the economy out of bankruptcy and build a market economy. Economic growth is expected to finance an expanded education system. USAID has worked with ministry officials throughout on a successful increase in school quality and student enrollment, especially of girls.

■ **Benin's** seventeen years of authoritarian rule by a Marxist government led to political and economic collapse and, to the surprise of many, a peaceful and speedy transition to democracy. Benin also embarked on an ambitious education reform. USAID has supported efforts to improve the quality of and equitable access to primary education, including innovative approaches to help parents demand more accountability from education officials.

■ **Mali** holds the remnants of an ancient and thriving civilization sunk to poverty. It has been losing a war with desertification and has seen too many years of neglect of all but a few of its people. In 1991, a new government took over. It has introduced democracy and committed itself to reforming its education system. USAID has given technical support to the ministry and is now supporting two thriving experiments with community schools. These Malian-defined schools are expected to eventually replace those closely tied to the old colonial model.

■ **Swaziland** has had the good fortune to be a single ethnic family that has chosen a democratic form of government. Practically surrounded by South Africa, the tiny nation has benefited from the strong economy of its neighbor and the homogeneity of its population. USAID supported a series of projects that have resulted in a sound primary education system. The agency has now completed its support to Swaziland, as well as that country's neighbors, Lesotho and Botswana, all of which have systems that can sustain the benefits of programs supported by USAID.

■ **South Africa** is the country in Africa probably best known to Americans. The "transformation" of the education system in that country entails the reallocation of fiscal and human resources dedicated to an elite group—exclusively white—toward children of all races. Unable to give direct support to the apartheid government that preceded Mandela, USAID supported non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were fostering education reform. Now working through Mandela's government, the agency continues to fund their efforts.

While the subject of the following chapters is primary education reform, the chapters can be read for more general revelations about the interplay between sector development (in this case education) and macroeconomic and political reform. These stories are rich with detail, and although sometimes technical, they provide an account of the seldom-featured "good side" of events in Africa. Positive change is not usually as riveting as horror and destruction. But those who would form an accurate impression of Africa should become familiar with its successes as well as its failures.

1. Uganda: School Reform in the Transition from Chaos to Democracy

Building from the ashes of destruction

Crested Towers rises high from the bottom of one of Kampala's many low green hills. Once the headquarters of Idi Amin, the two-towered building with dirty mustard walls still shows bullet marks, and only an occasional smoked glass shield remains on each floor to protect its occupants from Uganda's tropical sun. No other building of this height is nearby. Curiously, the towers are of uneven height, one of nineteen floors and the other of eleven, connected by a broad covered walkway from the top of the short tower to the middle of the tall one. Today, Crested Towers houses the national offices of the Ministry of Education. Like the building, the ministry has been undergoing badly needed repair.

To climb either tower, you must first descend to the opposing entryways, darkened by a huge concrete awning. Enter the small lobby of the building of your choice and join the crowd waiting for the one operating elevator. Or, if you think twice about being jostled into that long, deep metal box, hoisted by a twenty-nine-year-old conveyer belt, squeeze through the entryway to the narrow set of concrete stairs, which offer at each landing a view of the surrounding dirt courtyard and neighboring houses and shops.

On the tenth floor of the short tower is the office of Amania Mushega, who has been Minister of Education and Sports since 1990. Mushega is a lawyer by training and, more important, was formerly a militia man. He was fighting alongside Yoweri Museveni, now president of Uganda, when, in 1986, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) staged the last of a long series of coups and counter-coups, and took over the government from the second reign of Milton Obote. At that time, Kampala had the noxious air of today's Monrovia, Kinshasa, or closer to home, Kigali and Bujumbura. Decay and destruction prevailed; villages were torn apart, and the economy barely functioned.

Eleven years later, in 1997, Museveni and Mushega face another challenge. In the campaign for election in



July 1996, the president promised free education for four children from every family and all orphans. It is now up to his minister's staff to realize that promise. Can it be done? The answer depends on the readiness of Uganda's primary education system.

Historical background

What precipitated the fifteen-year-long disaster in a country that showed great promise at independence from Britain in 1962? Uganda's new government never really stabilized under its first president, Obote, who nearly twenty-five years later fell to Museveni. The political boundaries of the new country forced together four large, long-established kingdoms and other smaller ones whose leaders had little desire to unite and failed to shift their loyalties from their own nations to the new nation-state. Moreover, the colonial government had upheld the elevated status of the Bugandan kingdom in the South above the other ethnic areas. When at independence, Obote, who is from the North, became president, he never gained the trust of the strong Bugandan king, or of other kings and leaders. He responded to their distrust by fortifying his authority through abuses of a constitution intended to balance power; he simply put out of the way those who

threatened him. But the number of his opponents rose rapidly until his closest military subordinate, Idi Amin, who directed the army, had his troops seize power. Obote fled to Tanzania, from where he returned to power ten years later. In the intervening years, the uneducated Amin slaughtered viciously in order to keep contenders at bay. Tanzania's liberation of Uganda in January 1979 was followed by a series of short-lived governments. These included another reign of Obote's rule by machete, until his own troops succumbed to Museveni's NRM in 1986.



Museveni's challenge and approach

Thus, unlike the lurching progress in the 1970s toward national unity (sometimes one step backward for every two steps forward, but progress nonetheless) of the former neighboring British colonies, now Kenya and Tanzania, Uganda fell full force backward into chaos. In 1986, Museveni took over a country still smoldering with rebellious groups, a generation that knew little else than fear of government and understood that immediate personal survival was not compatible with long-term investment in an economic venture or surely not trust in a government program.

The challenge that faced Museveni, like that which faced Nelson Mandela in 1994, was national reconciliation to bring together bitter enemies in an integrated nation-state governed by laws that superseded those of their own kingdoms. Museveni did not have Mandela's advantage of years of negotiation among all parties in preparation for his moment of ascendancy; nor did his country have a robust economy and foreign investors waiting hungrily to return. Instead, he had to create stability with force and negotiation, to build from ashes, and to humble his authority to international lenders.

Structural adjustment and nation-building

To restore the economy, Museveni sought help from outside Uganda. When he came to power, the new president rejected the harsh terms of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for support in economic recovery. His first priority was peace, and for this he was reluctant to hold back spending on his army and on

civil posts, which meant bringing into the fold nearly forty ministers, each with his or her own staff and patronage network. But expanding the economy can help reduce civil strife, and Museveni soon agreed to the structural adjustment proposed by the IMF. The adjustment would bring public expenditures under control and boost private investment and productivity.

In 1991 Uganda and the World Bank agreed to a credit of over \$50 million aimed at improving private sector development and public sector effectiveness. The agreement included steps toward civil service reform, which limited what could be spent on salaries. Since teachers are civil servants, this agreement severely constrained attempts to hire more teachers or to raise the salaries of those already on the job.

Museveni and his government's use of the structural adjustment credit has helped open up the economy, which has grown over 4 percent per capita each year since 1987. This growth can be attributed to economic liberalization and political stability. Ugandan leaders have deregulated the economy, liberalized foreign exchange, and encouraged private investment. They have allowed back the Asian businessmen, whom Idi Amin kicked out, along with their money, technology, and expertise. The expansion of Uganda's economy rivals Asian success stories, said Jerry Wolgin, director of the Office of Sustainable Development in USAID's Africa Bureau.

While good for the economy and social services in the long run, the structural adjustment program has limited the government's ability to expand social services, including education in the short run.

The role of education in nation-building

Economists recognize education as a worthy investment in human capital, but they often see schooling as excessively costly. In 1987, the IMF economists believed that Uganda was spending too much on its civil service payroll, particularly in the education sector. As such, they set conditions that stopped growth of the payroll. Political leaders, on the other hand, especially those building a new nation, see education as key to inculcating allegiance. According to political analyst Judith Geist, the leaders of Uganda desired urgently that children and youth learn civic and ethical values quite different from those held by their parents—trust in government, national identity, trust in other social groups, accountability for individual and group behavior, and a whole host of other civic skills that have been irreparably eroded in the parental generation. Teaching these values was largely the task of schools, particularly primary schools.

Museveni did not want to ignore schools while other economic goals took priority. Schools, he believed, needed considerable attention. During and after Amin's regime, government's investment in education had fallen steadily. By the late 1980s, government contributed only 10 to 30 percent of the cost of educating primary school children; parents paid the larger share. And what parents got for their money was not much. One observer found the condition of school services to range from mediocre to abysmal. Many primary schools, especially those in rural areas, had dilapidated buildings and lacked roofs, walls, desks, and chairs. The few available textbooks were old and worn. Roughly one-third to one-half of the teachers had not been trained to teach. More than a few had never even completed primary school. The bare survival of these schools and of the remnant of an education system that they constituted lay in the wish of parents to see their children educated, whether or not the state chipped in.

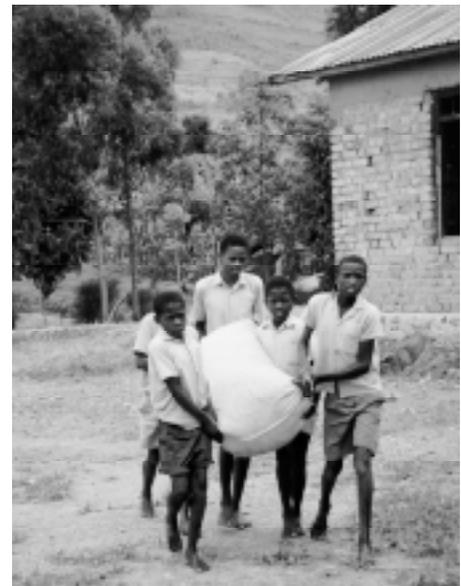
Though Museveni knew from early on that he would depend on schools to help build the new nation-state, it took five and a half years to formulate education policies. Those policies, which included the goals of educating Ugandans and strategies for how to reach those goals, have guided a promising reform of primary education. In 1996, the president campaigned

with the promise of introducing free primary education for most children in the coming year. His intent to keep that promise and the consequences of such a bold measure on the education system make the beginning of an interesting story.

Forming policy

In 1987 the NRM declared its intent to reform the education system. In the colonial tradition of policymaking by commission, the government set up an Education Policy Review Commission. This group of professional educators and others from government and the private sector consulted on aspects of the Ugandan education system that would be maintained or modified. Their report was next passed on in draft form to another group, which prepared the official government report—or White Paper—for approval by the president's cabinet. In 1992, the cabinet approved Uganda's education policies.

The long and drawn-out process of education policy formation reflected several dynamics. Different groups of stakeholders held diverse views on a complex set of issues that determine both the purpose of education and how it should be provided. Ministry employees, for example, were as uncertain about the length of their president's tenure as they were of the stability of their own careers. This situation is common to all bureaucracies when a change of government or the threat of change is in the air. It holds heightened apprehension in tumultuous times. People are unsure of not only whose jobs might be eliminated, but also whose lives. When the power structure could go topsy-turvy any day,



one is cautious about voicing preferences and opposing those of others.

Uganda’s goals and donors’ goals

The goals of education that eventually took hold in the White Paper reveal a decided view of the government’s intent. The first three of six goals were to build the nation and form the citizens of that nation: “the promotion of an understanding and appreciation of the value of national unity, patriotism and cultural heritage . . . the inculcation of moral, ethical and spiritual values in the individual and self discipline, integrity, tolerance and human fellowship . . . a sense of service, duty and leadership for participation in civic, social and national affairs.” The fifth goal was to improve the quality of individual lives: “the eradication of illiteracy and equipping the individual with basic skills and knowledge to exploit the environment for self-development as well as national development, for better health, nutrition and family life and the capability for continued learning.” Finally, the fourth and sixth goals concerned manpower for economic development: “the promotion of scientific, technical and cultural knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to promote development” and “the contribution to the building of an integrated, self-sustaining and independent national economy.” Clearly, the Ugandan leaders saw education as a means of nation-building first, individual development next, and manpower last.

Uganda is not the only African state that has placed the highest priority for its education system on nation-building and citizenship. In his 1990 analysis for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

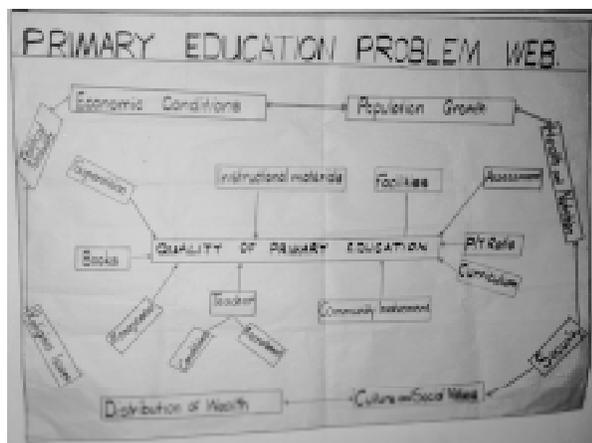
Organization (UNESCO) of education sector studies, Joel Samoff found that most governments stress nation-building and citizenship as goals. International agencies, in contrast, are more concerned with economic development and finance issues. During the 1960s Western educational planners treated education as the production of manpower. In the 1970s the amount of money school systems sucked up in order to churn out manpower rose to a fair chunk of the national budget, but graduates—those lucky few who got through the terribly inefficient systems—did not stride easily into jobs; school leavers fell into unemployment.

In the 1980s research began leading to another shift in investment policies. World Bank economists had discovered that a country’s rate of girls in school was inversely related to its rate of population growth. This cast a new light on the value of schooling. Getting more children, especially girls, through more years of school should help solve the global overpopulation problem. Once again, primary schooling caught the attention of the international community.

By 1990 donors were eager to support primary education. This was a good economic investment: birth rates would go down and the feared Malthusian outcomes would not defeat economic growth. Ugandan leaders’ interest in nation-building and the international community’s interest in stabilizing the rate of population growth were not incompatible; both favored investment in primary schools. The real issues came into play at the level of strategy: how to improve the school system.

Access or quality

What should be tackled first? Although the Ministry of Education relied on numbers produced by a data collection system that hardly functioned, it was clear that about half of Uganda’s children were not in school. Faced with this information, Uganda committed to providing Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2003. The White Paper called for a gradual move to free primary education. Beginning in 1997 or 1998 fourth-level students would not pay school fees. In the following year, fifth-graders would be excused, then sixth graders, seventh graders, back to third, second, until 2003, when those entering the first grade would pay nothing. This policy seemed to satisfy all parties.



Like other countries long under colonial rule, Uganda wanted to change its school system from one that educated the elites to one that reached all children. Clearly one challenge was to build and equip more schools, and supply them with teachers and books. Also clear was the dismal condition of most schools and the education they offered, especially schools outside of Kampala. Shouldn't these be improved before more like them were built? In the terminology guiding education reform, it was a question of "access" or "quality."

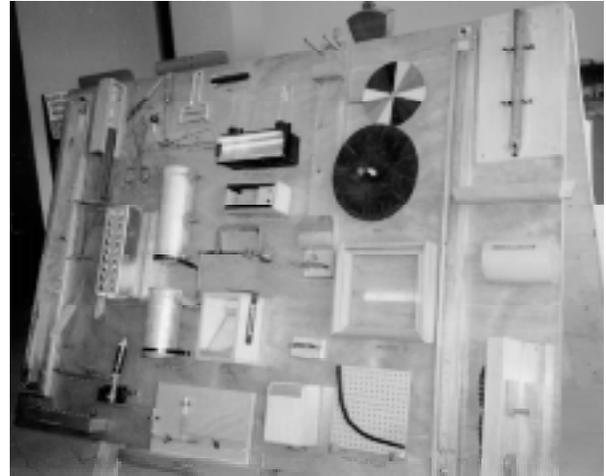
Conditions to improve

The practical problem was how to implement changes when the entire education system was largely incapacitated. Second in size only to the military, the Ministry of Education faced managerial and administrative problems common to all ministries, but magnified many times. Channels for communicating between schools and ministry offices had broken down; even getting salary payments to teachers was hit and miss. Improving the administrative side of the education system required improving government administration altogether.

Added to the enormity of the ministry's administrative problems was the realization that families in every corner of Uganda cared enough about their children's education to pay teachers directly. Everyone was aware of how little the government had been helping schools. If the leaders really meant for the schools to help build the nation, they had to devise the structure for doing so. In 1992 the government decided to collaborate with USAID and the World Bank in a significant reform of the primary education system.

Successes in reforming the system

Though the visitor to a scattering of schools in Uganda today may find more to bemoan than to cheer, the Ministry of Education has made remarkable progress since 1992 in rebuilding the education system. In particular, the respect of the teaching profession is being restored, and teachers, experiencing stronger support from the ministry, are doing their job in the classroom. "You find teachers dress better, talk with more confi-



dence, and are eager to share information about school," observed Sam Onek, Commissioner for Primary and Secondary Education, who has held this position for fifteen years and has no intention of leaving it. "In my opinion, the head teachers of primary school often outperform those of secondary school." They speak knowledgeably of budgets and administrative records as well as of teachers' concerns. Students are better disciplined and textbooks are likely to be in the classrooms. "We now have storage facilities at many schools," said Onek, "so that the books can be kept handy." Without such storage, head teachers often stored books far from the school to keep them safe rather than risk their loss by letting students use them.

Textbooks

Five years ago a visitor to one district office asked to see where the books were stored. He was taken to the local farmers' union. "My heart sank as I surveyed the place. The room had plenty of space but was filthy and rat infested. Rusted farm implements and dirty boxes of textbooks were strewn haphazardly throughout the store. I brushed away the dirt from a nearby box so that I could read the name of the school." These books had been stored for months, maybe years, waiting for the school to come up with some payment. This was doubly sad, considering that the World Bank had paid for all the books and their distribution.

Today the relative wealth of instructional materials coming into Uganda's schools can be seen in the resource center on top of Crested Towers' short build-

ing. There in a large room brightened by light from window walls overlooking Kampala, George Kalibbalah, in charge of the ministry's Instructional Materials Unit (IMU), proudly displays colorful sets of books, posters, and equipment for teaching basic science, math, language, and social studies. With remarkable skill and strategizing, the ministry has taken control over massive and corruptible procedures of getting textbooks into classrooms. It has broken the monopoly of the textbook market by two large British publishers, Longman and Macmillan. The procurement and distribution system was full of leaks, and most books failed to reach the hands of students. Many books were found for sale on the street, with profits going into private pockets somewhere along the distribution line. Other books sat in district offices, where ministry employees lacked the transport or initiative to take them to schools. Still others could be found locked in the closets of schools or nearby storerooms, safe from robbery or destruction, but also safe from use.

The ministry has liberalized the textbook market. It has adopted new procedures for procuring and distributing books, and the market for textbooks, notebooks, pencils, chalk, and other supplies is not only competitive, but includes Ugandan as well as foreign suppliers.

Ugandan schools choose their own books. However, to ensure that textbooks reflect the curriculum and meet standards of quality, the ministry draws up and makes available detailed specifications for textbooks. It then commissions a panel to certify the books it approves. School orders for books are consolidated at the central level and procured in quantity. The IMU has successfully consolidated and delivered the books to schools at 7 percent of the cost previously charged by an international firm. By mid-1996, primary schools had gone through the second cycle of selection and ordering. Seventeen publishers (four local and thirteen international) competed for and won contracts to supply 750,000 items of instructional materials, including globes, maps, and wall charts. Since the new procedures took hold, over one and a half million books had been distributed to schools in response to their requests.

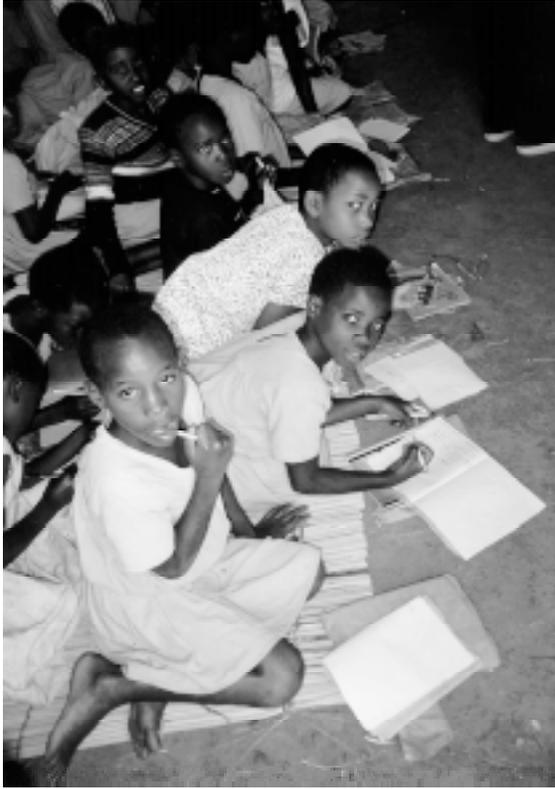
The textbook management system is not yet completely developed. The ministry is still working on a better way to ship books to schools. Though the ministry's budget includes, for the first time, a line

item for instructional materials, foreign donors are still sustaining this account. The ministry has yet to develop a system of cost recovery. On two occasions, the ministry attempted to institute a revolving fund, whereby families contributed to cover part of the cost of books. The attempt, however, was abandoned since such contributions rarely found their way to the fund. Many books still do not get into the hands of students. The main problem seems to be that teachers, long accustomed to teaching without books, do not know what to do with these newly-available resources. This situation is not unique to Uganda. Investigation in other countries in Africa and even in the United States reveals that teachers often ignore textbooks, unless they are trained specifically in how to use them. Fortunately for Uganda the new teacher training program is now giving specific training to instructional materials' use and management.

A side benefit of the new textbook procurement policy is its boost to the publishing and printing industries in Uganda, which had all but disappeared. "The number of book vendors in Kampala has risen from five to about thirty since 1990," noted Kalibbalah. "All the textbook publishers have established offices in Kampala, and most have partnered with local firms." There are now eleven commercial publishers in Uganda compared to none specializing in instructional materials just four years ago. They publish trade books as well as textbooks. Price surveys indicate that books are less expensive in Uganda than in neighboring countries. Kalibbalah hopes that the influx of books may help establish a reading culture in the capital city, as well as help transform Kampala into a better market for books.

Teachers

While revitalizing the flow of textbooks was a remarkable accomplishment, it appears like child's play in comparison to the reform of the teaching force. In 1990, when donors' analysts began sizing up the state of Uganda's education system, the most striking feature was the rock-bottom level of professionalism of what had once been a competent and proud teaching force. Researchers reported that the country's eighty-eight thousand teachers on the payroll earned about \$8 dollars a month, far from a "living wage" of \$72 dollars, and that about half of them had not been



trained as teachers. Teachers had to find additional sources of income to make ends meet. Recruitment standards fell, as village schools had to find teachers from among people who had only a few years of education themselves and would accept the abysmal pay offered. When a better job came along, the teacher took it. In 1992, 60 percent of those interviewed in ten districts said they had no interest in staying in teaching longer than necessary. Teachers were not the only ones to suffer from these conditions; their students were greatly disadvantaged as well. Teachers were often not on the job, had no time to prepare lessons, and had little energy for or interest in thinking about how to help students learn.

These profound problems had no simple solutions. It seemed impossible to raise salaries, as the government was constrained by its commitment to the IMF not to increase its civil service payroll. It would be a major challenge to improve teachers' competence. Though about seventy teacher training colleges were operating around the country, the ministry had little supervision over these (most were run privately by churches or had begun to operate independently of the government). In addition, between 1971 and 1986

nearly a generation of potential teachers who had taught before Amin's rule had migrated to other countries or to other occupations. And yet, despite great odds, Uganda has begun to turn the teaching profession around.

Salaries

With a great deal of effort and ingenuity, the ministry has managed to raise salaries to a living wage. Given severe restrictions on its civil service budget, how did it manage this feat? The story has several parts.

First, following the terms of its agreement with the IMF, the government moved money into the education budget from the military budget, raising the education budget from about 15 to 23 percent of the total national budget. In 1993 the education budget was, for the first time, larger than that of the military. Next, within the ministry's own budget, funds were moved from higher education (mostly the university) and administration to primary education. This amounted to a 35 to 55 percent increase in the primary school budget. Politically, this was not an easy move. The ministry cut generous subsidies and living allowances to university students, many of whom came from powerful families, an action that has helped topple the government in at least one other country (Mali) and given others cold feet.

Next, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the Ministries of Finance and Public Service, took measures to eliminate "ghost teachers," those drawing a salary but not appearing at school, from the payroll. A USAID report described the event as follows:

By the end of 1993, the government determined that an accurate control of basic education sector data—students, teachers, classrooms, and schools—was needed as the foundation for setting teacher deployment and school staffing norms. It designed and implemented a nationwide simultaneous head count of teachers and students in every one of the 8,450 government-supported schools throughout Uganda. A control mechanism and methodology were developed, enumerators trained and sent to the schools. On May 17, 1994, newspapers and radio broadcasts commanded

every teacher to report to his or her school to verify that he or she was on active duty and deserved to remain on the payroll. The names of teachers who showed up were verified against the 1990 census lists of teachers assigned to every school. Those not present were deleted from the payroll.”

One year later, the number of teachers on the payroll had declined to about seventy-five thousand, a 15 percent reduction. These measures freed up additional resources, which were then used to boost the salaries of those who remained. Based on the ceilings set for each school, many teachers were transferred from urban schools, where they were surplus, to rural schools with shortages.

Working through district education offices, the ministry administered a competency test to every teacher on the payroll who had not been certified. Those who passed were allowed to stay in the service, regardless of their training or certification, and those who did not were dismissed.

Training

Increasing salaries, though critical, was not in itself a sufficient boost to professionalism. The ministry also undertook a vast project of training teachers on the job, and it built a whole new teacher training system. Teacher training is a complex process. New teachers must be trained year in and year out, and those who train them (called “tutors” in Uganda) must also be hired, trained, and deployed each year to meet demand. In earlier years, tutors were trained at Makerere University, the institution founded by the British to serve all of East Africa, and at the Institute for Teacher Education, Kyambogo (ITEK), near Kampala. But by 1990 only ITEK was producing a limited number of tutors who then largely ended up in the more lucrative secondary teaching or primary school director positions.

In the past four years, the ministry has written and adopted a new teacher training curriculum and a set of instructional modules that will help unqualified teach-



ers earn a primary teacher’s certificate. These teachers are trained by locally-placed tutors who visit their schools from time to time. The tutors themselves are trained in selected primary teachers colleges around the country. Over eight-thousand teachers—about 50 percent of those untrained—have already enrolled in this part-time training course. During the weeks of vacation between terms, these teachers are trained in residence at one of the primary teachers colleges holding ten-day training sessions.

On a bright, warm, but rainy day, in a small classroom of the Kabulasoke College, twenty-five teachers sit at well-worn wooden bench desks as one of their peers stands before them to practice-teach a lesson on ecosystems. The interior walls of white-washed concrete contrast sharply with the blackboard that runs along each wall, interrupted on one side by two open doors and on the other by gray-encased windows looking out onto the green campus, where a few pigs pick at tree roots and a group of young boys runs along a dirt path chasing their ball. The teachers, however, are not distracted from the tall and graceful Bugandan woman in front of the class whose questions draw them into the lesson. Minutes later, she listens as they offer her suggestions for improving the lesson. This “interactive” style of teaching and learning is another sharp contrast from the method more common in Africa that finds students silent as the teacher either recites or instructs them to copy from the blackboard.

While thousands of teachers are learning to instruct and manage classrooms, twenty-five hundred head teachers—roughly 30 percent of the force—are

learning to manage schools and to reach out to parents for their involvement in their children's education. In addition, over two-hundred tutors are learning how to train teachers. These three training programs for teachers, head teachers, and tutors have set in motion the means for raising teachers' competence and pride. Getting these programs started has taken uncountable hours of labor on the part of Uganda's curriculum experts and administrators at both the central ministry offices in Kampala and the selected district offices where the project has begun. It has also demanded enormous amounts of political will and cooperation—a phenomenon visibly absent from the crippled ministry of 1987.

Institutional support

If Ugandans want schools to affect political, social, and personal values and attitudes, then the government must ensure that these items are addressed by the curriculum and that students learn what the curriculum covers. This simple imperative requires the establishment of not only an instructional system (curriculum, materials, teachers, and tests), but also systems to manage the flow between schools and the central offices of resources and information that support the system. For instance, because teachers in Uganda are employees of the Ministry of Education, rebuilding the teaching force entailed not only improving teachers' salaries and competence, but also strengthening administrative and technical support offices. This is another example of the ubiquitous need for

“institution-building” among offices of governments deeply mired in resistance. Could the administrative and political quagmire of the ministry be avoided, or, indeed, transformed into a supportive organization?

Avoided? No. Schools need the organizations that train teachers and supply textbooks. They need a curriculum and a certification system that helps them meet government standards. Can the institution be transformed? Perhaps. Uganda has taken significant measures to revitalize the remnants of a once-promising ministry. As part of a broader government reform, it has begun building a system to train and support teachers, created a group to manage the system and related reform measures, and started decentralizing education services. Also, with support from the president and from international agencies, it has started to change the institutional culture of the ministry.

Building a delivery and support system

Trained teachers and new textbooks, unless delivered to and supported at the school and classroom levels, could be under-used or perhaps ignored. With significant help from USAID, the ministry has developed a network of tutors who have become the core of the synergistic effort to change what happens in the classroom. This network and the teachers, textbooks, and other pedagogical tools is known as the Teacher Delivery and Management System (TDMS).

The TDMS operates through networks of school clusters, each supported by a teachers college. Many staff members spend most of their time on the road, observing classrooms, advising teachers, facilitating meetings, and resolving the inevitable problems of a system spread among schools miles apart on dirt roads. This effort to ensure that change is taking place in the schools is particularly important because of Uganda's systematic approach to reform. The effects of each component of reform, from policies to instructional materials, must converge at the school and classroom levels.

The new delivery and support system has taken root in six areas of the country. It serves all or most of sixteen of Uganda's thirty-nine administrative districts. In 1997, the system is entering another four areas,



covering an additional nine districts. With financial assistance from the British and Dutch governments as well as USAID, Uganda plans to have the system operational in the remaining eight core primary teachers college areas by mid-2000. Beginning in 1997, as new districts receive the system, USAID is moving out of those areas where it is well established.

Managing the implementation process (NPERPMC)

When the government, in close collaboration with the World Bank and USAID, officially launched the reform in 1993, it also constituted the National Primary Education Reform Program Management Committee (NPERPMC, pronounced “EN-perp”). Forming NPERPMC was critical because, without it, the ministry could not have been mobilized to manage the reform. NPERPMC has authority to act; it is chaired by the permanent secretary, who can approve policies recommended by the committee, either alone or in consultation with the minister. At first, the committee met once a week, but has gradually cut back to meeting once every three weeks. At ten o’clock in the morning, while treated to tea and cakes, members review the progress of offices working on specific assignments. Each office of the ministry and other institutions within the education sector that has a stake in the reform is represented. Representatives from the Ministries of Finance and Civil Service, and from USAID and the World Bank also attend. The committee has an agenda, and it follows up on actions taken or not taken. William Brands, USAID’s education desk officer and Christine Kiganda, whose notable career in curriculum development and teacher training in Uganda attracted the attention of USAID, represent the agency at NPERPMC meetings. “NPERPMC has become one of the more effective tools of the reform,” Kiganda said. “We discuss policy and implementation points; everyone understands his or her corner and is held accountable. They are under consistent pressure to perform.”

NPERPMC’s insulation from regular lines of authority has helped in getting business done. Until recently, the committee’s secretariat was an office called the Project Implementation Unit (PIU). Financed by the World Bank, the PIU pays salaries well above those of other ministry staff to officials it can trust to account for funds that it lends the ministry. The

downside of this arrangement is that the ministry’s Offices of Primary Education and Teacher Training, which should be central to reform activities, are only minimally-engaged in it. The reform is taking place on the edge of the ministry, not at its center. Aware of this problem, the ministry has begun to move the reform to its center. In November 1996 a consultant team hired by the ministry advised on how the functions of NPERPMC might be integrated into a reorganized ministry.

Decentralizing

In the United States the governance and management functions of education are decentralized so that each state has ultimate responsibility for standards of instruction. In turn, each school district has administrative responsibility for its schools. Uganda is also moving in that direction. When he became president, Museveni’s immediate challenge was to unite disparate groups into one nation-state. He had to centralize government operations as a means of keeping control. Centralized government hampers policy enforcement and accountability at the local level. The district offices were weak and not held accountable to either central offices or to the people they served. Though they had the authority to collect taxes, this was no easy task. The World Bank reported that between 1990 and 1991 local revenues covered only about 5 percent of government expenditures and districts did not collect all that they should have. Most tax money went to cover administrative expenses, rather than to provide services visible to the public. A 1995 USAID report stated that most people did not think local governments were accountable to them, and “the perception that corruption abounds has affected their ability to collect revenues.”

Once the NRM government stabilized, Museveni began to improve the authority of local government. Decentralization began in 1993 with the passage of the local governments statute. Currently, thirty-nine district government offices are assuming responsibilities far beyond what they had in the past. They have increased fiscal responsibilities, and are expected to administer primary schools, public health clinics, feeder roads and markets, agricultural services, and police and security services. They levy taxes and redistribute these to pay for social services. (Teachers’ salaries



continue to come from central government funds, but are distributed through district offices.)

One obvious service improvement is manifest in the primary schools. By 1993 the Min-

istry of Education had already planned to devolve important functions to the district level. And by 1995 these changes were taking place. Schools had begun to select their own textbooks. In the same area of the country, the teacher training system was coordinated with district-level services. Local education officers took more responsibility for ensuring that schools had competent and certified teachers. As part of the May 1994 head count, each officer had to physically count the teachers and students in each school in his district. Then the officers had to do the paperwork required to report on these numbers, an exercise that gave them a fresh start in keeping their own records. By now, many district officers work closely with teacher training colleges. They identify teachers who need training, and follow-up to ensure that training has been effective.

Managing resources

By 1990 the ministry had lost track of its resources. The planning department had no clear idea of actual primary education expenditures, since parents were financing most of it. Thousands of teachers on the payroll were not on the job, and an equally large number of individuals actually teaching were not on the payroll. Indeed, no one could even say exactly

where each school was, how many children it served, or how many teachers it employed.

Managing resources is critical not only to helping schools operate today, but also to planning for tomorrow. As the population grows and moves increasingly from rural to urban areas, the ministry should be able to plan and budget for new schools, more teachers, facilities to train teachers, and a continual supply of instructional materials. To this end, the ministry has begun to strengthen its planning function by adding seven new positions to that department and by obtaining technical assistance from the World Bank and USAID. As the reform actually rolls out, the planning staff has begun to see its job as more than aimlessly collecting and computerizing data. Now, when the minister asks a question about the future (for example, how much more will it cost the government each year to increase enrollment by 10 percent), the planners can use their data to answer.

Summary of achievements

Overall, the ministry has achieved some remarkable successes since 1992 in improving primary education. It has effectively removed the two publishers' monopoly on textbook procurement and helped schools select and order their own books; over one and a half million textbooks have been delivered to schools. The ministry has raised teachers' salaries from \$8 to \$72 dollars a month. In cooperation with other ministries, it has rationalized the teaching force and rid the system of thousands of ghost teachers and teachers not likely to ever be competent. It has begun in-service training and supervisory support for about half the teachers who lack certification, trained tutors and about half of the head teachers in school management, and transferred considerable authority and budget to district education offices. NPERPMC is providing continuous direction and substance to the reform as well as a credible form around which a growing number of donors are rallying support.

In addition, by offering to provide a teacher for each classroom, the ministry has encouraged communities to build over one thousand new classrooms in 1995 alone. Prior to 1995 only a hundred or so classrooms were erected each year. A new curriculum is almost in place, and the national exams board has added some "high order thinking skills" to the Primary

Leaving Examination (PLE). In Uganda's school system, like most in Africa, in which the actual content of lessons is driven by what is on the formal examinations, these changes in the PLE strongly encourage teachers to teach thinking skills more effectively. The central office has launched a campaign to raise communities' awareness of the value of educating young girls. It has awarded grants to about two hundred schools that have taken the initiative to attract more female students. Finally, the ministry has begun to change its institutional culture, becoming accountable to parents and transparent in the transactions it conducts with their money. Institutions outside the ministry but still within the education sector, including Makerere University and the Uganda National Examinations Board, have begun to participate in long-term research on how the reform is affecting classrooms.

These achievements are a credit to the determination and thoughtful planning of the ministry. But political as well as technical reforms are required to secure the benefits of the reform.

USAID's support for the education sector

About the time the Education Policy Review Commission was turning its report over to the White Paper group, the ministry was preparing a sector investment plan. This plan was a list of endeavors in which international donors and lenders could offer support. World Bank consultants drafted much of the plan. USAID, which had reopened its mission when the Museveni government appeared to stabilize the volatility of previous years, was preparing to negotiate with the ministry a program of support for primary education, where U.S. development assistance priorities and Uganda's investment plan converged.

Planning the SUPER program

As mentioned above, the government had affirmed in its education White Paper its commitment to Universal Primary Education or UPE. Schooling was to be compulsory and free to all by no later than 2003. USAID on the other hand, believed that improving the quality of existing school teachers, textbooks, and management was more urgent than building more of

them. The system had to be rehabilitated before students could learn or schools could attract more children. USAID also wanted to help the ministry bring rural schools up to par with schools in Kampala and other cities, and to get more girls into school. As such, USAID decided to support quality improvement and equity strategies rather than efforts to enforce UPE. Thus, it opted for "quality" over "access."

Was USAID presumptuous in opting to help improve school quality when the ministry's highest priority was to expand families' access to schools? While the issue did not prompt much discussion at the time, as later events witnessed, the debate was simply postponed. The ministry agreed to the program proposed by USAID. The agency offered foreign exchange funds that Uganda badly needed in exchange for permission to participate in the dialogue on policies and priorities. In 1992 USAID inaugurated its Support for Ugandan Primary Education Reform (SUPER) program. The ten-year, \$108-million effort is helping the ministry reform the teacher training system, raise teachers' salaries, improve the supply of textbooks, help communities become more involved in governing schools, and get more girls into school. The World Bank's complementary program was intended to support building classrooms, rewriting the curriculum, revamping the examination system, and strengthening the ministry's capacity to plan the expansion of the school system over the long term.

By 1997 the SUPER program was noticeably changing the education system. "What has impressed me is that SUPER has approached the problems of our education system very systematically," remarked Sam Onek. He explained:

Some may say they wanted to undertake too much, but I disagree. The elements of the education system are interlinked. We have learned that if you tackle one, you cannot go far without tackling others. The program tried to identify the most vitally interlinked elements and invest in those. That strategy has paid some dividends.

USAID has used two strategies to help the ministry: technical assistance and contributions to the national budget in support of policy reforms (known as non-project assistance or NPA).

Technical assistance

The strategy that for decades has been central to USAID's development support is technical assistance. As in the SUPER project, technical assistance is provided by a team of contractors to USAID who work side-by-side with government counterparts. The Academy for Educational Development (AED) provides technical assistance to SUPER. The "chief of party" is William Kromer, who has worked on other USAID teacher-training projects in Liberia and Swaziland. In addition to Kromer, AED's long-term consultants currently include one other American, a South African, an Englishman, and a Ugandan. Most short-term consultants have been Ugandans.

Kromer and his staff started in July 1993 to build Uganda's new delivery and support system for primary teachers, the Teacher Development and Management System. The TDMS was inaugurated in September 1994 in two areas: Bushenyi, fertile agricultural country southwest of Kampala, toward Rwanda, and Gulu, the more volatile north, near Sudan. In addition, the technical advisory team assisted the Ministry of Education to plan and implement many of the initiatives described above.

Kromer's office is a cheerful corner of space on the third floor of the tall tower. The walls are covered

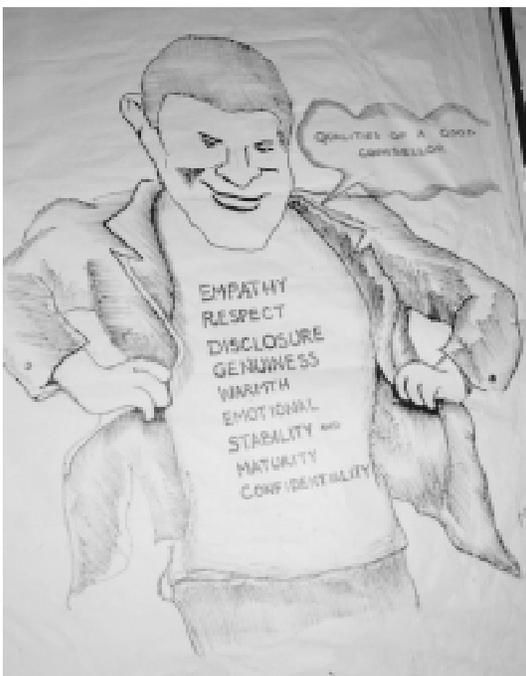
with photos of children, schools, and events. On the wall behind the work table is a poster picturing school children and three horizontal columns of text depicting the TDMS. Kromer explained:

The teacher development and support system is what makes this reform. Everything else, like the curriculum and the training courses, are simply tools. Our challenge is to build the system that allows for use of these tools. We must build it so that all parts and tools are aligned to reinforce each other. When we show a teacher a new behavior, she must be praised by her tutor for doing it, supported by the rules, and rewarded by her peers. The entire system must support that teacher.

Kromer's staff and their Ugandan counterparts form the TDMS team, and their challenge has been awesome. First, team members drafted the curricula and training materials for primary school and untrained teachers who were already in the schools, as well as refresher courses for other teachers and head teachers. Next, they prepared the curriculum and materials for teaching the tutors who would train all three groups of educators. In addition to preparing curricula and materials, the TDMS team created a system of itinerant tutors who would train teachers periodically in primary teachers colleges and intermittently on the job. They also reorganized the teachers colleges to handle in-service teachers and functions. Once the curricula, materials, and training program were ready, the team helped the Ministry of Education recruit and staff the newly-structured teachers colleges.

Each of these tasks required that the TDMS staff work through professional organizations in the education sector, such as the Education Service Commission, which hires and fires teachers, and the National Curriculum Development Center, which must approve all curricula. The tasks affected where teachers lived and how much they were paid. They impinged on the bureaucratic territory of many within the system. Getting approval on those actions from authorities in Kampala and beyond has not been easy.

Kromer, a youthful-looking grandfather of six, seems indefatigable. He must work through others who have authority. "As an advisor, I have no power base. They own the ideas and I support them," said





Kromer. This way of getting things done takes special skill. Kromer has had to help his Ugandan colleagues complete tasks that no one had anticipated. For example, they helped formulate and implement a new staff establishment formula, which required two workshops for officials nationwide and extensive support to offices around the country. They provided advice and logistical backing for organizing all teachers and students to report to school one day in May 1994 for the “head count.” And they helped the Uganda National Examinations Board design and administer the exam for identifying untrainable teachers.

Non-project assistance

A second strategy, one which USAID has been using only since the early 1990s and only in Africa, is to contribute to the government’s budget on the condition that the government implement and achieve certain policy-related actions. By 1996 USAID had released to Uganda \$39 million. This strategy has the considerable advantage to Uganda of providing U.S. dollars to pay off foreign debt or to devote more of its budget to primary education. It provides USAID, with its expertise in education in Africa, a legitimate role and potent leverage in policy debates. It also gives government agencies beyond the Ministry of Education, including the powerful Ministry of Finance, a vested interest in the goals and policies of the education sector.

This strategy, called non-project assistance (NPA) because it is not a technical assistance project, was extremely effective in helping the Ministry of Education raise teachers’ salaries. As part of the government’s structural adjustment package, the Ministry of Public Service had agreed to a significant reform of the civil service. Teachers constitute about half of the civil service. With pressure from the Ministry of Finance to raise teachers’ salaries—a condition for getting USAID’s substantial contribution to the treasury—the Ministry of Public Service was

ready to help the Ministry Education revise staffing policies and adjust the payroll. Thus, the Ministries of Education, Finance, and Public Service engaged in dialogue on issues in their shared interest and toward USAID’s policy objectives.

NPA, as a relatively new foreign-aid strategy, has not been without flaws. In Benin, Namibia, and Lesotho, where USAID first tried the approach, nitty-gritty conditions for receiving funds were programmed over five years and cemented in formal agreements. Lesotho agreed to nearly fifty such conditions. In Uganda, having the benefit of these earlier problematic experiences, USAID set far fewer but carefully-targeted conditions. While its policy objectives remained constant, USAID allowed conditions to “roll” from one year to the next, depending on progress made and circumstances changed.

The Uganda USAID mission was also in tune with what the Ugandans themselves wanted to achieve. This became evident when the ministry not only met USAID’s conditions but went far beyond them. USAID asked that teachers’ salaries be raised to a living wage over the ten-year period of the project. The ministry raised them that much in four years. USAID asked that the ministry put into its budget a line item of the equivalent of \$300,000 for textbooks. The ministry not only did so, but also reformed the entire set of textbook procurement procedures.

One might ask whether USAID really needed to offer incentives here. Probably so. The risk of losing

significant foreign exchange has often prodded government staff to press a bit harder to make unpopular moves. Recent discussions with government illustrate how future conditionality can be used as such a tool. For example, the sixty-three teacher training colleges that operate around the country are not evenly distributed to serve schools and do not all provide a quality program. The current number of colleges was reduced from ninety-three a few years ago, and at least thirty more should be closed to result in a “rational” network. But deciding which to close or move, as one American observed, is like trying to close U.S. military bases. USAID’s promise of funding will encourage the government to make these tough decisions. Another sticky situation was pulling the props away from the parastatal textbook procurement unit to open up the market to competition. With the force of USAID support behind him, the minister was better equipped to end the international publishers’ cozy relationship with the procurement unit. Minister Mushega called NPA “the wind behind the sails of our reform.”

What remains to be done?

Uganda’s primary education reform has thrived in part because political stability has increased and the economy is doing well. Reform measures have begun to improve the quality of instruction in impoverished schools throughout the country. About half of the schools have already been touched by those measures. By means of devolution of budget and authority to district offices, the way has been paved for the ministry to help schools become accountable to the families they serve. The reform is taking root, but it still needs attentive care.

Change the institutional culture

Institutions in the education sector, especially the ministry offices at the central and district levels, have perhaps more direct influence on the values and behavior of the nation’s people than do other institutions. Their purpose, after all, is to instill civic and ethical values, and teach new behaviors in both the intellectual and practical sides of life. If schools are to be held accountable to the students they teach and the commu-

nities they serve, then they must operate in an institutional culture that models accountable actions.

Yet the Ministry of Education continues to suffer from an institutional culture that disregards accountability to school communities and does not model commendable public service. Schemes to improve institutional capacity along the lines of organizations in industrialized countries often meet with exasperation from international donors. “Feeding corruption” and “pouring money down a rat hole” characterize the responses of foreign aid watchers who are told horror stories of African ministries.

Mamadou Dia, a former Senegalese government officer, explained that corrupt institutions reveal a “disconnect between formal and informal institutions,” between the government and a civil society built on family and community ties. Individuals know how they are attached to their families and communities, but they see no relationship between these and government offices. This holds true for many individuals who hold government jobs. The poor performance of African governments in delivering public services is largely due to what Dia calls “patrimonial distortions in the management of the state.”

Uganda’s own history, both the colonial and the post-colonial eras, help explain what feeds corruption as a strain of the institutional culture. The colonial government, which gave Ugandans their model of “modern” political structure and behavior, had no intention of responding to voices of the people or linking to grassroots associations. Like the British government in colonial America, it was in Africa to keep order needed to exploit the territory. In African eyes, government was there to harvest resources and acquire wealth, not to engage the people in sharing and managing what were really their own resources. The reign of terror that came within a decade after independence presented a distorted reflection of the colonial model of government. Whoever held a high-level government job was elite, privileged, and wealthy. That man or woman had not only the right but the obligation to share what came his or her way through the government with family, close and distant. Especially when times were tough, no one would deny the government worker the privilege of taking what he or she could get.

From his plain but comfortable office in Crested Towers, a senior education official agreed that “cor-

ruption has been a serious issue of public life over the past two decades. We've seen open swindling of public funds. People suspect that highly-placed officials and their political leaders divert public funds for personal ends." Corruption has many faces. Sometimes the politician, who needs money to meet the expectations of his community and other supporters, colludes with the public officials responsible for monitoring the use of funds. In falsifying records of transactions, their fraud "leaks" to lower levels and allows even junior officials to participate. Often, officials take kickbacks from procurements or allow vendors to "supply air," and pocket the difference between the cost of what was ordered and what was actually delivered. Finally, they use vehicles and other government property for private purposes, starving the institutions of resources they need to get the job done. "As long as the president depends on a handful of friends who are ministers—as long as power is brokered—attacks on corruption will fail," explained the official.

The institutional culture of the Ministry of Education has a mixed record of improvement. At the national level leadership is still weak. The permanent secretary position has been anything but permanent, having turned over six times since the reform began. Two strong players in the reform have died and others in key positions have been thrown out on charges of embezzlement. Among staff at the middle levels of the ministry—those who have helped to plan and manage teacher training and other activities—things look better. Many have been vitalized and taken opportunities to demonstrate competence in making and carrying out decisions within their realm of responsibility. Others lag behind.

The senior education official is hopeful that his colleagues in Kampala and in the districts are about to see corruption contained. A breakthrough has come in the general election of the president, held in July 1996. "Now the president is supported by a large majority of the people, not a handful of ministers." In addition, a court system, a free press, and several other offices are in place to enforce accountability and check corruption. These include the Public Accounts Committee, which holds permanent secretaries accountable, the Inspector General of Government, who has the power to prosecute, the Auditor General, and the Leadership Code, which requires that elected officials declare their assets and liabilities. Since his election, the president has moved to empower these institutions.

In addition, the president has promised to deliver services, including primary education, to Ugandans. The education official predicted that "the public will demand these services and ministries will have to provide them. Ministers can no longer allow scarce funds to be diverted; those who want to remain in office will have to check their appetites." Speaking of the Ministry of Education, he noted that "officials at every level will be operating in a straightjacket of resources such that stealing can hardly go on undetected."

The Ministry of Education still needs USAID's help in moving the management of the reform from its current peripheral position in the PIU to a more central one in the Ministry of Education's Offices of Primary Education and Teacher Training. This means not only drawing the organizational chart of functions and responsibilities, but also establishing and enforcing the rules for behavior. USAID can also use its leverage to help change the institutional culture, not only in the central Ministry of Education offices but also in local government offices beyond Kampala. The success of district education offices will depend heavily on the institutional culture of local government offices. If communities are to change their perception to one that holds schools accountable to them, ministry offices, from top to bottom, must act upon different values.

Foster democratic processes

The strengthening of democracy and the reform of education form a symbiotic relationship. Each is needed to promote the other. Reforming the school system offers an opportunity to strengthen the processes of democracy in Uganda. Judith Geist has advised USAID that its "true objective in the political sphere is the promotion of a network of associations and of the concepts that underlie it—freedom of thought, speech, and association." One key network of associations is the parent teacher associations (PTAs). Each school has one, though now they serve mostly to collect school fees from parents. PTAs can be vital because parents care about the education of their children. Once schools are seen as partnerships between the government and the community, many parents will take the opportunity the PTA offers to help govern the school. By helping the ministry (through its district offices) make schools accountable to PTAs, USAID can foster the democratic processes of associations. It

has already shown signs of success in this endeavor in Mali and Benin.

Namirembe Bitamazire is one of the two hundred twenty-one elected members of the new Parliament. She began her career as a teacher and, for an eighteen-month period just after Amin's fall, she was minister of education. Her commitment to teaching and schools has helped set her priorities in Parliament. One of these is to support PTAs. "I was one of those who initiated PTAs in Uganda. I had seen them in the United States. PTAs bring communities closer to the school; they integrate the responsibilities of parents and teachers for the child's education." They also form the basis of parents' political influence with their parliamentary representatives.

Just as PTAs should influence Parliament, Parliament should help keep the education system accountable to parents. Bitamazire serves as chairperson of the parliamentary Committee on Social Welfare and Services. Education is the largest of the three ministries monitored by this committee. "Our role is to relate policy to funding." The committee has already called education officials before it. And, with forty-one former teachers in Parliament, the committee is expected to play an increasingly strong role in keeping the ministry's activities in the public eye. Another member of Parliament with a distinguished career in education expects changes. "We are still experimenting with parliamentary democracy, but I see a strong ray of hope. Members are speaking for their constituents. Ministers realize they will be held accountable to us." A change in the institutional climate of the Ministry of Education seems inevitable.

Strengthening democratic government will move hand-in-hand with decentralizing the administrative services of government. In the long term, decentralizing education services should help solve the accountability problem by chopping it into pieces. Each district education office will be more likely to be accountable to the people it serves than the central office has been. For the present, however, political and administrative figures continue to sort out their jurisdiction and power at the district level. Arthur Bagunywa, a member of Parliament and consultant to the TDMS, is concerned that district-level education officers not be outweighed by local politicians. "District leaders," he noted, "need to make sure education funds are not reallocated elsewhere."

Root and expand the teacher training system

The second mission not yet accomplished in Uganda is the rooting and expansion throughout the country of the new teacher training system. Bill Kromer remarked, "I see the development of the system in three stages: preparation of materials, colleges, and district support functions, delivery of inputs to the colleges and districts, and field support, supervision, and coordination." He believes that the third stage—institutionalizing the new system—will probably be the most challenging:

We are asking thousands of teachers to change drastically how they teach. We want them to think differently about children and how they learn. They need to know how to teach with a textbook, something many have never learned. It's not enough to hand them paper, say 'read these and go to it.' They will need plenty of support.

The new system is designed to give the teachers this support, but, here again, the people in that system, especially the leaders, are being asked to change their behavior.

For example, George Kalibbalah, who has worked hard to help the ministry get textbooks to all schools, is not satisfied that books have reached the students:

The biggest problem remains efficient book use. We have a lot to do to ensure that the books belong to the children. We must convince teachers that the ministry will continue to supply books. Our track record is not the best. Teachers don't believe that we want the books to be well-worn, and that we don't mind if even a few are lost.

In many parts of Africa, where vehicles are scarce and fuel even scarcer, one indicator of the determination and ingenuity of those charged with implementing new initiatives is whether they sigh and lean on a "lack of transport" as an insurmountable barrier to their work. In Uganda, noted Ian Smith of the SUPER staff, "transport is a constraint, but it doesn't prevent tutors from visiting the schools. They are solving the problem with various strategies, including bicycles, motor-

bikes that they can also use as taxis, and building overnight shelters between remote schools for visiting tutors.”

The tutors’ solutions to the transport problem bode well for the future of the TDMS. The TDMS has yet to arrive in many districts of the country, and with pressure from the UPE policy, many schools will need the quality improvements that the system can deliver. With help from international donors beyond USAID and the World Bank, Kromer thinks that the system will be active in every district by the time SUPER has ended. He hopes that it will also be institutionalized and ready for the withdrawal of foreign assistance.

Meet the growing demand for schooling

Museveni has made the government’s commitment to the UPE policy quite clear. Hardly more than half of the school-age children are in school. His new policy will lower the barrier of cost to millions of families. But as barriers to school entry go down, the cost of expanding the system goes up. The government must hire and train more teachers, provide more books, desks, pencils, and paper, and build more classrooms. Secondary schools will soon have to expand to absorb the increased number of students in primary schools. Yet the 55 percent of education funds contributed by parents will disappear.

Politicians who support the president see the wisdom of his action. “He has said,” Bitamazire explained, “let us begin now. We will face the issues as they come along. Perhaps this crisis approach will move things along faster than sitting more years at the drawing board. When problems hit us in the face, we shall resolve them.” Other politicians have a more mixed response. One agreed that while the pronouncement has had the positive effect of raising awareness of the education reform that is moving well in some areas of the country, it has caused a “crisis in what was a systematic plan. The White Paper policy and TDMS strategy is in conflict with UPE in 1997. Schools are not ready to handle the influx of students.”

Education officials who must implement the policy agree that they face huge challenges. One senior man stated:

Our hope was that the reform would have improved education sufficiently so that when

the pressure of expansion forced it, we would have something acceptable to put into the hands of children. But that pressure has come too soon. The main issue now is to balance free education with quality improvements.

Sam Onek meets long hours with colleagues as the registration for free education gets underway. “This will strain almost all elements the reform has been addressing. We are trying to quickly grapple with the new policy and make sensible decisions.” The ministry is considering double shifts and larger classes to meet the immediate increase in students. Then, more schools must be built and furnished, more teachers recruited and trained, and more instructional materials put into the hands of students.

The government proposes to add \$14 million from the national budget to the Ministry of Education. Patrick Fine, who has been instrumental in making USAID’s assistance effective, calculates that this will cover only about 35 percent of the revenue lost from PTA fees. National funds pay for teachers, books, and the support structure of the ministry. PTA fees pay for everything else and sometimes top off teacher salaries as well. The ministry believes that its raise of teachers’ salaries to a living wage obviates the need for these top-offs. But some head teachers, teachers, and parents think that if a PTA is forbidden to collect fees, they will have trouble keeping the school in operation.

Uganda is not the first country to try balancing public and private funding of education. Most Asian countries moved toward full public financing as their economies grew and they were able to afford it. In Africa, few countries have become this wealthy. In the early 1970s Kenya pledged to eliminate PTA fees, but schools countered with “building fees” and other unofficial impositions, sometimes asking for more than PTAs had required. Higher fees curtail access to even more families. Another problem with such ad hoc fees is that their use is even less transparent than that of PTA fees, because neither the PTA nor any other group representing the community has oversight of spending.

The dilemma that moves to the front burner is the ministry’s need to plan for its long-range requirements for teachers, classrooms, books, equipment, and supplies. At what rate will the school-age population grow? In what parts of the country? Fine and his



learning is expected. Such policies can lower the cost of producing a primary school graduate dramatically. But they have clear implications for the value and usefulness of schooling. Students who pass every grade without learning are not educated graduates. Formulating the best efficiency policies for Uganda may take as much effort as did negotiating good policies on teacher salaries.

The payoff

colleagues at USAID are particularly concerned that many more students will enter the first-grade level, where more teachers are untrained, books are fewer, and, when there is a shortage of classrooms, students must learn under trees. Christine Kiganda at USAID asked, “What can we do to encourage schools to give more resources to the first-grade level?”

With the ministry decentralized these issues must be addressed at the district level, but most district offices still lack the skills and tools to do this planning. Indeed, even at the central level, the ministry may lack the capacity to conduct this kind of analysis.

Resolving issues of finance in education also brings into play issues of the system’s efficiency. Having found the means to pay more per teacher, the ministry now needs to determine how to pay less per student. The ministry estimates that an investment of twenty-eight school years is required to graduate one student from the seventh grade of primary school (down from thirty-two years in 1990). This is because about 20 percent of the students repeated grade levels at least once and about 10 percent dropped out before they finished, so many years are spent on students who do not graduate.

The efficiency in getting students through primary school could be improved in several ways. The most legitimate way is to continue improving the quality of instruction so that more students learn what is expected at each grade level. Another way is to change what regulates the flow of students, so that, for instance, teachers are required to pass everyone from one grade to the next no matter how much they appear to have learned. A third way is to lower standards so that less

Not long ago, an eminent educator from Korea visited Uganda. He praised the government for its economic policies and its commitment to primary education. His praise was not idle, because it encourages Ugandans to hope for their own version of an “east Asian miracle.” Some analysts now credit the economic success of Korea and other Asian countries with not only sound economic policies, but also the decision to invest with foresight in primary education for the whole population. Uganda has now chosen to make that investment, and Museveni seems determined to keep this promise. Uganda might become Africa’s first “tiger.”

While economic growth is surely a consideration, Museveni’s commitment to free education must be motivated as well by his desire to build national unity. While, in the short term, he may have to win national allegiance with guns and force, in the long run, he will gain it through educating Uganda’s children. Teaching all children allegiance to their country, and the values and skills of citizenship is a long-term effort. It requires an enduring school system, reaching every village, and instruction of sufficient quality to affect beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

For five years USAID has steered the ministry toward improving the quality of existing schools rather than creating a demand for new schools. But now that has changed. The president has committed to free primary education for all, beginning in 1997. Within the next five years, USAID will take a back seat in this venture. As the Ugandan government increases its contribution to primary education, USAID’s financial assistance will drop steadily in proportion to the ministry’s budget. When USAID pulls out in 2002,

Ugandans will perpetuate their own reforms in education.

Decisions made and actions taken this year will be critical in determining Uganda's success in giving every child a quality primary school education. In helping to meet this challenge, USAID's support will be indispensable. According to a senior ministry offi-

cial, "It is most urgent that we complete the TDMS in all areas of the country. We must give all schools trained teachers, instructional materials, and enduring support." Today, the system is thriving in areas where it has been established. The will to take it nationwide appears strong, among Americans as well as Ugandans.

2. Guinea: Education Reform in the Context of Economic Transition



The reform of Guinea's education system has been closely tied to the series of political changes and economic conditions that the country has experienced since independence. During its post-independence years, Guinea has zigzagged between liberal and authoritarian regimes and between socialist and free-market economic systems. In turn, these transitions have had a significant impact on education policies and practices. Today, the country stands with seven years of successful reform of the education system, particularly in primary education. As the political situation stabilizes and the economy improves, the education sector looks forward to continuing improvement. But the challenges remain considerable.

The political context in historical perspective

In less than forty years the course of history has changed direction twice in Guinea: in September 1958, Guinea became independent and a socialist government came into power. In April 1984, a military coup initially resulted in an authoritarian regime, leading to the establishment of a new constitution that ushered in a multiparty democratic government. This in turn led to a presidential election in December 1993.

In 1958 Guinea elected to break away from the group of French colonies in West Africa and to establish its own government with a strong socialist orientation. On the world scene, Guinea practiced an active, dynamic, and, in many respects, innovative diplomacy. For example, the new state's representative to the United Nations was the first woman ever to preside over the Security Council. Yet the fundamental question of political orientation and the choice of what kind of political and economic development to pursue remained an open question until 1984.

The political crises arising from this debate were particularly bitter in the 1960s and 1970s, when violence and repressive measures were instituted against political opponents. Arrests and assassinations of detainees resulted in large scale emigration to bordering countries, particularly Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. These internal crises had external repercussions, as humanitarian organizations and the international community protested Guinea's violation of human rights. Towards the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s there were attempts at reconciliation, especially with the countries in West Africa where there had been a strong exodus from Guinea.

The second major change in Guinean history followed the death of President Ahmed Sékou Touré in March 1984. The power struggle within the leadership of the socialist party and of the government assumed alarming proportions and was rapidly becoming uncontrollable. To prevent the country from falling into chaos, the National Army took power and installed a Military Committee for National Recovery (*Comité Militaire de Redressement National*). During the transitional period between 1984 and 1991, the socialist regime was replaced with a more liberal government. Political prisoners were freed, the country was opened to the outside world, and the freedom of action of all citizens was recognized. During this time, the one-party system was abolished, and organizations affiliated with this party were dissolved. While new institutions were being defined, the socialist constitu-

tion was suspended, and the government functioned by ordinance, decrees, and ministerial orders given by a transition committee in lieu of Parliament.

In a 1990 referendum, the country's citizens approved a new constitution. Political parties were legalized and permitted to prepare for presidential elections with universal suffrage in 1993. The Supreme Court was installed as the defender of the constitution and laws. And in 1993 the members of the National Assembly were elected on the basis of competing electoral lists.

Fluctuations in economic policies

With independence, Guinea immediately embarked on a program of development from within the country. It faced, however, two major obstacles from the outset: the consequences of its rupture with the Franco-African community, and the need for external economic assistance without endangering its newly-achieved independence. The government requested help from many countries, but obtained it principally from the eastern European socialist countries and the Soviet Union, which also provided an economic model.

The economic development plans of 1960, 1970, and 1980 sought to create a sector of state enterprises, and to modernize agriculture on a mechanized and cooperative basis. Most state enterprises were intended to ensure import substitution, and to use local raw materials and products instead. The productive, commercial, and banking sectors were—for the most part—placed in the public domain or taken over by cooperatives. However, serious shortages of raw materials and spare parts for machines presented insurmountable difficulties in the running of these industrial enterprises; they were functioning well below the profit margin and had to receive state subsidies in order to keep going. Too many employees, low levels of production, fixed prices that provided no incentive for either small agricultural businesses or cooperatives (that were in any case having a hard time organizing themselves, particularly in rural areas), resulted in the rationing of basic food items. A black market developed to satisfy the need for imported goods and foodstuffs. Both road and rail transport networks were deteriorating. The banking system was incapable of encouraging domestic savings in favor of development; and the national currency was overvalued.

In 1979 Guinea instituted some measure of economic and institutional reform. The intention was to increase tolerance for private enterprise, encourage foreign investment and diversification, and progressively introduce efficiency criteria and greater fiscal austerity. In 1982 Guinea extended these economic measures—with the help of the World Bank—to include the agricultural sector, particularly the distribution of improved rice seed to the rural population and the elimination of regional trading companies. The government and the IMF also signed an agreement in 1982 based on a financial and monetary Structural Adjustment Program or the French term *Programme d'Adjustement Structurel* (PAS). The essential elements of this recovery program were reforming the exchange rate, pursuing price liberalization, promoting the autonomy of parastatal enterprises and improving their efficiency, controlling employment and consumption, and improving investment programs and their external financing. Means had to be found to implement these reforms without jeopardizing previous achievements.

Following the military coup in 1984, a new political orientation made it possible for the new government to accelerate negotiations with donors. In December 1985 the head of state announced the new economic program. Its objective was the liberalization of the economy and the removal of the state from the productive sectors of the economy, an improvement in the efficiency of public administration, and the implementation of a system based on a market economy. Between 1986 and 1988 specific measures were undertaken, including the devaluation of the country's currency and the reorganization of the banking sys-



tem; the privatization of industrial and commercial state enterprises; trade liberalization and the elimination of price controls; reorganization of the ministries and departments; and the elimination of civil service jobs.

To support the government's efforts to attain economic growth, the second phase of the PAS was implemented with the help of the World Bank and the IMF. Its objectives were to consolidate the choice of a free market economy, strengthen the management of the national economy, and restore the growth potential of its key sectors.



Changes in the education sector

While Guinea's most significant education reform to date did not occur until 1989, several new policies were introduced shortly after independence and in the years that followed.

After independence

On achieving independence, Guinea faced questions about the relevance of its schools to the new state's sociocultural environment and the course of socialist economic development that it had undertaken. The government introduced a series of educational reforms to deal with these developments. The reforms addressed four areas of need. First, the school system had to allow access to more students, particularly girls. Second, institutes of higher education needed to train professional and technical workers who, prior to independence, had to seek such training abroad. Third, a largely illiterate population needed to evolve into a nation of readers and writers. Finally, the curricula had needed to become relevant to Guinea, not its former colonizer. To accomplish this schools were to teach "productive work" (which was to consume 25 percent of the weekly school calendar), especially in agriculture, and to instruct students during their first two years in one of the eight national languages, introducing French only in the third year.

Each one of these changes presented problems. The extension of the school system produced a greater need for more teachers, especially in primary schools, yet the Ministry of Education lacked the means to train

teachers. Literacy programs suffered from a lack of funds and planning. The inefficiency of the administrative services impeded efforts to adapt to improved strategies for differentiating between schools in the significantly different urban and rural environments. The introduction of national languages and productive work suffered from a lack of pilot, economic, and financial studies. Moreover, these reforms were poorly received, because no effort had been made to explain their virtues to parents, community leaders, teachers, or other stakeholders in the education sector.

To remedy these problems, the government introduced two projects, Education I in 1979 and Education II in 1983, with help from the International Development Association (IDA). These projects aimed to improve technical education, produce textbooks for primary education, build new schools, and train professionals in the central offices of the Ministry of Education. Although the results of these projects were positive in terms of their stated objectives, they had no substantive effect on the sector because they were outside of a coherent sector policy framework and failed to address the need for change in the overall strategy for education.

After Sékou Touré

Education policies are extremely political, and it is not unusual for a new government to strip away its predecessor's objectives and strategies. Following Touré's death and the government's reassessment of its direction, two national conferences were held in Conakry, in May-June 1984 and April 1985. All inter-

ested parties joined the debate, including Guineans living abroad and representatives of international donor agencies. During the course of these two meetings and over the intervening months, participants made a complete appraisal of education policies, reforms to date, and needs for the future.

Conference reports revealed that Guinea was among the least-developed countries in terms of primary school attendance. The disparity between the enrollment of boys and girls, and urban and rural areas was great. Classroom capacity was insufficient and unsuitable. In rural areas, there were often only one or two classrooms per community. In urban areas, there was vast overcrowding, with an average of 70 students per class in Conakry. The quality of instruction was low because teachers were underqualified, and textbooks and teaching materials were in very short supply. About one-quarter of the students were repeating classes, and about 14 percent dropped out each year. Secondary schools, universities, and technical and professional education were characterized by similar deficiencies. The repercussions of the low attendance rates at the primary level and of low rates of continuation from primary to secondary school were felt at each level, including higher education.

The administration and management of the education system was weak. Information failed to flow within the system, regional and prefectural offices lacked autonomy, and teachers received no supervision. Schools were severely underfinanced. Private schools were rare because of the difficulties of obtaining bank loans for recruiting staff and for construction, as well as difficulties in getting building permits and titles to property. Also, the school fees were too high for families of average means. This meant that the burden of financing education fell almost entirely on the government. These inadequacies of the school system particularly affected girls, and young children living in rural areas.

To solve these problems, the participants at the national conferences drafted a new educational policy and defined objectives for the year 2000. During a period of transition from 1984 to 1989, French would, once again, be introduced in the first year, and productive work would be eliminated from the curriculum. These changes were intended to restore the confidence of parents in the quality of schooling and to begin to restore balance to the educational system. Technical

training was to be diversified to respond to the job market, and training to help school dropouts find gainful employment was to be provided. Administration, planning, and supervision at the school level were to be strengthened.

These reforms too did not satisfy everyone, though in many ways they dramatically reversed those that they replaced. They failed to solve problems in the relationship between the schools and the communities that housed them, they did not enable the young graduates to enter the job market, and they did not put to rest the controversy over teaching in national languages.

After structural adjustment

The international community had stood back following the death of Touré while Guinea determined its future political direction and desired economic landscape. Following the political changes, including the two national conferences on education, relations with donors improved. With donors' help, the Ministry of Education was able to start implementing some of its new policies immediately. The French Cooperation Agency (*Fonds d'Aide et de Coopération* or FAC), for example, was quick to support the teaching of French by providing textbooks for primary schools, training teachers in language, math and science, and revising the curriculum. In 1987 the FAC sent technical assistants to help the Inspectorate of Education, an arm of the Guinean system based directly on the French model.

Other changes, however, were planned more slowly and deliberately. Perhaps the two most significant differences between the reforms fashioned during this transition period and



those of the socialist era were the government and donors' attempts to link them to macroeconomic reforms, and the ministers' concerted effort to keep everyone informed of and involved in their rationale and implementation.

The linking together of education sector adjustment in education and macroeconomic adjustment was planned from the outset. It was drafted and formulated as a result of actions undertaken in different sectors that eventually converged. Between 1986 and 1987 the government undertook specific measures relating to economic structural adjustment, including monetary revision, reorganization of the banking system, economic liberalization by the privatization of state, industrial, and commercial enterprises, administrative reorganization, and reduction of civil service personnel. These reforms needed to be consolidated in the education sector as well.

The government and the World Bank, which had supported two education projects, concluded that the impact of those reforms on the education sector was limited because they took place outside of a coherent sector policy framework. Such a framework, in addition to specifying how the education system would expand and improve, needed to define how it would be financed. While the World Bank was willing to provide substantial funding for education reforms, it recognized that the government would also have to find the means for long-term increases in its education budget.

Madame Aicha Bah Diallo became minister of education in 1989 and remained in that position for seven years. A teacher for thirteen years and a school principal for seven more, she had studied in the United States with support from USAID. She worked in the



Ministry of Women and Social Affairs for two years, following which she served as chief of staff in the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation before returning to head the Ministry of Education.

She found schools in dismal condition. Rural areas had hardly any schools, and in urban areas, tables and benches were unstable, if they were there at all, and few books were to be found. Hardly any girls attended schools outside of urban areas. "At first I did not know where to begin, because everything was of the highest priority. Should I start with the teachers, with the schools, or with buying books? Should books be written by Guinean teachers or imported? Imagine that school attendance was at 28 percent. I had to do something, everything, right away," said Aicha Bah.

The *Declaration of Education Policy*, the 1989 publication from which the above quotation was taken, is written in a clear and direct style. It describes the need for trained human resources as an essential component of macroeconomic reform. Thus, it follows that investment in the education sector is a critical component of national economic development. This laid the groundwork for an increased budget in education.

J.P. Kamano, in his case study of Guinea for the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) Biennial in 1995, noted that the policy provided a blueprint for specific objectives, procedures, and strategies to realize the increase in budget. Education's share of the national budget was to increase from 14 percent in 1989 to 20 percent in 2000, and the bulk of financial resources was to be directed towards primary education, which was given top priority. With these resources, the Ministry of Education was expected to raise enrollment from 28 to 53 percent by 2000.

These objectives had implications for teachers as well as for infrastructure and improvements in teacher training. Teachers would be recruited to keep pace with the increase in numbers of children attending school and the number of classrooms available. Disparities between the attendance of boys and girls, and in the number and quality of schools between rural and urban areas, were to be reduced. The increase in the number of students attending primary school and the improved efficiency of the system would affect other levels. Thus, secondary and higher levels were to be examined in terms of increased enrollment at the primary level and the new human resource require-

ments of the national economic situation. This reform, which was officially launched in 1990 and continued through 1993, was known as the Education Sector Adjustment Program, or the PASE.

The PASE (1990-1993)

Aly Badra Doukouré became Secretary General of the Ministry of Education while Aicha Bah was minister. In this position, he was responsible for managing the implementation of the reform policies for which Aicha Bah had secured political support. Doukouré started his career as a university professor and by 1978 had become rector of the university. He became a regional inspector of education, responsible for supervising teachers, principals, PTAs, and communities in their involvement with schools. In 1992 he was appointed secretary general.

Doukouré explained that the PASE came into being:

... in a particularly favorable context in the sense that there was a political will to change, so that it was established on the basis of recommendations arising from the National Conferences, and one of the pivotal elements of these recommendations was that the educational pyramid be turned upside down. Higher education was getting a disproportionately large share of the education budget to the detriment of basic education.

Planning the PASE

In contrast to earlier reforms, the PASE was designed by an interministerial committee called COPASE, which called upon the assistance of foreign experts for specific studies. COPASE operated between January 1988 and August 1989. During this time, it initiated thirteen foreign missions and eleven studies on issues that needed clarification for the program to be developed. COPASE was assisted by technical groups that functioned on the basis of the participative method, and all decisions were made on



a consensual basis. When the groups did not reach a consensus, specific field studies were undertaken, and two inspectorates served as models for observing local and regional realities. Aicha Bah stressed the fact that she was a great believer in sharing information and getting the partners together. “Everything that is done, tell the government about it; tell the teachers, the parents. Ask the media to help. Once the people know the facts, they are good citizens, they will agree even to tough decisions,” she said.

The Ministry of Economy and Finance’s commitment to provide for all the expenditures estimated to attain the objectives was truly remarkable. The support given by all the ministries confirmed the importance of their participation in its preparation. An important issue of debate was the target for enrollment. The proposed enrollment target was 60 percent and the attendance rate 53 percent by the year 2000. Doukouré stated:

There were of course reservations; some felt that the objective of a 60 percent enrollment rate in the first year was too high; others felt that, although it might be possible to reach the 53 percent attendance rate at the primary level, it would then be difficult for the other levels of education to sustain the growth rate for cohesive and sustained growth of the education system as a whole.

The target enrollment was eventually set at 53 percent. “Another suggestion,” added Doukouré, “was that the policy should provide a better platform for

rural areas and local community development by making the curricula more practical. Furthermore, the remodeling of schools and staff assignments should give priority to the rural areas and parents should be brought into the process.”

When she became minister of education, Aicha Bah benefited from having participated in COPASE on behalf of the Ministry of Planning, she noted:

When I was with the Ministry of Planning, I had kept myself informed of studies and even contributed to them. Thus, we had an education policy in the works, and as soon as I became minister, I updated the policy and submitted it for approval by the cabinet. So, I was able to start off with an educational policy, which made life much easier.

The policy was adopted in September 1989.

Aicha Bah and Doukouré agreed that the participation of all the actors and stakeholders involved helped to facilitate consensus on the policy. It helped clarify the global vision of the policy and of the sector adjustment program. And it helped focus attention on the need for giving priority to primary education and for devising criteria for quality education. Doukouré pointed out that “it is not enough to have more children going to school, but going to school to do what . . . children educated to do what?”

An important feature of the policy was that the reform would be system-wide, rather than a collection of individual projects. Kamano noted that “although the general guidelines, objectives, and priorities of the education sector adjustment program were clearly defined in the declaration, the procedures, mechanisms, and strategies for reaching them were not.” Kamano felt that a problem could therefore arise when more than one foreign donor chooses to intervene, each with “its own strategy, based on its own culture, and perhaps in conflict with each other or with how the Guineans would like to proceed.” Doukouré, however, felt that this was an advantage because it “allowed the government to negotiate with various donors on how each would be willing to offer support. Thus, several donors, each with its own objectives and spheres of interest, could participate in the reform.”

Aicha Bah elaborated on this strategy. “When we met around the table, we had our policy. So when the

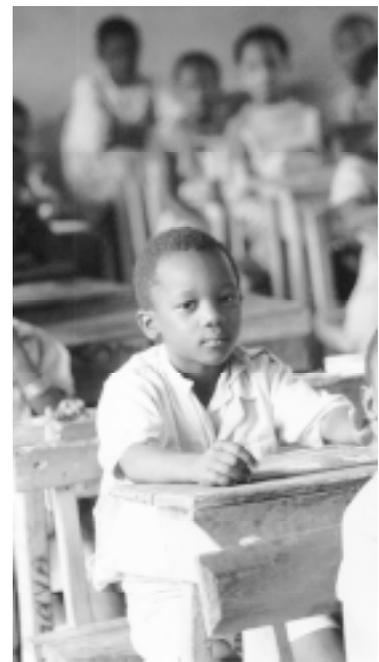
donors asked, ‘what do you want to do?’ we identified the objectives we wanted to obtain. Thus, USAID, the World Bank, and the FAC together agreed on a joint venture with the government, and we all worked together.”

The PASE was intended to support a reform of the education sector by restructuring the education system, and to improve and expand education with the money thus saved. The principal changes in financing were reallocation of resources from the post-secondary to the primary level and redeployment of surplus teachers from the secondary to the primary level. This was, of course, a very touchy point, and one where the unions protested. But Aicha Bah recalled that:

as always, anytime there was a problem or I felt there might be a problem, I asked them to come in. The unions are not easy. You have to speak in concrete terms. On the reallocation of personnel, I told them there were more than a thousand teachers who were getting paid and not working. This they knew, and they couldn't really countenance it, so they agreed.

In terms of improvements within the sector, the program covered four components. To accommodate more students at the primary level, multigrade classes and double shifts were introduced in urban schools. More schools were built in rural areas, and communities were asked to help finance the construction. The new classrooms were equipped and supplied with instructional materials. Ministry personnel were trained in administration and financial management.

K a m a n o wrote that each of these components was covered by an action plan de-



scribed in documents attached to the policy statement, defining how it would be implemented. These plans presented a list of activities, projects, deadlines, and objectives for the completion of each unit's program. They were prepared by each division and discussed to bring them into line with each other and promote an exchange of information. They strengthened the relevance of initiatives proposed by the various departments, prevented conflicts and duplication of efforts, and ensured that the proposed budget could cover the proposed expenditures. These action plans helped with the process of decentralized planning. Alpha Ibrahima Bah, a Guinean education officer at the USAID Mission in Conakry, sees both sides of the equation. He too feels that the adoption of the action plans to program and implement activities every year is an important step in education sector progress.

Specific role of USAID in the development of the PASE

USAID did not play a large role in the preparatory stage of PASE. However, in May 1990 a team was sent to design a specific USAID project. USAID decided to use the same conditions as the World Bank, and on this basis engaged in discussions with the other partners—the World Bank and the FAC—on the subject of national capacity building and other possible areas of intervention. It also decided that its financing would be disbursed over a five-year period. In September 1990 an agreement was signed between the government and USAID. USAID decided to provide assistance within the institutional framework, particularly to the administration and finance services; support girls' education; and support quality education, helping the government to choose its own approach.

USAID's interest in equity for girls was particularly important because in the resolutions of the national conferences, attention was drawn to disparities but not explicitly to the very low rate of girls' attendance in rural areas. In response to USAID's conditions, an equity committee was created in November 1991 with a specific mandate to study statistics in order to eliminate disparities between genders and zones.

Under the auspices of this committee, two important studies were undertaken with World Bank help.



The first focused on the obstacles in rural areas that prevent girls from going to school, and the second on the conditions for girls in the classroom in 1994. In 1992 a law was passed to abrogate the expulsion of pregnant girls. These studies and evaluations facilitated the drafting of a national action plan and the launching, with the help of USAID, of a sensitization campaign in favor of girls' schooling and of schools in rural areas.

The significance of this centered on its ability to draw on previous experiences to attain the goals of the national action plan. A pilot zone, where girls' school enrollment was the lowest, was designated to serve as a testing ground for new policies. The IEC method (information, education, communication) used by the Ministry of Health to fight against sexually transmitted diseases, with brochures printed and distributed throughout the region, proved to be particularly effective. It served as the model for the sensitization campaign initiated by the equity committee for girls' schooling. Local agents, living in the communities were recruited and trained to serve as local correspondents. The participation of the media, rural radio, and acting troupes helped spread the message. Constructive and interpersonal dialogue was started with village chiefs and other notables on the subject of girls' schooling. Prizes were distributed to girls and teaching personnel as incentives to excellence.

USAID's project

The purpose of USAID's assistance is to support the government's effort to restructure the education system, so as to improve the quality of education for an increasing number of school age children with special emphasis on girls' schooling and schooling for rural children. In financial terms, USAID's help was in the form of a grant to accompany the implementation of the sector adjustment program in education. The sum of \$22.3 million, representing 80 percent of the financing, serves to reimburse part of the external debt, which allows the government to redistribute certain national resources in favor of education. Twenty percent of this sum is assigned to the investment budget. The conditions attached to this contribution serve as a measure of the results of the program, and give the government access to additional means of financing for development. Directly managed assistance, representing a sum of \$5.7 million spread over three years, helps finance technical assistance, scholarships, and some equipment.

USAID especially contributed to bring about an improvement in working conditions by buying furniture, materials, and equipment necessary for the functioning of departmental services. A computer center was created to train personnel and actively help them meet their work obligations. Aicha Bah recalled:

USAID gave us seventy-five computers and I offered my own office to be transformed into a training center, and I moved into a small office—not too tiny, I was comfortable! But the minister's office, why should I occupy that when we need space for computer training, and all of my staff have been trained.

One of the distinctive characteristics of USAID's help in the execution of the PASE is the participation of beneficiaries in the management of the assistance, and the training given within the departments or abroad to the employees of the ministries. "I must stress one thing," noted Aicha Bah:

I had a team of young professionals who were fully committed. It was a very tight-knit group that thought only about work. Without that

group, it would not have been possible. They were highly motivated and trained by USAID to occupy such positions. They've had training to improve their job performance.

They have a training file. So, committed and well trained, we've done good work together.



USAID Technical Assistance

Financial and administrative management improved as a result of the USAID-financed assistance. Two long-term technical advisors attached to the Ministry of Education assisted with administrative and financial matters. Short-term technical assistance was provided as needs were identified, such as training in financial administration, monitoring, and advising on teacher training programs. This technical assistance included the installation, equipment and material for the functioning of budget management in the capital through the *Direction des Affaires Administratives et Financières* (DAAF or the English term Directorate for Financial and Administrative Affairs) as well as in the provinces, through the *Services des Affaires Administratives et Financières* (SAAF or the English term Administrative and Financial Affairs Offices); and the training of personnel in computer sciences, both in the capital and in the provinces.

At the central level, a detailed budget based on the evaluation of needs was made possible because of USAID's help, and the monitoring of expenses, expenditure authorizations, and disbursements were computerized. At the regional, prefectural, and community levels, of the forty-six units of SAAF, forty-three now have a system for tracking local primary education

expenses. All units mentioned that almost 100 percent of the financial allocations already spent had been appropriately documented, even though a recent evaluation shows that improvements are needed in the reports produced by SAAF.

Managing and monitoring the PASE

Recalling how he and his staff instituted the various PASE components, Doukouré explained:

It was not enough to formulate objectives, it was also necessary to create a structure for the coordination of activities in all parts and at all stages of the program intended to restructure the educational system. This was also necessary in order to prevent conflicts, and to identify problems before they became major.

During the course of the PASE, several structures were put in place to ensure its success.

When the preparatory phase ended in August 1989 and the COPASE disbanded, an interministerial monitoring committee was created to replace it during the implementation phase. This committee prepared joint reviews and presented them at quarterly meetings with the resident missions of the donors and helped sensitize the ministries responsible for the management of funds and human resources destined for the program.

A steering committee comprising the national directors and heads of central services in the Ministry of Education, the national coordinator of the PASE, and the technical advisors of USAID and the FAC was charged with coordinating activities of the PASE with other ministry activities, and evaluating and supporting the coordination activities of the action plans.

A three-person secretariat composed of ministry staff and foreign technical assistants was created to replace the COPASE in preparing dossiers to be negotiated with the donors, and to coordinate the launching of the PASE. It was responsible for providing logistical support to the monitoring and steering committees.

The steering committee's working sessions were opportunities for the exchange of information, monitoring the coherence of initiatives (both horizontally and vertically), and coordinating different initiatives in the execution of the program. Its meetings provided

a common ground for focusing on a global view of the PASE, and made it possible to integrate within the department projects that were conceived during the evolution of the PASE, such as the restructuring of technical and professional training and the national campaign for equity in favor of girls' schooling.

In addition, technical groups were constituted as needed. These included, among others, an interministerial committee for equity, a national commission for education for all, and a program of scholarships for women in science. These technical groups played an important part in drafting the component action plans. Finally, to bring in ministry officials at the regional and prefecture levels, back-to-school workshops were held to exchange information and define objectives and action plans at those levels.

Issues, problems, and their resolution

Within the context of these policies, plans, and structures, a number of critical issues gave the reform its unique shape and substance. From Doukouré's perspective as secretary general, the most important issue was financing the reform measures on a timely basis. Aicha Bah was concerned primarily with ensuring that all stakeholders were kept informed of decisions and progress and had their say in what happened. Other issues included improving the equitable access to school of girls and children in rural areas, protecting schools from the intrusion of politics during elections, and deciding what to look at in evaluating the reform's progress. Most of these issues were managed successfully so that they did not stall implementation, but not without effort.

Financing the reform: linking macroeconomic adjustments to sectoral adjustment

In their education sector adjustment agreements, the World Bank was to give a credit of \$20 million to the government, and USAID was to give a grant of \$28 million. Of USAID's grant, \$22.3 million was for use in balance of payments support. The World Bank's entire credit was for balance of payments support. This sum was disbursed in three tranches, certain condi-

tions having to be met before each disbursement. This was the donors' principal justification for participating in the government's policy decision-making dialogue, and their means of exerting pressure on the Ministry of Economy and Finance to increase the budgetary resources for education.

In addition to these contributions of money, the Ministry of Education received directly-managed assistance from USAID and the FAC in the form of technical assistants, scholarships, and some equipment. USAID's contribution equaled \$5.7 million, spent over three years, and the FAC's was about \$10 million.

For its part, Guinea was to increase its contribution to the budget of the education sector by just under \$29 million, in addition to salaries. With donors helping to pay its foreign debt, the government should be able to redistribute more of its own financial resources to education. Furthermore, Guinea expected to have additional revenues to spend on education as a result of its macroeconomic adjustments and consequent additional revenues and savings from more efficient management of finances. Thus, all parties expected from the government a sustainable and effective control of expenditures for education. These included an increase in the budgetary allocation for education; a normalization of budgetary procedures; and a reinforcing of educational, financial, and administrative services.

In fact a deficit in the treasury, brought about by the lack of internal resources of the national budget made the government unable to contribute its share of financing on schedule. This, in turn, resulted in a considerable delay in the disbursement of the third tranche of World Bank funds. The government's difficulty in financing its plans, noted Doukouré, was also complicated by the intricacies of its budgeting process and the strain between the Ministries of Finance and Education in coordinating the flow of funds.

Doukouré described the process involved. Because the Ministry of Education had adopted decentralized planning, it intended to come up with a set of action plans each year at the prefecture and regional levels, each of which had budget implications. Yet the process for allocating funds from the national budget to the ministry and its plans was far from straightforward. A circular letter from the minister of economy and finance to all departments indicated the general orientation that defines the sector budgetary objectives

of the department. Next, the DAAF drafted the central, regional, and prefectural budget. It was then presented by the DAAF to the national trade-off commission, which proceeded to integrate it into the draft budget law. This law was then submitted to the transitory committee for national recovery (CTRN or the French term *Comité Transitoire de Redressement National*) for approval. Thus, concluded Doukouré, it could happen that the action plans and the budget were not in accord, and that the actions planned did not have the budgetary resources necessary for their execution.

In addition, the personnel was mostly unqualified, and had only a limited knowledge of the new procedures, which made it harder to deal with the increased volume of financial activity during the PASE. Furthermore, the agents of the Ministry of Economy and Finance were unable to assimilate the nature of sector adjustment. Thus, the Ministry of Education was obliged to spend an inordinate amount of time explaining the priorities of the PASE and the difficulties the education department would have to face if it did not receive its budgetary allocation at the times fixed by the school calendar.

Budgetary problems in 1991 and 1992

The first joint review with the donors in 1992 ended satisfactorily. These positive results were due in part to the conditions imposed by the nature of the program's financing. The donors insisted on the disbursement of the credit by tranches to convince the Ministry of Education of the need for planning, budgeting, and monitoring the use of resources within the department. The donors also insisted that the Ministry of Economy and Finance should respect the conditions.

At a time when the application of the principle that links sector adjustment to the macroeconomic situation was remarkably successful, the education sector was blocked by the Ministry of Economy and Finance's slowness of disbursements of the resources needed for the execution of the PASE. The department had to wait five months in the beginning of 1991 for the treasury to release resources under the form of allocation of funds for the interior of the country.

French technical assistance funds, and the remainder of the funds under IDA's second project, helped avoid delays for certain critical elements of the educa-

tion program. However, school construction was adversely affected, as was the buying of textbooks. In 1992 the department had to wait eight months. One of the few programs unaffected was the FAC's teacher training. With the few remaining resources available, the minister of education proceeded with the redeployment of teachers from the secondary to the primary and with seminars for the training of administrative and pedagogical supervisors, and purchased some didactic material as well as some construction material for the provinces.

USAID assistance through PL480

Utilization of the budgetary aid of PL480 (Food for Peace) of USAID and the counterpart funds of other donors such as the FAC and the European Union, helped resolve the bottleneck in the execution of the BND (*Budget National de Développement* or National Development Budget) and the PIP (*Programme d'Investissements Publics* or Public Investment Program). This intervention was an emergency measure, limited in time, and for a specific objective, namely to reduce the difficulties for the sector adjustment program in education that had shown tangible results in the field.

During a meeting with the donors in December 1992 the malfunction in the distribution of financial resources was analyzed and solutions proposed. PL480 and other sources of funds were tapped to provide for textbooks and other urgent projects of the PIP. These measures made it possible to stay in line with the activities of the action plans of the PASE without impairing the government's capacity to manage its own investment budget.

The malfunctions noted in 1991 and 1992 also have an internal origin that touches on the centralized nature of expenditure within the Ministry of Education. As mentioned earlier, these problems have to do with administrative inefficiencies in directing available resources to the priority areas established by the PASE. Also the decentralized planning process, because of the exigencies of the school calendar, does not coincide with the imperatives of the submission of the budget proposal to the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The creation of a budget cell within the DAAF and the hiring of qualified personnel helped solve this kind of problem.

However, the solution for the lack of national resources brought about by macroeconomic problems cannot be found merely by addressing the administrative problems of the education sector program. Those solutions can only be found in improved macroeconomic management by the government and in a resolution of the current fiscal crises.

Because of the mobilization of counterpart funds, the objectives agreed upon in the action plans were met, including school construction with the help of donor assistance; the net rate of school attendance increased from 31 percent in 1990-1991 to 37 percent in 1992-1993. This corresponds to an increase in the enrollment rate in the first year for the same period, which went from 39 to 47 percent.

The positive side of financial processes

While Doukouré was deeply immersed in budget negotiations, he was still able to see some positive developments in the process. These were due in a large part to the technical assistance and training supplied by USAID. The agency trained a number of the ministry's staff members in administrative and financial management. The minister herself commented, "I had a team of young professionals who were fully committed and highly motivated. USAID supported the training of the entire financial management unit of the ministry. Without that group the reform would not have been possible."

Another positive development during the PASE was the increase in private financing of schools, which makes it possible for more public funds to go to rural areas. "This was something new for Guinea," remarked Doukouré. "How will the private sector be involved in education? First, in those areas of the country where people can pay for their children's education, mainly urban areas. The PASE is designed so that, as these private programs develop in urban areas, other programs are developed in rural areas." Aicha Bah also related that tradesmen are already building schools in their original villages:

People don't realize it, but it is so. They have built many schools. Private industry is interested only in the cities, but tradesmen build schools in rural zones and donate them to the villages. With us, it has always been a matter

of pride to be able to say 'I've done thus and so for my village.' Those who have more than a minimum of money, they have to share.

Support from all corners: getting the participation of stakeholders

In hindsight, some potential problems were diffused by the minister's determined efforts to involve all groups of stakeholders in the reform. These included the teachers, and particularly their union leaders, parents, village chiefs, donors, and also tradespeople.

The teachers' unions are stronger in Francophone than in Anglophone countries, said Aicha Bah, and she took pains to keep them from upsetting reform measures. "I was scared when I heard the four unions were planning to paralyze the country to obtain salary increases. I went to them and explained the situation, or I invited them in and we sat around the table. I did this each time we made a decision." Unions must be involved in a reform from the start, Aicha Bah said, and added:

They must understand that they should not always be fighting for salary increases. The proper concern of the unions must be the training of students and the training of teachers. They must make sacrifices for the children. If they get into confrontations with the government, it's not the government that would lose but the children. It hurts me to see these children taken hostage by the unions.

The minister also traveled frequently around the country to talk with parents and village leaders. "I went to visit the schools, the parents, and the village leaders. I never spent an entire week in Conakry. I was not a minister sitting behind a desk. I also used the media to reach them." Guinea has a network of rural radio stations that reaches throughout the hilly country where roads are few and travel time between towns can be days. Aicha Bah was well-known and respected. Her husband, who had been a minister at one time, spent ten years in jail as a political prisoner. "For ten years I worked hard to maintain my dignity. I sewed, I made candy, I baked, all while I was teaching. The people

know this, and I have their backing. People will accept what I say."

Aicha Bah also gained respect from the donors. In contrast to her predecessors, she allowed them to travel around the country and make their own judgments about what was needed. "At first, USAID did not want to get involved in school construction. But when they went around the country and saw the conditions of schools they eventually helped us equip schools and urge communities to build their own schools."

Getting more girls into school

With support from USAID, the ministry established an equity committee that reported to Doukouré. The committee conducted a national publicity campaign urging girls to attend school. "It took place in a pilot zone where girls' attendance was very low. We used rural radio to reach communities, and the minister herself visited many of them."

The minister was particularly interested in persuading more girls to enter school, especially in the rural areas. To meet this challenge, she received support from USAID. She also did much work herself, and Aicha Bah recalled:

In the area where I come from the Foulas are reluctant to send a little girl to school. School will change them, and the parents are afraid they will lose control. I went myself to the villages and I would speak to the sheikhs' wives. One day, with a delegation, I visited a sheikh in a village where there was no school. I sent the delegation in to the sheikh and myself waited outside in the courtyard, because I know that the sheikh should not see someone else's wife. I know the traditional values and I respect them. Seeing this, the sheikh said 'if all the women who go to school are like Aicha, I am ready to have a school here. I'll send my own daughters and my grandchildren.' Three months later, the school was built. I went twice to visit the construction site. And when the school was opened, everyone was there, girls as well as boys.

Many communities, inspired by the minister's personal attention, built their own schools, and at least six schools were named after her.

This story is the stuff that legends are made of: as Doukouré relates it he adds other insights. This happened in the village of Baléya, perched on the high central plateau, in the heart of Fouta Djallon, he tells us, a center of Koranic instruction for generations, and a bastion of traditional concepts on the role and place of women in society. He explains that the minister even took the trouble to come in the very early morning hours so as to disturb as little as possible the normal routine of the villagers, including the teachers and students of the Koranic school. The sheikh, adds Doukouré, was so disarmed by the minister's actions and attitude that he took the unheard of step of visiting her himself, and a meeting that might have been a confrontation was instead a direct and courteous dialogue.

Political activity in schools

Although the elections were welcomed in 1993 and 1994, the minister had to anticipate and prevent disruptions in the schools. At least forty-five parties supported candidates. Said Aicha Bah, "We had to prevent teachers from using their students to campaign and political parties from using the teachers. Some in the government party wanted teachers who were not of their party to be moved, but I told them 'No, education is a national asset. We must not inject politics into the schools.' I went around the country and forbade political meetings in school buildings, and the wearing of T-shirts with political logos. Someone asked me if the students would be given two weeks vacation before the election. I asked, Are they candidates? No. Are they voters? No. Then why do you want to close the schools?' So, schools were closed for only one day, and that was because the voting often took place in school buildings."

Aicha Bah herself was not unaffected by political activity:

In 1993 I almost left my job because my husband was active in the opposition party, and I was under much pressure. But I stayed

on because so many people asked me to. The FAC representative said 'Don't go! We have a partnership. You don't want to compromise the sectoral adjustment program, you must see it to the end.'

Teaching in national languages

The language of instruction was an issue on which people were divided. Some, especially educators, recognized that children would learn to read and write much faster if they did so in their local language. French is not used much in rural areas, and even people in urban areas often spoke in one or another local language. But parents considered French to be the language of schooling and felt that if French was not used, the school must be second rate. This issue was debated in the conferences on education immediately after independence, when those present opted for instruction in national languages, and again after 1984, when they reverted to a choice for French. In the PASE, national languages were introduced again, this time supported by instructional materials in those languages, thanks to support from USAID. Doukouré pointed out that this time they made an effort to explain to parents the value of teaching in the children's own language.

Criteria for evaluating progress

In 1993 the donors met, as they had done each year, to evaluate the progress of the reform. Whereas in 1992 the evaluation had gone smoothly, the following year the donors disagreed among themselves on what measures to use to make judgments. "USAID" said Doukouré, "was most interested in what changes had taken place in the schools and classrooms. The FAC, in contrast, looked for changes at the levels of the central ministry and the regional offices." The government played the role of mediator and prevented these disagreements from turning into confrontations by either giving the donors the opportunity to negotiate, or inviting them to a round-table discussion.

Assessing the PASE

Aicha Bah and Doukouré agree that the PASE succeeded in improving the education system during the 1990-1993 period. "PASE was a success to such an extent that the whole world is talking about it," said Aicha Bah. "Everywhere I go people say, 'Are you the same Aicha Bah from Guinea?'" Doukouré agreed that PASE had accomplished much.

The second joint review in May 1993 and the donors' coordination meeting in June 1994 proceeded to an evaluation of the implementation of the PASE, and a definition of the framework and broad objectives of PASE II. Agreement was reached on the necessity of preserving the gains attained under PASE I, and of updating the sector development policy. The discussions in large part concerned whether assistance should be in the form of balance of payments support or of direct support to education through the budget, or to specific projects. The crucial nature of the school construction program was a separate issue. The program required a reliable and timely availability of funds that should not be subject to budget trade-offs, and this is why the donors stressed the importance of the involvement of small and medium enterprises and of the strengthening of regional school construction supervision, and also recommended integrating the PASE monitoring mechanisms into the ministry's hierarchy.

The problem of girls' access had not yet been completely resolved, since the objective is 53 percent of girls enrolled by 2000. The statistical results available in 1995 showed that girls' overall school attendance rate was then 33 percent; in 1996, the rate was 47 percent. Girls represented 38 percent of first year students in 1995, an increase of 35 percent since 1991-1992 (the first year for which these statistics are available). This represents an annual growth rate of 7 percent.

In rural areas, where it is particularly difficult to convince parents to send their girls to school, they represented 34 percent of first year enrollments in 1995, as compared to 24 percent in 1991-1992. This represents an annual growth rate of 3.4 percent. This increase can in part be attributed to the national sensitization campaign launched with the help of USAID. School construction and the redeployment of teachers also contributed significantly to the increase in girls' school attendance rate and increased children's atten-

dance in rural areas. Girls' attendance rates in these areas rose from 19 percent in 1991 to 28 percent in 1995. Over the same period, children's attendance in rural areas increased from 21 percent to 34 percent.

But Doukouré also recognized that setbacks in macroeconomic reform had affected the education sector adjustments:

At the time of the appraisals, the questions were, has everything worked well? Did the sector get the allocation expected? Was the budgetary system able to allocate all the resources as foreseen? We realized that if the macroeconomic situation did not permit it, if the resources were not always sufficient, the budgetary allocation for education could be negatively affected. So then one asks, should the education sector be sacrificed if the macroeconomic situation is not evolving well?

The donors disagreed on the conditions of a further sector adjustment program, as well as on the evaluation system, the reformulation of curricula, the textbooks, and the real and tangible commitment of the government. Questions that were raised included whether to continue providing budgetary support or to limit support to technical assistance, the financing of which they managed directly. Saïdou Souaré, National Coordinator of the PASE, commented on the difficulties the ministry had had in getting funds from the ministry of finance in time to meet its costs. As a consequence, USAID decided to terminate its budgetary support.



Letter of development policy for PASE II (1995-2000)

The first part of the PASE II letter of policy identified the main achievements of PASE I noted earlier, as well as the new policies introduced with respect to education personnel, their deployment and training, the impact of PASE I on education at other levels than primary (particularly in the area of teacher training and the introduction of non-formal as well as technical education), and the emphasis on girls' schooling. As Doukouré summed up, "PASE II has to refine and improve on the foundations that were laid under PASE I." The second part of the letter of development policy defined the priorities of PASE II, dealing with three main issues: the efficiency of the education system, the quality of education, and access to education.

Increasing efficiency includes: improving the general structure of the department; building seven hundred eighty classrooms per year, and rehabilitating existing sites with local participation; the construction of secondary and technical training establishments; and computerizing educational personnel management, including streamlining job requirements. As much as possible, this should be achieved through decentralized mechanisms.

Quality improvement includes introducing personal hygiene and family planning, as well as cultural, environmental, and physical education activities in the curriculum, and setting up school pharmacies; improving laboratories and information and documentation centers in secondary schools; increasing the partnership with the private sector and encouraging private education; assuring that the share of primary education in the education budget would increase progressively from 35 percent in 1995 to 42 percent in the year 2000; and recruiting six hundred new teachers per year within the overall civil service limits agreed with the World Bank and the IMF. Improving access to education includes developing non-formal education, particularly to help adult literacy and school dropouts, and seeking diverse means of encouraging increased access for girls to education and professional training.

With the success of the PASE, between the completion of PASE I in June 1994 and the beginning of implementation of PASE II in the summer of 1996,



donor support for education not only continued, but increased as more donors entered the sector. New donors include Canada, Germany, Japan, the African Development Bank and Fund, the European Union, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Moreover, the role of NGOs increased substantially. At the same time, however, the macroeconomic adjustment slowed down. It is during this period that the actual definition and negotiation of PASE II took place in a climate of reduced coordination among donors. Disagreements arose on such matters as redefining curricula, school books, and the pace of sectoral adjustment, in particular with respect to levels of education other than primary.

FQEL project

USAID's contribution to PASE II is the Fundamental Quality and Equity Levels Schooling (FQEL) project, approved in September 1995. Alpha Ibrahima Bah explains that this project will help strengthen the planning system of the Ministry of Education as well as facilitate access to educational services for disadvantaged students (girls and rural children) and improve the quality of education. This project is a result of USAID's belief that in order to attain a base of sustainable development, the government must address simultaneously economic, sociopolitical, and institutional problems. Among these problems, the most crucial is the lack of human resource development. Special importance is given to girls' education. The central strategy of the project is to include in the policy dia-

logue all beneficiaries and partners: communities, parents, students, teachers, and NGOs, so as to evaluate, analyze, plan, and implement the interventions of the department and reach the objectives of the education policy. The partnership developed by the FQEL project includes the public and private sectors, and the participation of the beneficiaries and the communities, whose roles would be extended to support education.

The FQEL recognizes that there must be transparency in decision-making, and a reinforcement of the links between the schools, the decentralized school administrative services, the central administration, and the PTAs, and that stronger links between the schools and the communities must be developed. As Aicha Bah noted: "Transparency, total transparency, that is a characteristic that I learned from the Americans, and I very strongly believe in partnership and cooperation, based on openness."

In order to improve planning and management, the FQEL will encourage the decentralization of the system, with units to be established for planning, budgeting, and accounting at the regional level; procedures must be systematized and personnel trained, and links need to be established between DAAF and those responsible for decision-making, so that the availability of resources is assured on a regular basis.

Where access to schools is limited by the resources available for ensuring quality and equity, FQEL would help to arrive at realistic priorities and objectives. Minimum criteria must be established by national consensus, existing schools must be brought up to the level of these criteria, and new schools must conform to them. The project is directed by a team made up of representatives of the USAID mission, the Ministry of Education, other donors, and the private sector.

Projections for the future

The projected statistics available for 1997 and 1998 show that the budgetary allocation for education should remain stable, with the share of primary education, excluding salaries, increasing to 20 percent in 1998. The disparity between boys' and girls' enrollment should decrease further in 1998, with girls accounting for 41 percent of the enrollment, 35 percent more than in 1990. Children in rural areas should reach an en-

rollment of 44 percent, an increase of 23.5 percent as compared to 1992 when these figures first became available. The percentage of women teachers should reach 26 percent in 1998, an increase of 22 percent over 1990.

A larger number of women teachers will serve as a role model to help

girls stay in school. These projections show that the government and the donors give high priority to improving equity in access to education.

However, there is no sure indicator of profound change in the quality of education. This is why it is so important that USAID should continue its support of the government's policy to improve equity in education, as well as quality and training. Four objectives should be accorded priority in the future: increasing the expenditure per student (outside of teachers' salaries) to have an impact on school quality; ensuring the smooth functioning of planning and budgeting on the basis of reliable data so that good decisions can be made; pursuing girls' schooling by reviewing strategies and policies, e.g., curriculum changes, scheduling changes, and changes in the school calendar rather than a multiplication of projects; and creating conditions favorable to a partnership with the communities, who should be given the capacity to take charge of their schools as they are the most directly concerned. The NGOs should also be given a larger role in helping implement action plans.

Most recent studies on the specific role of the communities in girls' schooling have shown that many of the obstacles to access and to girls remaining in school have their roots in traditional practices and beliefs, and in cultural, religious, and social values. As shown by Aicha Bah, the elimination of these obstacles is only possible by persons or groups sharing these same values working together with the political authorities of the country. The lack of infrastructure



must be overcome with the help of communities, institutions, and agencies in a spirit of partnership.

Aicha Bah had this advice for the future:

The ministry must continue the partnerships that have already been established and involve the partners, involve them from the start, work with them, and understand the importance of training the teachers to enable them to better undertake the high responsibilities entrusted to them. Teachers and the unions must understand that children have to be taught, that the primary objective should be the education of the children, and not salary increases. We are all good citizens, we can

understand the economic problems of our country, and we know that we must make sacrifices for our children. Together, we can look back and say 'we have done good work.' It should be our ambition that in ten years, we can all look back and say the same words.

And to the donors, Aicha Bah would speak in these words:

You should be proud to have helped Guinea in education. A country can only develop if its human resources are trained. We have in Guinea a saying that those who have must help the others, and you have done that too.

3. Benin: Education in the Transition from Marxism to Democracy

No story of educational reform in Benin can be told without consideration of the dramatic backdrop to such reform—the nation’s startling shift to democracy. In February 1990, after seventeen years of a Marxist-Leninist regime, Benin made history by becoming one of the first African nations to make a peaceful transition to democracy. Neither planned nor foreseeable, Benin’s dramatic shift to democracy amazed foreign onlookers. The sentiment was equally shared by the Beninese. Monseigneur Da Souza, the Roman Catholic bishop of Benin and principal mediator during the transition, spoke for many when he exclaimed, “we surprised ourselves.” In the ensuing six years, political developments have continued to surprise both the Beninese and the world. But despite numerous fits and starts, democracy has become firmly entrenched in Benin.

By the late 1980s after almost two decades of economic mismanagement, the nation was bankrupt. Between 1985 and 1990 economic growth was negative. Both national banks were forced to close, leaving the government with substantial internal and external debt. By the end of 1989 government coffers were empty and salaries had gone unpaid for several months. Corruption was rampant.



The social impact of these circumstances in one of the poorest countries in the world was devastating. Already sparse and poorly-managed at the time of the economic downturn, social services came to a veritable standstill with the “res-

ignation of the state.” The quality of life for most Beninese became harsh and desperate.

The story of democratic Benin can be characterized as one of successive hand-wringing dramas. The social and economic upheavals understandably strained the political hold of the Marxist regime. And yet, Benin’s move to a democratic form of government was unexpected. Such a poor and illiterate country seemed an unlikely candidate for the establishment of democratic institutions. Also, with a great number of Beninese intellectuals residing abroad, the leadership needed to bring a positive regime change was virtually absent. The authoritarian government, however, had effectively rung its own death knell when it quashed any semblance of civil society in Benin; there was no organized opposition to the move to democracy.

Notwithstanding its initial obstacles, Benin has become one of the most stable democracies in West Africa. In 1996 for the second time in six years, Benin held presidential elections. The novice democratic and civil institutions were both challenged and strengthened. Moreover, while economic growth has tended to be strong, the new democracy has faced challenges. For example, a 50 percent devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 caused a tremendous jolt.

Soon after it began to democratize, Benin embarked upon an ambitious reform of its education system. The reform, deemed an intrinsic part of the democratization process, was conditioned by the same obstacles that faced democratic Benin. Interestingly, the process of democratization itself created additional challenges and opportunities for the education reform program, as well.

A new beginning: The National Conference and the General Commission on Education

The economic and social crisis of the Marxist regime stirred political leaders to bring together at *La Con-*

ference Nationale des Forces Vives (National Conference of Stakeholders) representatives from all calls of Beninese life to end Benin's free fall. Citizens from all over the country were joined by exiled Beninese to discuss the social and economic issues that confronted the nation. Several hundred participants arrived in Cotonou, the capitol city and large port on the coast of West Africa. Although the event was orchestrated by the regime, an atmosphere of open discussion and frank criticism was encouraged and tolerated.

Though it was certainly not the regime's intention, the National Conference declared itself sovereign and established a liberal democracy. This *renouveau*, or renewal, took the political leadership by surprise. Few who arrived at the National Conference thought such a transformation was going to be possible, or even desirable. Legend has it that President Kérékou arrived at the last meeting with two speeches in his pocket: one accepting the results of the conference and the other ordering the arrest of all the participants. To his credit, Lieutenant-Colonel Mathieu Kérékou acquiesced to the decisions of the Conference. Eventually, he stood in open presidential elections, lost, and then stepped down from office.

Introducing education reform

The new president of Benin, Nicéphore Soglo, had been an executive director for the World Bank. During the National Conference, Soglo played a key role and was the rallying point for calls for political liberation. Conference participants cited the disastrous state of the education system as an indicator of the failure of the former regime to honor even its social commitments. As such, the participants resolved that education would become a principal social goal of the new regime and requested the minister of education to organize an *Etats Généraux de l'Education* (EGE) or General Assembly on Education. The EGE aimed to convene principal stakeholders in the education sector to explore strategies for reversing the deterioration of Beninese schools.

Held in October 1990, the commission's more than four hundred participants included officials from the Ministry of Education, the University of Benin, other ministries, student organizations, teachers'

unions, parents' associations, and other prominent personalities. The participants diagnosed the ills of the education system and made recommendations on priorities and actions.

Though an encouraging first step, several aspects of the EGE have been criticized. First, stakeholders may not have been fairly-represented (government officials were both overrepresented and better-informed). Second, it is uncertain whether the participants were true representatives of their purported constituencies. There was, moreover, some disagreement regarding the actual mandate of the EGE. Some argued that its results were recommendations, while others held them to be directives. Despite these uncertainties, the EGE represented an unusual attempt to establish and maintain a policy dialogue in the education sector that included a broad range of stakeholders. The EGE's deliberations, based on extensive analysis of the education system supported by UNESCO, represented an attempt to carry out policy dialogue utilizing a common information base.

For its part, the Ministry of Education treated many of the EGE's recommendations as government policy, and promptly drafted a policy statement inspired by its recommendations. The resulting education reform program endeavored to place primary education as the highest priority in the sector, to assist more children to enter school, and to improve both the cost-effectiveness of the system and the capacity of its institutions to carry out their work.

Challenges to implementation

Meeting the objectives set out by the ministry was an extremely ambitious endeavor. Beninese schools were in a devastated condition; the buildings scattered throughout the nation could barely be characterized as schools. Many were dilapidated to the point of being dangerous. In one instance in Parakou, a wall had crumbled during class, killing one child and crippling another. Schools in rural areas often lacked latrines, safe sources of water, and safe terrains. Officials at one school near the southern town of Ouidah complained that snakes were a common problem in the play area. Virtually every school in the country had at least one classroom with a leaky roof, and the annual rainy season wreaked further havoc by damaging the tops of a good number of buildings.

Within the crumbling walls of the Beninese schools every imaginable necessity, from blackboards to chalk to desks to books, was lacking. To make matters worse, teachers were poorly-trained and unmotivated to take on the task of instructing children under the dismal conditions. Proper curricula were lacking; teachers were provided only with a list of subjects to cover over the year. After visiting a decrepit school with unhappy teachers, the regional director of the extremely poor northern Atacora province exclaimed: “What we see here are theater and farce; here is a room pretending to be a school, a man pretending to be a teacher, and children pretending to be pupils.”

Management of the education system added to the many challenges facing the ministry. A highly-centralized system with poorly-distributed responsibilities to equally poorly-trained and unmotivated administrators made even the most insignificant managerial decision a lengthy and painful undertaking. A teacher’s request for a leave of absence, for example, could take months, making the initial request obsolete. Even the physical location of the ministry was a daunting transportation nightmare. Spread over fifteen or so buildings across two cities, the various ministry offices were one hour apart on that rare day when traffic flowed. Making matters worse, the government reduced non-salary expenditures to minimal levels as a result of the ongoing budgetary crisis. Most ministry vehicles were inoperable, even if there was money to fuel them. Ministry telephones were either out of order or disconnected due to unpaid bills. Even office supplies were not available.

Reporting to work on his first day of service in 1992, the newly-appointed director of primary education found his staff seated at tables arranged in rows, as in a primary school classroom. All sat with hands folded on empty tables, waiting for something to happen. They had no supplies, no routines, no vehicles, and little motivation. This was supposed to be the nerve center of an ambitious program to improve primary education in the nation.

To overcome these formidable constraints, the Ministry of Education adopted two strategies. The first was to develop fifteen action plans. Each plan described activities and decisions, calculated what resources were needed, and identified who was responsible for implementing them. Each plan supported one of three goals:



- improving the quality of instruction (developing a new curriculum, training teachers, developing and distributing textbooks and other pedagogical materials, and creating a student assessment system);
- ensuring greater equity (promoting access of girls to schooling and regional equity in access to quality schooling); and
- improving managerial support (reorganizing and decentralizing ministry functions, reinforcing budget preparation and execution procedures, upgrading skills of administration, establishing school canteens, reorganizing and decentralizing personnel management, modernizing administrative units, developing a modern management information system, and promoting greater participation).

The second strategy was the Fundamental Quality Level (FQL) schools strategy. The FQL strategy is essentially an attempt to define school quality and to establish mechanisms to assure that primary education inputs and services are equitably provided to schools in discreet and complementary sets. Under FQL, rather than examining the ministry as a system that requires improvement (teacher training, textbook delivery), the analysis begins by looking at schools and asking what is needed to achieve a fundamental standard of school quality. This question is answered by the education sector stakeholders, such as the parents and the ministry. By engaging in this type of dialogue, the stakeholders arrive at standards for a “passing school” (not an “ideal school”). Once defined, the standards be-



come the basis for budgeting and planning as well as the basis for comparing schools with one another. In doing such a comparison, the inequities between schools can be pointed out and remedied.

It is indisputable that in order to function well and provide good education schools have to be well-managed as organizations. The FQL concept supports this notion and demands that schools function well as a whole. Implementation of FQL in Benin has been somewhat difficult, as it has been virtually impossible to escape the decentralization of responsibility. Under the FQL concept, the school defines its own strategies and priorities and the ministry must provide the school with the resources to meet such priorities. In doing so, budgets must be decentralized and authority must be delegated, at the very least, to the district level. In practice, the Ministry of Education flatly refused to decentralize, as it would have had to relinquish its control over the resources. As such, the FQL concept was on hold for a long time. Recent political changes in Benin have led to greater acceptance of decentralization on the part of ministry officials. However, as a strategy FQL is still pending.

Donor support

International donors played a pivotal role in the implementation of education reform in Benin. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which funded the UNESCO sector study used by the EGE, was particularly keen for the results of the EGE to be translated into government policy. Both the World Bank and USAID, eager to base their interventions on evi-

dent national consensus, also seized upon the results of the EGE. The design of both programs were inspired by the EGE recommendations.

USAID came to Benin with an ambitious program of support for education reform. A \$50 million grant was put in place to be disbursed as budgetary support. Conditionality was linked to progress of the reform effort. A support project (Children's Learning and Equity Foundations, or CLEF) was put in place to monitor progress and provide technical assistance to education.

Thus, by the end of 1991, Benin had established the framework for an ambitious reform program. Based upon recommendations from a wide range of stakeholders, the program was launched in the wake of a triumphant political transition in a context where anything was possible. Consequently, observers, donors, and educators alike agreed that nothing could stop the reform of the Beninese education system.

Benin's political evolution and its impact on the education reform

Unfortunately, national and international champions of Beninese democracy underestimated the imprint of the long tenure of an authoritarian government. Beninese people were simply unaccustomed to playing an active political role in ways that are taken for granted by those who live under a long tradition of pluralism. Democratic institutions, routines, and norms had to be built from scratch. Neither post-colonial regimes, the colonial administration, nor traditional authority structures of Benin had ever promoted a vocal role in the political arena for the Beninese people. The authoritarian regime of the 1970s and 1980s only further extinguished what little democratic practice had existed in Benin.

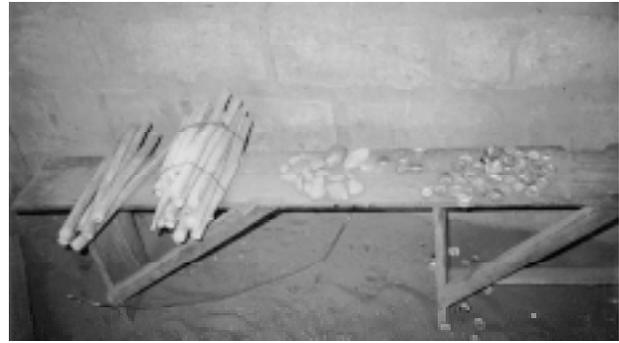
In spite of these considerable constraints, Beninese are successfully building a solid democracy. Democratizing, however, does not ensure democracy. In hindsight, the initial enthusiasm triggered by political change may have been naive. The premise that democratizing Benin would facilitate any and all reform

efforts was false. In practice, even democratization itself has entailed struggles and challenges that have constituted constraints to educational reform. On the other hand, the Beninese experience also indicates that democracy indeed has the potential of making reform more sustainable, more meaningful, and infinitely more effective.

Since 1991 the Ministry of Education has made substantial progress toward reform objectives. Economic stability has resulted in timely payment of teachers' salaries and allocation of additional government resources to the education non-salary budget. The ministry has outfitted its administrative structure with vehicles, office equipment, and supplies. It has also purchased school supplies and pedagogical materials to be distributed to classrooms throughout the country. It has begun developing a new curriculum and established a definition of the criteria for FQL schools. The functions of its administrative units have been reorganized, streamlined, and redefined.

At the same time, there has been an unprecedented and unexpected explosion in demand for primary education. Not only has the decline in enrollment been reversed, gross enrollment ratios (the portion of all children in school, no matter what age) have now reached a historic 68 percent. In addition, and particularly heartening, there has been an increase in the number of girls in school—reaching 36 percent of overall enrollment (up from less than 30 percent during the 1980s).

The progress, while encouraging, is only a start. There remains a great deal more to be done. For example, the execution of the fifteen action plans has proceeded in fits and starts. All are well behind schedule and some have ground to a halt. Almost all actions that would lead a *sustained* improvement of the primary education sector have yet to be implemented. Moreover, the decentralization of many Ministry of Education functions has been cosmetic; the lucrative and powerful personnel and financial management positions are still jealously hoarded at the top of the administrative structure. Some of the most important aspects of the reform, such as the upgrading of teacher skills and the continued provision of inputs to the schools on the basis of FQL criteria, have barely begun. At the school level, there has been little sustained



impact felt from the reform effort. The distribution of equipment and supplies is not yet institutionalized. In all, the larger objective of improving the quality of education is still to be met.

Where did everyone go?

Conversations with Beninese within and outside of the education system produce surprising results; many claim to know little or nothing about education reform. The comment of a member of the parents' association in the Cotonou area typified responses: "You mean those books we received in the middle of the school year? Was that the reform?" Teachers, community notables, and parents alike express surprise that a reform program even exists. Fewer still are aware of the action plans or specific strategies. Many confused the development of the new curriculum with the FQL strategy.

The principal pressure to develop and implement the action plans has come from the international donors. The World Bank leaned on the government to adopt official policy statements as preconditions for



the Bank's sector support project. USAID has made much of its financial support conditional on the implementation of the action plans and achievement of key goals of the reform effort. For example, budget targets for primary education and the development of FQL norms are both conditions for disbursement of USAID budgetary support.

Surprisingly, outside of the Ministry of Education, few of the Beninese themselves have actively monitored the reform. A monitoring committee, which was to be formed after the EGE, has never been convened. An education commission, established within the National Assembly, has rarely asked the ministry to account for its reform progress. The Soglo presidency asked only for cursory updates from the ministry. (There are indications, however, that the new presidency has requested more of an accounting of the reform program.) Most other ministries were neither involved in the action, nor expressed much interest in playing a greater part. Only the Ministry of Finance has been obliged to follow the reform efforts, and it has done so in a lackluster manner.

Other important stakeholders have also been noticeably absent from the reform process. Parents, the private sector, private schools, church leaders and groups, national NGOs, regional and local associations, and journalists—so enthusiastic at the outset—have done little to follow the reform. None has asked the ministry to report on progress in the action plans.

This indifference even pervades the Ministry of Education. Although teachers tend to be vaguely aware of the action plans, they are rarely informed of expected activities or calendars. Even mid-level administrators are often in the dark about the reform program. Outside of a small circle of technocrats, few within the ministry are aware of progress.

Political vs. technical agendas: a challenge for all democracies

What happened to the ambitious and enthusiastically-supported agenda for education? Why did the education reform not take off? A closer look at the evolution of the education reform as it interacted with the process of democratization reveals two unexpected challenges.

First, democratization introduced electoral politics, changing the rules for accessing power and influ-

ence. The scramble for position and leverage either "deprioritized" other, more technical agendas, or rendered them hostage to political maneuvers. The education reform was essentially eclipsed as different political actors based education policy decisions on electoral calculations.

Second, elections are but the punctuation point of democracies. Democratic regimes are also characterized by greater public participation in policy debates and in the setting of issue agendas. As Benin's experience demonstrates, this type of participation does not suddenly come into being. Rather, it must evolve as a new relationship between people and government begins to develop. True democratic participation requires the establishment of organizations that legitimately represent the interests of different stakeholders, and the maintenance of networks that compel decisionmakers to take these interests into consideration. In Benin, stakeholders who would benefit from the implementation of education reform have yet to develop their capacity to participate in the policy process. As a consequence, democracy in Benin does yet mean that the "people" will or can keep reforms on track.

The distraction of electoral politics

Elected as prime minister in 1990, Soglo's political honeymoon lasted about one year. (Soglo was elected president in 1991.) Competition for power began in earnest in 1992. The National Assembly quickly coalesced into a number of major political camps and countless minor ones. Conflicts between the presidency and the National Assembly became increasingly common, reflecting the growing pains of different branches of democratic government. The altercations also manifested an ardent competition between Soglo and a number of contenders, who had their power bases in the National Assembly.

As time went on, Soglo became increasingly preoccupied with his reelection. He eventually formed his own political party to capture a majority during the 1995 legislative elections, which provided an opportunity for the president and his opponents to test their relative strengths in preparation of the 1996 presidential elections. Soglo did not attain a majority in the National Assembly, though he did end up with the biggest single political formation. This was not sur-

prising, as more than eighty political parties put forth candidates.

In April 1996 Benin withstood one of the most important tests of any democracy: the transfer of power through peaceful elections. This experience was all the more significant because the incumbent president lost and stepped aside. But the Beninese story has a surprising twist. The winner of the March 1996 election was Mathieu Kérékou, the president under the previous Marxist regime.

These elections revealed three challenges facing democratization in Benin. First, Beninese tended to vote along regional grounds rather than on the basis of issues or ideology. Voting by ethnic or geographic affinity is not unusual, even in more established democracies. However, with eighty political parties, personal ties were particularly persuasive. Regional politics dominated the presidential elections. In much of Africa, the specter of regional and ethnic strife is a real threat to security and the success of any political experiment. However, in Benin, regional voting behavior appears to be more a sign of political immaturity than one of ethnic division. The panoply of political parties attests to the parochial nature of politics. People voted for native sons and for whom native sons told them to vote.

The second observation concerns the campaign process itself. Although there was little election fraud and the actual polling took place with few disturbances, attempts to purchase votes were prevalent throughout the country. At its most subtle, vote buying

translated to local development projects sprouting in every region. At its most blatant, many envelopes passed from hand to hand during the last few days of the campaign. In one particularly telling instance, a candidate for deputy was asked by a peasant at a campaign rally: "We know that you are not going to do anything for us once you are elected. So, what are you going to do for us now?"

President Soglo used his incumbency to rally support. He attempted to force through a national budget that included a number of visible infrastructure projects, and refused to budge on the rather limited salary increases he had proposed for civil servants, on grounds that this would violate an agreement he had forged with the IMF. He also encouraged ministers to create their own political parties (clearly allied to the president) and to focus their attention on the elections. Ministers that fared well during the legislative elections kept their positions.

The mobilization of the political class around elections affected efforts to improve governance and strengthen civil society. The election process also rendered young associations in Benin vulnerable to co-optation. Many national organizations, local development associations, and cooperatives aligned themselves with one political party or another during the legislative and presidential campaigns; some even splintered. Local organizations that attempted to keep their distance from the political mêlée were often denied access to resources, or were forced to face additional administrative or legal obstacles.

Events at the Ministry of Education provide an interesting example of how the elections diverted attention from reforms. Like many other ministers, Karim Dramane, the minister of education, created his own political party and encouraged his staff, including teachers, to join his party and campaign on his behalf. However, most educators had already made other commitments. Also, many thought they had benefited little during Dramane's term. At any rate, the minister's party failed to win any parliamentary seats. Dramane was later provided with a second opportunity when administrative irregularities annulled the first results in his native district. This time, the minister allegedly diverted school equip-



ment ordered for other school districts to his own, and thus won his seat.

The education reform, therefore, was eclipsed by electoral politics. The distribution of all types of pedagogical materials, the construction of new classrooms, and the training of teachers—critical to effective reform efforts—were all heavily affected by electoral calculations rather than FQL standards. Most action plans ground to a halt as human, administrative, and financial resources were funneled toward the campaign effort.

Considering the election outcomes, it appears people were not always swayed by these less seemly campaign maneuvers. “We took the envelopes and then voted the way we wanted to,” explained the head of one parents’ association in the northern Borgou region. Regional consideration may have swayed voter behavior, but bribery and “pork” appeared to have only a limited impact.

Many of Benin’s new democratic institutions proved to withstand the test of these bruising electoral contests. Following the runoff presidential elections, Soglo demanded that the Constitutional Court examine claims of fraud. After considerable pressure from the incumbent president’s camp to do otherwise, the court declared Kérékou the winner of the elections. Emotions ran high at the end of the campaign, and anything was possible. Nevertheless, both the Beninese and their new democratic institutions successfully kept to the high ground, and respected the results. “The candidates we had for the presidency were a bit embarrassing,” admitted a journalist from the independent newspaper *L’Echo du Jour*. “Many of us were unsatisfied with Soglo and dreaded the alternatives. However, the real winner of our elections was democracy itself.”

A fragile alliance of competing parties and a populist agenda

Kérékou’s election was not a call for a return to the “good old days.” Even those who opposed him admit that it would be impossible for Kérékou to bring back Marxism, or that it was what people wanted. This does not reflect some romantic notion that Kérékou has changed (while this might well be the case). Rather, and more important, because Kérékou returned to power on the coat tails of a coalition government with

more than fifteen political parties, his margin of maneuver has been considerably restricted.

Kérékou made a number of promises during his campaign, at least implicitly. Kérékou and other opposition candidates depicted Soglo as aloof, with few concerns about social equity. They claimed that the economic growth—few could disagree that there had been an economic recovery—had not affected the masses. It had, rather, benefited the urban elites and those close to the Soglo family. Soglo was accused of preventing greater participation and more political liberalization. His tussle with the National Assembly over the 1994 budget continued delay over liberalizing the airwaves, and foot-dragging over decentralizing government were all used against him.

The result of these campaign tactics was that Kérékou came back to power with a populist agenda. He promised that the people would experience more of the benefit from economic growth—more social services, more employment, and more local development. He also committed his government to greater participation, in contrast to his depiction of Soglo and his ministers as distant technocrats.

Following the new president’s strategy, the new education minister, Jijoho Léonard Padonou, who came to office with a firm commitment to bring greater transparency to operations of the ministry, also contrasted his management style with that of his predecessor. “We have a vision for our sector: something that was lacking in the past. We will ensure that all schools will feel improvements. We have an explicit pledge to greater social equity.” Echoing Padonou’s words, a vision statement is posted on the wall of his office. And, indeed, under Padonou’s direction (and concerted pressure from the donors), the Ministry of Education has achieved some significant successes in education reform. One such accomplishment has been the decentralization of the education budget to the regional offices of the ministry. The transfer of most non-salary allocations for primary education resulted in more than a tenfold increase in the regional offices’ operating budgets.

Padonou’s job has not been easy. There has been significant pressure from his political party and others of the coalition to name party faithful to key ministry posts. This pressure reflects an important reality of coalition government. Each party is trying to position itself for the legislative and presidential elections in

the years 2000 and 2001. As a consequence, political maneuvers continue to compete intensely with other more technical agendas.

Thus far, party politics has forced Minister Padonou to dismiss most of his *département* (subregional) directors. Those who were “pro-Soglo” were replaced by party faithful. This was a great blow to the reform effort as many of the dismissed civil servants were considered by most, Beninese educators and donors alike, to be competent and respected administrators. Many had been involved in the design of the reform program from its very outset. Almost all were undertaking interesting innovations in their respective regions. Ironically, the ousted administrators had been frustrated by the centralizing tendencies of Minister Dramane and his cabinet. Later, when decentralization was deemed desirable and necessary, those men and women most capable of achieving his aims were dismissed. A great deal of political bickering surrounded the nominations of the administrators’ replacements, most of whom were rewarded for the role they had played during the elections. As one highly-placed education official confided, “The new regional directors see their nominations as ‘prizes.’ I hope they will realize that they also come with certain responsibilities.”

Coalition politics has also interfered with solving the problem of the dire shortage of teachers. In instituting reform, no one had realized that demand for primary school would increase at such a rapid pace. This increase has been in direct conflict with Benin’s structural adjustment program, one objective of which has been to contain the country’s salary bill. As the education sector constitutes the largest portion of government personnel expenses, the whole country has felt the impact of the hiring freeze. Average student-teacher ratios soared from thirty-five to one in 1989 to more than sixty-five to one in 1995. And this harrowing statistic does not begin to convey the true depth of the problem, as it does not take into consideration Benin’s high dropout rates. It is not unusual for first grade classes to have more than one hundred fifty children. Under such conditions, very little learning occurs. One overwhelmed first

grade teacher exclaimed, “I am not a teacher here, I am a babysitter. I try to keep things under control, nothing more.”

With a green light from the World Bank and the IMF, additional budgetary resources are finally being allocated for teachers’ and administrators’ salaries. To keep costs down, the government intends to hire more than two thousand high school graduates on two-year revolving contracts. They will be paid substantially less than civil servant teachers. USAID will provide accelerated training to these teachers. Teacher training colleges that have been closed for more than eight years are scheduled to reopen. The plan has had support at the highest political levels, as the recruitment of new teachers has been construed as a response to promises of more employment opportunities. The minister is keenly aware that the number one measure of his success will be how he addresses the shortage of teachers and other pedagogical staff.

The coalition government has placed obstacles before these good intentions. The teachers were supposed to be trained in September 1996 and ready for placement before the beginning of the 1997 school year. First, bickering between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Civil Service over who should be responsible for hiring the contract teachers slowed the selection process. The Ministry of Civil Service wrested away the task and, most would agree, failed miserably. It quickly became evident that recruitment was based, not upon objective criteria, but political allegiance. The public uproar was such that the ministry’s initial recruitments had to be annulled. The



Ministry of Education then stepped in, and is currently organizing the recruitment process on a decentralized basis, but too late for contract teachers to benefit from some training before being assigned to classrooms.

The clash of agendas

Even those happy to see Dramane replaced as minister of education acknowledge his political skill in preventing rebellions. Though some grumble that the reform would be much further along if Dramane had not played electoral politics, they credit him for an absence of teacher strikes and peace among university students. Such accomplishments should not be underestimated; the process of democratization was fostered by the absence of social unrest. After all, teachers and university students certainly had the potential to make the political environment much more problematic.

But why was support for education reform not demanded? Why did no one fear those whose interests would be served by the reform? The answers reveal the dilemma of Benin's transition to democracy. The institutions are not yet in place to carry the voices of people living in towns and villages to the top levels of government. An education officer's comment brought home this vacancy. "Once I had to navigate through a group of university students conducting a sit-in at the ministry to get to my office. I guess we'll know we've won when there's a group of parents sitting out there."

Apprenticing democratic practice

Benin has jumped wholeheartedly into the process of democratization. At the highest and lowest levels of society people are transforming their political world from one of repression to one of participation. At the apex of the body politic as well as at the grassroots Benin is conducting a tremendous experiment.

After the 1990 presidential elections Benin began putting in place the institutions of a democratic regime. Virtually everything had to be established from the ground up, e.g., the Constitutional Court, the High Audiovisual Authority (equivalent to the U.S. Federal Communications Commission), the auditing unit of

the Ministry of Finance, and the Social and Economic Commission. Existing institutions were now expected to operate under new rules. The National Assembly was vested with new powers, as were the presidency and the courts. Even the ministries were expected to function in different ways. Most officials affected by these changes, whether they were newly-appointed, elected, or had held similar functions under the previous regime, were not sure what was expected of them.

An active civil society is considered an important means of promoting responsible government. In Benin, since the *renouveau*, there has been a veritable explosion of associational life. The opening up of the political process led to the creation of political parties and the establishment of a number of competing labor unions. With economic liberalization, more than two hundred private primary schools and twenty private secondary schools have opened.

Over four hundred NGOs have registered with the Ministry of Plan, and the number is growing weekly. NGOs include organizations that provide services on a charitable basis and those that conduct advocacy on social or political issues. They can operate at either a national or more regional level. Some are even national chapters of international organizations. NGOs do not represent a constituency, as associations do. Political parties and labor unions are not considered to be NGOs.

Virtually every locality throughout Benin has created grassroots organizations, including development associations, user groups, peasant cooperatives, and health committees. This has been an impressive, if not daunting, evolution. These organizations provide invaluable services and have become important actors on Benin's political and social landscape. However, the capacity of most of them to endure as representatives of their constituents at a national level is questionable.

Participation at the top

Government officials in Benin are unaccustomed to being held accountable for their actions. Habitual means of exercising authority are deeply ingrained and have constituted formidable constraints to expected changes. Communications between the government and citizens have typically been in one direction. Officials balk at the exposure that has accompanied

increased liberties of expression and association. At the same time, citizens hesitate to demand accounts from officials. In the education sector, two examples tell of the accountability gap.

First, Ministry of Education officials have reacted irresolutely to the few requests made by the Ministry of Finance, the presidency, and the legislative education commission for information about the reform. They seem suspicious of the motives of such requests and are not completely convinced anyone has the “right” to question them. Second, the Ministry of Education has never convened the EGE monitoring group. Individuals who probably would have been part of that group have expressed their frustration, but have not clamored (nor see it as their right or responsibility to clamor) for the group to be formed. As one such individual exclaimed, “It’s the minister’s job to create this group. On what basis would we create such an organ?” Indeed, this individual was appalled at the thought of taking the initiative.

Decentralization in education is also an interesting case in point. On paper, many responsibilities have been moved to the *département* (regional) levels in the education sector. *Département* directors are theoretically responsible for personnel deployment decisions, budget propositions and execution, and the organization of examinations. Actual transfer of these responsibilities, however, has been postponed for several years now. The ministry cabinet has explained that lack of administrative capacity at local levels and coordination with other ministries have been responsible for these delays. But the cabinet is also reluctant to see the effective power of the education sector removed from its own hands.

Three national-level institutions have the clout to foster broader participation of people outside the ministry in its affairs. These are the grand conferences, the legislature, and political parties that make it up, and the press. While grand conferences have traditionally been used to bring a wide group of stakeholders into the policy-making arena, the free press, political parties, and the legislature are relatively new institutions in Benin.

Grand Conferences. The National Conference and the General Commission on Education held in 1990 constituted attempts by government to bring different stakeholders into the policy process. The Beninese are proud of these events; there is something momentous and dramatic about the coming together of

the people of a nation to take history into their own hands. However, experience has shown that, isolated from other mechanisms, these grand gatherings have little lasting impact.

The National Conference and the EGE provide an interesting contrast. The National Conference was followed by the establishment of a national committee, whose members were important notables in Beninese society. During the transition phase, this committee was a potent moral force that ensured the establishment of new democratic institutions and mechanisms. Indeed, these new institutions, such as the Constitutional Court and the National Assembly, became in their own right the guardians of the results of the National Conference. As for the EGE, the absence of any similar mechanism or institution is partly to blame for the slow progress toward goals. It also accounts for the lack of knowledge of and public involvement in education reform.

The Legislature and Political Parties. None of the four or five major political parties has established an education platform. In 1994 the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a German donor agency, offered to publish the social agendas of any political party. Those among the eighty parties that accepted this proposal published statements that contained generalities about education and little mention of the education reform program (for or against). In addition, no political party demonstrated any capacity to conduct policy analysis in this sector.

Few officials from the major parties are willing to discuss education. One admitted that most hesitate to show their cards yet. None wants to be vulnerable to criticism in the event of a ministerial reshuffling and an opportunity to “win” the Ministry of Education.

Discussions with members of the legislative education commission reveal a continued lack of knowledge about the sector. Few deputies are aware of the education reform. Although the deputies are acutely aware of the problem of teacher recruitment, few have any knowledge of the FQL strategy, a far more profound policy matter. The president of the legislative education commission believes that with some of the political fights in the past, education will become a more central issue. A law on education that enshrines the recommendations of the EGE has been tabled since 1990. The commission’s president believes that the law will be voted on in 1997.

The Press. Journalists have not actively followed the education reform effort. A journalist from the independent *Le Matin* explained:

We need to sell papers in order to keep afloat. When we first began publishing, only the most sensational stories sold papers. The readership is becoming more sophisticated and government scandals rather than human interest stories are catching people's eye. But stories about education just don't sell newspapers.

Nevertheless, a new newspaper devoted to education came out in late 1996. At first, *Le Collegien* provided general information to teachers and students about developments in education. Increasingly, however, it is focusing on issues of accountability and education reform, and becoming a forum for educators, students, and parents to exchange concerns about the education system.

Participation at the bottom

The president of a district federation of parents' associations asked why USAID did not do more to ensure that resources made available to the Ministry of Education reached the school level. His interlocutor responded that USAID could only do so much and that it was also the responsibility of organizations such as theirs to ensure that the Ministry of Education was using money in the most effective manner. The district federation president was incredulous that his organization might be able to do such things: "I do not have a document authorizing me to request such information from the ministry!"

A local awakening. For a democracy to function effectively the populace must exercise a number of rights and take on certain responsibilities. In Benin, this will require a profound change in behavior and attitudes. People are struggling with their new roles. Before the *Renouveau*, the regime severely repressed civil society. NGOs were outlawed and church groups were closely watched. Traditional authority was often humiliated or simply squashed. The single revolutionary party attempted to encompass all possibilities for association by creating a number of village associations and organizations such as development associations, peasant cooperatives, and parents' associations

in order to extend its power to the local level.

As the government's power began to wane during the late 1980s, the role of these local organizations began to change. With fewer resources at their disposal, the government and the party were less able to use these organizations to control village life. Resources could no longer be funneled through them and they failed as instruments of surveillance and control. In many cases, these organizations began mobilizing resources for use at the village level and became manifestations of a *de facto* decentralization.

Upon this tentative foundation, a growing role for civil society can be discerned at more local levels. Local officials have been traditionally obliged to depend on community support. In many cases, this relationship has been reinforced, particularly as few resources made it to lower levels of the administration. Local officials have had to find creative ways of maintaining or improving their functions. Of course, stories abound of district officials bullying and taking advantage of local populations. Yet more and more, officials realize that communities are their allies. In addition, communities are beginning to understand that if they are responsible for maintaining certain services, they should have a say in their functioning. An education *département* director confessed, "I was concerned about efforts to mobilize parents. I did not need two bosses. But now I see parents as allies in my attempts to lobby the central ministry for support."

There are signs that political consciousness at local levels is changing. People are more likely to express opinions that they used to keep to themselves. They see that a different relationship with the government is possible and that the more traditional, informal means of relating to authority through appeals to informal ties are not as effective. One man considering consultation with the minister of education reasoned:

The minister is from this region! He is our son! We will ask him to come here and explain to us what he has done with that money. . . . But, we know what he'll say. He'll say that we can trust him. Not to worry: everything is under control. He will be sure that something special will happen for his 'fathers.'

After some thought, he added:

But we will not get an accounting of what happened to the money. We must find another way to get this information.

One fiasco awoke many to the ministry's abuses. "It was like a stream of ants, all headed to Tchaourou and Parakou," said a school official, describing the thousands of school benches and tables delivered to schools by the ministry right before the legislative and presidential elections, an event now referred to as the "school bench scandal." Most benches and desks were manufactured by a few businesses in the south with wood shipped from the north. One local entrepreneur exclaimed in disgust:

Why was the wood shipped to the south and then the desks and benches back to the north? Why weren't they just manufactured in the communities that were to receive them? After all, any local furniture maker can put together a school bench; not much expertise is needed for that.

Stories spread like wildfire about the high manufacturing and transportation costs, the opaque way contractors were chosen, and the peculiar criteria for selection for reception. Another official told how benches delivered to his district in the pouring rain at night had become waterlogged, warped, and useless. A journalist recounted how some communities were obliged to pay as much for transport of furniture to their schools as they would have spent on building them.

There have been no hearings or investigations of the benches and tables scandal, though the formation of a dispersed but concrete demand for accountability can be discerned. Rather than regarding the benches and tables as "gifts" bestowed by a benevolent authority, people are asking questions about the proper use of public funds.

Grassroots organizations. At least at local levels, new political awareness has begun to be translated into organizational power. The proliferation of grassroots organizations has been exciting. Most associations were created to mobilize communities around specific development issues, often with support from UNICEF or other international agencies. Although advocacy was not the initial objective of this support, community organizations often find themselves nego-



tiating with local government officials who are ambivalent about these projects, particularly as the officials recognize they will have little authority over resources or events.

Yet the projects need their support. In the education sector, local teachers and school directors are often expected to play important roles in these projects. They need permission from their district officers, especially if the community must be convinced that its efforts will not be eventually sabotaged. Consequently, leaders of these organizations are learning that negotiating skills are essential to project success.

Communities are participating more substantively at a local level in their own development and demanding greater accountability from local officials. In one administrative district in the Zou region, the *Sous-prefet*, or regional administrative officer, was replaced by a faithful party member. Local development associations were up in arms. Eventually, the original officer, who was highly-respected and trusted by the local communities, was brought back.

The Borgou region, in the north of the country, has been home to a growing number of success stories. A great part of this evolution can be attributed to newfound power that has accompanied economic development. The devaluation of the CFA franc has made cotton a particularly profitable crop. Economic liberalization has led to cotton producers keeping a greater proportion of their profits. As a consequence, many communities have had additional resources to use for their own development needs, investing their cotton profits in infrastructure and social services. This has also made them a growing political force, at least in the region.

Thus, there is a political awakening in Benin at a local level. People are demanding better service and

respect from political authorities. They are less afraid to voice their complaints or their needs.

Connecting the dots: from local participation to setting the national agenda

The challenge for Benin is to forge the links between local politics and national policies. Legislators and their political parties are supposed to serve this function. These instances, however, have not yet evolved into true representatives of local interests. Local participation remains atomized and distant from the corridors of power in the capitol. Other types of institutions must be established and perspectives nurtured to provide the linkages from the grassroots to the offices of central power. In other words, Benin must now work on “connecting the dots.” In education, labor unions, NGOs, and particularly parents’ associations present the greatest potential for linking local voices to national policy.

Labor Unions. Autonomous unions, newly-empowered by new rights of association, primarily focus on questions of pay and working conditions. Negotiations with authorities revolve around back pay and compensating civil servants at their “real” salary levels (salaries were frozen, but civil servants continued to receive automatic annual promotions that technically have pay scale implications).

Teachers unions have been particularly effective in mobilizing to defend these short-term “bread and butter” interests. Though successful negotiation has led to salary increases for many teachers, this benefit has been won at the expense of hiring new teachers. Their desire for increased pay might interfere with increased spending on instructional materials.

Arrangements between teachers unions and the previous minister illustrate how reform agendas can be overtaken by political concerns. In 1990 the majority of teachers had the status of “assistant teacher.” Most had been recruited in the early 1980s as “young revolutionary teachers” and were never given the training to pass the teacher certification examination, which leads to an automatic pay hike. The minister promised the unions special training opportunities to help these teachers pass the exam. Indeed, by 1996 most assistant teachers had achieved better status and pay.

But the intent of the reform’s Teacher Training Action Plan was quite different from the minister’s

arrangement with the unions. The action plan was to create an in-service training system that would continually upgrade the skills of all teachers. Instead, a limited group of teachers was trained, and questions are raised about the quality of training they received. Moreover, the activity left no institution in place to continue in-service training for other teachers.

NGOs. A joke going around Cotonou goes like this: What do you call three motorcycle-taxis, two street hawkers, and a beggar waiting for the light to turn green at the intersection? Answer: An NGO.

The increased interest of international donors to work with NGOs has surely contributed to their rapid proliferation. A survey conducted in 1994 by UNDP of the NGOs registered with the Ministry of Plan indicated that no more than forty were likely to survive over the long run. With limited economic opportunities, many NGOs were simply created with the hope of obtaining donor resources. It was common for an NGO to be headed by recently laid-off civil servants or unemployed university graduates. Many mid- and high-level government officials were on the boards of NGOs. Two rival national umbrella organizations struggle to become the interlocutor with the government. This rivalry has suppressed the development of an “enabling environment” for NGOs. A number of NGOs were often informally linked to political parties and constitute integral parts of electoral machines.

Government reaction to the tremendous growth of NGOs has been surprisingly subdued. However, when setting the specific parameters of action for NGOs on a case-by-case basis, many government officials have been reluctant to allow NGOs too much discretion. Some officials claim that some NGOs attempt to usurp the role of the state or accuse certain NGOs of being amateurs that will eventually cause more harm than good. Civil servants also express frustration and resentment because of the considerable resources donors divert to NGOs.

Aside from parents’ associations, few NGOs at either the local or national levels focus on education. USAID is encouraging two that work on relevant issues to include education on their agendas. One is *Nouvelle Ethique* (new ethic), which works primarily on civil servant accountability. The other is *Africa Obota*, which became famous throughout the country for its skits on the thorny issue of vote buying.

Education: an affair of the state or of the community?

Certain historical factors make connecting the dots in education particularly challenging. Education is generally perceived by Beninese as an affair of the state. There is a firmly-held belief that the government should provide education and that school should be free. Free and compulsory education is declared a right in the current Constitution and has been touted as such by virtually all regimes since independence. Of course, schooling has never been completely free nor compulsory in Benin. Parents have always contributed financially and in kind to school construction, equipment, and operations. And less than full enrollment rates attest to lack of access for a great number of Beninese children. But these promises constitute widely held expectations. Most Beninese think that education should eventually be available to everyone by the state and that current arrangements are temporary.

In addition, many believe that the purpose of education is to provide access to the modern sector, which until recently, has been synonymous with the civil service. The colonial school gave access to jobs in the colonial administration, and schooling, since independence, provided access to government employment. Although it is common to talk about the education system's lack of relevance to the world of work or needs of the community, most Beninese continue to believe that the purpose of school is employment in the civil service.

There is a general ambivalence regarding the relative responsibilities of the state, the community, and the private sector in this domain. Many believe that the community should not have to get involved in managing or setting policy for education. Education should be the concern of the state. However, the state is not living up to its responsibilities and thus society is obliged to play a greater role than was expected or desired. Few would admit that this represents a permanent shift in the role of society and state in this sector.

The notion that the government provides and the population receives is challenged daily. The absence of resources, the reluctance of political elites to allow true participation, and the weakness of the administrative structures throughout government gradually leads the populace to understand that it must take charge of the process of democratization if it is to be successful.

Monsignor Da Souza, who presided over the National Conference, is considered by many to be the conscience of the nation. He has become deeply disappointed with the government and the behavior of the elite during the parliamentary elections and had distanced himself from former allies. He stated:

We must adopt a new strategy. It is time that we work toward educating and organizing civil society. We can no longer depend on the authorities to transform Benin. We must work in collaboration with the government while making their life difficult. It is not enough to protest and criticize. We must make allies and negotiate. The government has power and can still easily limit the actions of civil society if it wants to.

Parents' associations: connecting the dots in education

In education, parents are beginning to take on the challenge of connecting the dots. They are being drawn into a void created by the inability of the state to live up to its unrealistic commitments and are slowly making their voice heard by those responsible for education policy and priorities. Support from USAID is strengthening the potential of this national lobby for parents.

Local Parents' Associations. Of all stakeholders in education, parents are clearly the most concerned and typically the least represented in policy deliberations. Benin, however, has a certain potential in this domain. As local arms of the Marxist regime, parents' associations were required at all schools. As fewer and fewer resources made their way to the school from the ministry, parents' associations were expected to take up the slack. When the government failed even to pay teachers' salaries, the associations often kept schools open. As a consequence, parents' associations started to represent the community *vis-à-vis* the school, rather than the other way around. Without them, in almost every case, local primary schools would not be able to function.

Today, the strength of individual parents' associations varies. Board elections, when they occur, are rarely done through secret balloting. As such, powerful members of the community often control the func-

tioning of the parents' associations without much oversight. No statutes guide their operations. Most meet only when there is a crisis or when the school needs money. Often, their role is reduced to one of collecting school fees and exhorting community members to send their children to school. Relations between school directors and parents' associations are rarely well-defined. Where the association is weak, the school director may have free reign over the use of contributions. Reports of collusion between school directors and the parents' association are not uncommon.

In some cases, particularly in urban areas, parents' associations have carved out a more dynamic role for themselves. The greater sophistication of these local communities has been a contributing factor. Members of these associations usually demand a more intrusive role in the affairs of the school and are often willing to defend parents *vis-à-vis* the school and the school *vis-à-vis* the education district offices. In one urban area within Cotonou, the parents' association of one primary school of over two thousand students is particularly powerful. Some of its members are important figures in national labor unions. They bring their advocacy and organizing skills with them. Even the local education district officer can do little without the support of this parents' association. It has forced the replacement of poorly-performing teachers and has obtained additional administrative and pedagogical resources from the Ministry of Education. Although not all are so empowered, many urban parents' associations have come to exert an influence that school directors and teachers ignore at their peril.

Absence of federations. Although many parents' associations actively represent the interests of parents, they have rarely been in a position to engage in dialogue with national or even regional authorities. The primary problem, mirroring a characteristic generally found in Beninese civil society, has been that parents' associations are atomized. There is virtually no contact between the groups. Although district and regional level parents' associations exist, they usually lack resources and legitimacy. Just as NGOs have no strong umbrella group to represent them to the government, parents' associations have had few effective interlocutors for discussions with national educational authorities.

USAID support. Recognizing the potential of parents' associations as "dot connectors," USAID

contracted with World Education, a U.S. private voluntary organization, in 1994 to work from the bottom up in training these groups in organization development skills. The project works through local NGOs, and, upon completion of training, offers the schools small grants to finance school improvement efforts. World Education has worked in two of the six regions in Benin. In each region, associations in every school in two districts (one urban and one rural) have received training and grants. USAID hopes that a critical mass of invigorated parents' associations in each targeted district will lead to the establishment of dynamic district-level parents' associations. With two well-organized districts (out of approximately ten) in each *département*, regional associations may also become more effective and representative.

Parents' associations supported by the project have definitely become "owners" of their schools. World Education has provided support to approximately two hundred schools in the northern region of Borgou and the eastern region of the Mono, where the project has begun to awaken parents to their rights and responsibilities. Participating schools must reorganize their association, adopt transparent rules and regulations, and learn to better manage resources. At first, this requirement was little understood by parents and directors. However, most participants quickly saw the benefits associated with these changes, and stories abound of how parents uncovered collusion and mismanagement. Many schools saw their contribution rates increase considerably, as parents gained more confidence that their resources were going to be put to good use.

In a fair number of schools, conflict has arisen between parents and school directors. For years parents handed over resources to school directors and rarely asked for any accounting. Now they demand a say in how their resources are used. Some directors did not see this as a positive development and resisted changes. World Education organized a meeting with school directors to explain the purpose and principles of the project. This meeting led to an easing of tensions in a great number of cases. In addition, the regional director has often taken the side of parents in conflicts between communities and school staff. Some directors and teachers have even been replaced, a clear signal that resistance to increased power of parents would not be tolerated at higher levels.



It has clearly not been the intention of World Education to foment conflict between parents and teachers. However, perhaps such friction was inevitable; people rarely welcome more

oversight in their work. It should also be noted that many directors were already concerned with their dwindling status and saw this as an additional threat. One school director confided that: "We have not received raises for several years. At every turn, we see that we have less prestige and the community respects us less. Now parents are treating us like domestics."

USAID has also launched a parallel effort to reinforce parents' associations at a more central level. The agency sent a number of representatives from district and regional parents' associations to a meeting in Brazzaville, Congo, of parents' association federations of Francophone African countries. Upon returning from this conference, the Beninese participants decided that it was time to create their own federation. In May 1995 a national seminar was launched with financing from USAID, bringing together representatives of parents' associations from all over the country, and a national federation was created.

Individuals from all over the country have come forward to become the spokespersons of the parents' association movement. Some were associated with the earlier federations. Others are simply notables in their communities who have taken an interest in education. These individuals constitute the driving force behind the creation of the federation. They have been able to retain positions of authority within the structure of the newly-founded federation.

The future development of the parents' associa-

tion federation will depend on actions to bolster the representativeness of intermediary organizations, such as regional and district federations. Those who fear or are suspicious of greater participation on the part of parents can easily point to the faulty representativeness of the structure of the national federation in order to undermine its legitimacy.

Initially, the reaction of the Ministry of Education to these efforts was mixed. Minister Dramane ignored both the USAID project and the creation of the federation. In contrast, regional and technical directors of the ministry were enthusiastic about the project. They viewed these organizations as potential allies. This difference in views reflects the schisms within the Ministry of Education, particularly before the change of government. It is the perception of many education administrators that regional and technical concerns were largely ignored by the cabinet, particularly as a result of the focus on the election campaigns. At district levels, the reaction was again ambivalent. On one hand, greater parental involvement makes the district education officer's job easier and creates an ally for dealings with superiors. On the other, the district officer looks with dread at the possibility of being held accountable.

With the new government and minister, relations between the parents' association federation and the Ministry of Education have improved considerably. Padonou has ensured that representatives are present in fora where policy is discussed. He attended the inauguration of the expansion of the USAID project and praised its progress.

The parents' association movement is an exciting instance of the development of civil society. The evolution of this movement indicates the opportunities for promoting greater participation of the public and greater accountability in government. To date, the parents' association movement has been able to avoid many of the political traps into which other novice groups of civil society have fallen.

Adjusting USAID's strategy for supporting reform

Although USAID's CLEF project has cajoled and pressured the government to live up to its commitment to

reform the education system, it became apparent in the early years that this was not a sustainable strategy for promoting the reform effort. To have a lasting impact, the reform needed other constituencies behind it in addition to foreign donor agencies. One change in USAID's strategy was to support parents' associations. A second was to promote public participation in primary education. In 1993 USAID introduced a four-pronged strategy to encourage the government, particularly the Ministry of Education, to be more amenable to stakeholder involvement. First, it encouraged information flows to and from government decisionmakers. This entailed frequent exposure of the education reform to the media, the National Assembly, and interest groups such as the parents' associations. Next, it assisted the government in establishing mechanisms for public oversight of implementation decisions. Finally, it helped the government work more closely with the private sector in promoting educational reform.



USAID has had less success with changing ministry practices than with parents' associations and other stakeholder groups. It may be that progress in this area has been hampered by the realities of electoral politics and requires a concerted effort. The CLEF project recently sponsored a workshop on the education reform for journalists and others in the media, in which participants were given suggestions on how to report on activities and issues in the sector. In addition, NGOs are being courted to focus resources on the accountability and governance issues in education.

Overall, USAID has played an innovative role in linking the reform of primary education and the process of democratization. In doing so, it has not been able to follow a blueprint; rather, it has responded to opportunities and corrected its course as events warranted.

The FQL strategy has helped bring stakeholders into the reform process. Criteria for FQL schools were developed with the participation of parents, unions, teachers, inspectors, university professors, private

schools, and other stakeholders. Teams conducted workshops with local officials and representatives of different stakeholder groups to explain the concept of FQL, receive feedback, and discuss what aspects of the FQL definition would be a priority for them.

People all over the country know what FQL is, even if they cannot describe other aspects of the reform. Some FQL has been able to advance, despite less than wholehearted support of the ministry until recently. The ministry's position on FQL is understandable, since the strategy implies the devolution of power to local and district authorities. Amidst the political excitement, USAID advisors continue to work with ministry officials on implementing the action plans. With growing support for reform from parents and other stakeholders, these technical dimensions of change should become easier to accomplish.

In summary, the reform of primary education in Benin, where the process of democratization is in full swing, has been a positive experience in changing political behavior in school communities, ministry offices, and central seats of power such as the National Assembly. Electoral politics have intruded on technical plans, but they have also ensured that the reform will belong to the people of Benin and that the government will become its strong ally.

4. Mali: Building Consensus Around School Reform

A rich past, a difficult present, an uncertain future

The road to Yérédonbougou (“the village that knows itself”), one of Mali’s more than ten thousand villages, where four out of five Malians reside, is rutted from the weight of the fleet of eighteen-wheelers that come once a year to carry the local cooperative’s crop of cotton to the central processing plant. The ruts are deep; this was a good year. The rains came on time and came steadily throughout the season, resulting in a bumper crop. The mud storage bins are overflowing with the product of the corn and millet harvest. Even the mango trees at the entrance to the village show the bounty of the good rains, with their boughs sagging under the weight of the sweet fruit.

Young boys test their skills trying to knock the ripe treats from the lofty branches, seeking refreshment after their hard-fought soccer match. They take aim with the rock-hard immature fruits they have gathered from the lower limbs. Their sisters wait their turn at the village well, tugging on the rope to empty the rubber sack filled with water into the plastic basin. Aminata and Salimata hoist the basin onto Djénéba’s head as she starts home along the still-muddy streets past the grazing cattle, past the mud-walled, thatch-roofed family compounds of the village to fill the canari with water to drink and to bathe her younger brother and sisters. The smell of the okra and feuille verte sauce simmering in aluminum pots suspended by three rocks above wood fires greets her as she works her way home. Passing by the palaver hut beside the village chief’s compound, the discussion of the council of advisors is drowned out by the rhythmic thump-thump-thumping of her mother and two

elder sisters pounding dried corn for the night’s ‘toh.’

Djénéba knows that something important is going on as the group of elders all wear grave looks on their faces. She pauses, her brightly-patterned cloth wrap wet against the front of her legs from sloshing water, watching the group of men as each person “takes the word” in turn, restating the problem and re-crafting the solution until, by the time the word is passed to the chief, a common point of view has been forged, one that will be adhered to by the village’s leaders of opinion, and consequently by the whole village. Consensus, not the vote of the majority, has been the law of the land in Mali.

Viewed from an international perspective, Mali is a nation of acute contradictions. In the year 2000 Mali will have been independent for four decades from over a half-century of European colonial rule. Mali’s history as a nation actually stretches back twelve hundred years, to the days of the empire of Ghana. Today the average rural Malian may make only \$1.50 a day for hard physical labor, but he or she can also tell tales of Kankou Moussa, the Malian who centuries ago took so much gold with him when he made his pilgrimage to Mecca that the bottom fell out of the precious metals market in Egypt as he passed through. Contemporary Mali has two faces. One is that of a proud, rich history and culture, complete with elaborate textiles that are featured on the runways of Paris’ *haute couture* houses, world-class musicians, and internationally-acclaimed filmmakers. The other face is one of an abjectly-poor nation, judged by its unschooled children, a penury of resources, and its rural masses largely out of touch with the modern world.

Had the United Nations been founded five centuries ago, and had it set about collecting the same education statistics that it collects today, Mali would have been near the top rather than the bottom of

international rankings. During Europe's late middle ages, Mali's northern cities of Timbuktu and Djenné were prominent centers of Islamic learning. The University of Sankoré in Timbuktu was founded centuries before Harvard or Yale, and Malian children were learning to read and write in large numbers in Koranic schools long before the idea of the public primary school existed in North America. Yet today, international statistics place Mali among the least-developed of the world's nations, whether the yardstick be education (three out of five children never start primary school), health (three out of twenty children die before their fifth birthday), or the strength of the economy (per capita gross national product, or GNP was \$250 in 1994).

Chances that the pendulum tracing Mali's history has begun to swing back to days of glory have improved dramatically since 1991. In that year, the twenty-three-year-old dictatorship of Moussa Traoré was overthrown in the wake of a popular revolt. Within fifteen months of this uprising, Mali had given voice to all of its citizens to define the path of an infant democracy. A new constitution was drafted, abolishing the single-party system (up to forty-eight new parties existed at one point, eventually narrowing down to under ten in 1992). And a new legislature and the nation's first democratically-selected president were elected. The so-called "Third Republic" was formally born in June 1992.

A state that listens to its people, a people who make themselves heard

When Djénéba's parents went to vote for the first president of the Third Republic, they went with full confidence that their ballot would count, not just in the actual tally, but that it would help bring about positive changes for their family, for their village, and for the whole nation. No longer would they have to watch donor assistance intended to help them increase the productivity and profitability of their cotton crops go instead to enrich further the cronies of Traoré's Second Republic.

The past five years have been the most dynamic period in Mali's history since its independence from

France in 1960. People from all classes and regions speak of building a new society and of the need to defend their new rights and institutions from the abuses of the Traoré period. President Alpha Oumar Konaré has governed the country with considerable popular support, impressing Malians and the international community alike as an intelligent, dedicated, principled, and humble leader. Perhaps the greatest compliment one could pay him, in comparison with his predecessor, is that if he loses the upcoming elections scheduled for 1997, he would step down with neither ruse nor rancor. However, such a loss is unlikely: his party holds a 75 percent majority in the National Assembly and his current prime minister is equally held in wide esteem for his no-nonsense dynamism and competence. The energy of the new republic is also felt in the efforts of the central government to bring greater authority to local government. The central government is preparing to initiate in 1997 a wide-scale decentralization of planning, financing, and administration of government responsibilities and operations. Yet the realization of this ambition is fraught with obstacles.

Mali's people will deal with these obstacles in their consensual yet cumbersome tradition of reaching decisions. Few other countries in Africa, let alone in the world, exhibit the same degree of respect and harmony among different ethnic groups and economic strata. Consensus calls on all members of the community to pay full attention to issues and to express their views articulately if they wish to have a say in the outcome. It builds solidarity, skill at compromise, and active commitment to final decisions, even those that are contrary to one's own preferences, all dimensions that appear to be disappearing in Mali's more atomized, contemporary urban environments. However, the method is slow and cumbersome, still carrying many of the caste and gender inequities of traditional Malian society, and can be manipulated by higher-ranking individuals in the community. These features are particularly prominent when applied to national decision-making, where the logistics of "hearing out" all parties to generate a consensus are daunting. From the perspective of the nation-state, particularly one that is less willing to let its elite continue to define the interests of all, this approach may seem archaic and impractical.

A compromise is not immediately evident. It is clear, though, that this transformation will require

creativity, patience, and a willingness and capacity to change on both sides of the equation. Traditional institutions will need to provide more opportunity for autonomous, collective voices to influence final decisions, the majority rule approach of a democracy. Conversely, modern democratic institutions will need to embrace a more robust, broadly-inclusive process of popular debate, permitting the “word to pass” on both a local and a national level before calling the vote. It may be surmised that this manner of procedural compromise has a greater chance to occur as the nation and its citizens achieve a greater degree of security, both as regards basic rights and, perhaps more importantly, the attainment of physical—economic and personal—well-being.

The challenges of creating a brighter economic future

Some of the people of Yérédonbougou are descended from semi-nomadic herders who would follow their herds across wide areas as they searched for green pasture. But today, the migrations of the village’s young men are not stimulated by herds following the rains but rather the search for wage employment in urban centers. Djénéba’s older brother, Madou, took this option several years ago, joining over half of his initiation group in abandoning the fields to their aging parents and younger siblings to try their fortunes in a town in neighboring Ivory Coast or in Mali. Madou made his way to Bamako, the nation’s capital of about eight hundred thousand people. After suffering in three successive apprenticeships as an auto mechanic, carpenter, and tailor, he finally settled on welder. Madou expected to demonstrate greater skill and to find greater satisfaction in this, given that he came from a family of blacksmiths. If this did not work out, he would finally have to conclude that city living was not for him. Several times he had considered leaving the mass of aggressive people, threatening traffic, loneliness, poor housing, and inadequate food to return to the security of his family and the village. He stays now more to be able to

send what little money he is able back to his family, rather than because he expects to get rich in town. The bright lights of the city have faded for him.

For those who have stayed on in Yérédonbougou, life is equally hard. At the start of the rainy season, the village is largely empty during the day, as both men and women head for the fields in preparation for sowing. While the hope germinated by the first rains is great, Djénéba and her parents are not able to match this sentiment with a high level of energy. With the next harvest still a few months away, the family grain stores are becoming depleted, so meals are more spare. Before the village’s new, covered well was installed, Djénéba’s whole family was regularly weakened by stomach ailments when the new rains washed droppings from the livestock into the family’s well. And as the new grass sprouted, so did many of the disease-bearing insects. Kadiatou, Djénéba’s little sister, lay home shivering with malarial chills. The teacher had promised to pick up a dosage of chloroquine in town, but Kadiatou’s fever was quite high and Djénéba’s parents worried that he would not return in time. Walking back from the fields, carrying a load of branches on her head, Djénéba wondered how she would have the energy to help her mother chop the wood, start the fire, clean the children, cook, and clean up after the meal. At least her mother did not ask her to wake with her before the roosters the next morning to cook and clean again before another full day in the fields.

A statistical portrait of the country reveals a degree of poverty that places Mali’s people near the bottom of the pile in virtually all social and economic indicators. On the 1995 United Nations’ Human Development Index, Mali ranked third from the bottom, above only Sierra Leone and Niger. The eight out of ten Malians who live past their fifth birthday will, on average, not survive past their fiftieth birthday (the average life expectancy at birth is forty-six years). Only 41 percent of the population has regular access to safe drinking water, and barely one in four has access to safe sanita-



tion facilities. Malaria, dengue fever, guinea worm, and increasingly AIDS, among a phalanx of other preventable illnesses contribute further, leaving those who do not die frequently ill. Access to suitable modern health care is estimated at more than thirty-three thousand persons per doctor and more than fourteen thousand for every trained nurse.

Women's health is even more threatened (although they do tend to outlive their male counterparts). Women shoulder almost entire responsibility for the reproductive burden of their households and communities. With an average fertility rate of above seven births per woman, it is no wonder that two out of every one hundred women die in childbirth. The onus of reproduction continues beyond pregnancy, as the work of the woman includes caring for her children and husband, preparing the meals (which includes typically pounding the grain, cooking over the wood fire, hauling firewood and water from often increasingly distant locations), all the cleaning, and other household chores. These already-crushing tasks do not exclude the woman from fieldwork, her own gardening, and seeking other activities by which to earn money to clothe, feed, and school her children. She also maintains important roles in many of the cultural and social functions that enliven or otherwise bring together the community.

Mali's poverty is also apparent in the classic measure of national welfare: per capita gross domestic product (GDP), which was \$197 dollars in 1994. Cotton, gold, and livestock comprise the country's major commodities, with the transformation of agricultural crops constituting the major industrial activities. The fact that the country's economic profile is dominated by agriculture (85 percent of all Malians are employed predominantly in this sector), with about 80 percent of farmers engaged in production primarily for their families' own consumption, seems to provide a buttress against the negative impacts of this financial poverty. This result is evident in the relatively high level of nutrition enjoyed by Malians, surpassing on average the rest of sub-Saharan Africa and of all least-developed countries by almost ten percent, based on a per capita daily caloric supply of two thousand two hundred seventy-nine.

Much of the rest of the economic activities of Malians also falls outside of the formal accounting that commonly contributes to such figures as GDP and GNP. Some studies attribute 20 to 25 percent of Mali's GDP to this sector.

The recent devaluation of the national currency, the CFA Franc, and a series of other macroeconomic adjustments prompted by agreements with the IMF, seem to have stimulated a resurgence (albeit a slow and timid one) in Mali's economy. Self-sufficient in grain production as recently as the late 1960s, Mali was jolted into severe dependency by crushing, multi-year droughts in 1972 to 1974 (when about 40 percent of the country's livestock died) and 1983 to 1985 that affected most of the subregion. The effects of these natural disasters were compounded by the oppressive, corrupt regime of Moussa Traoré.

With the emergence of democratic rule in 1991, the process of privatization of formerly-nationalized industries began. Combined with new governmental fiscal austerity, liberalized policies governing the trade and the overall economy (perhaps most notably of agriculture), a high degree of international donor financial and technical support, and much more regular, adequate rainfall, both agricultural and overall production have rebounded. Since 1993 Mali's farmers have been regularly generating surpluses.

The hope of the current government and its international partners is to match the emergence of a dynamic, progressive political environment with that of

a vibrant, diverse economy. They hope to capture the country's nascent productive momentum and use its dynamism to stimulate the economy so it will continue to grow in a way that raises directly the welfare of Mali's full population. This challenge is great, especially given that so many of the factors of success—most notably, the climate and international markets—lie largely beyond Mali's control. However, there is considerable reason for encouragement on the eve of Mali's first elections since those of the Third Republic's inaugural government. Within this political context, the moves to continue the liberalization of the market and broader economy, as well as the continuing investments in the social sector (not least of which is education, which currently receives about a quarter of the government's total spending), offer even greater promise.

The burden for bringing about economic reform, without which social and political reform are likely to remain elusive, resides in virtually all sectors. Within the economic domain, small-scale producers and industry face a process of diversification, privatization, and improved productivity and quality, stimulated by the recent devaluation of the CFA Franc. The agriculture sector will continue to bear the brunt of this transformation, as it is likely to continue to employ more Malians and dominate the country's international exports and internal consumption well into the twenty-first century. The social sector bears the burden of improving the population's access to better health services, improved infrastructure, including water and waste management, roads, and communications. And the administrative and governance issues of the new democracy are equally obvious, perceived from the perspectives of both the governing and the governed. Without access to "the word," there is little hope of Malians feeling committed to the decisions made and directions taken by the country's authorities. In some manner, all these sectors trace back to the ability of Mali's schools and broader education system to help mold the country's population into a productive, civic-minded, and individually-motivated citizenry.

The challenges faced by the education sector, and the country as a whole, are immense, as they try to turn Mali's new national enthusiasm and vision into improved well-being for all of its citizens. A great deal of flexibility is demanded from the schooling system, an

institution that has endured and generally failed at many attempts at reform across Africa. Perhaps greatest among these is the considerable gap between the high motivation and the limited ability of Mali and its people to implement the civil, institutional, economic, and other changes necessary to bring about true progress. Situating education at the center of this effort, the most immediate matter may be that of training Mali's managers, technicians, and laborers in all sectors to perform more effectively and efficiently. As a more long-term issue, Mali and its partners must consider the vital importance of education to prepare Mali's children to become the engine of the country's future well-being. While the revolution of 1991 may have stopped the pendulum in its swing toward continued national decline, abundant training is needed at once to reverse the trajectory. A new democratic school system is needed to initiate the momentum to propel the country's fortunes forward along this new path towards its past grandeur. Mali's obvious commitment to make this happen has mustered for the government a great amount of both domestic and foreign goodwill and support, not least of which is evident in the education sector.

The first thirty years: the republic finds its way

Djénéba knows that the elders are meeting about the question of their children's schooling. For years the nearest school was in the village of Yankadi ("it's good here"), ten miles away. The school building there was old and crumbling. Two grades had to operate in the same classroom because the roof of the other had fallen in. First year classes often contained more than seventy students, and were more like exercises in crowd control than teaching.

Parents in Yérédonbougou wanting their children to go to primary school had to send them, at the age of six or seven, to stay with a family in Yankadi. Djénéba's father often spoke to her of the experience of sending Madou to school in Yankadi fifteen years before, hoping



she would understand why he did not initially want to send her to school. Her father delivered Madou to a “tutor” with two hundred-kilo sacks of millet that were meant to feed Madou for the school year. The tutor’s family ate up all the millet, and Madou went to school hungry most days. Madou found school a lonely and confusing experience, as he never learned to understand French well. He was lucky if he could get away with pretending to understand what the teacher said and parrot it back. In the end, Madou and his family were hardly disappointed when he failed at the end of the first year and was unable to return the next year. Madou’s father even felt relieved, though secretly, as he had seen too many of the village’s boys struggle through primary school only to decide that they were now “intellectuals” and hence too good to soil their hands with manual labor. They fled the village for the city only to suffer in petty commerce, hustling tourists or, worse, resorting to criminality and in some cases falling to drugs. No success stories had come from the village’s experience with school.

But village attitudes toward schooling have been changing steadily for the last five years. Supported by USAID and Save the Children, a U.S. NGO, the village of Yérédonbougou established a community school in 1992. They built the school and manage all aspects of its operations. They chose two villagers to be trained as teachers, and courses are being conducted in Bambara, the children’s mother tongue, so children learn quickly

and parents can, for the first time in their lives, follow what goes on in their children’s school.

Djénéba’s heart was satisfied as she listened to the elders reflect upon the school they had built. Her uncle, a member of the village school management committee, was expressing his relief that the villagers no longer had to send their children to Yankadi. They could now be sure that their children were not only well cared for, but that their moral education was not neglected. He pronounced his endorsement of the curriculum, which emphasized information that has meaning to the lives of both the villagers and their children.

Mali’s poverty manifests itself in the education system in several ways: less than two out of ten people over six years of age is able to read, and just over one of ten women in this range is literate. The prospects for raising this figure are dim, given that fewer than one of four children (one of six girls) eligible to attend primary school does so (the numbers are even more dismal in the rural areas). Only twenty-five of every hundred children who begin primary school continue to seventh grade. Given the high repetition, dropout, and failure rates, the government and families must invest in several decades of total schooling to produce just one high school graduate. For those who do manage to attend and persist in their formal schooling, the quality of education they receive poses an equally formidable set of problems. With very low average expenditures per child in primary school, students face learning conditions characterized by poorly-trained and supervised teachers, overcrowded and poorly-maintained buildings, and few or no books or other basic pedagogical materials. The effects of these circumstances are exacerbated by the poverty of most students’ home environment, where their parents are unable to offer them help that might compensate for the poor instruction provided at school. To the contrary, parents generally require their children (especially their daughters) to substitute homework with household chores and secondary schooling (if they are lucky enough to have that option) with work or, for their daughters, marriage. Parents are unable to buy their children basic school supplies and are even sometimes forced to send their children to school hungry, sick, or both.



A colonial legacy

As is true of much of francophone West Africa, Mali's national education system possesses abundant remnants from the one it adopted from the French colonial period. The French system had two major purposes. First, it was designed to create a mass population that was productive and easy to govern. Basic literacy, arithmetic, and civic and moral education for all, and agricultural and vocational skills for the boys and home economics for the girls comprised a fundamental education. Students learned to grow export cash crops to enrich the colonial empire. The second purpose was to cull out from this mass a small elite group to serve and manage the colonies under the direct tutelage of the French. This group comprised the teachers, nurses, agriculture trainers, translators, clerks, and in a few cases higher-level professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and administrators.

While independence brought an autonomous government and a clean break from France, at least for the first couple of years, vestiges of the colonial system remained in several domains. First, the structure of the schools mimicked that of France, maintaining the same progression of classes and diplomas based on year-end examinations and culminating in the baccalaureate degree. It replicated the French system of highly-centralized education administration and supervision. The French have maintained since the late 1960s a strong technical assistance and funding role in the development of education in Mali in support of this system.

Second, the basic formal education program also remained French for several years, with the same

curriculum, textbooks, student evaluation and monitoring, and teacher training. For several years, French school inspectors continued to monitor and supervise Mali's schools, and French teachers taught in the country's classrooms, especially at the secondary level. However, in recent years the mentality of both the government and of the general population have begun to turn increasingly toward Malian culture.

Thirdly, the purpose of the school system was to train civil servants. Schools were not geared to mass education, and they were selective. Also, families (especially among the majority rural population) have tended not to send all of their children to the formal government school.

There were other education opportunities at hand within the village that would ensure that the child remained a productive, dedicated member of the community and the family. These were primarily the traditional "schools" associated with initiation and other cultural institutions. More recently in Mali's history, the Koranic schools have been an alternative. Another option for educating Malian children was that of apprenticeship training, which could result in a salaried or wage-earning position. This option was especially attractive during the colonial and earlier post-colonial periods. These same decisions and tendencies pertain to a large extent today, especially as access for secondary and tertiary school graduates to civil service and other salaried jobs becomes less and less likely.

Post-colonial period

During the post-colonial period, Mali has been a leader in alternative approaches to schooling, receiving help from international partners in a wide array of programs designed to link education more closely with productive activities and other sociocultural priorities. Non-formal or out-of-school education projects generally involved literacy training, and in some cases included mathematics or some related subject, provided within the context of an economic development project. These had such suggestive names as "Operation Cotton" and "Operation Peanut."

The innovative formal school initiatives may be traced in virtually all instances to the progressive

Education Reform Law of 1962, which maintained three fundamental goals: to provide a quality education to all children; to train sufficient numbers of professionals to respond to Mali's economic, social, and administrative needs; and to "decolonize the minds" of Malians: that is, to construct an education system that emphasizes national cultural and developmental priorities while remaining open to universal values. This was an education for productive citizenship that has been translated over the past thirty-five years to signify a schooling that added practical topics to the more common basic academic skills of "reading, writing, and 'rithmetic."

A litany of innovations have come and, in many cases, gone (and then sometimes come back again), including such initiatives as "ruralization and schooling," the "science center," "education for health," the use of indigenous languages in the classroom, "environmental education," and community schools. The most recent innovation represents essentially a combination of all of these aspects: the New Basic Education School, which has yet to be adopted officially by the government.

Democratizing education: first steps

Every person—child, youth and adult—shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.

—World Declaration on Education for All, March 1990.

In the closing years of the Traoré regime, Mali's reputation in international circles was getting progressively worse. In education, Mali, with the lowest peacetime primary enrollments in the world, was pointed to as a paragon of inefficiency and wasted resources. At the same time, the international community was gearing up for a major renewal of the push towards universal primary schooling, symbolized by the Jomtien Conference. Mali was a signatory to the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All, as were

almost all the other countries of the world. Mali was also one of six nations chosen to sponsor the 1990 Children's Summit in New York City, a meeting that also proclaimed children's right to education—a demonstration of the political importance of universal schooling, even if the reality was quite different.

With the 1991 *coup d'état*, things started to change. The months that followed the coup were full of new energy and enthusiasm. At the National Conference in July 1991, Malians from all walks of life came together to discuss the new society they wanted to build. As Lalla Ben Barka, head of the current education reform, puts it, "we had just come out of a national ordeal, all of us. We said, 'here's the society we're looking for.' It was a sort of therapy, a cure. But how would we actually get there?"

Shortly after the *coup d'état*, Mali held its follow-up round table to the Jomtien Conference, to propose ways to achieve basic education for all. Unlike the heady discussions of a new society at the National Conference, the results of this round table were "old school." More than 90 percent of the members of the resulting Education for All commission were government officials, with few members representing other constituencies. The major recommendations for getting to universal primary enrollment consisted of exhortations to donors to finance the entire package. Though Malians were excitedly discussing democracy, representational government, and citizen action as general themes at this time, the ideas had not yet caught on at the Ministry of Education.

At the same time, grassroots actions to increase



access to schooling were on the rise. In Bamako, where classrooms were chronically overcrowded, young unemployed graduates were establishing what they called “basic schools,” private primary schools financed by parents and housed in whatever quarters could be found. Similar initiatives were taken on a smaller scale in some rural areas, where payment was often a combination of cash, grain, and help with domestic chores or fieldwork.

Conflicting priorities

The first years of the Third Republic’s education policy were difficult. Secondary and university students, who had played a major role in the protests that brought down the Traoré regime, aggressively demanded their say in Malian politics, and the issue of stipends and scholarships became a political flash point. Mali, like other African nations, had since independence been providing substantial financial support to secondary and university students in order to carry on their studies. This policy consumed precious funds that could be used to expand and improve primary schooling, sacrificing many primary pupil-years to educate and support just one university student for one year.

The government was caught in a vise. International and domestic constituencies expected democracy to lead swiftly to expanded educational opportunity, especially at the primary level. Clearly, this was also the ardent desire of the new president, Konaré. This entailed reducing funding for higher education in favor of primary education. However, student leaders felt that an increase in stipends was due them for their definitive role in Traoré’s fall. Indeed, the new government had promised them this as part of its electoral strategy. Student strikes began in the 1991-1992 school year, and intensified to the point that normal class schedules at all levels were followed in Bamako for only about two months total in 1992 to 1993. Teachers and opposition political parties got increasingly involved in the strikes themselves. The government closed all schools in the country—from kindergarten to medical school—for a period of several weeks in the middle of the year. The first two prime ministers of the Third Republic lost their jobs during this period, largely because of the public perception

that they did not know how to handle the student unrest. In one particularly tense week of April 1993, demonstrations turned violent. The National Assembly was attacked, strategic bridges across the Niger River were occupied, and the homes of the minister of education and his director of secondary education were burned.

Many observers, comparing the Bamako scene with the ideal of village-level consensus, began asking whether Western education was weakening one of the few resources that almost every Malian community, rural and urban, has traditionally enjoyed: solidarity.

Between 1993 to 1994, the student situation was brought under control. This was due partly to the new prime minister’s firmness and to the students’ growing feeling that the strikes were hurting rather than helping their life chances. But it was also because the new government, true to its democratic leanings, realized that a principal reason the school caused such antisocial behavior was precisely because it had been conceived as a colonial institution outside of traditional Malian society. As such, the school system had little sense of responsibility to the larger culture. During the 1993-1994 school year, the government started working in earnest to bring the school back into the community and to bring the community back into the school.

The first step was to create a new Ministry of Basic Education, which covers the first nine years of schooling, and appoint Adama Samassékou as minister. This nomination was a clear indication to the government and the people of Mali that President Konaré intended both to expand basic education and to launch a *rapprochement* between individual communities and their school.

Several such innovations had already been attempted, but none had moved beyond the pilot phase. For over five years, the ministry had experimented with a “convergent methodology,” teaching in students’ mother tongues and with more “student-oriented” pedagogical methods, with encouraging results. Two American NGOs in Mali were working with communities in projects to help shape Minister Samassékou’s eventual policy. Save the Children, working in the south in the Sikasso Region, had piloted four “village schools,” patterned on the Bangladesh Rural Action Committee schools, which were specifically designed to make primary schooling affordable at the village level. World Education, with USAID

funding, had begun working on the democratization and training of parent-teacher associations, which under the Traoré regime had been among the most corrupt of local institutions. USAID, seeing the potential of these two organizations' approaches, funded expansions of both projects during 1993 to 1995. Between 1994 and 1995, the number of village schools had increased to sixty-two, and by November 1996 there were over four hundred, and in the next four years fifteen hundred more will be funded. The number of assisted parent teacher associations had multiplied. Save the Children and World Education established strong partnerships with Malian NGOs. With USAID support, World Education, Save the Children, and five Malian NGOs established the *Groupe Pivot/Education de Base* (Pivot Group/Basic Education), a consortium of NGOs working in education.

A third NGO, Plan International, was working with the Ministry of Basic Education to pilot Centers for Education for Development, which would offer a three-year literacy and vocational skills course to children who had dropped out of primary school or who had never had a chance to enroll.

Nouvelle Ecole Fondamentale—NEF

In October 1994, the minister of basic education, eager to find a formula that would harmonize all these different initiatives—that is, to simultaneously promote and regulate them—announced the new primary school policy, *Nouvelle Ecole Fondamentale* (NEF or its English term New Basic Education School). The NEF initiative aimed to provide all Malian children with a minimum of six years of schooling in harmony with their home cultures. In many ways, Malian policymakers acknowledge, the NEF revived the post-independence principles of the reform of 1962: quality primary education for all children, relevant to the culture and economic level of Mali's poor rural majority, but also opening the door to the modern world.

Perhaps the key question facing education officials was how and why the NEF could succeed, when the reform of 1962 achieved only mixed results. Pedagogically, the NEF included several innovations. The first is convergent methodology, piloted for ten years in the Ségou region. In this methodology, initial pri-

mary instruction is in national languages, rather than in French. Early comprehension by young students is thus accelerated and facilitated, and students are prepared for the life that most likely awaits them in their village or neighborhood. Over the six-year primary school cycle, instruction is gradually switched into French, so that by the end of the cycle, pupils have gained a spoken and written mastery of both languages. A USAID-sponsored evaluation of the convergent methodology experimental schools in 1990 showed that students who started studying in their own language and subsequently moved into French did better than those who started in French.

A second, less prominent aspect of the convergent methodology is the adoption of learner-centered methods that engage students actively in their education rather than treat them as passive receptors. The policy sought to humanize teacher-student relations, an approach that contrasts with the prevailing model of teacher behavior in primary schools across much of Africa (rote transmission of facts within an environment of strict discipline). The convergent methodology promotes methods rarely practiced in any sort of Malian schools, including autonomous group work and self-paced learning. The implementation of this approach and the attainment of the strong results came



at a high cost. It involved considerable training (including overseas instruction) of teachers and great investment in the development and production of instructional materials, as well as other expenses.

The NEF also promoted the concept of an “enlarged partnership” around the school, with three groups of partners. The school’s “social partners” are the parents and communities they serve. The school’s “operational partners” are organizations outside the ministry that support the expansion and enrichment of the school system, including local and international NGOs and Islamic organizations. The school’s “technical and financial partners” are the international donor community, in which USAID, the World Bank, the French government, and the U.N. agencies figure prominently. No longer would the primary school be the “closed shop” of the Ministry of Education; each of these partners would have a large and creative role to play.

The implementation of the NEF reform nationwide represented major challenges. Not the least of these was the burden placed by the complete retooling of the curriculum upon teacher training institutions, both pre-service and in-service, curriculum development units, and the ministry’s testing and evaluation group. This situation was heightened by the need to undertake these changes in many different languages. Since the urban middle class dominates the media and strongly influences the National Assembly, national-level debate about the NEF has reflected their “not-yet-convinced” attitude. In 1995 the minister presented his case for the NEF in a televised hearing before the National Assembly, and he received a markedly cool reaction, which prompted many to ask whether the policy would ever be implemented.

Building consensus around school reform: *Refondation* and the Ten-Year Plan

As some have pointed out, the critical questions and skepticism about the NEF are also signs of a healthy democracy. The ministry has been motivated to seek a wider political consensus on the necessity for school reform. In 1995, the *Commission pour la Refondation du système éducatif* (Commission for the “Re-creation” of the Educational System) was established. A clear

sign of progress since the coup, this commission includes a much broader group of stakeholders than the one set up in 1991 to promote education for all. The commission includes politicians, religious leaders, intellectuals, media figures, teachers’ and students’ organizations, business people, and officials of critical ministries outside education, such as the Ministry of Finance. A former director of primary education was named to head the commission.

But even as the commission began its work, it became clear that the targets of the discussion were being shifted in several directions. First, important donors, led by the World Bank, wanted a more reflective, methodically planned reform that would treat the education system in its entirety (which was difficult for either Ministry of Education to do on its own). Second, the government wanted to negotiate a comprehensive, multi-donor ten-year education plan, rather than juggle many small projects with differing objectives covering different, shorter periods. Third, it became clear that the consultations started by the commission should include the countryside, necessitating missions to all eight regions of rural Mali. For these reasons, the Ministry of Planning, hierarchically above both ministries of education, set up the Ten-Year Program for the Development of Education (ProDec). ProDec’s one-year mandate was to consult with all levels of Mali’s population, in all its regions, on what they wanted from the educational system, and to commission studies on more than a dozen critical aspects of the educational system. It was to synthesize profiles of the types of students and skills that Malians want from the educational system—all before the elections scheduled for mid-1997.

ProDec team members visited many communities throughout Mali, and held wide-ranging consultations with community members and leaders, NGOs and associations, and local and regional officials. It has included some of the most fractious voices in the educational debates, such as student groups, teachers unions, and opposition parties.

Though ProDec officials claim that a clear, consensual profile of the type of schools that Mali wants is emerging through the process, they are still vague on its exact contours and the kinds of students and skills it will produce. What seems clear is that ProDec discussions will result in more of an incremental reform than the NEF did, more of a compromise



between donor expectations, political realities, and stakeholder aspirations.

The role of USAID: promoting an education of quality for all

After long discussions with the NGO, the elders of Yérédonbougou agreed to give girls equal access to schooling. Djénéba was one of these children, and she is now in her fifth year of schooling.

Now she listened as her uncle made the surprising admission that he was extremely pleased that his daughter and niece were in school, how impressed he was with their progress, and how they had not, as he had once feared, grown distant from their families because of being in school. “Our daughters,” he declared, “will bring benefits from their schooling not only to their own families, but to all of us, to our village, and to the whole country. They will raise healthier children, they will engage more actively in income-generating activities, and they will contribute actively to the betterment of the village.”

Djénéba has another reason to be proud of Yérédonbougou’s school: her mother is one of

its two teachers. Though her parents had never considered sending her to school herself, Djénéba’s mother had learned to read and to do math in a literacy class at night. Her hard work enabled her to become a teacher, and has given her new status in the eyes of her neighbors—and she is a new kind of role model for her daughters and nieces.

The role of the U.S. Government in both bringing far-reaching, substantive improvements to Mali’s national education reform and in creating a vision for the sector’s future development has been significant and meaningful in many ways. USAID has joined the World Bank in taking the lead among the donor community to help define and pursue Mali’s goals of more children in schools of higher quality. In collaboration with several bilateral donors, the two agencies undertook the design and implementation of the Fourth Education Project, begun in 1989. During the five years of the project’s initial phase, the ministry was able to mobilize community members to contribute up to 25 percent in funds, materials, and labor to build nine hundred fifty-seven new classrooms and to renovate nine hundred fourteen existing, dilapidated classrooms. At the same time, USAID provided to the ministry technical expertise, equipment, materials, and training valued at \$25 million to improve the quality of the instruction delivered in schools across the country. Specifically, this assistance helped to develop new instructional materials, strategies, and technologies to promote their adoption by teachers through the operation of an innovative in-service training approach, and to distribute textbooks directly to students and their teachers. USAID also provided \$16 million in the form of community school grants, for a project total of \$41 million.

The ministry’s capacity to plan and manage these and other aspects of the national fundamental education system was strengthened through direct training to Malian counterparts responsible for such functions. USAID further provided direct technical and material assistance to two units within the ministry with key responsibility for measuring and analyzing the level of success achieved in: assuring suitable conditions for learning in all regions of the country (including most prominently infrastructure, teachers, and pedagogical materials); and ultimately promoting satisfactory learn-



ing by the students. The former involved the establishment of a management information systems operation, providing basic information related to such things as enrollment, the distribution and quality of resources, the location of schools (the “school map”), as well as of communities needing schools. The latter capacity entailed provision of training and technical assistance to the pedagogical research and innovations division of the National Pedagogical Institute to provide the ministry with regular monitoring and feedback related to the quality of instruction and learning occurring in the primary level classroom.

Finally, USAID’s participation in the Basic Education Expansion Program (BEEP) raised the level of governmental and community sensitivity to the need to correct the extremely low levels of participation and performance in school by Mali’s girls. Policy work was done that resulted in an increase of the number of girls enrolled in first grade. Because of USAID’s efforts, girls’ education offices were set up at the national and regional levels. USAID surpassed most of its targets for increasing girls’ enrollment by employing a combination of a “social marketing,” or awareness raising, campaign and more direct promotional activities, such as the use of prizes and subsidies to reward girls’ participation and success in schooling. While long-term positive effects of this and the other initiatives on teaching and learning in the classroom have yet to be confirmed, there does seem to be an increased enthusiasm about schooling (including for girls) at the local level, both among the ministry’s regional authorities and at the community level.

USAID is supporting other education efforts as well that incorporate more explicitly this manner of

community development. Community school projects amended and extended the contributions designed and managed under BEEP by employing more drastic innovations. Some of these schools teach in French, while others have worked on the development of a curriculum and materials in the mother tongue of the students, Bambara. The Bambara language schools employ largely un-schooled, literate villagers, trained specifically to deliver lessons to children in remote villages. Perhaps most novel, the community schools initiative transfers many of a school’s management functions directly to the community, including such responsibilities as providing basic materials and building the school, recruiting *and paying* teachers, maintaining the school’s facilities, monitoring the teacher’s performance, and organizing the school calendar. Finally, the community schools project took BEEP’s objective on girls’ schooling to its logical limit, insisting that a village send boys and girls to school in equal numbers.

USAID helped the ministry create a model of a decentralized school system in Mali, placing the ministry’s National Pedagogical Institute in the role of technical resource to the regional school directorates as well as to teachers in the classroom. Through this intervention, USAID has helped the ministry support teachers and their respective supervisors to identify, implement, and monitor improved language-learning practices in the crucial early years of primary schooling.

USAID, the World Bank, and other donors are assisting the government with its ten-year planning exercise, ProDEC. USAID helps Malians responsible for this task to incorporate a widely representative sample of voices into both the process and the product of the eventual plan.

The road from here: education for a sustainable democratic future for Mali

Djénéba listens as the discussion gradually gets to its real point: the moment has come for the village to decide what to do with their children after primary school. Djénéba and her classmates, now in the fifth grade, will

take an exam next year to be eligible to enter intermediate school. Some will pass and leave the village to go to the nearest intermediate school, fifteen miles away. Others will not pass, or will decide that they wish to stay with their families in Yérédonbougou.

Now, after five years of managing and reflecting on their children's schooling, the parents of Yérédonbougou are beginning to take more active roles. They have an idea of which children are likely to succeed on the exams, and they have decided to use some of the proceeds from this year's cotton sales to cover the costs of sending these children to intermediate school. They have discussed with the teachers and with the pupils themselves what this sacrifice means to the village, and what the village hopes to gain from the children's learning. Equally importantly, the village is discussing how to build on the learning of those children who will not continue in the formal educational system. These children are about twelve years old: marriage and parenthood will come in the next five or ten years, but according to traditional norms, none of them will be considered elders or leaders until they are forty years old or more. The elders themselves are beginning to realize that the village must adapt, forging new partnerships between the wise but illiterate "gray-beards" and the intelligent but unskilled young school leavers.

Djénéba pauses for a moment to ask herself which of these paths she wants to follow: her chances of passing the test for intermediate school are good, but she doesn't know if she wants to leave her family and her village. Anyway, she tells herself, at least I may have the choice. With that thought, she hurries back down the path, as she knows her family is waiting for her.

During his trip to Mali in October 1996, Warren Christopher, then U.S. Secretary of State (the first ever to visit Mali), declared to his hosts that he had initiated his Africa tour in their country because he was "inspired by what the people of Mali have done. You have shown all of Africa and the world that freedom can unlock the door to a better future." The country has summoned the strengths and honor of its past to show the rest of Africa, along with the whole world, how a diverse people can come together to define their problems and to tackle these in a democratic manner, he said.

Mali's challenge is great, both in stature and in scope. The promise made by the Third Republic is to provide all of Mali's citizens a place at the table at which the path to Mali's future is forged. Embracing Mali's transethnic cultural hallmark of "passing the word" to craft decisions from consensus, the government has created several national consultative fora and processes by which to give voice to all points of view. The successful execution of the national elections in mid-1997 should go far toward confirming the legitimacy of this approach.

Less clear, though, is the ultimate purpose of this new democracy; the "to what end?" question. In a country that ranks in the bottom five on the U.N. Development Program's Human Development Rankings, the prospect of a vote may feed one's sense of justice, but it will not fill one's belly, relieve the crushing burden of a woman's daily routine, or create work. Neither the rhetoric of the country's leadership nor that of its international development partners provides a coherent vision of where Mali's path to economic security lies. The story of Mali today is that of a



new democracy. Not to minimize the significance of this accomplishment, this plot-line risks being overwhelmed quickly if the people's share of the political pie is not matched by a similar sort of equitable allocation of the economic pie.

Given this national focus, the education reform evokes calls for the creation of Mali's new citizen, able to participate fully and capably in the country's civic life. Many of those directly involved in the reform either overlook the schools' role in building a secure economic future for Mali or speak of this aspect in vague terms. While there can be no doubt that the importance of economic development is valued, its relegation to the status of an "assumed truth" deprives it of a coherent strategy for implementation. How can schooling help prepare the future economic actors of Mali at the same time it is preparing its future political citizens?

This somewhat dim view may be brightened, however, by listening to the parents who do choose to send their children to school. They are not thinking about how their sons and daughters will be better able to participate in the democratic process. Rather, they want to maximize the prospects of their children's succeeding within the context of their immediate community environment. They are seeking an education that will help their sons and daughters to have greater access to future knowledge and skills by which to secure their futures and those of their families.

As the reform moves control of Mali's education system to the regions and beyond, in some cases even as far as the community, the political agenda of the government and donors, and the economic situation of the families should converge. The government and donors have begun to trace an education system for Mali that will help the new democracy in important ways. In some cases, the reform activities have even begun to color in the outlines. The education officer for USAID's Mali mission perceives the most important of these initiatives to be:

- the increased responsibility for school management placed in communities, which gives Mali a model that is already working within the local context for decentralization.
- the greater capacity of communities to meet the demands of this role, through training and capacity

development of parent associations to have a say in the management of the schools.

- the gains made in girls schooling, institutionally, as well as in terms of increased numbers and policy.
- the increased ability of the ministry to manage the national education system, including a better handle on relevant information by which to make informed decisions; and
- the introduction of better teaching into the classroom to promote better learning, especially as relates to the use of local languages as the medium of instruction in the early grades.

The gains for democracy accrue not only in the new competencies, knowledge, and outlook of the next generation, but also in the devolution of responsibilities for the school to the local community, an inherently democratic development.

To bring a more global perspective to this appreciation, Mali's current education reform efforts may be admired most strongly for the way they have been defined along indigenous terms and priorities. The government is doing, as a nation, what it is proposing communities accomplish at the local level—taking control of education. Local languages, local control, and locally-defined priorities seem to be supplanting the vestiges of the colonial education heritage at an accelerating pace. The primary school is becoming a Malian institution—the preferred goal for any country.

This Malian success may also be interpreted as a success of the donors, who have not only helped to define and install a conducive framework for these sectoral developments, but have provided considerable technical, financial, *and moral* support to boost the system's and communities' capacity to reach this level. Notwithstanding the progress of the Ministry of Basic Education to refine and execute its reform, the international donor community, and prominently USAID, will continue to have a vital role to play for many years to come. The education sector in Mali has not yet reached the level of a critical mass by which the present momentum may be maintained. Even though there are neither adequate technical nor financial resources, Mali is taking the lead in defining a school that is perfectly adapted to its own needs, and deserves

continued donor support in this endeavor.

The challenge Mali faces, with its donor partners, is considerable: merging two meritorious, but quite different political traditions—the long, strong heritage of consensus and acceptance upon which Mali’s greatness was constructed and the new heritage of the country’s infant democracy—within a context of enormously limited resources and great need. The contribution of education to resolving this contradiction can be prodigious, but it cannot be limited to handing over control to local communities. The outcome of this strategy could well be little more than local control of schools that are as poorly-constructed and of as low quality as today, if not worse. Even more problematic is the potential for progress to be highly localized, with inequitable quality matching inequitable distribution of wealth—a situation that many U.S. communities confront.

Therefore, the picture must be completed. Mali’s education reform must be about more than the democratization of the system and the preparation of the country’s future citizens. A few current initiatives shine light on what these other aspects might be. The Ministry of Trade and Tourism’s vocational and technical training capacity addresses directly the economic purpose of education. Development and incorporation of a primary classroom, and of a comprehensive environmental education curriculum will help prepare students to maintain the supreme source of their own and their country’s livelihood—the rivers, the forests, and the arable lands. USAID’s efforts in health, income-generation, and agricultural development must also be



perceived as integral factors in the process of consolidating and consecrating Mali’s infant democracy. As Mali and the donors continue to establish and strengthen the democratic structures for the governance of Mali’s schools, the most likely next phase seems to be to build substance upon those structures that will move the students towards a palpable aim of social and economic security. Surely primary school will not create ready-made workers, but it must be seen as critical to the preparation of graduates who are ready to learn to be the producers that Mali currently requires. The assumption is clearly that this will happen. But it won’t, at least not until it graduates from an assumption to an explicit, strategic plan.

The achievement and maintenance of democracy is a magnificent accomplishment, but the strength of a democracy is not in its attainment—look at Russia, or even the United States—but in its illumination of a path by which the people might attain together an acceptable level of welfare and well-being. Therein lies the next chapter of the Mali story.

5. Swaziland: An Education System on the Path to Self-Sufficiency

His Majesty the King of Swaziland has summoned the nation to the Royal Kraal. The news spreads through his kingdom like the grass fires that race along its night-blanketed mountain sides as farmers prepare for spring planting. It travels along formal networks—radio, television, and newspapers—and informal ones—the powerful African grapevine. Speculation is rife that the Ngwenyama (the Lion), King Mswati III, will replace his prime minister. Of course, there is no question that the new head of the government will be a Dlamini, a member of the huge royal family. But which Dlamini will it be?

Swazis of all backgrounds gather in the kraal (corral) as the appointed hour approaches. Women and men, rich and poor, urban and rural, uneducated and educated, come in hundreds to hear their monarch. Many men have already gathered in the regiments, traditional groupings that now provide a social bond for males willing to answer the occasional summons to work in the king's fields. Finally, the time is right and the monarch appears to tell Swaziland the name of its new political leader.

This defining moment exemplifies a unique aspect of this tiny African country, the smallest in the southern hemisphere and one of three functioning monarchies on the continent. Swaziland embodies the powerful coexistence of two distinct cultures, two separate political and social traditions. On the one hand, Swaziland is a traditional African kingdom that can trace its history back for centuries and its human roots to the early Stone Age. On the other hand, it is a modern, Western-style political structure based on the British model of a constitutional monarchy. Swaziland is unique in that the two traditions function as equal but distinct partners. The prime minister serves as the head of a parliamentary government that functions like Westminster. Yet, the prime minister serves at the real (not merely formal) pleasure of his king. When Mswati III decides that Swaziland would do better under different political leadership, he chooses the new prime minister and he announces his choice. He is account-



able to no one. This king is a true ruler with tangible power.

The dichotomy is reflected elsewhere in Swaziland. At first glance, the outsider sees a small, but recognizably Western country, with courts of law, a legislature, an economy, and an education system that clearly owe allegiance to their British roots. Swazi tradition is visible in colorful ceremonies: the Bemanti people traveling by foot to Mozambique to collect the foam of the waves, renowned for its medicinal and mystic powers, in preparation for the great Incwala (first fruit) ceremony; male youths gathering the sacred Lusekwane shrub for the King's enclosure at the same ceremony; and unbetrothed maidens displaying their beauty during the colorful Umhlanga, or Reed Dance, where for many decades Swazi kings chose new brides.

Yet it soon becomes clear that traditional life in this modern nation is far from a mere show for tourists. At the very least, tradition is an equal partner in Swazi society. A Swazi man who wishes to marry may choose to do so under civil law, in which case he must take only one wife. Or, he may follow traditional rites, in which case he can (and almost certainly will) be polygamous. In certain circumstances, a Swazi accused of a crime can be tried either in a civil court, under its British-derived code of justice, or in a traditional ("national") court, in front of a chief and his

advisers. At government ministries, Swazi civil servants in Western business clothes mix with colleagues wearing the Mahiya traditional costume, essentially two light, patterned cloth wraps for the lower and upper body. Asked how he decided which style of dress to wear on a given day, one senior official at the Ministry of Education replied with a smile, “The weather.” Swazi dress is demonstrably cooler.

Swaziland’s duality can be a mixed blessing. Many Swazis argue that their traditions slow progress in important areas such as the status of women or democratization. Furthermore, for outsiders, if not for Swazis themselves, the two worlds can give policy-making and planning a surreal flavor. When a government minister who is also a royal prince makes a decision to grant (or not to grant) a concession to workers in a labor dispute, is he operating on the basis of cabinet guidance or palace intervention? No one from the outside can ever know. Swazi decision-making is a classic black-box system. One can observe what goes in and what comes out, but never what happens inside.

Nevertheless, the existence of such vital traditional systems in a modern nation has offered many benefits to this small African country. It has provided a cultural anchor to help Swaziland ride out the kinds of social and political storms that have all too frequently swamped other African lands. It has served as a social compass that has helped guide Swazis into the twentieth century without destroying Swaziland’s ancient character. Other advantages have also contributed to the country’s success, not the least of which is the existence of a single tribe, the Swazis, and the unifying influence of a single language, siSwati. On balance, the strong social fabric of Swaziland helps explain its unusual status as one of few African countries that has enjoyed relatively uninterrupted stability and prosperity since independence.

This article examines Swaziland’s development progress since the 1960s and the role that foreign assistance has played in that progress. It looks particularly at the story of basic education, the foundation on which a country places social and economic progress. The review begins by briefly locating Swaziland geographically, economically, and historically. It examines the development of Swaziland’s education system since independence, then looks at the specific contributions that USAID has made. It assesses the impact of foreign assistance on the country’s education develop-

ment and discusses lessons that others can learn from this record. Finally, it asks Swazis to speak to those who have contributed the funds from which they have benefited.

Swaziland in perspective

Swaziland is a landlocked country in Southern Africa, bordered on the east by Mozambique and on all other sides by South Africa. Smaller than Massachusetts, Swaziland is only about one hundred ten miles from north to south at its longest point. It stretches ninety miles from east to west. This small, egg-shaped land contains such a variety of climates and beautiful scenery that one can perhaps excuse its inhabitants for comparing their country to the Garden of Eden.

Abundant natural resources—rivers, forests, farmland, and minerals—give Swaziland economic potential disproportionate to its size. As a result, the country is an island of relative prosperity on a continent where poverty is still all too common. Although it is the second smallest sovereign state in mainland Africa, at \$1,160, Swaziland has one of the continent’s highest per capita income levels.

This is not to say that no clouds darken the horizon. One problem is a growing sense of concern that the economic situation is soon likely to become worse. In the past few years, Swazi taxpayers have watched a succession of current account surpluses be transformed into annual deficits, swelling from \$15 million in 1992 to a projected shortfall of more than \$100 million in 1998. Inflation stood at 14.7 percent per year in 1995. An estimated 30 percent of the labor force is unemployed, with the small number of new jobs created each year unable to absorb even school graduates into the formal sector. Moreover, the urban labor force has become increasingly militant, with several general strikes in recent years.

The country’s annual rate of population growth, at 3.5 percent one of the highest in Africa, severely strains social services as well as economic development. It is the primary reason that Swaziland’s gross national product has declined, in real terms, at an average annual rate of 1.3 percent. Extreme inequalities of income distribution, seen elsewhere in Africa, are also present in Swaziland. More than two-thirds of

the resident population comprises families earning generally poor incomes from cash crops or subsistence agriculture on small plots. The condition of the rural poor has been largely unimproved by periods of rapid growth since independence.

The 1990s have brought political as well as economic turbulence to the tiny kingdom, with a growing opposition movement and calls for multiparty politics. Even so, compared with its sister countries in Africa, Swaziland has enjoyed relatively peaceful (albeit slow) evolution towards an increasingly democratic system. On September 6, 1968, Swaziland, a British protectorate since 1903, was restored its independence. The king at that time, Sobhuza II, continued to rule as a constitutional monarch until his death in August 1982.

King Sobhuza's sixty-one-year reign was generally seen as a period of wise government and peaceful progress. It was King Sobhuza who instructed his subjects to preserve the good in their culture while he steered Swaziland to full membership in the community of modern nations. Hence, Swaziland has not suffered the military coups, debilitating wars, or the more blatant forms of human rights abuses that some of its closest neighbors have experienced. In harmony with much that characterizes Swazi society, its political evolution has been a deliberate, step-by-step march into the twentieth century without losing the essence of its special past. Swaziland's development has enjoyed the blessings of peace.

Development of Swaziland's education system

Education is not compulsory in Swaziland, but it is highly valued by parents who see success in school as a key to unlocking prosperity's door. The education system has clear roots in a Western, and particularly a British, model. Primary education begins when children are six years old, although in practice there are wide variations in children's ages when entering school. Under the current arrangement primary school lasts for seven years, at which time there is a national "leaving exam," the Swaziland Primary Certificate (SPC). (English becomes the language of instruction at Grade 4.) There then follows three years of secondary school, culminating in the Junior Certificate (JC)

exam. A final two years of high school leads to the O-Level (for ordinary level) examination. The Swaziland Examinations Council develops both the SPC and JC exams locally. The O-Level exam still comes from England, although there are often calls for it, too, to be localized.

Following British practice, only children who pass each of these examinations receive a certificate and are eligible to move to the next level of schooling. In this sense the leaving exams are equivalent to American school diplomas. The difference is that under the Swazi/British arrangement children who complete one level (for example, primary school), but do not pass the corresponding leaving exam, do not receive any written recognition for their effort or accomplishments. The leaving exams are norm-referenced, which means that children are marked in comparison with each other. Thus, it is inevitable that some children fail, no matter how much they may have learned. This has obvious disadvantages. On the other hand, norm-referenced exams serve as useful filtering mechanisms. For example, since there are not nearly enough places at Swaziland's two university campuses to absorb all high school graduates, the O-Level exam is used to select the entrants.

Education progress since independence

According to the twenty-fifth annual report of the Ministry of Education:

The Government's goal since independence in 1968 has been to develop the human resource base of the Swazi Nation. In this regard much progress has been made. . . . Classroom space has doubled, the number of pupils has increased threefold and the number of teachers fourfold. In fact growth has accelerated in all aspects of education development. Many new programs have been developed, planned and executed.

Leonard Lukhele is the Swazi educator responsible for administration at the Examinations Council of Swaziland. When independence arrived, he was already serving as an assistant inspector of schools. In 1974, he took over as head of the Primary Curriculum Unit. With assistance from USAID, he eventually went



on to master's and post-master's graduate studies. Lukhele noted that prior to independence there were three separate systems of education in Swaziland for Europeans, Euro-Africans (colored or mixed-race), and Africans. In 1966, the three were amalgamated, and the government adopted the European system. This was to the disadvantage of many Africans, who did not possess the requisite materials and tools to efficiently administer the European system.

However, despite inherited disparities, Swaziland's post-independence education record has been exemplary. In addressing the challenges of developing a new education system, Swaziland's first objective was education for every Swazi child. The ministry's report states that "in the first two decades of independent development, emphasis was placed on building the capacity to support equitable access to education for all boys and girls. One hundred percent gross enrollment was achieved at the first level of education in the mid-1980s, meaning that sufficient places were available for the total school-age population." At independence, Swaziland counted three hundred fifty-eight primary schools, with an enrollment of more than sixty-two thousand children. Twenty-five years later, there were five hundred twenty-six schools and enrollment had risen to almost one hundred seventy-two thousand children. A 1991 survey indicated that, on average, each primary school child possessed four textbooks.

Teacher training kept pace with the system expan-

sion, an important requirement to ensure quality as well as quantity. In 1968, there were a few more than sixteen hundred primary school teachers. As enrollments expanded, so did the teacher force. By 1976, some 30 percent of all primary school teachers were untrained. However, the Ministry of Education successfully reversed this trend, so that in 1995 only 9 percent of almost six thousand primary teachers were untrained. The pupil-teacher ratio, which stood at forty to one in the early 1970s, decreased to thirty-three to one in 1993.

Despite advances, problems persisted. High rates of repetition and dropout resulted in crowded classrooms that kept many children out of school. As a result, attention was shifted in the 1990s to improving the efficiency of the entire system while improving the quality of the learning process.

Commenting on a quarter-century of education development, M. E. Vilakazi, principal secretary for the Ministry of Education, noted that one of the major changes is that education has been systematized in the sense that the ministry is now aware of what is happening in the schools. There is order. "We know there is a curriculum that is being taught, and we are examining the curriculum. We know there are teachers teaching there. We have decentralized the administration. There are people nearer to the schools who are checking on what is happening there."

The principal secretary further commented that Swazi teachers are now far better qualified than in the past. Moreover, the people of Swaziland are more aware of their education needs. There are schools almost everywhere in Swaziland and the Swazis know they have to send their children to school. This, the principal secretary asserted, has been a major achievement.

The development has caused a marked improvement in the Swazis' standard of living. Empowered through education, they now have greater expectations. "There are certain things they expect the political system to deliver, because people are enlightened through education. That's why these days you hear a lot of talk about democracy."

The principal secretary concluded:

We have had a fairly stable country for a very long time. We've not had any revolution. Even changes, when they come, are smooth. For

example, I am maybe the fourth or the fifth principal secretary in the Ministry of Education. No one has been murdered or chased away. And because of that our system has had almost no disruptions. That has helped a great deal.

Justice Nsibande, Vilakazi's predecessor, is himself a teacher. "My background and my career was in education," he noted. "I never changed." Nsibande began as a young teacher before independence. In 1968, he was an active member of the teachers' association and a faculty member at William Pitcher Teacher Training College.

When he retired from education in 1991, Justice Nsibande had been principal secretary for twelve years. Retirement was not to be as relaxing as he might have expected, however. He was elected to the new Parliament, and there he was elected speaker. He noted wryly, "Well, you retire from one activity into another."

So Nsibande found himself the speaker of Parliament for Swaziland, a position closely parallel to the American speaker of the house. Thus, the speaker looked over the history of Swaziland's education development from two important perspectives: from the top of the Ministry of Education as well as from a senior political position.

The speaker recalled that in 1968, the Swazis desired to change the system from one with a British orientation to one with a Swazi orientation. The reform exercise was two-pronged: first, to change the curriculum so that it was Swazi in character, and then to develop expertise within the Swazi people themselves so that they should be the ones promoting changes, the ones writing and developing the programs. "I must say that we were very lucky, because we were able to do both."

With the assistance of international agencies ("the King's friends") the curriculum was tackled first. "We established a curriculum center of which we are proud today. It is second to none in the region. Combined with that was training of curriculum developers and

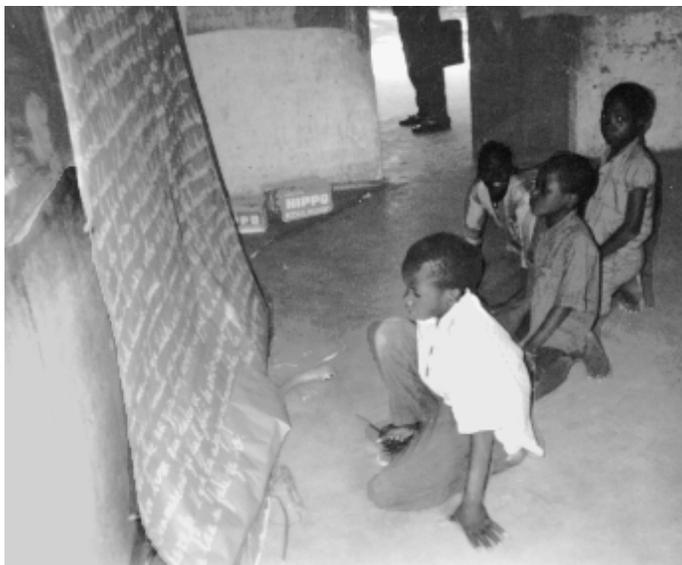
writers. Today's curriculum is written by Swazis. One is very proud of that," said Nsibande. School administrators and teachers were given training in the new curriculum so they would be more favorably disposed towards the reforms that were being carried on. Reflecting upon USAID's Educational Policy, Management, and Technology (EPMT) project, the speaker continued, "In the same way we then realized that we needed to improve administration and management of programs. Again we had another program. I'm happy to say that I learned that these programs have worked very well."

From his perspective in Parliament, Justice Nsibande confirmed the link between education and good government earlier identified by his successor. He noted that the development of the education system has had a strong impact on the economy, both in terms of the number of people who have qualified to take up jobs within the country and in people's greater awareness of their government. "Before I came to Parliament I wasn't aware that in fact parliamentarians are groping with the same problems as in education. But now I realize that without an educated population, good governance may not be possible. If you don't have a good school system, you cannot have good governance."

Peterson Dlamini, the current Principal of Ngwane Teacher Training College, was still a high school student at independence. He began teaching at primary school in 1974. After studying in England under Brit-



ish Council sponsorship, he became a school head and then a primary school inspector. He earned his bachelor's degree at Eastern Michigan University, then a master's in education at Bridgewater State College in Massachusetts, all through USAID. In other words, foreign donors have sponsored all of his post-secondary studies. From a teacher's perspective, Dlamini agreed that tremendous progress has been made. He recalled that when he first started teaching in the 1970s, each teacher was provided a rigid syllabus and told what to teach. A teacher had no input in the formulation of the syllabus or the curriculum. "That was when I started teaching. But now a teacher is fully involved in the development of the curriculum."



Dlamini further remarked that the conditions of teachers have improved immeasurably. "You know when I started teaching, I was in a mission school. My salary was far lower than that of a teacher in a government school. Now we have a Teachers' Service Commission that employs all the teachers in the country. Things are more properly organized than they were when I started teaching."

USAID's contributions

The United States contributes 7 percent of the \$18 billion in development aid that the world offers annually to Sub-Saharan Africa. Though this is no small amount (\$1.3 billion in 1992), it is only a small fraction of the total aid provided to the region. Therefore, USAID has sought to leverage its investment by supporting programs that offer the possibility of positive impact out of proportion to their cost. In the education sector, this has meant laying a solid foundation at the primary level. USAID's contributions here have been particularly valuable because for many years other donors mostly ignored basic and primary education in favor of secondary schools and universities.

USAID began planning its assistance to education in Swaziland in 1970, just two years after independence. In 1973, it awarded a contract to the American Institutes for Research to provide a curriculum adviser at the Ministry of Education for two years, focusing on

primary schools in particular. Three major education projects followed: the Primary Curriculum Development project (1975-1983), the Teacher Training project (1984-1990), and the EPMT project (1990-1996). Training for Swazis in Swaziland and the United States supported the work of all these ventures.

Primary Curriculum Development project

Swaziland faced numerous challenges when it took over the reins of its own education system in 1968. Not the least of these challenges was the question of the curriculum.

In the United States during the late 1950s and early 1960s, educators developed a new approach to writing curricula. Instructional objectives were no longer to be written in terms of general topics ("multiplication") but in precise terms of student behavior ("mentally multiply single digit numbers"). This approach both stated precisely what students were to learn at each grade level and gave more guidance to the teacher on how to teach and to assess students' performance. It was a major change in pedagogy that Swaziland was unfamiliar with.

The curriculum inherited from the British was only loosely defined in documents known as "syllabi," essentially lists of topics for the teacher to cover. Dr. Irma Allen, a Mexican-born American who has lived in Swaziland since 1960 and who served as a technical adviser to each of USAID's three major education projects, recalled her early days as a teacher in Manzini

Central School. “When I first arrived I asked some questions about the curriculum.” Allen’s inquiry was met with blank stares. The word “curriculum” was not even used. Teaching was driven by a syllabus. The educators did not participate in its development, nor did they question it. It was simply accepted as part of their job that they had to follow the syllabus.

Elmoth Dlundlu is Swaziland’s chief inspector for primary schools. Under the British education model, special officers known as inspectors visit schools regularly. In essence, they are supervisors. They monitor the performance of teachers (like police officers) and assist teachers where possible (like counselors). No one ever refers to Dlundlu by his first name (Elmoth), or even as “mister.” He is invariably addressed as “Babe,” pronounced bah-beh and literally meaning “father.” This form of address seems particularly appropriate for his position. The chief inspector of primary is the father for all primary schools in Swaziland.

Like most of his colleagues, Babe Dlundlu worked his way up the ranks from classroom teaching, serving as a headmaster, school inspector, and regional education officer before taking his current position. Along the way, Babe Dlundlu studied overseas several times under British, Canadian, and American sponsorship:

When I was teaching, we had a syllabus. It was just points, topics. You were to teach about multiplication. You had to teach about the rotation of the earth and all those things—just topics. And as teachers we had to run around, find books of our own. You collected a lot of books and then searched for the information that was relevant.

Dlundlu continued:

You did not know the level at which you had to teach because there were no objectives. You just had to teach. The objective was that children had to learn about multiplication, but how far—it was not described.

Another important issue was the relevance of the curriculum. Like most post-colonial African countries, Swaziland inherited a system that looked more towards Europe and beyond than towards its own continent. Swazi children were taught neither their

history nor their language. “We were learning about the Greeks, the British, the Russians, but very little about Swazis. The dynasty in Swaziland dates back to 1750; there’s quite a lot of history to teach,” explained Justice Nsibandé.

Irma Allen offers another example from her experience as a teacher in a Swazi high school:

I remember when I had to teach something that required ice. The lesson was on dwelling places, including Eskimos’ igloos. But none of my students had ever seen ice, and I didn’t have any. Remember there was no hydroelectric power at that time. At my farmhouse I had a kerosene fridge. I tried very hard to take ice-cubes to school so that the kids could understand what ice was. So here I was trying to make ten miles on a dirt road while I kept the ice cubes from melting.

With the introduction of siSwati in 1968, emphasis on developing siSwati writers became a priority. The first siSwati textbooks came from the curriculum center established with support from USAID.

Then there was the challenge of training Swazis to undertake curricular reforms. Leonard Lukhele recalled, “In the local scene I was the only who had been trained in the theory of curriculum development, at Leeds University in England under the sponsorship of the British Council. The rest of our chaps had not been trained.”

The Primary Curriculum Development project, the first USAID education project in Swaziland, was designed to help address the foregoing challenges. The project’s audacious scope led to its description as a high-risk venture. It lasted eight years, in two phases, at a total cost to USAID of just under \$6 million. It targeted two major objectives: establishing curriculum development systems that reflected Swaziland’s education needs, and training counterparts to carry out the work. Enhancing USAID’s contribution, the World Bank also assisted by constructing facilities, while the Africa Development Bank funded training elsewhere on the continent for staff.

During the project’s life span, USAID sponsored two external evaluations. Both reviewed the new curriculum materials for relevance to “national outcomes or education goals.” Both judged the new curriculum

and its materials to be of high quality and more relevant than what had existed previously. Teachers observed by evaluators demonstrated “overwhelming acceptance” of the new materials, and some studies suggested achievement gains by pupils using the new curriculum.

“That project made a dramatic impact,” recalled the permanent secretary. “It was one of the most significant, because before that we hadn’t had a systematic way of writing up the curriculum.”

Teacher Training project

The second major USAID project focused on teacher training. Originally scheduled to last five years beginning in 1984 with a contribution of \$5.6 million, the project was eventually extended to 1990. Described by its evaluators as a “complex venture,” the Teacher Training project was designed to improve pre-service training for student teachers and in-service training to upgrade teachers already in the field. “We attacked teacher training by putting every college faculty member into an in-service training program, trying to create a critical awareness of whatever they’re doing so that they could see the need to reform and change,” explained Speaker Nsibande. “The exposure to the new curriculum material made them more agreeable to changes and also more willing to go for further training.”

The U.S. institution providing technical assistance was Ohio University, and to this day the project is known in Swaziland as the Ohio University project. USAID’s support complemented that of Sweden, the United Kingdom, the European Economic Community, UNESCO, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The project’s strategy linked teacher training with Swaziland’s long-standing goal of universal primary education. The story of education in post-colonial Africa has, for the most part, been the story of expansion at the expense of quality. More children receive an education, but the breadth, depth, and value of what they learn diminishes as the new systems of mass education struggle to cope with greater numbers. A vicious cycle develops, wherein poor quality in schools leads to weaker graduates who, if they become teachers of the next generation, are weaker teachers. Recognizing this cycle, the USAID and Swazi project designers aimed to enhance the government’s capacity

to “produce better-qualified and more highly-motivated teachers capable of improving the quality of instruction available to Swazi students through the use of more appropriate curriculum materials and teaching methodologies.”

A critical aspect of the project’s success was its connection to the Primary Curriculum Development project, a link encouraged by USAID. Nsibande explained that with the new curriculum developed by the first project, the Swazis were also in need of new teaching methods, new approaches in each subject, and new ways of organizing students in classrooms:

You needed a different format from the previous lecture type of education. You wanted students to participate and the only way of doing that was through teacher training so that the new concept would come through and the colleges would be ready to deal with the new curriculum.

Teachers already in schools were trained at TIDCs (Teacher Innovation and Distribution Centers). At that time, the in-service department of a teachers’ college was still an upgrading department, training those teachers with low (or even no) qualifications. “There was a need to upgrade them because a lot of schools came up after independence,” recalled Israel Simelane, a Swazi educator directly involved with the Teacher Training project. The radically increased demand for teachers could not be adequately met, thus resulting in the placement of teachers with less than adequate qualifications.

At independence, Simelane was a high school student, having started first grade at the age of ten as was customary in those days. After training and working as a high school teacher, in 1985, he joined the in-service training department, which he now heads. He did his first university degree in the United Kingdom, through the British Council, then a master’s degree through USAID.

In 1986 the upgrading of unqualified teachers was phased out. By then, Ngwane Teacher Training College had begun operation and was producing teachers. William Pitcher College and Nazarene College were also producing primary school teachers. The colleges switched gears, and the project began to assist with in-service training of the qualified teachers.

The Teacher Training project also encouraged the university to introduce a bachelor of education program. At its inception, the program was used to upgrade those who were teaching in the teacher training colleges but did not have bachelors' degrees.

For in-service training, a multiplier-effect program was instituted, whereby a small group of teachers was trained to go out and train other teachers in their sister schools. The shortcoming of such a method, noted Simelane, is that when one person has to train others when he has not yet mastered the lesson himself, the one he trains may not learn what is expected. "But in any case it worked," he shrugged.

Did the Teacher Training project succeed? Speaker Nsibande certainly thought so. Many of the teacher trainers from the project continue to work in the regions. And the success of the project may have attracted support from other donors. "We started with the Swedes. Then the Americans came in. And now the British have come in because they can see there's something in the projects."

The project's final evaluation report concluded that its "major impact . . . has been reaching its objective of strengthening the primary teacher education system." The evaluation noted that the project had a significant impact on curriculum revision, the quality of teacher training, the quality of teacher performance, the Government of Swaziland's awareness of the significance of primary school education, and the Ministry of Education's dedication to primary education. Moreover, findings suggested that improvements implemented during the Teacher Training project continued to be in place and functioning.

The evaluation report noted that teacher education had become a line item in the annual government budget, that the new three and four-year pre-service training programs were continuing, and that virtually all the five hundred four primary schools in the country were reached through the in-service program. Five years later, Swaziland has held onto and extended the gains it achieved with project assistance.

Peterson Dlamini pointed out that the relationship between Ohio University and Swaziland has continued long after the end of USAID funding. And while the arrangement

between the Ministry of Education and Ohio University is now a private one, it is mutually valuable. Lecturers from the Swazi teacher training colleges, particularly Ngwane College, complete their graduate degrees through an exchange program. In turn, as many as fifteen students from Ohio University attend Ngwane College each year. "They come during teaching practice. They sleep in the dorms with our students. They interact with them and they go and teach Swazi children. I think that link is very, very positive," said Dlamini.

Educational Policy, Management and Technology project

The most recent USAID project, the EPMT project, began in 1990. "The third project came in as a direct result of the successes that we had in the curriculum and teacher training projects," recalled Justice Nsibande:

What came out was that in the ministry itself, we needed better management, better information systems, to provide feedback to teachers as to what is happening. So we thought that if we can improve, in particular, the management in the planning section of the ministry, we would facilitate some of the work that was being done in the schools.



Described by its evaluators as “an appropriate capstone to more than twenty years of USAID support to education in Swaziland,” EPMT’s objective was to improve both the quality and the efficiency of basic education. The thrust to improve quality was a continuation of the strategy underlying the two predecessor projects, while the move to enhance efficiency added a new dimension. Thus, EPMT targeted the high rates of repetition and dropouts that dramatically increase the costs of education and limit access to schools.

To implement the project, USAID chose the Institute for International Research (IIR), an organization related to the American Institutes for Research, USAID’s first education contractor in Swaziland. IIR provided support in five crucial areas:

- Continuous assessment, to introduce a comprehensive system of mastery learning, testing, and remediation into all primary schools;
- Head teacher management training, to provide specialized training for all school heads to equip them better to manage their schools and improve their quality of education;
- Management information systems, to give Ministry decisionmakers accurate, useful information about the education system on which they can base effective policies and plans;
- Organizational development, to carry out research and strengthen the operation of the Ministry of Education; and
- Career guidance, to help students make more realistic decisions about their futures.

In the words of the midterm evaluation, EPMT was an “enormously ambitious” venture. It attempted “to bring about change at every level of Swazi education, from the way teachers teach to the way principals administer to the way policy is formed to the way students find jobs.” EPMT was eventually to run for six years, finishing in 1996 just as USAID’s mission to Swaziland closed its doors. U.S. contributions through the project exceeded \$6 million.

Continuous Assessment

The largest component—and perhaps the most visible aspect—of EPMT was continuous assessment. Swazi experts had identified continuous assessment as a priority as early as 1975. The “centerpiece of the project’s strategy,” the innovation of continuous assessment represented the culmination of Swaziland’s movement away from a teacher-centered, “sink-or-swim” education system to one with the learner at its center and that learner’s success as its goal. Before continuous assessment, teachers and students had no effective way to predict performance on the end-of-primary examination. As such, there was no way for teachers to help students prepare for it by overcoming their weaknesses.

Continuous assessment comprises three components. First, the student is tested frequently in order to assess his mastery of what has been taught. According to her performance, the student is directed either to remediation or enrichment. Finally, the student’s performance is recorded, and that record is maintained in order to keep track of his progress.

“Continuous assessment focuses on the child,” remarked Concilia Munro, who heads the Continuous Assessment Unit at Swaziland’s National Curriculum Center. “It focuses on every child being a successful learner. We put the child in the center and surrounding the child we’ll have the policy, that is our Ministry of Education in this case, deciding what is good for the child.” Herself a beneficiary of USAID training, beginning with the Eastern Michigan University program, Munro now holds a master’s in education. At independence, she was a primary school teacher. From there, she moved to in-service teacher training and, after returning from studies in the United States, to the curriculum center. She joined the new Continuous Assessment Unit when it was formed at the start of the EPMT project in 1990.

Ms. Munro continued:

We have the teachers taking care of the child. We have the National Curriculum Center designing materials to take care of the child. We have inspectors who are there solely to look after the interests of the child in school. We have teacher training colleges where teachers

are trained to go and help a child. We look at the community to help the child, the parents to look after the child. So, continuous assessment focuses on an individual child. And, here we say that each and every child can do something given a chance.



EPMT's final evaluation echoed the beliefs of many Swazis who believe that EPMT has had a profound impact on Swazi education, especially in the primary schools where continuous assessment has begun a process that may change forever the way teachers evaluate children. The final evaluation further declared:

At its most effective, continuous assessment can move the center of gravity in a classroom from the teacher to the student, from teaching to learning. Ultimately, continuous assessment can change the culture of a school from one of testing, where children are primarily judged and ranked, to one of assessment, where children are given a chance to progress through a series of objectives to greater and greater mastery. EPMT has opened up the possibility for this transformation to take place in Swazi schools.

Babe Dlodlu's appraisal was far more succinct: "Continuous assessment has been the cry of the whole nation."

Head Teacher Management Training Program

In Swaziland, school principals are called head teachers or headmasters and headmistresses. The goal of the Head Teacher Management Training Program was to provide specialized training to all school heads so they would be better equipped to manage their schools and improve the quality of education for their students. The project design saw this intervention as important to the overall improvement of the education system and vital for the effective implementation of other innovations, notably continuous assessment.

A five-week course was designed and delivered to virtually every primary school head teacher in Swaziland, some five hundred thirty in all. At the ministry's request, the program was extended to secondary schools, where almost two hundred head teachers were also trained. Anecdotal evidence recounted by Justice Nsibande suggested that the training program had a positive effect. The numbers of head masters accused of financial irregularities has been reduced to a great extent, and there appears to be overall improvement on financial management by head teachers.

Israel Simelane, responsible for head teacher training's continuation, had no doubt about its effectiveness. His visits to individual schools have confirmed that teachers are being supported and supervised by head teachers and that, with the sound leadership in the schools, Swazi children are learning better.

Simelane's impressions have been substantiated by independent evaluations conducted by Swazi experts. One such evaluation was conducted by Dr. Anderson Nxumalo from the University of Swaziland following the first cycle of head teacher training. Comparing trained and untrained head teachers, Nxumalo found superior performances by those who had been trained, particularly where the training had been coupled with follow-up sessions.

Guidance, management information systems, and organizational development

A key constraint to the Ministry of Education's expeditious implementation of new policies was the



lack of information available in the ministry about schools and pupils throughout the country. Recognizing that the ministry needed a reliable information system on which to base decisions, EPMT designed two related components, management information systems (MIS), and organizational development, to strengthen the ministry in its capacity to analyze, establish priorities, and implement policies.

The MIS component focused on maintaining three types of data: student and teacher demographic data, data on school facilities, and research data from studies commissioned by the ministry. The organizational development effort began with a study exploring the ministry's organization. Using the study as a guideline, seminars were created for the ministry. As of the close of EPMT, the schools database (resulting from a schools mapping exercise) and teachers database of the Teachers Service Commission were two of the most comprehensive in Southern Africa.

The final EPMT component, guidance, proved to be an early success. The component was intended to strengthen vocational guidance efforts by assisting the ministry to extend career and occupational information to pupils at the primary and junior secondary levels. By the time of the midterm evaluation, the component had already achieved increased awareness among students of career choices and resources for identifying employment options.

Largely due to its success, the guidance component was concluded immediately following the midterm evaluation. Noting the needs in other project components, the evaluators recommended that the

component's funding be shifted to the continuous assessment and head teacher management training components.

Three years after its funding was halted, the guidance activities originally instituted by EPMT continue to thrive within the Educational Testing, Guidance, and Psychological Services unit of the ministry, which effectively carried out the demands placed upon it for guidance and measurement services to the schools. Fully staffed, it provides orientation in career guidance concepts to students at teacher training colleges and

enhanced services to secondary students. The unit also continues to focus upon career guidance teachers, conducting training to enhance their skills, assisting in the organization of career days, and developing and providing materials and information to support the guidance teachers' activities.

Impact and prospects for the future

Although EPMT's final evaluation raised some issues about the project design, it concluded that "EPMT overall has been a very successful project." In the end, this project will have made a profound difference in the quality of education in Swaziland."

The Swazis agree. The principal secretary remarked that EPMT's successes, especially continuous assessment and head teacher training, have been "internalized and institutionalized." EPMT has affected "a lot of practices in the schools" and we are continuing on our own."

Moreover, like its two predecessor projects, EPMT shows every sign of producing an impact destined to outlive USAID funding. The final evaluation found each of the five EPMT components to be "viable with existing Swazi expertise and resources," such that additional outside assistance would be useful but not necessary. Moreover, the evaluators noted that anticipated (and actual) grants in aid from UNICEF and the British Overseas Development Agency would serve as a "bridge from USAID support to self-reliance."

In connection with project funding, two factors in particular weighed heavily in the project's success.

First, the government backed up its commitment to EPMT's work with continued funding and new positions at the Ministry of Education. Second, USAID's Swaziland mission and the Ministry of Education successfully leveraged American support to involve other donors. The Swazi government remains committed to the programs instituted by EPMT, as manifested by the budget earmarked for ongoing activities. For example, continuous assessment is being extended with Swazi government and U.N. funding, even as a new British project is building on and extending EPMT's management training to all teachers.

Perhaps most exciting is that the impact of EPMT, particularly its continuous assessment component, appears to have reached even beyond Swaziland's borders. Swazi continuous assessment experts have been called upon to advise several other African countries about their innovation.

Training

USAID projects usually spend money on three primary inputs (that is, three ways of adding value to development efforts in a country). The first is technical assistance, or bringing outside experts into a country to work with, train, and advise local colleagues on improving an education (or health, or agricultural) system. The second is commodities, or purchasing the equipment and supplies necessary to get the job done. Finally, training is provided to give local officials the skills to accomplish immediate project or program objectives, as well as to ensure that they can sustain and extend those accomplishments.

In many respects, training is the foundation of a successful development strategy. Training may be short- or long-term, at a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral level, carried out in the host country, in the United States, or in a third country.

All three education projects in Swaziland included training components. Each used an innovative combination of in-country and overseas training to provide many Swazis with the skills needed to manage their own education system after independence. Many senior staff members at the Ministry of Education, including the permanent secretary, are among the more than five hundred Swazis sent for degree training in the United States. The speaker of Parliament, the current prime minister, and many other government officials

are also part of this group. All speak readily of the substantial impact produced by the training.

Many Swazis, including Speaker Nsibande, found that the dual in-country/overseas approach in the Primary Curriculum Development project ensured the relevance of training; the in-country instruction provided the trainee with a "specific mission" to which later instruction could be applied. Also impressive to Speaker Nsibande was that "the institutions that we sent our students into tailor-made the programs to make them more relevant to our needs, instead of making them Western."

The Teacher Training project took the same dual approach. Principal Secretary Vilakazi noted that by and large the whole project helped to upgrade the staff who did not have the requisite degrees to perform their jobs as teachers in teacher training colleges. "But through that project we were able to upgrade all of them. It improved their effectiveness by giving them confidence to start with and also their expertise was sharpened. Even now some are still there and doing a fine job."

Even the final project, EPMT, which had more modest training goals, used both in-country and overseas training to accomplish them. Six Swazis received Master's-level training overseas, while seven Swazis went to the United States on short courses. In-country workshops trained more than one hundred twenty trainers and forty-five hundred school personnel in continuous assessment and school management.

The impact of foreign assistance on education in Swaziland

Without a doubt, the foreign aid provided to support the independent development of the Swazi education system quickened the pace of such development.

The principal secretary noted that with foreign assistance Swazis have built classrooms and schools almost everywhere in Swaziland. Both primary and secondary school facilities have been constructed. Swazis have successfully achieved universal enrollment in primary schools, and estimate that, of the children who finish primary schools, at least 70 percent will be admitted into secondary. "Because of the stability and the assistance that we have been getting

we have been able to build a solid foundation,” said Vilakazi.

It is clear that over a quarter-century of foreign assistance has left its mark. Said Dlodlu:

Swaziland has one of the best education systems in the southern Africa region. We more or less have enough schools for everybody. Each and every child has a book. The qualifications that are held by our teachers are reasonable. We have one of the highest trained manpower through the projects.

Many donors, including The World Bank, the United Nations, the European Union, and individual countries such as Britain, Sweden, and Japan, have supported the successful development of Swaziland’s education system. In providing its assistance to Swaziland, USAID tried to identify opportunities for assistance not being addressed by other donors. It looked for programs that would have maximum impact on sustainable development and economic growth through improving the quality and efficiency of basic education. This resulted in a basic priority, support for primary schools, and a fundamental strategy, support at the classroom level.

Dlodlu noted:

We had good classroom facilities and most of our teachers were trained. But what was coming out of the classroom was not as good. There were still a lot of children failing, repeating. That is what people wanted to address. The EPMT project came at the right time, because it focused on classroom teaching, on children achieving in class.

On a more practical note, the chief inspector recalled that “the first vehicle that we had in the regions was from the Primary Curriculum Development project. . . . Before that we did not have any vehicle.” The value of that vehicle was not to be underestimated. “You cannot reach schools as inspectors without transport.”

Would there be a continuous assessment system operating now without U.S. support? Babe Dlodlu felt:

I don’t think so. Even now, it’s something that is very difficult. We have to supervise and

monitor. It demands a lot from the teachers. In developed countries, if a child has not achieved you have to account. But we are a developing country. A lot of children that we teach in class get left behind as the teacher just teaches. And there’s no way of accounting unless you’ve followed that child, you know what the problems of that child are. And you pray that in Swaziland, when a teacher gets in front of children, the teacher will know his children and know the ability of all those children. And continuous assessment is the only thing that can help the teacher know the abilities of the children.

Lessons learned

USAID’s education development experience in Swaziland offers several clear and powerful lessons.

Establish true partnerships

When asked what makes foreign assistance effective, Swazis who have been instrumental in using aid give a unanimous reply: building a sense of local ownership through true collaboration.

“In the past 20 years we have learned one very crucial lesson,” declared Speaker Nsibande. He continued:

People (it doesn’t matter where they are) feel very proud if they are involved and do the thing themselves. This . . . has been very crucial in our experience. The donor agencies have been very flexible in that they’ve allowed us to participate. Therefore, we feel very proud and even own the programs because they are no longer foreign programs. They are our programs. I think it’s one thing we never had before independence. Things were done for us.

Other Swazis echoed this principle as well. Concilia Munro felt that EPMT helped the Swazis form their own continuous assessment program. Israel Simelane confirmed the same lesson regarding EPMT’s head teacher management training component. The Swazis

and the USAID adviser began by jointly composing and piloting a training needs assessment questionnaire. Next, the Swazis designed the materials to be used in head teacher training, with their adviser's assistance. Simelane added, "So you see, today we can sit down and develop those materials. We know how to go about it because we actually worked it out with the adviser. So there is that ownership."

Effective collaboration between donors and host country nationals is not without its challenges. Principal Secretary Vilakazi emphasized that at times foreign advisors clash with host country nationals as to how something should be done. In such cases, the secret is to accommodate the view of the advisers:

... because you know there are certain things that they expect from you. You try to have a way of accommodating without necessarily having a confrontation. I say, 'These donors want this and this is how I wanted to try it,' and through some discussion reach a mutual understanding.

Accommodation, however, does not mean doing whatever the donor thinks should be done. The principal secretary also felt it was key to "make them feel welcome while at the same time not allowing them to dominate the situation." Sometimes, Vilakazi felt, advisers have to be helped to realize that things may have to be done differently from the way they are accustomed to doing them.

Respond to local needs

The project design must lay the foundation for a sense of local ownership. The principal secretary pointed out that sometimes project designers "try to put in what they think . . . people want instead of trying to do the things that the people want themselves." Thus, in providing assistance to a host country, it is critical for a donor to understand what the recipient really wants. If the donor attempts to impose its own idea of what should be done, the project becomes the donor's, rather than the host country's. "And if the project now belongs to the donor, as soon as they go the project grinds to a halt because the people have not really taken the project as theirs." If a project is not seen as addressing a country's needs, when the donors

leave, the project collapses. The secret, concluded the principal secretary, "is that the donors should try and do what the people want instead of what they think the people need."

Build one project on another

USAID's project sequence illustrates the importance of projects working together and building upon each other. Noting the effective sequencing of USAID's education projects in his country, Israel Simelane recalled that the Swazi projects began by establishing the curriculum and writing textbooks. The next project upgraded the level of the qualifications of the Swazi teachers so that they could use the materials created under the previous project. And under the subsequent project, the head teachers were trained. "Somehow these pieces seem to fit together nicely," remarked Simelane.

Thus, USAID successfully used one project to complete or correct work from an earlier one. For example, the final evaluation of the Primary Curriculum Development project indicated concern that:

Formal relations between the Primary Curriculum Unit, now the National Curriculum Center, and the nation's teacher training institutions should be established and the institutional responsibilities for pre- and in-service training of teachers in the use of the new curriculum detailed.

The evaluation expressed a strong concern that "the Primary Curriculum Unit cannot and should not be held responsible for doing everything." One purpose of the Teacher Training project was to help the Ministry of Education address just this issue. In turn, when the Teacher Training project was unable to establish the in-service training unit as a separate, viable organizational entity before its conclusion, USAID continued to support the Ministry's efforts to do this under the EPMT project.

Another important factor in Swaziland was the complementarity among projects from different donors. Babe Dlodlu pointed out, for example, that EPMT may not have worked the way it did had it not been for the sufficient numbers of classrooms built under the World Bank project.

Provide support over longer periods of time

Assessing lessons learned from USAID’s capstone education project, EPMT, the project evaluators began with this point:

If a project is attempting to change behavior that is deeply ingrained or trying to change the culture of an organization, then at least six years are required. If the EPMT project had been any shorter, lasting change would have been impossible.

The Swazis agree. Principal Secretary Vilakazi commented, for example, that the Teacher Training project wasn’t “one of these short-term projects that before you even know it, before you have the impact, the project winds up.”

Projects need time to evolve. USAID has earned high marks for its flexibility in this regard, both from its Swazi partners (as the speaker of parliament has noted) and from project evaluators. Acknowledging that project designers cannot perfectly predict how projects will evolve, the evaluators observed that flexibility on the parts of USAID and the contractor allowed projects to grow organically.

On the negative side, the final report on the Primary Curriculum Development project noted conflicting priorities between training and production, a problem that bedeviled subsequent projects as well. According to the report, curriculum development was entirely new to Swaziland. The Swazi staff had not been trained to write curriculum materials; none were college graduates nor did they have any writing experience. Yet the Primary Curriculum Unit was expected to produce a full year’s curriculum in five or six different subjects each year. This, the report held, would have been a “formidable task even for a trained staff.” Moreover, Swazi staff members were expected to complete their university education at the same time. In spite of their long-term nature, USAID’s Swaziland education projects felt the negative impact of time constraints. Deadlines sometimes forced advisers to do things for, rather than with, their local colleagues.

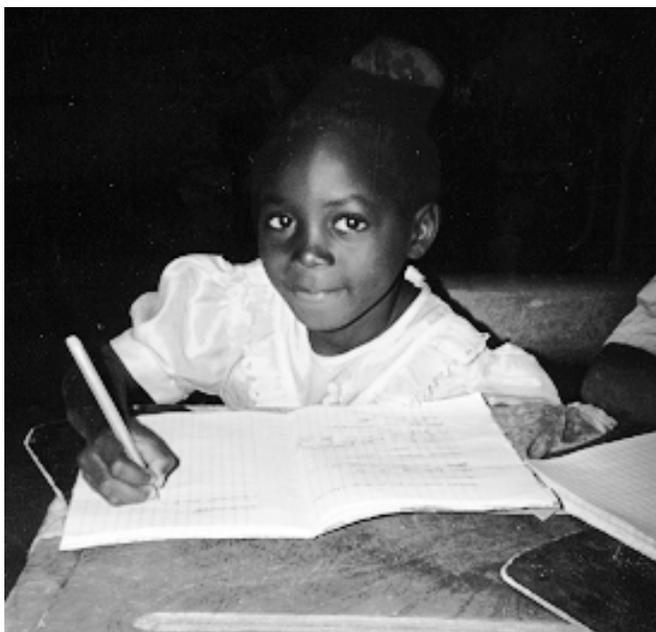
Staff for sustainability

When asked why some projects create sustainable results, and others do not, Babe Dlodlu noted that the curriculum project created a large number of permanent staff posts that survived even after project completion. The persons holding these posts continued to carry on the project work. This also occurred with EPMT; people were trained, posts were created, and these people continue at their posts. He continued:

I think technical training is important. By ‘technical training’ I mean training people through the project and then creating posts to supervise the project. . . . Another donor’s project had a lot of money but there’s not a single person that it did train. It didn’t have a structure that it created and then left in place. Because it didn’t have that structure there’s nothing you can trace out of that project.

USAID mission to Swaziland’s record

How did the USAID Mission to Swaziland perform? Asked this question in terms of three criteria he had identified—cooperation, accommodation, and sustainability—the principal secretary replied that USAID has done very well indeed. The legacy of each



of the three projects lives on. A curriculum unit continues to operate under Swazi direction. Those trained under the project to write and revise the curriculum continue to serve that function. Thus, the principal secretary pointed out, the process has “been internalized and is now part of the system.” EPMT programs also continue to thrive. “That shows we feel this is our project and it’s doing what we want ourselves.”

Further education development needs

In spite of impressive gains in education, Swazis are the first to acknowledge their need for further progress. In addition to recounting successes, the twenty-fifth anniversary report cautions that “there is still much that can be done to ensure that all Swazi citizens receive an education appropriate to their needs and abilities such that they contribute even more to the development of their country.” As Swaziland begins its second twenty-five years as a modern nation, its goals for education development are shifting from quantity, universal access, and basic literacy to quality, a focus on what students learn, and its relevance to their lives and the needs of their country.

The goal of universal enrollment is still elusive in practice. Forty thousand children of primary-school age (a full 20 percent of the total) are not enrolled at all. To a large extent, this is the human cost of high repetition and dropout rates, what education economists call internal system efficiency. Too many of the children actually in school (16 percent in primary schools) are repeaters who have been there too long. They clog the system by taking places that would otherwise be available for out-of-school children. Furthermore, too many children (34 percent) start school only to drop out before completing primary level. Although 66 percent of all children entering primary school will complete it successfully, the government and parents will pay on average for more than eleven years schooling per graduate because of these factors.

Other challenges are primarily a function of tight government budgets, which place greater burdens on parents and communities through school fees and self-help efforts. With parents already paying almost 30 percent of the overall cost of basic education, and

education already consuming an equivalent percentage of the government’s recurrent budget, the resources available to address such concerns are limited.

For example, classroom construction has not kept pace with the growth in the number of pupils, so some classes must be held in church buildings or, occasionally, in the open air. More worrisome, perhaps, is that only 28 percent of primary school pupils have both desks and chairs. Facilities in some primary schools, especially in the rural areas, are still rudimentary. And, noted the principal secretary, because conditions in rural schools are not good, the better teachers tend not to go there. While rural schools are often expensive to operate because of low enrollment, urban schools are often overcrowded. Urban migration has exacerbated these conditions.

Curriculum appropriateness and overcrowding also continue to require attention. The twenty-fifth anniversary report noted: “Relevance of the curriculum . . . has constantly been in the public spotlight. However, the attempt to make education respond to socioeconomic and environmental issues has tended to result in overloading the content of primary curricula indiscriminately. As a result, both basic and learning skills and the integrated approach to problem solving have been neglected.”

The principal secretary notes:

For the next five years or so we want to concentrate on improving what is existing, especially at the primary school level. We will train teachers on the job and improve the physical facilities of rural primary schools. Then, at higher levels we may train for self-employment and vocational education.

The path to self-sufficiency

Swaziland has already begun to see diminishing donor funds. In Southern Africa, USAID has closed its missions in Swaziland, Lesotho, and Botswana, replacing them with one Botswana-based regional mission that has no current mandate to fund education in Swaziland. This is the result of a difficult decision-making process within USAID itself, which is attempt-

ing to spend a limited foreign aid budget in the most effective way possible. Ironically, Swaziland's development success is now making it harder to justify further foreign assistance.

For their part, Swazis come from a proud nation, certainly not one that would aspire to continuing dependence on other countries. So one might expect them to share the vision of a Swaziland without any need for outside help. Nevertheless, things are not quite that simple. The principal secretary, for example, suggested that assistance will still be required in the future, but focused on very specific needs. "I think if we can be more prudent on our expenditure we can cope with a number of situations. But there are some areas where we might need quite a lot of assistance for quite some time, such as vocational education." The Swazis' attempts to establish vocational education through the training of technical teachers proved in vain when most such teachers were wooed away by the industrial sector. Back at square one, the Swazis now feel that a major training project would effectively jump start Swaziland's vocational education needs. "We also want to train our students for self-employment if that can be done," said Vilakazi.

Another example cited by the principal secretary of his country's continuing need for assistance was upgrading university faculty members. A large number of expatriates still work at the University of Swaziland. Swazis must be trained both to run the university and to teach. However, with diminishing foreign aid, training of university professors at masters' and doctoral levels has become impossible.

Finally, Peterson Dlamini shared a vision of a time when his country will become a giver, as well as a receiver, of assistance:

There will be a time when Swaziland will be expected to send its own Peace Corps volunteers to other countries that are less developed than Swaziland. Even more developed countries will need us. They will say, 'Okay Swaziland, we understand that you have been struggling like that. Now we want to help Rwanda or Zaire. How do you think we can do that?'

A message to the American people

The story of how Swaziland's education system has developed in almost thirty years since independence is an encouraging one. Building on its relative peace and prosperity in comparison with so many other African countries, Swaziland has moved closer to its goal of universal primary education. It has created enough primary school places for all its children. Eighty percent of those children are actually in school. The curriculum has been reoriented to the Swazi child and the Swazi context. Teachers have been trained to teach and assess children more effectively. Head teachers have learned how to manage their schools more successfully. The Ministry of Education's capacity to plan and monitor the education system has been enhanced.

The United States, through USAID, has played an important supporting role in these achievements. As part of a larger cast of donor agencies, and over a period spanning a quarter of a century, it has contributed approximately \$20 million to Swaziland's education development. Using these funds Swazis have been able to obtain training, technical expertise, and commodities to help them develop their education system and their country.

People who donate funds and the people who benefit from them rarely know each other. The money that USAID brought to Swaziland came from American taxpayers. A tiny fraction of their tax dollars found its way to this little kingdom in southern Africa to benefit children in primary schools, the teachers who teach them, the head teachers who run the schools, and the officials from the Ministry of Education who support the system. These Swazis will probably never get a chance to speak directly to the Americans who have assisted them. Most Americans probably will never meet their Swazi beneficiaries. Yet suppose they could be brought together. What would the Swazis say?

Of course, they would begin with "thank you." This is more than just protocol. Swazis are exceptionally polite people. It would be unthinkable for them not to express gratitude for a gift, and to express that

appreciation with sincerity. Then they might talk a little about what American assistance has meant to them. They might even philosophize about the implications of development aid in an interdependent world.

Principal Secretary Vilakazi pondered the impact of the foreign aid:

If Americans would come here they would see for themselves the amount of development, especially in education. They would see that quite a number of people have benefited out of their tax dollars. It has improved the standard of living of the Swazi people. It has helped the Swazi child to gain access to education. The education, because of their assistance, has been improving over the years. And if I may say about our system—by African standards—we have one of the best.

He concluded with some reassuring words about fiscal responsibility:

In some countries donor funds have been misused through corruption. We have never had that here. At least we have been very prudent in using donor funds. There has been proper accounting for every cent. So every cent has been put to good use.

Israel Simelane's thoughts echoed a Native American proverb, "The gift must travel." It is critical, he felt, that Americans know their money has been well-spent to improve other people's lives. Much like Peterson Dlamini, Simelane expressed his wish to return the favor by providing aid to another struggling developing country. "I think what the American people have

done is to set an example that we need to copy and that we need to practice."

From his position as speaker of parliament, Justice Nsibandé took an even broader view, pointing out that foreign assistance benefits both the donors and the recipients:

One of the problems in the world today is that if you have one region underdeveloped and another highly developed, the imbalance is such that the developed countries would not be comfortable. . . . There's this global need for uplifting, for making the quality of life good to all people of the world. It's even visible in Swaziland, small as it is. This disparity between regions, between developed and underdeveloped regions within Swaziland, is such that if you have one area that is backward the other regions are not comfortable. In order to ensure . . . peace and stability you need to sort of balance the level of development throughout the regions, and of course this applies throughout the continents.

Finally, Peterson Dlamini added to his personal thank-you a vision of how the model of American philanthropy is, in itself, a gift to Swaziland.

Firstly, I would like to thank those people for their generosity, for making these contributions that end up helping developing countries like Swaziland. And what I can tell them is that they are not throwing away their money on Swaziland. They are investing it. They are trying to build a better world for our children, for all the children of the world.

6. South Africa: Post-Apartheid— Transformation of an Entire System



Members of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) listened quietly as another victim of their country's violent past told her story:

That morning I did something I have never done before. My husband was still at his desk busy with the accounts of our business. I went up to him and stood behind his chair. I put my hands under his arms and tickled him. . . . He looked surprised and unexpectedly happy. . . . 'And now?' he asked. 'I am going to make tea,' I said.

While I poured water on the tea bags, I heard this devastating noise. Six men stormed into our study and blew his head off. My five-year-old daughter was present. . . . That Christmas I found a letter on his desk: 'Dear Father Christmas, please bring me a soft teddy bear with friendly eyes. . . . My daddy is dead. If he was here, I would not have bothered you.'

In their first year of work, the TRC commissioners endured many such tales, from victims seeking truth and from perpetrators seeking forgiveness. The victim was most often black, but many were white. The perpetrators came in all shades. The brutality of

apartheid's death throes saved its worst for the poor and defenseless, for people of color, but it left no group untouched.

Perhaps, then, it came as a surprise to the commission, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, when late in 1996 a group of South African NGOs, led by the National Literacy Cooperation (NLC), asked it to investigate a different type of human rights abuse:

Since May 1996 the commission has highlighted the situation of many victims of human rights violations, thus permitting an overall picture of the gross violations of the past is gradually emerging. Our country is beginning to come to terms with the nature and extent of the physical violence and abuse created and perpetuated by the system of apartheid. In addition to those who suffered physical violence, many were victims of nonphysical violations of basic human rights (such as the right to an education, to work and earn a living) during the apartheid years. The stories of such victims also need to be investigated.

In particular, the NGOs felt that:

In the context of the country's high levels of illiteracy, infant mortality, poverty, rising unemployment and the resulting increase in violent crime, especially within the black communities, the denial of educational opportunities to the majority of people not only closed the doors of learning to these communities but also systematically deprived them and their families of the means to life.

The submission enumerated several specific violations of educational rights, including equitable access to quality schools, quality teaching and learning, and

educational advancement; the rights of rural learners, adult learners, and learners with disabilities; and the rights of teachers to develop professionally and practice their vocation.

It is possible to follow apartheid's educational philosophy to extremes so ridiculous that they strain credulity. For example, here is a system under which one provincial government actually prohibited overweight teachers, mainly white and colored (mixed-race) women, from promotion and permanent appointments. It maintained secret height and weight tables against which to judge its employees.

However, the nightmares of physical violence retold to the TRC evoke horror, not ridicule. The statistics compiled in support of the NLC's submission represent another kind of tragedy. It is the tragedy of entire groups of people being deprived of access to quality education because of race, and only race. In 1979, 81 percent of white pupils completed primary and secondary school; only 29 percent of black pupils made the distance. In 1988, there was one teacher for every fourteen white students, and one for every thirty-eight black students. More than four times as much money was spent on educating a white child as on a black child. Colored and Indian students fell in the middle, always doing better than blacks but never as well as whites. Thus, a child's race determined what kind of education he or she would be offered. In turn, that education determined the child's future.

This chapter examines South Africa's progress in laying the foundation for a new, nonracial education system and the role that foreign assistance has played in that progress. After highlighting some of the challenges and contrasts that characterize the country, the article focuses on how its educational system has developed, both during the apartheid era and after democratic elections. It then moves to the support of USAID during those two periods, exploring the American strategy for basing future success on past progress and looking in more detail at eight of the NGOs that have benefited from U.S. funding. It next assesses the impact of foreign assistance, especially American aid, on South Africa's development, discusses some key lessons learned arising from that assistance, and tests the viability of USAID's strategy for the future role of the NGOs it has supported. Finally, it offers South African NGOs the opportunity to speak to those who have contributed the funds from which they have benefited.

While this discussion emphasizes primary education, a broader brush is needed to paint South Africa's full education picture. As in other countries, teacher education is part of the story as well. The quality of primary



schools cannot be improved without attention to primary teachers. Because many South Africans never had the chance to receive decent primary schooling, or indeed any primary schooling at all, national goals cannot be achieved without taking into account the vast need for adult education.

South Africa in perspective

Perhaps no country in Africa is more familiar to Americans than South Africa. This is due, in some measure, to its long-standing position as an economic powerhouse on the continent. By far the most important reason, however, lies in its four decades of increasingly violent confrontation over the doctrine of apartheid, theoretically the concept of separate but equal development, but practically the domination of the vast majority of the country's people, who are not white, by the mere 18 percent who are. Although the Afrikaner Nationalist Party introduced apartheid per se when it took power in 1948, white political and economic control was a fact of life from the merger in 1910 of four British dependencies that formed the Union of South Africa.

The majority's long years of struggle against apartheid finally bore fruit on May 10, 1994, when Nelson Mandela, released from prison just four years earlier, became the first president democratically elected by

all South Africans. His inaugural address inspired a vision that confirmed his stature as one of the great leaders of the twentieth century:

We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build a society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity—a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.

South Africa remains a country of extraordinary contrasts, expected and unexpected. Until recently, Nelson Mandela was probably the only leader of an industrialized nation who did not have access to potable water in his home—not, of course, his two official residences, but his traditional home at Qunu in the Eastern Cape Province. Until a local insurance company installed a \$50,000 pipeline there (in advance of a larger scheme to bring water to the entire village), when the president visited Qunu he had to wash and drink from six-gallon drums trucked from nearly sixty miles away. Yet, in other parts of the country, cellular telephones are making inroads to places not yet served by land lines. This sophisticated technology brings modern communications to underdeveloped regions such as the Transkei, not just for community services but also for rural entrepreneurs. Having once dismissed this market as economically-unfeasible, one major cellular service provider now finds its largest dealer in Transkei.

Great visions are not easily achieved, of course. South Africa faces major challenges in its quest to become the rainbow nation of President Mandela's dream. The London-based Fund Research organization recently characterized South Africa as "a country of forty-one million people surrounded by some of the worst poverty in Africa, with a rigid and under-educated labor force, an oligopolist economy, and high real interest rates." One of the major problems of South Africa, the group found, is the high and increasing level of unemployment. With a third of the labor force jobless, the increase in crime threatens both social cohesion and economic progress.

External assessments tend towards mixed reviews of current performance but cautious optimism about

the country's longer-term economic potential. For example, in the United States the Heritage Foundation and the *Wall Street Journal* gave South Africa three marks out of five on their index of economic freedom, but lauded its transition to democracy and judged national reconciliation to have been impressive. World Bank estimates put per capita income at \$2,910 in 1994, placing South Africa well ahead of other countries on the continent (with the exception of Libya and Gabon) and in the upper-middle-income ranks of the world's nations. On the other hand, the country's Gini Coefficient (an index of income inequality) is one of the highest in the world, reflecting the unequal wealth distribution among different racial groups that was the goal and the result of apartheid.

While admitting serious African National Congress (ANC) mistakes in its first years of power, President Mandela marked the beginning of 1997 with an optimistic assessment of South Africa's progress and prospects under democratic rule. He spoke of solid foundations and a noticeable impact of reconstruction and development. He highlighted the signing of the new constitution as "a fitting way to end the year," and the work of the TRC as "a powerful instrument of healing." He expressed pride that millions of people have gained access to water, electricity, and health care, that quality education for all is taking shape, and that programs for land reform and housing are now "firmly on track." Speaking of the economy, he noted that "the year ahead will be a testing time for all: government, business, and labor; producers and consumers alike. But the fundamentals are sound. By keeping our sights on the long term we can manage the ebb and flow of the present."

Development of South Africa's educational system

In 1994 South Africa abandoned apartheid. Education policies and programs were profoundly affected by that change.

Situation prior to 1994

The problems of the apartheid educational system went beyond overt racism and inequity. Some of its

subtle weaknesses affected all students, black and white. For example, under the old regime formal education was largely based on the conservative values espoused by a policy called Christian National Education. Its underlying philosophy, in the words of a 1983 South African government paper on education, included the “molding” of good citizens to “fit into ordered society” and to be obedient to the state. This emphasis on conformity served to reinforce didactic theories of knowledge and authoritarian teaching practices, emphasizing “facts” with little concern for insight or application. Not surprisingly, therefore, a common complaint from university faculty about the white graduates of the country’s elite secondary schools was that they first had to be taught to think.

The great burden of the former system, however, clearly fell on the shoulders of South Africans of color. In its submission to the TRC, the NLC puts apartheid education into this context:

The architects of apartheid employed a multiplicity of strategies, including the fragmentation of the education system into different subsystems along ethnic and racial differentiation. Education was used as an instrument to dehumanize and indoctrinate black people into submissiveness and acceptance of their inferior status. The passing of the Bantu Education Act, for example, emphasized the efforts of apartheid governments to deny black people the right to an education by denying them entry to educational institutions and centers of literacy development, providing biased financial and material resources, neglecting rural education, and discriminating against disabled students and through state-planned violence that created the breakdown of what came to be known as the ‘culture of learning and teaching’ in most black communities.

Through the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the Department of Native Affairs gained control over all African schools and laid down a syllabus geared to serve apartheid’s objectives. Urban students, however, became increasingly politicized, culminating in the late 1970s in the infamous township uprisings that cut off an entire generation of youth from schooling.

Rural children faced difficulty even finding schools to attend. When they did obtain a place, it was likely to be in conditions so harsh (a one-teacher school with one hundred sixty-nine children, for example) that effective teaching and learning became almost impossible.

From these roots grew the inequities documented in the NLC’s submission—those of an educational system in which access and quality were directly determined by a child’s skin color. Blacks faced large student numbers with inadequate supplies of classrooms and teachers, producing large class sizes and high pupil-teacher ratios. Large numbers of nonwhite students were retained in lower grades through failure. Dropout rates for African learners were especially high relative to whites. Almost 100 percent of white students passed the high-school leaving exam, while at best only about 50 percent of African students finished successfully.

Progress since 1994

As democracy dawned in South Africa, nowhere was the need to break with the discriminatory past more evident than in the education system. No social sector evoked higher interest among the general public, black or white. In response, the new government allocated a quarter of its annual non-interest expenditure to education and committed itself forthrightly to a series of policy initiatives intended to “open the doors of learning for all” and to “build a just and equitable system that provides a good quality education and training to learners young and old throughout the country.” These were based on the principles of a fundamental right to education, one nonracial system, compulsory basic education, lifelong learning, and a division of powers between the national and provincial levels of government.

That these goals are necessary makes them no less audacious. The challenge of implementing them, to no one’s surprise, has proven daunting. Almost three years into its mandate, the new government still struggles to move from conception to reality. Widespread concern grips the public. Those who enjoyed the privileges of the former elite system fear a collapse of standards. Those who were previously excluded vent their frustration at the slow pace of change and the staggering inequities that still remain. The excitement of giving birth to new vision is giving way to the

sometimes overwhelming challenges of turning it into reality.

On the first day of the 1997 South African school year, readers of *The Star* awoke to front-page headlines warning “Tidal Wave of School Pupils Hits Gauteng.” South Africa’s huge central province, the country’s economic heartland that encompasses both Johannesburg and Pretoria, faces at least eighty thousand new pupils, largely as a result of migration from other parts of the country. Mary Metcalfe, head of the provincial education department already facing accusations of mismanagement in the administration of the critical “matric” high-school leaving examination, reported that at least one hundred new schools are needed now. About one hundred fifty thousand of the province’s children are not enrolled in school at all, generally because of special needs or because they had no school to attend. To make matters worse, many learners would start the year without textbooks because of a “glitch in tender procedures.” She admitted that:

We are not going to be able to keep up with the backlogs, not this year, not next year, not in the immediate future. The backlogs will be addressed as we achieve economic growth. We hope to see in the next ten years every child in a classroom, but until then, we are working to make sure resources are used adequately.

No one would deny that such problems are real, and no one expects them to disappear overnight. As noted by a spokesperson for the national Ministry of Education, with almost half a million employees the largest government sector, transforming education entails a “process of magnitude and complexity that confronts no other government function.” It will not be made any easier by pending budget cuts to most national ministries, including education, described by Minister of Education Sibusiso Bengu as “a threat to transformation plans.”

On balance, though, the nation definitely is making progress towards its goals of a transformed educational system. The old apartheid laws are gone. Racially-fragmented bureaucratic structures have been torn down; new united organizations are being built in their place. One of the government’s major accomplishments in 1996 was to pass the Schools Act, which

replaced five racially-based education laws, introduced a new nonracial system of school governance and funding, outlawed admissions discrimination on the basis of race, enshrined parental oversight, and eliminated vestiges of the past such as corporal punishment. Other accomplishments included: policy papers on the organization, governance, and funding of schools; legislation promulgating the South African Qualifications Act, the National Education Policy Act and the Educators’ Employment Act; task team investigations into technology-enhanced learning and education management and development; work in progress on gender equity and language policy; and the funding of programs to promote the culture of learning (including improvements to school buildings, quality of learning, and school governance), building of new schools, and community colleges for youth not attending school.

In fact, the day after its “tidal wave” warning, *The Star* ran a page-three story under the headline “Children Cram into Classes But Most Schools Cope Well,” and reported “the smoothest and most orderly return to school in years.” One of its (white) commentators, in the midst of a fierce attack on the early retirement of thousands of experienced teachers in the name of resource reallocation, spoke of an education department “that has otherwise done a good job, . . . that has moved South Africa from segregated to integrated schooling, from partial to mass education, in just one year.”

The commentator emphasized that thousands of schools have been integrated all over the country, even in the most conservative areas. Such integration happened almost without incident—with only one brief protest demonstration by a handful of right-wing parents at a school in Potgietersrus.

He compared this to the American experience, recalling the turmoil that accompanied school integration in the American south when President Kennedy had to call out the National Guard to force the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi, and Governor George Wallace made his stand in the doorway of the University of Alabama. By contrast, the commentator felt, South Africa’s experience was “nothing short of astonishing.”

Vusi Mona, a teacher who edits a monthly education newspaper, agreed that many have underestimated the successes achieved so far:



A few years back there was no nation to talk of. We were on the brink of catastrophe. Today we have a country; we have a nation. A few years back there was a lot of violence in our schools. . . . Today we see a lot of cooperation. The culture of learning and teaching had collapsed in almost all the urban schools. Today we see our kids again committed to education. They want good education. All those things, to me, are significant. Change is taking place, although some people will argue not at their desired pace. But we've come a long way.

USAID's contributions

Such changes have not happened entirely without outside help. For example, the United States has spent nearly a billion dollars in the past decade on development in South Africa. The scope of these efforts has been broad: helping lawyers defend victims of apartheid, building houses, restructuring government ministries, and, of course, supporting a variety of educational reforms. To take just one specific example, the United States was the largest single donor to voter education efforts during South Africa's first nonracial national election. Evaluations have praised the innovative character and emphasized the impact of American interventions.

U.S. assistance has also strengthened NGOs and CBOs (community-based organizations that are usually created to serve one or more local communities).

Both NGOs and CBOs in recent years have provided social and environmental services that the government has neglected.

At the same time, Congressional critics have accused USAID of "interfering in South Africa's domestic affairs and often going against President Mandela's commitment to a nonracial society." Local newspaper articles, under headlines such as "Major U.S. Aid Programs Under Fire for 'Meddling,'" repeated charges against USAID by staff of the U.S. House of Representatives International Relations Committee. These charges ranged from forcing whites out of projects to ignoring a shortage of fifty thousand classrooms in favor of overspending on conferences and seminars.

To some extent such criticisms seem to reflect a lack of understanding about USAID's development strategies. For example, the agency believes that technical assistance and training is more likely to contribute to sustained development than is a school construction project. But the dichotomous praise and blame also originate from some unusual features of USAID's South African program.

South Africa's story is, in many respects, just beginning. Most other countries on the continent where USAID works (with the notable exception of Namibia) achieved their independence more than two decades ago. Nations such as Guinea and Uganda have entered demonstrably new phases in their national development with U.S. support. Swaziland has "graduated" from American assistance, albeit reluctantly, as its own economic and social progress meant that other sister countries could claim greater need. If these places represent new chapters in the development story, or even the end of the book, South Africa has just completed its preface. The first chapter in the story of a free, democratic South Africa is only now unfolding.

The other unique feature of USAID's South African program arises from the special nature of that preparatory phase. Prevented by principal and by law (specifically, the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act or the CAAA) from providing funds to the apartheid government or its agencies, USAID ventured into the relatively uncharted waters of NGO funding. Whereas in other countries USAID projects usually work through host governments, in South Africa the USAID Mission responded to unsolicited proposals from small organi-

zations outside of the apartheid political system. The result was, by agency standards, a huge national program when measured in numbers of grants and recipients, and an unusual one when assessed strategically. This alternative approach has yielded some of USAID's most effective assistance in South Africa. It has also caused some real management headaches.

Preparing the ground through NGOs

The story of American assistance to South Africa goes back to the 1960s, long before any USAID office opened in the country. Agencies like the United States Information Agency, working through the American Embassy, sponsored small programs (including a human rights fund) and larger training projects that eventually reached over a thousand students with scholarships for study in the United States and elsewhere in Africa. USAID's major program work in the country, however, began in 1982, after Congress approved \$4 million for scholarships to South Africans disadvantaged by apartheid.

In 1986, USAID sent its first envoy to South Africa. A few months later, the U.S. Congress passed the CAAA. Responding to growing public hostility toward apartheid policies and the brutality they fostered, the act's purpose was "to set forth a comprehen-

sive and complete framework to guide the efforts of the United States in helping to bring an end to apartheid in South Africa and lead to the establishment of a nonracial, democratic form of government."

Soon after this legislation was enacted, USAID initiated a South Africa country program and began preparing to open its own mission in Pretoria. The CAAA prohibited the United States from assisting any agency "financed or controlled" by the South African government. It required instead that American funds be channeled through NGOs. This posed a particular challenge for educational development. Some of apartheid's most visible inequities were reflected in the school system. Yet that system was very much a government activity, with only 1 to 2 percent of the country's schools private. Therefore, the new USAID office in South Africa had to work with NGOs that were creating innovative models for redressing the balance and preparing for a democratic future. It funded organizations working in many different areas, including policy formulation, in-service training for teachers and school principals, curriculum development, student organizations, and pre-primary education. In many of these realms, USAID provided grants to five or six separate groups taking different approaches to the same problem.

The release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February 1990 and the beginning of negotiations for an end to white minority rule stimulated a dramatic increase in the level of U.S. assistance. Annual USAID funding doubled from \$40 million in 1990 to \$80 million in 1992. Almost half of this money was aimed at education. In response, USAID began to review its funding strategies, moving towards bigger grants focused on major strategic areas. The mission also sought to become more proactive, responding to fewer unsolicited proposals.

Further complicating the situation were intricate political realities. Many of the very groups targeted by USAID's strategy were suspicious of the motives and objectives of American funding. They viewed foreign assistance in general as a weak and unacceptable substitute for sanctions, a reflection of the failed "constructive engagement" concept. They worried that USAID's agenda would be determined by U.S. security interests. But when USAID proved itself a supportive partner, a growing number of NGOs and CBOs sought its assistance, arguing that it was possible to use



U.S. funds to finance projects of genuine benefit to disadvantaged South Africans. Eventually, the first American contractor firms were allowed to begin work in the country.

Post-apartheid assistance

Just days after South Africa's first democratic elections in May 1994, the Clinton administration announced a huge three-year aid package more than half a billion dollars in size, with USAID assistance projected at approximately \$130 million per year. USAID targeted about a quarter of this annual amount, approximately \$30 million, to the education sector. Although the expansion of the total package reduced education's percentage somewhat from previous USAID budgets, this is certainly a respectable figure, close to funding levels in the years immediately preceding democratic elections. Still, it is only a small fraction of South Africa's \$7 billion education budget. In keeping with its global strategy, USAID has aimed to leverage its investments through programs that create high impact at low cost.

What USAID is trying to do in South Africa has not changed very much since the days of the CAAA. The agency continues to work towards the broad goal of good education for all South Africans. It continues to emphasize South Africans who were unable to obtain high-quality education, or indeed any education at all, under the apartheid system. All of this is summarized in USAID's new strategic objective for its education work: a transformed system based on equity of access and quality.

How USAID is trying to achieve its objective has changed substantially, on the other hand. The agency still works at all levels of the education system, from primary to tertiary. It still supports further education and training for disadvantaged South Africans. However, it has begun to tighten its focus somewhat, pulling back from areas such as career guidance and secondary education. Its university and professional training approach is being revised to take into account the fact that South Africans of color are no longer excluded from such opportunities within their own country.

The biggest shift in USAID's strategy, however, affects who receives its funds. Money once given exclusively to local organizations now goes increas-

ingly to support the government's objectives, although the funding continues to support NGO collaboration. Funding NGOs was a strategy dictated by U.S. condemnation of the apartheid government. The advent of democracy in 1994 removed these restrictions and allowed USAID to support the government directly. Increasingly, then, funds that previously went to NGOs and CBOs now go to the national and selected provincial governments.

USAID's broad objective in education is to help the country increase equity of educational quality and access. To meet this objective, it plans to support three areas of activity: policy formulation, system development, and capacity enhancement. To "transform" the education system, national and local governments need new policies that create equitable opportunities for all children, youth, and adults. USAID has already played a catalytic role in supporting policy formulation at all levels of education through technical assistance and funding to organizations that have contributed to policy research, analysis, and public consultation.

Next, responsive systems are needed to translate good policy into effective practice. In the realm of primary and basic education, USAID has conceived its role as supporting the development of models, or "blueprints," for effective systems. One example is the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), a system for integrating in-school and out-of-school education and training established under the new South African Qualifications Authority Act. Under the NQF, a worker who never had the opportunity to complete primary education can receive equivalent training as an adult learner. This training will be recognized as the qualification necessary to proceed to secondary-level education (which can be delivered in or out of school).

Finally, the educational system's organizational capacity should be enhanced. USAID is focusing on all players in the drama of transformation: national and provincial governments, educational institutions, youth commissions, and NGOs. The key question is what can be done to improve the ability of South African groups to implement the policies and run the systems that will increase access and quality for historically-disadvantaged individuals.

USAID's strategy is based on the "development hypothesis" that the NGO community represents a reservoir of expertise from which the new national and provincial governments can draw. Thus, in its post-

apartheid funding, USAID continues to support NGOs and CBOs, although on a reduced scale, both in terms of numbers of organizations and levels of contributions. USAID expects that government itself will purchase relevant services from NGOs, often with funds that the United States has provided.

Contributions to education of NGOs supported by USAID



How can such a hypothesis be tested? One starting point is to examine some specific organizations that have benefited from USAID funding, to explore their work in transforming the education system, and to hear the comments of their staff about the past and the future. This article looks at eight such NGOs, covering a spectrum from direct support to schools and teachers to broad policy reform.

Education Support Services Trust: innovative learning materials

Established in 1986, the Education Support Services Trust (ESST) provides innovative, learner-centered materials to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. USAID's funding helped the organization expand its services, test innovative materials with teachers, develop teacher guides for mass distribution, and conduct research to improve materials development. Program Director James Olivier traces ESST's roots back to the fundamental inequities of apartheid education that became evident when he was teaching at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), in those days primarily a "colored" (mixed-race) institution.

He recalled that in the 1980s, when the political barriers in the Western Cape started breaking down, a lot more black students came from outlying areas to UWC. These students found themselves at an enormous disadvantage because of the schooling they had received. Compared to students from local areas, the black students' schooling had been minimalist and

incredibly poor. The UWC faculty felt that most of the disadvantaged students had a language problem; they had very poor English language skills. However, Olivier recognized:

The first thing you realize is that it's not a language problem. It's a problem of educational quality that spans over the children's lifetime until the age of eighteen, nineteen, or twenty, when they come to university and the whole disaster unfolds. They are unequipped to handle the university curriculum.

Out of these concerns came the English Proficiency Program (EPP), the first focus of USAID's support to ESST. It developed inexpensive learning materials for students in grades 4 to 7 that presented the kinds of people, places, and events familiar to the children. Using methods that required minimal guidance to the teachers, ESST was teaching more than facts and ideas. It aimed at a new attitude to life and learning.

Olivier explained that the black students did not have the experience and the exposure to the range of stimuli to make it possible for them to enter into a strange setting and recognize how to handle issues that arose. In a world of political oppression, they had been taught to be docile, even by their own families and teachers. Thus, they had to be "seduced" into an ability to look at their situation and assess it critically. Olivier continued, "I'm talking about ten, twelve-year-old kids. We tried to give them the kind of mental stimu-

lation that would make it possible for them to respond creatively.”

Lydia Abel, ESST’s senior research and educational coordinator, noted that another unique element of her organization’s approach was its work at the classroom level. Until its last years, the apartheid government made it difficult for NGOs to work in the schools. In spite of this, ESST found ways to access classrooms directly. “I think we didn’t realize what a difference we were actually making with the pupils.” Teachers interviewed by Abel had found it tremendously liberating to “have the materials and know that they could pick up the phone to somebody and say, ‘Help, do something.’”

As the new decade dawned, ESST expanded into new areas: materials for higher grades, African language instruction, teacher education, and adult basic education and training. Community groups and even corporations use ESST materials. USAID’s funding made some of this expansion possible.

Between 1990 and 1993, ESST began slowly expanding its services to teachers with “far too little money.” In mid-1992, USAID funding enabled ESST to expand into the rural areas, where local funders had shown no real interest (most local funders were interested in the urban areas, where their factories and businesses were located). In the last two years of its four-year commitment, USAID specifically targeted the Teacher Methodology Program. USAID, noted Olivier, “was our first international donor. It was also our biggest single donor when it came on board.”

The EPP has expanded rapidly since its inception. Students using it have shown improved test scores, and tend to use English more spontaneously than those not using it. ESST directly distributes its materials to a large number of schools (primarily in the rural areas), and several companies have subscribed to the program for their employees’ children. In addition, many informal schools and educational organizations use EPP materials. The demand by schools and communities for EPP materials continues to grow exponentially. The program has recently been adopted by the Northern Province Department of Education for province-wide distribution as part of an innovative business-government-NGO partnership, using newspaper to publish low-cost materials for all Standard 3 students. It will soon be replicated in the Eastern Cape and the Northern Province.

The Teacher Methodology Program has helped teachers introduce more interactive methods of teaching, giving students more responsibility for their learning. One teacher described a lesson she taught based on her experience in the program:

Pupils did research on medicine, hospitals, diseases, and had to compile a book about the topic. It was a group activity, and they had one week to do this. Today, one class reported back. They did very well—talked and explained everything in their books. I was amazed with the quality of work they handed in. There were interesting facts about the disease AIDS that I, myself, did not know. The pupils taught me something (actually a lot).

Open Learning Systems Education Trust: teaching by radio

OLSET, the Open Learning Systems Education Trust, was founded in 1990 to investigate how technology can help the disadvantaged majority through quality instruction at lower cost. Its primary activity is the Radio Learning Project, which uses radio (with printed materials and face-to-face teacher training) to teach primary-school children and to train teachers. According to Gordon Naidoo, the trust’s director, OLSET was established to introduce cost-effective, high-quality, and interactive lessons in English, mathematics, and science directly into the classroom. Black students at the junior primary level have generally done poorly in these important subjects.

Naidoo noted that the large number of unqualified junior primary teachers, the lack of resources in black schools, high pupil-teacher ratios, and the use in school of Afrikaans, which was not spoken by most black children, all contributed to pupils’ learning problems. “Inappropriate classroom practices and teacher training also fed into the hemorrhage within the junior primary sector for possibly forty years.”

The model of radio instruction used by OLSET was developed by USAID in the 1970s to teach mathematics in Nicaragua. USAID funded extensions of the methodology to other subjects in other places, including a series of programs in Kenya and Lesotho entitled *English in Action*. OLSET adapted this series to the South African situation. It also pilot-tested

mathematics programs and explored possibilities in science.

USAID funding for OLSET's radio work began in 1992. Naidoo remarked that OLSET received a considerable amount of funding from USAID in the initial years, when its staff was going through a steep learning curve. Indeed, in those years, USAID was OLSET's primary funder. "I suspect without the funding in our first few years, we would not have been where we are currently." Later, OLSET received funds from others, including the Joint Education Trust, the Independent Development Trust, the Liberty Life Foundation and the Japanese Embassy. Over the last two years, the Royal Norwegian Embassy has become OLSET's primary funder. "Now USAID has come on-stream again with a two-year tranche," Naidoo.

Radio English is now broadcast by the national radio service in seven of South Africa's nine provinces. *English in Action* reaches between sixty and seventy-five thousand students. Evaluations have shown the programs to be highly effective, particularly among remote rural schools and in communities where English is not commonly spoken or taught. Annual per-pupil cost is approximately one dollar. One teacher

from a black township outside of Pretoria put a human face on these statistics, remarking that he had found a cure for his class by singing, dancing, playing, and talking with his children. The barriers were thus broken. The children did not have to sit and listen to the teacher; they got involved. "They ask questions. They answer questions. They formulate their own sentences. The learning gains can be seen."

Studies have demonstrated that radio learning attracts both students and teachers. According to Naidoo, "Teachers say that students come to school because they don't want to miss *English in Action*. We've been heartened by that."

Early Learning Resource Unit: early childhood education and anti-bias training

A child's success in primary school depends much on his or her learning environment prior to school, in the home, and in preschools. When primary school children come from disadvantaged backgrounds, early childhood education (or educare, as it is called in South Africa) becomes even more important.

The Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU) is a Cape Town-based research and development agency that provides training, support, and resources throughout Southern Africa to help communities offer learning opportunities to young children. To carry out this mission, ELRU undertakes advocacy, develops programs and materials, trains trainers, and offers training for adults. Growing out of the work of one early learning center in the Cape Town area, ELRU now concerns itself with national strategies to benefit the nearly six million preschool children in South Africa.

ELRU's main trust is aimed at training preschool teachers, parents, and other trainers. ELRU's significant impact through its training program is also supported by research and materials development. Freda Brock, ELRU's director, considers ELRU's strong research expertise to be a particular strength.

ELRU's research and information services coordinator, Linda Biersteker, added that when ELRU first started, there were no NGOs offering early childhood development training. ELRU's training of trainers program was developed in the 1980s in response to a need for such trainers. "Now there are probably eighty NGO training agencies."



USAID's funding has supported expansion of ELRU's program, aimed particularly at influencing early childhood policy advocacy and multicultural curriculum development. The program includes staff development, training for rural educare workers, training and program development for parent play groups, policy research initiatives, information dissemination, pilot models, linkages to junior primary school, and anti-bias training for trainers.

Anti-bias training has been of particular interest to USAID and to South Africa. Thikam Pillay, who coordinates ELRU's efforts along these lines, explained that in the early 1990s, many schools became open schools. That is, previously white schools were opened up to accept children of other cultures and language groups. Unfortunately, the teachers of these open schools were not equipped to deal with their new circumstances.

Helen Robb, Pillay's colleague involved in the project at that stage, perceived a need for further training. During training workshops, "there were always sessions where people burst into tears, where it became quite hot with discussion. And underlying it all were issues of racism very often." Accordingly, Robb and Pillay set out to develop a course that would help trainers like themselves, and approached USAID for funding. "Funding came for our three-year project, which has now come to an end, what we refer to as our anti-racism training program. That started back in 1993."

Unlike other ELRU programs, the anti-bias initiative was not just concerned with early childhood development; it cut across all sectors of education, the secondary and tertiary levels as well as the early childhood, NGOs, and non-formal sector. At the end of its three-year run, the program had trained one hundred fifty trainers of trainers. "We're proud of the figures," remarked Pillay. ELRU training courses and workshops have reached some five thousand five hundred adults and benefited over eight hundred thousand children. Its awareness programs have reached an estimated seven thousand parents.

ELRU has changed the lives of many women. Some have found their voices for the first time. One



trainee commented that shyness has to do with custom and how girls are raised by their parents. "Now in the community I don't sit down. I stand up and talk even around men. I'm challenging men now. . . . Now I've developed; I must stand up and help other women now."

Media in Education Trust: using print media for teaching

The Durban-based Media in Education Trust (MIET) developed from another USAID-supported organization, the Education Foundation. It became an independent NGO in April 1996. MIET's vision is to help transform classroom practice, teach critical thinking, and bring about real learning, particularly for educationally-disadvantaged South Africans. It uses the print media to do this, developing education supplements, and promoting the use of newspapers and magazines as up-to-date, low-cost, and disposable learning tools for teachers and learners. It also trains teachers.

MIET's director, Wilna Botha, visited the United States in 1992 as part of an Education Foundation research project on media, especially the print media, in education. She returned "with a whole range of ideas and materials" and began working with people experienced in using newspapers for education in what was then Natal Province (now KwaZulu Natal Province).

According to Botha, MIET began conducting workshops in partnership with the Education Department, which, at that time, seemed to be "ahead of other

departments in terms of starting to work together.” MIET’s workshops were held throughout KwaZulu Natal for teachers from different departments. Botha recalled going to the town of Kokstad at a time when there was a lot of conflict in the area; the daily newspaper headline proclaimed Kokstad to be a “Powder Keg Waiting to Explode.” “And we had, for the first time ever, teachers from the previous black, Indian, colored, and white schools sitting together saying, ‘This is history being made.’ The project grew from that. Very much a part of its strength is that it ties together teachers from different environments.”

MIET also develops newspaper and magazine supplements. It serves the primary and junior secondary levels, where it was possible to effect changes in approaches and methodology.

Lynn Larcombe, who is in charge of training for MIET, emphasized its rural focus. MIET, she noted, is one of the few NGOs that has persevered in the rural communities, where working conditions can be arduous in terms of high expenses and difficulty of distribution:

In fact, Wilna has from the beginning used a picture of a rural child as a kind of touchstone. We keep going back to that. Are we making a difference to that rural child in what we’re doing? We’ve really persevered with training in rural areas so that we can make a difference to those rural children.

MIET’s accredited training programs in rural areas are largely funded through USAID. Its materials are primarily sponsored by South African newspapers and magazines, as well as by local businesses. Larcombe remarked that USAID funding allowed MIET to develop a substantive course, which actually met teacher training needs. With further USAID funding, MIET has been able to pilot and evaluate the course, as well.

MIET has already trained more than twelve thousand teachers in three provinces. Many more teachers have been served through its expanding “train the trainers” program, which has already reached about two hundred fifty teacher-trainers. The newspapers and magazines carrying its education supplements have a combined circulation of about six hundred sixty thousand, and reach a readership of four and a half million people.

The Teacher: a monthly newspaper for educators

MIET is not the only USAID-supported NGO working to harness the power of the print media in service to education. Another innovative endeavor is *The Teacher*, a monthly newspaper aimed at primary and secondary school instructors. *The Teacher* is a project of the South African Newspaper Education Trust (SANET). Established in 1987 and based in Johannesburg, SANET trains young journalists from disadvantaged communities across the country.

A national, nonpartisan newspaper, *The Teacher* is a color tabloid that includes a mixture of editorial content and advertisements. It provides information and support to South Africa’s disadvantaged teachers during this period of educational transformation. Recent headlines have ranged from “Curriculum Debate Gains Momentum” to “Risking Our Lives to Teach.”

Vusi Mona, who describes himself as “a teacher by birth, by profession, and by inclination,” is *The Teacher’s* editor. According to Mona, *The Teacher* came at just the right time in South Africa’s history. The newspaper provides the platform for teachers to air their views on any issues on education and also to share ideas on what has worked for them inside the classroom. It is a monthly publication, usually ranging from twenty to thirty-two pages. In response to criticism that, as a monthly newspaper, *The Teacher* is unable to keep abreast of current topics, Mona responded that being a monthly is actually an advantage. *The Teacher*, he contended, provides the kind of background and analysis that dailies and weeklies cannot. At this time in South Africa, teachers need to be involved. They need to know the background that informs some of the government’s policy decisions.

USAID’s support is intended to pay for approximately twenty editions of the newspaper, while the project becomes self-sustaining. USAID funding also pays for the editors’ training, workshops, writer training for urban and rural teachers, and underwriting scholarships for classroom innovation.

“We have been able to pay staff salaries, we have been able to pay for our printing costs, and other infrastructure like offices that we are renting. . . . It has provided us with a solid foundation from which we could build the success of the paper.” Mona expressed confidence that, with “a bit more funding,” within three to five years the paper would be self-sustaining.

The newspaper targets three hundred thousand employed teachers, as well as eighty-two thousand trainees in teachers' colleges. It set a target of reaching more than forty thousand subscribers by the end of the two-year USAID grant that began in 1995. The current figure of more than one hundred thousand subscribers substantially exceeds that objective. Most of these are members of the South Africa Democratic Teachers' Union, which has agreed to supply *The Teacher* eventually to all one hundred forty thousand of its members. Individual subscriptions are also sold to approximately eight thousand teachers at a cost of about four dollars per year.

National Literacy Co-operation (NLC): a network of literacy organizations

The first line of defense against illiteracy is primary school. In South Africa that line has been repeatedly breached, first by the challenges facing any African country (too many people, too few resources) and then by the special forces of apartheid (intentional marginalization of nonwhite students and teachers, the breakdown of urban education). The result is a literacy challenge that belies South Africa's status as the continent's economic leader. One expert estimates that twelve to fifteen million adults in the country are functionally illiterate.

Transforming primary schools will not help those South Africans who have already missed their chance. If they are to learn how to read, write, and count, they must do so as adults. Thus, USAID's strategy for strengthening basic education also includes what South Africans call ABET, adult basic education and training.

Prior to democratic elections in 1994, ABET was officially the job of the Department of Education and Training, or DET, the government bureaucracy charged in practice with delivering inferior education to nonwhites. DET ran night schools to teach adult literacy. Whatever their technical strengths and weaknesses, the DET night schools were politically unacceptable to many South Africans. A host of NGOs and CBOs sprang up to offer alternatives.

NLC is a black-led, independent, Johannesburg-based network of such groups. Established in 1986, it is the largest national umbrella organization represent-

ing literacy and adult basic education NGOs in South Africa. By coordinating and supporting the work of its ABET NGO affiliates, the NLC aims to make a significant impact on reducing the number of functionally-illiterate adults. The national Ministry of Education has identified the NLC as the leading NGO to help facilitate its literacy campaign. In fact, Khetsi Lehoko, now in charge of the ministry's national ABET program, is a former NLC staff member; its former director, Kumi Naidoo, now heads the South African National NGO Coalition.

Enrico Fourie, NLC's acting director, traced the organization's history, which proceeded in three phases. During the first phase, from 1986 to 1989, it comprised a few organizations concerned with the theory and practice of literacy. These organizations formed a loose network. During those years, the NLC had no national office or provincial offices. "It was more supportive work, bringing together ideas."

During the second phase, between 1989 and 1993-94, the network between the organizations was formalized and a structure emerged. During this critical period, models of curriculum materials, training in the field, and provision (or direct classes) were developed. Towards the end of this phase, when it became clear that elections would be held in 1994, NLC's member organizations began planning mass-scale literacy programs for a future South Africa.

Only during its third phase did NLC consolidate its affiliates and form a unified organization. A national office was established, along with a national structure, and a set of policies and guidelines. The NLC began to build a system of accreditation of various kinds of provision in the voluntary sector. It also began testing mass skill provision. Through the Thousand Learner Unit Program (created with European Union funding), the NLC has reached a thousand learners per province in a pilot study to determine how adult basic education provision can be further expanded in the country. Nearing the end of its third phase, the NLC, currently comprising one hundred sixty affiliates, continues to grow.

USAID has provided two grants to the NLC. At the time of the first grant, the organization was staffed by only two individuals, and the literacy community was fraught with fragmentation and intense competition. During the eighteen months of the grant's life span, the NLC succeeded in building capacity and infrastructure in each of the nine provinces and facilitated the develop-

ment of a national framework for the delivery of adult basic education in South Africa. The second USAID grant, in 1995-96, aimed to further strengthen the NLC. Fourie explained that the USAID grants directly supported the activities of the NLC national office. The grants were critical in sustaining the NLC's work at the policy and advocacy levels, including generating policy interventions, drafting policy documents, and funding the national office infrastructure cost and salaries.

The Education Foundation: better information for better decisions

Established in 1990, the Education Foundation's mission is "to address the critical lack of contemporary and accessible data and information about education in South Africa." It is dedicated to helping educators make better decisions. The foundation develops and provides data, decision support, training, and information systems to a wide variety of groups, from communities to provincial and national government. The Education Foundation has established a strong non-partisan reputation based on its ability to respond rapidly and objectively to critical issues and problems.

Peter Badcock-Walters, the foundation's executive director, explained that the organization's mission is to ensure that sufficient information reaches the hands and heads of decisionmakers at all levels. In its first year of operation, the foundation set up a free query service. To the surprise of many, the biggest users of the service were the government education departments, who were essentially getting back the same data they had reluctantly provided to the foundation (only in a more comprehensive form).

The Education Foundation convened top-ranking education officials of the government and the ANC as well as other key people in the transition to a democratic government. This was the first opportunity for these people to jointly confront issues and discuss options, data, and various policy positions. "We were able to bring a healthy dose of reality to what were, up to that time, some incredibly optimistic and perhaps naive visions of what a future education dispensation might deliver."

For example, recalled Badcock-Walters, people outside government would argue that since the whites had always had twenty pupils to one teacher, twenty

pupils per one teacher should remain the policy of a future dispensation. The foundation's role was "not to comment or play any kind of judgmental position, but to get people engaged in the creative process and then to introduce a reality check." The reality check, in terms of the policy model, came when the participant came face-to-face with the real cost of his or her decision-making. "As we were fond of saying at the time, all this looks great but you, as the hypothetical minister of education; now you need to explain to the ministers of transport, health, and housing that they don't have any budget left because you spent it all," said Badcock-Walters.

Following the 1994 elections the foundation decided to focus on the provincial level. While the national Department of Education is responsible for overall norms and standards, the provinces have to administer education. Yet provincial offices were sorely lacking in administrative skills. "After the elections," said Badcock-Walters, "we set out to work with the education departments in each of the provinces to help design and establish EMIS (educational management information systems) units."

USAID has supported several key aspects of the foundation's efforts, including modeling work carried out in conjunction with the Research Triangle Institute in North Carolina, the EduSource user-friendly education database, the training of black South Africans in policy options modeling, and the Media in Education project that evolved into MIET. Badcock-Walters explained that USAID came on board within the foundation's first twelve months of activity, and has been the foundation's most consistent funder. "What we did from those early days was work hard to leverage the kind of money that USAID was making available to us with funding from other sources."

Independent Examinations Board: transforming assessment to transform education

As with most English-speaking countries in Africa, South Africa's education system has its roots in a British model. Not the least of the European influences is the concept of a terminal, or "leaving," examination. In South Africa, this is the "matric" (for "matriculation examination"), the end-of-high-school exam that determines a student's future standing in general, and eligibility for further education in particular. Students

who do well on the matric can look forward to a place at one of the country's best universities. Students who fail do not even earn a high school diploma.

Exams are the driving force of instruction. By altering the content and format of the matric, educators can quickly change the priorities and practice of students and teachers alike. In this fact lies much of the importance of the Independent Examination Board (IEB). Established in 1988, the IEB's initial role was to take over the functions of the Joint Matriculation Board, an early attempt to establish nonracial and national, as opposed to provincial (and, therefore, curriculum) examination standards. Now its mission is to train educators in modern approaches to assessment and to support learners through assessment systems that promote quality and access.

In addition to administering the independent matric exam to an estimated three thousand five hundred students in 1996, the IEB is also involved in helping set adult basic education examinations recognized by government and industry, training teachers in assessment, supporting the development of an accreditation system for early childhood development practitioners, helping design the new National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and establishing pilot Standard 7 (ninth grade) examinations as a mechanism for assessing compulsory basic education.

"What we have to do is to shape differently the quality of the instruments of assessment and what they're assessing, since they have such a huge influence on what is actually taught," said Ed French, director of communication and research for the IEB. "We must build into that end point the real things that we're striving for. To some extent you're then obliging teachers to change." French said that attempts at innovation were futile unless teachers believed they would help students pass the exam. It is more effective to change the exam than to persuade teachers to give it less attention.

The Standard 7 exam is one such contribution that the IEB has made to the primary system. According to French, the IEB founders started the Standard 7 public exam to hone their skills in organizing and running an exam, and also to prepare those students who would be working towards the new IEB matric exam some years later. In a sense, IEB worked towards the broad core curricula prescribed nationally. They tried to introduce outcomes-based features into these exams.

Standard 7 came to be declared the government's official General Education Certificate level. Unfortunately, the Standard 7 exams remain relatively small and vulnerable because there is not a great deal of social pressure to write them. Said French:

But we're building up that pressure. We find a lot of need, especially in the poorer provinces, where they just want to do some tracking and motivation of quality lower down the school system then happens at the moment. After twelve years the school system really only has its quality check at the last moment.

USAID is supporting the IEB in the areas of adult basic education and training (for Department of Education staff training and quality assurance systems) and primary education (assisting provincial departments improve access and quality). French remarked that USAID support provided an important foundation for IEB. "We've particularly valued how the agency has listened, shared with us in shaping a vision, and helped us to realize it."

The impact of foreign assistance on educational development

Many countries can take credit for supporting South Africa's struggle for liberation and development. Just about every major donor is actively represented in the country now. Some are well-known to Americans: the World Bank and United Nations agencies on the multilateral side, and on the bilateral side Canada, the European powers, and Japan. Others perhaps seem more obscure, but are no less important. For example, the Nordic nations supplied about \$750 million directly to antiapartheid forces and contributed between one-half and two-thirds of the ANC's nonmilitary budget in the twenty years preceding the 1994 elections.

USAID stands in good company on a crowded foreign aid field. OLSET's Naidoo asserted that, without USAID funding, radio learning would probably not have taken off. "We couldn't have gotten support from the government of the day or from local funders."

Olivier of ESST noted that USAID's contributions went beyond money to organizational development, a

process that not only improved his NGO's effectiveness but also its ability to raise additional funds. Indeed, Olivier went so far as to hold that, without foreign assistance, ESST's present existence would have been doubtful. He recalled that when USAID came on board in 1992, it was very emphatic about systemic change and strengthening, and organizational development:

It strengthened our developmental capacity, it strengthened our printing capacity, it strengthened our staff capacity, and all over it strengthened our organization's ability to do its work and to do it better.

Abel agreed with Olivier, noting that:

you can do wonderful work with ten or twenty people, but when you're working with two hundred, two thousand, twenty thousand, or two million, then the whole thing becomes much more difficult. I think one of our strengths is that we've actually been able to reach so many people. That wouldn't have been possible without foreign donors.

For Biersteker, the impact of USAID funding on developing ELRU's capacity, as well as its special programs, was critical. With USAID's help, she recalled, ELRU was able to bring in highly-skilled research staff. Moreover, the funding started building the research department, which has been quite active in policy. The anti-bias program would not have existed without USAID assistance, either.

Badcock-Walters of the Education Foundation continued: "I think we would have achieved some of what we've managed to do, but one must remember that this is an extremely tight environment." Had it not been for USAID's support of key activities, he felt, the foundation would have been unable to implement its full agenda. Through USAID, the foundation was able "to access a remarkable body of international expertise based in the United States." It was also exposed institutionally to a great deal of financial discipline and development innovation.

The other important point about leveraging one set of funds with another, he explained, is that USAID is very specific about funds allocation. In its own right,

USAID could have been quite restrictive in respect of the often dynamic circumstances of the education environment in South Africa. "So we were able to use the corresponding funding from other sources to be able to move forward our activities that might otherwise have taken USAID quite a long time to approve." Quite simply, Badcock-Walters concluded, USAID was "critical to our success," despite certain rigidities.

Lessons and concerns

The South Africans who have worked with USAID as beneficiaries of its support to NGOs conclude, for the most part, that the agency's assistance has been critical to their development and their contribution to the country's education sector. They also express some concerns about policies and practices they have been obliged to follow.

American influence

Those unfamiliar with the situation in South Africa during the apartheid era might be surprised at the level of suspicion of foreign donors, especially the United States, described earlier in this article. Biersteker recalled that ELRU wavered for quite a long time before accepting USAID funds. During the "deep struggle years, there was a lot of anxiety about foreign money. There were a lot of concerns kicking around at the time about CIA connections and all that. We actually checked out with the [antiapartheid] movement that it was okay to get the money." Following the initial hesitation, USAID became an enormously sought-after donor. "We were quite satisfied that there wasn't an agenda behind the USAID funds."

Eventually, the NGO community gained confidence that support would not equate control. And experience vindicated that confidence. Mona, who as a journalist would be more sensitive than most to outside influence, was unequivocal:

My editorial independence has never been interfered with. USAID does sit in our editorial advisory board, but simply as an observer. My editorial independence has never been under any threat.

USAID's reporting requirements

Ironically, USAID's oversight has caused problems at the bureaucratic, not the political, level. One of the most common complaints has to do with USAID's requirements for frequent, detailed reporting. Difficult even for American universities and contractors with substantial experience implementing USAID projects, these reports can prove overwhelming for small organizations. One organization's head described new reporting procedures "so extreme as to create a really negative reaction, not just from NGOs but importantly from government." Another claimed that it was necessary to hire a full-time staff person just to deal with USAID. A third commented that USAID funds have been helpful "in spite of Washington's bureaucracy, which makes anything a misery in a way."

Badcock-Walters explained how an NGO must respond. It is critical, he pointed out, to operate effective financial management and controls, because "ultimately the reporting requirements of any donor organization are a lot more rigorous than most NGOs are used to." Consequently, at the very outset, effective systems have to be put in place to meet exactly the kind of needs that USAID has articulated.

On the other hand, these same organizations recognize the need for accountability. Many acknowledge some value to themselves from comprehensive reporting. They must put effective accounting systems in place to meet strict requirements. Olivier noted that while USAID's precise demands for financial reporting and staff employment policies are annoying, "in retrospect all of those irritants were good irritants."

Affirmative action

A particularly contentious policy issue for USAID, as for the United States and South Africa as nations, has been affirmative action. The U.S. Congress directed USAID to empower black leadership and the "victims of apartheid" while at the same time supporting South Africa in its goal of creating a nonracial society. Critics in the United States have charged USAID's leadership with excessive zeal in carrying out its affirmative action mandate. According to South African press reports, congressional staff members charge that whites have been forced out of USAID projects.

A recent evaluation of USAID's South African program, however, concluded:

Any genuine effort to implement the CAAA's mandate leads unavoidably to the giving of preference to black groups over white ones in the dispensing of aid, and USAID/[South Africa] has unashamedly pursued this policy. . . . Excessive zeal is, however, hard to find. The data shows that, despite USAID's efforts at implementing an affirmative action program, it was only in 1994 that black-led organizations, for the first time, received total awards greater than white-led South African organizations.

Some white NGO staff see value in USAID's policy, even though it has precluded the agency's funding of their own salaries. Olivier, whose status as a white South African prohibits him from receiving a salary funded by USAID, acknowledged that USAID "forced us to check our own mind sets." The chances of finding suitable black applicants for the job of a skilled creative artist, writer, or illustrator are extremely low. They have had no opportunity for training or experience. Affirmative action, Olivier added, is a form of investment:

You very often pay for results that you aren't getting yet. We see it as investing in people, people that we've taken on board who couldn't perform on strength yet. We were forced by USAID to invest in them. And two, three, four years later, we are reaping the results.

USAID's supportive role

Counterbalancing the NGOs' concerns with USAID policies and practices are their sincere expressions of appreciation for moral and technical support. Naidoo expressed a common belief that in working with USAID there have been very few strings. Rather, USAID has given the NGOs a great deal of latitude, has brought a number of perspectives to the table, and has allowed South Africans to set their agenda and goals. "Basically they have given us carte blanche and said, 'It's your country, your situation. You develop your radio learning program in a way that you see fit for your culture and for your situation.'"



Naidoo found that the relationship with USAID was far more than a financial one:

We've had very genuine concern within the USAID mission. A number of USAID people have actually been engaged with what was happening in the project, visited the project often, came into the classrooms, attended teacher support groups, attended teacher training workshops, and so on.

Botha of MIET agreed:

Our personal experience has been that with USAID there's been far more interaction than with any other donor, sort of ongoing communication interaction. We've been very fortunate.

The Education Foundation's experience also confirms this. Peter Badcock-Walters explained that USAID has been the foundation's most consistent funder, "but more than funder, partner." He characterized the relationship between the foundation and USAID as a remarkably honest and interactive one. "We've not always agreed on every point of activity, but they have listened very attentively to whatever information we could provide on our view of the education environment, and they've responded extremely flexibly." While not usually renowned for its flexibility, USAID has nonetheless been remarkably accommodating. Badcock-Walters noted, "I don't think we can point to an occasion on which USAID didn't

listen hard and carefully and come to a pretty well-reasoned decision for supporting or, as the case may be, not supporting us."

Testing USAID's development hypothesis

As stated earlier, USAID supported education in South Africa through NGOs because U.S. law prohibited giving funds directly to the apartheid government. With the advent of Mandela's government, however,

USAID began funding national and provincial administrations directly, while continuing to support NGO collaboration. This decision was based on the hypothesis that the governments will call upon NGOs for expertise and service to their school systems. Was USAID's initial strategy sound, and will its reaffirmation prove successful in the new South Africa?

Accomplishments

The stories of the NGOs confirm that USAID's investments during the struggle years produced tangible results in its three target areas. In the realm of **policy formulation**, for instance, USAID can point to:

- Ground-breaking work by the Education Foundation on the entire range of policy issues facing the new, democratic government, from educational financing to pupil-teacher ratios;
- Contributions by OLSET to the new national policy on technology and education;
- ELRU's lobbying on behalf of early childhood development policy, to "put young children on the map," including submissions to the constitutional assembly on children's rights;
- NLC's contributions to planning and delivery policy for adult literacy and basic education;
- New policies on assessing basic education pioneered by the IEB;

- MIET's successful advocacy for policy changes on accreditation, allowing NGOs to offer recognized teacher training;
- Input to the new national curriculum in areas such as outcomes-based education and curricular learning areas from NGOs such as MIET; and
- Policies on more effective teaching methods to replace rote learning, pioneered by several of the highlighted NGOs such as ESST.

Turning to **systems development**, USAID-supported NGOs have delivered:

- Innovative, learner-centered materials for primary-school children from disadvantaged backgrounds produced by ESST;
- OLSET's radio learning model, now being examined by several other NGOs working in different sectors, including early childhood education;
- MIET's model learning materials and innovative distribution methods using the print media;
- NLC's model adult basic education delivery systems;
- Alternative in-service teacher education models introduced by several NGOs highlighted here;
- ELRU programs for anti-bias training and community motivators;
- The Education Foundation's information systems for government and NGOs; and
- IEB's new assessment systems, from design to logistics.

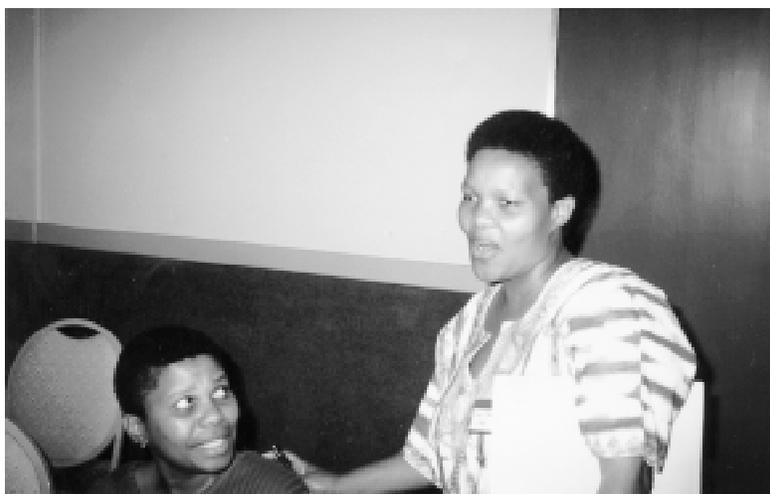
Finally, USAID's development partners have **enhanced system capacity** in many different ways:

- Teacher training programs from NGOs such as ESST and MIET in

how to change the classroom into a learning environment;

- General support for teachers through *The Teacher* newspaper;
- ELRU's programs to prepare early childhood education trainers and to give women access to further training;
- New approaches to national curriculum development based on OLSET's pioneering radio work;
- Adult basic education capacity-building workshops for government and other NGOs sponsored by the NLC;
- Training for individuals, and organizational support for government departments from the Education Foundation; and
- IEB's provincial-level training in new assessment models.

These accomplishments, in turn, have obvious potential to help transform South Africa's education system by improving equity, quality, and access. In the view of many of the responsible NGOs, the alternative models they are pioneering have already made a difference. For instance, ELRU takes great pride in its community motivator program, which is increasing access to early childhood education for millions of children who would never have been able to get into



centers or schools as they exist because of fees, or because of their location.

OLSET's radio programs offer a similar advantage, as explained by Naidoo. Historically, rural communities, particularly black communities, did not have access to mainstream education. Girls and women did not have equity of access to education of any significance. Radio offers immediate access to all of these communities without any gender, race, or distance bias. The radio learning program has also shifted the perception of English language teaching. The perception of the high cost of delivery of education has been changed, as has the impression of quality dissipating the further one moves away from the hub. Radio learning has shown that the same quality of instruction can be provided to both the remotest of rural areas and the center of the city.

NLC's Fourie extended the argument to adults, noting that the programs being planned and delivered will provide millions of illiterates with access to the system: "the potential for access in terms of lifelong learning and further education or immediate access in terms of access to the economy, access into social institutions, access into education, the education ladder."

Of course, these efforts are still in early stages. French noted that development of equity and quality remains one of the largest challenges of the future:

A funny thing about our adult exam system is that when you're actually working in there you become almost physically aware of the transformative capacity of an assessment process like this as you conduct it. You become also intensely aware that unless you build quality you're not going to be building equity, you'll just be opening doors that people actually can't go through.

Mona stressed the importance of teacher training, a major aspect of the work of many NGOs and the rationale for *The Teacher* newspaper. While transformation is taking place, a lot remains to be done on teacher retraining. Mona emphasized that, at the end of the day, teachers are the implementers of the policies:

Otherwise it could be said that we have changes without any difference: change at national level, change in so far as policies are con-

cerned, but no tangible changes in the classrooms and in our schools. But I must say that teachers in this country are enthusiastic about the future. They are prepared to embrace change. They are prepared to play their role in transformation.

Finally, Badcock-Walters cautioned against impatience. "We all fail to recognize . . . how long transformation in education really takes. We delude ourselves that we can declare policy and fix things, but in practice, particularly in a system as big and complex as South Africa's, it is a long, time-consuming, and painful process of attrition."

Future of NGOs

USAID's approach to linking its apartheid and democratic-era funding strategies depends on two assumptions: that the work of NGOs supported with U.S. assistance prepared the ground for the new dispensation, and that the same groups will provide a reservoir of expertise on which government and society can draw in the new South Africa. Having demonstrated their clear impact in the preparation phase, what can be said about NGO prospects for future contributions?

Crystal balls are always cloudier than hindsight. Certainly South Africa's estimated thirty thousand NGOs are themselves wondering what the future will bring. Ironically, the democratic government itself comes under attack in this regard. Ben Turok, an ANC member of Parliament and himself the controversial head of an NGO, recently suggested, "We have to admit that the new South Africa owes the NGO movement an apology." He cited several causes for the problems faced by NGOs, including "a large hemorrhage of skilled personnel who have moved into government," "a huge loss in funding," and "a chronic incapacity" to work harmoniously together towards a common vision.

Efforts by government to "coordinate" foreign assistance funds have garnered the most criticism by NGOs. Kumi Naidoo of the South African National NGO Coalition declared such efforts to have been:

a tragic error that resulted in many NGOs going to the wall. Of course international

agencies have so much more interest in funding government. Regardless of the government's policy to encourage foreign donors to work directly with NGOs, it's not happening.

In general, the future seems brighter for the USAID-supported NGOs described here. For example, MIET has already begun successfully working for, as well as with, the government. Botha explained that her organization is increasingly responding to the needs of national and provincial governments. For example, MIET recently contracted with the national Department of Education to develop a "launch document" for a new curriculum.

Larcombe also envisioned the possibility of generating fees from MIET clients by providing a teacher qualification of sorts. In theory, teachers could enroll with and pay their fees to MIET, rather than to a university. "We see that as an avenue of sustainability where external funding, donor funding, might no longer be available."

However, some organizations do have very real concerns about their prospects for becoming stronger, or even surviving. In part, this depends on the constituencies they address. Organizations serving people at the bottom of the social ladder or those with the most limited resources are the most dependent on outside funding, whether from overseas or within South Africa. When asked where ELRU will be in five years, Brock responded, "Without foreign aid, nowhere." Brock pointed out that foreign donors have been poised for a long time, waiting for the South African government to begin funding them. Not only has the government been unable to provide such funding, it has also failed to develop within its own programs the capacity to do the kind of work that NGOs are doing. For their part, the NGOs hope that good will and good sense will prevail:

Basically, if that doesn't happen, if there isn't a fairly prolonged, conditional funding period, because of our constituency we don't think that we're going to be able to generate enough income to sustain ourselves.

Brock also noted that NGOs often serve people who cannot afford to purchase services at commercial

rates. This suggests the need for some sort of ongoing funding as a means of helping those who are economically—or socially—disadvantaged. French agreed, pointing out that it is very difficult to charge people in rural NGOs what it costs IEB to administer the exams. As such, there has been a great deal of backing for the examinations; the major support has come from international donors, including USAID.

Several NGOs see tripartite cooperation as the logical next step. Abel revealed that ESST has been attempting to enter into partnerships with the government and one or more donors. Donors prefer to channel the funds to NGOs through the government. But so far NGOs are not seeing these funds. Provincial governments have been told that money is available, but for a variety of reasons they are not acting as a conduit to NGOs. Abel estimated that it may be at least three to five years before the provincial governments are in the position to buy into some of the work of NGOs.

For his part, Naidoo of OLSET envisioned a cooperative relationship between his NGO and the provincial ministries. "The ultimate mark of success would be our working ourselves out of a job and the ministry taking over the role of provisioning in schools, in all the provinces." However, Naidoo also felt that NGOs serve as a civil society balance in South Africa, and are conducive to maintaining a very healthy democratic atmosphere, even if they will not be the primary providers of education in ten years.

Fourie foresaw that NLC's future relationships with government will likely be substantially different from past ones. He envisioned two options. Under the first, NLC would be absorbed into the State as an allied arm, and be funded by the government in terms of its policy work. Alternatively, NLC would set up an institute as an autonomous organization that is funded directly by the government. Fourie pointed out that in its funding and grant agreements, NLC has always classified the current period as a period of transition to the year 2000. In the long term, adult basic education should be a state-provided service:

We should be providing education as a state. So we don't see ourselves as being a separate entity unless we want to set up an institute or a national center, which then would not function the way that we function now.

Finally, while Badcock-Walters spoke of a development partnership, he also saw the necessity of NGOs becoming more effective and commercial. NGOs are going to be drawn more and more into providing services in direct commercial competition with the private sector and with far more commercially-driven NGO organizations. As such, NGOs are going to have to become a great deal more effective, cost-efficient, and commercially-motivated. NGOs are close to realizing a vision they have long pursued: a real partnership between the NGO sector, the education departments, and the enabling capacities of development agencies like USAID.

A message to the American people

Most other African countries can already look back on a few decades of educational transformation; South Africans see a job that began just a few years ago. Yet even in that short time, much progress has been made. President Mandela is signing a new Schools Act. Racist laws are gone. Racially-divided bureaucracies have been replaced by new, united structures that are already making progress towards smoother functioning (albeit with great room for improvement). An entire nation is coming to terms with the new dispensation, with much tumult but surprisingly little conflict.

The United States, through USAID, has been an important player among the many donors assisting South Africa. Prior to the 1994 elections, USAID's support strengthened a large number of non-governmental and community-based organizations working to compensate for apartheid's ravages and to prepare for a new political dispensation. That dispensation achieved, USAID is now spending approximately \$30 million a year to help the government as well as its former NGO partners transform the education system, to give all South Africans equal access to quality education, on the basis of a foundation laid in policy formulation, systems development, and capacity enhancement.

As is the case everywhere, the South Africans who have benefited from this assistance and the American taxpayers who contributed to it do not know each other. Nor are most of them likely to ever meet. Yet suppose they could be brought together. What would the South Africans say?

Olivier of ESST pointed out that South Africans are in the absolutely singular position of being able to redesign their society. And South Africa is part of the world society. The American taxpayers, who are helping to fund ESST, are also helping to resuscitate the South African society. With a black government and a black president, South Africans are rebuilding their society from a drastically different perspective than the one to which many of them are accustomed:

I find it exhilarating to be living within a social ideology that I walked into. As I grew old, I walked into it. I didn't come out of it. And the same goes for probably all South Africans. We've walked into a very futuristic notion of South Africa.

Olivier felt that American taxpayers are doing a much similar thing globally, that is, they are walking into a new universal society. "And that's what I would tell them. Thank you very much for funding that universal society."

Botha of MIET echoed both Olivier's appreciation and his global vision. She pointed out that American taxpayers are very far away, and that there are pressing needs in the United States. One's first sense would be to want to address those domestic needs. However, as members of a global community, what happens in one area of the globe must affect what happens elsewhere. "I do think that maybe what's been developed in [South Africa] also has the potential of having an impact on the rest of the continent."

From the perspective the Education Foundation, Badcock-Walters suggested that both sides benefit from the relationship. If the United States has any aspiration to remain a world leader, it can only do so in a world that is competent to work with and alongside it. South Africa, he felt, has a fighting chance of being able to pull off a development paradigm that can provide a meaningful partnership for the rest of the developed world. In that sense, U.S. contribution to the achievement of such development translates into a rejuvenated and effective education system that produces quality people to work alongside—any contribution along those lines makes the future of both Africa and the U.S. better.

OLSET's Naidoo pointed out that some Americans do get to see the results of their contributions after



I want ordinary Americans to appreciate that their money is going to black South Africans. It's going to the poorest and the marginalized in our sector, and that is a hell of a contribution to make. It's about people helping people.

Biersteker of ELRU remarked that it is not the “big stuff” that marks the impact of American contributions:

It's the voices of women in the communities that have been touched by the training and empowered to help other women, to help their neighborhoods, and to help children. And you can only see it drop by drop. At a personal level there are these really stunning kinds of things that radiate out. Agencies like ourselves can act as a catalyst in releasing that kind of talent, of creativity, of skills, which would otherwise just lie there and not be used.

all. Recently, a group of American educators, visiting South Africa through the Citizen Ambassador program, opted to come to Soweto and other townships to see what OLSET had been doing with radio learning. They came away extremely impressed with how American tax dollars had affected the lives of children in disadvantaged South African communities:

One of them said to me, 'It's ages since I have been so misty-eyed in a classroom situation.' He was emotionally shaken, visibly affected by what he saw happening in a classroom. I suspect that most Americans would be equally touched. They would feel extremely proud of what they saw and where their money went.

Continuing to focus on the human level, the NLC's Fourie pointed out that at the basic level, the development efforts have been about the people who have struggled:

A woman who learned through ELRU to teach young children in an impoverished rural area once described ELRU as “the breast that never dries up.” Brock concluded:

It has been nurturing, it has provided in very far-reaching, sustaining ways. And I just want to thank, on behalf of people like her, the American people for feeding into ELRU. Because without that we certainly would have dried up.

Conclusion: Education Reform

Education reform

In the preceding accounts we have presented close-up views of current reform activities in primary education in six African countries. We conclude our study with a summary of their common themes and essential messages to those interested in support the United States is giving to people in Africa.

Primary education is essential (though not sufficient) for development.

Nations that look forward to enduring democratic governments, economic growth, and a better life for their people must invest in the long-term development and maintenance of an education system, beginning with primary education. Though this notion has for a long time been as incontrovertible as motherhood and apple pie, concrete evidence of its validity has only recently come to the forefront of discussion on development.

When schools do their job, individual students reap private benefits. Stated summarily in USAID's 1993 progress report on its Development Fund for Africa:

More educated people are, in general, more productive, have greater access to wage employment, and earn higher incomes. They have also been shown to live longer, healthier lives and to have lower rates of fertility and infant mortality.

The public, as well as individual students, benefit from education on a mass scale. In recent history, an astounding fact about the keys to economic growth has become clear. A line of East Asian countries, beginning with Japan, Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and leading to Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia have stabilized as success stories in economic development. Analysts of these "miracles" have

reached interesting conclusions about what has led to them. Amidst controversial theories about the contribution of various economic and industrial policies, the heavy investment of these countries for three decades in primary education stands out as one certain explanation of their present ability to compete in the global economy.

A 1995 World Bank review of education priorities and strategies concludes that "the major difference between East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa is due to variations in primary school enrollment rates. Investment in physical capital accounts for only 20 percent of the difference." The Bank review cited recent studies that "confirm the importance of education, and especially widespread primary education, for growth." These cross-country studies "suggest the possibility of a threshold level of human capital accumulation beyond with a country's growth may accelerate."

Finally, even people in remote corners of the globe are affected by gains in education and growth in human capital. Statistical findings demonstrate that investments in primary education contribute to reducing our most pressing global problem: population growth. The fact that the world's nearly six billion people will increase to nine billion in the next twenty years cries out to many governments to slow down its birth rate. Demographic research of the past two decades demonstrates that the most effective, long-term means of doing this is to help more children, especially girls, go to school. Girls and boys who have been to school grow into men and women who decide to have fewer children.

Educating all children is a challenge without equal

If primary education is so critical to sustainable development, why have not all governments in Africa guaranteed every child a place in school? The simple answer is that providing universal primary education has been a challenge of the highest order. The politics, the cost, the cultural core, and the technical demands have stymied bold attempts to reform education systems.

Education, in the words of the World Bank, is “intensely political.”

This is particularly true in African countries, where teachers constitute the largest group of civil servants, the Ministry of Education administers the government’s largest budget, and the product—educated people—is diffuse and intangible. The immensity of the education sector presents an administrative challenge at many levels, from the school to the top of the ministry. A World Bank Review, *Priorities and Strategies for Education*, notes that the interests protected by the education system are usually those of “teachers’ unions, university students, elites, and the central government rather than those of parents, communities, and the poor.”

Education is expensive.

Primary education, in particular, requires the government to invest in the poor, whose voice is seldom heard, as well as the elite, who cry loudly not to lose government support for a university education. Other pressures as well put education systems on the back burner. Though the social rate of return on education is remarkable, countries in economic crisis cannot ignore more urgent demands for available funds. Most African countries suffered economic crises during the 1980s and are deeply in debt. Many countries must still give high priority to keeping a military force to check internal rebellions and ward off foreign aggressors. To invest in schools and teachers, governments must forego stronger armies, better roads, and payment on substantial foreign debt. Schooling is costly not only to governments but also to families. The amount cash-poor parents must relinquish for uniforms, building fees, and books is in addition to the opportunity cost of children who otherwise provide critical labor and help at home.

Education is a cultural process that cannot be readily installed with bricks and mortar.

In industrialized countries, schools have evolved as institutions that prepare children and youth for life in modern organizations and communities. Schools in sub-Saharan Africa are often inimical to daily life—concrete barricades imported from another world and

servicing only that world. What takes place inside the school is also too often remote from the immediate needs of families. Many African children still learn to read and write in a language they don’t speak. Changing this disjuncture between school and community—preparing curricula, training teachers, and building schools and classrooms to reflect community values—is a long, slow process.

Finally, education is a demanding profession.

Both teaching and managing a learning environment require technical virtuosity and professional status not easily acquired in societies where mass schooling does not reach back farther than a generation. Teachers in Africa work with little support from either the ministry that employs them or the communities they serve. In many parts of the continent, they are lucky if they are paid regularly. Most get little professional support. They teach in a bare, windowless classroom, with no books, and more than fifty students of a wide range in age, many undernourished and hungry, crowded into too few, if any, desks. What learning can they foster under such conditions?

Educators have launched systemic reform.

Three decades of successes and failures in building education systems in Africa, as well as a sea change in Western understanding of what makes schools effective, have helped educators unlock the essentials of systemic reform. With help from international donor agents, African education officials have launched major efforts to ensure that, over the long term, a quality primary education will be available to all children.

Governments have given top priority to building effective schools for all children.

They have launched fundamental reforms to the interlocked systems of instruction, management, and governance. They have prepared the ground for sustaining these reforms by linking them to broader reforms in macroeconomics and democratic governance. In the context of their structural adjustment programs, the IMF and World Bank have convinced governments to reallocate significant portions of the budget from the military to the education sector. Within edu-

cation, they have helped the ministry move funds from higher education to primary education. While in some countries, like Uganda, political leaders have made these moves without allowing rebellion from either the army or the university students, in other countries, such as Mali, they have had to move more slowly.

Education projects supported by donor agencies in the decades following independence were generally piecemeal; that is, a project in Kenya might train teachers while a project in Senegal might improve the education management information system. Subsequently, research and experience in industrialized and developing countries revealed the importance of systemic reform. Improvements in a teacher training initiative, for instance, cannot be fully effective or sustained without reinforcing improvements in school management and instructional materials. Vain attempts to isolate textbooks or some other “input” as paramount in improving schools have helped economists come to agree with what educators already knew: there is “no quick fix.”

This is because the essential system of education—the instructional system comprising the curriculum, instructional materials, teachers, and tests—cannot function outside the context of two other important systems—management and governance. The management system ensures that information about each school and each student is recorded and taken into account in myriad decisions, that teachers get paid, and that budgets reflect the projected growth and migration of populations. The governance system brings the voices of all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, students, and other government and non-government functions, into decisions about education policies. Recognizing that these three systems are inseparable and that reform is a systemic process has led to dramatic improvements on the road to universal primary education.

From study and collaboration with their colleagues in other sectors of development, such as agriculture, health, and urban and rural development, educators concerned with African countries have learned much more about the relation of the education system (in its complexity) to other political and economic systems. Donor agents are intervening to insist that governments clean up their bureaucratic practices and the behaviors of their civil servants. Macroeconomic reforms in African countries have had notable effects—

both good and bad—on education. Political reform and the process of introducing democratic government is also making players in the vast network of teachers and administrators more accountable to both communities and government offices. Politicians are less able to squander public funds on personal and political gain, and junior officers, including school principals, must make their business transactions public.

Finally, education and schools are becoming the organs of the people they serve, not the products of officials in a remote capitol city or even more distant international bureaucracy. Governments are decentralizing social services, including education, making local offices accountable for how money is spent and what needs to be improved so that students can learn more. The decay of authoritarian regimes has permitted the associations of civil society to bloom, creating for people organized links to government. Parent teacher associations and school management committees are forming to turn schools into community learning centers.

USAID will continue to provide tested strategies and tools to support reforms.

Eight years of intensive experience with education reform in twelve African countries have given USAID the confidence that its present goal in the education sector is the right one: to support “the transition to sustainable systems that expand and improve basic education.” USAID’s strategy for implementing that goal:

- *Focuses on building effective schools* where policies, inputs, and services come together to support teaching and learning. Effective schools are characterized by a school climate that supports learning by having: 1) high expectations for children’s learning, capable and motivated teachers, strong leadership, high learning time, and an organized, relevant curriculum; 2) effective learning and teaching strategies through variety in teaching methods and materials, integration with children’s experience and culture, and frequent assessment of student learning and feedback; 3) supporting conditions and inputs including: community involvement and support; nourished and healthy children who are ready to learn; functioning government policies on school

management, financing, resources, and evaluation; a qualified teaching staff; adequate materials and school facilities; and regular supervision and professional support to teachers.

■ ***Promotes systemic reforms.*** An approach to education reform that views the education system as a whole requires a comprehensive analysis and treatment of the myriad elements, dimensions, and actors within an education system. This systemic approach addresses the critical linkages between educational policy, resource availability, institutional capacity, educational services, management/administration, and stakeholder interests and roles, so that no one component or aspect conflicts with or constitutes a brake on another's development. This is in contrast to earlier approaches by which both countries and donors focused on a single aspect or element of a system without coordination with its many other elements.

■ ***Creates the conditions for sustaining those reforms.*** Sustainability is defined by four key principles: 1) systemic reform that ensures that improvements take root and flourish; 2) consensus and ownership so that the reforms have the approval, endorsement, and support by those providing and those receiving educational services; 3) institutional strengthening that focuses on strengthening the functioning of institutions in relation to the policy objectives of the reform, and does not simply focus on training individuals. Institutional strengthening addresses both government and non-governmental organizations, and seeks to strengthen relationships between institutions; and 4) financial pragmatism and realistic public finance. USAID seeks to assist national reforms so that they are ultimately financed by public and private resources within the country. For the transition to financial sustainability to occur a coun-

try must show economic growth in excess of population growth, and allocate increasing amounts to support basic education so that it maintains or increases per-pupil expenditures while expanding enrollments. The role of USAID and other donors is to assist in forging new policies, systems, and practices during the transition period that ensure that external support represents a declining proportion of total costs.

USAID's tool box contains implements that have been honed for successful collaboration with government officials and other educators.

■ ***Technical assistance,*** given both directly to planners and managers and indirectly to their staffs throughout the ministry, including teachers.

■ ***Non-project assistance*** (or funds deposited in the government's foreign exchange account), furnished to encourage policies and procedures that support a sound basic education system.

■ ***Active and sustained participation in African regional organizations,*** notably the Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), as a means of participating in the international dialogue and national policy formulation process.

In conclusion, the involvement of USAID in primary education reforms in Africa has been a challenging but promising effort by many people—Africans, Americans, and others. All those who have participated have learned from the experiences of these eight years. Guidance from U.S. research on effective schools and school reform in the United States has led in the right direction. Lessons from practice are now directing a continuing investment in what more and more social, political, and economic analysts are pegging a critical dimension of sustainable development in Africa.

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