

Sleeping on borrowed mats:
Instruments and policies
for aid to West African education
in the 21st century

April 1997

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**This document was prepared for the ABEL Project,
Center for Human Capacity Development
Bureau for Global Programs, Field Research and Support
Contract: HNE-Q-00-94-00076-003**

This ABEL-funded study was conducted in the field in close cooperation with the ADEA Working Group on Nonformal Education in each of the concerned countries as a collaborative strategy and means of institutional development. This version of the study was presented to the World Adult Education Conference in Hamburg, on behalf of the ADEA International Working Group on Nonformal Education.

SLEEPING ON BORROWED MATS

INSTRUMENTS AND POLICIES FOR AID TO WEST AFRICAN EDUCATION

A Moré proverb from Burkina Faso holds that “whoever sleeps on a borrowed mat should realize he is lying on the cold, cold ground.” Reforming and revitalizing aid to West Africa for a new generation means crafting situations under which people can make, remake and market their *own* mats -- not to speak of beds, barracks and related furniture manufactories or sleep research institutes. And it necessarily involves careful assessment of --

- (a) the way in which aid is raised or “tithed” by the governments and donors concerned, as well as allied stewardship issues;
- (b) the policy targets and substantive programs toward which aid is directed; and
- (c) the instruments and procedures by which it is delivered and related decisions are made.

The following pages concentrate on the latter two of these issues and, in conformity with the priority established in the Cooperation 21 exercise, deal with instruments first and substantive policy second. Remarks are based on initial results of the PADLOS-Education Study -- an 18-month effort, carried out in five West African countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Senegal) under the joint aegis of the OECD/Club du Sahel and the CILSS. The study focused on what is too often the Achilles’ heel or “missing link” in decentralization policies: lack of appropriate education and training among those who must assume and sustain the initiatives.¹ Remarks to follow are therefore naturally formulated from a human resource development perspective.

¹ *The central objective of the research was to identify measures that can be taken to help community associations, local businesses, and citizens’ groups acquire the new skills and knowledge they need in order to take over economic, social and political functions heretofore monopolized by government or simply unexercised. Though improvements in schooling are in the long run very important to this movement and though schools can and should play a critical role in supporting the new local human resource development schemes required, the existing primary education system -- even where it is solidly implanted -- generally cannot meet these needs on its own, because the people who must assume new responsibilities and who therefore require varied kinds of training are typically adults, both men and women. Some already have rudiments (or more) of formal education, some have been through Koranic schooling, some have done or could pursue nonformal education to acquire functional literacy in African and/or international languages; some have experience in job apprenticeships or different varieties of vocational training. Most have relevant experience and sources of traditional knowledge, are able to master the new skills in question -- if they are presented progressively and pedagogically in concrete terms -- and are in need of further instruction and practice in order to develop their confidence and abilities*

The PADLOS-Education Study was devoted to examining the experience of over fifty communities where significant progress has been made (or very instructive failures encountered) in the realm of decentralization and local assumption of new socio-economic and political responsibilities. The study was designed to identify



INSTRUMENTS: DOING THE THING RIGHT

The distinction between policies and instruments is always a slippery one, and this fact is particularly important to note in the realm of human resource development, for it is the one sector that is most clearly both an area of substantive policy concern and a critical *instrument* for achieving aid objectives -- be they those of different groups of Sahelian citizens, of their governments, of donors or of a critical mass of people in all three categories.

David Naudet implicitly says as much when he classifies "capacity building" as one of the four primary targets of aid (and the one least squarely hit over the last thirty years) while at the same time emphasizing genuinely Sahelian "intermediation" and "structures d'accueil" as critically important instruments. These notions are closely linked, and all entail careful attention to appropriate training and education -- formal, nonformal and/or informal. Nodes of authentic and culturally-rooted intermediation ("intermédiation immergée") don't emerge unless the capacity to manage these transactional functions is developed; and capacity-building is a short-lived affair if the resulting centers of competence have nothing to intermediate -- i.e., no "throughput" to exercise their new skills and to justify the investment in them.

In regard to instruments, it might therefore be said at the outset that one of the major challenges for providers of aid in the "next generation" is to make their instruments and procedures themselves more directly supportive of learning and capacity building, to work out a better harmony of means (the mechanisms for delivering aid) and ends (the types of objectives and programs to which aid is devoted). Corporations and public agencies in industrialized countries are currently paying greatly increased attention to strategies for building "learning organizations" -- that is, enterprises and institutions which can adjust creatively to a changing and challenging environment because a majority of employees are regularly involved in learning about, refining and reconfiguring what they do, and because they define new learning to be as much the intended result of their operations as is the production of specific outputs or the delivery of particular services.

One of the weaknesses of aid activities on the instrumental side has been the sharp divorce between program personnel on one hand and administrative/accounting personnel on the other, resulting as often as not in a "good guy/bad guy" tandem at the interface with host country staff and beneficiary representatives. Part of this is eminently understandable, even if

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- (a) *the ways in which those associations and communities have succeeded in mobilizing the human resources or acquiring the competencies required to assume such new responsibilities,*
 - (b) *the obstacles that they have encountered in the effort,*
 - (c) *the lessons to be learned from their experience, and*
 - (d) *the kinds of support and policy reforms that would enable groups like these to render their efforts more effective and self-sustaining in the future.*

Results are currently being analyzed and are bringing into focus a number of significant observations concerning the dynamics of effective decentralization at the local level and the role of education and training, as well as a number of important policy implications for national governments and donor organizations interested in promoting decentralized development..

increasingly outmoded. The two have quite naturally seen themselves as having distinctly different, if theoretically complementary, missions: the first to promote all the laudable objectives of particular projects, and the latter to ensure accountability to legislative oversight and demonstrate that no funds are being wasted.

And yet in the “new generation”, as decentralization and assumption of management responsibility by increasing numbers of actors in a pluralizing society become realities, the line between management and program begins to blur in significant ways. If it is critically important that citizens and associations of diverse kinds not simply execute development activities and/or benefit from them, but that they manage them themselves, then what was heretofore an accounting and administrative concern becomes a programmatic one: how to induct people as effectively and sensitively as possible into the rigors and responsibilities of resource management. That requires, at both the personal level and the institutional one, “facilitative” and “pedagogic” accounting, or very management-wise technical assistance. This is not an easy junction to effect, management accountants being by habit and necessity risk averse whereas program personnel have to be more adventurous; but a lot of energy can be reaped from better fusion -- or at least relation --of the two.

As a consequence, “capacity-building” is progressively migrating into the category of aid instruments and is likely to do so increasingly in the years to come. There follow a series of more detailed and practical implications of the experience acquired in the course of the PADLOS-Education for the “how” of aid, all in a sense extensions and applications of the fundamental points just made.

1. **Treat subcontracting, delegation and devolution as vital learning tools.** Paradoxically, at a moment when the effectiveness of project-style funding and programmatic strategic planning is increasingly put into question at the donor agency and government Ministry level, simplified and more participatory forms of these methodologies are proving quite relevant to capacity building in local associations and nascent businesses. It is as if the methodology of development administration itself had needed to be decentralized.

Performance contracts are instruments that allow potential funders to respond to requests and proposals formulated by civil society groups and institutions on the basis of their own definition of priorities and to jointly specify with these beneficiaries -- through open negotiation -- the services or materials to be produced and acceptable and culturally-relevant means for quality control. They provide a medium for putting critically needed resources at the disposal of these local institutions and ensuring them the means to acquire valuable experience and take responsibility for the effectiveness of their operations. They can create a framework for developing and practicing accountability and for training beneficiaries in new areas of technical competence. To achieve these ends, however, contracting must be treated as a *teaching and learning exercise*, which requires of the grantor agency both a good mastery of the accounting mechanics involved and an ability to configure this activity in a pedagogical manner, complete with appropriate evaluation and quality control and programmed to interweave training and increasingly sophisticated practice.

Modified forms of the *request for proposal* mechanism can likewise be used to good effect to incite intermediate groups and associations to engage in strategic planning and envisage worthwhile investments. Criteria for selection may create incentive for engineering broader participation in these exercises and coming up with schemes that will have a stimulating effect even on those not eventually successful in the grant-seeking process.

2. **Develop and use a rich variety of *participatory planning* techniques for program and project design.** Relentless but carefully orchestrated introduction of stakeholder

representatives into all facets of the planning of development assistance and the management of the resulting activities is a key means for ensuring the relevance and sustainability of investments, as is explicit adoption of a “process” rather than a “blueprint” approach to activity design. Since the crux of participatory planning -- and the watershed often separating bogus from more genuine varieties -- is inclusion in budgetary decision-making and monitoring, these habits and the subcontracting methodologies mentioned above can be mutually reinforcing.

3. **Adopt participatory evaluation and research approaches as *modus operandi* for program assessment and innovation development.** It is high time to institutionalize the voice of local beneficiaries in the assessment of programs and the design of new initiatives. Techniques of participatory evaluation can provide an excellent “entering wedge” for enhanced local responsibility in development decision-making; and participatory research strategies (like MARP, action research, empowerment evaluation and others) offer a way to systematically incorporate local viewpoints and knowledge in the identification of new solutions. Both activities can be valuable learning and capacity-building experiences for local beneficiaries and agency or NGO staff alike. Both can be designed in ways that tailor the level of complexity to the technical competence of different groups of stakeholders and to the relative magnitude of their “stakes”, while simultaneously creating a common language for dialogue about the underlying issues among technicians, politicians and local beneficiaries alike. Moreover, participatory evaluation and planning are closely linked, for those who have finally had increased voice in the assessment of development initiatives almost always want as a consequence to have increased voice in the programming of subsequent ones.
4. **Consider locally-directed (though centrally supported) training in both technical and management realms -- paired with actual transfer or generation of seed resources and legal entitlements, and alternated with genuine assumption of management and fiscal responsibility -- to be quite simply obligatory ingredients of all development investments.** The key, as suggested in the section to follow, is linking financial, intellectual and institutional forms of capitalization in an ascending spiral anchored at the local level. A prime means for moving beyond donor aid is for the recipients themselves to become donors -- bankrollers and investors, at whatever humble level, of development initiative. So credit facilities, banks and related training are arguably the cornerstone of local economic renewal.
5. **Explicitly link both formal and nonformal varieties of education to every development initiative.** This serves at one and the same time
 - to enhance learning opportunities for participants,
 - to give them avenues of access to more responsible positions,
 - to promote the ownership and effectiveness of the operations themselves, and
 - to provide sorely needed fields of practical application and “knowledge-testing” for existing programs of formal and nonformal education, which are too often cloistered in the classroom through lack of the resources necessary to apply their lessons or of the imagination needed to change their teaching and learning styles.

The same effort should create means for much closer relation between FE and NFE and for the kind of “bridges” and “equivalencies” that allow learners to shuttle back and forth with greater ease among certificated education, practical training, and on-the-job experience.

6. **Provide for broader circulation of information about development investments, programs and activities** by generating new avenues of communication with a variety of local stakeholders as part and parcel of aid programming. Neoclassical economic approaches to market phenomena generally assume perfect circulation of information, but in societies and situations where dominant-language literacy is restricted, multiple cleavages of geography and culture impede communication, and information is a critical ingredient of power, awareness of opportunities, of accessible new resources and of the “specs” of innovations may be much more limited.

It becomes therefore critical to open new lines and media of two-way communication -- without necessarily directly confronting the sources of power that restrict information flow -- in order to improve and equalize access to the facts and understandings that generate broad ownership of development initiatives. Tools for improving communication flows include cultivation of proliferating media like private and/or local radio, and use of written materials in African vehicular languages or Arabic script in addition to dominant international languages. Literacy in these languages has always included a significant increment of population not covered by English or French, and they have become increasingly widespread in recent years. Local newspapers in African language have taken root in many areas of the Sahel.

7. **Promote lateral exchange among beneficiaries of development investments and programs at intermediate and local levels.** Much traditional African culture reposes on networks and networking, which have provided the strength and resiliency to survive hardship as well as varied means for enriching quality of life. One major challenge of development is to find ways of broadening these traditional repertoires in order to create new forms of association that span geographical and ethnic lines and that provide new bases for resource accumulation and new avenues for intermediation. Top-down program development and administration modes tend to generate networks of a strictly “clientelist” nature, however. Systematically using development programs as an occasion at the same time to link participants in different circumstances and communities in new ways can have major “spillover” benefits both for ownership of the targeted activities and for creation of increased collective capacity for innovation and investment.



POLICY: DOING THE RIGHT THING

Reforming the “how” of development aid only makes sense, of course, if the “what” addresses real needs and is of sufficient potency to make a difference. The remaining pages are devoted to summarizing some of the lessons of the PADLOS-Education study regarding the orientation of outside assistance, particularly in respect to the development of the human resources required for successful decentralization. A background remark first, however. The study was developed on the premise that **decentralization is necessarily a two-way street**: It must be both bottom-up and top-down to succeed, and the two strategies have to dovetail. It has therefore more to do with a redefinition of the respective roles of center, region and locality than it does with the supposed superannuation of one or the other. (In fact, the supportive and facilitative role that central government plays in a decentralized framework requires *more* competence -- and so a more proficient State apparatus -- than is needed in a traditional hierarchical one.)

The remarkable achievements, if still partial success, of many local associations rapidly pose the problem of better articulation between regional and subregional authorities and these emergent local initiatives, as well as questions concerning the culturally-relevant judicial, legislative and administrative forms that will give permanency and meaning to democracy at the local level. The small geographic region is the arena where the two complementary forms of decentralization -- top-down and bottom-up -- meet and must be reconciled in a democratic framework. This makes clear at the same time the importance of harmonizing sorely-needed training for newly elected regional and communal officials with the training offered to, or organized by, local associations.²

Practically speaking, this perspective suggests that governments and donors should give as much attention to identifying and nurturing the conditions -- legal, economic, informational -- under which "bottom-up" initiatives can take root and lateral linkages among businesses and communities form as they do to figuring out how to privatize, delegate or deconcentrate state functions. In any case, the following paragraphs present a series of policy lessons and practical implications that spring from the PADLOS-Education study and flesh out this perspective.

- (1) **No effective and democratic decentralization without closely-related education and training efforts.** Education and training programs are prerequisites for ensuring the democratizing effect and the sustainability of decentralization initiatives. Where initiatives to decentralize or deconcentrate development functions and decision-making powers are not accompanied by systematic -- and, to the extent possible, locally-managed -- efforts to develop new competencies among a relatively broad set of stakeholders, those powers risk being monopolized by a local elite and abused.

Training is required at two distinct levels:

- (a) At the local level, where those responsible for assuming the new functions need the skills and knowledge necessary to exercise them proficiently and responsibly and those to whom they are accountable need enough understanding of the matter to ensure democratic control of operations.
- (b) At the central/regional level, where government or sponsoring institution staff need the skills and knowledge to facilitate and support the process and provide requisite training and technical assistance.³

² *Case illustration: In the Thiès region of Senegal, villages like Fandene and Saam Njaay which have taken major initiatives in assuming new development responsibilities have likewise begun to form networks of communities that coordinate their efforts in credit mobilization and health service delivery. However these local undertakings as yet bear little relation to regional public health or investment facilities, though they offer a major potential for amplifying the effects of regional programs; and national government plans for training of locally elected officials and decentralization of governance stop at Thiès.*

³ *Case illustration: In a number of villages within the Niono region of Mali, credit mutuals established by the Office du Niger have had chronic problems of unpaid loans and poor performance, in part because few local people beyond the immediate mutual staff were trained, initiated or made responsible for their operation. In Mafi Kumase in the Volta Region of Ghana, on the other hand, the creation and management of a new water reservoir turned out to be a great success, in good part because care was taken to train overlapping sets of people in both the technical and managerial skills necessary to run the system. Same story at Kaniko and several other communities of the Koutiala region of Mali, where the density of villagers literate in Bambara and the extensive management training given them by the CMDT have been largely responsible for the success of local credit mutuals.*

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

IT IS MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT TO JUSTIFY CONCEIVING OR DESIGNING EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN ISOLATION FROM EACH OTHER. THIS SUGGESTS IN TURN THAT NO SINGLE MINISTRY CAN VALIDLY PURSUE AN INTERVENTION STRATEGY IN THE FIELD AND FEW SINGLE-SECTOR DONOR PROGRAMS MAY BE WORTH AUTHORIZING OR FUNDING. AT A MINIMUM, DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS THAT TARGET LOCAL ASSUMPTION OF RESPONSIBILITY MUST INCLUDE WELL-ARTICULATED TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR STAKEHOLDERS, AND EDUCATION OR TRAINING PROGRAMS THAT ARE NOT INTEGRALLY CONNECTED WITH ASSUMPTION OF NEW POWERS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND STATUSES BY THEIR BENEFICIARIES ARE UNLIKELY TO SUCCEED.

THIS INJUNCTION FOR INTEGRATED INITIATIVES IS A NATURAL CONCOMITANT OF POLICIES FAVORING GREATER INTERMEDIATION BY -- AND DECISION-MAKING POWER FOR -- LOCAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES AND ASSOCIATIONS IN-COUNTRY, FOR SUCH FIELD INSTITUTIONS TEND NATURALLY TO SEE PROBLEMS IN MULTI-SECTORAL FORM.

- (2) **Three ingredients appear necessary for the success of such decentralization initiatives.** They constitute at the same time a “recipe” for genuine capacity-building and compose a strategy for local accumulation and investment in three interdependent dimensions:
- (a) Financial capitalization: Some actual transfer of resources, entitlements or income-generating potential. Schemes that involve no actual generation of new resources at the level of beneficiaries create little motivation or need for new management competence, and those that involve only a transfer of *costs* (“Let them pay for it!”) seldom remain solvent.⁴
 - (b) Institutional capitalization: Enablement and reinforcement of institutional capacities and frameworks for associating members, managing resources, selecting competent people for functions, holding them accountable and assessing outcomes. Frameworks of inter-community collaboration and enabling legislation for small business are among the most important of these.⁵

⁴ *Case illustration: Numerous “post-literacy” programs initiated by the Government of Niger in recent years, in villages having completed the literacy campaign, in order to promote establishment of local newspapers, libraries and income-generating activities have had little success because they were essentially divorced from other development activities and involved no local “capitalization” or transfer of resource-generating potentials that required management and the exercise of literate skills. On the other hand, in the Koutiala region of Mali, the CMDT (Malian Textile Company) has turned over major responsibility for credit extension and cotton marketing to village associations in communities like Kaniko, and they have succeeded in mobilizing the competence to organize these activities on their own and to reinvest a good portion of the proceeds.*

⁵ *Case illustration: Decentralization activities seem to succeed best in Ghana in villages sustained by urban associations of out-migrants from the localities in question, for these associations are highly structured and serve as a template for village management efforts and a conduit for transfer of new skills and experiences.*

- (c) **“Intellectual” capitalization (Human capital):** Education and training facilities to help ensure that those charged with new responsibilities have the knowledge and skills necessary to discharge them and a larger number of other local stakeholders understand enough about the process to monitor activities and replace incumbents when necessary.⁶

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE, FINANCIAL RESOURCES, AND TECHNICAL COMPETENCE SEEM TO BE THE THREE ELEMENTS FUELING THE UPWARD SPIRAL IN DECENTRALIZED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT. NONE CAN BE EASILY OMITTED, NONE NEED NECESSARILY BE EXTERNALLY SUPPLIED, BUT ALL ARE REINFORCED BY EXTERNAL EXCHANGE AND ALL MUST BE EXTERNALLY COUNTENANCED AND LEGALLY PERMITTED. GOVERNMENT AND NGO PERSONNEL CAN BENEFIT GREATLY FROM TRAINING AND GUIDED PRACTICE IN THE ART OF NURTURING THESE CONDITIONS.

- (3) **Mobilizing the skills and competencies to take charge:** Successful community organizations and local associations “*font feu de tout bois*” (“make fire from all [available] wood”) -- that is, they draw on the entire mix of human resources of their constituency, including primary school leavers or dropouts, former literacy or Koranic students, out-migrators returned from urban centers, and people who have undergone diverse apprenticeships or job training experiences. Nonformal education programs are often the meeting point of these different groups and the place where knowledge acquired elsewhere is recycled into the specific skills and forms required by the new enterprises. From this point of view, nonformal and formal education programs clearly compose part of the same local system, and one that is increasingly needed to furnish “human capital” for local as well as for regional or national markets.⁷

The spread of literacy in African languages and the presence of people literate in Arabic script and/or Arabic transcription of African language (e.g., *ajami*, *wolofaw*) have greatly facilitated the self-governance and operation of many local associations and nascent enterprises, particularly in areas where knowledge of English or French is not widespread. Accounting systems have been successfully set up in these vernaculars and in some cases are used for effective management of hundreds of millions of francs in transactions. The relation of widespread networks of Koranic learning to new local economic and socio-political activities and the practical literate and management competencies conferred by

⁶ *Case illustration: Agricultural cooperatives have had their ups and downs in the Chadakori and Sayé Sabaoua zones north of Maradi, Niger, but greatest success has coincided with periods where the confluence of new marketing and credit schemes with both technical training for cooperative staff and widespread information of cooperative membership and instruction in basics of accounting and management oversight have given a large proportion of the population a sense of “ownership”.*

⁷ *Case Illustration: At Niono-Coloni in the Office du Niger sector of Mali, officers of the village association that manages marketing and credit activities are a mix of school dropouts, literacy students and Koranic students -- but all have learned the Roman-letter transcription of Bambara by attendance at the literacy courses: In many communities of Ghana visited, an essential role in promotion of income-generating and local self-governance functions has been played by community residents who had migrated to Accra, learned new skills and perspectives, and then returned to the village.*

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

IF DEVELOPED IN BOTH BOTTOM-UP AND TOP-DOWN DIRECTIONS, DECENTRALIZATION STRATEGIES OFFER A CRITICAL OPPORTUNITY TO PROFIT FROM EXISTING RESERVOIRS OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND FROM THE ALTERNATE LITERACIES AND SOCIAL NETWORKING SYSTEMS THAT MOST DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS HAVE HERETOFORE IGNORED. THERE ARE, FOR EXAMPLE, WHOLE REGIONS OF THE SAHEL WHERE SIMPLY ACCEPTING ARABIC SCRIPT COMPETENCE AS A LEGITIMATE FORM OF LITERACY WOULD CUT ADULT ILLITERACY RATES BY AS MUCH AS HALF OVERNIGHT. THREE SPECIFIC MEASURES ILLUSTRATE WAYS OF MOBILIZING THESE UNTAPPED RESOURCES:

- (1) RESUSCITATE THE RESEARCH AND ACTION AGENDA ON "DIVERSIFICATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD" UNDERTAKEN BY IIEP/UNESCO SEVERAL YEARS AGO AND PREMATURELY ABANDONNED;
- (2) MORE VIGOROUSLY PROMOTE BILINGUAL (AFRICAN AND INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE) FORMATS FOR PUBLIC DOCUMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATERIALS; AND
- (3) DEVELOP RESEARCH AND R&D ON AFRICAN LANGUAGE-INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE TRANSITIONS BOTH IN CHILDHOOD SCHOOLING AND ADULT TRAINING--

DONORS SHOULD AT THE SAME TIME RECOGNIZE THAT MOST REGIONS OF WEST AFRICA, WHERE THERE IS IN ANY CASE A LONG TRADITION OF MULTILINGUALISM, PROBABLY HAVE A TRILINGUAL FUTURE: MOST CITIZENS WILL ACQUIRE FUNCTIONAL FLUENCY IN THEIR OWN LOCAL LANGUAGE, AN AFRICAN LANGUAGE OF WIDE DIFFUSION (BAMBARA, YORUBA, FULANI/PULAAR, HAUSA...) AND AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE (ENGLISH, FRENCH...).

Koranic instruction and by socialization in related commercial ventures are, however, insufficiently understood.⁸

- (4) **Empowering women:** Nonformal education and literacy in African languages are often particularly important for the effective participation of women in decentralized development schemes, given the lower rates of schooling that typically characterize this group. The most successful forms of literacy and training for women place immediate emphasis on acquiring management and accounting skills. There are at the same time an increasing number of examples of women's cooperatives, businesses and development associations -- in rural areas as well as in urban ones -- that have capitalized themselves to an impressive degree. This said, because of the greater difficulty women experience in obtaining credit, deficits in their previous access to education and training, and the weight of tradition, "co-ed" or mixed associations are still generally run by men and even

⁸ *Case Illustration: The Tin Tua Association of eastern Burkina Faso -- a local NGO -- has developed an entire system of newspaper production and another for school and training center management in Gourmantché, the language of the region. The "ton" associations of many villages of the Oulésébougou region of Mali (among them, Sougoula and Kafara) operate a series of economic enterprises growing out of commercial agriculture in the Upper Niger Valley thanks to complete systems of accounting and management developed in Bambara. Much of the rapid spread of Wolof-language literacy in villages reached by Tostan, a Senegalese NGO, in the "bassin arachider" regions of the central-West is due to the fact that a major proportion of participants were already at least semi-literate in Arabic characters.*

those explicitly for women often still depend on male assistance in accounting and technical realms.⁹

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

A GOOD ARGUMENT CAN BE MADE THAT DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES -- AND THE ACCOMPANYING TRAINING PROGRAMS -- SHOULD, LIKE THE TOSTAN PROGRAM IN SENEGAL, TARGET WOMEN FIRST BUT ADMIT MALE PARTICIPANTS, WHO IN THIS CASE COME ANYWAYS.

- (5) **Promoting local “HRD”:** To meet the knowledge and skill requirements of a truly democratic brand of decentralization and to make maximum mileage from the impetus that it can give to “education for all”, we are increasingly required to think in terms of a *locally-managed “human resource development system”* -- that is, a mutually reinforcing network of all training facilities available in a given locality, from existing primary schools to nonformal education centers, Koranic or confessional institutes, and even systems for in- and out-migration. From the perspective of self-governing associations and businesses that are assuming important new socio-economic and political functions, these varied “training facilities” all constitute sources of competence and human resources -- each perhaps with its own comparative advantage -- that can be mobilized to meet and profit from the new challenges posed by democratization and decentralization.

This is also where the movement for greater parent, teacher and community involvement in the governance of *schools* is most successfully reconciled with the larger decentralization impulse, because communities which are taking -- and whose citizens are acquiring the skills necessary to take -- greater responsibility for a series of new social and economic functions prove increasingly likely to approach schooling in the same fashion. It is no longer seen as the local and inviolate outpost of a distant Ministry or culture, but as in some sense the education and training branch of the growing set of locally-managed enterprises, and therefore a logical target itself for a larger measure of local management.¹⁰

⁹ *Case illustration: The nonformal education program that Tostan runs principally for women -- but opens to male participants as well -- in the villages of Keur Simbara and Saam Njaay near Thiès, places early emphasis on project management and work organization. Participating women start their own problem-solving and income-generating activities as part and parcel of the curriculum. A number of women have taken major leadership roles in developing these activities, though men still occupy key positions.*

¹⁰ *In Tostan-supported nonformal education programs of the Saint-Louis region of Senegal, the local population has opted in a number of cases for the establishment of their own Wolof- or Pulaar-language schools for children as the next step in the local development process, because they wish to bring all training activities under a single “umbrella”. The multiple functions of the Manegbzanga network of neighboring village associations west of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, draws on “graduates” and dropouts of a variety of different training venues, from primary schooling and adult literacy programs through religious instruction to trade apprenticeship.*

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

CONSISTENT EFFORTS MUST BE MADE TO RECONNECT -- OR TO ENABLE THE RECONNECTION OF -- FORMAL AND NONFORMAL EDUCATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, FOR AT LEAST TWO REASONS. FIRST, COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLING CAN SCARCELY SUCCEED WITHOUT (ESSENTIALLY NONFORMAL) MECHANISMS FOR TRAINING LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD PERSONNEL. SECOND, NONFORMAL EDUCATION OFTEN CONSTITUTES THE MISSING PIECE OF A LOCAL HRD SYSTEM AND A CRITICAL INTERFACE AND PASSAGEWAY BETWEEN SCHOOLING AND THE PRACTICAL, BUT INCREASINGLY TECHNICAL, CONCERNS OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT. THIS MEANS DESIGNING AND TRYING OUT FORMULAS FOR EQUIVALENCY AND CROSSOVER BETWEEN THE TWO REALMS -- IN BOTH DIRECTIONS -- SO THAT LOCAL CITIZENS HAVE GREATER EASE ACCESSING THE VARIED KINDS OF TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION THAT THEY MAY NEED AT RECURRENT POINTS IN THEIR LIFE CYCLE. IT ALSO MEANS PROGRESSIVELY DEVELOPING SKILL AND KNOWLEDGE CERTIFICATION MECHANISMS THAT ARE BOTH SUPPLE AND DISCIPLINED ENOUGH TO PROVIDE COMMON DENOMINATORS FOR THE GREAT VARIETY OF NONFORMAL EDUCATION OFFERINGS AND TO TRANSLATE THEIR OUTCOMES INTO FORMALLY-RELEVANT BENCHMARKS.

- (7) **Revamping “Education for all” strategies:** Under conditions of genuine decentralization like those sketched above, one finds an increasing number of communities which have opted to take their children’s basic education in hand themselves -- including villages previously without schools that have established their own institutions of schooling, often based on the African language writing systems used in literacy programs, to ensure that no child reaches adulthood illiterate. The examples strongly suggest that basic education -- formal as much as nonformal -- no longer needs to be conceptualized and pursued as a benefit solely dispensed (and often rationed) by a central school system but constitutes an activity *that communities can and will organize successfully themselves*, as an essential part of their own program of self-managed economic and social development, provided a modicum of decentralization and income-generation make this possible, appropriate technical support and quality control are ensured, and transitions among languages of instruction and nonformal and formal modes of organization are facilitated.¹¹

¹¹ *Case illustration: In a number of communities of southern Mali and eastern Burkina Faso, villages have in fact both set up their own African language school systems and worked out transitions to French sufficiently well to attain better-than-average rates of success on the primary school leaving examination.*

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

TO THE DEGREE THAT LOCAL COMMUNITIES PROVE WILLING AND ABLE TO ORGANIZE THEIR OWN SCHOOLING, "EDUCATION FOR ALL" TAKES ON A DIFFERENT MEANING, AND RELATED STRATEGIES MUST TAKE ON A VERY DIFFERENT FORM. BASIC EDUCATION APPEARS LESS AS A SERVICE TO BE DISPENSED BY CENTRALIZED PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SUPPLIERS AND LABORIOUSLY DISSEMINATED ACROSS THE MAP THAN AS SOMETHING THAT COMMUNITIES ORGANIZE FOR THEMSELVES WHEN CONDITIONS ARE MINIMALLY FAVORABLE. IN THIS LIGHT, EMPHASIS SHOULD GO NOT SO MUCH TO SPREADING AND SUSTAINING NATIONALLY-SPONSORED SCHOOLS AS TO CREATING THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH COMMUNITIES CAN AND WILL TAKE SUCH INITIATIVE (INCLUDING THOSE OUTLINED ABOVE FOR DECENTRALIZATION ACTIVITIES IN GENERAL), PROVIDING THE TECHNICAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT REQUIRED, AND ENSURING NECESSARY QUALITY CONTROL AND APPROPRIATE TRANSITIONS AMONG DIFFERENT FORMS OF BASIC EDUCATION.

- (8) **Revitalizing extension and innovation-diffusion methods:** Public extension services (agriculture, forestry, health..) and traditional strategies for the diffusion of innovation seem increasingly outmoded by the growing complexity of local development problems and the increasing initiative and competence of their intended beneficiaries. "One size fits all" technical solutions and top-down dissemination methods find little audience, while examples abound that the growing number of literate rural adults are quite capable of playing an active role in the experimentation and dissemination processes.¹²

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

EXTENSION AND APPLIED RESEARCH SYSTEMS IN THE SAHEL ARE DUE FOR A MAJOR OVERHAUL THAT WILL ENTAIL MUCH BROADER USE OF VILLAGE EXTENSION PERSONNEL, THE CREATION OF "LABORATORY COMMUNITIES" FOR FIELD RESEARCH IN HEALTH AND AGRICULTURE, THE ADOPTION OF ACTION AND PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH APPROACHES, AND THE DESIGN OF MORE ADVANCED LEVELS OF TECHNICAL TRAINING FOR LOCAL PERSONNEL IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES.



Right tools, right targets: The chance of making good choices and attaining sustainable outcomes are obviously much improved if those most concerned are integrally involved from the outset. And for that to happen, much learning must transpire on both sides. The human factor is both instrument and substance, both means and end in improving the record of foreign aid. For communities and groups across the Sahel to have the wherewithal to weave, use and market their own strong mats in the era of a new Charter, the institutions of learning and the institutions of doing must interweave their operations in new and innovative ways.

¹² *Case illustration: Locally staffed dispensaries and pharmacies are becoming the rule across wide expanses of the Sahelian countries and in both Mali and Burkina Faso local paramedics have been successfully included in the design and execution of epidemiological studies*