USAID and Community Schools in Africa: The Vision, the Strategy, the Reality[1]

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Introduction

The term "community schools" has been interpreted in many different ways because of the link between community and school – the community's school by virtue of ownership, management, commitment, engagement in operations – a school for the community that was defined by it, or by others. Different models of bringing a community into its school run the gamut from a situation where the community creates its own school and provides all education inputs from teachers to materials and infrastructure to one where a community takes charge of the management of its government school. The term here is taken as a paradigm of community engagement and participation in schools through mobilization, sensitization, funding, training and capacity building of a representative and effective parent-teacher organization (PTA). Community schools in the context of this discussion refers to the multiple school models of community-managed schools, and the process of school community engagement and empowerment developed by the various NGO and PVO partners funded by USAID to improve basic education in Africa.

USAID supports over 5000 community-managed schools through its African education programs in Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, South Sudan, and Uganda. These schools represent the fruit of an effort begun in early nineties on the part of USAID, national governments and international and national NGOs seeking to empower parents and communities to improve education in Africa. A range of innovations arose over the course of the nineties as USAID and its partner PVOs created a movement that increased access and prompted stakeholders and policy makers to consider how alternative modes of delivery could help countries educate all of their children, reach Education for All goals, improve student achievement and reach out to remote, disadvantaged populations.

There is no single model of community schools, or a "one size fit all" approach to be found in USAID programs to improve community participation in schools in Africa. In fact, USAID adapted its design and strategies for community schools to the context of the countries in which they operate. The design and strategies evolved along with the host country's political and socio-economic development. Common USAID strategies and patterns are nonetheless apparent in different countries. And while community participation does not develop linearly but

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[1] The opinions and findings presented in this publication are those of the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID.

is chiefly determined by the socio-political environment in which a community must function, similar tensions, points of replicability and strategic trends in USAID's support to community schooling across countries are also evident.

Given that almost all community-schooling programs in Africa supported by USAID are now at least a decade old, it is useful to look at the identifiable patterns and phases of implementation. This study, used to frame the presentation of case studies of Save the Children's community schools in Malawi, Mali, Ethiopia and Uganda supported by USAID (and other funders in certain cases) examines the why and how of USAID- supported community schools, the strategies that were adopted and how they changed over time. It also addresses the lessons learned by USAID to guide its strategic and programmatic decisions. This study is a descriptive analysis that does not seek to analyze the strengths and challenges of community schools, or scrutinize the compelling issues raised by the experimentations, or evaluate the experience[2].

Why Has USAID Supported Community schools?

In the late 1980s, USAID Africa bureau received a congressional earmark to develop the capacity of African countries to deliver, on a sustained basis, quality and equitable primary education to children in Africa. These funds allowed USAID to participate in education reform on a large scale, starting with the launching of five new basic education programs between 1989 and 1991 in Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mali and Namibia, under a new Development Fund for Africa designed by the US Congress in 1987. Together with the World Bank, USAID forcefully promoted a "systemic" approach to reforming African education, or a "system-wide educational reform". A comprehensive approach to the renewal of African education systems, it argued, had to focus on achieving greater quality, equity and access at the primary level. USAID intended to assist governments in building their institutional capacity to efficiently manage their education systems; USAID's approach emphasized host country leadership, ownership and sustainability. A systemic reform required that ministries of education and the sector itself be reorganized, that decision-making, financing and the improvement of education management and planning capacity be decentralized[3]. It targeted "reform of the education system by the system itself"[4].

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[2] The review of strengths and weaknesses of community schools was conducted in the *Literature Review of Community schools in Africa*, Miller-Grandvaux Yolande and Yoder Karla, USAID Africa Bureau, Washington, 2002.

[3] For a comprehensive history of the systemic reform approach to education reform in Africa, see *Education Reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa: Paradigm Lost,* Moulton Jeanne, Mundy Karen, Welmond Michel, Williams James, Greenwood Publishing Group December, 2002; also see *Basic Education in Africa: USAID's Approach to Sustainable Reform in the 1990s,* DeStefano Joseph, Hartwell Ash and Tietjen Karen, 1995.

[4] Overview of USAID Basic Education Programs in sub-Saharan Africa III, USAID, Washington, 1999, p. 13.

In the early to mid 1990s, USAID focused primarily on building institutional capacity and slowly introduced the concept of equity in education through girls' education[5]. The combined emphasis on gender equity and on the need to bring education systems closer to the beneficiaries naturally pointed to strengthening community support for schools at the local levels and improving the quality of education services. Supporting girls' access to school was thus a major component of USAID education programs particularly in countries where the gender gap was wide such as Mali, Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda, Ghana and Guinea. Any effort to achieve gender parity in enrollment required that parents be sensitized to the multiple benefits of educating girls, to keeping daughters safe and close to their parents and to their communities, to adjusting a school timetable to girls' work at home, to adapting curricula to the needs and values of the community. In other words, it took changing the system and reshaping the enabling environment to specifically accommodate girls – half the target population – rather than be an obstacle to their participation.

In the mid to late 1990s, USAID's Africa Bureau further refined its understanding of the process of education reform. To guide its missions in the field, it developed the Education Reform Support framework, which was published in 1997. The framework suggested that development assistance for education reform could be designed to help build the capacity of various actors, *i.e.* indigenous NGOs and civil society organizations. Such organizations could work together to influence policy reform by empowering citizens to govern their own interests and ultimately create networks and coalitions to support the policy dialogue. Many missions had already been providing grants to international and national NGOs and PVOs to implement school-based development projects. The framework reinforced the idea that missions could create partnerships with civil society and governments to achieve access, quality and equity of education, and thus support education reform.

Within the broader framework of Education for All, USAID Washington pursued the development of a policy reform and education sector support framework that was committed to three foci: school and community change; systemic reform; African ownership of and capacity for the reform process[6]. More specifically it was based on the promotion of community participation and the improvement of access to education, especially for girls, quality and efficiency. When in Mali, Guinea, Ethiopia, Malawi and Benin, NGOs such as Save the Children or World Education proposed their own innovative community-based approaches to achieving these broader goals in unsolicited proposals to missions, they clearly matched and supported USAID's goals and theoretical approaches. USAID and NGOs have since maintained a long-standing partnership, mutually reinforcing each other's vision and strategies.

The Role of NGOs

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[5]*Analysis of USAID Programs to Improve Equity in Malawi and Ghana's Education Systems*, Wolf Joy, 1995.
[6] Overview of USAID Basic Education Programs in sub-Saharan Africa III, USAID, Washington, 1999, p. 13.

As governments were adjusting to receiving and relying on large donor funds, their institutional structures often could not meet the operating demands or even understand the approaches promoted by donor agencies. Governments often reacted with cumbersome bureaucracies, uneven levels of competence, and sometimes uncooperative administrative structures. USAID was under pressure from Congress to produce results, to decrease or simply stop providing direct budget support to governments (as a case in point, USAID Benin withdrew its budget support in 1998). USAID missions tilted their decisions and programs towards working with communities through NGOs to foster school-level changes and reach out to local beneficiaries. By doing so USAID programs were to gain in efficiency and sustainability while at the same time building the capacity of civil society as a whole. Governments alone did not have the means or the capacity to deliver education services to schools in rural areas to reach communities that had no schools. NGOs were certainly the best placed to do so: NGOs work at the community level, thus affecting social change where governments cannot; NGOs can represent and catalyze civil society, a key to democratization and sustainability; and NGOs are simply more efficient than government partners[7]. USAID's strategy in all countries in Africa was to fund international NGOs such as Save the Children, World Education, Africare, World Learning, CARE and others, to partner with and train national NGOs to build local capacity and assist parents to organize and provide services to their own communities. NGO and local development agents were funded and trained by international NGOs under contracts with the agency, leading the local organizations to play an increasingly important managerial and pedagogical role in schools, which inevitably led to certain overlaps and frictions with government authorities.

Examples of role overlaps abound. One example was in Malawi where Save the Children produced a teaching manual, and in Mali where Save the Children, together with its local partner NGOs, trained teachers and monitored their performance or provided the means to ministry inspectors to visit schools and teachers. In these instances, Save the Children was playing the controversial role theoretically assumed by pedagogical advisors to travel to remote schools to work with teachers on an individual or a cluster basis. Government officials in Mali and in Ethiopia challenged this role quite seriously and momentarily put projects in jeopardy. Local government authorities often felt forced by donors to recognize NGOs as legitimate partners, and resisted, thereby challenging USAID's preferential way of doing business through NGOs. In many instances however, this contentious overlap contributed to the improvement of education quality by providing teaching and learning materials that the government could not provide. The most striking example of positive outcomes is that the principle of using maternal languages as a medium of instruction, experimented with by Save the Children community schools in Mali, was later adopted into the national Malian curriculum.

Evolving Issues and Strategies

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[7] *Evolving Partnerships: the Role of NGOs in Basic Education in Africa*, Miller-Grandvaux Yolande, Welmond Michel, Wolf Joy, USAID, 2002.

USAID's support for community schools has been focused on different areas of interventions at different times, quite naturally. Starting from an initial concern with getting children into school (access and equity) within a clear strategic reform framework, it then addressed larger issues related to the quality and relevance of education, to the diversity and acceptability – by parents, by ministries of education – of alternative delivery of education, to the blurring of the division between formal and non-formal education, to the basic financing of education, to the implications of EFA, and finally, to USAID strategic decisions related to sector investments. Many of these questions are still being discussed today. USAID, like its partners and the communities it is serving, benefits from its long experience in support of community schools.

USAID community schooling programs can be said to have evolved in three phases: i) a first phase focused on access and quality within a strong systemic policy reform and capacity building framework; ii) a second phase emphasizing quality at the school level within a decentralized framework based on a projectized approach; iii) a third phase attempting to bridge the gap between formal education and alternative delivery of education services within a pluralistic national framework.

Phase 1: Systemic Reform to Improve Access and Quality

From 1991 to approximately 1996, USAID supported different models of community involvement in Ethiopia, Mali, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, and Uganda. The primary goal was to expand access to disadvantaged children, especially girls, by providing education services to communities that governments could not reach. Increasing access meant not only increasing enrollments but also ensuring that children *stay* in school. Focusing on access through community participation during that first stage meant that parents primarily provided labor and funding to create or sustain their own schooling infrastructures and material inputs.

Over time, implementers and decision-makers were faced with difficult quality issues that required a new type of community involvement. Parents had to understand what quality of education meant to them and how they could influence it; that teachers needed qualifications and training; that curriculum and the language of instruction had to be made relevant to their needs; that relationships with education officials had to be established to obtain pedagogical support and be officially recognized. Both USAID and the implementing NGOs struggled with such needs and adjustments, which often ran contrary to their initial principles.

USAID's strategies in education thus focused virtually concurrently on access, especially for girls, *and* quality. Community participation was viewed as a way to meet the goals of increasing access, equity and quality, which still characterize all of USAID's education strategic objectives in Africa.

In the early to mid 1990s in Mali, Ethiopia, Guinea, Ghana and Malawi, USAID focused on increasing access to primary education to the large majority of out-of-school children, and

especially girls. USAID's community schooling strategies were based on three factors. First, the outreach and decentralization of social services and the commitment to education were seen as the pathway to development by countries that had experienced major political upheavals and had replaced dictatorships with democracies. Second, the realization that although governments had committed to Education for All, none had the capacity or resources to meet the demand for education or to supply it, and thus had to pass the responsibility for education to communities to address their own needs. Third, the guiding principle, taken from the education agenda that USAID had been developing for its African programs, that community participation is a key component to the success of systemic reform. All USAID missions embarked on programs that built on these factors and relied on community participation to achieve the goals of increasing access and providing quality of learning to primary schools.

The following three country programs illustrate the pattern adopted by USAID in this early phase.

Malawi

The USAID strategy in Malawi evolved slowly, by first pursuing the goal of increasing access and equity within a national systemic reform framework, "rather than the rapid expansion of access"[8], and eventually switching to a focus on quality. In 1991, USAID Malawi launched the Girls Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education (GABLE) project that focused on access, especially for girls, and systemic education reform, before shifting its emphasis to quality of learning with the Quality Education through Supporting Teaching (QUEST) project in 1998. GABLE reached out to communities by implementing a large mobilization program to educate girls and provide them with a relevant gender sensitive learning environment. When in 1994, a new democratic government suddenly decided to promote free primary education, USAID's position was to provide assistance with the many quality of education issues raised by the influx of 1.4 million pupils into the system. Community participation however was not just a donor strategy. First, the Ministry of Education had intended to revive the school management committees that existed but were not functioning. Second, the Malawi Policy Investment Framework (PIF) called for community mobilization to increase the role of communities in improving school facilities and mobilize them to increase attendance rates. The Government of Malawi however had neither the means nor the knowledge to generate grassroots community support to schools and was concerned with providing inputs like teachers; at least 18,000 were needed immediately! USAID created its strategic niche within the national policy framework and favored the approach of emphasizing access *and* quality, and the strategy evolved from community mobilization through GABLE to community participation through QUEST. At the implementation level this translated into different community roles. Under GABLE the communities' role was still limited to providing labor and funding[9]; under QUEST, USAID

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[8] *Paradigm Lost*, p. 25.
[9] cf. Wolf, p. 43.

communities were addressing issues of learning and teaching, with the expectation that school based quality interventions had the potential to influence education policy.

In 1994, under GABLE and later under QUEST, USAID merged its strategies by funding innovative education management strategies achieved through community involvement. USAID turned to Save the Children and funded 24 village-based schools. The village-based schools program trained school management committees and parents teachers associations to manage their schools. The School Management Committees hired paraprofessional teachers and provided them with in-service teacher training and support; it involves the parents in construction and decision-making. High levels of community participation, well-prepared teachers and pupil centered learning characterized these model schools[10]. USAID and its partners had progressively shifted their strategies and were now promoting grassroots participation to support higher-level education goals.

Mali

USAID's role and strategies promoting the development of community schools is best represented in Mali. USAID's Basic Education and Expansion Project (BEEP) is one of the best-known community participation in education experiments in Africa. The community school component of the program implemented by Save the Children and the community involvement program implemented by World Education in the early to mid nineties were the flagships of the USAID Mali mission for over a decade, and changed the African educational landscape at large. Again USAID's goal was to increase access in a country with abysmal enrollment rates and to improve quality through a systemic reform support framework. When in 1992 Save the Children approached the USAID mission with an unsolicited proposal based on the well known Bangladesh Rural Advance Committee (BRAC) model to fund a community schools project in the district of Kolondieba in southern Mali, USAID saw an opportunity to help the new democratic government address the issue of access to education and assist with promising innovations that would help achieve the Jomtien commitment to education for all. Save the Children's intent was to bring remote rural communities to take charge of their own identity by helping them provide a relevant education based on their local needs and cultural values. As described in the other chapters of this study, communities built their own schools and recruited their own teachers (literate individuals from the community), the curriculum was learner centered and used maternal language as a medium of instruction, schools were run on a flexible schedule to allow for children and especially for girls to tend to their household chores. Success was immediate: in 5 years over 651 community schools were built.

USAID concurrently funded another model proposed by World Education based on the premise that strengthening the capacity of communities through locally elected Parents Associations (Association des Parents d'Elèves or APE) to democratically manage their *public*

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[10]Miske S. and A.J.Dowd, *Teaching and Learning in Mangochi Classrooms: Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Information to Study Twelve Primary Schools in Malawi*, Washington D.C., Creative Associates International, 1998.

schools would lead to improved retention and quality of education[11]. All education inputs met national standards: the national curriculum was used, French was the language of instruction, and the teachers were civil servants. The model also spread quickly: within 3 years, APEs were actively involved in 340 schools. In 1997, USAID education, democracy and governance and health programs entered another cooperative agreement with Africare to create and support additional community schools in the Segou region. By 2001, there were 81 community-managed schools.

All education stakeholders were taken by surprise at the rapid expansion of the community schools movement, the engagement of illiterate communities and the inspiring model of cultural and linguistic relevance that the Save the Children schools were offering. USAID saw these innovations as a complementary form of systemic support to the education reform that aimed at increasing access and improving quality and equity in Mali. USAID's BEEP focused on building institutional capacity at the central levels of the Ministry of Education; community participation in school was one strategy among several to support the government of Mali. Clearly, in the early phase, communities focused on access and expansion by creating schools and building infrastructure and on quality by providing the resources to pay for educational inputs such as materials as well as to pay teachers, in the case of the Save the Children schools. Neither USAID nor host country government claimed to have clear answers or solutions about how to manage this new situation: in effect, communities and their local partner NGOs were assuming a new role, filling in where government had failed, meeting their own needs. Policies were quickly drafted to give community schools the status of private schools (1994), resistance slowly built among education officials who saw NGOs empowered to act as educators and receiving per diems to do so and saw themselves kept out of the system[12]. Some feared that a parallel system of education was being created, that poor quality discount education services were being offered since community schools were built with mud and clay, since French was not taught and pupils were not in school for more than 3 hours a day. Other issues, - not analyzed here- included the recruitment, status and certification of community school teachers, the sustainability of funding, the relevance of curriculum, the distribution of materials, and the official recognition of schools by the government. Yet, ten years after the beginning of the experiment, 1665 community schools are receiving support from USAID. Other donors were also enthusiastically replicating the models in different regions of Mali.

Guinea

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[11] This approach was not readily accepted by USAID. It met some resistance in Mali and elsewhere. In Guinea for instance "World Education faced on-going difficulties in persuading USAID of the value of their community participation activities as a means to improve education quality" in "*This Vast Field of Partnership": a Study of Community Participation to Improve Basic Education in Guinea*, deMarcken Natasha, University of Minnesota, 2003, 143.

[12] For an in-depth study of the role of NGOs in Mali, see *Evolving Partnerships: the Role of NGOs in Basic Education in Africa*, Washington, 2002 and in *Le rôle des ONG dans l'Education au Mali*, Brehima Tounkara, ROCARE, Bamako, 2002.

A similar evolution in the direction of aid from expansion of access and equity as part of strengthening an institutional education reform framework, to school level community participation took place in Guinea. Until 1995 USAID/Guinea had used budget support to fund the education sector under the Education Sector Adjustment Program (Programme d'Ajustement Sectoriel de l'Education (PASE). PASE 1 goals were to substantially increase primary school enrollment and expenditure for primary education. USAID/Guinea, in collaboration with other donors, used a systemic reform approach to build institutional capacity at the Ministry of Education. Although sectoral management improved and enrollment increased, USAID was concerned that changes in the quality of education were not taking place at the school level. The 1996 political and economic crisis and the Ministry of Education's inability to ensure the regular flow of resources to the education sector precipitated a strategic change for PASE 2. The focus switched from expanding access to designing a customer-driven program for education quality and equity that would promote change in schools while continuing to build capacity. USAID introduced the idea of working through local NGOs and Parents Associations, an approach partly inspired by the Mali and Benin experiences. In 1997, USAID/Guinea funded two pilot models that focused on increasing civil society participation in the primary school system by strengthening the institutional capacity of local Parents Associations through grants to Save the Children and World Education. Save the Children went to remote rural parts of the country to help communities create their own schools; World Education worked with existing schools in the Mamou region to develop the capacity of Parents Associations to manage their government schools. The endemic issue of teacher shortages in Guinea initially affected Save the Children. New schools were built by communities but teachers could not be found. Unlike in Mali and Malawi, the Ministry of Education insisted on controlling the quality of teaching by providing only trained and certified teachers who had gone through the government's approved training system. No para-professionals were hired and school authorities could not supply enough teachers to meet the demand. Only one-third of the community schools got teachers. USAID reacted by shifting its focus from increasing access through the construction of community schools to addressing access, quality and equity issues through improved public governance of existing primary schools.

Ethiopia

As early as 1991, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education had stipulated that community participation would increase demand for education and would allow for resource mobilization for schools. However, the mandate was unclear and little implementation followed[13]. When USAID's Basic Education Sector Overhaul (BESO 1) program was initiated in 1994, the primary goal was to promote quality and access, rather than expand access by building infrastructure. As it had done in other African countries, USAID sought to build institutional capacity in the education sector to support the reform. It funded various programs: teacher development, materials production, education planning and policy, financing and management. The community participation component of BESO, implemented by World Learning, was

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[13] *Paradigm Lost,* 163.

developed to change the learning environment in existing schools and ensure equitable access for girls. An incentive funding system was put in place whereby communities could apply for a grant to address what they perceived as their school's greatest needs. Communities typically began by focusing on improving the physical condition of their schools; the concrete process and visible results empowered them. Subsequently they felt better equipped to focus on quality inputs leading to better student retention and learning. USAID Ethiopia has committed to innovate in the area of community participation and alternative education delivery by supporting different models of community schooling. In 1997 the Project for Innovations in Education, which USAID supported in partnership with Pact, the Banyan Tree Foundation and Save the Children, was developed to promote community engagement and self reliance in education in Guraghe.

Phase 2: School-based Quality and Institutional Decentralization

The challenges related to the quality of community schools and of community participation in schools are well known and documented[14].   They all relate to poor teacher qualifications and competence, lack of supplies, insufficient resources to fund teachers' salaries, lack of teacher support and supervision, etc. The challenges of community schools' are mostly a reflection of the conditions that affect national education systems. However these challenges partly explain the strategic changes made to the design of programs with strong implications for the international and national NGOs implementing them. While systemic reform design largely relies on a cookie cutter approach to capacity building and sectoral support across countries, community participation strategies had to be revised and redeveloped one at a time. In this second phase, from the mid nineties to early 2000, USAID's strategic directions aimed at bridging the gaps between institutional capacity building and the quality of education systems at central levels, and community-based interventions at local and school levels. During this period, the political and institutional contexts were clearly shifting and the agency and its partners had to adjust their education strategies accordingly.

Decentralizing Education Quality

From the mid nineties on, most governments aimed at decentralizing their functions to regional or even local levels, based on the rationale that education decentralization would improve efficiency, equity, effectiveness and democracy.   While for many governments and ministries of education this meant deconcentrating or delegating rather than decentralizing resources and functions, the emphasis was put on bringing government structures closer to the constituents and potential taxpayers. Donors, including USAID, encouraged the decentralization of education services, and governments drafted policies to support the new trend. USAID supported decentralization through its education strategic objectives as well as through its democracy and governance strategic objectives. As a result, it supported the decentralized quality of education interventions such as training regional and local education authorities, promoting cluster-based

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[14] *A Literature Review of Community Schools in Africa*, Miller-Grandvaux, Yoder, USAID, 2002.

teacher training, the local production of pedagogical materials, regional management of information systems, and funding for regional management units. USAID also provided funding for regional education authorities, regional management and operations. In Mali, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, USAID decentralized most of its education programming.

The same shift to a focus on the quality of services was taking place at the school community level. After communities had built, fixed and provided financial and managerial support to their schools, it seemed that the next natural step was to help them become involved in the quality of learning and teaching in school. In Ethiopia, after most communities used their grants to improve the physical infrastructure of their schools, they began to focus on student learning, teaching performance and school management. The move from access to quality was seen as natural, albeit complex. USAID programs in Mali, Malawi, Guinea, Ethiopia, Benin, Ghana, emphasized the quality of interventions –effective teaching, continuous assessment, development of local pedagogical aids, learner-centered pedagogy, group learning, ability grouping, interactive curriculum modules, etc. Communities were monitoring student attendance in class and checking on homework at home, drop-out and retention rates, providing opportunities for girls to get extra-curricular assistance, funding pedagogical advisors to supervise their teachers and organizing mock exams for their pupils. In Ethiopia and Mali the NGOs recruited and paid government officials to work as development agents or education facilitators with teachers. The emphasis on quality paid off. Several student performance tests were conducted in selected countries. In Mali and Malawi the community school students consistently showed higher results than their counterparts in control groups. The community school movement was slowly changing the African educational landscape.

The quality of education in community schools was subsumed by two issues: the integration of community schools into the formal education system and the relationship with government authorities within the decentralization policy framework.

Integrating Community Schools into National Education Systems

When, in Mali, communities asked to integrate their non-public community schools into the formal education system and to change the mother-tongue curriculum to French so that graduating 3rd graders could move on to 4th grade and eventually complete the primary school cycle, new strategies had to be developed. Parents who had created and sustained their local school wanted their children to be given the opportunity to join a public school and have equal access to the Malian education system. As Save the Children and USAID revised their strategies, the key factor to address was the quality of instruction.

Save the Children Mali responded by providing teaching and coaching support to teachers, upgrading their recruitment criteria (teachers had to be francophone and most francophones did not live in the villages; teachers' qualifications had to be upgraded to a 9th grade level) and working closely with the Ministry of Education to ensure that teachers would teach to the

standardized curriculum as of 4th grade and to the CEP test at the end of the six-year primary school cycle.

The government of Mali struggled with the serious issue of integrating non-public community schools into the system, first as a quality of education problem and second as a financing problem. Would the children have the necessary achievement levels to join the public school pupils who had learned to read and write in French? Should the teachers who always taught in Bambara receive the same pedagogical training as public school teachers? Communities could not afford to cover the cost of more than one or two teachers per year nor could they sustain the level of economic engagement required for a full-fledged school with 6 grades and all ancillary materials. The Malian government, strapped for resources, acknowledged that it could not afford to finance community schools and balked. Similar dilemmas were raised in countries where the same models of community schools had been supported by other partners, such as the hundreds Schools for Life in northern Ghana (supported by Denmark) or the ACCESS centers of Ethiopia and Tanzania (supported by Action Aid), Togo's village schools (supported by a French Catholic organization). In Guinea, the problem had been avoided by the Ministry of Education, who had insisted from the outset that USAID's community participation interventions not create a "parallel" system of community schools but rather work within the existing framework of officially recognized public schools.

The USAID Mali mission saw the integration of community schools as a major concern to which no immediate and clear solution existed. Full integration meant that the governments recognized these schools officially as a "public interest" service to which it would therefore allocate resources. The integration issue raised the question of the financial sustainability of schools for neither the communities nor the government could fully support them. In 2000 USAID, the World Bank and Malian authorities joined forces, which led to an agreement that public monies from debt relief funds be used to contribute to the salaries of non-public community school teachers. They also found an institutional answer to the issue of integration by agreeing to build "bridges" between public and community schools (*passerelles*) so that non-formal community school pupils could attend formal schools. This required children from community-owned schools to learn French, to function within the national curriculum, and also to travel far from home, all of which were initially seen as irrelevant to village life. The communities' demand to have their schools integrated radically altered the original model of community school. Yet it kept its alignment with the communities' vision. At the policy level the model challenged USAID and the government alike to ensure sustainability without taxing communities any further and without risking the loss of school ownership.

Decentralization and Devolution of Authority

How did the community school model fit into the emerging progression of decentralization? USAID programs supported both. The process of decentralization taking place in most countries would, it seemed possible to believe, help institutionalize community schools by supporting the local delivery of education services to remote communities. USAID engaged in

policy dialogue with governments to make this happen. Several constraints made the implementation of this complex process less smooth than hoped for.

In spite of decentralizing reforms, the allocation of resources and decision-making authority to regional and local entities did not occur in most cases for reasons already analyzed[15]. Regional and local government authorities were often reluctant to embrace community schools and to be held accountable by illiterate communities or NGOs that were stepping on their territories. At the same time, governments recognized that USAID strategies of working though NGOs and with communities had considerably contributed to raising enrollment rates, improved the quality of education, and increased private investments in education. USAID and NGOs strategies provided evidence that governments could not attain Education for All goals by themselves.

Second, USAID's difficult and idiosyncratic contractual practices contributed to a lack of policy coherence that could support or institutionalize community-schooling innovations. Good policy should be grounded in effective practice that can in turn inform the policy framework. However USAID's education programs typically rely on a multitude of implementing partners who often manage their components independently of each other because they are governed by the approach and deliverables stipulated in their contracts or cooperative agreements. There are no compelling reasons for partners to invest in the synergies, partnerships, networking or sustainable interactions that would anchor decentralization in practice and thus further the community schooling approach[16].

Third, the projectized assistance pattern adopted by USAID tends to weaken the traditional cohesion of education programs based on joint institutional reform support and community empowerment. The programming tensions between central and regional support to government structures, and between government support and community/NGO support have never been analyzed. Tensions are also created by the very nature of the approach that warrants empowering communities, *i.e.* a non-education input-, to produce an education output – i.e. quality of learning and higher achievement. USAID's stove-piping approach to funding education activities has in some instances had a negative impact on promising community schooling innovations. Finally, in some cases defined by USAID's monitoring systems as in Guinea, USAID considers community participation programs as of "indirect" rather than "direct" benefit to the government, which implies that community participation cannot be of benefit to the formal education system[17].

By the end of the late nineties, there were several questions. What kind of partnerships between governments and other constituencies should be developed to sustain community support to

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[15] For the most recent analysis, see E*ducation Decentralization in Africa: A Review of Recent Policy and Practice,* see Gershberg, Alec Ian, and Donald R. Winkler. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2003. www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralization/Feb2004Course/Background%20materials/Winkle.doc

[16] Ash Hartwell and Mitch Kirby, Malawi TDY trip report, February 2001.
[17] DeMarcken, 149.

schools? Should USAID invest in building the capacity of civil society rather than that of government? Can institutional reform and community schooling be mutually reinforcing endeavors to ensure integration of new modes of education delivery and management into the formal education system?

Phase 3: Reinforcing Bilateral Support and Multiple Partnerships

USAID's strategy towards community schools programs shifted in the early 2000s. First, the community participation model was significantly scaled up to increase geographic coverage. Second, USAID now mainly supports two community managed school models: one that builds the management and governance capacity of the Parents Associations in existing public schools and one that promotes community creation and ownership of schools that provide an alternative and flexible model of delivery to marginalized children. Third, USAID strategies focus on inclusiveness, as the new programmatic directions bring together central formal education authorities and local communities through partnerships and federations of civil society organizations networking in favor of education.

Scaling Up

USAID missions in Guinea, Benin, Mali, Malawi, Ghana and Ethiopia decided to scale up the school community participation activities in the early 2000s. In 2001 USAID Benin asked World Education to expand its Parents Association training program from one region to the whole country, going from 50 schools to 1300 in a year. In Guinea, recognizing that primary schools had visibly improved through the active management of Parents Associations, USAID also made the decision to expand. The number of community-managed schools rose from 250 in 1991 to 738 in 2004. Ghana has expanded its community participation program from 2001 to include 389 communities and in 2003 supported the training of 10,600 SMC/Parents Associations representatives from 2656 schools to acquire relevant skills and knowledge in school management procedures and activities. In Malawi, the USAID 2001-2005 strategy commits to expansion by adding four more districts to QUEST.

The rapid scaling up pattern across USAID programs is provoked by the widely acknowledged links between quality of education and community engagement -- all annual reports from USAID missions in the early 2000s state that community participation had a system level impact warranting the geographic expansion of the approach – and ongoing pressure from Congress to produce large quantitative results.

USAID's new strategies to scale up could only succeed with strong support from government and institutionalized school community management practices. USAID- funded PVOs systematically included government staff in their community participation and management training so that education officials would be in a position to conduct community empowerment activities in the schools that they monitor. Government and NGO staffs collaborate to develop and implement teacher training programs. Community schools negotiate the provision of

pedagogical materials with local education authorities. Thus the expansion has been carried out in partnership with and through government representatives, which was inconceivable seven years ago. The USAID scaling up strategy reinforced the creation of partnerships based on a tacit principle of inclusiveness.

Current Models

USAID currently supports two main community schooling models:

- One model based on the Save the Children community schools innovation in Mali, which aims at providing relevant and community owned learning opportunities to disadvantaged target groups. Communities create, build and manage their own schools; the curriculum is made relevant and the timetable is flexible to accommodate all children; instruction is in maternal languages. This model targets specific groups of vulnerable children in countries like Zambia[18] where the number of orphans has destabilized the system, like Southern Sudan with war-affected populations to educate, or in remote nomadic areas of Ethiopia. Such alternative systems are seen as the only hope for providing a minimal package of education to vulnerable children.

- One model inherited from the World Education experiment, to increase the participation of civil society in the formal primary education system. Here, programs are developed to reinforce Parent's Associations so that they can become more active, effective groups that can meaningfully participate in the management of their children's schools. In the 2000s, the approach has evolved from the local training level of school-based Parents Associations to regional levels whereby Parents Associations are trained to organize networks and federations. In addition to management, USAID programs provide Parents Associations federations with the advocacy skills needed to make their demands known to the government and to negotiate decisions.

Partnerships

After a decade of rather successful experiments and accomplishments with community participation in schools, governments, donors and NGOs all recognize the need to partner and collaborate to ensure the provision and the quality of education. USAID missions no longer ponder whether to invest in NGOs or government capacity, what community schooling model to adopt or whether to fund regional versus central entities. In this third phase of development, USAID strategies of inclusiveness tend to build bridges between central and local government structures, between government and communities; to reconcile the grassroots communities it supported through its community schooling programs with the central authorities supported

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[18] A recent program is currently being implemented by USAID in over 600 community schools in partnership with UNICEF.

through the systemic reform framework. The middle link is an increasingly organized, federated process of negotiations and collaboration to achieve common education goals.

Partnerships are complex, labor intensive, costly and ever-changing. But they are shaping the integration of the community schooling paradigm into the formal education system. On the one hand governments now demand more quality control over the management of the schools; they have accepted the need to partner with NGOs as the only way to achieve universal primary education in their country as long as it remains within a standardized framework. The creation of school management committees is a case in point. These equivalents of school boards consist of school staff that work together with the democratically elected Parents Association. At the local level, the quality component for the new strategic objective in Malawi is linked to yet another slight shift: to focus on the empowerment of school management committees as well as Parents Associationss and dialogue with authorities[19]. Roles are still the subject of many controversies. However, governments in instances such as Mali, Malawi and Ghana and Benin have agreed to contribute to school expenses or community school teachers' salaries.

On the other hand, USAID strategies support both their community based organizations and government structures by fostering dialogue between constituencies, establishing networks and channels of communication between communities and authorities, and with each other. In Malawi, USAID has helped position the Centre for Creative Community Mobilization (CRECOM) as the education NGO that can have a seat at the policy table. In Mali, USAID phased out its support to the Save the Children village schools in 2003 but the inclusiveness trend is clearer: the new education program includes a strong bi-lateral support program with government and promotes community participation in school clusters comprising public schools, community schools and medersas. All are geared to benefit from government educational inputs while retaining communal and community based practices and prerogatives.

Presently, USAID's renewed emphasis on bilateral support through systemic education reform and capacity building to improve the quality of education still governs the education programs. Yet USAID has over time expanded its support to regional and local levels aligning its strategies in most cases with decentralization policies that have affected the funding of decentralized structures. USAID's current strategies also aim at fostering new partnerships within a multiplicity of civil society partners and at promoting the acceptance of different delivery models within an agreed national decentralized policy framework.

Conclusion/Perspectives

The last decade has seen the emergence of a dynamic set of formal and alternative education models that have promoted a process of continuous transformation for communities around and beyond their schools. The line between non-formal and formal education has been blurred and

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[19] *USAID Malawi, Triennial Review Report, Country Strategic Plan FY 2001-05*, Lilongwe, October 2003.

USAID's trend towards inclusiveness has contributed to showing that alternative delivery mechanisms can indeed coexist to ensure wide access to quality and equity of education.

In all the cases discussed here, the trend shows USAID education programs moving towards inclusiveness, recognizing that alternative systems of delivery can cater to minority and special needs children and still feed into a national education system; that governments can contribute their share of funding and support to relieve the financial burden placed on communities; that communities' governance of schools affects not only education but also strengthens constructive social and democratic behavior.

The context in which USAID is operating is in flux. Fewer resources for education and better endowed sectors have created a need to consolidate resources while exploring the potential of multi-sectoral approaches. In fact, a strategic pattern is currently emerging at USAID: it aims at consolidating strategic objectives such as health with education programs. Certainly the trend towards consolidating education programs with other sectors, particularly within the context of HIV/AIDs or conflict, is likely to accelerate and to propel the principle of inclusiveness to the forefront of the agency's thinking.

The patterns and trends have emerged over time and across education programs in Africa. Community schooling pioneered by USAID and its partner NGOs has evolved from being an approach to a becoming a development strategy. USAID has progressively integrated the lessons learned from implementation into its strategic vision and has adapted it to each country context. In each case the learning process resulted in an informed and intentional change of strategy, consistent with USAID's vision of support to education systems.

Interviews with USAID education officers conducted for this study have made it clear that the commitment to retain community schools or rather community engagement in schools is a key component to all education programs. Several USAID programs are asking the question of where to take the current commitment. An evaluation of best community schools practices and lessons learned across countries needs to be carried out to further inform future strategies. It will not be enough however. In the light of current international violence, conflict and HIV/AIDS pandemic, donors and governments realize that uneducated populations' needs and aspirations must be systematically addressed, often one community at a time, which entails a long term commitment. The next strategic challenge for ministries of education across Africa and for USAID as a donor may just be how to manage a multiplicity of models of education delivery within a unifying vision, in systemic collaboration with a multiplicity of actors and partners. The macro education context may temporarily be of help: Education for All, Fast Track Initiative and Millennium Development Goals add to the list of partners that have already joined forces to pursue what communities did at their own level and with their own limited resources. In that case, we may just count on communities to show the way.