

[Keynote Speech]

“Educational Development and Participation of Local Community”



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Abou DIARRA is a linguistic researcher who graduated from the Linguistic Institute of the Science Academy of Moscow. He has worked for the Ministry of Education for over 18 years, mainly in the National Pedagogic Institute and the National Center of Education. He has been successively put in charge of various tasks at different levels of responsibility. He is one of the leading contributors to the development and implementation of the Ten-Year Program for Development of Education (PRODEC) which is the current education policy in Mali. Also, he is now Chief of the Education Decentralization/Deconcentration Bureau (CADDE) which is currently running the “School Management Committee Support Project” with the help of JICA. He has deep knowledge and a wealth of experience in the Malian educational system.

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Introduction:

From independence in 1960 until the 1990s, organizational and managerial policies regarding education systems remained heavily inspired by the colonial system in most developing countries; this was particularly so in French-speaking African countries. The education systems of these countries are characterized by, among other things, elitism and an extremely centralized style of management.

From the World Conference on Education in Jomtien, Thailand (1990) to the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal (2000), significant progress has been made towards reaching Education For All (*Ecole pour tous*, or EPT) goals in most developing countries. These results were made possible thanks to tremendous efforts made by the states themselves, as well as to their technical and financial partners.

Despite the encouraging progress achieved in these countries—notably concerning children’s access to education and teaching quality—one is forced today to acknowledge the limitations of these organizational et managerial policies, this at a time when the local communities are aspiring to greater democracy and calling for their share of responsibilities in the management of educational institutions.

In this context, governments and their partners in development have grown increasingly cognizant of the fact that one of the keys to reaching the Millennium Development Goals(MDGs) in the field of education resides in the decentralized and de-concentrated management of education systems.

Indeed, today the old forms of centralized organization and management of education systems can no longer meet the enormous needs of quality universal education. On the other hand, if school management competences and responsibilities are transferred to the level of local authorities or schools—in other words, closer to the main beneficiaries of education services—school management and the quality of education service will improve and take increasingly into account the needs and concerns of those beneficiaries; thus the importance and validity of decentralizing education.

I. STATE OF THE FIELD:

The analysis of the education system carried out by Mali while the country was elaborating its PRODEC showed a lack of partners related to and working for schools. The orientations of the Education Sector Investment Program (*Programme d’Investissement Sectoriel de l’Education* or PISE) implemented to make the PRODEC operational confirm the engagement of the Malian government to bring to order a decentralization and de-concentration policy regarding education through the transfer of necessary competence and resources to local authorities and to De-concentrated Government Services.

Regarding the delegation of competences from state to local authorities, under the terms of Decree #02-313/P-RM of 4 June 2002, 19 competences were transferred to *Communes*, nine to the Council of *Cercles* and eight to the Regional Assembly. Under the terms of Decree #02-313/P-RM, local authorities and local communities can now exercise several functions, including the construction, outfitting and maintenance of primary schools, the management of human resources made available to them and the organization and operation of school lunch programme

Regarding community-based school management, let us remind the reader that the introduction of community schools was adopted in Mali in 1990. Today, there are more than 2,000 community schools at the primary education (i.e. almost a third of all primary schools). A community school is a school established and managed by the community. The creation of such schools contributed greatly to the amelioration of the schooling of Malian children. Local communities have displayed great willpower and unflagging commitment to the promotion of children's education. They demonstrated their capacity and potential to play an important role in the development of Mali's education system.

Drawing lessons from the results obtained by community schools in school management at local level, the National Education Ministry—in concordance with decentralization legislation and within the framework of the education sector policy (PRODEC)—judged necessary the establishment of a consensual structure in all Malian schools, to be achieved via the School Management Committee (*Comité de Gestion Scolaire* or CGS). In order to make it easier for local authorities to exert their jurisdiction at the school level, Decree #04-0469/MEN-SG (April 9 2004) regarding the creation, organization and operating modes of School Management Committees (CGS) was adopted. CGS are managerial organizations that engage the community in a genuine partnership built around the school. The CGS constitutes an extremely important tool for local authority- and community-based school management. Every primary school in Mali has a CGS. Nevertheless, one is forced to acknowledge that most of the established CGS are not functional: this due to the system of electing members, to the lack of training available to these members regarding techniques of participatory school management, to the actors' lack of appreciation of their roles and responsibilities, and finally to the fact that there is no monitoring mechanism in place.

To make the CGS functional the Ministry of Education, Literacy and National Languages of Mali initiated a project entitled "School Management Committees Support Project" (*Projet d'Appui aux Comités de Gestion Scolaire* or PACGS) in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Initiated in May of 2008, PACGS is today in its first phase. PACGS targeted 156 schools during the first year of implementation and 300 more during its second year. In total, the project targeted 456 schools during its first two years of implementation.

PACGS applied three main approaches to make CGS functional:

- 1. Democratic establishment of CGS members through secret-ballot elections:** compared to other methods of selecting CGS members, this process makes it possible to choose people that are trusted by the community.
- 2. CGS member training in participatory school management techniques:** training themes revolve around the roles and responsibilities of the CGS in school management, the elaboration of the school project and the action plan, the mobilization of resources, the execution, monitoring and evaluation of activities, administrative management as well as financial and materials management.
- 3. Establishment of a sustainable CGS monitoring and supervising system:** PACGS organized training sessions in order to strengthen the capacities of de-concentrated and decentralized government services in terms of implementing and operating the grouping together of the different CGS within a *commune*, as well as in terms of supervising dialogue regarding the grouping together of the different CGS within a single Pedagogical Activity Center (*Centre d'Animation Pédagogique* or CAP).

According to the experiences of the 456 target schools of the project, communities actively carried out activities contributing to the improvement of learning conditions. This materialized notably in areas such as building classrooms out of *banco* (a type of mud-brick), building and fixing school desks with attached benches, building latrines, digging wells, transporting drinking water, implementing school pharmacies, buying school supplies, building accommodations for teachers, organizing night classes, planting trees, planting school gardens, carrying out public awareness campaigns regarding girl's education, building school fences out of *banco*, recruiting a property manager, etc.

In total, **1351 activities** have been carried out by the 387 CGS (i.e. an average of 3.5 activities per CGS); all of

these activities were programmed and carried out by the communities themselves. A total of **145,881,125 Fcfa** were invested by the 387 CGS (an average of **376,954 Fcfa** per CGS).

Other results of the project worth noting:

- **456** CGS were established democratically through secret-ballot elections;
- Based on voting lists, an average of **100.12** voters per school participated, of which **58 %** were men and **42 %** were women;
- Out of fourteen elected members per board, an average of **four** women were elected;
- **29** CGS presidents are women;
- 412 CGS (**90.4%**) elaborated a school project and 426 CGS (93.4%) elaborated an action plan;
- 387 CGS (**84.9%**) have produced an annual report.

Monitoring/evaluating missions of PACGS made possible the following observations regarding functional CGS coupled with community participation in educational development:

1. Amelioration of access to education: development of school infrastructures and furniture (building classrooms, latrines, water extraction points, etc.); public awareness campaigns, particularly regarding girl's education (daily local awareness activities); monitoring of student attendance.

2. Amelioration of educational quality: teacher support (help with lodging, salaries, teacher training, support for Teacher Training Communities); improvements in school performance (organization of supplementary classes, rewarding outstanding students, purchase of textbooks and of school supplies); monitoring of teacher attendance.

3. Improvement of school management: better management of funds from the "Direct Support to Improve School Performance" plan (*Appui Direct à l'Amélioration des Rendements Scolaires* or ADARS), granted by the government and the World Bank; better management of school infrastructure maintenance and furniture; better management and maintenance of textbooks; better communication with authorities and with school administration; active participation in the management of school cafeterias.

Regarding participatory school management in French-speaking African countries, Japan International Cooperation Agency's support began in Niger in 2004. Seeing conclusive results there, JICA progressively extended its collaboration to Senegal in 2007, Mali in 2008 and Burkina Faso in 2009. JICA supports the initiative of these four countries to meet and share their experiences once a year.

It is in this context that a sub-regional workshop on decentralized school management, initiated by the governments of the participating countries and by JICA, was organized in Bamako in February of 2010. This workshop on decentralized school management, which included Mali, Senegal, Niger and Burkina Faso, enabled experts from these countries to share their experiences.

II. PERSPECTIVES: The progressive generalization of the functional CGS model is included in phase III of Mali's Education Sector Investment Program (PISE). During the third year of the program the extension of functional CGS will target 1000 schools located throughout all regions of Mali and in the Bamako District. In total the project will cover 1469 schools. Activities for the generalization of the functional CGS model are scheduled to start in all primary schools of Mali in the last quarter of 2011. Perspectives will principally concern the enormous challenges to come in the progressive generalization of the functional CGS model to all schools in Mali. It will mean, among other things, a rereading of the Decree relative to CGS operating modes in order to integrate all of the approaches applied by PACGS.

III. CONCLUSION: Mali, through PRODEC, has committed itself to deepening decentralization and de-concentration and to realizing a transparent management/decentralization/planning of education, giving greater responsibilities to local authorities and local communities.

These communities are developing a wide panel of activities, all geared towards improving learning conditions in schools. A great potential for solving school problems at their root lies within these communities and through these activities. From the experience acquired in Mali through community schools and particularly through PACGS, we strongly believe that local communities can participate effectively in school management. In spite of the great potential of these communities to solve current school problems, one is forced to note that communities alone cannot solve all of them: That is why it is essential that actors and partners as a whole, at all levels, make synergistic efforts to support and reinforce the local community actions in school management.