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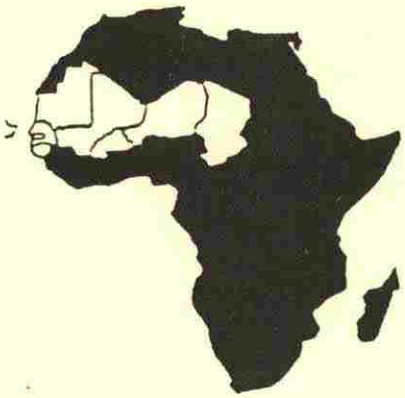

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Democracy and political participation in the Sahel:

The place of education

by

Simon M. Fass

April 1995 *General Distribution*

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DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE SAHEL: THE PLACE OF EDUCATION

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DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE SAHEL:
THE PLACE OF EDUCATION

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Two events that open a new window of opportunity to foster both speedier reform of public policies and wider participatory democracy are now operating in the Sahel. One is increased fiscal stress. States are no longer able to expand the supply of public goods and services at the same rate as in the past. The other is increased attention to political development. Democratization, participation, and related themes have moved from the background to the foreground in the agendas of several influential actors in the donor community.

Crucial to taking advantage of this opportunity are actions that promote decentralization of the will and capacity to influence government decisions - from towns and wealthier people to rural areas and poorer people. This is important because the power to decide what states do is centralized among a small number of competing groups, together constituting the political class of each society, that do not and cannot reflect the social and economic interests of the larger population.

Membership in this class now limits itself to people that for the most part live in towns and derive their livelihood from employment or other close associations with the state apparatus. They include families of officials, administrators, health personnel, transport and factory workers, teachers, employees of public enterprises, students in secondary schools and universities, the military, and both Africans and foreigners that work in donor agencies. Given that political survival requires governments to supply policies that satisfy dominant interests in the class, its narrow composition not only prevents the policies from incorporating the concerns of majority populations but also leads to practices that are antagonistic toward these concerns.

Exchange rates and tariffs that favor imports and lower urban consumer prices over exports and higher farm output prices, extractive taxation and inequitable resource allocations that support government and other urban sectors at the expense of agriculture and related rural activities, bias in investment and in recurrent expenditures toward political rather than economic productivity (e.g. military outlays, government wage structures disconnected from financial realities), concentration of health and other social services in cities, and other similar policies exist because they benefit dominant interests. As a result, their reform is very difficult without change in the characteristics of the class which produces them.

To be sure, many actors in the class, including donors, have long pressed for reform. But their efforts did not produce satisfactory results. One factor was inattention to the need to cultivate political demand for adoption of their proposals. Their methods centered on nagging of officials and, among donors, support of reform projects within the state apparatus and/or offering financial inducements of various kinds. The idea that reform might also require actions to alter the composition and balance of interests within the class, though present, was uncommon.

Another factor was lack of opportunity. Even if reformers had wanted to do it, the environment for political decentralization was inhospitable. Governments had the means to satisfy most demands and thus avoid hard choices between different groups. Competition within the class, as a result, was moderate and calls for democratization were faint. Political development was also low on the list of donor priorities. That is, there was no compelling political problem for which democracy, representative or participatory, might serve as a solution.

These circumstances have changed. Though the tendency of reformers to ignore demand continues, the environment has become more hospitable. Fiscal stress, the corresponding inability of governments

to satisfy all groups within the class, and the resulting intensification of competition between different factions for shares of an increasingly limited supply of public goods and services has created precisely the type of problem which one form of political decentralization, representative democracy, can help to solve.

This solution has spread though Africa in step with stagnation of fiscal resources, most recently in Benin and Mali. Some donors, notably USAID and France, encourage the emergence of representative democracy and use progress toward this goal as a criterion for deciding about types and levels of assistance to different countries. Now that the relative importance of external resources has increased as domestic budgets have stagnated or declined, so too has the capacity of donors to influence the speed of the process.

Representative democracy, however, is by itself insufficient to assure reform in all sectors. Priorities in the class remain the same no matter the names that elections give to individuals, parties, and factions at the helm of the state apparatus. Reform in many areas still requires change in the composition of the class. That is, while representative democracy creates a more conducive atmosphere, significant change in a near term demands progress in participatory democracy. It needs people outside the class who are impaired by the agendas of current members to participate in shaping state actions and, by definition, to become new members.

If it spreads, this type of democracy can have impacts that extend well beyond achievement of policy reforms. Through gradual erosion of the capacity of dominant interests to influence government decisions in one sector after another, it can strengthen representative democracy where it has already surfaced and, more important given its rarity, stimulate its emergence where it is now moribund or absent.

Several questions introduce themselves in this context. Which sectors offer good prospects for taking effective advantage of the opportunity presented by fiscal stress and concerns with democracy? In which of these sectors does harnessing of the opportunity show promise for achieving reform objectives and advancing the cause of democracy at the same time? Where among these candidate sectors does the donor community, the main audience for this study, have sufficient interest and strength to influence the course of events?

We did not have to answer these questions because USAID and the Club du Sahel asked us to look at basic education. Fortunately, their choice was appropriate. Most if not all parents see themselves as expert in determining the content of this instruction. The sector is thus inherently democratic. The political issue with respect to the segment of the sector that falls within the purview of the state is therefore not about how decisions are made but rather about how many people are engaged in the process. Also, because no parent lacks interest in the matter, especially not in rural areas where children are the guarantors of parental longevity and survival and thus the most fundamental of all productive assets, few sectors hold as much potential for broader participation. And as regards the sectoral purpose to be achieved by this participation, suffice it to say that the perceived importance of education is such that it does not and cannot suffer a shortage of proposals for improvement.

What makes the sector especially interesting at present is the effect of fiscal stress on its public segment. One of the region's distinctive features is a type of public education that, coincident with the interests of the political class, has a western, urban orientation which is irrelevant outside the confines of the state apparatus and a few other parts of the urban economy. National budgets must therefore supply not only education but also the benefits that are supposed to flow from it, such as government employment. Financial constraints acting on both the supply of and demand for this education are thus stimulating the asking of important questions by people inside and outside the class. One is: Who pays,

who defines, and who is responsible for public education? Another is: What purpose does this education serve if it no longer yields tangible benefits? The search for answers to these and related questions has stimulated new social dynamics that bode well for changes that may eventually benefit majority populations.

Fiscal constraints have also increased the capacity of donors to influence the future characteristics of the sector. This derives in part from increases in the importance of their resources relative to the state and in part from their ability to suggest workable answers to some questions. Though their words are more plentiful than their resources, the evidence is clear that several donors wish to promote fundamental reform in education. Their interest in cultivating domestic political demand for change is not yet apparent. But if they decide to do it, even if their focus is education only, they now have a rare opportunity to proceed with effect directly and, indirectly, to contribute to political decentralization. In brief, even if education is not the best sector through which to promote participatory democracy, it is a very good place to make the attempt.

Accordingly, this study explores opportunities for making education more pertinent and helpful to the societies of the region and, at the same time, for harnessing the sector to promote participatory democracy. Specifically, it points to three areas of strategic action that require more attention. One is reform of the secondary and higher levels of the public system in ways that provide strong incentives for improvement in teaching methods, curricula, and other aspects of primary education. Without reorientation of the upper levels, especially of the link that now exists between these levels and prospects for emigration and study in Europe and other western countries, significant reform at every level will remain elusive. Similarly, without change in teaching and learning methods in secondary schools which produce most teachers, chances for enduring improvement at the primary level in a near term are also low.

This area of action should be of special concern to donors. Though their help to the sector is small, about 5.5 percent of total assistance during the last decade, the bulk of it flows to secondary and higher education, especially to scholarships and other support for study abroad. [1] Donors can therefore exercise considerable influence on demand and other characteristics of the entire public system through actions in this domain.

The second area involves fostering the asking and answering of basic questions about primary education by more of the region's rural and poorer urban communities, and empowering these communities with the will and capacity to propel their own ideas and demands into public consciousness and policy and thereby act on the state in their own interests. This would increase probabilities for ideas about education that emanate from the milieus in which people live to find their way into the process of reform. It would also advance the cause of participatory democracy.

Especially important in this regard are efforts that give non-western education, now excluded from the public system and from most discussions of reform, as much respect and attention as the primary school. Because it has a western, urban orientation, this school has a limited market in the region. Questions that confine themselves to it are thus meaningless to many parents, as is the capacity to do something useful with the answers. As a result, many rural and poorer urban families will not enroll their children in it, will not demand creation of primary schools or their reform and, by extension, will not engage in actions that can contribute either to educational improvement or to political decentralization.

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1 The figure of 5.5 percent, provided by the Centre d'Observation des Economies Africaines (COBEA, Paris) is for 1980-1990.

Because political history has not endowed them with the ability to propel their perspectives into public discourse, these families are also unlikely to demand alternative services from the state, such as incorporation of the content of Islamic or community education systems into the public curriculum or assistance to improve these systems on their own terms. Lacking reason to respond, the state will not supply alternative products and services that might be able to elicit interest among the families. And in the circular logic of things, without such products and services they will continue to have no reason to demand anything from the state and will continue to have no influence on it. They will remain outside the political class.

Movement toward representative democracy is altering this situation. But there is still considerable scope for boosting the process by promoting the asking and answering of questions that are not now posed with the frequency that they deserve in the communities of the region. What is basic public education? What are the purposes of this education? For whom is it public and/or basic, and why? Should public schools in a community offer only western urban education? If not, what should they offer? Who should support it: the state, the community, a combination of both?

The third area has to do with assuring that donor assistance to the state does not lead to reduction of fiscal stress and, thus, premature closing of the window of opportunity for reform and democracy. Budgetary support under structural adjustment or other policy reform initiatives, as well as certain types of education improvement programs may sometimes achieve their objectives. But by directly or indirectly helping the state to continue to be both the main supplier of education and the principal consumer of its output (i.e., graduates), these actions strengthen rather than weaken the characteristics of education that need reform. At a moment when the value of external resources has increased relative to those of the state, and when external actors show increased concern with democracy, it would be ironic and unfortunate if donors were to inadvertently contribute to halting the very process which they say they want to encourage.

We will return to these matters at the end of the report, after exploring the considerations that lead us to them in the sections that follow. Part I introduces the main thrusts of current reform proposals and presents an overview of some of the political and economic factors that cause the characteristics of education to be what they are. It describes the place of education in the political economy of the region, points to the difficulty of changing the sector without also changing one or another part of the political economy that it serves, and highlights the ways in which fiscal stress is altering the political economy and opening opportunities for reform of education and politics.

Part II examines the western, public education system in greater detail. It looks first at some of the assertions that have been made about enrollment and literacy statistics. After noting that the quality of the assertions often leaves something to be desired, it reviews the history of this education, including the period immediately before and after independence that led it to acquire its present features. This review suggests that universal enrollment and literacy are unlikely in a near term unless public education can expand its scope to supply more than a route of entry into the state apparatus and of escape from the region. As an indirect means to promote necessary expansion, we discuss the need to reform secondary and higher education. Turning to direct means, we follow with an exploration of the utility of empowering more parents and communities with the capacity to reform primary education, and show evidence from Tchad, Gambia, and Mali, and outside the region from Zambia, Haiti, and Benin to illustrate the advantages of this approach.

Extending beyond the confines of the current public system, Part III concentrates on non-western education. It examines the ways in which the fortunes of history have suppressed its development in Africa, on useful historical guidance that some industrial nations offer regarding methods to correct

this situation, and on embryonic processes emerging in and near the region which, if nurtured, offer considerable promise for the future.

Part IV, after discussing how certain ideas in the reform community obstruct progress in education and politics, provides a synthesis of our main conclusions and recommendations. Its details would be different had USAID and the Club du Sahel asked us to look at health, environmental protection, land tenure, agriculture, animal husbandry, water resources, local government, or taxes. But our basic line of argument would be the same because no matter how else one chooses to define it, and no matter its many inconveniences, participatory democracy is a vital technique for improving the quality of public thought and action in all societies where the power to decide what the state does or does not do is centralized in minorities, including the reformers among them, who do not and cannot reflect the interests of the whole.

I. THE PLACE OF EDUCATION IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

Concerned by low primary school enrollment, inferior teaching and student performance in schools, adult literacy rates that remain among the lowest in the world, and by other signs that the education sector is not as effective as it should be in transmitting knowledge, advocates of reform have produced a long list of shortcomings in policies and practices that warrant correction. These include: curricula and languages of instruction in primary schools that are disconnected from the milieus in which most people live; preference in spending at the primary level on salaries, with little left over for teacher training, books, pedagogical materials, or other items that can improve learning outcomes; insufficient state (and donor) support of education; bias in the allocation of domestic and external resources toward secondary and higher levels of the public system; and, at these levels, excessive spending on high salaries and on scholarships, boarding facilities, and other student support (Belloncle, 1984; Botti et al., 1978; Heyneman, 1983; IIEP, 1989; Lockheed and Verspoor, 1992; World Bank, 1988, 1990).

Proposals to correct these faults consist mainly of advice that states reverse their current practices. With respect to what happens inside primary schools, for example, what some call the issue of quality, recommendations include adaptation of curricula to local circumstances, use of local languages (as necessary), improvement in the availability and content of books and other learning materials, programs to enhance student nutrition and health and, for teachers, improvement in recruitment methods, supervision and training, pedagogical techniques, and morale.

To enable these improvements while also providing access to public education for as many children as possible, there are also calls for increases in the amount and in the cost-effective use of resources. Suggestions here include: expansion of government and donor support of education, especially for the primary level; transfers of scholarship and other current resources from the secondary and higher levels to the base of the system; mobilization of additional contributions from parents and local communities; minimization of construction expenditures; raising ratios of students to teachers (but not beyond the point where they have negative effects on learning outcomes); lowering teacher salaries per student by such means as double shifts; and so on.

As in most other sectors, realization of these recommendations has been slow. One constraint is that the list does not account for all the purposes that education serves. Most proposals presume that the only objective of the public system is to transmit knowledge. They ignore its additional functions, one of the more important of which is to control the size and composition of the political class. To the extent that wider access, increases in the rate at which students move from one grade and level to the next, and other similar ideas threaten the system's capacity to perform this service, they are inconsistent with political reality.

Another factor, mentioned in the introduction, is the limited range of ideas about "how" to press for change. Badgering government officials, donors, teachers, and parents to do this or that, setting up special projects and programs to demonstrate the utility of certain suggestions, or providing financial incentives for policy reform, though successful in certain times and places, do not fully address the causes of existing policies. Officials and other actors have good reasons to do what they do. Nagging is one way to answer the question of how to promote change. But greater impact usually flows from methods that act upon the reasons rather than the practices which result from them.

Also noted in the introduction, a third factor until recently has been lack of opportunity to make effective use of ideas about reform or implementation. As implied in our allusion to political reality, above, education systems are integral parts of a larger political economy. Each of their features serves a specific political, economic, or other social purpose. Change in one or another feature is usually concurrent with change in one or another part of the larger framework. The catalyst for change may sometimes appear inside the education sector. At other times it may appear outside. But no matter the origin, these moments are rare. And because they are the only instances which offer prospects for promoting significant change, opportunities to use older or newer ideas are also rare. The last important window of opportunity, one that reformers of the period used to create the present system, closed thirty years ago.

Reform of a significant type, by which we mean extensive alteration of many basic features of an education sector rather than trivial changes, is thus a complex social process that requires the coming together of at least three ingredients. One is an opportunity for significant reform. Second is the presence of actors within the political class willing and able to take advantage of the opportunity. Third is the availability ideas that are effective in generating interest inside and outside the political class and in cultivating broad social and political demand for improvements in the quality of basic education; wider access to this instruction; increases, transfers, and more cost-effective use of resources; and other changes.

Only the first two ingredients are certain at present. Though ideas are abundant, those about methods to achieve reform objectives do not seem likely to produce significant change while the window of opportunity remains open. The region still waits for the pool of individual and institutional actors in education to reveal a fuller appreciation of the place of education within the larger political and economic environment, of the factors that cause current policies to be what they are, and of the inadvertent ways in which certain ideas that circulate in the reform community sustain these factors. In this context, one of reform's urgent needs is wider understanding of the ways in which the political economy shapes the relationship between the meanings and purposes of education.

1. Meanings and Purposes of Education

Most people in the political class understand education, for lack of a better description, to mean one or another variant of the "western secular" instruction that now takes place in schools of the public system. This schooling has always had an "urban," or what some call an "academic" orientation in the Sahel. Because this is inconsistent with the milieus in which most children live, reformers in the class urge that the curriculum adopt a more appropriate "rural" or "practical" orientation. However, though there are passing references to "non-formal" training, reformers and others exclude from their definition all the non-western family and community systems that transmit essential social and economic knowledge and values from one generation to the next outside the public segment of the education sector, including Islamic, Animist, and other religious instruction. That is, the class excludes from its definition all the systems that are already rural, practical, and consistent with the milieus.

Other than denoting the part of the education sector over which the state exercises authority, this exclusion gives the concept of "public" a meaning that is different than in other parts of the world. Because family, community, and religious education served as foundations for the development of public instruction in Europe, the United States, Japan, and other industrial societies, the gap between what this education offers and what parents demand is usually small and the concept of public covers the majority of educational interests in each nation. In the Sahel the notion restricts itself to a narrower set of interests, primarily but not exclusively those of the political class, and ignores the concerns of other publics.

The sector thus contains two separate domains. One is a western component divorced from the social and economic realities of the majority of families. It is unfit to offer information of productive value to most people, especially in rural areas. It nevertheless receives support of the state and its external assistants as well as the attentions of most reformers. The other is a non-western component. Though closely attuned to these realities, misfortunes of history have caused it to fend for itself. Left to their own devices, systems in this domain do not receive the support that they require to modernize themselves on their own terms and to thereby serve as vehicles through which to add new items to existing repertoires of knowledge.

Although the shortcomings of the western component contribute to it, this division, in place since the beginning of the colonial era, is what underwrites the inability of the education sector as a whole to equip each succeeding generation with the capacity to contribute more to economic and social progress than its predecessor. Its replacement by an integrated system of public education that is worthy of the name is therefore central to progress in education. This is hard, however, because the factors that created and now sustain the partition have etched themselves deeply into the political culture of the Sahel.

No less today than when European influences first entered the region, one of these factors is the tendency of non-Africans with urban roots and of Africans in the political class that share the same views to earnestly believe that public schooling, irrespective of what it offers, is a synonym for education. This canon is implicit in several orthodox notions. People that have not attended a public school are "uneducated" rather than simply "un-schooled." The share of an adult population that spent time in school and/or is literate represents a reliable measure of the quantity of human resources in a society. The level of school attainment measures the quality of these resources. Change in enrollment rates is a measure of educational progress. Political classes governed by these or other doctrines that discount non-western education are unlikely to act in ways that can integrate the two domains.

The tenets of foreigners may sometimes find cultural explanation, such as inappropriate extension of ideas shaped by western economies into societies with very different characteristics, what some call "ethnocentricity." This cannot adequately explain the behaviors of Africans, however. Their children, after all, are the ones that actually proceed through and bear the tangible consequences of the education sector. Because beliefs are usually consistent with self-interest, a better explanation here is that a definition which can divide a whole population into two categories, uneducated and educated, and within the latter which offers a way to clearly classify those with relatively more and less education, is a very useful method of social screening, especially if foreigners endorse it.

Dominant definitions of education act as more or less effective economic screens in all societies. The one in the region is especially valuable because it doubles as a political screen. It controls access to the one economic sector that offers promise of substantially higher income, the state apparatus. It therefore also regulates entry into the political class. This dual service, even if it is now inadvertent, is the legacy of at least three deliberate characteristics of colonization that endure to this day.

Synonymous with the idea of colonial rule, one was centralization of authority in an administrative apparatus and thus in people that work in or attach themselves to it by other means. Second was the authorities' use of facsimiles of metropolitan education as the principal method to recruit, train, and select African cadres for the apparatus and related colonial enterprises. Third, perhaps the most important, was lack of interest by the colonizers in promoting either broad economic development or improvements in the indigenous education systems that sustained agriculture and other productive sectors. Without reason to do otherwise, early colonial education focussed mainly on metropolitan languages and literacy, the inculcation of metropolitan values and behaviors through rudimentary versions of European primary schooling, and a limited number of vocational skills that were useful to the apparatus and its enterprises.

Given that advancement in the system implied greater mastery of language, literacy, values, behaviors, and skills of worth to the authorities, higher attainment usually led to higher points of entry into the administrative apparatus. At the limit, especially in the years between the end of the Second World War and independence when reform of the system eliminated vocational training at the base and introduced an exact duplicate of European systems into the region (and, indeed, made them direct extensions of metropolitan systems), students that reached the highest level could pursue further studies in the metropole with support from the authorities and then either return to occupy high posts or remain abroad.

The highly academic nature of education in the metropoles during this period of reform, especially of the French system that would not shift away from its focus on classical education (or what Americans refer to as general instruction in the liberal arts or humanities) until about 1970, meant that individuals who went to Europe usually studied in universities or other higher institutions that did not have rural orientations. Colonization thus produced a legacy of strong relationships between a particular type of western education and prospects for entry and advancement in the apparatus which, through neglect of most other economic sectors, was the only domain that offered clear prospects for higher income and, thus, political influence.

Independence, because it involved only a slight rearrangement of actors already in the political class, provided no opportunity to restructure these relationships. Europeans moved out of the upper ranks of the colonial administration into a new institution called the donor agency while Africans moved up from lower ranks to replace them within the state apparatus. Without change in the composition of actors, ways of thinking and acting in the class remained the same. The notion that the state was central to development, for example, or that it required "educated elites" to work in the apparatus, was perfectly consistent with colonial practice.

Indeed, the channeling of almost all external technical and financial assistance to or through the state after independence increased the primacy of the apparatus in the economy and strengthened the relationships. Together with deepening of cultural and institutional ties between the metropoles and the states, including creation of universities in the region and the forging of direct links between them and urban higher education institutions in Europe, it also reinforced the role of the public system of western urban education as the main path to affluence and influence.

The political economy of the region and the characteristics of the education sector might look different today if there had been no colonization or, with it, if the colonizers had promoted progress in all economic sectors and in the education systems of all people engaged in them. Things might also be different if independence had been accompanied by political decentralization, or even if western education had been linked mainly to European agricultural universities or other higher institutions with rural orientations. Interesting as these speculations may be, the fact is that history ran its particular

course and endowed the region with a divided education sector that benefits a minority at the expense of the majority and that does little to raise overall social and economic productivity in the societies.

This situation is hard to change because the social screening function of education has become so deeply embedded in the life of the political class and of people that aspire to enter it that change of even one important characteristic of education now requires concurrent change of one or another important feature of the class. Curriculum reform or, more generally, the challenge of shifting public education from its western urban or academic orientation to one that is more attuned to the circumstances of most people illustrates the scope and complexity of the problem.

2. Curriculum Reform

One obstacle to reform of curricula is the absence of a compelling need for change. The purpose to be served by integrating western and non-western systems, for instance, is unclear because successful passage through the public system offers an array of valuable economic and political rewards while other systems provide little or nothing of comparable value. Short of integration, the need for change inside the public system is also unclear because the key to these rewards is not so much knowledge as the level of student attainment, as symbolized by graduation certificates. Aside from mastery of literacy and the language of instruction, and acquisition of values and behaviors consistent with expectations of the political class and state apparatus, it does not matter what a student learns. The diploma is the key because it provides access to domestic scholarships, sometimes at the secondary but mostly at the university level and, for the longer term, is what the state, larger commercial and industrial enterprises, and donor agencies use to select job applicants.

More important than lack of need, another obstacle is the presence of very good reasons to keep things as they are. One is that the ultimate prize offered by the public system is escape from the region, either temporarily though study abroad (preferably with a scholarship) or permanently through emigration. The entire structure of the system, from universities through the secondary level to the first grade of primary schools therefore orients itself to this goal. That is, although any hierarchical system of formal instruction with almost any type of content could allocate domestic rewards, the need to promise access to the social and economic milieus of urbanized secular societies in the west demands that the system maintain its present orientation.

Another reason, more in the nature of a useful side effect than a deliberate decision, is that this orientation is an effective method of controlling the rate of entry into the state apparatus and, thus, expansion of the political class. The need for control stems from the requirement that the public system balance a credible promise of large rewards with assurance that only a small fraction of a society's children ever obtain them.

Economic life in the region leaves much to chance. If the perceived value of rewards is high enough relative to the costs of acquiring them, then sending one or more children to school may often involve no more risk of loss than any other investment of family time, energy, or funds. Were this not the case enrollment in public schools would not have expanded as quickly as it did during the last three decades. However, as in lotteries or other games of fortune the system would not be viable if a limited supply of prizes had to be divided among a large number of winners. This would dilute the value of each reward and thus undermine the support that the system receives inside and outside the political class.

The western urban secular orientation helps to resolve this difficulty by creating what looks like a "natural" barrier to enrollment, especially of rural children. This barrier works by narrowing the difference between perceived benefits and costs. Because schools provide little of practical value for

life in most areas, failure to reach a diploma means that a rural child acquires nothing that can enhance its capacity to support itself or its parents in these areas. If the cost of attending school includes less time spent in receiving family and community instruction, then there is even a risk of loss to productive capabilities. Moreover, because European languages and literacy have value in towns even without a diploma, and because the higher cost of living often offsets the higher income that urban workers receive, there is also a chance that the child's net addition to parental income will be less after education than would be the case without school and migration.

Closely related to this are social costs and benefits. Schools transmit western and urban beliefs as well as information. These are often incompatible with rural family and community values, and can sometimes threaten the survival capacity of parents. The idea of secular education, for instance, is no less alien and worrisome to many Muslim households than Islamic education to most French or American parents. Among other compelling reasons for worry, wide divergence between the attitudes and behaviors of children and those of parents undermines the cohesion of the family (or community) as a social unit and thus also the willingness of children to support parents in later years.

In other words, the western urban secular orientation of public education presents higher costs and risks, and lower benefits, to rural families in the majority than to urban families in the minority. This is an effective way to restrain enrollment and demand for schools in rural areas, to prevent dilution of state budgets, and to stem the rate of increase in numbers of graduates and competition for scholarships and employment. And because diplomas, indeed, the mere fact of secondary school attendance represents entry into the political class by students from families that are non-members, it slows the rate of outward expansion of the boundaries of the class.

However, because the value of promised rewards remains high relative to available alternatives, the orientation is by itself not sufficient to protect them. Increasing shares of families in the majority have shown willingness to incur the risks and to demand schools for their children. To deal with this problem the system has also developed a pattern of resource allocation, described earlier, which increases the probability of success among urban children, especially those from wealthier families, while decreasing it for others. As a result, financial reform is no less and perhaps even more difficult than reform of the curriculum.

3. Financial Reform

The role that resource allocation plays in controlling entry into the apparatus and political class, like the role of orientation, is not deliberate. It stems primarily from the closed nature of the public system. Whereas the economic purpose of public education in Europe and America is to produce a supply of people for the economy in general, in the region it has little relevance beyond the state sector and a few large enterprises. Education budgets, not to mention an important share of total government budgets, must therefore both supply education and demand its final products. Resources need to be allocated not only between different levels of the system on the supply side, but also between supply and demand.

This circumstance produces a particular hierarchy of priorities within the political class. Forced to make a choice, for instance, maintenance of salaries and scholarships are more important than public spending on learning materials because wealthier families can afford contribute more to help their schools obtain materials and to buy books for their own children. Their adults are available to assist with learning because most are already literate in a European language. Children receive better nutrition, are healthier and, living in towns, do not have to travel long distances to school. These children have the best chance to advance to the highest levels of the structure, to receive scholarships

and diplomas and, eventually, to use the papers to secure employment as teachers or other state employees, visas, and other advantages.

With high probabilities for successful passage of their children from one grade and level to the next, it makes no more sense for these families to urge that resources shift from the demand to the supply side of the budget than it does to insist that the content of curricula do anything but follow a straight path leading from the base to the highest level and beyond. Demands that the state reduce or eliminate salaries and scholarships would be tantamount to asking for removal of the very purposes for which parents send children to school. Together with other wealthier and poorer families that already have students in or about to enter the secondary or higher levels, as well as graduates that work as teachers or other state employees and who assign utmost importance to maintenance or increases of their salaries, they sustain the current pattern of resource allocation.

Poorer households in both urban and rural areas that want their children to try to benefit from public education cannot match the capacity of wealthier families to offset incomprehensible curricula and languages, inadequate nutrition and health, long travel distances and costs, lack of books, teaching and learning techniques that depend mainly on oral repetition and memorization (unavoidable without books or writing materials) and, as a result of their prior formation by primary and secondary schools, demoralized or incompetent instructors. In these circumstances most children repeat grades and, for this and other reasons, eventually abandon school long before completing the primary level or learning to read and write. This outcome also hinders dilution of state budgets (especially at the advanced levels), increases in numbers of graduates, competition for scholarships and employment, and expansion of the political class.

The question of whether these households would prefer that resources shift from higher levels to the base or from the demand to the supply side of the budget, or would be willing to contribute more to the cost of schooling in order to increase chances for their children to succeed, does not have an obvious answer. Parents that see acquisition of reading, writing, counting, or language skills as the main reason to enroll children are likely to support transfers. Because these goals are attainable in a relatively short period of time, shorter if the schools have more and better resources to work with, they might also be willing to invest more in schools.

But families that treat such skills as secondary or insignificant relative to diplomas, the majority of those with children in school, might see things differently. No different for them than for wealthier families, the system must supply both education and its benefits. Remove the rewards and the purpose of schooling is lost. The utility of transfers is not self-evident in this case. Similarly, with low probabilities of reaching a distant goal giving public education the character of a game of chance, the benefit to be derived from paying more to enter a child in the game is also unclear.

4. Constraints and Opportunities

Thus, whether the issue at hand is about the definition of education, curriculum, the pattern of resource allocation, resource mobilization, or some other feature, the situation is the same. Every characteristic of the public system serves a tangible purpose and reform of one or more of these features implies some deliberate or accidental change in one or another part of the political economy that the system serves. In brief, the main constraints to reform in the Sahel have been the roles of the state apparatus and emigration as the only unambiguous paths to higher economic and social standing, the role of public education as the only route to the apparatus and beyond, and the role of donors, especially the former metropoles, in sustaining these features of the political economy.

These are the factors that give the emergence of fiscal stress and donor concerns about democracy their special significance. The first item, among other consequences, is generating uncertainty about the capacity of the state to offer rewards and, therefore, about the purposes of the public system. The second is producing uncertainty about the degree to which donors will continue to work only with the state apparatus, in education or in other sectors. Prospects for the emergence of new sources of income growth, suppressed or overshadowed by the primacy of the state until now, are therefore higher than in the past. Prospects are also greater that additional ideas about education, this report being only one example, will move closer the forefront of talk about reform and, perhaps, eventually into policy. In other words, the political economy of the region, rigid for so long, has at last become elastic enough to stimulate dynamics that open paths to removal of the obstacles.

Of course, the impact of fiscal constraints on education is unlikely to be large in a near term because the overall goals of the current spectrum of dominant interests in the political class, even though chances for reaching them are lower than before, remain the same. The importance of the constraints lies more in the way that they are leading to reassessment and refinement of priorities which, if nurtured properly, offer considerable promise for the longer term.

Faced with a choice between immediate benefits such as scholarships and the longer-term benefits of having certificates, for example, parents and students are choosing the latter. Although they may protest this turn of events, they are slowly resigning themselves to the prospect that new cohorts of students will not receive the same financial support as past cohorts. Similarly, refinement of priorities at the primary level is favoring maintenance of current teacher salaries rather than the addition of new schools and teachers or, not that it was ever of utmost concern, equipping current schools with furnishings, books, and other things that are good for learning but bad for self-interest.

Such processes do not look promising to many reformers, but they are welcome. The inability of states and the small urban economy to employ graduates of the secondary and higher levels, the corresponding rise in the number of them that remain un- or poorly-employed, and the elimination of immediate benefits such as scholarships are conspiring to force graduates, students, and parents with children enrolled at all levels of the public system to reassess the worth of the diplomas and, more significant, to also begin to look at the pertinence of the knowledge that they acquired on the road to these certificates.

This process has been underway for a long time in western Africa. Parents in Togo protested in 1984 that:

> *They are deceiving us today..... They are cheating us with the school. Before, when one had the CEPE* [i.e., primary diploma] *one could find a job; now our children return to the village with the BEPC or Bac* [i.e., secondary certificates], *declaring that there is no work for them.... Why?*
>
> *They say that there is no more work in the public service... and that factories are closing. Why don't they also close the CEG* [i.e., rural schools] *as long as they are closing the factories?* (translated from Lange, 1987: 83-84).

Similarly, when asked to explain the closing of his school, a village chief responded by saying:

> *You who are in Lome, find me three guardians and two office jobs for our boys, then two placements as maids for our girls; and tomorrow I will fill the school.*

These questions and statements are important because reflections upon them are the principal social mechanism through which societies such as those of the Sahel come to identify the degree of mismatch between the knowledge provided by their public education systems and its social or economic utility in the private domain. If the mismatch is large, as many observers believe, the emergence within the political class of increasing numbers of parents, students, and graduates that actually see it offers good prospects for witnessing a rise in social and thus political demand for change in the content, quality, allocation of resources, and other characteristics of the entire system.

The reflections, when they turn to issues of finance, also contain considerable potential for stimulating processes of decentralization and democratization. The inability of the state to add new schools and teachers, for instance, is requiring more parents and communities that want to provide children with this type of instruction to find alternative sources of financing. This process, as we describe later, has been underway in Tchad and Gambia for more than a decade and is now surfacing in Mali. It is leading to gradual acknowledgment that responsibility for financing primary schools, at least in places that do not have them, may rest as much if not more with parents and communities as it does with the state.

Interesting questions, and answers to them, can flow from this understanding. What are the respective roles and responsibilities of parents, communities, and states with respect to schools? Who pays for what in a school? Who decides on the allocation of school resources? If teachers are paid by parents and the community, who decides their salaries and to whom are they accountable? What is a good school? How can the performance of students in the school be improved? In other words, a shift in the supply of all or part of a public service from the state to other social entities leads to several useful outcomes.

One effect is that all or part of the responsibility, management, and control of that service also shifts to these entities. Another is that this process of *de facto* participation and decentralization introduces social and political pressures that can have positive repercussions on the content, quality, allocation of resources, and other characteristics of primary schools. If these repercussions lead schools to do better in transmitting whatever it is that parents and students want from them, be it literacy or diplomas, then a third outcome is that the process may lead not only to the rise in demand for similar changes where schools already exist, but also to an increase in political demand for the state to supply or otherwise assist in the creation of schools by groups that are not now in the political class - precisely because they make no forceful demands on the state.

Among other useful consequences that would please many reformers, rises in demand for assistance at the primary level that greatly exceed fiscal capacities, especially if the basis of this demand flows from rewards outside the state apparatus, may gradually lead governments to have no choice but to shift resources from higher to lower levels of the system, and from the demand to the supply side of their budgets.

The asking and answering of questions brought about by fiscal stress is thus a permanent process of reflection, discussion, negotiation, and revision of the implicit social contract between the state and the political class that it serves. Through the improved results that may flow from the answers, it is also a method of reforming public education and a method of promoting outward expansion of the boundary of the class to encompass more groups in the majorities that are not now in it.

In combination with gradual movement toward representative democracy, fiscal stress will continue to catalyze the process of political decentralization. This window of opportunity will not remain open indefinitely, however. Nor, given that the last opportunity witnessed creation of the present system, is there assurance that significant reform of education or politics will take place before it closes. To

increase the likelihood of change, the region needs actions that, on one hand, can give the process a strong push and, on the other, can keep the window open long enough for the process to work its full effects.

With increasing numbers of parents and students raising questions about the pertinence of diplomas and other characteristics of public education and, therefore, more open to suggestions about alternatives, one strategy that holds promise is reform of the upper levels of the system in ways that encourage change at the base. At the base, another is encouraging more rural and poorer urban communities not only to ask questions about western and non-western education but also to insert their answers into public discourse and policy. To provide these and similar strategies with sufficient time to evolve, a third is to maintain fiscal stress by limiting assistance to the state.

We reserve discussion of this last item for our recommendations in Part IV, and of issues regarding non-western education for Part III. The next section, focusing on the public system, presents our analysis and suggestions with respect to reform of the secondary and higher levels and to empowerment of parents and communities in matters of primary schooling. Because these suggestions are uncommon (though hardly original), we precede them with a look first at certain ways of thinking that hinder change, especially ways that do not consider social, economic, and political demand, and then at the evolution of public education to highlight the importance of accounting for these things.

II. WESTERN EDUCATION

Looking at current statistics, many individuals assert that enrollment rates in public education are too low. Of particular concern to them are rates at the primary level and among certain segments of the population, such as women and the rural poor, and the adult literacy rates that result from low enrollment (e.g. Ki-Zerbo, 1990; CILSS, 1990). Viewing the same numbers, others contend that rates are too high. They do not question the value of schooling or literacy. They concern themselves with what economists call opportunity costs. Some, especially those who work outside the education sector, note that public spending for schools means not spending for other things such as roads, wells, agriculture, health, or other items. Within the sector, others suggest that use of resources to increase enrollment has undermined the quality of instruction. A few contend that production of large numbers of secondary and higher-level graduates that cannot find jobs is waste of resources. Because the presence of large numbers of "educated unemployed" can sometimes contribute to political instability, it also seems dangerous.

While they offer general information about long-term trends, enrollment and literacy statistics for the Sahel are not reliable enough to sustain credible comments of any kind. The total population, age structure, fertility rate, mortality rate, and other figures required to estimate the size and growth of the school-age population since 1960 remain heroic guesses based on incomplete census surveys. Numbers of primary students come from reports by school directors to government inspectors and from the inspectors to central administrators. The capabilities of these individuals vary and the conditions under which many of them work are difficult. The data sometimes include non-government schools and at other times exclude them. Sometimes they show enrollments at the start of the school year and at other times they are for later periods when dropouts have affected the initial figures. Many reports never reach the central administration.

Any statistic for Tchad in 1980 is suspect because the country was at the height of its civil war at the time. Any statistic for 1988-89 is also suspect. In a report for the World Bank, Orivel and Perrot (1990) indicate that the primary enrollment rate for that year was 32 to 37 percent according to the

education ministry's planning service, and 56 percent according to the inspection service. The authors then make their own guess: 49 percent.

For Niger we found four different sets of figures for 1980-89 that government representatives presented at various international meetings in 1989 and 1990 (IIEP, 1989; République du Niger, 1990). Depending on the set one adopts, enrollment could have risen, fallen, or remained stagnant during the decade. Our inquiries about the primary enrollment rate in Mali yielded answers ranging from less than 20 to more than 30 percent. The one individual with all the official statistics in his computer at the education ministry could not say with certainty whether they covered all government schools or whether they included Islamic and other non-government schools.

Similarly, literacy statistics suffer from lack of a common definition for the term and from lack of means to test for any particular definition. As when Orivel and Perrot tried to guess at an enrollment figure for Tchad, there is always the problem of government and donor agency staff and consultants that adjust numbers for various purposes, such as trying to make them seem more believable. A recent example is the 1992 edition of the World Bank's World Development Report. Although there have been no surveys in the intervening period, and although it gives no explanation for the change, the report's literacy estimates for the Sahel are significantly higher than in the 1991 edition. If the new figures represent actual rises rather than imaginative artifacts, backward extrapolation implies an exponential rate of growth that now is higher than in 19th-century France and the United States when their literacy rates expanded at maximum speed. If accurate, this is welcome news. The trouble is that while the appearance of rapid expansion may be consistent with other fabrications in the report, such as economic growth rates, it is difficult to reconcile with enrollment statistics.

The reliability of statistics is not important for purposes of making comments, however. More precision would not change them because the claims have nothing to do with the numbers. Enrollment and quality are always too low for some and too high for others even when there are no statistics. While many educators at the time pressed for more schools and better teaching in order to speed the spread of literacy and other knowledge or to achieve certain social or political goals, Colbert complained in 1667 that France had too many schools that were producing too many lawyers, petty judges, petty bureaucrats and shabby priests (Cippola, 1969). In 1762 De La Chatolais protested that:

> *even the working people want to study...and after a poor education that teaches them only to despise their father's profession, they...join the clerics; they take posts as officers of the law, they often become persons harmful to society.* (cited in Cippola, 1969: 100).

In historical context, therefore, assertions are more important than statistics because they are vital components of the "nagging force" within the political class that is produced by and that promotes social and economic change. The class would exercise less social and political pressure for increases in the supply of schools without declarations among its members that enrollment and literacy are too low. Similarly, there might be less attention to the need for balance in investments across different economic and social sectors, to quality of instruction, or to relationships between the supply and the demand for graduates if there were no assertions that they are too high.

It follows that the quality of the assertions that enter into debates about education is also more important than the quality of the statistics. In this respect, a major difficulty in the Sahel is that the scope of the nagging is too narrow. Perhaps because it is focussed on the state, perhaps for other reasons, the nagging is almost always about the supply of public education and only rarely about the demand for it. This often yields assertions that miss the mark of what is important.

For example, those who earnestly believe that enrollment is too high because it contributes to "educated unemployment" and who therefore suggest that governments spend less on education, do not notice that high unemployment rates among recent graduates are normal in many industrial countries. What has been abnormal in the Sahel, because governments were able to absorb the flow of graduates, was the absence of unemployment in the past. They also do not notice that unemployment is a luxury that only the relatively wealthy and politically influential can afford. The unemployed are from families that matter in domestic politics, as are most of the future unemployed who are still in school. The political dangers that might result from efforts to constrain admission or graduation rates should thus be no less worrisome than the dangers of having too many graduates that cannot find work.

More important, the presence of the educated unemployed is in many respects an indicator of success in the Sahel. It is a sign that the public system is at long last on the verge of extending itself beyond its limited role as gateway into the state apparatus. Creation of a surplus army of graduates unable to find government work and who must look elsewhere as a result, given the absence of improvement in other education systems, is the main mechanism through which the range of formal knowledge in the private labor force is able to expand. This knowledge may not be useful at present. But it is largely through the autonomous social process of discovering the mismatch between what the market demands and what graduates supply that social and political "feedback" emerges to insist upon more appropriate types of public instruction.

With manpower planning and other techniques having demonstrated their inability to assess educational needs in coherent ways, this is one of the most important benefits of having a lot of unemployed graduates. Given a choice between the educated and uneducated unemployed, the Sahel needs as many of the first type as it can produce because, rather than being a problem, it is part of the solution to the problem of public systems that only serve the needs of the state sector. If it leads systems to supply what other economic sectors demand, the phenomenon of educated unemployment will eventually disappear.

To the extent that there may be a problem, it stems from the prospect that educated unemployment may not last long enough to generate the political feedback required for enduring change. Responding to the obvious drop in the value of expected rewards, primary enrollment and literacy may also decline and thereby eliminate the phenomenon before it has an opportunity to alter the characteristics of the public system. If this happens the first real chance since independence to try to reform the characteristics of the advanced levels of the public system in ways that can improve the base may be lost.

The reasoning of many who believe that enrollment is too low, turning to another example, may inadvertently contribute to this loss. Of particular concern are assertions that flow either from the premise that primary schooling and education are the same thing or, alternatively, that the knowledge and other benefits that schools provide are not only inherently good for all people in all circumstances but also better than the learning offered by other forms of instruction. These articles of faith are a problem because they sustain a tendency to ignore demand and, therefore, to prevent active search for factors that constrain enrollment and literacy rates and for methods to deal with these factors.

This search is especially important when political centralization makes the range of opinions and other information that enter into the formulation of policies much narrower than in societies where broad participatory democracy allows all opinions to find larger or smaller places in public discourse. Because the policy milieu in the Sahel is not as saturated with opinions as in the industrial societies, there is a good chance that vital information required to develop effective interventions lies outside

rather than inside the arenas of discussion within the political class. Any assumption that discounts the need to look for this information is an obstacle to progress.

For instance, if one believes that western schools are superior in all circumstances, then there is no need to look at non-western systems, to discover why enrollment rates in them are close to 100 per cent, to understand why they are often preferable to western education, or to find ways either to integrate them into the public system or to help them improve on their own terms. Similarly, within western education, fervent belief in the inherent goodness of schools eliminates the need to explore the reasons that parents do or do not enroll children in them. This makes it difficult to conceive the possibility that transfers of resources from higher to lower levels of the public system might cause declines in enrollment, or that increases in enrollment and improvements in quality at the base may require more rather then less public investment at the advanced levels. At the primary level, the belief also makes it difficult to conceive the possibility that indicators which parents, students, and other key consumers use to assess quality and other matters may be more important than the measures used by suppliers.

This last has special significance because the tendency to ignore the perspectives of consumers obstructs efforts to cultivate political demand for change by the population that now cannot insert its own opinions and proposals into public discourse. If for no other reason than the weight of their numbers, the opinions of parents are central to public decisions in democratic societies. Accordingly, policies in these societies are usually consistent with social demand because they respond to what the majority of parents, or at least a sizeable minority of them, demand from their governments. That is, the characteristics of supply at any moment usually flow from demand for them at that moment, and changes in the characteristics usually flow from the accumulation of compelling social and political demand for their reform. Because the size of the political class that now has the will and capacity to make such demands is very limited, changes in enrollments, literacy rates, quality, and most other features of education require change in the composition of the class.

Failure to attend to demand and to the search for the important things to which it points is what may contribute to loss of the current opportunity to change education. A brief review of the origins and the evolution of western education may help to clarify this issue.

1. Demand and Supply, 1816-1990

Western instruction added itself to the inventory of education systems in what are now the Francophone parts of the Sahel when the governor of Senegal invited a teacher to open a primary school for boys near Dakar in 1816. [2] Although initial languages of instruction were French and Wolof, the school abandoned the local language in 1829 because of disinterest by parents and students. A few years later the sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph de Cluny organized a school for teachers, and a school for girls that emphasized household and sewing skills. The Brothers of Ploermel, who eventually took charge of large portion of primary instruction in Senegal, followed in 1840. Among other things, they started a practical training program in agriculture, woodwork, and metalwork. But low enrollment caused them to cancel it a few years later.

In the second half of the century the administration established secular schools and evening classes, in part to attract Muslim students who attended Koranic schools during the day (i.e., "traditional" Islamic religious schools). It also created "hostage schools," which later became "schools for sons of

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2 This review draws largely from Capelle (1990). Except for occasional references to Tchad, in French Equatorial Africa, it covers only the area of French West Africa that today contains Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania and Benin. It does not cover the British and Portuguese periods in the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Cape Verde.

chiefs." This was the first deliberate effort to prepare people for service in the administration. Customary chiefs were obliged to send sons to this school, but many of them supplied slaves rather than sons. Still, when the occupational mobility of graduates through the ranks of the administration became evident, so did the advantage of sending sons - if not to the chiefs then to others.

In 1860 there were 900 primary students in Dakar, including 200 girls. After introduction of four primary schools in 1882, the system in Mali expanded to include a school for sons of chiefs, a vocational facility, two agricultural schools, and 30 primary schools that contained a total of 800 students in 1900. Military officers and local translators taught in a few of the schools, but most teachers in Mali and elsewhere were missionaries. As a result, expansion came to a halt in 1903-4 after enactment of the Laic Laws in France which prohibited Catholic congregations from teaching in government schools. [3]

Application of these laws in Africa caused many schools to close for lack of lay teachers to replace the missionaries. Enrollment rates for girls suffered greatly. When the Catholic sisters who had developed the trust and confidence of Muslim communities left their posts, parents withdrew their daughters from school. The estimated enrollment rate for girls in French West Africa (i.e., the share of the school-age population actually enrolled in school) dropped from 17% in 1903 to 5% in 1917. [4]

Benin was an exception. Many communities found means to pay the missionaries and to finance the schools after the administration withdrew support. This effort, an indication of high community interest, may partly explain why enrollment rates for boys and girls in Benin were and remain among the highest in western Africa.

Coinciding with the transfer of teaching authority from missionaries to the state, the entire school system narrowed itself to a single purpose: production of skilled personnel for the administration and for other components of the colonial economy. Clozel, governor at the time, made this clear when he said:

> *I think that the most important outcome to obtain from the instruction that we provide in our colonies should be one of usefulness, first for us, then for our natives* (translated from Désalmand, 1983).

The administration reorganized the system for this purpose in 1903. This involved creation of a hierarchy of filters with increasing specialization at each level. At the bottom was the village school. It provided four years of instruction in the rudiments of language and literacy, and some training in agricultural work. Next was the regional facility. It offered the same four years of instruction as the village school for students that lived in its immediate vicinity. Because the quality of instruction was better than at the village level, it also received the most promising students from villages in boarding facilities. In addition, it offered two years of middle-primary instruction for graduates of the four-year cycle.

There was also an urban school. The only difference between this and the regional facility was that it replaced agriculture with training in metalwork, woodwork, dressmaking, and other household crafts. Students that graduated from the middle-primary level at the regional and urban schools could go to

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3 These laws were the result of the latest battle in a protracted struggle for control of schools between the Catholic church and Conservative forces that wanted to produce good Catholics loyal to the Church, and Republican forces that wanted to produce good citizens loyal to the state and to Republican ideals.

4 These enrollment figures should be interpreted with caution. Administrators, no more then than now, did not know the exact size and rate of growth of the population. The figures are useful only as indicators of the general direction of absolute enrollment.

a vocational school or to two more years of advanced primary study (école primaire supérieure - EPS). Graduates of the EPS could then move on to either a normal school that offered three years of training for careers as teachers or administrative assistants, or to a medical center for training that led to service as health assistants. Other than changes in the content of the curricula and in the names attached to each level, i.e., from village-urban, regional, and EPS to primary, secondary, and higher, this structure, as well as the filtering purpose that it served, would remain in place for the balance of the century.

The Laic Laws were relaxed in 1913. Missionaries resumed their teaching activities, particularly in village schools. Although they could establish their own schools and teach religion in local languages, the missionaries had to follow the official curriculum and teach it in French. In addition, the administration began to support some Koranic schools and took over three Medersas (i.e., "modernized" Islamic schools that combined religious instruction with non-religious subjects).

One reason it did this was to bring more Muslims into the school system and eventually into the administration. The vast majority of people was Muslim. They were under-represented in the hierarchy of schools because parents, to the extent that they had any interest in helping an occupying power to meet its goals, were generally hostile to the idea of secular schools. Since the administration could not bring enough Muslims into the hierarchy, it expanded the system to include the Islamic schools. Another reason, perhaps more important, was to bring Islamic teachers under its direct control. The spread of ideas associated with pan-Islamic nationalism, ideas that challenged the authority of the French, had to be blocked.

There were also two lycées in Senegal catering almost exclusively to children of French citizens. They were not part of the colonial hierarchy of schools. They followed the curriculum of the metropole and their diplomas gave access to further education in France. The diplomas granted by the African schools lacked standing in France and did not offer access to further secondary or higher education.

The estimated enrollment rate in West Africa stood at 2.4% in 1938-39. This low level of enrollment was deliberate. There was no reason for schools to produce more graduates than could find gainful employment. Even so, in some areas it was very difficult to find parents who were willing to sacrifice their children to meet the needs of the French. In these areas the administration expanded its usual obligation that chiefs collect taxes and recruit forced labor from their subjects to include supply of a minimum quota of students for each school.

The disinterest in schools was only partly the result of the enduring hostility of many Muslim and other parents toward the French. It also resulted from the irrelevance of western education. In the view of the parents, though practical for the French, it was completely academic. It contained nothing that could prove of use in the probable life courses of the young, not even literacy. Also, the colonial system as a whole offered no possibilities for other life courses, such as opportunities for advancement to secondary and higher levels. Then there were the gardens and workshops. Besides the fact that this instruction was either useless or inferior to what the children learned at home, the obligation of students to work the fields or to make wood and metal items was the same as forced labor. It was worse when school masters behaved more like planters or businessmen than like teachers. It was slavery. Africa had enough of that.

These parents were certainly not opposed to education. Brenner (1989a) reports that in some places, such as Mali, the enrollment rate of Muslim children in the lower grades of Koranic schools and Medersas was close to 100% in 1940. These schools clearly promised something that the parents valued while the administration's schools did not. And Islamic instruction was not the only form of non-western education with high enrollment. In addition to Animist instruction, enrollments were also near 100% in community education systems that transmitted practical economic and social knowledge

from one generation to the next, and that had been doing this since long before the arrival in Africa of Islam and Europe.

Called "initiation" by some observers, these education systems had high enrollment because the very survival of families and communities depended on them. They remain basic systems of education for the majority of rural inhabitants because survival still depends on them. Relative to this instruction, which almost all children received and which most continue to receive no matter their faith, the content of western education was trivial.

For these and other reasons enrollment in western schools declined dramatically in Mali and Guinea when the French stopped the practice of involuntary enlistment of students in 1946. The decline eventually reversed itself, however, in step with reform of the school system to make it identical with the one in France, and with economic transformations that increased the share of the population that saw value in it. This was the last significant reform to take place in the region.

i. The Great Reform, 1946-1960

In combination with the French government's decision to elevate its colonies to the status of overseas territories, the reform of 1946 resulted from incessant demand by the administration's African employees for an education system that would give them access to the highest levels of the administration and other colonial enterprises. French citizens with metropolitan diplomas monopolized these posts because only a very few Africans had managed to obtain the necessary certificates through the local lycées or in France. Clearly, more Africans needed diplomas. The unity of African interest in this matter showed itself at a Brazzaville conference in 1944, where participants agreed on a resolution calling for (French) "education for the majority" (Botti et al., 1978).

When African representatives to the French parliament made this request they received counter-proposals for practical, adapted curricula. These proposals made little sense to most or all the Africans. Each was a recapitulation of the very system that they were trying to eliminate. Like the parents who refused to send children to western schools, they also saw that what looked practical or adapted to their French colleagues in the national assembly was totally academic in Africa. They persisted and parliament acceded to their demands in 1946.

The reform removed agricultural work from rural schools. It combined European and African children into the same classrooms. And it tried to make the primary curriculum more consistent with the milieu by introducing new texts that covered local history, geography, and nature. It also made the curricula of urban and rural primary schools identical. This allowed equal access to secondary and higher levels of instruction. With respect to these levels, the reform opened colleges (4 years) and lycées (7 years) to Africans in all territories. The University of Bordeaux supervised the examinations and diplomas were valid in France. The administration also provided scholarships for study in France because there were no facilities for higher education until the University of Dakar opened its doors in the 1950s.

The impact of the reform on the enrollment rate in West Africa was almost instantaneous. It reached 4.2% in 1950. Although lower than in adjoining areas, e.g., 8.5% in French Equatorial Africa, 23% in Togo, and 20% in Cameroun, this rate was a 75% increase over the figure of a decade earlier. The quality of many of these schools seemed poor, however. Capelle (1990) reports that during a visit to a middle-primary class in Cote D'Ivoire in 1949 he noted the following question on the blackboard:

> *What is the amount of funds that, if invested at 4% for one year, yields 4,680 Francs in capital and interest combined?* (translated from Capelle, 1990).

The solution provided by the teacher, also written on the blackboard, was:

100 F in 360 days: *(4 x 360)/12 = 120 F*
which thus become: *100 + 120 = 220 F*
the amount is thus: *(100 x 4,680)/220 = 2,127 F*

This was not a unique case. Quality looked like a widespread problem to external observers even when the enrollment rate was only 4%. But this interpretation of quality was not germane because the main purpose of schools was not exactly the same in Africa as in France.

In 1950 the purpose of French primary schools from the point of view of the state and of most (but certainly not all) parents was to assure literacy and political socialization. More important, because probabilities for advancement to secondary and higher levels would remain very low for at least another decade, and because many students dropped out before graduation, primary education for most of the French population was terminal. Employment prospects in the labor market were therefore determined by whether a person graduated from primary school and, if so, their grade. That is, the environment provided considerable incentive for parents to have their children master literacy and do well in all subjects.

Literacy and political socialization were also part of the agenda in Africa, but with practical uses for reading, writing, counting, and primary diplomas scarce outside the public sector and small urban economy, the economic incentives were much weaker. This situation was the same in France before and during much of the 19th century. At that time the economic purpose of primary schools was to supply the secondary and higher levels and thus the state apparatus with survivors - "people of quality" that passed the examinations permitting entry to the advanced levels no matter what took place in their primary schools.

This was also the main economic function of primary education in Africa after the reform of 1946. It therefore did not matter whether schools transmitted useful or even correct information. The measure of quality for most parents was the capacity of schools to move students from one grade to another and from one level of the system to the next. If the teacher in Cote D'Ivoire had managed to complete his secondary studies and thus earn the right to teach without having mastered his numbers, then this deficiency was irrelevant. The fact that the entire system offered instruction that was largely immaterial to the circumstances of the Sahel was also irrelevant. All that mattered were the certificates, among other reasons, because opportunities to make use of them were rising.

ii. Enrollment and Literacy, 1960-1990

As the Sahelian nations approached independence (most in 1960), Africans were rapidly replacing Europeans in the administration and in emerging industrial and commercial enterprises. French and donor investments in various development activities were increasing the demand for goods and services. Many cities were growing quickly in response to these economic changes. That is, incentives to enroll children in western schools and to encourage them to advance to the highest level were increasing. Proficiency in French and literacy were essential to employment in the expanding sectors. And the higher the level of school attainment, the higher not only the positions at which individuals could enter employment but also the chances for study abroad and emigration.

As a result, the enrollment rate soared to 15% in 1958. This was an increase of almost 400% over the figure of eight years earlier. There were also 22,000 students in secondary schools and 1,000 at the University of Dakar. Still, the rates varied greatly from one place to another. In major towns they were between 70% and 90%, except in Dakar (50%) where very rapid population growth made it difficult

to keep up with demand for school places. Rates were also 50% or higher in those rural areas of Senegal, Cote D'Ivoire, and Benin that were undergoing significant economic expansion. This expansion was absent in most zones, however. Average figures for each country and across the region's landscape were therefore much lower: 34% in Cote D'Ivoire, 30% in Benin, 25% in Senegal, 12% in Guinea, 8% in Burkina Faso and Mali, 7% in Mauritania, and 4% in Niger.

The process was similar in Tchad. Enrollment grew from about 50 students in 1921 to 900 in 1939, 7,300 in 1950 and then to more than 40,000 in 1958. Rates varied here as well, from 3% to 36% in different areas of the country (Mbaïosso, 1990).

To some observers in 1960, such as Capelle (1990), it seemed that the governments of the newly-independent states would not find it possible to sustain these high rates of enrollment growth without new resources. They were already devoting 20% to 25% of their national budgets to education. In the event, and without noticeable increases in budget shares, growth in tax revenues, budgetary support from donors, technical assistance in the form of instructors at the secondary and higher levels, and other external help allowed states to satisfy rising demand caused by increased concentration of fiscal expenditures in the public sector and concurrent urbanization, employment opportunities in donor agencies and their projects, donor (and government) scholarships for short- or long-term overseas study, and prospects for emigration.

Enrollment statistics for primary, secondary, and higher education were thus able to rise for the next three decades at rates that, until quite recently for most countries, were comparable to those of Japan and several other industrial nations during their own phases of rapid expansion a century earlier (Tables 1 and 2, Illustration 1). Geographic and social variations in these rates, which among other things reflected enduring differences in the interest of parents in western education, were also comparable. As in France in 1820, areas that benefitted more from economic development, the coastal nations of Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia, Senegal, and Mauritania showed faster growth of enrollment than Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Tchad in the interior (Illustrations 2 and 3). Expansion in urban and in dynamic rural areas was higher than elsewhere within each country. Rates for boys were invariably higher than for girls. And, if latest World Bank numbers are to be believed, literacy is now expanding at a rate equal to or higher than in France or the United States during the 19th century (Illustration 4). [5]

iii. Structural Adjustment

Although the statistics have yet to show a trend, partly because they are inaccurate but mainly because adjustments to new realities usually take time to work their effects, it seems likely (or at least more likely than in 1960) that growth in enrollment at all levels, if it has not already begun, will soon slow down for a while as a result of fiscal stress, lowering of real levels of donor assistance, and increasing obstacles to emigration. There may even be an absolute decline if rates fall below that of population growth. This too is comparable to the experiences of the industrial societies with respect to primary education in the 19th century, secondary education through most of the 20th, and higher education today.

What may happen as a result of this adjustment is uncertain. If actors in the education sector persist with their old habits, one possibility is simple contraction in the size and growth of public education

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5 Similarities do not apply only to the 19th century. Analyses of the performance of French primary students conducted by the Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques indicate that dropout, repetition, and passing rates in 1960-66 were very similar to those in the region today, and that the relative social and economic position of parents, as in the Sahel, explained much of the difference in these rates (INED, 1970).

Table 1: Données de base sur l'éducation - Basic education statistics, 1990

	Burkina Faso	Cap Vert	Gambie	Guinée Bissau	Mali	Mauritanie	Niger	Sénégal	Tchad
PNB / GNP per capita ($EU / $US):	330	890	260	180	270	500	310	710	190
Dépenses publiques pour l'éducation / Public expenditure for education:									
% du budget total / % of total budget:	22	15	22	16	25	22	18	24	12
% du budget de l'éducation au: / % of education budget to:									
primaire / primary:	47	72	59	48	33	36	46	46	53
secondaire / secondary:	26	22	27	50	45	38	34	30	30
supérieure / higher:	27	6	14	2	22	26	20	24	17
% des bourses etc. dans les dépenses totales pour l'éducation: / % scholarships etc. in total expenditures for:									
secondaire / secondary:	35	-	13	-	19	19	23	13	-
supérieure / higher:	79	-	-	-	67	57	60	44	33
dépenses annuelles par étudiant / annual expenditure per student (CFA):									
primaire / primary:	20,200	11,200	19,000	14,000	17,800	31,600	28,000	33,700	7,200
secondaire / secondary:	135,500	-	44,700	-	96,000	190,000	118,000	124,000	24,000
supérieure / higher:	769,000	-	-	-	424,000	890,000	882,000	811,000	375,000
Taux d'inscription bruts / Gross enrollment rates:									
Primaire / Primary (%):									
garçons / boys:	43	112	80	73	29	60	36	67	69
filles / girls:	27	106	46	40	17	42	20	49	35
Secondaire / Secondary (%):									
garçons / boys:	9	15	26	11	8	22	8	21	11
filles / girls:	5	14	10	4	4	10	4	11	3
Taux d'alphabétisation / Literacy rate (%):	18	48	27	36	32	34	28	38	30

Sources: CILSS, 1990; CMET, 1990; World Bank, 1992.

Table 2: L'Evolution des taux d'inscription - Enrollment rates, 1960-1990

		Burkina Faso	Cap Vert	Gambie	Guinée Bissau	Mali	Mauritanie	Niger	Sénégal	Tchad
Primaire/Primary (%)	1960	8	33	15	25	9	7	6	27	17
	1965	12	45	26	24	18	12	11	40	30
	1970	12	53	27	39	22	17	14	41	35
	1975	15	125	31	49	24	23	20	41	35
	1980	18	112	49	67	25	37	27	46	36
	1984	26	109	60	60	22	46	26	55	34
	1987	31	108	63	57	21	53	29	57	48
	1990	35	109	63	56	23	51	28	58	52
Secondaire/Secondary (%)	1960	0.4	11.8	4.0	2.7	0.7	0.4	0.3	3.0	0.4
	1965	1.0	7.7	7.0	2.0	3.7	1.4	0.6	6.7	1.0
	1970	1.4	10.1	10.0	8.0	4.8	2.4	1.2	9.8	2.0
	1975	1.8	6.5	10.0	3.4	6.8	4.2	2.2	10.4	3.0
	1980	2.7	7.8	13.0	5.9	8.1	10.9	5.0	11.2	5.0
	1984	3.8	10.9	18.0	8.8	6.3	14.7	6.0	12.7	6.0
	1987	5.7	14.7	18.0	8.4	5.7	16.0	6.4	14.0	6.0
	1990	7.0	nd	nd	nd	6.0	16.0	6.0	16.0	7.0
Supérieure/Higher (%)	1960	0.0	nd	nd	nd	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0
	1965	0.0	nd	nd	nd	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0
	1970	0.0	nd	nd	nd	0.1	0.0	0.0	1.4	0.0
	1975	0.2	nd	nd	nd	0.5	0.0	0.1	1.9	0.2
	1980	0.3	nd	nd	nd	0.8	1.4	0.3	2.7	0.3
	1984	0.6	nd	nd	nd	1.0	2.6	0.6	2.3	0.4
	1987	0.9	nd	nd	nd	1.0	4.8	0.7	2.8	0.7
	1990	1.0	nd	nd	nd	1.0	3.0	1.0	3.0	1.0

Sources: CILSS, 1990; CMET, 1990; World Bank, 1992.

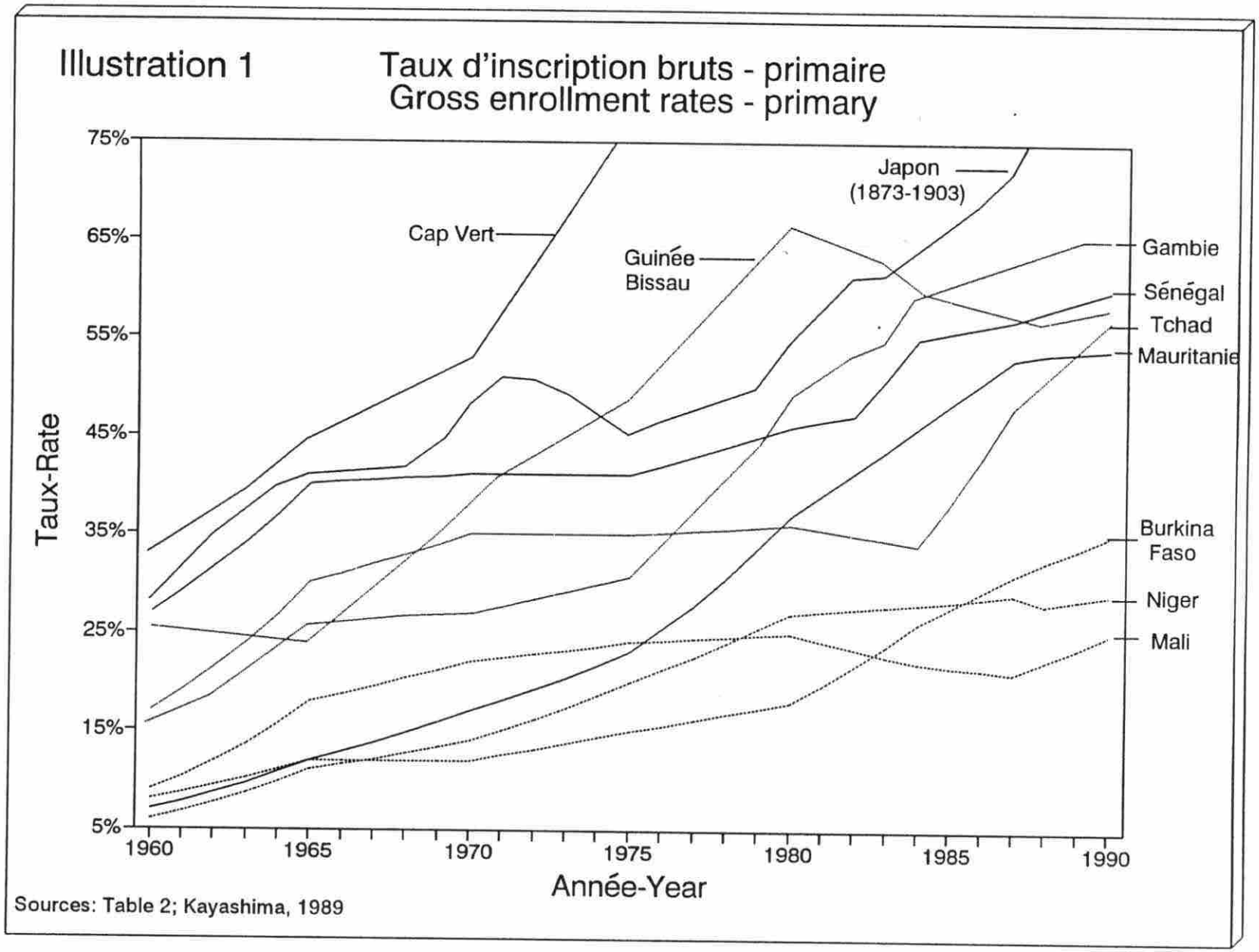
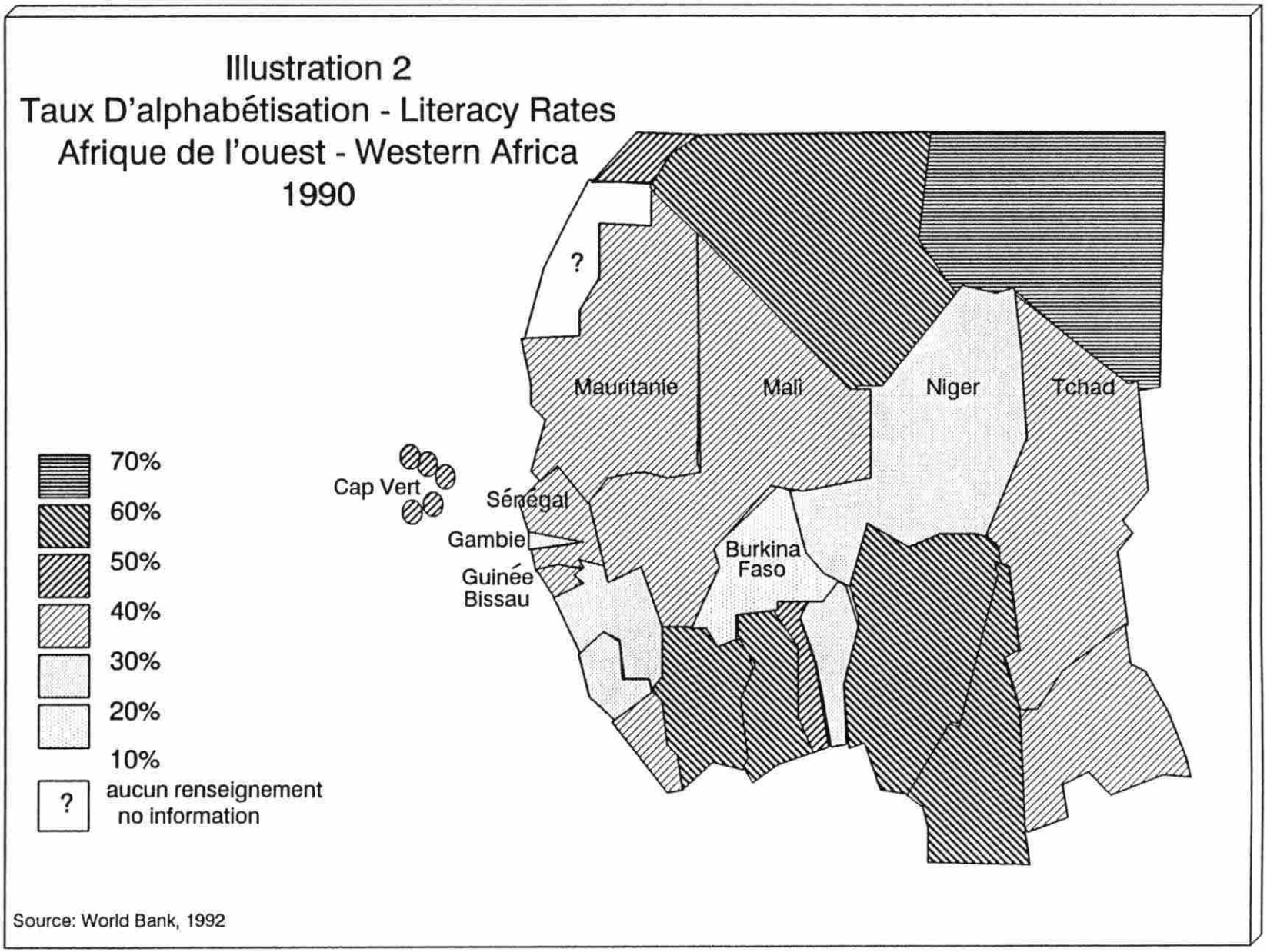


Illustration 1
Taux d'inscription bruts - primaire
Gross enrollment rates - primary
75%
65%
55%
45%
35%
25%
15%
5%
Taux-Rate
1960
1965
1970
1975
1980
1985
1990
Année-Year
Japon
(1873-1903)
Cap Vert
Guinée
Bissau
Gambie
Sénégal
Tchad
Mauritanie
Burkina
Faso
Niger
Mali
Sources: Table 2; Kayashima, 1989

Illustration 2
Taux D'alphabétisation - Literacy Rates
Afrique de l'ouest - Western Africa
1990



Source: World Bank, 1992

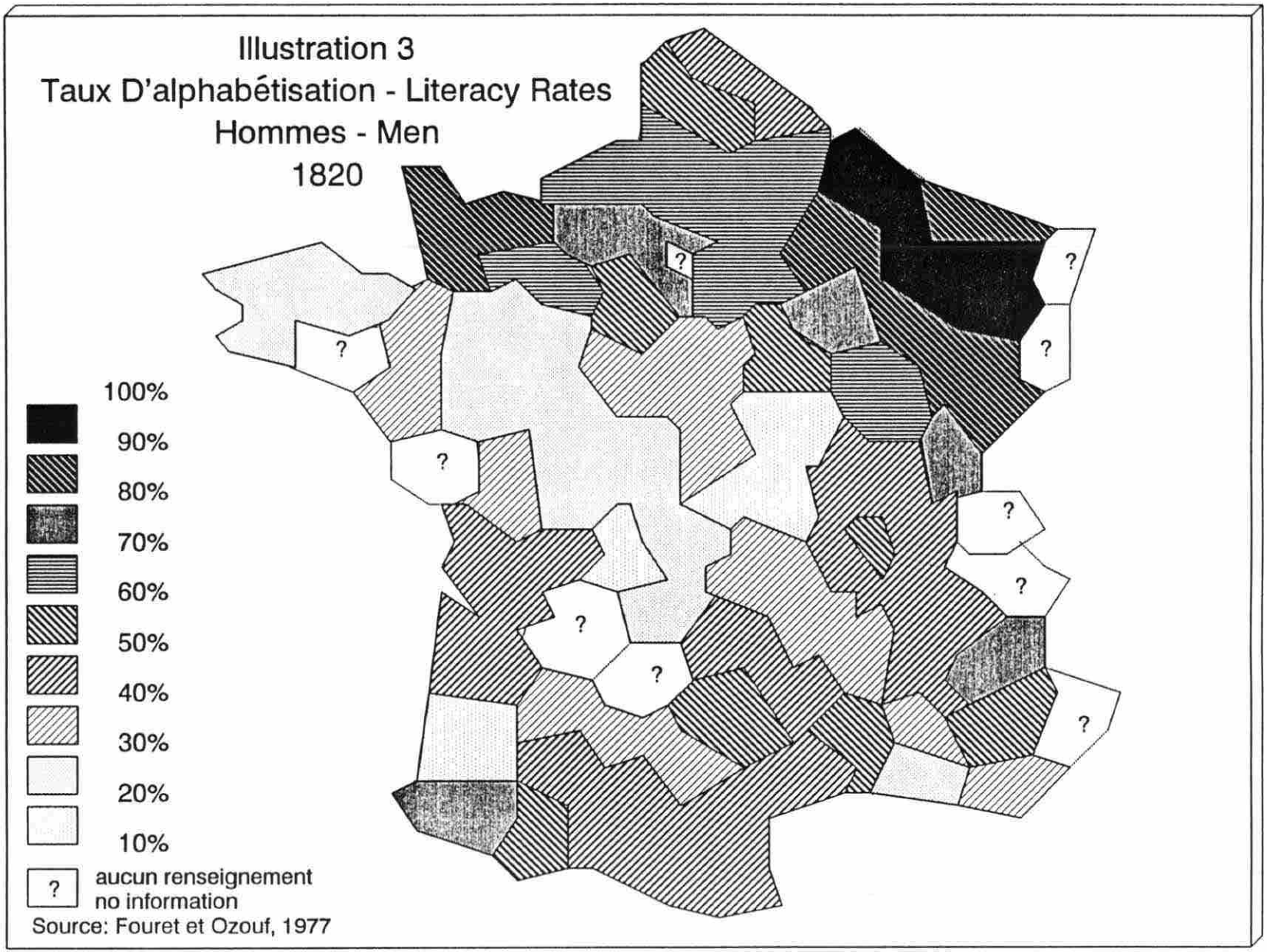
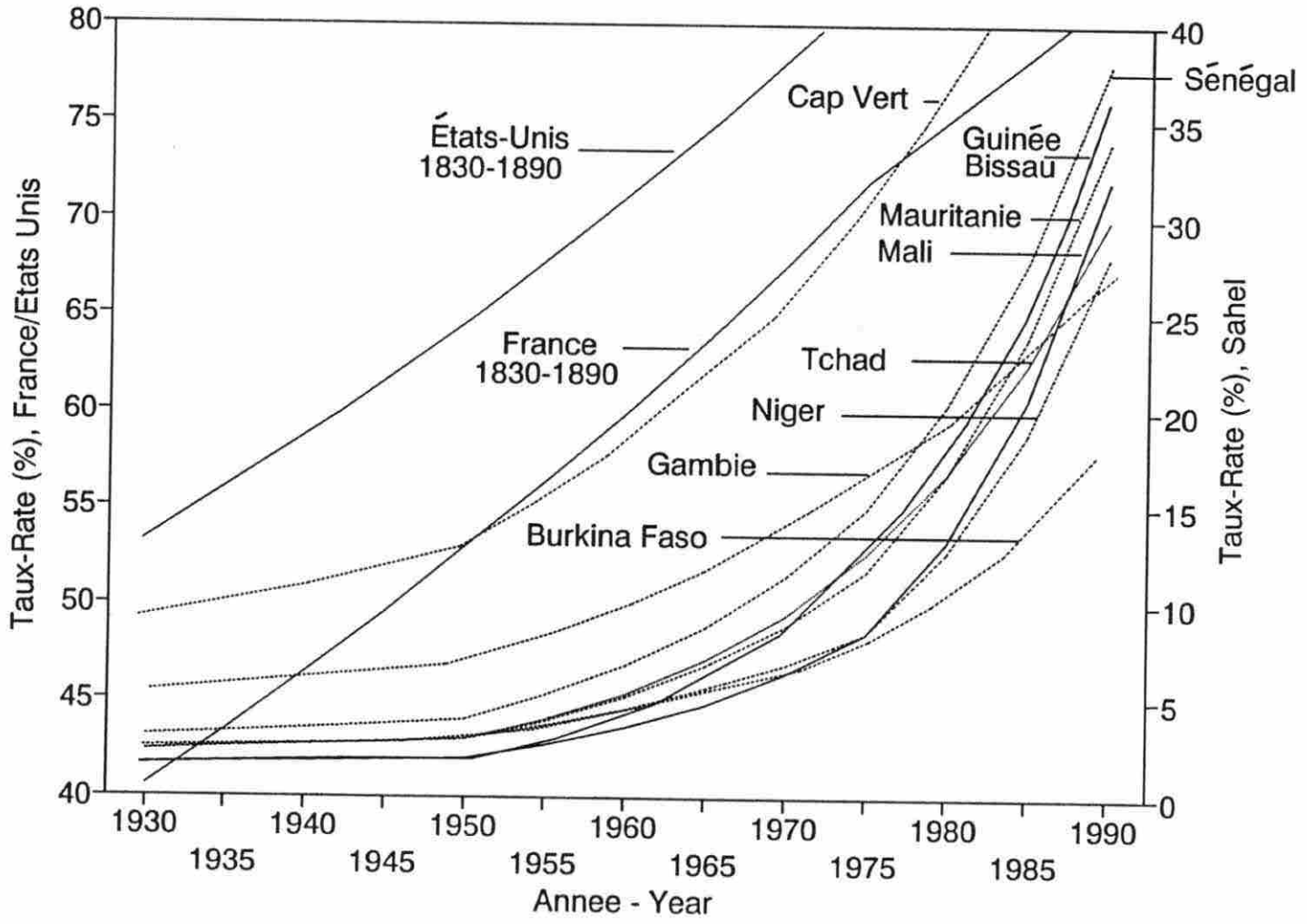


Illustration 3
Taux D'alphabétisation - Literacy Rates
Hommes - Men
1820
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
?
aucun renseignement
no information
Source: Fouret et Ozouf, 1977

Illustration 4

Taux D'alphabétisation, 1930-1990
Literacy Rates, 1930-1990



Sources: Capelle, 1990; CILSS, 1990; Cippola, 1969; CMET, 1990; Fouret et Ozouf, 1977; World Bank, 1992.

until circumstances allow resumption of its previous course. This is what happened after state authorities, in response to complaints of the Togolese parents that we noted earlier, took the position that:

> *The purpose of a school should not be reduced to that of purveyor of employment.... Constraints on employment opportunities in the public service should therefore not in any way justify a disenchantment with schooling.* (translated from Lange, 1987: 84).

Another possibility, looking more like true "structural" adjustment than mere contraction is significant reform that shifts public education to a path very different from the one that it followed since the last reform. The fact that western education in the Sahel evolved in ways that are comparable to the industrial societies is important in this regard.

It suggests that the future of this type of education, if it does not change, will continue to be determined mainly by the pace at which economies in the region come to resemble those of the industrial nations at various points in their historical development. Barring successful revolutionary movements that require literacy to reach their ideological or religious goals, or massive increases in the coercive power of states, universal enrollment is unlikely to come before rural production surpluses and expanded trade make reading, writing, and counting essential for most people.

As most reformers recognize, earlier achievement of universal enrollment and literacy requires public education to expand its scope by supplying things that respond to demands other than diplomas and the need to manage surpluses. Because this was also the case in the industrial societies during much of the 19th century, the similarity between the evolution of public education in these societies and in the region therefore also suggests that some experiences of the industrial nations may offer guidance on ways to create additional sources of demand. One experience with particular relevance, because it harnessed existing demand to create new demand, is change in higher education - the targets to which most parents now aim children when they enroll them - as a means to alter the characteristics of secondary and then primary education.

2. Higher and Secondary Education

Higher education exerts a strong influence on the characteristics of secondary and primary education most parts of the world, and Africa is not an exception (Adams, Bah-Layla, and Mukweso, 1991). General secondary schools in the region have reduced or eliminated all pretense of offering vocational skills and now focus almost entirely on preparing students for university entrance examinations (Hinchliffe, 1987). If the universities, as Salifou (1983) argues, offer material that is completely divorced from the social and economic realities of the region, then the content of secondary schools must be equally irrelevant. To the extent that it is now mainly oriented to equipping students with what they need to pass examinations leading to the secondary level, the same applies to primary education.

Though most reformers acknowledge the existence a systemic relationship between the levels, they do not pay enough attention to its causes and strength and, consequently, do not look for ways to deal with it. Their proposals for improving the quality of primary schools now derive almost exclusively from the observation that most students will not graduate and that fewer still will reach secondary or higher education. Because memorization of irrelevant topics in an alien language that few in the vicinity can understand, the typical mode of primary instruction, is not an effective way to transmit knowledge or to increase the demand for schooling, the proposals focus on direct efforts to change teaching and learning methods, curricula, language of instruction, and other things that can maximize what students learn during the few years they are in class.

These are sound objectives. But the tactic to achieve them, intervention only in primary education, presents a difficulty. This method is reminiscent of the approach that led to replacement of the "latin" school in the United States (which like the classical school of France served only the needs of social and economic elites) by the "common" public school in the 19th century (Castle, 1970; Commager, 1976). It tends to be effective in situations where the demand for primary education derives principally from factors other than a desire to reach the top of the public system. [6]

Unfortunately, inadequate attention to the causes and strength of the relationship between upper and lower levels prevents many reformers from noticing that they operate in a situation where demand mainly reflects hopes of reaching the top, and that exclusive reliance on direct intervention, as evidenced by the limited success of efforts to promote the "petite école" (small school) and "popular" education in France during most of the last century, is not as effective in this circumstance. This leads to neglect of the manners in which the characteristics of secondary and higher education obstruct efforts to reform the base, and of the need for strategic actions to reform the advanced levels in ways that can indirectly stimulate change in primary instruction.

To be sure, many parents enroll children primarily because they want them to acquire literacy and other knowledge and therefore welcome efforts to improve their transmission. Reports from inspectors indicate that families engaged in commerce often remove girls from school as soon as they learn the rudiments of reading, writing, and counting, usually after about four years. That is, the girls leave as soon as they acquire skills that the families can put to immediate use. If improvements in quality permit the girls to acquire the skills in less than four years, or to learn more of value in the same amount of time, so much the better. Village associations in southern Tchad that operate "self-managed markets," about which we will say more later, support schools and efforts to improve them for similar reasons. Together with others that view literacy and western knowledge as valuable on social grounds, these parents are usually enthusiastic about direct action.

However, as we indicated earlier, no matter how remote the chance of success and no matter how useful literacy or other knowledge might be, a much larger number of parents send children to school in the hope that they will reach the highest level. In their view only secondary- and higher-level certificates provide the social status and economic benefits of public education. The diplomas, as well as scholarships and other benefits that might be collected along the way are what they understand to be the principal objective of schooling. They also welcome direct interventions at the base, but only those that can increase chances for children to reach the advanced levels.

Literacy certainly helps. The basic skill that now permits success in the national examinations that control access to secondary and higher levels, however, is memorization of specific subjects in a European language. Efforts to improve the perceived quality of schools for this population must therefore strengthen memorization of the required topics in the compulsory language, noting here that increases in the availability of reading materials can be quite helpful in this, or change the requirements for entry and passage through the advanced levels. The first method is not attractive to reformers because it is contrary to their goals. The second, which has received very little attention, is thus essential.

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6 The United States of the 19th century, unlike Europe, was swept by repeated waves of different nationalities, religions, and languages that for the most part demanded assimilation into their new homeland. At the same time, arrival of the divergent groups led to friction among them and between immigrants and the native-born. The common school emerged to meet the demand for assimilation and for social order by teaching one language, using literacy in that language to promote the ideals of tolerance and democracy, inculcating the notion of a common history and destiny (e.g. the "melting pot" society), and so on. Because the purpose of sending children to this school had much less to do with preparation for advanced study than with social and economic integration, and because literacy was vital to achievement of this goal, direct efforts were the only way to improve the quality of primary instruction.

The experiences of the industrial nations, as well as the reform of 1946, show that change in the upper levels can often elicit strong social and political demand for change in what takes place in primary schools. This happened in France after Napoleon established the "Grandes Ecoles" and restructured the French education system to meet the needs of his administration at the beginning of the 19th century (Lewis, 1985; Ulrich, 1967). It happened in the United States when federal authorities, under pressure from rural advocacy groups and state governments, helped each state create public "land grant" universities (so named because the central government endowed each facility with large tracts of federal land for buildings, agricultural research, and rental income) after 1862. In both instances the new institutions were alternatives to existing universities that offered only classical curricula and, even though enrollment in them was low, their creation led to a rise in demand for change in the content of secondary and then primary schools.

In the case of the "land grant" universities, integration of portions of the classical curriculum with programs in agriculture, animal husbandry, mechanical and civil engineering, home (or domestic) economics, mining, forestry, fisheries, public health, and other subjects pertinent to the rural economies of each state led secondary schools, until that time little more than extensions of primary education, to duplicate the general structure of the higher level. They created and then guided students with different degrees of promise and interest to "tracks" of study that prepared them for participation in different domains of the economy as well as further study.

For example, a "college preparation" track focussing on the sciences, mathematics, and classical studies was available for the very few boys and girls that showed early promise of moving to the higher level. More often girls combined portions of this preparation with subjects such as health, nutrition, household skills, and bookkeeping while boys combined it with woodwork, mechanical repair, drawing, agricultural technology, and other manual arts. Though most students in the vocational tracks did not go beyond the secondary level, the alignment of these tracks with programs in the "land grant" institutions allowed those with interest and ability to attend university.

In this way the tracks induced by the "land grant" university led the general secondary school to supply a variety of skills that were as useful in the rural economy as they might be for advanced study. Also, because secondary schooling was increasingly becoming the desired terminal of public education toward the end of the 19th century, primary schools broadened their scope from literacy and political socialization to include a focus on materials that prepared students for the different tracks at the secondary level.

Now that college preparation has become the definition of secondary education and enrollment in the advanced levels has risen to very high levels, the relationship between higher education and the base is even stronger than before. Whenever public universities in the United States announce important changes in entry requirements, secondary schools in the vicinity quietly adjust to the new rules in two to four years. If this adjustment is very large, primary schools change in four to six years.

The capacity of change at the upper level to contribute in important ways to change of "whole" education systems is very important in the Sahel. The region has witnessed many failed experiments with "practical" or "adapted" education at the base that tried to introduce alternatives to standard teaching methods, curricula, and languages. These efforts, which after independence included "ruralization" programs and creation of "basic" or "fundamental" schools had several weaknesses. One, the same as hampered the work of missionaries after 1816, was curricula that looked more practical to educators than to parents or students. Another was that teachers usually knew much less about the topics than the parents (Diarra, 1991). However, the "Achilles heel" in all these efforts was creation of "dual" systems in which students in standard schools had a small chance of going on to advanced study while those in reformed schools had no chance at all.

Parents everywhere view children as too valuable a resource to waste on pointless academic exercises. A school that leads to nothing is worth nothing. Although many experiments made great strides in literacy during the short periods of time they were in place, none of them achieved their intended goal of reforming the entire primary system. Similar efforts now underway therefore seem unlikely to do better than their predecessors if they remain inattentive to the reasons for and the strength of the connection between different levels. They are likely to do much better if they broaden their scope to include identification and implementation of actions to alter the characteristics of secondary and higher education in ways that complement rather than obstruct change at the base.

The need for a broader range of interventions is not new. What is new, and fortunate, is that some important actors in the region are beginning to show an appreciation of this need. In early 1992, for instance, USAID, French, government, and other partners in a basic education improvement project in Mali discussed ways to expand their activities, until then limited to the direct tactic, to include what some of them called a "systems" approach. The partners perceived the need for actions that, at the very least, would prevent wide divergence between what they were trying to do in primary schools and what was required to pass the national examinations leading to the secondary level. It may take some time before the examinations actually change in Mali or elsewhere. The mere fact that some influential advocates of reform now see a need for this change is nevertheless important.

Equally important would be recognition of the constraint presented by the qualities that secondary schools imbue in their students, many of whom become primary school teachers. These individuals are the successful products of the education system whether or not they receive secondary certificates and, like the teacher in Cote d'Ivoire that concerned Capelle in 1949, whether or not they are competent. As such, all of them are masters of the art of memorization and many are expert at incompetence. It is hard to convince them of the merits of anything that they themselves have not experienced or learned while in school and thus hard to get them to permanently adopt teaching methods that reformers might prefer or to transmit correct information.

Therefore, in addition to in-service and other training of teachers, faster improvement in primary teaching methods requires faster production of individuals who have benefitted from improved instruction for longer or shorter periods of time. There is thus a need for sustained efforts to improve teaching and learning methods in secondary schools. Or, to put this plainly, there is need for a reform of all aspects of general secondary education that is as comprehensive as what advocates propose for the primary level.

The difficulty here, of course, is that while a number of independent changes are possible, major reform of secondary education requires major reform of higher education. Appreciation of this relationship is still lacking. Some recent reflections on the characteristics of higher education are nevertheless beginning to point to helpful actions. In a recent review of its assistance to education, the French government proposes several changes in its policies toward the higher levels (Peccoud, 1991). These include strategic use of assistance to promote areas of technical study that have utility in the region or priority in development assistance programs, complementary use of scholarships and other support to attract students to these areas, concentration of scholarships for study in France only or mostly to students seeking doctorates and, for short-term training and awards, a shift in emphasis from general to professional-technical training.

These proposals hold promise as direct means to revise the content of university curricula, especially if other donors follow a similar path. Though the document does not reveal an appreciation of the connection between levels, the proposals also offer promise as indirect means to revise the content of secondary and primary education. And because the road to competence in technical matters often

depends more on genuine understanding than on memorization, the changes would serve as incentives to alter teaching and learning methods at all levels.

The document does not indicate what it means by technical areas that are pertinent to the region or to development programs. Because choices among different areas may have important impacts on the degree to which change, if and when it occurs, can alter the characteristics of whole education systems, there is a need to move the French initiative forward by evaluating the potential impacts of alternative strategies. One option could be to shift resources in ways that lead to shifts in enrollments from current programs in the social sciences and humanities, which now contain 60% to 75% of all university students, to current programs in the sciences, mainly the natural sciences, medical science, mathematics and engineering, and agriculture. Though beneficial, the impact of this option is limited by the irrelevance of many scientific programs to the circumstances of the region.

An option that includes the addition of new programs pertinent to the rural economy, perhaps along the lines of the "land grant" universities, might be more effective. The creation of home (or domestic) economy departments in these institutions, for example, not only provided instruction, research, and extension services oriented to improving the conditions of family and community life (including family and community production, health, and education systems) but also, by inducing the creation of new tracks in secondary and primary schools that were consistent with the vital economic roles that women played in the society, had a strong impact on enrollment rates of rural girls in these schools.

Efforts to transform the region's institutions in ways that can do for the Sahel what the "land grant" and other universities with rural orientations did for the agrarian populations of America and Europe a long time ago warrant serious attention. These universities are no longer what they were because the societies that they serve have long since become industrial and urban. Nevertheless, they can contribute much of value. On the supply side they can draw from their own histories to assist in the development of new programs. On the demand side, deepening of existing formal relationships and creation of new ones between them and African institutions, such as the cooperative relationship between Morocco's Hassan II Agricultural University and the University of Minnesota (a "land grant" university) that witnessed a two-way flow of thousands of teachers and students over the last twenty years, can help shift demand to new programs while sustaining hope for study abroad and thus general interest in western education.

Moving beyond the industrial nations, important benefits may also flow from efforts to cultivate stronger links between western universities with rural orientations in the Islamic countries and the region's universities and Medersas. Many secondary and university graduates in the region further their studies in these countries. The share of Tchadians, for example, was about 30 percent in 1989 (Orivel and Perrot, 1990). For the most part, however, graduates of the public system pursue programs that are not relevant to the rural economy. Room therefore exists to explore possibilities for shifting demand to more pertinent programs.

Graduates of Medersas, excluded from the statistics, do not go to western institutions. The nature of instruction in these schools, as we discuss later, now leads almost all of those who advance their studies to theology and law in seminaries and to preparation for careers as members of the clergy, including service as missionary teachers in the Medersas. In this case, even though Islamic education is mainly driven from the bottom of its own structure, the absence of a wider range of opportunities at the top constrains the capacity of Medersas to advance the process of modernization that led to their creation in the late 19th century.

Absent other possibilities for advanced study, parents that refuse to send children to western schools are unlikely to increase demand and Medersas are unlikely to increase the supply of major changes

in the content of Islamic schools. That is, most Medersas are relatively isolated from the full range of logical extensions to Islamic education and Arabic literacy that now benefit students in similar schools in the Islamic countries. Elimination of this isolation can help to raise the demand for Arabic literacy and the quality of basic education, and cultivation of relationships between Medersas and non-religious higher-education institutions in the Islamic countries seems one useful way to proceed.

The wisdom or feasibility of this and any other of our suggestions remains to be seen. Four things do seem certain. One is that donor agencies, no less now than in the past, have a greater capacity to directly influence secondary and higher education than primary education. With France serving as the dominant actor in the Francophone countries, the advanced levels received 90 percent or more of total donor aid to education in the region during the last decade (Orivel et Sergent, 1989). Most of this aid, the non-capital components of which represented 20 to 50 percent of the recurrent education budgets of different governments, supported foreign technical assistance and scholarships for study abroad. The first item provided donors with a capacity to exercise direct influence on the characteristics of supply. The second gave them the capacity to directly influence the characteristics of demand for higher education and, indirectly, for secondary and primary education.

Another certain thing is that the relative power of donor scholarships and other assistance to influence demand and, more generally, to sustain interest in western education has increased in recent times. This stems from the decrease in the ability of governments to offer similar support, to provide scholarships for domestic study, or to assure the employment of graduates. That is, the main factors that sustain belief in the value of university (and secondary) certificates among parents and students have declined in importance relative to use of the diplomas as passports to donor scholarships, study abroad, emigration and, to a lesser extent, local employment by donors.

From this a third certainty is that donors, more so now than at any time since independence, have the capacity to promote reform of secondary and higher education in ways that can lead to major change in the characteristics of primary education. If they shift in a concerted way toward students that enroll in new programs or that wish to pursue them in other countries, for example, funds now available for scholarships can do much to offset resistance to change by students, parents and governments. In turn, this can open the way for use of technical assistance funds to help design and incorporate the new programs into the region's universities.

In the long term such a strategy would not necessarily require more resources than donors expend for higher education today, especially if France takes the lead in pursuing it. If and when interest in new types of secondary and higher education rise to the point where scholarships are no longer necessary to assure enrollment, or when the demand for primary education derives more from its content than from its promise of certificates, there may be scope for large transfers of both donor and government resources from higher to lower levels.

In this context, the last certainty is that ill-conceived shifts of donor or government resources from higher to lower levels, a constant theme in proposals for reform, may harm rather than help primary education. The wisdom of these shifts, an action that certain agencies have already incorporated into their policy reform agendas (e.g., as when the World Bank requested this transfer in exchange for budgetary support to Mali in 1990-91), is not obvious in systems that are driven more from the top than from the bottom. Even if there were no other barriers to the transfers, it should be clear that enrollment at the base of these systems depends greatly on the availability of incentives at the top, that strategic actions to change the secondary and higher levels are at least as important to achieve quality improvements and other reform objectives as direct efforts at the base, and that these actions may require more rather than less investment.

3. Primary Education

Though change in secondary and higher levels can create more favorable conditions for actions at the base, increases in political demand for reform of primary education may depend more on the speed with which advocates add the perspectives of consumers to their narrow definitions of the meaning of quality, finance, and other improvements. Engrossed by specific inputs that can maximize learning outcomes or minimize input costs per unit of result, such as teacher training, books, lower investment in construction, higher student-teacher ratios, and double shifts, advocates have produced a list of proposed actions which, though technically sensible, disregards the views of parents. As a result, the list ignores important things that parents take into account when deciding whether to send children to school and when asked to contribute more resources to a school. Inattention to consumers is usually a disastrous mistake in business. Though not catastrophic, the error is still a formidable obstacle to progress in education.

Surveys of rural parents in Mali, for example, suggest that key indicators of a good school are acceptable physical conditions and adequate furnishings, a low ratio of students to teachers, teachers that reinforce good manners and respect for family and community values and traditions, and teachers that do not molest children or force them to work their fields (IMRAD, 1989; ARD, 1991). These things are important not only because they influence the perceived social cost of schooling but also because they are visible long before parents can see and judge the educational performance of a school. A facility may be superb in providing literacy. But it cannot be effective with respect either to learning or to cost when it stands nearly empty because parents have withdrawn or will not send their children for other reasons, or when they refuse to support the school for these reasons.

The challenge at hand, therefore, is to discover strategies through which the aspirations of parents and reformers can support each other. In the short term, for example, it would seem to do little good to insist upon low ratios or double shifts. Besides, teachers do not like large classes or extra shifts. Gains in cost-effectiveness due to lower operating costs per student may be lost if their morale suffers too much. But this is trivial. More important is that increases in demand for schools, for improvements in quality and learning outcomes, and for cost-effectiveness, as well as the willingness to pay more than at present will continue to be compromised so long as alienation, molestation, use of students for slave labor, and similar items rank high among the concerns of parents.

The problem is not the offenses. It is the belief among parents that they cannot respond to them except by removing their children from school, deciding not to enroll them, or complaining to school inspectors, researchers, and other strangers. That is, the offending school director or teacher is immune from the immediate and severe sanctions that the community would normally impose on anyone else. And if they believe that they cannot control the worst kind of behavior that a parent can possibly imagine, they also believe that they have no power to influence anything else that happens in a school, such as instructional quality, student performance, examinations, curricula, language, books, or the estrangement of children from family and community values. [7]

As in colonial times, though it may be useful, many parents view the school as an alien object in their communities. It is an extension of a distant, powerful entity called the state. Its personnel, including

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[7] Some observers suggest that molestation, forced labor, and so on may not be as widespread as the frequency with which parents mention them. They intimate that parents have other reasons for keeping children out of school or for not contributing more to the cost of schools, and that their complaints are useful inventions that mask the real reasons for their decisions. But the frequency with which parents throughout the region make the same claims, and the frequency with which one hears talk about them among inspectors and administrators imply that even if the actual incidence of improper behavior is low, fear of it is high. Also, parents would not rely on such excuses unless they believed that researchers, inspectors, and others to whom they complain will not question the underlying premise that communities have no influence on the actions of school personnel. In other words, even if the claims are fictions, the presumption of powerlessness that gives them credence remains real.

reformers, are agents of and protected by this state. The role of parents, consequently, limits itself to sending or not sending a child to school and to contributing or not contributing resources to it. The issues of quality, enrollment rates, resource mobilization, and so forth thus come face to face with the issue of highly-centralized power to control what happens in schools. Accordingly, achievement of quality and other objectives requires discovery and initiation of actions that empower parents and communities first with the belief that they can indeed have direct influence on their schools and, second, with the capacity to use this authority in constructive ways.

This is hard. Teachers, certainly, are unlikely to make it easier by volunteering to give up the comforts of being functionaries of the state in order to become community employees. Some of them are superb at what they do. Others may become superb as a result of efforts to improve their pedagogical skills, teaching environment, and morale. Many are and will stay in the vanguard of reform efforts on the supply side. But it will remain difficult to persuade most teachers to hold themselves accountable to parents and communities for their performance and behavior and, therefore, to convince them to work better or harder or to make their salaries consistent with economic realities.

This difficulty stems from the political potency of teachers and their allies among students in secondary school. No different than government employees in other sectors or their counterparts in the industrial countries, teachers exert considerable power to maintain the status quo. As we noted in regard to the "educated unemployed," individuals that reach the secondary or higher levels are not ordinary people from ordinary families. They are disproportionately from influential social and economic strata. In addition, they have organized themselves into powerful unions in most countries of the region and their salaries now constitute 10% to 25% of total recurrent public expenditure while their numbers represent 20% to 50% of total public employment. Suggestions that the state try to reform teachers by threatening to remove them from their jobs or by other means thus ring hollow because teachers, in most important respects, "are" the state.

The issue here is not so much about the potency of teachers and their allies inside and outside the state apparatus as it is the absence of forces on the side of parents and communities that can counterbalance it. The region contains nothing similar to the elected boards that exercise independent authority over schools at the community level in the United States. There is also nothing similar to the array of strong organizations, such as the National Union of Parents of Free School Pupils (UNAPEL), the Federation of Parents Councils (FCPE), the National Committee for Secular Action (CNAL), the National Union of Elementary Teachers (SNI), the National Union of Secondary Instruction (SNES), and the Federation of Education (FEN) that compete or collaborate to influence national education policy in France (Ambler, 1988).

Even though every school in the region has some kind of formal or informal parents of students association (APE), this organization is now ill-equipped to serve as a vehicle for change, especially in rural areas. With the school director more or less in control of its officers, the typical association serves as a moribund extension of the school's administration and does not receive enthusiastic support from parents. Often reinforced by the insistence of some donor agencies that it does so in exchange for other support, the main function of the APE is to contribute resources to pay the non-salary expenses of the school, such as construction, repairs, furniture, teaching materials, and housing for personnel.

In recent times this function has broadened slightly to include provision of representatives at conferences and other meetings when governments or donors need to demonstrate that they are promoting "participation." Sometimes the activities of APEs also include furnishing respondents when researchers and other people appear on the scene to ask their opinions on various pre-determined

topics. In other words, and consistent with the prevailing belief of most rural parents that they have little influence on school affairs, the primary purpose of the APE is to respond to the needs of the state and its assistants.

The limited "absorptive capacity" of APEs and other community organizations, as some people like to phrase the issue, is not the obstacle. Every organization has limits and, if these seem too restrictive, then the sensible thing to do is to try to extend them. The obstacle is the scarcity of major actors in education willing to do it.

Surmounting this barrier requires finding actors that have a missionary determination to do at least two things at the same time. One is to broaden the scope of their activities to include support not only of governments but also of APEs and other community organizations that work with schools. The second is to engage in actions that can lead to a situation in which the primary purpose of the state is to respond to the aspirations of the majority of parents and the purpose of the APEs and other organizations is to identify and demand these responses.

Finding actors with the will to embark upon this long and possibly painful road is especially hard because it means inverting a relationship that has been etched deeply into the political culture of people that live and work in the region. However, at a moment in history that witnesses the confluence of democratic stirrings, the appearance of more enthusiasm for democratization and popular participation and, in general, a greater willingness among many reform-minded people to do things differently than before, the hour may be opportune for these actors to come forward.

If these actors appear they will be in positions to build upon dynamics of change which indicate that democratization of the process of reform can often lead to more rapid improvement in the quality, financing, and other characteristics of primary education. These dynamics have been underway for more than a decade in Tchad and Gambia. They are now beginning to emerge in Mali. More important, if the actors decide to engage themselves in the process they will also be in positions to use reform of education as a vehicle through which to promote progress in political decentralization and participatory democracy. In this regard recent experiences in Haiti offer proof that certain donors in the Sahel have the will and ability to act as the required missionaries in their operations outside the region, and in Benin show that at least one of these agencies has begun to give some thought to doing the same thing in Africa.

i. Tchad

Parents, teachers, and administrators in southern communities that were cut off from the state by the civil war have for the last twenty years worked through their APEs to operate what is in effect a sub-national education authority. During the 1980s they reportedly built 3500 classrooms (about 33% of the national total), procured books and materials, paid cash and in-kind salaries to 2500 teachers (about 40% of the total), and organized district inspection services (Gouvernement du Tchad, 1990).

This phenomenon is more widespread in the Christian and Animist south than in the Muslim north. One reason for this stems from the political and educational bias of the colonial administration. Mutual hostility between Muslims and the French led the administration to locate most of its schools in non-Muslim southern areas and, in 1947, to invite Christian missionaries to open more schools in these areas. At the same time the administration discouraged the expansion and modernization of Islamic learning in the north. For example, in 1950 the authorities discovered that 700 students enrolled in a Medersa in Abeche while only 50 were in the state's primary school. They responded by creating what they called a "Franco-Arab" school next to the Medersa.

Then, as now, Muslim parents that could afford it sent their children to schools across the border in Sudan or Egypt. As a result, the "educated" people required by the administration were disproportionately Christian and Animist southerners. After independence they dominated the state apparatus. This dominance, besides acting as one catalyst for the civil war, led to higher interest in western education in the south.

Another reason was economic change in the south that at the same time stimulated demand for more schools and provided communities with additional resources to supply them, especially in recent years. An important source of these resources was the "rebates" made by Cotontchad (a state enterprise that promotes cotton production) to communities that established "self-managed markets" (Gouvernement du Tchad, 1990). Cotontchad introduced these markets in 1975 to lower its marketing costs. In exchange for the rebates, which were separate from payments to individuals for their cotton, the markets performed weighing, classification, maintenance, and management activities that would otherwise require more costly use of Cotontchad personnel.

Because Cotontchad would not recognize a market unless the village association that operated it contained at least two farmers who were literate in French, there was a strong incentive for adults to become literate and to send their children to school for this same purpose. With demand for schools now high, the associations used the rebates not only for charity, wells, pharmacies, and other public goods and services but also for creation and maintenance of schools. Cotontchad estimated that the self-managed markets processed 62% of total cotton production in 1989-90. It hoped to expand operations to cover 2,500 villages by 1993-94.

In the event, many of the changes that reformers propose are now in place. Parents and communities pay the full costs of schools and, notwithstanding their loud protests and recurrent efforts to get the state to transform them into functionaries, teachers are accountable to communities for their performance and behavior. In addition, average teacher salaries are the lowest in the region and the ratio of students to teachers is the highest (CILSS, 1990). Since overall enrollment and literacy rates seem comparable to those of other large countries, southern Tchad may have one of the most cost-effective systems of public education in the Sahel.

ii. Gambia

Unable to respond directly to requests by rural parents because of fiscal constraints, in the late 1970s the government of Gambia welcomed an offer by ActionAid, a British non-governmental organization (NGO), to establish public schools in rural areas. By 1983, in addition to assisting 31 state schools, it had helped to create 49 new schools, providing finance and teachers while the villagers furnished land, labor, and buildings. [8] The interesting feature of the program, an expression of this NGO's interest in doing things in a participatory way, was the establishment of village school committees. In collaboration with ActionAid personnel, members of the committee served as the elected representatives of parents and as the management authority for each facility.

Among many other things, the committees opposed the efforts of ActionAid to replace the standard national curriculum with what the NGO considered a more "appropriate" and "practical" program of study. After all, committee members said, if parents did not want the national curriculum they would not have bothered to ask for schools in the first place. More constructively, the committees and ActionAid agreed to employ as teachers individuals that the state did not regard as qualified because they did not graduate from teacher colleges, and to train them on the job. They also agreed to include Koranic teachers in each school. ActionAid provided training and some support for these instructors

8 Information provided by Mr. Robin Poulton (USAID/Mali), former director of the ActionAid education program in Gambia.

while the committees raised the balance of remuneration from parents. Similarly, to integrate the schools with existing village education systems the committees invited community instructors into the schools to teach specialized skills that parents valued, such as certain crafts, plowing, and other agricultural techniques.

One result of this process was creation of a primary education subsystem that combined three types of instruction that parents in the villages valued: the national curriculum leading to higher levels, religious instruction leading to family and community cohesion, and some practical training leading to assurance that time spent in school would not result in ignorance of truly productive skills. A second result was that teacher costs were much lower than in state facilities. A third outcome was that student performance was superior. When the first cohort of students reached the end of their primary studies in 1986, the share that went on to secondary studies was 25% higher than the national average for government schools, and almost 50% higher than for state schools in rural areas.

As word of the experience spread, and as more rural communities demanded similar approaches to education from their elected representatives in parliament, perhaps the most interesting political impact was that education ministry officials were gradually forced relinquish their monopoly over education policy decisions. It is now common for them to work in partnership with school committees throughout the country.

iii. Mali

These kinds of processes do not require the misfortune of civil war to launch them or the luck of having an NGO to offer help at the right moment. But they do require that demand for schools exceed the fiscal capacity of governments to respond to it in habitual ways. With the spread of fiscal stress across the region, this requirement is being met in an increasing number of places and is slowly but surely giving birth to promising dynamics wherever it appears. A very recent example is Mali.

In 1991 twenty rural and forty urban parent groups approached the government, non-government organizations, USAID, and other donors for help in establishing new schools in their villages and neighborhoods. In the case of the twenty rural groups, all from one district, the idea that it was both possible and proper for them to exercise leadership in initiating the process of creating schools, in demanding assistance from the state, and in searching for assistance from donors and non-government organizations all originated from the efforts of one school inspector who fervently believed that it was the responsibility of parents to take charge of the education of children. [9] Together with those of the urban groups, these initiatives stimulated consideration by several non-governmental organizations about whether they should help the parents and thus enter the education sector. They also led USAID and its partners to reorient several parts of their basic education improvement project, the one mentioned in our discussion of secondary and higher education, toward the demands of these groups and other similar parents.

The most interesting impact, however, was creation of the beginnings of a new relationship between the state, teachers, and parents. Lacking funds to pay for 60 or more new instructors yet obliged to respond to the demands of the groups in some coherent way, circumstance compelled the government to act as an intermediary rather than as a direct supplier of teachers. It located people to serve as instructors and then helped to negotiate the terms of cash and in-kind remuneration between these individuals and the communities that wanted them. Because their livelihood now depends on good relations with their community employers, one may suppose that these teachers are less likely to engage in offensive behaviors, more likely to try to provide good performance than their colleagues

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9 Information provided by Serge Cuenin (IREDU, Dijon).

who remain accountable only to the state and, for lack of alternative ways to use their primary and secondary certificates to produce income, a greater willingness to accept higher student-teacher ratios and lower remuneration.

These events in Mali are not dramatic. They are only early signs of departure from prior practices in education and from prior relations between governments, teachers, citizens, and donors that hold considerable promise for the future. Similar beginnings in Zambia, for instance, not only led communities to supply their own schools but also activated the individual initiative of many teachers, inspectors, administrators, and parents to carry out reforms that the government could not implement after announcing them in 1977 (Hoppers, 1989).

Among other things, the need to find additional non-salary resources for schools encouraged many teachers to become more interested and more productive in generating revenues from school gardens and from home economics, woodwork, and metalwork courses. Communities became actively involved in this process because the income produced by the work, though small, allowed the school to purchase additional pedagogical materials. Parents and students did not necessarily see that the courses were useful, or even that they were part of the curriculum. But if the school was to do a good job teaching the materials required for passage from one grade to the next, they needed to do whatever they could to help the school.

Without official authority, teachers from different localities also organized themselves to collaborate in improving quality by jointly producing new curricula and pedagogical materials and, as in Tchad, by organizing their own school inspection service. Scandinavian donors have been helping them. Hoppers adds that through these things the teachers have acquired more confidence in their profession and, as their counterparts in several industrial nations, have taken *de facto* responsibility for leadership in education.

Because these scattered events in Tchad, Gambia, Mali, and Zambia are larger or smaller symptoms of a deeper social process known as political decentralization, they hold promise for change that extends well beyond reform of education. The widening gap between demand and the fiscal capacity of states to respond to it is slowly but surely transferring areas of decision making that now rest exclusively with the state to other social entities. This slow process may pause or step backward from time to time. But so long as there is forward movement each stop creates a new formal or informal accord between the state, teachers, parents, communities, and donor agencies regarding their respective roles and responsibilities in education. As such, every stop represents a revision of the implicit social contract between the state and the political class, an expansion of the boundaries of the class, and completion of another step toward broad participatory democracy.

Nothing guarantees this process. Nor is it possible to predict the exact path that it may follow. Recent experiences in Haiti, a Caribbean country with a Francophone education system that is geographically distant but politically similar to much of western Africa, nevertheless offer guidance about one possible direction and about the role that donors can play in it.

iv. Haiti

The gross enrollment rate in primary education in Haiti increased from about 30 percent in 1960 to almost 100 percent in 1990. Because the demand for schools was much greater than the capacity (or willingness) of the state to provide them during this period, and because the state did not interfere with the efforts of individual communities, non-governmental organizations, and private entrepreneurs to respond to the demands of parents, more than 80 percent of primary students, all secondary students, and a rapidly-increasing share of university students are now enrolled in non-government schools.

Of greater interest, after donors became involved in primary education the dominance of non-government actors in the sector led to important changes in the relationship between the agencies and the state and, by extension, between these institutions and the population. USAID, for example, began to assist non-government actors in 1985. With this help the local NGOs that supported most non-government schools established a national federation to try to integrate the schools into a country-wide system in 1986. After more than a decade of providing the government with the same kind of assistance as in the Sahel, even the World Bank joined the process. Together with USAID and some other donors, it began to insist that it would agree to new grants and loans only if the government approved inclusion of major components for non-government entities.

In discussions with one of us in 1991, the Minister of Education in Haiti's first elected government mentioned that he and his predecessors were merely ministers of state education. The ministry of "national" public education came to life only when his staff sat in the same room with personnel of the non-government federation. Fortunately, federation personnel often came to the ministry with requests of one kind or another, and ministry staff often visited the federation because they needed to talk about important matters.
The principal matter was finance after donors demanded that the government share resources with the non-government sector. The range of topics then expanded to include curriculum and teacher training after the minister dissolved the state's Institut Pedagogique National (IPN). Decades of assistance to the IPN from UNESCO, the UNDP, the World Bank, and others left little of enduring value. On their own initiative, the non-government school systems had developed superior curricula and training methods (in both French and the local language of Creole) as well as more cost-effective ways of providing them. The government therefore decided to rely on the knowledge, skills, and services of the non-governmental organizations within the federation instead of its own capabilities.

The evolution of this process slowed down after a coup d'etat displaced the elected government in the second half of 1991 and caused several donors to reduce or withdraw assistance. Though slower than before, the process still moves forward because it does not depend on governments or on donors. These institutions may help or hinder it, but the basic force that drives it in Haiti, and which has shown itself to be the mother of very useful inventions in Tchad, Gambia, Mali, and Zambia, is demand.

The experiences in Haiti thus present a very important question for reformers: Can the demand for western education that now exists in the Sahel be actively harnessed in ways that at the same time lead to increased empowerment of parents and communities, improvements in the quality and other characteristics of primary education, and advances in participatory democracy? Village schools in Gambia suggest that the answer is yes in Anglophone countries. Although Mali shows promise of eventually giving the same reply for Francophone countries, a definite answer is not yet apparent. What is apparent is that there is considerable scope for experimenting with ways to discover the answer. More important, tentative proposals to undertake such experiments are beginning to emerge in the neighborhood. Benin is one example.

v. Benin

Drawing on their experiences in Haiti and in the Sahel, as well as conversations with parents and APE officers, in mid-1992 USAID consultants collaborated with senior education ministry planners and other officials to design a 10-year program of "institutional development" on behalf of non-government entities in Benin. As one small component a much larger project to reform all aspects of primary education, the proposed program's main component involves animation, technical assistance, and training in support of APEs and other community organizations (USAID, 1992). At one level these activities would try to encourage organizations to take greater charge of the affairs of their individual

schools. Building from this foundation, at a higher level the activities would try to enable communities to work in district and national federations that, through actions in the media, the national assembly, the presidency, and the education ministry, could eventually voice their own opinions and lobby for their insertion into national policy decisions.

In effect, the program is an attempt to do for parents and communities what donor assistance has done only for the state since independence. It is a deliberate effort to create a new balance in the direction of demand and response between the state and the majority population. Accordingly, other than approving it and assuring that its execution conforms to existing laws and regulations, the program envisages no direct role for the state.

With many teachers and administrators likely to oppose their exclusion, the proposal runs the risk of not receiving final approval by the government and/or by USAID, or of being subject to extensive revisions that eliminate any chance for the program to achieve its goals. But whatever happens, the proposal points to the kinds of democratizing actions that are needed in the Sahel and, as such, represents yet another promising departure from traditional thoughts and practices.

vi. The Demand Constraint

What the future holds for education in the Sahel is unknown. The thing that matters, as Lourie (1987) notes, is that the combination of government resource constraints, the rising scale and influence of foreign and national non-governmental organizations and of local governance structures, the increasing involvement of parents in finance and in other school affairs, and of teachers and administrators in designing the content of education, almost always leads to introduction and adoption of useful and important ideas. These ideas may eventually lead to systems of schools that are more consistent with the heterogeneous composition of cultures, resources, responsibilities, and interests in education that distribute themselves across the social landscape. As expressed by a constant process of renegotiation of the social contract between the state and the political class, they may also lead toward the democratization of education, of efforts to reform it, and of the society in general.

However, the examples from Tchad, Gambia, Mali, Zambia, Haiti, and Benin point only to the positive outcomes that can emerge when conditions produce a level of demand for literacy, certificates, and other benefits of western education that exceeds the capacity of states to supply it. Though fiscal constraints have increased, circumstances that provide openings for restructuring the balance of responsibility and accountability for education between the state and communities are still quite rare. The main problem is that the demand for western education in the Sahel, especially in rural areas, is much more limited than in Zambia or Haiti. This imposes severe constraints both on efforts to spread literacy and other knowledge and on efforts to promote political decentralization. Lack of demand for "something," as in northern Tchad, means that there is little to decentralize or to democratize.
This is important because, irrespective of whether education leads or follows them, the processes of decentralization and democratization are vital components of an even deeper dynamic called "nation building." It thus seems crucial to recognize that the issue of empowerment does not apply only to western education. In the specific circumstances of the Sahel it also applies to a broader and more fundamental matter: the power to decide about what is or is not basic education and what is or is not public education.

The greatest shortcoming of the current list of things that reformers suggest be done to improve education may therefore be its failure to acknowledge the possibility that the western school does not offer what many or most parents define as education and, as a result, that these parents do not now and will not send children to this school no matter how good it becomes in the eyes of reformers. Or, to put this positively, constructive ideas and actions with respect to the various types of non-western

education that exist and that almost all children in the region receive may be as important in achieving literacy, democracy, and nationhood as actions with respect to the western school. Actions in this area are also hard. But where there is a will there is also a possibility to start them.

III. NON-WESTERN EDUCATION

All parents believe that they must provide basic education for their children. Forced to define it, most would probably agree with Guizot's definition. In a statement to French teachers when he was Minister of Education in 1833 he said that it is: *that knowledge which is indispensable for social life and without which the mind languishes....* (cited in Maynes, 1985:55). But because the meaning of indispensable varies with the social life in question, i.e., with the specific social, economic, and political environments in which people live or expect to live, many of them would probably disagree with Guizot's personal formula for this education and with his reasons for it:

> *through the teaching of reading and writing and arithmetic* [the curriculum] *provides for the most essential necessities of life; through teaching the legal system of weights and measures and of the French language it implants everywhere, enhances and extends the spirit and unity of the French nation; through moral and religious instruction it provides for another order of needs every bit as real... for the dignity of human life and the protection of the social order.* (cited in Maynes, 1985:55).

This was Guizot's way of promoting "popular" education as an alternative to the classical primary school that served the needs of elites. But a great many French parents found it uninspiring. Literacy was not essential in many rural areas in 1833. Nor was the French language of value in those parts of the country where people spoke Breton, Provencal, Basque, Flemish, or German. Even if literacy and language were somewhat useful, what purpose would be served by offering up children in the name of bizarre abstractions such as the "nation" or "social order?" What about the risk that the "morals" and other things that schools transmitted would encourage children to behave improperly or perhaps eventually leave the family and village? And what was wrong with the basic education that they and other villagers provided to children? Did this instruction, in the words of the 1990 declaration of the "Education for All" conference in Thailand, fail to equip people with the skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes:

> *that a human being needs to survive, to develop all his abilities, to live and work in dignity, to fully participate in development, to improve the quality of his existence, to take enlightened decisions and to continue to learn.* ? (translated from CMET, 1990: 167)

These were important considerations, ones that all parents think about. For better or worse, and notwithstanding the efforts of Guizot and other reformers, central authorities rarely involved themselves in promoting anything but classical education until the last quarter of the century. But by then France had nearly achieved universal schooling and literacy.

Besides economic transformations that gradually raised the value and therefore the demand for literacy and schools, on the supply side this achievement was helped to a considerable degree by the efforts of local clergy, village and town leaders, inspectors, teachers, and other advocates of basic popular instruction to establish independent community schools (Michel, 1992). In most cases, either because it allowed them access to some funds from public or non-government entities (e.g., the Catholic church) or because they believed in it, these individuals insisted on experimenting with ways to combine materials of importance to the "nation," including religion, with subjects that were already part of unwritten community curricula. That is, similar to the approaches of the village committees in

Gambia and teachers in Zambia, they joined a common "core" of subjects with materials adapted to the particular characteristics of their localities.

The rationale for adapted materials had relatively little to do with their instructional value in areas where demand for schools was weak, however. In these areas the main reason was that the topics to be covered in schools, and the ways that they were covered, had to look like they had merit in the eyes of parents. The portion of the curriculum that adapted itself to local circumstances was thus an instrument for marketing schools to parents.

A useful side effect of this approach was that it cultivated interest among parents in the quality of instruction that their children received. After all, if the content of what schools offered had value, it was important to assure that children maximized their learning of it. They became more involved in the operations of their schools, either directly in parent associations or indirectly through political demands for assistance from local and national authorities. Over time, the question of what communities could do for schools shifted to what different levels of government could do for them. The French government's decision to take direct responsibility for all schools, made in the last quarter of the 19th century, was the last noteworthy answer.

In retrospect, the process took much longer to evolve than now seems necessary. More than four hundred years of local effort were required to produce the situation that confronted Guizot, and another 60 years to reach universal schooling and literacy. Even allowing for limited resources and demand, the process would likely have moved forward more quickly if central authorities had not insisted on financing only the classical primary schools and the higher levels to which they led, had encouraged or supported the local initiatives, or had tried to change the minds of the many local leaders who opposed popular education for various reasons, such as contributing to rising expectations among the masses, too many "educated unemployed," and so forth.

That is, especially during most of the 19th century, the process was constrained by political centralization. Central authorities supported classical schools and no other products for at least two reasons. First, without an interest or capacity among rural parents, advocates, and local leaders to demand alternative commodities, there was little political pressure on the authorities to even think of supplying or otherwise supporting them. Second, even if the center had some thoughts about it (e.g. Guizot), there was heavy pressure on the state from the industrial, commercial, and, most especially, the administrative elites to favor only the one product for their children and the higher levels to which they led.

The situation in the Sahelian societies is similar. The western school, in all its variations, holds the same political position as did the classical primary school in France (and the latin school in the United States). The corresponding political position of the French Revolution's "petite école," Guizot's popular education, and the American common school is non-western education.

Actions to improve education can therefore proceed along one of two paths. They can continue to rely only on the traditional practice of treating education and the western school as synonyms, of trying to market the school to reticent consumers, and of hoping that economic change and autonomous local effort can achieve universal literacy in another 50 to 200 years. Or they can capitalize on historical hindsight about the evolution of the western school in France and in the Sahel and on current concerns with decentralization and democratization to accelerate the process by also encouraging the development and improvement of education systems that address the preferences and aspirations of the many different publics that live in the region.

For this second, broader path attention needs to focus on the demand for Islamic education and, for lack of a better term, the demand for African community education (including Animist religious instruction in places where it is practiced). These forms of education are not mutually exclusive and are not necessarily incompatible with the western school. Depending on the nature of demand in them, children in different localities receive two and sometimes all three forms of instruction at separate sites or, as in Gambia, under one roof.

The objective of supporting development of different education systems for different publics therefore does not restrict itself to promoting improvements in literacy and other knowledge. Consistent with the purposes of the core curriculum of French advocates of popular education, with the visions of advocates of the common school in the United States, and with the nation-building goal that most governments attach to education, the ultimate objective is to achieve integration of the different strands of demand so that each society comes to have national systems of basic public education that are worthy of the name.

1. Islamic Education

Missionaries introduced Islamic education to the region in the 12th century. Although it reached a high point with the University of Timbouctou (Mali) during 1493-1528, this education usually took the form of simple Koranic schools in which tutors, as part of their divine obligation to the faith, moved among villages to teach children to memorize and recite their prayers, and a few to actually read and write in Arabic.

The spread of pan-Islamic nationalism in the middle of the 19th century, together with the emergence of Arabic-speaking networks of merchants that engaged in inter- and intra-regional trade stimulated a movement to "modernize" this education in the early 20th century. As we indicated earlier, this involved establishment of proper schools called Medersas that went beyond recitation to focus, at minimum, on sufficient literacy to read and understand the Koran and, at maximum, on extensive training in religion, law, and other subjects that could be furthered in seminaries in Egypt, the Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere. In the normal course of events graduates of these higher learning institutions returned to the region as missionary teachers in the Medersas.

The French authorities were not happy with this. Aside from cultural biases, pan-Islamic nationalism was a serious threat to colonial rule. Where it could not suppress the movement the administration tried hard to compete with it (e.g., the Franco-Arab school in Abeche) or to control it (Brenner, 1989c). Though these actions hindered the modernization process they did not alter the social demand among parents to have children learn their prayers and, if possible, read the Koran. In a very concrete sense this type of instruction was and remains public education for devout Muslims who believe that they are members of the Islamic nation.

The relationship between religion and the demand for literacy was also strong in the industrial nations. In parts of northern Europe and the United States, for example, the idea that faithful Christians should have access to God's word by reading the Bible led many families and communities to recruit teachers and to establish schools in the 17th century. Most people had no other use for literacy at the time. Indeed, faith in the value of access to the Bible was instrumental in guiding leaders of the colony of Massachusetts (United States) to impose compulsory education in 1647 (Ulrich, 1967). Similarly, Kayashima (1989) reports that Japan's primary enrollment rate of 25 percent in 1870 resulted mainly from rapid increases in the number of students in pagoda schools, from 220,000 in 1830 to 930,000 in 1860.

In other words, the same social dynamics that led Christian and Buddhist institutions to be the vanguard of literacy long before economic progress and governments entered the scene in the industrial societies are alive and well in the region. But unlike the experiences of these societies, most post-independence governments and their donor assistants have yet to try to build on this institutional foundation, in part because political centralization allows them to continue to ignore it and in part because they fervently believe that the western school is the only admissible way to provide basic education.

This belief is unfortunate, for at least two reasons. One is that a serious shortcoming of this school in the eyes of many Muslim parents, besides the fact that it does not teach Arabic, is that it is "secular." That is, it is a derivative of the European Christian school and therefore transmits values and behaviors that are inconsistent with those of Islam. Unless there are some tangible benefits to offset it, sending a child to this facility risks the substantial cost of alienating children from their faith, culture, community, and family. This is what some of the parents in Mali had in mind when they said that good teachers were those that reinforced proper manners and respect for adults and community values.

The other reason is that the Medersas have continued to modernize themselves and their curricula have increasingly incorporated many elements that are the same as in secular schools. Brenner (1989a), for example, notes that except for retaining religious instruction and teaching in Arabic, some Medersas have become indistinguishable from secular schools. In recent times this has allowed more students to pursue subjects such as engineering and science in universities in the Islamic countries and to take posts other than teaching upon their return. That is, the Medersas are gradually taking positions in the education sector that are comparable to those, say, of Catholic schools in France and the United States. Though only a very few Medersas have reached this stage, they are indicators of the direction in which an important segment of Islamic education is moving. Given high interest in Islamic instruction by parents who refuse to enroll children in secular schools, it does not deserve continued inattention.

In any event, the problem at the moment is that Medersas are few and far between. After a century suppression and inattention, modern Islamic education now flourishes only in corners where individual Medersas receive direct financial assistance from donors based in the Islamic countries, such as the World Islamic League and the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia (which mostly pay the salaries of missionary teachers). Though some governments and donors have begun to take interest in Medersas, their initiatives have not been particularly constructive. In 1985, for example, the government of Mali declared that they would henceforth come under the authority of the Ministry of Education (Brenner, 1989b). Because this was a repetition of colonial practice and because Muslims and missionary teachers answer to a much higher authority, they received the announcement with little enthusiasm.

More recently, in the name of promoting private schools and thus improvements to the cost-effectiveness of the education sector as a whole, projects sponsored by the World Bank in Mali have broadened to include Medersas within their purview. Because it once again places the schools under (albeit limited) state control and because it uses Islamic education mainly to respond to the needs of the state and donors rather than the reverse, this does not seem like an ideal way to proceed. Still, when some estimates suggest that as many 25 to 35 per cent of all Malian children enrolled in school attended Medersas and studied in Arabic in 1987 (Brenner, 1989c), something is better than nothing and the action is a start toward formal recognition by at least one important donor that the western school is not the only legitimate form of public education in the region.

A more promising approach, one that can address issues of finance that concern donors such as the World Bank while doing a lot more to advance the cause of basic education and of democratization would be to assist Islamic educators in their efforts to bring institutional coherence to this type of

instruction and to advance the modernization process so that more schools come to respond to contemporary educational needs. Evidence to support the potential utility of such an approach is available in Benin.

The Union des Jeunes Muselmanes de Benin (UJMB), for instance, has tried for several years to bring the country's 100 independent Medersas and their 25,000 students into a national system of Islamic education in which, at the very least, the schools would share the same books and cooperate in seeking resources. Each Medersa now uses whatever books and funds its directors and teachers can obtain as gifts through their personal connections with schools in the Islamic countries, usually their *alma maters*. As a result, students that study the same subject must often use different books, with the class as a whole using a dozen or more texts from different countries and institutions to learn the same thing. Similarly, while a few schools are blessed with excellent financial connections, most others languish.

One approach that the UJMB uses to address these and other issues, following a path similar to Mali, has been to promote the idea of integrating French (as a second language) and certain other components of the state's curriculum into the schools, and to have the government recognize them as legitimate expressions of national education for an important public in the society. According to UJMB officers, success in this endeavor would hopefully accomplish several things at the same time. It would advance the modernization process. It would provide opportunities for students to transfer to non-Islamic schools or to advance to non-religious higher education institutions in the Islamic countries. It would provide a stronger foundation for requests for assistance from the state. Most important, it would help to mobilize additional financial contributions from parents and communities that want the schools and thereby overcome a basic structural difficulty of Islamic education.

The difficulty is that while most parents pay minimal fees and provide additional small contributions to teachers and schools as gifts, many or most of them see no reason to pay for Islamic education because teachers are supposed to provide it as part of their divine obligation to the faith. Medersas are able to function in this circumstance in part because most of their religious instructors are missionaries that receive support from the Islamic countries, in part because they insist on payment of fees to cover a portion of non-missionary salaries and other costs, and in part because they engage in creative financing to increase revenues.

Asking for contributions to support special events that parents and communities see as separate from teaching, such as graduation ceremonies where students receive their diplomas, is an ongoing example of this creativity. Similarly, the UJMB believes that if the Medersas introduce French and other elements of the national curriculum, parents are unlikely to confuse this with Islamic instruction and the schools would be in stronger positions to request support for the non-Islamic part of the curriculum while maintaining that they are providing the Islamic component as a matter of principle.

Progress on these and other fronts has been very slow because Islamic education does not generate sufficient internal or external resources to support the sustained costs of bringing directors, teachers, and community leaders together to discuss the future of Islamic education, or to develop and implement any improvement programs that they may find useful. This may change if the "institutional development" program proposed for Benin sees the light of day. Because it is open to many definitions of the concept of community and therefore does not favor one form of instruction over another as a method of improving the quality of basic education, the program includes components to assist the efforts of religious organizations. The program sees the UJMB as one candidate for the Muslim community. The Catholic and Methodist churches are candidates for others.

Ultimately, however, this approach must confront the fact that the forms of education that may be of greatest economic importance in rural areas of the region, what we refer to as community education, now offer no organized institutional entities with which to work. In this case the process of improving education and promoting democratization requires efforts that, had history been kinder to Africa, should have started one hundred or more years ago.

2. Community Education

Whether Christian, Muslim, Animist, or Secular, many parents share the perspectives of their predecessors in rural France. Their worlds revolve primarily around their senses of the communities to which they belong. These communities may define themselves as one or a combination of village, region, faith, occupation, class, language, or ethnic group. One thing that these communities may have in common is that they are non-western or, to put this in a positive light, African. What this means is that for social and economic reasons that are more varied than is the case with Islam, the western school is either irrelevant or in some way a threat.

A survey in Benin recently asked rural parents why they did not send boys or girls to school. In addition to the Malian responses that we noted earlier, and the comment by Muslims that state schools turn children into infidels, a recurrent theme in the answers were that they threaten both the social cohesion and the long-term economic welfare of the family and community. Typical comments about schooling for boys included (translated from Akpaka et Gaba, 1992):

> *It is good for some to go to the White Man's school, but it is also necessary for others to stay at home to learn our things.*
>
> *One should not find oneself in the situation of someone who does not have any children.*

Statements concerning schooling for girls were:

> *They behave like White women* [after schooling], *although we live in Africa.*
>
> *They learn the civilization of the White man ... what they learn is useful for you* [the interviewer] *but it makes no sense for us.*

In the eyes of many parents that live in milieus where the work of children is crucial to assuring the older generation a longer life expectancy, western schools are a threat because they undermine the social cohesion that binds children to their families and communities. De La Chatolais noted this effect in 1762 when he wrote that French schools taught children to despise their parents' profession (Cippola, 1969). Equally or more important than subverting their willingness, western schools undermine the capacity of children to support their parents and communities because they offer little or no knowledge of productive economic value. The idea of sending children to school therefore makes no more sense to parents that live in these milieus than the idea of adopting family planning practices.

Thus the present problem among families and communities that do not want their children to leave or that do not expect them to be able to make productive use of western education even if they succeed in obtaining certificates derives from the failure of history to provide opportunities to incorporate literacy and other skills into the repertoires of existing community education systems. Literacy required that Animists convert to Islam in the pre-colonial period. In the colonial and post-colonial period they and Muslims (i.e., with respect to non-Arabic literacy) have had to become Christian or Secular or Western. And even if willing to make this cultural sacrifice, the probability of

deriving tangible benefit either from literacy or from sending children to public school was and remains very low. So why bother?

That is, this population never benefitted from deliberate or accidental events that could have stimulated a process of educational modernization similar to the ones that gave rise to the Medersas in Africa and to the western school in Europe. As far as colonial and post-colonial authorities were concerned, there was certainly no point in deliberate efforts because the very fact that these people did not already have literacy and other western knowledge meant that they were primitive, backward, uncivilized, unenlightened, underdeveloped and, in a word, uneducated. Equally certain among many reformers today, the way to extract people from this condition is to endow them with western education. No less now than in the 19th-century practices of the colonial authorities and Christian missionaries, the only way to proceed with modernization is to persuade or coerce reticent parents to send more of their children, now with an emphasis on girls, to school.

There were numerous attempts to adapt schools to local conditions and to make curricula more practical, of course. A few succeeded in adding knowledge of value to families on the margins of existing western curricula, as in Gambia and Zambia. But as we indicated earlier, efforts at more substantial transformation usually failed. The main difficulty in more recent times was that the attempts tried to design and sell a single commodity to a heterogeneous market that required, indeed, that already contained several different products. It was hard for a school to be all things to all people, even in one community. It could not at the same time satisfy the educational aspirations of parents that wanted children to acquire literacy in a European language and/or certificates and the aspirations of parents that had no interest in these things.

Outside adult and other "non-formal" education programs there were few attempts to follow the path of French advocates of popular education, to incorporate literacy and other things into existing community education systems for children, and to thereby promote the emergence of other types of schools that did not present parents with threats to their welfare. Yet the success of many adult programs in the region suggests that there were and are ways to do this. Certainly, the need for this kind of effort should be clear to reformers who believe in the existence of a relationship between education and economic productivity because, to the extent that there is a link, formal community instruction is much more pertinent than the western school.

In certain areas of Tchad, for instance, this instruction for boys covers: initiation to religion; morals and social conduct; use of farm and hunting implements; nature and the physical environment; production of traps; management of animals; crop production techniques; social convention and law; geography; history and culture; participation in community affairs; verbal expression and debate; and intellectual refinement (Mbaïosso, 1990). The corresponding sequence for girls covers: morals; social conduct and politeness; initiation to household production activities; personal hygiene and health; posture and physical comportment; culture; pounding of grain; production of thread; sewing and knitting; preparation of meals; hairdressing, cosmetics, and dress; sex; and understanding of aphrodisiacs.

Because it transmits the knowledge required for livelihood and survival from one generation to the next, this type of curriculum is the most basic form of basic education that exists in the Sahel. There is a great deal that can and should be done to try to improve it. However, the record of failed attempts since 1816 suggests a strong case for abandoning the idea that the only way to do it is to alter the curricula of western schools. These schools have ample room for change. But so long as their main purpose in the eyes of parents that want them is for children to reach the highest levels, and so long as the probabilities of making productive use of what these schools offer remain low, it will remain

incompatible with the view that the ultimate purpose of education is to transmit the willingness and capacity of offspring to produce income and to assure the longevity of their parents.

There is an even stronger case for trying to bring literacy directly into the practical community education systems that have already adapted themselves to their environments in order to open doors to flows of additional information about animal husbandry, agriculture, health, aphrodisiacs, and other things from which people can select the items that seem interesting. This may sometimes involve no more than bringing community instructors into existing schools, as in Gambia. In most instances it may require the development of new institutions to promote the gradual transformation of what now exists into national systems of community schools which are distinct from the state schools that now offer one or another variant of western education. If the experiences of the industrial societies serve as guides, efforts in this direction can narrow the wide gap that now separates the western school from community systems and, in the long run, can give way to their partial or full integration.

As indicated, adult education programs in the region provide a basis upon which to design this type of effort. In an initial period, for example, one may imagine an approach in which the lessons learned from these programs are applied to providing literacy to community instructors. Discussions with them during this teacher training phase would provide opportunities to learn more about the content of existing curricula, to deliberate upon methods to improve it, and to translate older and newer knowledge into written form accessible to children. Certain instructors might volunteer to expand the repertoire of what they teach and offer to also train children in the rudiments of reading, writing and counting.

If done successfully in thousands of villages across the region for a decade or more, the process may eventually lead to the emergence of formal community schools, production and distribution of textbooks and other written materials, teacher training programs, and so on. Because the curriculum is vital to survival and must therefore be offered by every village all the time, one may also imagine that even if the initial investment in such a program is high, operating costs, in money if not in terms of time, will remain quite low.

But this is just one simple outline. The actual paths that this process should or might take if it is ever launched are unknown. One thing that is known is that the opening of opportunities to do no more than discuss the matter can stimulate very considerable interest, as happened in Benin in early 1992 when the Hanns Seidel Foundation of Germany sponsored a conference on the future of Animist education (Fondation Seidel, 1992)

Planned for 30 to 40 education specialists, the meeting drew more than 500 people from all walks of life that subscribed to "Vodoun." The final declaration of the conference indicated that the main obstacle to literacy in this community was the total inconsistency between the beliefs, values, and behaviors transmitted by government schools and the values of Vodoun. The declaration went on to suggest that progress in this area required the integration of local leaders who shape the preferences of parents in their communities, especially leaders who are hostile to western education, into the design, creation, and operation of a new type of facility that we call the community school.

The number of participants at the meeting suggests that there is substantial interest in improving at least one type of community education in Benin. The characteristics of the declaration also suggest that there is good understanding that the way to begin to do it is to start with the community and its leaders. Encouraged by this, the Government of Benin-USAID "institutional development" program proposes to take the process further by including within its purview a branch that covers Animist and other forms of community instruction.

There being no institutions like the APEs and UJMB to serve as points of departure for community education, the program plans to initiate the process of creating them by inviting community leaders and instructors to participate in conferences and meetings throughout the country. The purpose of these meetings would be to launch a permanent process of discussion and action that covers, among other things: the demand for improvements in community instruction; methods to organize responses to this demand, including the utility of establishing one or more non-government institutions or of using some of the ones that already exist; design and implementation of appropriate actions; and methods to mobilize support for the idea of transforming community education and for actions to put political pressure on the state (and, through it, on donors) to provide this modernization effort with necessary human and material resources. Though a century or more overdue, this too seems like a useful beginning that warrants consideration in the Sahelian countries.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A participant at the 1990 expert meeting of the Club du Sahel that stimulated the request for this study described public, western education in the region as a poor graft on societies that seem to need other types of education (OECD, 1991). Guizot probably had a similar opinion of the classical Greco-Roman system that grafted itself onto France. But in both instances the systems were excellent for the particular social groups that wanted and could acquire them. And in both instances there were and are additional systems that are equally excellent for others.

Given that every system is inferior to what it may become in the future, progress in education requires the development, some call it the modernization, of all them. This may be what Guizot and other French advocates of popular education had in mind in the 19th century. However, because historical hindsight suggests that the same forces of centralization that hindered this development in France and elsewhere are at work in the Sahel, progress in education also requires progress in political decentralization and participatory democracy.

The social process that produces decentralization and participation is hard to understand and harder still to influence in ways that lead to predictable outcomes. Our review nevertheless suggests that many current ideas about reform and about tactics to implement them may inadvertently constrain both reform and decentralization, that there exist alternative strategies of action which offer greater promise of nurturing them, and that autonomous movements toward representative democracy (e.g., the recent elections in Benin and Mali), fiscal constraints, and heightened donor interest in political development have together opened a very important window of opportunity to introduce the strategies.

The rate at which these strategies actually introduce themselves is uncertain, however. A factor that contributes to this uncertainty, one that we mentioned several times but have yet to confront fully, is the belief among far too many reformers that western schools and education mean the same thing. This premise, especially when taken to extreme, discounts everything but the preferences of the supplier. This obstructs identification of actions that can flow from attention to consumer preferences and the demand for education. It thereby also impedes introduction of alternative strategies.

For example, if people truly believe that parents are uneducated, as distinct from being "un-schooled," then it often follows that these parents are too ignorant to decide on the basic education that they or their children might need. In this perspective the role of consumers must necessarily limit itself to accepting or rejecting what governments, donors, and non-governmental organizations decide to offer. If these actors offer the western school, and if parents and communities reject it, then it seems obvious that they are too uneducated, too backward, or too stupid to understand the value of basic education.

As one French school inspector of the mid-19th century wrote when he had to explain low enrollment and absenteeism in his report, the difficulty has to do with the negligence, ignorance, greed, lack of appreciation of knowledge, and:

> *the indifference of some parents who do not want for their children a benefit whose advantages they cannot comprehend because they themselves are deprived of it.* (cited in Maynes, 1985: 105).

This reasoning was dominant during the development of western education in Africa in the colonial era. It was also important in the industrial nations until progress in participatory democracy during the 19th and early 20th centuries made it increasingly untenable. The problem with this reasoning is that it almost always sees the consumer, and not the product, as defective. This is the specific item which hinders identification and introduction of alternative strategies.

The same thing happens when reformers do not question assertions that there *is now a persuasive body of theoretical and empirical evidence that investment in the formal education and training of the labor force plays a crucial role in economic development* (Haddad et al., 1990: 3), or that the literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving knowledge that schools provide have *direct positive effects on earnings, farm productivity, and human fertility, as well as inter-generational effects on child health, nutrition and education* (World Bank, 1990: 10). It also happens when they believe that specific studies, such as benefit-cost analyses by Psacharopoulos (1985) for Burkina Faso and by Mingat, Jarousse, and Lailaba (1988) or Oudin et al. (1988) for Niger mean that the assertions are as valid for the region as they might (or might not) be elsewhere.

The inattention to consumers and demand that these assertions and studies engender would be more understandable, though no less troublesome, if they were plausible. But there is ample evidence to indicate that the claims are exaggerations at best and that the studies which sustain them are flawed. Glewwe (1990) and Behrman (1990), for instance, show that estimates of gains in farm and non-farm output and earnings, after correcting for several types of technical and conceptual errors in many studies, are much lower than originally reported. Behrman also makes a strong case that the effect of school attainment of parents on health, mortality, nutrition, children's education, and fertility has been greatly overstated and that causes for differences in these indicators of household productivity are still unknown.

The work of historians is also instructive. Cipolla (1969), Cubberly (1919), Furet and Ozouf (1977), Graff (1987), Kayashima (1989), Maynes (1985) and Resnick (1983), among many others, are consistent in finding that after financial and institutional constraints on sending children to school disappeared, even after governments began to compel parents to send them, rural families in most parts of the world were the last to show interest in doing so. It may be that these studies only show that cultural or other impediments among rural populations everywhere always prevented and still prevents them from appreciating the productive value of schools. But greater respect for their intelligence, understanding of their own circumstances, and knowledge of what is required to survive in these circumstances can just as easily suggest that the populations showed little interest either because schools did not offer productive benefits or because these benefits were offset by high social and economic costs.

Beyond statistics and history, there is the matter of coherent logic. It is difficult to explain why western schools should have effects on productivity. Literacy in rural environments where there is little to read or count is not helpful. The primary curricula of most countries provide little practical information on agriculture, health, or any other items that might influence productivity. Nor is it

obvious that the problem-solving or "cognitive" skills which schools supposedly transmit are pertinent to the rural economy or that they are superior to the skills that people acquire from other sources.

The knowledge that helps rural people to produce the bulk of what they produce comes from family and community education systems. So if there is a form of education that merits the adjective "basic" and that leads to changes in productivity and economic growth it is more likely to be centered in these systems than in schools that offer western education. Indeed, when communities refuse to provide their own brands of education to children that advance in school, as happens in certain parts of Mali where western education is viewed as a threat to community cohesion, school attendance may actually lower rather than raise productivity.

It is true that assertions which can mobilize more government and donor resources than possible only with arguments that education is a basic need or right may be helpful in improving and expanding the supply of schools. But even if the claims are correct, the problem remains that advocates who are so engrossed by supply that they cannot perceive that what they think matters much less than what parents think, or that it is essential to design strategies of reform around the characteristics demand and consumer preferences, not only obstruct achievement of their own objectives but also hinder the processes of decentralization and democratization.

This narrow way of thinking contributes to the inability of reformers who are guided by it to recognize the role of secondary and higher education in stimulating demand for primary education and in shaping many of its characteristics. It contributes to inattention to parents, to their views about such things as quality, and to the relationship between these views and their willingness to pay for schools. It contributes to their failure to recognize that even if schools do indeed provide basic knowledge and noticeable productivity gains, they also present costs that offset these advantages. It contributes to their inability to see the utility of building on the demand for education that is already manifest, such as Islamic and community instruction, as foundations upon which to erect national systems of schools in which benefits exceed costs for the majority of parents. And, in general, it contributes to more reliance on thoughts and practices of the 19th century and earlier than should be the case on the eve of the 21st.

Reasoning is not a cause, however. It is merely another symptom of a larger problem: the nature of politics in the region. Similar ways of thinking, as we noted above, were dominant in the industrial societies before and during the 19th century. Although many people in these societies continue to subscribe to them, the ideas are no longer dominant because the emergence of participatory democracy has long since made it very difficult for one group to accuse another of stupidity or worse without risk of penalty, especially when the stupid have power. That is, vocabulary, ideas, practices, and politics change together over the course of time. Though people have every right to adhere to narrow reasoning, it has become inconsistent with economic and political realities in democratic societies because parents and communities now have much greater voice in matters of education and, for better or worse, are much more powerful than self-anointed reformers. [10]

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10 European and North American advocates who are parents might better understand what we mean by this if they were to imagine what would happen, and what they themselves might do, if their own education authorities proposed that public schools devote half of all teaching to Japanese language and the other half to memorizing the Koran. There would be a loud protest, just as there was in France in response to less dramatic organizational suggestions put forward by reformers such as Savary and Haby, and in the United States with respect to sex or religious instruction in public schools. It is precisely because of this potential for immediate and sometimes devastating political response that suggestions for reform, whatever may be their ultimate fate, do not gain prominent places in public discourse until very sizeable numbers of parents show willingness to support them.

In brief, the same type of political environment that sustained narrow reasoning in the industrial societies before the advent of economic and political change continues to sustain it in the Sahel. Unlike the circumstances that confront most of their counterparts in societies with broad political participation who must answer to elected education officials (and who, in turn, must answer to parents), the professional survival of reformers inside and outside governments and donor agencies does not depend on the opinions or preferences of consumers, voters, or anyone else in the majority of the population. The reasoning holds sway because, without the will or capacity of most parents to propel their own ideas into public discourse, it is under little or no political pressure to change.

Thus, buried among the relationships between reform of education, decentralization, and democracy that we have already discussed, there is an important link between political participation and the characteristics of thoughts and practices in the reform community that, if it does not change, will continue to hinder progress in education and politics. This progress is likely to be slow if it must wait for participation to alter the community. It is has a chance to move faster if the community, particularly members who attach themselves to donor agencies, can find ways to engage a process of self-reform that yields thoughts and practices which help rather than hinder the evolution of participatory democracy.

Past actions and inactions may not have been important when donors hoped that helping states to do more of the same things that they had been doing for a long time would produce significant progress. But things are different now. Hopes have turned to doubt, sometimes to despair. At the same time, the capacity of donors to influence the future has increased considerably. This being the case, they may now have more reason to ask themselves questions about the implicit social contract that they themselves have with the Sahelian societies. Should they continue to work only or mostly with states that by definition cannot act independently of dominant interests in the political classes? Alternatively, or in addition, should they try to work more directly with other elements in these societies in order to broaden the composition of the classes?

These questions are not new. They have been asked and answered in many ways over the years, both in the region and elsewhere. The dominant answer in the Sahel has been yes to first question and maybe or sometimes to the second. There are many reasons behind these answers. But for present purposes these reasons are not important because there is sufficient evidence to suggest that when donors have the will to become part of the solution rather than remain part of the problem, their creative talents usually find ways to do things that earlier seemed impossible, illogical or, at the very least, unusual.

We therefore believe that donors can do much to accelerate diffusion of new knowledge, improvements in basic education, and the emergence of participatory and representative democracy. As USAID seemed to begin to do in Mali and Benin during 1992, and as it, the World Bank, and others did in Haiti for several years, they can do it by expanding their scope to include activities that flow from attention to demand.

1. Recommendations

Our recommendations do not exhaust the list of ideas that can flow from attention to demand,. They limit themselves to the three strategic areas of action which we have already discussed: reform of higher and secondary education, empowerment of parents and communities with the will and capacity to promote change, and revisions in the ways that donors assist the state.

What might happen as a result of these actions is uncertain. Most of them will elicit strong resistance from different quarters of the political class, including opposition from within the donor and reform

communities. This is to be expected. But some or perhaps all the actions will also elicit support from other quarters because their time has come. What is unknown is whether this support will be strong enough to counter the resistance.

Even if the forces of change succeed, it would be naive romanticism to believe that pursuit of empowerment, for example, would lead quickly or inevitably either to improvements in education or to the speedier rise of democracy. As in France, the United States, and Japan during the 19th century, the political organization of many communities is non-democratic, often tyrannical. Nor is there everywhere a latent demand for the improvement of western or the modernization of non-western education. But the alternative, which consists mainly of depending on the effectiveness with which reformers entreat teachers to improve the quality of their instruction, beg parents to contribute more than they do, and badger government officials with requests that they shift resources from higher levels to the base and do other things have yet to demonstrate that they are the best or only ways to proceed.

Drawing on lessons that history offers about different strategies, what empowerment and the other suggestions we make might be able to do is raise the level of experimentation that is now taking place in the region and, by extension, might also increase the probability that reform of education and politics will take less time to reach fruition than in the industrial nations.

i. Higher and Secondary Education

Demand for the knowledge, values, and certificates offered by public education now stems mainly from perceived opportunities for employment in the state apparatus, a few other segments of the urban economy and, ultimately, abroad. The ultimate promise causes the highest level of the system to maintain its western, urban or academic orientation, and the chain of increasingly valuable domestic rewards that are available on the way up to this level causes secondary and primary education to have the same orientation. Until such time as the economies of the region increase the range of opportunities to make use of this type of education, it will remain very difficult to disconnect primary from secondary education, secondary from higher education, and higher education from the characteristics of the industrial societies to which it promises access.

More attention to the top of the system is therefore required, beginning with the link that now exists between higher education in the region and advanced institutions elsewhere, and then down the structure to connections between the higher and secondary levels, and between secondary and primary education. Though outcomes are unpredictable because attention to these relationships has been rare, experiences of the industrial nations indicate that this approach has promise. It therefore merits consideration in the Sahel.

1. To begin to explore methods to alter the characteristics of the link between universities in the region and their French and other European counterparts, donors and governments should launch a sustained process of discussion and debate concerning answers to several basic questions, such as:

    Can the awarding of scholarships and other forms of student support for domestic or foreign study and/or the local employment practices of donors be harnessed to encourage shifts in demand away from diplomas that are accepted only by urban or academic universities in the industrial nations and toward credentials that would be accepted by agricultural, technical, or other higher institutions with rural orientations in these nations?

Can technical assistance, particularly French assistance because it dominates in the region, help the Sahelian universities modify themselves to supply these credentials? Or does the situation require creation of completely new facilities that must compete for students with the existing ones (e.g., as the "land grant" universities did in the United States)?

Can useful lessons be extracted from the experiences of nearby countries, such as the long-term partnership between Morocco's Hassan II Agricultural University and the University of Minnesota (a "land grant" institution)?

2. Because answers to these and related questions have language and cultural limits, there is a need to examine prospects for changing the characteristics of other external relationships. Of particular interest, because a great many graduates of the public system and Medersas pursue further study in universities and seminaries of the Islamic countries, is promotion of stronger ties to specific institutions with rural orientations in these countries that show potential for having beneficial impact on both western and Islamic education.

3. Fundamental reform of general secondary education, including but not limited to curriculum, teaching and learning methods, and teacher training needs to become an objective that is no less important than change at the primary level. Questions here include:

   What reforms are feasible at the secondary level without significant change in the characteristics of higher education?

   Can scholarships or other incentives at the secondary level be effective in drawing students to new programs (i.e., tracks) that lead to advanced study of pertinent subjects, either in the region or abroad?

   Can donor technical assistance organize itself to help supply both the incentives and the new programs?

   Can the characteristics of national examinations that control entry to higher education from the secondary level, and to this level from primary schools. be changed so that passing them requires less memorization and more mastery of basic knowledge and skills?

4. There should be no premature shifts of donor (or government) resources from upper to lower tiers of the public education system until it is clear that this transfer will yield a better impact on primary education than modifications to the way resources are now used at the secondary and higher levels.

ii. Empowerment of Parents and Communities

Though successful change of secondary and higher education will help to reform primary schools, the main focus of attention must remain fixed at the local level. At this level the objective should be to stimulate increases in social and political demand for the state to assist communities in providing western education for children, non-western education offering knowledge and values that have merit in the eyes of parents, and improvements in quality of instruction and learning outcomes in both types of instruction. If efforts to achieve this objective are successful, chances are good that there will be a rise in the willingness of parents and communities to increase their contributions to basic education

and a corresponding rise in pressure on the state to shift resources from higher levels to the base. Several things may encourage this process.

1. There is a need to abandon the notion that schooling and education mean the same thing, that school attainment, attendance, and acquisition of knowledge and values offered by public systems are valid indicators of the quantity or quality of human resources in all circumstances, and that the only way to improve basic education is through one or another variant of the western school. Efforts to improve the quality of this school may increase passing and graduation rates, lower repetition and dropout rates, raise enrollment, improve what some people call the internal efficiency or cost-effectiveness of school systems, and boost adult literacy rates. These are worthy objectives because, even if they do no more in a near term than increase the number of people that hold pieces of paper, the mismatch between knowledge acquired on the way to these papers and its utility in the economy fuels crucial social and political dynamics that offer considerable promise for significant reform in a longer term.

   However, because demand for this type of school is limited by the characteristics of the regional economy, it cannot remain the only vehicle through which to improve basic education. In this regard, improvement efforts that implicitly sustain the idea that people without schooling are "uneducated," UNESCO's "Education for All by the Year 2000" program being only one of many ongoing examples, continue to draw attention away from possibilities to harness existing demand for other types of instruction as means to promote acquisition of literacy and other potentially useful knowledge. And because such efforts implicitly discount the perspectives of parents, they also obstruct prospects for using education as a method to promote the emergence and spread of participatory democracy.

2. For similar reasons, it is important for donors to avoid practices which reinforce the idea that parents and communities count for little. For example, even though it organized many national and district meetings, a recent "education-training-employment" planning project that the UNDP and ILO sponsored in Tchad failed to invite participation by parent associations. This habit of ignoring parents should stop. Weak justifications for this failure, such as the APEs' lack of sufficient organization (heard in Tchad!) and the fact that APEs are present at all meetings because almost every adult at such meetings belongs to an APE, should also stop.

3. More important because it occurs more often, donors should not treat APEs in manners that reinforce the traditional relationship between the state and the majority of society. Local resource mobilization, participation, and decentralization are good objectives. But when these things refer only to inviting parents and communities to pay more taxes in the form of higher contributions to their schools, as happens in many projects sponsored by the World Bank, they are relics of colonial and 19th-century European practice that cannot yield more resources, participation, or decentralization of any meaningful kind. They can only continue to obstruct progress in education and democracy.

4. A constructive alternative to this practice which does not require extraordinary effort is to insist that design of every project, including the very definition of its purposes, begin with parents rather than with the state or its assistants. Donor support of independent national opinion surveys that periodically collect, synthesize, and diffuse information about the concerns of parents in different areas, in different social groups, and at different times is one way to do this. These surveys are important in the shaping of policy in the industrial nations. High illiteracy rates and frail communication media make them even more vital in the region. Certainly, as the insights provided by the few studies of rural families that have been done in

the region attest, opinions of parents are of much greater relevance to the future of education than enrollment and literacy statistics.

Moving from the national to the local level, the habit of designing programs first and then later asking parents to participate in discussions about how they might assist in implementing them should be reversed. Discussions with parents and APEs about education in general and their schools in particular, and about how the state, donors, and communities might collaborate in improving basic instruction should become the first step in all design activities. This is the way in which things are now usually done in participatory democracies.

5. Another alternative, but one that requires extraordinary effort to produce extraordinary results, is to engage a sustained process of "institutional development" on behalf of non-government entities in order to empower parents and communities with the conviction and the capacity to influence both their schools and national policy. Whether the process of empowerment emerged autonomously, as in Tchad and Zambia, or was assisted by donors, as in Gambia and Haiti, it is has shown itself to be much more effective in achieving major reform objectives than the traditional method of nagging officials, teachers, and parents.

   The proposal put forward in Benin by USAID consultants and education ministry planners during early 1992, to encourage and enable APEs and other local organizations not only to take greater charge of their schools but also to work in district and national federations that could voice their opinions and lobby for their insertion into national policy is one example of the type of effort that is needed.

6. Extending this theme, the efforts of Muslim communities to organize themselves into national systems of modern Islamic education and to improve its quality also require attention and support. Donors can do this directly or indirectly. A direct approach might assist in arranging conferences in a near term. Depending on what these meetings produce, it can later provide "institutional development" support similar to that proposed for primary and other education in Benin. In this case the effort might try to empower parents and local leaders with the conviction that this kind of education is no less "public" than the current model, and with the capacity to promote this idea and to demand appropriate responses from the state. An indirect approach, perhaps justified by lack of understanding and sometimes hostility toward Islam among western donors, could entail efforts to encourage deeper involvement in education by donors based in the Islamic countries.

   Although more difficult because they have yet to develop formal institutions such as schools, similar approaches are warranted on behalf of Animist and other social communities that regard western and Islamic education as equally alien. But whether direct or indirect, the main purpose of efforts with respect Islamic, Animist, or other religious communities would be to decentralize the meaning of national public education to encompass several types of schools and systems that offer basic knowledge in different ways.

7. Especially important here, because it lies at the center of the relationship between education and the quantity and quality of human resources in the region, are efforts that focus on improving those parts of community instruction systems which now transmit the most basic components of productive knowledge. The answer to the question of whether such improvements can be accomplished more effectively by changing the curriculum of primary schools, incorporating additional elements into Islamic or Animist education, or creating new types of formal facilities called "community schools" will vary with time and circumstance in

different localities. What is crucial at the moment is that the process of asking this and other questions and of discovering answers to them receive encouragement.

This type of activity is not completely unfamiliar to donors. In an important departure from prior practice, for example, in 1989 USAID, the Club du Sahel, and CILSS organized a regional round-table on natural resources management at Segou (Mali) that included almost as many farmers and representatives of village associations as the typical assortment of government and donor personnel that invite themselves to such meetings.

Accordingly, building on the recommendations of the 1992 conference on Animist instruction sponsored by the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Benin and the "institutional development" proposal put forward in that country by USAID consultants and education ministry planners, donors can begin to encourage the search for answers in education by helping local leaders and community instructors organize meetings where they can discuss opportunities and constraints for modernizing their education systems, alternative methods to implement a modernization process, the utility of establishing autonomous institutions that can help create and organize it, and the appropriate roles for states, donors, and communities in the process. Further actions can be based on the results of these meetings.

iii. Assistance to the State

Although all governments exercise some degree of authority over public education, the majority of the population in the region has yet to express its will with respect either to the definition of this education or to the scope and characteristics of the state's authority over it. Now that fiscal stress has opened a window of opportunity through which new social dynamics offering considerable promise for reform of education and politics have entered the scene, external assistance should not act in ways that close it before the dynamics work their full effects.

Donors therefore need to minimize actions that may help the state apparatus retain total control of public education and continue to satisfy only dominant interests in the current political class. This means that donors should do as little as possible to relieve fiscal constraints and, within this framework, restrict assistance to those things where it seems likely that a national entity would have a direct role even in the most decentralized of circumstances.

1. Because it allows the state to retain command of activities that need urgent decentralization, proposals to increase support of either the general or the education budget need to be treated with extreme caution. In addition to other criteria, donors should assess the extent to which this assistance might produce negative impacts on the process of changing education and politics. Even if donors attach policy reform conditions to it, as the World Bank attempted in Mali in 1990-91, this assistance can still be harmful when the conditions are inconsistent with the interests of the political class. It provides states with additional resources to respond to the class in the interval between receipt of initial tranches and cancellation of subsequent tranches caused by the inability of governments to comply with contractual obligations.

   If this type of assistance is unavoidable then donors, as some of them have already done in Haiti, should try to use it to maximum advantage by means such as requiring governments to allow implementation of initiatives outside and without direct involvement of the state (e.g., the institutional development activities mentioned above).

2. Education programs and projects that donors sponsor, likewise, should focus on actions that are useful while doing nothing to increase the state's capacity to respond to dominant

demands. Support for books and teacher training may be warranted, for example, because they have low priority in the class, because education budgets now contain negligible allocations for them, and because the items can contribute to improvements in school quality on the supply side. The same applies to less important items that also seem unlikely to produce negative effects, such as management training, data collection and analysis, school inspection, and so on.

External finance of transportation and other allowances for teacher training programs, domestic or international travel of officials and administrators to attend meetings or short-term training seminars, scholarships or other assistance to help students pursue study abroad, and similar items are another matter. States are under constant pressure to supply these things for different factions of the political class. Donor support thus allows governments to allocate less of their domestic resources to them than would otherwise be the case, and thereby relieves states of some degree of fiscal stress. Further assistance is not warranted unless there are indications that it will help rather than hinder progress, such as using scholarships to induce students to enroll in new programs.

Construction and repair of primary schools fall into the same category. Several donors, notably the World Bank, resist this type of support because some studies suggest that it has little impact on learning outcomes. But they nevertheless supply it. This is unfortunate because construction has high priority among parents and communities that have or want primary schools. External finance in this case not only allows governments to allocate less of their domestic resources to physical works but also, by relieving financial stress, slows the rate at which responsibility for schools shifts from the state to communities. Again, support for this item is not advisable without evidence that it can be used to productive advantage.

3. In this context, sustained efforts are needed to drive a wedge between teachers and the state apparatus in order to restructure the balance of their accountability to the state on one side, and to communities on the other. So long as all or most teachers remain functionaries with highly-organized and influential syndicates, it will remain very difficult to make them work harder or better than they do, to remove them from their jobs, or to hold them responsible for their performance.

A strategy that makes sense in this circumstance, drawn from experiences in Tchad, Gambia, Zambia, and Mali is to use future growth of demand for primary education as a vehicle to increase the share of all teachers that are paid by local communities. A teacher that depends for livelihood on the community in which he or she works is accountable to that community and, if required, will work better and harder for less money, especially if there are no alternatives available. If governments cannot add or replace teachers, and if communities want to recruit more of them, then in the long run the national cadre of teachers will cease to be functionaries, their average salaries will drop to levels consistent with economic realities, and they will have every incentive to maintain good and cost-effective performance.

To reach this goal, beyond maintenance of fiscal stress and other recommendations mentioned above, it is essential for donors to stop the practice of urging that communities contribute to construction and furnishings in exchange for teachers or other government support. Donors should urge that communities mobilize combinations of cash and in-kind resources to remunerate teachers in exchange for public supply of construction, books, or whatever. Though some reformers insist that the inability of states to pay teachers is a problem, it is and will remain a solution to the much more fundamental problem of political centralization.

4. Finally, people that provide technical assistance to the state through donor agencies, most especially those who are not African, Muslim, Animist, farmers, or herdsmen should refrain from proposing specific curricula for basic education. Of all the different actors engaged in the sector, they are the least qualified to make competent suggestions. More important, the suggestions are counterproductive. In addition to allowing their limited personal experiences to endorse the notion that western schooling of one kind or another and education mean the same thing, specific suggestions at this point in the region's political history obstruct emergence of the idea that curricula are things which should be negotiated between states and parents, and that appropriate content will materialize as shares of national populations that participate in this negotiation grow larger.

   What these individuals can contribute, though this would depend on the speed at which different social groups bring pressure for change to bear on the state, are organizational concepts that may help to expand the process of negotiation. For instance, drawing from the 19th-century experiences of the industrial nations, ongoing practice in several of them, and analogous thinking here and there in Africa (e.g., the village school committees in Gambia and the UJMB in Benin), it might be useful to promote the idea of national systems of public education that contain a number of different sub-systems. One possibility might be a core curriculum that is the same in every sub-system. This core could serve as the basis for national examinations and passage to higher levels while the balance of each sub-system's curriculum covers materials of value to parents in different social groups.

   Political and economic circumstances in the Sahel make implementation of such concepts unlikely in a near term. But their increased circulation within the donor community would constitute an important change in the characteristics of the political economy. As such, they would at least offer hope that progress in education and politics may move forward more quickly in the future than in the past.

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