



**ADEA Biennial Meeting  
Arusha, Tanzania, October 7-11, 2001**

Reaching Out, Reaching All –  
Sustaining Effective Policy and Practice for Education in Africa

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**Session 1  
From pilot to scale: issues and experience**

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**Mobilizing Guinean educators to generalize a program  
for improving the quality of elementary education**

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This document was commissioned by ADEA for its Biennial Meeting (Arusha, October 7-11, 2001). The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and should not be attributed to ADEA, to its members or affiliated organizations or to any individual acting on behalf of ADEA.

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# Contents

<b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. ORIGINS AND RATIONALE</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. PROGRAM ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>11</b>
FIGURE 1: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	12
<b>6. PRINCIPAL IMPLEMENTATION STAGES</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7. REASONS FOR SUCCESS</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>8. DIFFICULTIES, DILEMMAS AND CONSTRAINTS</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>9. LOOKING AHEAD</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>10. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>ANNEX 1. PRINCIPAL IMPLEMENTATION STAGES OF PPSE</b>	<b>26</b>
1. PREPARATORY PHASE (1993-1995)	26
2. EXPERIMENTAL PHASE (1995-1997)	26
3. GENERALIZING THE PROGRAM (1997-2001)	27
<b>ANNEX 2. TRAINING SESSIONS ORGANIZED BY THE SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM (PPSE)</b>	<b>28</b>
1. TEACHER TRAINING/AWARENESS WORKSHOPS	28
2. INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP FOR NEW SUPERVISORS	28
3. TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR JURY MEMBERS	28
4. TRAINING ACTIVITIES FOR NEW REGIONAL COORDINATORS	28
5. COMPLEMENTARY AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR JURY MEMBERS	29
6. CONTINUING EDUCATION SESSIONS FOR THE SUPERVISORY TEAM	29
7. WORKSHOPS ON GETTING STARTED/MANAGEMENT/EVALUATION	29
8. REGIONAL DISSEMINATION SEMINARS (SARD)	29



## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In response to the need to develop the professional qualifications of primary school teachers, the Ministry of Pre-university Education in Guinea designed and implemented a continuing education program for teachers called “Program for Small Grants to Schools” (PPSE). The program, started in 1994, arose from the obvious dissatisfaction of leaders of education at all levels, and teachers themselves, with the cascade approach to continuous education. The PPSE was built on the belief that one cannot make improvements in education sustainable – much less train people – without engaging education’s principal actors, the teachers. In other words, the PPSE put teachers at the center of the qualitative changes desired and viewed their acquisition of skills as an internal matter arising from problems occurring in the process of education/learning.
2. The program consists of a set of planned activities, developed and implemented by teams of 4 to 10 teachers organized into units for educational renewal (CRE) from which they took their cue. Specifically, the PPSE expects to develop the capacity of primary school teachers to: 1) analyze the various problems linked to their class practices, choose which of these would be most appropriate and susceptible to being resolved by means of a small grant; 2) develop projects for educational reform (PRE), implement them, evaluate their impact and report back on what the grant was used for. In this way the grants program is helping to make basic education more dynamic by providing teachers and supervisors with pedagogical support and material that lets them take charge of their own training, improve school teaching and give credit for the learning apprenticeship of students.
3. From a strategic point of view, the grants program includes a preparatory cycle involving the selection of a reform project, followed by its implementation. The implementation takes place during the second year, with the possibility of its being renewed for two additional years. The teams whose projects have been selected by a regional jury receive the funding they ask for and also benefit from special support throughout the project’s duration. The support takes the form of participation in a workshop on getting started/managing/evaluating at the beginning of the school year; receiving extra supervision throughout the project from a facilitator (EF) or other resource person as required; and by three visits a year from an educational supervisor (EE). Project results are presented at the end of the school year by members of the educational reform units during the regional dissemination seminars.
4. It is the responsibility of the regional coordinator, supported by a Regional Technical Committee and a regional inspector of education, to see that the program in each region functions well pedagogically, administratively, and financially. Central oversight lies with a Technical Committee presided by the National Director of Elementary Education. To this end a national team was constituted made up of a national coordinator and five others who manage the program. For all major training and dissemination activities the national team receives support from a group of training supervisors selected from among the most skilled and experienced supervisors in each region. Finally, the PPSE has benefited from the technical support of Michigan State University (MSU). One result of the program is the positive rating given it by all actors. All categories of staff were able to contribute something to the success of the program. Both the national team members and the international consultants from MSU followed the program closely at all levels in order to respond to needs and problems as they arose. This sharing of responsibilities and complementarity in performing tasks helped to energize all the actors.

5. Six years of PPSE have allowed 300 pedagogical supervisors to be trained who are capable of leading the skills development at school level and supporting the teachers in their efforts to change. Thanks to PPSE, nearly all primary school teachers (more than 15000) have been sensitized to educational reform and initiated in drawing up projects. More than half of these teachers have taken part in writing the final project proposal and more than 6000 of those belong to 1200 reform units that have had a chance to implement a project between 1996-1997 and 2000-2001. The reasons for this success are varied, but include the following: 1) the organization that extends from school to the central services and that makes those in each post responsible for their output; 2) the rigor imposed by action-oriented research, experimentation, and a gradual extension supported by flexibility and adaptation; 3) the valorization of teachers by providing them modest material and financial assistance, and the development of supervisors' skills by providing non-directive guidance to teachers in a classroom situation; 4) the design of the programme with a view to scaling up; 5) the introduction of competition as an impartial means of assessing and selecting projects helps all school authorities get involved; 6) the setting up of an integrated training system for all PPSE participants and, along the way, the creation of a corps of training supervisors; 7) the importance given to integrating assessment within the Program; 8) the introduction of partnerships based on mutual respect and the sharing of responsibilities during program development; 9) the regular holding of regional dissemination seminars and a national workshop for disseminating results from the implementation of educational reform projects.

6. Despite the success of the grants program certain difficulties were encountered. Problems would seem inherent in all program management, but especially in education. The difficulties included: resources not being available to many teachers on time, logistical and financial obstacles, not enough competent and available supervisors which in its turn slowed down the program's extension. Finally, we should mention the challenge of preserving the teacher's autonomy in the face of heightened supervision carried out by people from outside the school.

7. In less than six years the PPSE took off at a pace rarely seen in Guinea or elsewhere. While not claiming to be the only factor contributing to educational qualification in Guinea, the program can take credit – through its philosophy and approach – for creating a general framework of support for initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools. The great impetus given by the grants program to the notion of continuing education for teachers has forced people to look at teachers differently, viewing them not just as consumers of innovations and pedagogical models but rather as artisans who can craft their own professional development. Capacity developed through the PPSE can be used to make further improvements in Guinea's educational system. This is the purpose of the soon-to-be-introduced program of support to educational reform in Guinea's schools (PAREEG) being initiated under the 10-year Program of Education for All. PAREEG is the logical extension and strengthening of continuing education centered around the pedagogical practices and needs of teachers and schools.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

8. The priority accorded by the Guinean government since 1984 to education and training has been accompanied by a number of important political and pedagogical actions. These were announced in the September 1989 Declaration of Educational Policy and were implemented through a two-part far-reaching action plan called “Program of Sectoral Adjustment for Education (PASE)”. PASE I went from 1990-1994 and PASE II from 1996-2002, with the former emphasizing expansion of the educational system by a rapid and significant rise in school enrollment, and PASE II focusing more on improvement of quality, access and equity. Implementation of these two plans brought remarkable results, especially with regard to the overall enrollment rate which climbed from 28% in 1989/90 to 53% in 1999/2000; with regard to training of teaching staff and pedagogical supervisors; and the availability of textbooks and teaching materials for students and teachers – all of which contributed to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

9. In both these programs, the continuing qualification of primary school teachers was the main concern of the authorities and the various development partners, led by the World Bank. The PASE II program of continuing education for teachers, called “Program for Small Grants to Schools (PPSE)”, was conceived and implemented to respond to this concern. The program envisioned a range of activities that would be planned and carried out by teams of teachers according to their own ideas and needs, in cooperation with training institutions and local resources of the national education system. While calling upon the experience of those in the central services and on the outside, the PPSE was primarily directed at strengthening teaching skills and fostering professional development using self-learning tools.

10. Thus the PPSE aims to make teachers themselves responsible for improving the quality of learning within their own classrooms. It has adopted the inverse approach to the usual way of introducing continuing education. From the outset it involved teachers and schools directly: classroom teachers from one or more schools would get together to identify problems encountered in their classes which hampered the smooth functioning of the learning process. Then they suggested strategies, methods and actions to help resolve these difficulties and thereby improve student performance.

11. This report comes during the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the Program for Small Grants to Schools. It describes the Program and its results according to the following outline:

1. Origins and rationale of the small grants program
2. Purpose
3. Program organization
4. Implementation stages
5. Reasons for success
6. Difficulties, dilemmas and constraints
7. Looking ahead

### 3. ORIGINS AND RATIONALE

12. The PPSE grew out of the dissatisfaction of Guinea's political leaders, members of the educational establishment, and parents of school-age children. They were unhappy with both initial and continuing training of primary teachers, their performance in the classroom and above all, with the poor quality of students leaving primary education. It is true that the Department of National Education has made a great effort since 1984 to qualify teachers and increase productivity. The Center for advanced language training (Centre de Perfectionnement Linguistique – CPL) was created to boost French and mathematics skills of primary school teachers, the Centers for Continuing Education (CFC) had offered long-term courses of 4 months' duration, the Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs had reconsidered its basic training program, and various other efforts were made to give greater coherence to teacher training and continuing education. But none of the strategies used – especially the bloc training – seemed to respond adequately to the actual skills training needed by teachers.

13. Among the criticisms that were made of conventional types of training were that:

- Teachers were often obliged to abandon their classes in order to participate in long-term refresher courses;
- There was usually a top-down (central to local) emphasis on abstract pedagogical material that took little or no account of what grass-roots teachers themselves thought was necessary;
- Teachers were not much interested in what was taught because it covered what they knew already or didn't fit their training needs;

14. The total ineffectiveness and inappropriateness of this top-down training approach was clearly documented in a report from the National Office of Elementary Education (DNEE), dated November 1992. In its report the DNEE suggested that an improvement in quality at local level would only be possible if all elementary teachers were regrouped into small study teams and working units as a way of energizing the training process and making it more dynamic.

15. The Grants Program now in its 6<sup>th</sup> year of implementation had its roots in this basic document which provided a vision that has helped to mobilize – and continues to mobilize – both people and financial and material resources. In other words, the vision existed already in Guinea, but the international consultants from Michigan State University helped their Guinean counterparts to structure the vision and translate it into concrete operations.

16. The PPPSE is a logical outgrowth of the belief that sustainable improvements in quality of teaching are possible only if teachers themselves become active participants. Therefore it was necessary to approach the matter through the school and the classroom directly, because that is the best place to qualify teaching staff and improve the quality of what children are learning. Continuing education was seen as a means of improving the learning experience. In other words, it was by looking at student performance that you could discern the training needs of the teachers.



17. The following principles express the philosophy and theory that underpin the PPSE:

- Educational renewal puts teaching at the center of the desired qualitative changes and in the place where it can occur – namely the school;
- Teachers should continually challenge their own teaching practices and be able to see themselves with an objective eye;
- Skills developments should be viewed as an on-going process developing from the concerns of teachers themselves; the desired changes should occur within the individual person, in their attitudes and way of working.
- Trainers should immerse themselves in understanding how teachers perceive the renewal of education and translate this into their daily classroom practices;
- Support for teachers should be non-directive and given in such a way that it valorizes their daily efforts to improve the quality of education;
- Evaluation is an integral part of educational renewal. Follow-up is not merely a question of occasional controls, but rather of providing real support to teachers and students through ongoing, on-the-ground assistance.

#### **4. PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM**

18. In the long term, the PPSE is helping to revitalize basic teaching by providing teachers and their accompanying supervisors with pedagogical support and material that allows them to take charge of their own continuing education, to improve school teaching and to qualify the student's apprenticeship in learning. In other words, the PPSE seeks to:

- Strengthen pedagogical leadership among regional and local education bodies which, in the past, have been limited to administrative supervision;
- Develop the classroom teachers' capacity for daily questioning of their practice and their ability to find ways to solve the problems that interfere with the teacher-learning process.

19. More specifically, the PPSE seeks to develop in primary school teachers who are regrouped into Units for Educational Renewal (CRE) the capacity to:

- analyze problems connected with their class practices and to choose those which are most relevant and likely to be solved using small grants to fund various projects for educational renewal (PRE);
- draw up project proposals having specific goals and coherent plans for achieving them;
- implement these projects and evaluate their impact;
- report back on how funds from the grant have been used.

## 5. PROGRAM ORGANIZATION

20. The PPSE functions through a cycle of project preparation, selection and implementation. The preparation period lasts one school year, while the implementation period occurs during the next school year with a possibility of two extensions, for a total time of three years.

21. For those teachers who are not yet acquainted with the program the cycle begins with an awareness-building and training workshop together with about 40 other teachers. These are divided into smaller groups of 4 – 10 teachers from the same or neighboring schools. During the workshop a facilitator (normally a pedagogical counselor or a professor from the Ecole Normale) explains the operational manual, the handbook for writing project proposals and a series of additional explanatory notes. Towards the end of the workshop the teachers begin to write up a preliminary project proposal that they want to implement. They determine its content, draw up a budget for additional funds needed to implement the project (such as funds for purchasing textbooks or other supplies, purchase of the teacher's guide and payment of the people running the training sessions). The writing continues after the workshop with the help and advice of the facilitator. It is then submitted to a prefectural jury, presided by the prefectural director of education and made up of local personnel from the Ministry. A retired teacher also sits on the jury. The jury chooses the most promising proposals and sends them back with comments. The proposals are then revised by the members of the CRE with the help of the facilitator, and these are submitted to a regional evaluation/selection jury. It is this jury, made up of regional personnel and presided by the Regional Inspector of Education that makes the final choice about which projects to finance.

22. The teams whose projects are selected receive the funding they request, whereas the teams not selected receive a token encouragement. The selected teams also benefit from additional support throughout the project's implementation. This includes a kick-off workshop at the beginning of the school year, close supervision by the facilitator or other resource persons, and three visits from the evaluation supervisor. For greater impact, the grant winners can ask that their projects on teaching and learning be renewed for a second or third year. The results are presented at year's end by team members during the regional dissemination seminars.

23. When the program began, most projects proposed by the teachers had something to do with teaching methodology for learning how to read and how to use reading manuals effectively. But gradually, projects broadened to include more complex and varied subjects such as mathematics, empirical sciences, local history and geography or even how to manage multi-grade classes and the dropping out of girls.

24. At each stage of implementation the teaching teams receive non-directive support from the facilitators. This is done by encouraging them to teach themselves. The facilitator is expected to stimulate the teacher's own thoughts on teaching practice so that they may identify their own potential for improvement. Another responsibility that facilitators have is to provide support to the CRE for surmounting obstacles that impede effective planning and execution of their projects. If necessary, they may call on outside assistance and resources. The facilitators see to it that balance sheets and justification of expenses are in order, that a financial report is submitted by the treasurer of each team to the regional coordination unit.

25. In addition, each team receives evaluation training from the evaluation supervisors. Their role is to give complementary technical support to the work of the facilitators and to provide written reports on the state of each project with regard to its

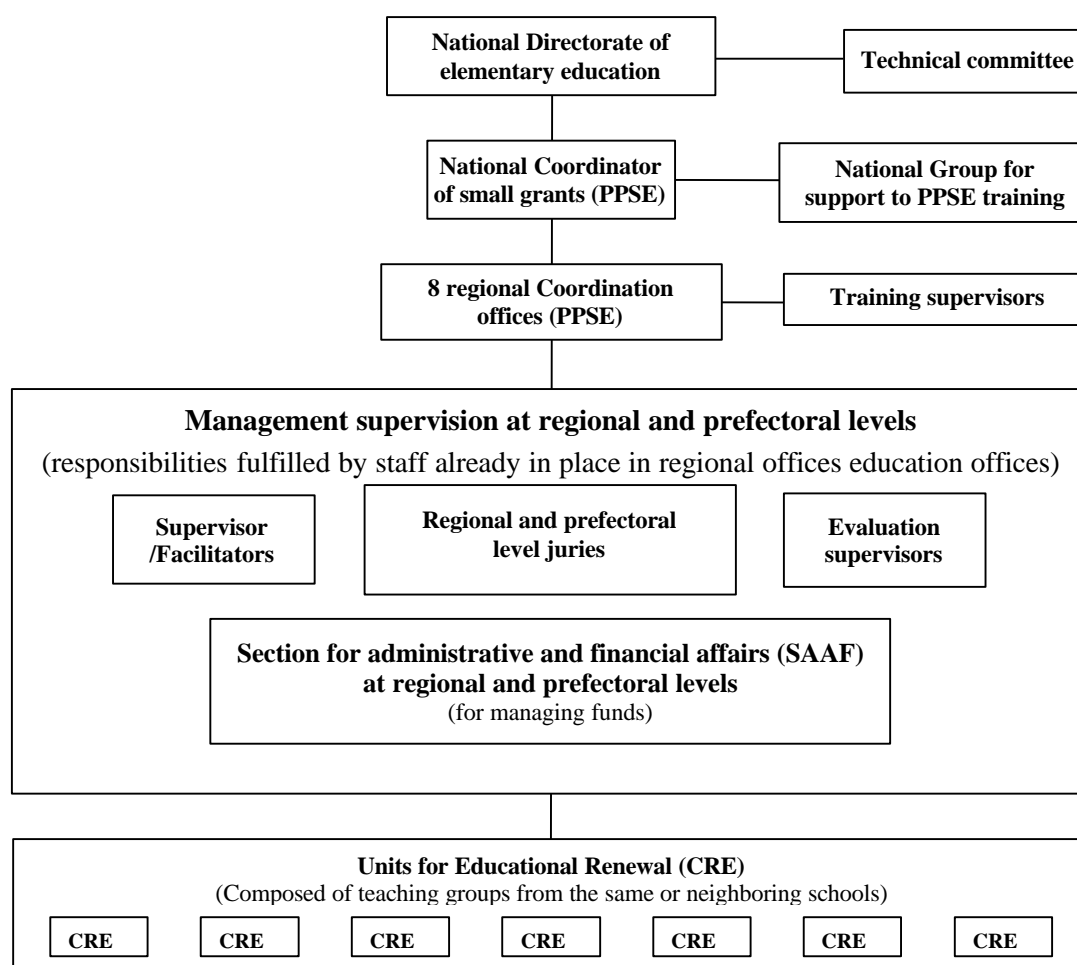
stated goals after each visit. They visit three times during the project's implementation: at the very beginning, during implementation, and at the end when they can assess the project's impact.

26. Correct functioning of the program in each region – administratively, financially and pedagogically – is the responsibility of the Regional Coordinator (CR) appointed by the national coordination office. Usually the regional coordinator is head of the section for elementary education within the Regional Inspectorate of Education. At the national level the programme is overseen by a Technical Committee presided over by the national Director of Elementary Education. Within this office there is also a national team composed of five program managers and a national coordinator. All the major training and dissemination activities are underpinned by a group of training supervisor especially selected from among the most experienced and capable supervisors in each region. The program's generalization owes much to the efforts not only of the national team and international consultants, but especially to the training supervisors who come from the pilot region.

27. Finally, the State University of Michigan has supported program development by offering technical assistance consisting of 2 to 4-week long visits by four consultants from the United States, Burkina Faso, Togo and Brazil, completed by the presence of a Guinean expert with a PhD in education, who is currently doing research at the University of Quebec in Montreal.

The organizational structure of PPSE is summarized in the following schema:

**Figure 1: organizational structure**



## 6. PRINCIPAL IMPLEMENTATION STAGES

28. The rigor observed during the preparatory stage, the gradual implementation scheme adopted and the extensive management system all played a part in successful implementing and generalizing of the Program for small grants to schools (PPSE). The process went through three stages:

- A preparatory phase (1993-1995) during which the agreement among different parties and choice of the test area were obtained and the basic documents drawn up.
- An experimental phase (1995-1970) during which the programme was tested in the region of Labe which is made up of 10 prefectures, namely the five current prefectures comprising three from the Mamou region and two from the region of Boke.
- A generalization phase which happened in two parts: a first stage from 1997-1998 involving the administrative regions of Boke, Faranah, Kankan and Kindia; and a second one starting in November 1998, which allowed the PPSE to be extended to the whole country by including the administrative region of N'Zerekore and the city of Conakry.

Annex 1 presents a more detailed account of activities carried out during the three phases.

## 7. REASONS FOR SUCCESS

29. While it is true that the grant is fairly small (1,000,000 GNF per project) it is also true that the organization in place is far-reaching. It extends from the school up to the central services of the Department and gives responsibility to the staff already holding management responsibility within the educational system. This large-scale operation – resulting from the wish to handle the grants program correctly and effectively – is eloquent proof of the close partnership sought between the central authorities and the teachers in their classrooms. The success of this partnership approach and the results obtained on the ground have turned the PPSE into everyone's darling. Here are just a few of the many factors contributing to the successful implementation of the Program.

30. *A rigorous approach to participatory action-oriented research, tested and gradually extended against a background of flexibility and continuous adaptation.* Although the Program was launched in 1994, the first projects were not actually implemented until October 1996. This measured advance grew from the conviction that any reform effort can easily fail if it is rushed along too fast out of a wish to show off impressive statistics. To avoid such a fate, the PPSE required: (1) a testing out of the whole organizational support system and its parts on a participatory basis, (2) a gradual extension in planned stages, and (3) flexibility and continuous adaptation. In reality the construction and implementation of the grants program are indistinguishable. The PPSE was not a ready-made program. Rather, the actors tested ideas, hypotheses, procedures and support mechanisms for the teachers' self-training as being the best way to improve the student's learning apprenticeship. With this goal in mind, they sought constantly to establish a balance between the initiative/autonomy of teachers and the expertise available outside the school.

31. *Valorization of teachers by making them responsible, establishment of material and financial resources and strengthening of capacity among the supervisory corps in order to provide non-directive guidance to teachers.* The PPSE is based on evidence from around the world that top-down programs of continuing education are ineffective and therefore classroom teachers must be given responsibility but also given close supervision to help bring about the changes that are so difficult for them to make. This approach can be summarized as follows: 1) Betting on teachers responsibility for practice in the classroom to improve their teaching and student learning; 2) providing modest material and financial resources to encourage working conditions that favor innovation and the participation of students in their own education; 3) strengthening of capacity among the supervisory personnel and staff in local institutions in order to offer non-directive assistance to teachers.

32. The PPSE gives increasing responsibility to teachers for their own professional development. They decide what they want to do in their projects, which gives legitimacy to the Program and creates a sense of engagement on the part of the teachers. Making teachers accountable is consistent with a larger perspective in which teachers participate as active players in their own professional development instead of being just passive receptacles for the knowledge of experts who are often far-removed from the classroom.

There is abundant literature showing the central role of teachers in the process of implementing educational change and new practices (cf. Craig, Kraft & Plessis, 1998; Cormier & Gagnon, 1986); Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 1982; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; McLaughlin, 1991; Rust & Dalin, 1990; Smorodin, 1984). As Cormier and Gagnon (1986) emphasize, change is not a matter of devaluing the personal initiatives and experiences of the teacher; rather it seeks to move them towards greater planning and

consultation so they can play a decision-making role and take charge of their own professional development. Giving teachers a say in determining the “what” and “how” of their continuing education requires more than just one questionnaire or interview. They must be able to express the needs and preferences which are the basis of decisions that others (hierarchical superiors) will take on their behalf. Rather, teachers must be allowed to take those decisions and initiate those actions that are the natural response to the needs they feel. (Colleta & Perkins, 1995).

Teachers in Guinea responded well to this call for taking responsibility for their own development. During the five years since the PPSE program began, more than 15,000 teachers have made nearly 3000 project proposals having to do with the different subjects taught in elementary school.

33. *From the beginning, a program designed to be generalized.* From the start it was clear that the Guinean authorities wanted a national continuing education program for primary teachers. Thus the program was conceived with this in mind, and the pilot project took account of the following questions:

- What is the best means to select schools and participants for a program of national scale?
- What is the best way to offer teachers the guidance and help necessary in such a program?
- Are there enough staff with the skills and willingness necessary to offer such assistance and, if yes, how should they be chosen?
- What is the best way to manage the financial resources for such a program?
- How much time can teachers devote to the Program after the experimental phase and how motivated will they be to prevent its becoming a boring routine as new regions are added?
- How can problems of transportation, communication and national-scale logistical matters be resolved?
- How best can educational authorities be involved on a daily basis in a program of national outreach?

34. Obviously, not all these questions have been answered. Nevertheless, the fact that they were taken into consideration at the time of the PPSE’s inception means that certain difficulties could be anticipated and appropriate responses found.

35. *Using existing staff in the Ministry to serve in various capacities within the Program.* The ability of PPSE to mobilize the whole educational system stems from the fact that it relied on existing staff at all levels of the Ministry of Primary education and civic education. It has therefore mobilized an impressive number of actors.

For the record, in addition to the 15,495 teachers who participated through the grants competition and the 6000 among them who helped implements the funded projects between 1996 and 2001 (i.e. 89% and 35% of the entire teaching corps), the PPSE mobilized:

- some 300 facilitators and evaluation supervisors
- the first 46 educational managers at prefectural, town, and regional levels, including Conakry, through their presidency of prefectural and regional juries;

- more than 200 other members of juries, including retired teachers, members of the APEAE, and members of other development sectors such as social affairs, health, rural development.
- staff responsible for coordinating the Program at regional level, mostly Heads of the Elementary Education Section of the regional inspectorate;
- a dozen members of the national headquarters responsible for national coordination of the Program and for supporting various kinds of training needed.

In addition to all these people one should count the local communities who brought their multifaceted support to the education renewal units engaged in implementing the projects.

36. This mobilization of staff and teachers helped integrate the program into regular school activities, even if more work still remains to be done. It also demonstrated that it is possible to support and operate a national program like the PPSE, despite limited resources.

37. *The effects of implementing a project go well beyond the teachers and supervisors.* The positive impact of PPSE has been felt everywhere, from the smallest village and most remote classroom to the individual student who is its ultimate beneficiary. All the basic actors, communities included, understood this from the beginning. As an illustration we might mention the case of the community that asked that all its teachers be replaced because they had not succeeded in drawing up a “bankable” project proposal.

38. The jury system also proved effective in getting educational administrators and managers at every level involved in the Program. Thus the 8 regional inspectorates and 38 prefectural offices that manage primary and secondary school throughout the country were able to work with 286 other personnel assigned to the juries by reading, evaluating and commenting on each project proposal. One should also mention the presence on juries of staff from other sectors such as social affairs, health and rural development. They all received special training, which served also as an opportunity to discuss the problems of elementary education in general as seen by the teachers.

39. At the beginning no one knew if the juries would take their work seriously or not. But all doubts were dispelled by the jury in the test region of Labe. They worked very hard for an entire month to choose the first 54 projects to be awarded grants, and they were scrupulous about applying the rules and grid supplied by the program directors.

40. *Installation of an integrated training system for all participants in the program and the creation of a corps of training supervisors as implementation progressed.* It may seem obvious that all participants would need training. But the literature shows that lack of preparation and communication with the participants is still a major cause of failure when implementing innovative approaches in education. Any kind of change, even when done willingly, means a break and disruption for both the beneficiaries and the accompanying actors. These disturbances are as profound as the changes in question are complex. Therefore beneficiaries and actors need to be prepared and to be informed about the nature of the changes and what awaits each and every one of them. Training and communication thus play a seminal role (Hall & Hord, 1984). Because implementing change is a process of continual enlightenment, the price for considering training and communication as one-time actions needed only at the outset, is that participants are likely to drop out along the way. Therefore, to get an effective organization in place and also have staff ready to play their respective roles, the PPSE anticipated the need for a complete line of basic and continuing education for all categories of personnel. (See description of these activities in annex II). Albeit indirectly, these activities contributed to supporting the program’s organization and provided a means of disseminating information.



41. In this regard, making the training supervisor the key actor in most activities was crucial when it came time to extending the program. Inventing this new category of staff meant it was possible to satisfy the number of new staff needed, and it also turned out useful in many other ways. Thanks to this measure, personnel in the newly involved regions could be trained by people who had been there at the start and were personally aware of the challenges and problems inherent in implementing such a program. These trainers (about 40) were not only imbued with the program's mission, but also well informed about what it had become. Creating this new category also allowed official recognition of the merit attached to people who had succeeded in the program, thus giving them a special status and motivating others to aspire to the same.

42. *Creating a place where staff and teachers could share the results of their work with other educators.* At the end of each project year, the regional coordinators organized regional dissemination workshops. Here, each winning project had a chance to present its results and, by linking the different actors with partners in the field, to ensure that PPSE had a national impact. The national dissemination workshops, of which the first took place in September 2000, play an identical role.

43. *Exceptional importance accorded to making evaluation an integral part of the program.* Even without asking a third party to conduct the evaluation, it is no exaggeration to say that the PPSE made a greater effort with regard to evaluation than any similar project that we know of. Besides the Teaching teams' obligation to design and implement an evaluation component in their project, PPSE uses some 106 evaluators chosen among the middle level personnel from the Ministry of Pre-university Education who are put at the partial disposition of the program. Each of these staff is expected to allocate 50 days of work to the program each year. This represents the equivalent of full-time work for 25 people/year (namely, 106 evaluators x 50 days/yr. divided by 220 days), without counting their participation in various seminars and training workshops. Naturally, none of this included the intensive effort that teachers themselves devote to assessing their projects. The evaluators make 3 visits a year to each grant-supported project (one at the beginning, one to measure progress made, and one to evaluate impact). The evaluation is external to the teaching teams, but inside the program. The main purpose is not only to help teachers improve and disseminate the results of their projects, but also to develop and/or strengthen the ability of departmental staff to evaluate projects, evaluate teaching and evaluate learning.

44. *Using competition to ensure impartiality and the full attention of school authorities.* No country is able to implement effectively a complex national program of support for all classroom teachers at the same time. Thus it was absolutely necessary to find some way of selecting a relatively small number of schools and teachers to begin with. The method had to meet the following criteria: 1) involve a small enough number of participants for the program to be manageable within the limits of its financial, logistical and human resources; 2) ensure that participants would be sufficiently motivated; and thus 3) improve their chances of success from the beginning of the program. Competition is only one means among many. Certainly it can be controversial, with supporters and detractors. But for the designers and managers of PPSE it seemed the most impartial means of maintaining the program which also involved limited participation to teachers and schools that demonstrated they were ready and determined to engage in the process, and to offer a certain guarantee that projects selected for grants would attain a minimum level of quality in terms of outcomes.

45. Candidates' interest was aroused by the impartial nature of the competitive process. The jury system proved effective in engaging the principal educational administrators at prefectoral and regional levels in periodic discussions about the various strategies possible for improving the quality of elementary education. Even so, the

competitive aspect proved to be a double-edged sword. It was used to ensure that only the most promising projects would receive grants and also to keep the program manageable on a national scale. Unfortunately, competition also implies that some candidates will be unhappy. Over the years, special measures have been instituted to encourage those teaching units that have failed several times in the competition, especially those in rural areas.

46. *Instituting partnerships based on mutual respect and shared responsibilities for developing the program.* One of the fundamental characteristics of PPSE is the positive response it has received from participants at all levels. While founded on the principle that teachers are themselves capable of training themselves, the program did not underestimate the contribution of other actors. All categories of personnel demonstrated their capacity to bring something specific and necessary to the success of the program. The various supervisors, for instance, answered the teachers' needs for guidance and help in drawing up and implementing projects. The regional offices provided a place for the selection, follow-up and dissemination of results as a way of integrating the program into the existing duties of inspectorates and prefectural offices. The national team, for its part, ensured that regional offices had the resources they needed, that policies and program implementation addressed the various problems encountered and that results were communicated to all those who needed to know of them. The international consultants worked alongside the members of the national team at all these levels so as to be aware of the program's advancement and be able to respond to needs and problems as they emerged.

47. This shared responsibility requires the active participation of all actors in the program, for it is meant to be decentralized and to favor grassroots initiatives to improve the teaching-learning apprenticeship. At the same time it receives support from other levels each time there is such a need. To keep such a balanced system functioning under the difficult conditions of a country lacking resources, the program's leaders invoked a spirit of sacrifice among all participants, including the international consultant.

48. No single element has an outstanding role under such a cooperative system. Thus it was out of the question that the international consultants impose their point of view or their solutions to problems encountered. They did not arrive with a set plan all ready to be executed. Rather they contributed to building the program gradually with Guinean personnel from a shared understanding of principles and characteristics of effective continuing education for teachers. Of course, since 1994 there have been discussions that wandered far afield, and moments of tension, but differences were always resolved and they tended to motivate the actors still more.

49. It was thanks to a contract with the State University of Michigan that the Ministry was able to make a team of five consultants available, all from different countries (including three Africans) to work with the actors at different levels. The consultants contributed and participated in the kickoff of all the major activities of PPSE (See Annex II), but always by sharing planning and leadership tasks with their Guinean colleagues. Later, after testing and the initial revision, responsibility for leading was increasingly transferred to local staff. One a year an activities calendar was planned which defined the role of consultants for the year to come.

50. It is important to recognize that it was not the consultant's role to fight for certain teaching reforms, nor to develop teaching materials, and even less to substitute for Guineans in choosing problems and strategies or to replace them as resource persons. Rather they were there as facilitators giving organizational support to the principle of teachers' self-education. In this way the team of consultants, out of respect for the

impressive capacities of Guineans themselves, played an important role in the life of the Program yet did not occupy a central position.

51. *Intangible engagements by different partners to advance the Program.* What has been described above may be useful, but is in no way sufficient for describing the success of the Small Grants Program. Participants at all levels brought to PPSE a whole set of intangible engagements, including beliefs, attitudes and judgments that allow this ambitious project to function as intended and to surmount a number of obstacles. It also permitted a more successful extension than anticipated.

52. In any case, there are many reasons to believe the program owes much to Guinean staff members and to the following:

- A conviction that teachers can assume greater responsibility for themselves
- Belief in the importance of the enterprise and the program's worth
- Commitment to do the needed work, even when promised resources were not available, when there were other jobs to do or many personnel problems to resolve
- Willingness to select supervisory staff on the basis of objective judgments about their competence and credibility;
- An expressed willingness to extend the program throughout the country, even at the risk of losing some gains
- Confidence that by opening the program to others they will be capable of achieving what they could not before
- Willingness to live year after year with the feeling that one is never satisfied with the results (unless one renounces further progress).

## 8. DIFFICULTIES, DILEMMAS AND CONSTRAINTS

53. The gains outlined above should not obscure the difficulties inherent in managing anything, and especially education. In terms of implementing the Program for Small Grants to Schools, we would mention the following:

54. *How to approach the unresolved problem of being unable to access the resources made available by the program and the logistical and financial obstacles yet to be overcome?* These were the problems encountered:

- Certain education renewal units (CRE) did not receive any grants even after making several proposals. Such is the consequence of having instituted a competitive system from the outset of the program;
- Teachers belonging to CREs whose proposals are selected for funding may get transferred elsewhere;
- Insufficient transportation for supervisors who, in fulfilling their obligations, are often required to travel long distances;
- Late transfers of funds into the regional coordination accounts, which in turn means scheduled implementation dates have to be changed;
- Teachers in some very isolated schools have no contact with the program.

55. *To the extent that the facilitators provide the essential support mechanism for teachers, it is their number and availability that determined the rate at which the program could be extended.* Given the importance of the facilitators, their availability and competence become major elements in any discussion about being able to extend the program. Thus the planning and generalizing goals were respected and even surpassed in those regions where it was possible to choose competent and committed facilitators. In Conakry City, however, a deficit of facilitators meant the program's extension plans had to slow down.

56. *The fact that it is not possible to resolve once and for all the tension between teacher autonomy, on the one hand, and close supervision by experts from outside the school on the other.* Besides the sensitivity/training workshops for teachers and those for starting-up/management/evaluation, the program foresaw three kinds of supervision to help teachers implement their projects: follow-up visits from facilitators, services offered by resource people, and assessment visitors by the evaluation supervisors. The timing and length of these visits caused much discussion, and certain adjustments were proposed. There were several reasons why visits during project implementation have needed limiting: 1) visits were a major expense for the PPSE; 2) the facilitators, evaluators and resource people had trouble supervising all the units in their charge because of their many other tasks and responsibilities outside the program; 3) finally, it was thought desirable to have the units function autonomously as much as possible. Nevertheless, the problems encountered thus far (especially the difficulty teachers having in collecting the necessary evaluation data) would argue against any drastic reductions. Thus it is hard to know whether teachers are suffering from too little or too much guidance and help.

57. *Although the program has succeeded in instituting a decentralized system which gives considerable financial autonomy to regional coordinators and to teaching teams, it is still encountering some obstacles in the process.* It was essential for regional autonomy to establish regional accounts and a means of advancing funds that would allow planned activities to go ahead. However, it was difficult for the system to operate without delays in making advance payments. Another text for the program during its first year and – and

in subsequent years in other regions added after the test phase – was its capacity to deliver as promptly as possible the material resources requested by the winning projects. Although the program succeeded in putting substantial resources at the disposal of teachers without too much delay, this aspect of the program threw light on some of the hard realities of decentralization: even though their proposals had been examined by prefectural and regional juries, at the end of the day teachers don't always ask for what the authorities think is important or what is easy to find in the marketplace. Honoring these requests thus became a significant measure of how committed the PPSE was to giving teachers more responsibility and control over their own professional development.

## 9. LOOKING AHEAD

58. The PPSE is a process of continuous improvement. That means one can never be satisfied with what has already been accomplished. It means using the impressive capacity already developed at all levels by the Program to push further in improving the quality of elementary education. That is why our expectations focus on a multi-pronged support to educational renewal in schools, an ambitious program that is part of the 10-year Education For All program to be implemented in 2002. The specific goals of the new program of support to educational renewal in primary schools are:

- To strengthen the capacity of primary school teachers to identify and analyze pedagogical problems linked to their practices in the classroom, to design and conduct educational renewal projects in order to resolve the problems identified and thereby to improve the quality of students' learning experience.
- To allow teachers and their supervisors to innovate in the field by designing and implementing action-oriented research projects devoted to educational practice;
- To gradually institute a culture and practice of management autonomy in the primary schools.
- To turn the pedagogical delegation of the sub-prefecture (DPSP) into a node for integrating and coordinating initiatives for educational renewal at the base;
- To strengthen the human resources coming out of PPSE so that their capacity is maximized, on the one hand, and their gains are made sustainable, on the other.

59. Finally, the PPSE – a response to the problem of continuing education for elementary school teachers – can be considered the foundation of a general support framework for initiatives by local actors (teachers and communities) for improving the quality of education. Also, given the realities in the field, the program designers are thinking about whether to mount a National coordination unit for action on behalf of quality in education.

## 10. CONCLUSION

60. In less than six years, the PPSE has taken off on a scale achieved by few training programs in Guinea or elsewhere. Many people have devoted enormous effort and made undeniable sacrifices. One can say that:

- Six years of implementation (from 1995-96 to 2000-2001) have allowed the PPSE to train a large number of pedagogical supervisors (about 300) capable of leading training activities at school level and of supporting teachers in their daily work.
- Thanks to PPSE the quasi-totality of primary school teachers (more than 15,000) have been sensitized to educational renewal and initiated in how to design pedagogical projects. More than half of these teachers have participated in writing final project proposals for the renewal of education (PRE). More than 6000 of them, as members of some 12000 educational renewal units, have had a chance to participate in implementing a renewal project between 1996-97 and 2000-2001. PPSE's material and pedagogical support has thus permitted teachers to use the act of teaching as the ultimate means of perfecting their skills.

61. This exceptional exercise shows the interest of the teaching teams and their great motivation in the face of a demanding program. Writing project proposals seems to be useful to teachers in terms of gaining knowledge and competency, on the one hand, and in terms of gaining team experience on the other. The teachers were able to strengthen their professional skills in general, and in particular their ability to analyze and synthesize ideas by means of conceiving and implementing a pedagogical project. From now on, we can hope that thinking analytically will become a habit for teachers when they reflect on problems and priorities, about needed resources, about activities they might undertake and about evaluating data they are able to collect – rather than being content to accept what others tell them to do or say.

62. The projects for educational renewal contain opportunities for teachers to use new methods and technique in class, to address more relevant subjects and to make learning easier for students. For example, because of the PPSE changes were allowed in how teachers perceive of reading in primary school. Teachers involved in the program agree to put more emphasis on reading comprehension than on the mechanical mastery of reading. This gain is especially important when realizing that education in Guinea is delivered in French, which is not the children's mother tongue.

63. In addition, the PPSE helps teachers to buy sufficient numbers of textbooks and teaching materials, reference works and educational supplies to meet their project needs. It also budgets for the services of outside resource people who can lead continuing education activities that they themselves have identified and programmed. They choose their own group leaders to manage the projects, especially the material and financial resources put at their disposition.

64. The fact that involved teachers agree to be accountable for their pupils' educational performance and their own development is a tremendous step forward. Finally, given that nearly all the teachers participating in the program had no prior experience in planning projects, the teachers thus engaged had to master even better than before the idea of designing and evaluating projects.

65. In the light of what was said before, we can say that the PPSE is a fine example of partnership between the Ministry of Education, its decentralized institutions and classroom teachers. It is an adequate way of reaching a large number of teachers at a time and of having a direct effect on their general level of performance. But trying to cover a

large number of teachers is constraining from the point of view of implementing a complex support system with decentralized management and the involvement of a large number of motivated and competent people. Nevertheless, the Program demonstrates that teachers have a great many ideas and are strongly motivated and that with a little creativity and imagination it is possible to discover and use the many individual capacities possessed by everyone in education. The program confirms that if teachers internalize the responsibility for their educational training, they are able to make a positive and immediate impact at the classroom level.

66. Although far from being the only factor contributing to the development of education in Guinea, the PPSE can take credit, by its philosophy and approach, for creating a definite craze among the actors in the field and the community partners. Each and every one has worked without stinting to achieve these results.



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## **Annex 1. Principal implementation stages of PPSE**

### **1. Preparatory phase (1993-1995)**

The preparatory phase extended from 1993 to 1995. It was a period of intensive activity which accomplished a number of important tasks:

- The basic documents for the program were drawn up and the guide to writing proposals for the Project for the Renewal of Education (PRE) was pre-tested. The documents were based on interviews and exchanges with actors in the field and in accordance with the program philosophy.
- School authorities in the test region were initiated. Frank and open discussions during the various sessions helped participants anticipate what benefits might come from the PPSE and thus to prepare for it better.
- The national and local arms of the PPSE (juries, supervisors, coordination units) were officially consecrated. Staff appointments to different management posts were recorded in public deeds. This act was all the more important in that it ensured staff already in place in the educational system would be available to the Program.

### **2. Experimental phase (1995-1997)**

It is important to point out that building and implementing PPSE were part of the same process. In no way was PPSE a turn-key operation. The actors had to test ideas, hypotheses, procedures and support mechanisms for enabling teachers to take charge of their own continuing education – training which was tied to improving the quality of learning of their pupils. They had to find a balance (or a happy marriage) between the teacher's autonomy/initiative and expertise available from outside the school. Thus each phase was marked by cautious experimentation accompanied by serious reflection.

The choice of pilot test areas needed for the Program's gradual extension, was consistent with the goals to be achieved. The region of Middle Guinea was chosen as a test area for the following reasons:

- Low enrollment rates
- Its rural nature and fair distance from the capitol
- Easy access despite the distance

During the experimental phase there were two competitions for school grants, two years of funded implementation of projects and one regional seminar for disseminating results. The organization and commitment and enthusiasm of the actors at all levels was such that during the first of implementation the Program had to support 54 projects instead of the 21 originally foreseen.

From the beginning, autonomy was granted to each category of project managers, with the idea of making them more dynamic. Field visits by national headquarters staff were used to give the support necessary to help local units assume this responsibility. The autonomy measures allowed the regional coordinator of the pilot region to pre-select the supervisors and manage all stages from the test announcement and grading of papers to the announcement of results. The first test was given to 174 candidates. Through his rigor and impartiality the Regional Coordinator of Labe demonstrated he was capable of taking responsibility, thus paving the way for the program's future. A total of 24 supervisors

spread over 10 prefectures in the pilot region were tested and retained, a number proportional to the number of educational renewal units (CRE) needing to be supervised.

### **3. Generalizing the Program (1997-2001)**

The generalization phase followed the guidelines contained in the Instruction Manual that made involvement of other regions conditions upon the success of the experimental phase and recommended progressive expansion. As early as 1996, and in anticipation of this extension, each region (Boke, Faranah, Kankan and Kindia) was asked to send two participants to an initiation and PPSE management session. The current regional coordinators were selected from among the participants on the basis of their contributions to the workshop and by consensus of the workshop leaders.

The whole matter of generalizing the program was discussed during the closing workshop held in January 1997. It was approached from every possible angle during these intense and productive debates, but with special emphasis on the distribution of projects among the different regions and over the five-year period between 1996 and 2001.

## **Annex 2. Training sessions organized by the small grants program (PPSE)**

The general training plan of the small grants program called for sessions that would make an impact because of their intensity, rigor, and especially their expected results. They were addressed to all the actors in the program, from the teachers and members of the education renewal units to the president of the regional jury. Thus the PPSE is a program of continuing education. The following sessions were part of its experimental phase and were also renewed as necessary:

### **1. Teacher training/awareness workshops**

This three-day workshop, offered at the beginning of each new round of the small grants competition, is for teachers and supervisors. The sensitivity workshops are the teacher's first real contact with the program and help them get familiar with the basic PPSE philosophy and documents. This is one of the partnerships sought after. The teachers, having studied all the documentation are guided by their supervisors to begin designing a project which they can either pursue in their CRE unit or abandon for something else.

### **2. Introductory workshop for new supervisors**

Its purpose is to help future supervisors understand the philosophy of PPSE and the need for renewal projects. It also helps them acquire the theoretical and practical skills and aptitudes needed to fulfill their future roles as supervisors (facilitators, evaluators, trainers). The work consists of role playing and simulated exercises in proposal writing and supervision. These workshops are run by the National Group for Training Support (FNAF) experienced coordinators, training supervisors and international consultants.

### **3. Training workshop for jury members**

These workshops serve to raise awareness and introduce the prefectural and regional jury members to their tasks while familiarizing them with PPSE documents and procedures (especially the Guide to writing grant proposal, the Explanatory Notes and the Grid for Assessing projects). They offer essential tools for analyzing projects and for learning how to note and give feedback on the draft and final project proposals. Practical evaluation exercises of real or simulated proposals are scheduled. The workshops are led by the National Group for Training Support, experienced regional coordinators, training supervisors and international consultants (when necessary).

### **4. Training activities for new regional coordinators**

These activities continue the awareness training of new coordinators, help them get to know the basic documents and PPSE procedures better and initiate them in their future roles of planning, managing, supervising and monitoring. Work includes visits/study of a Education Renewal unit (CRE) to see how it functions and is supervised. Leadership is provided by experienced regional coordinators, training supervisors, the National Group for Training Support, and international consultants (as needed).

## **5. Complementary and continuing education for jury members**

Extra or complementary training is foreseen any time that a jury member lacks the requisite knowledge or skills. Practical exercises and trial evaluations of project proposals are on the program. Instruction is provided by the National Group for support of Training (GNAF), regional coordinators and training supervisors.

## **6. Continuing education sessions for the supervisory team**

Training sessions for each category of actor have been instituted to ensure the permanent qualification of the supervisory team. These sessions were originally called “Monthly Meetings for Continuing Education of Supervisors” but a Meetings for Continuing Education (RTFC)” They make it possible to measure progress after each phase and to allow actors at every management level to improve their skills and knowledge. The occasion also provides a chance to discuss some pedagogical, professional or academic topic of interest that the supervisor then agrees to present at the plenary session. Similar agendas and goals are applied to meetings of the evaluation supervisors in the framework of evaluating project implementation.

## **7. Workshops on getting started/management/evaluation**

The purpose of this workshop is to train the different categories of participants in project evaluation methods so they can assess the impact of projects on the education and learning of the pupils. They are also an occasion for participants to learn about PPSE funding and the accompanying financial management documents. Using exercises, members of the education renewal units examine how various ledgers are kept and what supporting documentation is needed to ensure a successful project launching. These sessions are intended for the grant winners who will soon have to get their projects going.

## **8. Regional Dissemination Seminars (SARD)**

With a reputation for give-and-take the Regional Dissemination Seminar includes the presidents of the former grant winning project units, the presidents of units which are preparing to implement projects, facilitators and evaluators, members of the technical committees and the various educational partners. As its name suggests, the SARD exists to disseminate the results of projects already carried but it also contributes effectively to the education of everyone. There is common agreement about the serious nature of the renewal exercise and the value of the results obtained, as the number of presentations in plenary, the technical reports and manuals produced give ample evidence. At the same time the seminar offers proof that the teachers are aware of the need for rigor in evaluating the projects and testifies to the achievements of teachers and pupils alike.