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Country Case Study Mauritania

**An Approach to Improving Educational Quality
in a Reform Context**

Ministry of National Education

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
PY	Primary Year
SY	Secondary Year
ADB	African Development Bank
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
BED	Basic Education Department
PCD	Planning and Cooperation Department
ETPD	Education-Training Projects Department
RDBE	Regional Department of Basic Education
TTI	Teacher Training Institute
EFA	Education For All
IDA	International Development Association
DIBE	Départemental Inspectorate for Basic Education
NPI	National Pedagogical Institute
EERI	Educational Economics Research Institute
MED	Ministry of the Economy and Development
MNE	Ministry of National Education
WFP	World Food Programme
PCAES	Programme for the Comparative Analysis of Educational Systems
NPDES	National Programme for the Development of the Educational Sector
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
RT	Reference Terms
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

1. SUMMARY

1. As part of the activities that the ADEA carries out in order to improve the quality of basic education, it has set up a group to conduct a study entitled: *The Challenge of Learning: Improving Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*.
2. One participant in this exercise is Mauritania, which recently acquired experience in developing an approach to improve the quality of education in a “reform context”. This approach is incorporated in the National Programme for the Development of the Educational Sector (NPDES), which covers the period 2001 – 2010.
3. Preparations for the NPDES were initiated in the year 2000, in a situation where education was one of the main concerns of both the international community and Mauritania’s governing authorities.
4. **The preparations for this decade-long educational programme with regard to methodology were *Participatory, Comprehensive, Iterative, Multi-sectoral and Multi-partner*. It was part of an internal regulatory process that was characterized by the establishment of various bodies, each of which is in charge of monitoring preparations. Several committees were thus set up, in particular an inter-ministerial committee chaired by the Prime Minister that included all the ministers concerned with educational activity.**
5. Implementing the programme required setting up bodies to deal with the strategic guidance, coordination and management of the activities of the programme’s different components. These bodies oversee the sectoral character of the programme as well as the allocation of responsibilities between the different entities involved in its implementation. For instance, a programme coordination committee composed of the central and regional directors as well as representatives of other departments involved in implementation was set up and is responsible for implementation and the achievement of the targets set. In addition to this committee, intermediary management and coordination bodies were set up to play a role in implementation. Other management tools were also planned to facilitate programme implementation (a manual of procedures and an implementation manual).
6. One major challenge that often faces the implementation of educational development programmes is that of sustainability. It is important in this regard that measures be envisaged to ensure the continuity of programmes beyond the initial period.
7. *In 2002, the government had already undertaken a vast programme aimed at promoting the spread of knowledge throughout Mauritanian society and the development of libraries in all the country’s moughataas (towns) in order to ensure that all citizens have access to reading. Within this framework, media campaigns aimed at involving the public in this initiative were organized and fundraising efforts were conducted through the media (telephone, theatre, artistic evenings, etc). It is also worth noting that the government allocated an annual budget to promote reading and knowledge. These initiatives should help achieve the objectives of the NPDES and help sustain its accomplishments by improving the knowledge of pupils’ parents, which should also have an impact on the fight against illiteracy.*
8. Undoubtedly one of the main conclusions that can be drawn from the preparation of a large-scale programme like the NPDES concerns the degree of involvement of the public authorities on behalf of education. The existence of a strong supportive policy was a valuable asset in the definition of the choices, the involvement of people and resources, and the timely approval of technical proposals. The team in charge

succeeded in maintaining this policy support from the beginning to the end of the exercise.

9. The NPDES can be said to constitute a contract through which everyone involved in educational activity solemnly undertakes to lift Mauritania's schools to new performance levels in accordance with the framework set by the most recent reform of the educational system.

10. Nevertheless, there are still major challenges ahead, and meeting them depends on the level of performance of the NPDES. How quickly can the problems that often characterize the management of educational policy be solved? This depends on the capacity of the educational system to generalize the accomplishments achieved by the NPDES in improving basic educational quality and making them sustainable. These are the challenges that face everyone involved in education at this decisive turning point for the future of Mauritania's schools.

2. INTRODUCTION

11. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) is working actively to promote education for all in accordance with the commitments made by the international community at Jomtien (Thailand) in 1990 and renewed at Dakar (Senegal) in 2000. As part of the activities that the ADEA carries out in this regard, it has set up a group to conduct a study entitled: *The Challenge of Learning: Improving Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*. The methodology adopted aims at ensuring that experiences in improving the quality of basic education is exchanged between the countries in the sub-region in order to identify successful strategies in this field so that they can be popularized and sustained.

12. Mauritania, which places the highest priority on developing universal high-quality basic education, was selected to take part in this exercise based on the value of the experience it recently acquired in developing “an approach to improving educational quality in a reform context”. This approach is incorporated in the National Programme for the Development of the Educational Sector (NPDES) covering the period 2001 – 2010.

13. This case study is interesting first of all from a methodological viewpoint, as the impact of the programme on quality indicators cannot be measured in a significant way at this stage of implementation. The point is to examine the process of developing a strategy to improve educational quality in its different phases. It is also worth examining how the methodology used succeeded in involving everyone concerned with education in Mauritania, from the beginning to the end of the process, including educators, decision-makers, civil society, development partners, etc. It will also be shown how this process of broad consultation promoted a widespread understanding of both the positive and negative points of the analysis right from the start.

14. It will then become clear how easy or even natural it became to work together to develop a consensus-based approach to identify the responses that were most relevant to the obstacles in the way of achieving the new reform’s goals and ambitions. In addition to these achievements, and perhaps because of them, the most remarkable result of this participatory approach was the rapid mobilization of the funding needed to implement the programme, whose consistency and relevance won support from both national and external funding sources. Thanks to an effective methodology, educational quality could thus be promoted under the best auspices.

15. This experience and the lessons that can be drawn from it will be broken down into four main sections, which will be preceded by a brief presentation of Mauritania and its educational system:

- The general context
- The process of preparing the NPDES
- The process of implementing the NPDES
- The lessons learned and conclusions.

3. GENERAL PRESENTATION

3.1. Brief presentation of Mauritania

16. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania covers an area of 1, 030, 000 sq. km extending into the Western Sahara, and, except for the southern portion, is mainly desert. The population is estimated at 2, 500, 000 inhabitants and is growing at an annual rate of 2.6%. The people live to a great extent from agriculture and livestock breeding. The urban population makes up 52.4% of the total.

17. For a little more than a decade Mauritania has been involved in an ambitious reform programme, which has affected the political, economic and social life of the country.

18. The decentralization process begun in 1986 has led to the creation of 208 administrative communes that function on the principle of autonomy. In 1991, a pluralistic democracy was established, with the adoption of a constitution that guarantees basic liberties and the separation of the executive, legislative and judicial powers, and which established universal suffrage for the election of the President of the Republic and the representatives of the people to the National Assembly.

19. At the same time, a programme of economic reform begun in 1992 has helped to improve the financial situation of the government and the main state-owned corporations, as well as to stabilize the macro-economic situation, liberalize markets and prices, promote the growth of the private sector, improve the state of the infrastructure and refocus the government on its core tasks of the regulation and allocation of resources and the development of basic social services.

20. These policies and reforms have helped Mauritania to make considerable economic progress. For instance, the average annual growth rate was 4.4% during the last decade, while inflation was held to an average annual rate of 6. 2% over the same period, and a budget deficit of 9. 8% of GDP in 1993 was transformed into a surplus of 1.5% in 1998. Likewise, the current account deficit (excluding official transfers) was brought down from 28. 9% of GDP in 1993 to 11. 2% in 1998.

21. In 1986, the government set up a large-scale programme of public assistance to help the disadvantaged, which included the school enrolment of children, literacy programmes for adults, and improving access to basic healthcare and drinking water.

3.2. Presentation of Mauritania's educational system

22. the different levels composing the educational system can be presented as follows:

- **Basic Education (BE):** the purpose of this level of education is to provide a basic education to all children aged 6 and over in primary schools for a duration of 6 years, concluding in a primary studies certificate (“CEP”).
- **General Secondary Education (GSE):** this educational level is broken down into two cycles:
 - The purpose for the first cycle is to consolidate basic education and to prepare the pupil either for continuing studies in one of the branches of

second-cycle general or technical secondary education, or to be integrated into socio-economic life. This level takes in pupils from the 6th year of basic education who have been admitted after completing an entrance examination into general education middle schools (“CEG”) for three years under the transitional system and for four years under the reform system, and it concludes with the first cycle studies certificate (“BEPC”).

- The purpose of the second cycle is to prepare for higher education. This level admits pupils who have successfully completed the first cycle into general education high schools (“LEG”), based on counseling and in accordance with the available capacity, and concludes with the Baccalaureate diploma.
- **Technical and Vocational Training (“FTP”):** This level of education is aimed at preparing for employment or the pursuit of higher technical or vocational studies. It consists of:
 - Technical and vocational education admits graduates of the first and second cycle of general or technical secondary education through an entrance exam into two or three year courses that terminate with the vocational studies certificate (“BEP”) (two years after the CEGs), the Technician’s Certificate (“BT”) (two years after the 6th year of LCG), the Technical Baccalaureate (“Bac T”) (three years after the CEGs) and the Higher Technician’s certificate (“BTS”) (two years after the Bac or the BT). The reform ensures that those leaving basic education who do not have access to the CEGs are to a great extent accepted into the regional vocational education centers.
 - Vocational training that recruits adults of all ages, whether or not illiterate, and whether or not employed, to prepare them through initial or continuing training so as to give them access to a job that they can hold, or, if necessary, to convert their job skills.
- **Higher education (“E. Sup. ”):** The purpose of this level of education is preparation for a career. It accepts holders of Baccalaureate diplomas into universities and higher educational institutes and prepares them one of various higher education national diplomas in two or four year programmes.

23. Parallel to the system described above, the educational sector in Mauritania also includes a no-less significant age-old informal component represented by traditional schools known as “Mahdra”. These traditional schools provide an education based essentially on the Koran and the Hadith, as well as literature and sciences in Arabic. These types of schools and learning facilities are widespread throughout the country and are valued by a large part of the population, and contribute actively in propagating knowledge. There is no reliable data about the situation of the sector, in particular enrolment figures, the number of institutions or their distribution around the country.

4. GENERAL CONTEXT OF THE REFORM

24. Preparation of the NPDES began in 2000 in a situation where education was a key preoccupation of the international community as well as the public authorities in Mauritania. Many different factors in this situation had a great impact on building awareness among the various actors with regard to identifying promising and effective strategies to reinvigorate the educational system. The following factors were especially noteworthy:

4.1. Education for All (EFA)

25. The goal of universal schooling set out by the international community in 1990 at Jomtien (Thailand) was re-evaluated when the Dakar Forum was held in April 2000. The result of the evaluation made then was that, despite some quantitative progress, the problem of quality had even been exacerbated and that generally the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa was of even greater concern.

26. On this occasion, the international community, as represented by politicians, funding organizations and representatives of civil society, reaffirmed its commitment to quality education for all. It recommended that action programmes be drawn up and it made a commitment that any country capable of presenting a coherent, credible programme to reform and improve its educational system would not be handicapped by a lack of financial resources.

27. Mauritania was represented at this forum and, on the one hand, recognized its own situation with respect to the inadequacies of quality education, while on the other hand it was heartened by the commitment of the international community at the very time that an ambitious reform of Mauritania's educational system had just been decided.

4.2. The HIPC initiative

28. In March 1999, Mauritania was declared eligible for the HIPC initiative that had been decided in 1998 at the Cologne summit. This meant that it benefited from an immediate reduction in its debt. According to the terms of the debt reduction agreement, the resulting benefits should be channeled in priority to benefit social services. Less constricting trade-offs for education now became possible, which would enable the sector to benefit from substantial additional resources, thus enhancing the possibility of success in implementing its programmes.

29. **Education is at the heart of the country's strategy to reduce poverty.** Indeed, Mauritania's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for the 2001 – 2015 period was finalized in January 2001. Its objectives for the year 2015 accord with the international Millennium development goals. The strategy underlying the PRSP is based on four major points: (i) accelerating economic growth, (ii) focusing its activity in the economic sphere among poor people, (iii) developing human resources, and (iv) developing institutions and good governance. Education is concerned by the first three points; the strategy for the education sector is in line with that for poverty reduction and thus takes the following main forms:

- organizing the production of human capital to contribute to growth, on the one hand, by providing universal good-quality coverage at the basic level, which can be seen as an investment in human capital “that is ready for anything” to ensure productivity gains in the traditional sector (agriculture) and, on the other hand, by providing

technical and higher education that is consistent with economic demands and the market for skilled labor.

- to equip poor people who are excluded from more efficient economic channels with the minimum human capital needed to be incorporated into these channels and thus to contribute to economic growth and, at the individual level, to escaping the poverty trap.

4.3. Reform of the educational system

30. The 1999 reform is the fourth reform since independence. The previous reforms (1967, 1973, 1979) were concerned above all with adapting the system to the socio-cultural environment, and were influenced by passionate debates on the issue of languages. This trend reached a peak with the 1979 reform, which led to the creation of two distinct branches: one Arabic-speaking, the other French-speaking. The result was a lowering of the level in scientific disciplines and in second languages, particularly French, as shown in different evaluations (1989, 1990, 1998), as well as an increase in educational costs.

31. The aim of the 1999 reform was to build on the achievements of preceding reforms and to correct their weaknesses. It maintained the importance placed on Arabic and native culture, but committed the system to an approach of modernization and openness to put the school at the service of growth. The modifications introduced are part of a policy to improve quality:

- Unification of the system by the elimination of the linguistic branches created by the 1979 reform;
- Extension of the period of instruction in the first cycle of secondary education from 3 to 4 years;
- Strengthening science education by introducing physics and computer sciences in the first cycle of secondary education;
- Promoting the teaching of foreign languages (French, English).

32. The long-awaited innovations were greeted with enthusiasm by the entire society, which saw in them a possibility for rehabilitating the school system. The reform acted as a trigger, and by unifying the system it is building the foundations on which initiatives to improve education can arise.

4.4. A sectoral analysis

33. The sectoral study conducted in 2000 gave more detailed confirmation of the analysis already made in the course of preparing the reform. This study was conducted with a rigorous scientific approach by a multi-disciplined team and showed the full range of the sector's problems, in particular the obstacles and malfunctions that undermined the system's quality and its overall performance. The valuable information gathered challenged decision-makers to come up with the measures required to put a stop to the deterioration observed and to commit the system to improve quality.

34. In light of the above, it could be argued that preparation of the NPDES was undertaken in a particularly favorable context:

- Commitment of the international community on behalf of education;
- Debt reduction initiative permitting education to benefit in priority from the resources thus released;

- Adoption of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which placed education among the government's priorities over the coming 15 years;
- Implementation of a new educational system reform, which reflected a medium and long-term approach for the sector;
- Availability of reliable, up-to-date data on the sector, including the latest demographic information, with the publication of the results of the national population and housing census.

35. In addition to these factors, a demonstrated political determination also made for a more favorable context. This determination could be seen in the direct involvement of the highest governmental authorities, who did not miss an opportunity to publicly emphasize the role of education in the country's growth and social modernization.

36. This could also be seen in the cost and attention that was given to the development and implementation of the reform. An inter-ministerial committee chaired by the Prime Minister and including the Ministers of Education, Economics and Finance supervised the various phases of the reform. The same attention was given to the NPDES, which made it possible to overcome various obstacles and mobilize the funding required.

37. Finally, another non-negligible advantage was the existence of a solid group of national experts that worked together well and who could seize on any opportunity, thanks to their long experience in the sector, including in preparing educational projects, and their in-depth knowledge of the procedures of the different funding organizations and their scope of action.

5. THE PROCESS OF PREPARING THE NPDES

5.1. Why an NPDES?

38. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper constitutes the economic and social development plan for Mauritania for the 2000-2015 period. The new educational system reform approved in 1999 sets out the broad guidelines for education. The National Programme for the Development of the Educational Sector (NPDES) is one of the cornerstones of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and also concretizes guidelines for the new reform through strategies and action plans that flow from the results of the analysis of the educational system. It also constitutes a transition between the project approach and the sectoral approach, which will ensure greater consistency and continuity in the planning approach. This approach, which is more appropriate for educational policy, also has the advantage of developing synergies between the contributions of the various actors, by creating a single framework for the activity of the government and its partners within a long-term perspective.

39. The NPDES thus meets a large-scale challenge with regard to the goals set for the 2001-2010 period:

- Improving educational programmes and promoting the system's retention capacity;
- Strengthening the quality of teaching and learning;
- Rationalizing the management of resources;
- Consolidating the system management at every administrative level;
- Reducing disparities between genders, regions and zones;
- Making training commensurate with the aspirations of individuals and the needs of society and the economy.

5.2. How was the NPDES prepared?

40. The preparation of the NPDES was handled by technical and policy bodies based on a national approach that integrated all the ministerial departments involved and ensured the participation of everyone concerned. The various aspects of the methodology are described below.

41. In this respect, the institutional and methodological provisions were given particular attention, by officially forming ad-hoc bodies and defining the methodology that was to guide the work.

5.3. The preparatory bodies

5.3.1. Inter-ministerial committee

42. This committee was chaired by the Prime Minister and included all the ministries involved in the educational operation (Ministry of National Education, Ministry of the Civil Service, Labor, Youth and Sports, State Secretary for Literacy and Koranic Education, State Secretary for Women) and the ministries and departments concerned with the education sector (Cabinet Secretary of the President of the Republic, Minister Secretary-General of the Presidency, Special Adviser to the Presidency, Minister of the Interior, Minister of Finance, Minister of Economics and Development, and

Minister of Health and Social Services). This committee was set up in 1998 during the preparation of the educational sector reform and was given responsibility for approving educational policies and monitoring the implementation of the reform. In this regard, the Committee approved the 10-year strategy and the action programme, and it is kept regularly informed of the state of progress of the NPDES.

5.3.2. The sector validation committee

43. This committee consists of the Minister, the Secretary-General, and Central Advisers and Central. It is responsible for consolidating the work of the technical and coordination bodies and approves items that are to be submitted to the Inter-ministerial Committee, which meets weekly under the leadership of the Prime Minister. The committee:

- Ensures in particular the compliance of work with the general approach of the MNE and reform goals.
- Ensures that the recommended solutions comply with the government's general policy.

5.3.3. The coordination committee

44. This includes the MNE director of planning and coordination (since changed to the Director of Planning and Reform) and the MED Director of Education-Training Projects. It supervises the overall process of developing the programme.

45. In the course of its mission, the coordinating committee:

- prepares the schedule and sees that deadlines are met;
- draws up the RT for the thematic groups and monitors the progress of their work;
- oversees relations between the sector validation committee and the technical validation committee;
- anticipates problems and develops solutions;
- handles coordination with the other ministerial departments involved to ensure the overall programme is consistent;
- holds discussions with the technical ministerial departments (MED, finance);
- handles coordination with funding agencies.

5.3.4. The technical validation committee

46. This committee is composed of resource people who are members of the technical groups and who have experience in preparing the programmes based on an overall view of the sector. It is in charge of overseeing the reports of the thematic groups in coordination with the coordinating committee.

47. This process involves examining the content and formulation of ideas and their consistency with existing studies.

48. The report can be subject to several back-and-forths between the work group and the validation committee until it is clear and comprehensive and reflects the entire group's views.

5.3.5. The thematic groups

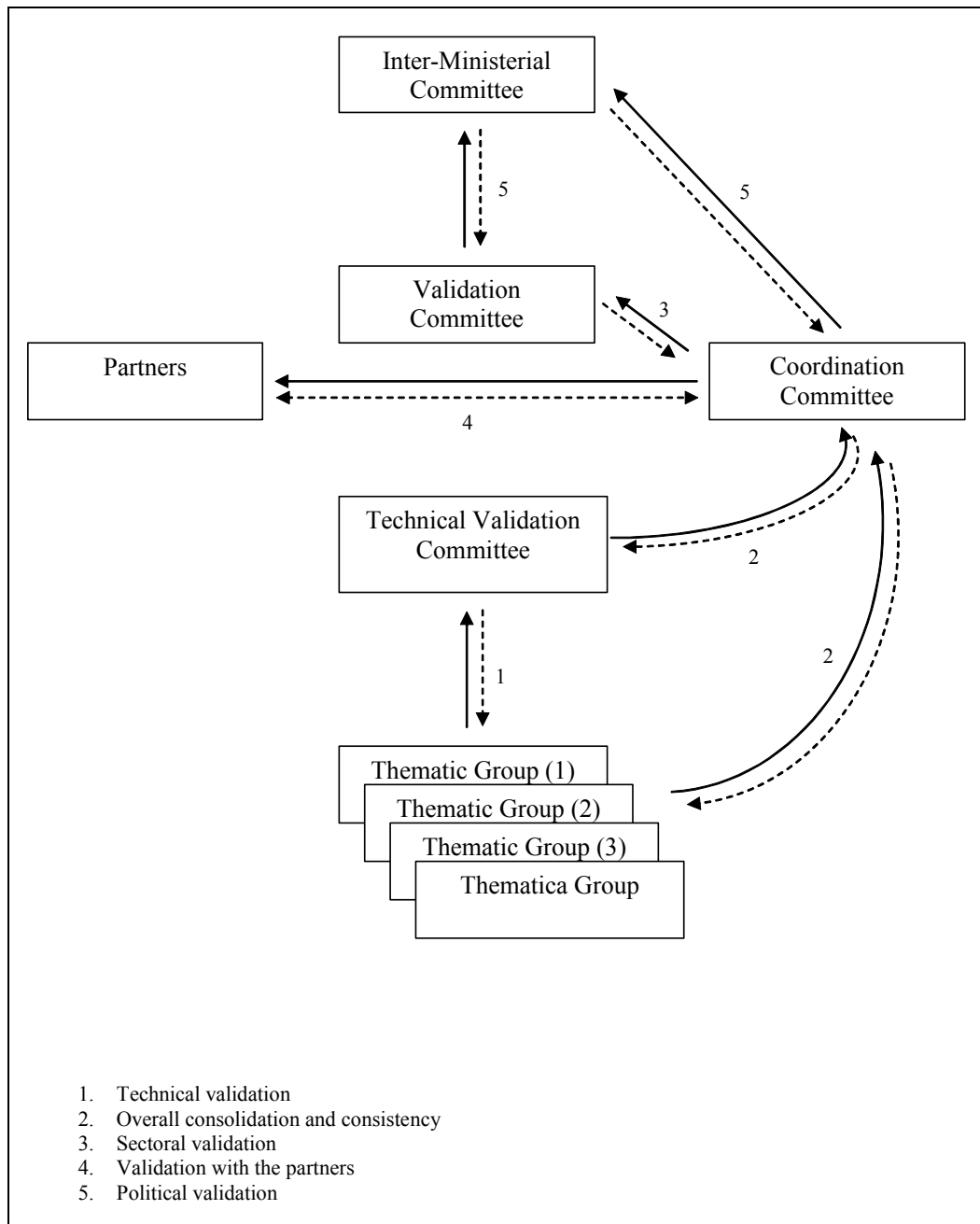
49. These are composed of representatives of the different ministerial bodies concerned and representatives of other partners, under the coordination of a high-ranking official. There are eight such groups, in order to cover the eight components of the programme:

- early childhood;
- basic education;
- secondary education;
- technical and vocational education;
- higher education;
- system management;
- literacy and Koranic education;
- school health.

50. These committees are responsible for preparing a report on each component. To this end, they have the greatest liberty of thought and action, so as to be free of any temptation to obscure or prettify the facts. The only demand made of these groups is objectivity. In this respect, the assessments suggested by the sector study are subjected to interpretation, which in turn leads to a proposal for an action strategy. The definitive report is summarized in four pages and is approved by the coordinating committee and the sector validation committee before submission to the Inter-ministerial Committee.

51. This approach makes it possible to share observations with decision-makers at the highest level, in particular concerning basic education and proposed solutions.

Figure 1 Institutional diagram of preparation for the NPDES



5.4. Methodological approach

52. The groups, which function using a methodological approach based on “observation/analysis/remedial proposals”, receive technical and methodological guidance as they draw up proposals for the policy-makers.

53. Nevertheless, because of a genuine political determination to improve the system in a lasting way, the policy-makers accept the reality of the situation and are thus prepared to consider suitable solutions, including with regard to the allocation of funds.

54. The methodological approach is characterized by a level of flexibility that ensures a high-quality comprehensive product, as well as its acceptance by different actors. The approach used for this purpose consists of:

55. **A participatory approach**, that is, involving all the actors that take part in the system (central and regional authorities, parent-teacher associations, civil society and development partners), which has enabled the groups' work to benefit from fruitful, frank discussions that have promoted a climate of trust among the various parties. This climate of trust has contributed to motivating the group members and ensuring their punctuality and respect for deadlines.

56. The goal sought was to produce a consensus-based strategy that had the support of all the actors and that as a consequence meant it was more likely to be comprehensive and taken on board.

57. **A comprehensive approach**, that is, a systemic approach that takes into account all problems related to educational quality as well as the links between different fields of teaching and the other aspects that could influence quality. This situation was decisive in defining the 10-year strategy in that it made it possible to understand that quality problems must not be considered in isolation from other problems in the sector. It also helped precisely to identify factors that were salient for significantly improving educational quality.

58. **An iterative approach**, which demands determination to produce a quality strategy that wins the approval of the relevant authorities. This involves circulating information between the various committees so that each party has a chance to make comments and suggestions. To this end, documents frequently go back and forth between the thematic groups and the technical and sector validation committees in order to develop a coherent, comprehensive product that will be presented to the inter-ministerial committee for final approval.

59. The back-and-forth process involved in this scenario can be repeated as often as necessary and can involve any party to a document. It is obvious that the more a document conforms to its reference terms, the quicker its validation.

60. **A multi-sector approach**, that is, involving all sectors concerned by education. This kind of involvement is intended to help identify children's problems at various levels, including pre-school, basic education and literacy and Koranic education programmes that admit school-aged children. This approach made it possible to:

- take into consideration all the problems that could hinder the development of a young child;
- give a sense of responsibility to all the sectors concerned, that is, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, the Civil Service Ministry, the Secretary of State for Literacy and Koranic Education, and the Secretary of State for Women's Affairs;
- to respond better to the recommendations of the Dakar Forum on EFA.

61. **A multi-partner approach**, which has the advantage of bringing together all agencies that fund education in Mauritania. Thus at every step in the process the agencies, in particular their on-site representatives, took part in drawing up the document for that phase. This has led to a coordinated framework for intervention that has the government's approval for any actions they might wish to finance. This has the advantage of avoiding double-financing, centralizing funding and ensuring more coordinated follow-up. This approach will help every partner evaluate its own activities, and the government will be able to improve its dealings with its partners based on the interest each of them has shown in developing a programme.

62. This approach is both organizational and methodological and can be applied at the level of most steps in the preparatory process, including the analytical phase, proposals for strategy and action programmes, setting the macro-economic framework and quantifying targets.

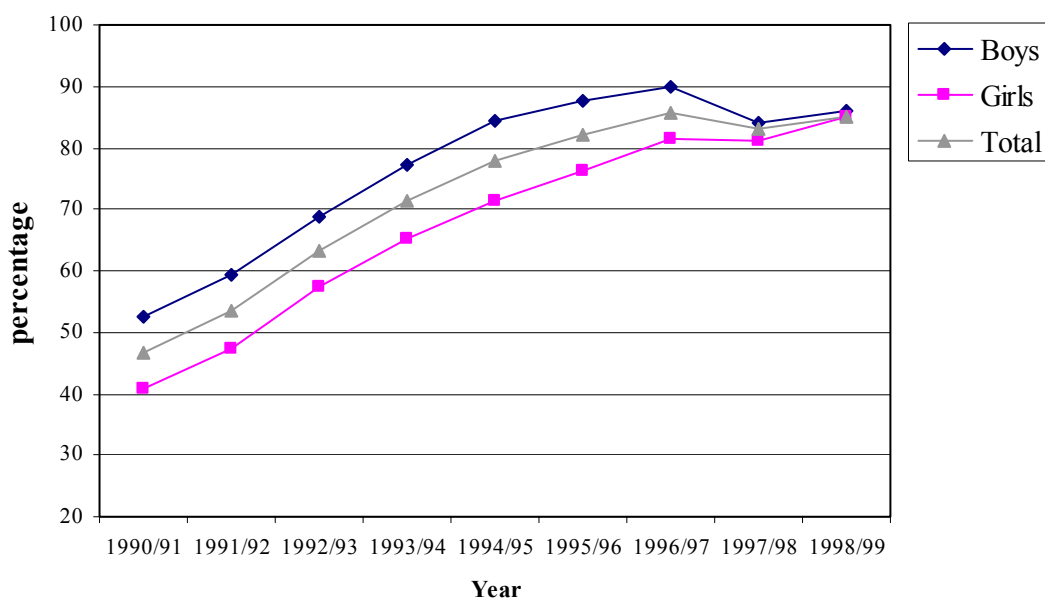
5.5. Initial preparation time: analysis

63. Having drawn the lessons of preceding projects that were to a great extent prepared by international experts, Mauritania decided to undertake preparation for its programme based on an overall vision of the sector and by mobilizing in the main existing local know-how. To this end, and to ensure a solid foundation for its ten-year strategy, the country launched a study of the sector that produced an analysis which, though sometimes severe or even in certain areas damning, was nevertheless complete and objective.

64. Indeed, all the members of the Ministry, from the department heads to the Minister, were determined to ensure the most objective analysis possible, as everyone was fully aware that future action depended on the rigor and accuracy of the analysis. The assessment was subjected to analysis by the thematic group, which interpreted the results, and came up with proposals for strategies and action programmes based on up-to-date, reliable and comprehensive information that was shared by everyone involved in the exercise. Given how essential the quality of this information was for seeking relevant solutions, the timeliness of the sector study was greatly appreciated.

65. The analysis confirmed that Mauritania had made substantial progress in quantitative enrolment. Indeed, the gross enrolment rate at the level of basic education rose from 53% in 1991/92 to 86% in 1998/99. The rapid increase in enrolment, which was due in large part to the massive enrolment of pupils in PY1, led to an increase in the gross admissions rate for the same period from 58% to 94.3%. The progress achieved led the government to increase investment in this sector so as to absorb the inflow of pupils.

Graph 1 Change in the overall enrolment rate



66. In the same period the number of schools rose from 1, 309 to 2, 676, the number of classrooms from 3, 598 to 7, 576, and the number of teachers from 3, 967 to 7, 366. There was also progress in the enrolment of girls, which was lagging in the early 1990s, with the rate rising from 43% to 48% during this same period.

67. Nevertheless, this progress in quantitative terms was not accompanied by comparable progress with regard to quality. The main elements in the analysis that were the focus of particular attention by the thematic group with regard to the determinants of basic education quality concerned the following points.

5.5.1. Retention

68. The relatively high rate of enrolment, which was 86% in 1998-99, was helped by growth in the rate of access to PY1, which rose from 78% to 97% between 1991/92 and 2000-2001. Nevertheless, this achievement has been undermined by the weakness in the retention rate, which is assessed at 55%. Analysis has shown that this situation is due to an extremely high dropout rate, which is linked to:

- an insufficiently complete school programme. In 82% of schools, mainly in the countryside, the teaching programme is incomplete and does not offer pupils who have access to the first primary year an opportunity to continue their studies locally up to the end of the basic education cycle;
- the poor quality of teaching, which undermines the image of the school in the eyes of pupils' parents;
- problems in demand, in particular the enrolment of girls in the countryside, where socio-cultural reluctance holds back demand.

69. Overall, the differences between girls and boys are relatively limited, with boys having a slightly higher retention rate than girls. Thus 53% of boys reach the last year of primary education, whereas the rate for girls is 50% according to the latest statistics. This difference is greater in the countryside than in the city. The retention rate in the countryside in basic education is estimated at 43%, compared with about 70% in the city. With regard to girls in particular, 64% of them finished this level of schooling in the city, versus only 38% in the countryside.

5.5.2. The programmes

70. A study conducted in 2000 by the IPN with help from the IREDU of Dijon showed that educational proficiency was about 30% for all the disciplines evaluated (Arabic, French, math and environmental studies) in the last four years of basic education, both public and private. In addition, there was extreme variation in the level of proficiency from one classroom to another and from one school to another, with a variation of 10 to 80% between classes, due to the lack of "overall pedagogical control".

5.5.3. Manuals and guides

71. It was observed during the aforementioned study that, taking all four years together, about 34% of the pupils had a textbook for the main language while only 25% had textbooks for math or environmental studies. Only 15% of pupils had a textbook for the second language. 60% of the teachers did not have teaching materials. The increase noted with regard to the numbers of pupils, schools and teachers has not been accompanied by a suitably effective policy on school textbooks.

5.5.4. Teachers

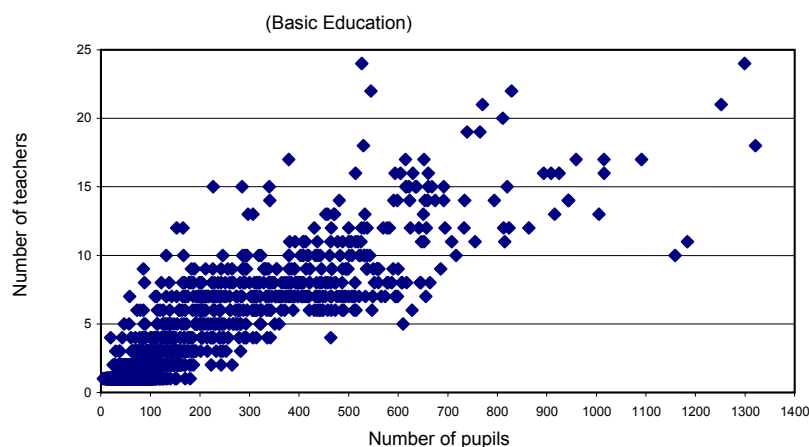
72. There have been significant weaknesses in the effectiveness of transferring knowledge to the pupils. These weaknesses are linked in particular to the role of the teacher in the learning process. The effectiveness of the teaching process is limited considerably by the inappropriateness of initial teacher training, inadequacies in continuing training, problems with teaching support, the inefficiency of teacher supervision and the poor motivation of the teachers.

73. Initial teacher training lasts one year in the teacher training institutes (TTI), which is not enough to meet the needs of implementing the reform. The continuing training of teachers is irregular and not very effective; it is divided among several structures and is characterized by a lack of consistency and effectiveness.

74. The pedagogical and administrative management of teachers is also not very effective. There is no real planning for the hiring of teachers to deal with teacher losses or needs arising from demographic growth or new linguistic needs brought about by the reform.

75. The assignment of personnel is still very haphazard (and particularly unsatisfying because it bears no relationship with the numbers of pupils to be taught), and only 81% of the variation between regions can be explained. In the absence of rigorous management and monitoring procedures at the level of the decentralized regional services, the system is not able to handle the assignment of teachers based on actual needs. There are significant regional disparities with regard to the allocation of teachers to schools. There are also disparities between zones within a single region.

Graph 2 Relation between the numbers of teachers and pupils



76. The situation of teachers is characterized by an increasing lack of motivation caused by poor career prospects and the absence of consideration for inspection observations as well as by the lack of incentives for exercising the profession in difficult posts (distant areas and multi-grade classes).

77. Pedagogical supervision is characterized by a lack of regular follow-up and ineffective pedagogical regulation, even though there is currently a sufficient number of inspectors responsible for basic education.

5.5.5. Teaching effectiveness

78. In addition to the lack of internal efficiency, as illustrated by the low retention rate (55%), it also seems that the external efficiency of basic education, which is largely determined by the intake capacity of the first cycle of general secondary education, is also not very high, as seen in the results on the SY1 entrance examinations. It often happens that significant portions of pupils are declared accepted even though their results are below average.

5.5.6. Pedagogical evaluation

79. Pedagogical assessment, which is indispensable for monitoring quality, is almost non-existent at the level of basic education. It is indeed a rare classroom where even modest evaluation efforts are part of the regular tools used by teachers, as there is no culture of evaluation rooted in daily teaching practice.

5.5.7. System management

80. The weaknesses noted above are probably attributable to problems in system management. These weaknesses can be seen by looking at data on system management (pupil numbers and distribution) and results (internal and external achievement, repetition, dropouts, exams, quantitative evaluations). These significant weaknesses in system management are due in particular to the lack of a culture of strategic management. It is also important to emphasize that management information mainly concerns resources and funds, and rarely results.

81. The regulatory and legal framework for administrative management is woefully inadequate with regard to *departemental* activities, while at other times it is just plain inappropriate. Supervision suffers from vague directives, poorly defined procedures, imprecise planning and often insurmountable barriers separating different administrative bodies.

82. At the end of this phase, which should make it possible to observe and analyze the results, the group should have sufficient information to undertake a search for the elements to a solution that should steadily come to constitute a strategy to be proposed to decision-makers.

5.6. Second preparatory period: defining the elements of a strategy

5.6.1. Sector thematic strategies

83. After having completed the analytical document, each theme group proposes a certain number of key strategies based on an “observations/analysis/action proposal” approach.

84. Each thematic document is analyzed by the coordination committee. After analysis, the document is systematically presented to the Inter-ministerial committee, which approves it after having made any amendments it considers necessary. This method has proven to be very effective, as it makes it possible to:

- Keep policy-makers informed very rapidly, and thus maintain good understanding and effective control of the process.

- Ensure that the thematic groups see their work evaluated and approved almost immediately.
- Help the coordination group rapidly and efficiently set up an overall strategy with the assurance that it will be approved because it is shared by the different parties.

85. **The ten-year sector strategy flowing from this exercise is structured around the following *key points*:**

- Consolidating management of the system based on the development of planning capacities, the organization of the central administration and the ongoing evaluation of the system.
- Improving educational programmes by setting up a school distribution plan, and reorganizing university and technical training.
- Raising the quality of teaching by renovating programmes and professionalizing initial and continuing training as well as administrative and pedagogical supervision.
- Improving human resources management.
- Reducing regional disparities.
- Increasing the enrolment of girls.
- Expanding the role of the private sector.

86. **As a consequence, the specific strategy for basic education is founded on five priorities:**

- **Improving access and retention by means of:**
 - Generalizing full-cycle schools by 2010;
 - Rationalizing management and the assignment of personnel;
 - Reducing regional disparities;
 - Building about 530 classrooms each year;
 - Increasing the number of teachers by about 650 each year;
 - Admitting about 3, 000 pupils into private education.
- **Improving the quality of teaching by:**
 - Professionalizing the initial and continuing training of teachers and school heads;
 - Setting up incentives for teachers assigned to difficult areas;
 - Steadily reducing the pupil-teacher ratio from 48 at present to 40 by 2010;
 - Developing and renovating educational programmes;
 - Making teaching tools available (textbooks, guides, teaching kits, etc);
 - Developing a policy on textbooks that is aimed at making textbooks available to school institutions and undertaking the liberalization of the publishing industry and the distribution of textbooks by 2005;
 - Promoting the practice of pedagogical evaluation in the classroom.

87. A distinction needs to be made between strategies to deal with problems raised by the sector study and temporary measures that need to be taken to deal with

certain aspects of the reform. The relevance of the strategies is assessed with regard to the analysis of the quality of basic education.

▪ **Implementation of and support for the reform**

88. The new reform must coexist with the previous system until 2004, which means that certain temporary measures need to be taken:

- The development of a policy on hiring teachers to meet the needs of the reform;
- The development of accelerated training for potentially bilingual teachers;
- The priority assignment of bilingual teachers to multi-grade classrooms and of monolingual teachers to areas where there is a high concentration of pupils with whom they can acquit their full teaching load.

▪ **The enrolment of girls**

89. The government will develop special measures in order to encourage the enrolment of girls and keep them in the school system, by reducing the handicaps they confront upon enrolling and on exams:

- Promoting the enrolment of girls in basic education in regions where there are marked disparities between the genders;
- Developing incentives to increase the presence of girls in secondary and higher education.

▪ **School health, environment, citizenship**

90. The system will strengthen its partnerships with the healthcare and environmental sectors in order to familiarize pupils with major issues concerning their civic and social responsibilities and their own health at every stage of schooling. This policy will be based on the following points:

- Adapting and strengthening programmes related to school healthcare, environmental protection and education in citizenship;
- Adapting training modules for pupils and teachers concerning school healthcare, environmental protection and education in citizenship;
- Develop a healthcare, hygiene and nutrition policy in school institutions that takes into account the spread of HIV/Aids in the sub-region;
- The building of toilets (for teachers, girls and boys) and providing access to drinking water for all schools;
- Continuing training and the production and dissemination of teaching tools.

5.6.2. Summary and consistency of the theme strategies

91. The development of an overall strategy does not come about by simply juxtaposing or adding together the different theme strategies. The impact that a decision taken by one theme group can have on another needs to be taken into account. Some decisions may even be based on an indisputable internal logic, but be in contradiction with general policy. It is thus up to the coordination committee to ensure that the overall strategy is consistent with the goals of the reform.

92. To this end, the coordination committee established a “bottom-up” communication process towards policy decision-makers and a “top-down” policy towards the theme groups, who need to be kept informed about how and why any particular proposition was the subject of a given decision (amendment, approval or rejection). Only when this summary and communication process has been completed can a final synthesis be developed by means of the sector strategy.

93. This sector strategy constitutes the basis for Mauritania’s policy in the field of education. Any action, any future project, or any budget must henceforth be developed based on this framework document and its guidelines. The final synthesis makes use of a pedagogical approach and is based on the sector strategy in order to identify the most promising means for developing education in a harmonious, lasting way. At the conclusion of this work, which sets out basic guidelines for the sector, it was necessary to determine whether such a programme was financially sustainable.

5.7. Third preparatory phase: the macro-economic framework

94. This third phase in the development of the NPDES takes place when and only when all the strategic elements have been defined and approved. This study was conducted using the “impact calculation” method. Two types of questions are posed for each strategy:

- How much will it actually cost?
- What impact will this action have on exogenous factors? (Other departments, other ministries, private sector, national economy, etc.)
- Can these actions be funded by the government budget, given economic growth and structural constraints?

95. This phase is crucial and must be conducted cautiously and in coordination with the technical sectors responsible for the economy and finances. It will help verify the consistency of the document with the country’s general policies and ensure that the measures envisaged are sustainable. To this end, and based on the specific sector policy, a simulation model is developed.

96. This model is used to calculate the impact of the measures envisaged as well as all requirements. In addition, it is used to make any objective trade-offs in order to determine precisely the resources that can be allocated to the sector in light of the government’s financing capacity.

97. The simulations were conducted with an overall goal of improving quality at every level and enhancing relevance to the upper reaches of the labor market (higher, technical and professional). They were also conducted based on an idea that there were, on the one hand, strong educational policy decisions concerning certain important segments of the system, while on the other, there were less defined options on other segments. Basic education, higher education and the second cycle of secondary education are in the first category, whereas technical and vocational education as well as the first cycle of secondary education are in the second category. The strategy for performing the simulation was thus to quantify the policies defined by taking into account both their quantitative and qualitative dimensions and proposing alternative options for the quantitative and qualitative development of technical and vocational education and of the first cycle of secondary education. In addition to quantifying the various elements with regard to the resources to be mobilized, simulations were also conducted in the sphere of resources that could be mobilized based on an equilibrium to be achieved between jobs and resources at the overall level of the education sector.

98. The overall macro-economic framework adopted for these simulations is based on the following hypothesis: average annual growth of 6% over the period, fiscal revenue that represents about 27.8%, and a net increase in current spending on education as a percentage of government revenue that rises from 13.5% to 16.5% by the end of the period.

99. It should be specified that, while it is true that the coordination committee benefited from the valuable help of a high-level expert in the sector, in the main it drew on national capacities.

100. The coordination group believed that, while it might be a priori very comfortable to rely systematically on help from people outside the country, this could result in undermining a sense of responsibility, and lead to a loss of control and responsibility for the socio-economic aspects of the national development programme.

101. This framework document was also presented to the Inter-ministerial Committee for its approval so that the decision-makers constantly took responsibility for the consequences of the choices made.

5.8. Fourth preparatory phase: quantification of targets and drawing up budgeted theme action plans

5.8.1. Quantification of targets

102. At this stage, the theme groups will already have made an initial estimate of practical and material impacts while developing their proposed strategies and action plans. But these of necessity will not have taken into account the field of macroeconomics and will thus have remained vague and incomplete.

103. During the fourth phase, it became necessary to define as precisely as possible what the material impact of each target would be. This was done in the course of drawing up the logical framework. Each of the objectives was translated into expected results. These were then measured using indicators.

104. To give an example, an expected result like “adapting the educational programme to demand in basic education” involved a certain number of success (or achievement) indicators, such as:

- Increasing the number of full-cycle schools from 17% to 45% by 2005 and 67% by 2010.
- Raising the participation rate of girls to 48%.
- Building 450 classrooms each year until 2005 and 610 classes until 2010.

5.8.2. Budgeted theme action programmes

105. The process of identifying strategies to deal with the problems identified goes hand-in-hand with developing proposals for possible solutions that will gradually take the form of concrete, realizable actions. This is the way that the budgeted theme action programme is constructed. Here we will present step by step the way the action programme was developed as the process actually took place in Mauritania.

▪ **What is a budgeted theme action programme?**

106. The budgeted theme action programmes are framework tools that are relevant to the entire planning process. Nevertheless, what counts is not simply the framework tool in itself, but also the process of conceiving and developing the tool.

107. The strategy developed to remedy the situation identified by the system analysis (improvement of quality by improving the educational programme) needs to be broken down into concrete actions that can be funded cost-effectively. This is the purpose of the budgeted theme action programme.

108. More specifically, the budgeted theme action programme is a tool that can be used to develop action proposals to be implemented to accord with a developed strategy in a precise framework. This is a framework in which one can find concrete elements and a notion of the sums needed to implement them, with a view to negotiations with funding agencies.

109. In this sense, the budgeted theme action programme is a constituent of the NPDES itself. In addition, much of the work conducted by the theme groups concerns the development of this programme. Nevertheless, it is here that difficulties in understanding this instrument may arise; the budgeted action programme is also a powerful support framework for programme implementation. Indeed, it provides the manager with a list of the actions that need to be undertaken to carry out the strategy.

110. Likewise, the budgeted action programme is a good monitoring tool, because it provides a framework for measuring how well actions have been achieved with regard to the strategy. Shortcomings in the implementation of actions conducted under the programme point to difficulties encountered or to adaptations that need to be made to the strategy.

▪ **How is the budgeted action programme developed?**

111. A dual concern for theoretical presentation and conceptualization leads to presenting the process of developing the budgeted action programme in a historic fashion. This implies that different versions of these action programmes are examined, even if they do not cover the entire process of drawing up the NPDES (this was in particular the case of the revised action programme).

- *The first version of the programme*

112. Developing an action programme like this is an iterative process involving multiple steps that draws on the knowledge and contributions of all those directly concerned by the actual implementation of educational policy.

113. It is an iterative process because an action programme involves several steps prior to finalization. An initial version is produced during the course of the participatory workshops that are broken down into components (or theme groups). Remember that the actions are understood here as referring to the different operations (that mobilize human resources or material) that go into the achievement of a given objective.

114. Thus the different departments and autonomous institutions composing Mauritania's educational system took an active part in developing the initial annual action programmes that make up the NPDES. The work was conducted by groups organized by theme component and sub-component, which accorded with the participatory spirit that prevailed at every step in the process of drawing up the NPDES.

115. These action programmes are far from being definitive and in fact served as a basis for negotiation and discussion with the main funding agencies. It should be

emphasized here that the process of negotiating with the funding partners is continuous and concomitant with drawing up the NPDES.

- *Analysis of the capacity for execution*

116. Once there has been initial formal acceptance of the action programme, the actual process of adapting the proposed actions begins. Ideas need to be compared with reality. In other words, it is necessary to consider whether the actions proposed for implementing the strategy are actually realizable, financially acceptable, non-repetitive and cost-effective.

117. “Actually realizable”, because many actions that are intellectually acceptable prove not to be feasible for logistic or geographic reasons or because of the government’s absorption capacity. By way of example, planners may envisage disseminating know-how simultaneously throughout a country’s territory and then face the fact that it is impossible to actually do this because they do not have sufficient human resources to cover such a vast territory in such a short time.

118. “Financially acceptable”, because some actions that one may consider to be technically and materially feasible might have to be abandoned due to a simple lack of funds. Most of the time a lack of funding for a given action is the result of trade-offs made when considering the plan as a whole.

119. “Non-repetitive”, because the very principle of participatory development often leads to producing redundant actions. In practice, several theme planning groups are working simultaneously and develop concomitant theme action programmes. Given the common professional origin of the participants, it is generally quite likely that a relevant action will be considered and planned by more than one group. In addition, it is broadly accepted that an institution has a natural tendency to seek to expand its future field of action. Finally, and along the same lines, the search for institutional efficiency will lead the participants to seek to integrate some missions that have been legally devolved to other partner institutions. In Mauritania’s case, this dynamic was illustrated perfectly in the field of continuing education.

120. “Cost-effective”, because despite the existence of adequate financing and demonstrated technical feasibility, some actions may have to be abandoned due to their relative cost. This is the situation with selecting the mechanism for continuing education: should training be centralized at Nouakchott or decentralized to the provinces?

- *Consolidating the budgeted action programmes*

121. Just as the accounts of a private company with several plans are consolidated, the consolidation of the action programmes is the process used to combine various action programmes in order to produce a single, homogeneous document.

122. There are in fact two stages to the process of consolidating the different theme action programmes that incorporate materially and financially feasible actions. There is an initial intra-component step during which the actions proposed for sub-components are analyzed and selected in order to avoid repetition and promote cost-effective distribution.

123. The second phase in consolidation involves bringing together the work of the various groups (inter-component) in order to develop an overall vision of the actions proposed and the resources that will be needed to implement them. This is the level at which the final trade-offs are made so as to produce a proposal for a general action programme.

- *The revised action programme*

124. After the consolidation of the action programmes and consultation with funding sources, it very frequently happens that adjustments are made to objectives. An action plan that is designed in a certain context may be invalidated by a profound change in aspirations (a change in the national or international economic climate). It may also happen that in the course of implementation it comes to light that a relevant element has not been taken into account or that a precondition has not been understood, which could lead to a partial redefinition of strategic objectives and, consequently, to a final revision of the budgeted action programme.

125. This is why the annual tranche of the action programme is revised each year in order to ensure it is suited to the context, which also guarantees the flexible adaptation of the programme.

5.8.3. Process of building awareness among partners

126. In the course of implementing a reform programme, “building awareness” among the actors is an aspect whose importance could be said to be even more than strategic. Based on this observation, the MNE used every available means to build broad awareness among potential funding sources.

127. It should be pointed out as a preamble that before building awareness among partners, the Mauritanian government had already developed a coherent overview of the problems and strategies to be used in accordance with the priority given to education. The government wanted long-term action conceived over a ten-year horizon that took into account a certain number of problems considered to be priorities.

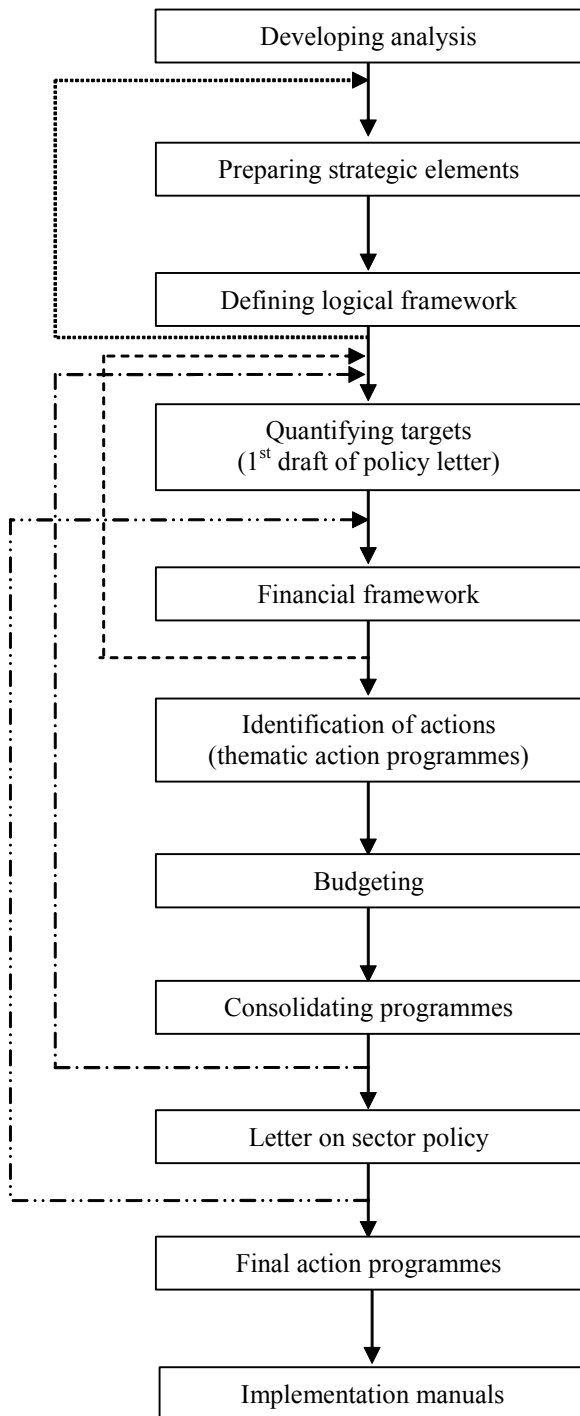
128. In addition, in drawing up the PRSP Mauritania’s actors and decision-makers had already acquired experience in the coordinated development of development programmes similar to those for education. Once the observations, analysis and broad guidelines had been defined, the Minister, along with all the concerned ministerial directors, met with the main partners in the sector in order to build awareness and convince them to get involved as partners in drawing up the NPDES and in bringing to their attention the fact that Mauritania already had a relatively clear vision of the situation, and the priorities for action, and that it was committed to a ten-year programme of reflection and action.

129. It is noteworthy that the funding agencies made a serious commitment during the drawing up of the NPDES, and were involved throughout the process.

130. Thus a vast process of communication and awareness-building was conducted with the funding agencies with the aim of ensuring their involvement in funding the actions set out in the NPDES. One indication of the importance of this process was the numerous trips made by the Minister of Education and his collaborators.

131. One of the key elements in ensuring broad financial participation was developing an ongoing climate of exchanges concretized in the numerous meetings that were held with multi-lateral funding agencies (ADB, IDB, IDA), UN agencies (UNPD, WFP, UNICEF) and bilateral funding agencies (Coopération française).

Figure 2 Diagram of preparation of the NPDES



5.9. Funding the NPDES

132. Funding for investments in the programme during the first phase (2002-2006) comes to about **130 million dollars**, which is broken down as follows:

133. **ADB: 8.29 million dollars** for basic and secondary education, and **11.6 million dollars** for higher education. This brings the contribution of this partner to about **20 million dollars**.

134. **IDA: 50 million dollars** for all the programme components.

135. **Coopération française: 15 million French francs**, i. e. , about 2 million dollars.

136. **IDB: 40 million dollars** in the four following areas:

- Promoting the teaching of science in basic, secondary and higher education;
- The development of vocational, scientific and technical branches at the higher education level;
- The development of transition mechanisms between Koranic instruction and modern education;
- Improving the management of the educational system.

137. This support will be spread over several projects that will be set up each year. The first project, support for the teaching of the sciences in secondary education, was approved by the IDB Board of Administration at the end of October. The amount of its initial contribution is about **11 million dollars**.

138. The **WFP** (World Food Programme) is active in supporting school canteens as part of its future programme.

139. **UNICEF** (United Nations Organization for Children) is active in financing the first phase of the NPDES for about 6 million dollars.

140. The government's contribution to programme investments over the first five years of the NPDES is estimated at about **USD 20 million**, to which needs to be added the recurring charges generated by the implementation of the programme, in particular the hiring required to achieve the quality target that underlies the strategy and the increase in the operating budgets of the teaching institutions.

141. In addition, it should be noted that since 2002 the operating budget has included the allocation of **incentive bonuses** for teaching personnel assigned to difficult areas or performing a particular service, as well as **the consequent increase in the budgets of regional education services** for improving their operating conditions, and the establishment of **autonomous budgets for large secondary institutions**. There is in addition a consequent increase in the budgets allocated for inspections to improve close pedagogical supervision.

142. The following table summarizes the financing for this programme:

Table 1 Budget summary (in million 1998 MU)

	1998	2005	2010
Current spending			
Basic	3, 205	5, 914	8, 828
1 st cycle secondary	1, 044	2, 110	3, 558
2 nd cycle secondary	936	1, 138	1, 395
Technical education (and vocational)	190 (86)	375. 5 [327. 3]	815. 8 [680. 1]
Teacher training	230	[450]	[650]
Higher education	1, 269	1, 368	2, 000
Total current spending	6, 874	11, 355. 5	17, 246. 8
As % of GDP	3. 7	4. 2	4. 7
Total current spending on education (a)	6, 960	11, 682. 8	17, 926. 9
As % of GDP	3. 7	4. 3	4. 9
Investment			
Basic		9, 250	9, 950
1 st cycle secondary		5, 951	7, 921
2 nd cycle secondary		1, 904	3, 204
Technical education		2, 273	4, 546
Higher education		9, 751	9, 751
Early childhood		487	887
Literacy and Koranic education		515	1, 515
School healthcare		286	686
System management		4, 307	5, 307
Investment total		34, 724	43, 367
Public financing			
GDP (annual average growth rate of 6%)	185, 300	272, 300	368, 600
Overall tax burden (%)	27. 6	28. 9	27. 8
State revenue	51, 130	78, 600	102, 400
Current spending on education as % State revenue	13. 4	14. 4	16. 8
Total current spending as % State revenue	13. 6	14. 9	17. 5
Current public funding for education (b)	6, 874	11, 355. 5	17, 246. 8
As % of GDP	3. 7	4. 3	4. 9

Current spending on this programme is handled by the government and investments are the responsibility of the State and the NPDES partners (IDA, IDP, ADB, UNICEF, WFP, French Cooperation).

6. PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING THE NPDES

143. Like preparation, the implementation of the NPDES is a complex process requiring the development of organizational structures, the selection of relevant instruments for intervening in implementation, and assessments of the accomplishments of the programme at the end of this process. We will review the organizational structures, the tools and the implementation assessments in that order.

6.1. The implementation bodies

144. Programme implementation requires the development of organizational bodies in charge of strategic management, coordination, and the management of the activities of the different programme components. These bodies oversee the sectoral character of the programme as well as the allocation of responsibilities among the different people involved in implementation. These include:

6.1.1. The programme coordination committee (PCC)

145. This committee brings together all the managers who are involved in implementing the programme. It is chaired by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of National Education and is responsible for:

- Assessing the progress of the programme;
- Studying and approving the overall plan for the annual action programme and budget (AAPB) before it is presented to the ministries and funding agencies;
- Monitoring the results and performance of the AAPB and meeting the funding organizations during annual joint reviews.

146. This committee is composed of the central and regional directors as well as representatives of the other departments involved in implementation.

6.1.2. The programme management committee

147. This committee is composed of the Director of Planning and Cooperation at the Ministry of National Education and the Director of Education-Training Projects at the MED. It ensures that the AAPB is consistent with the programme and coordinates preparation and regularly monitors execution.

6.1.3. Managers of the different components

148. The NPDES consists of eight components. Each component has several sub-components and falls under the responsibility of a high-ranking official who ensures overall coordination. The task of this official is:

- To coordinate the various actors who play a role in the execution of the different aspects of the component;
- To negotiate a production schedule for the products for which the various actors are responsible;
- To draw up and present to the Management Committee, no later than 31 July each year, proposals for the following year for the operating plan and annual budget (AAPB) for their component, including a schedule and a detailed annual budget as well as monitoring indicators;

- To assess the progress made in implementing the current AAPB and draw up an AAPB proposal for the following year in conjunction with the other participants.

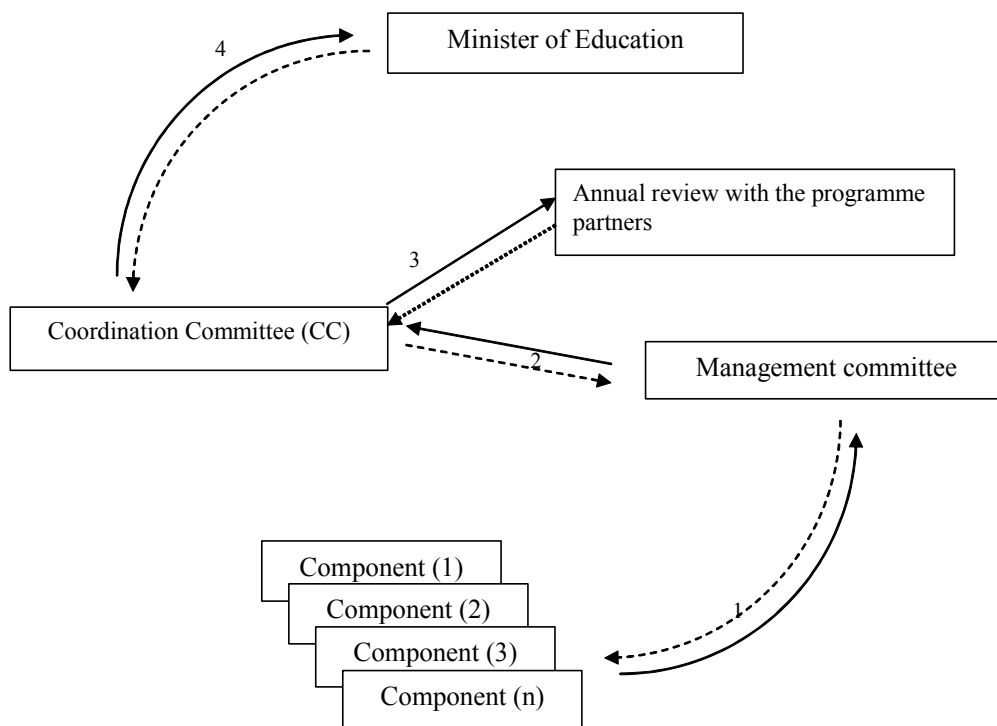
149. In addition to these arrangements for the regular follow-up of the NPDES, there are two annual meetings that bring together all the central and regional actors as well as the Technical and Financial Partners (TFP). One meeting summarizes the experience of the current year and approves the AAPB for the coming year. The other is held to make an assessment midway through the AAPB.

150. These meetings are chaired by the Minister or the Secretary-General; the first meeting is held in September, and the second during the school year in order to assess the state of progress of the annual action programme and review the commitments made at the preceding meeting.

151. The mid-stream reviews and the periodic supervision sessions organized together with the TFP also provide an opportunity to assess programme performance and come up with any useful corrections.

152. Finally, these arrangements also offer an opportunity to reinvigorate everyone involved in the work.

Figure 3 Diagram of implementation of the NPDES



1. Development, implementation of the Annual Action Programmes (AAPB)
2. Technical consolidation/validation
3. Validation of the AAPB with the partners
4. Definitive validation of the consolidated Action Programmes

6.2. The instruments used

153. These instruments are generally used broadly, and the funding agencies have contributed a great deal to introducing them into the assessment system.

154. The purpose here is to show how they have been taken up and then used following a training programme conducted during the preparatory phase.

6.2.1. The manuals on procedures

▪ Why a procedural manual?

155. Any complex activity, particularly when it gives rise to the intervention of several different entities, must obey a certain number of rules. These rules can be codified in writing in different ways. While everyone is familiar with the “User manual” supplied with equipment requiring a series of operations, the operators of projects and programmes make use of “operating procedures”.

156. Manuals on operating procedures can be broken down into two types. Administrative and/or financial management manuals and manuals on management procedures.

157. The purpose of the administrative procedures manuals is to ensure uniform administrative follow-up of operations. These voluminous collections of procedures help actors in the field do their best in managing whatever situations they face. In many situations, the administrative procedures manual is more a help tool than a restrictive framework.

158. In general, the financial procedures manual is the most restrictive document, because it is intended to ensure respect for the legal principles underlying the mobilization of funds. It is a basis for checking on the form in which financial requests are submitted. Irrespective of the soundness of any request for funds, it must conform with the rules set out in the procedures manual, or risk being set aside by the payment services. Based on the type of relations that it governs, the financial procedures manuals could be said to apply to third parties.

159. The management procedures manual has a different character, as it is aimed more at clarifying the “chain of command” relevant to the type of task being performed.

▪ What is the role of the procedures manuals in carrying out the NPDES?

160. Different types of procedures manuals have been developed in the course of implementing the NPDES, depending on how they are to be applied.

161. The general operating handbook was drawn up based on the situation of Mauritania, as can be seen by the attention it gives to listing activities and the precise description of the bodies responsible for the various stages and their implementation.

162. On the basis of the revised thematic action programmes, all the essential tasks were listed in order to determine which institutions and people would be responsible for their implementation. The operating handbooks are modeled on the structure inherent in the programming of the NPDES objectives, either by component or sub-component. They are thus directly related to the primary goals arising from the strategic planning. For example: “BE2 – Improving the quality of basic education”, or “SM2 – Improving management of the educational system”.

163. The procedural manuals were developed by a local consultant in cooperation with the different components and were distributed to the NPDES implementation bodies

to facilitate administrative and operational interaction. The operating manuals produced in this framework thus include elements that can help managers understand the measures to be taken to implement programme activities. In general, they include:

- a description of the component;
- its estimated cost;
- the institutional arrangements;
- administration (of financing and the method of mobilizing funds);
- a schedule for implementation;
- performance indicators;
- any specific commitments related to an allocation of funds;
- any major risks (that could endanger the listed activities);
- arrangements for evaluation.

6.2.2. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation

164.

▪ The indicators

165. The bodies responsible for monitoring and evaluating a programme will not be able to issue informed opinions without quantitative and qualitative information that shows the actual progress of the programme.

166. This is the role of the matrix of performance indicators and qualitative evaluation surveys. The matrix of performance indicators is a document that covers the main objectively verifiable indicators derived from programming the objectives that make it possible to carry out the programme.

167. There are two different types of indicators in a performance matrix. Quantitative indicators apply to quantities or more particularly correspond to quantifiable applications, for example, the number of classrooms built in a year. Qualitative indicators show the qualitative value of these applications, for example, the local population's view of the quality of the schools constructed. There is thus a certain element of subjectivity in qualitative indicators. Nevertheless, the subjectivity lies in the definition of the indicator, while its measurement and interpretation should be objective.

168. Whether quantitative or qualitative, the indicators cover several types of idea. Results indicators are focused on end products. They measure the final conclusion of actions, for example, "training 100 teachers in bilingualism".

169. Process indicators seek to assess the intermediate steps in carrying out an action, for example, the number of pupils who sign up for an exam.

170. Performance indicators are used to measure notions of productivity. They are often given in the form of ratios. They are particularly effective for assessing difficulties encountered in implementing an action and are valid above all when there is a basis for comparison.

171. With the exception of the results indicators, these indicators can be associated with notions of time or frequency. A comparison of two indicators measured at different dates then becomes an indicator of change over time.

172. The connections between all these different types of indicators are the basis for detailed and particularly precise monitoring. To summarize, qualitative process

indicators show us the way that a result is obtained, which is itself measured by a result indicator. Quantitative performance indicators enable us to have an idea about the efficiency of the process used to achieve this result. Shortcomings with regard to targets give us information about the difficulties experienced in implementing a given action.

173. One problem with indicators in a programme that is as ambitious as the NPDES arises from the large number of points involved in its implementation. On the other hand, there is much work in the educational and development field that is of international interest for this sector and provides much food for thought concerning the development of the NPDES battery of indicators.

174. These include in particular macro-economic sources generated by the international work that is taking place within the Education For All (EFA) framework. The Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative has also strongly influenced the approach to the production of indicators. By making the constitution by national teams of a strategic framework for the fight against poverty a condition for eligibility, the exercise led to the development of a strategy that emphasized the social services sectors.

▪ **Evaluation**

175. Evaluation is one of the sources of the production of norms and indicators that can be used to measure the achievement of targets. Evaluation is in this sense conceived as activity consisting of the development of broad qualitative surveys throughout the territory.

176. The most important aspect of evaluation consists of correlating the qualitative information with the results of the pupils on the tests they are given. This makes it possible to measure objectively how reasonable certain educational policy decisions are and determine which relationships should be adopted to make the system more efficient.

177. It goes without saying that an important tool like evaluation was used extensively to produce some of the strategy elements recommended by the NPDES. Likewise, conducting “campaigns” was considered to be one of the main activities in the system of monitoring and evaluating the strategy to improve the quality of educational programmes. Some of the main results indicators flow directly from the evaluation surveys.

178. In this respect, an evaluation of the coverage of programmes in the 5th year of the basic education cycle is currently underway. It aims to produce an objective measurement of the coverage of programmes in Math, Arabic, French and the natural sciences, but especially to identify the causes of the disparities observed between the classes tested (213 different classes).

▪ **The annual action programme and budget (AAPB)**

179. The action programmes arising from the strategies implemented under the NPDES are broken down each year by component in the form of a plan consisting of a detailed breakdown of the actions to be carried out during the current school year, as well as the corresponding budgets.

180. This annual action programme and budget (AAPB) makes it possible, for each component:

- To assess the progress of activities planned to promote it;
- To carry out any corrective action needed;
- To deal with any problems observed and carry out periodic assessments.

181. The AAPB for each component is made up of the contributions of each sub-component and is prepared under the leadership of the component head together with the other participants.

182. The AAPB is assessed using the same process as for its preparation. The AAPB is a tool for implementation that involves all the partners and thus contributes to forging their commitment to carrying out the activities that concern them. This component-based approach is reflected at the regional level in the development of a plan listing the activities scheduled each year by each regional basic education department in light of the funds that have been allocated it in the State budget. This is the regional budgeted annual action programme.

183. It is used to ensure close supervision of the implementation of activities whose execution depends directly on the regional authorities: administrative and pedagogical supervision, the school distribution plan, continuing education, building awareness among partners, collecting information, etc.

6.3. Generalizing the programme to the national level

184. To implement the new strategy that concretizes the implementation of the 1999 reform, the government used every available means to build awareness among each target social group. This approach led to holding a large-scale national seminar, followed by regional seminars in the different geographic areas.

185. The national seminar to launch the NPDES was held in Nouakchott in January 2002 and was aimed at everyone involved in the education sector (central departments, autonomous institutions, inspectorates, regional basic education departments, representatives of funding agencies) but also and more particularly at the governors of the regions (Walis), the leading regional representatives of the government.

186. In light of the target public, a very substantial amount of work took place to prepare this seminar by developing popular versions of the documents to be presented. Three commissions were set up to produce presentations on the problems of administrative management, financial management and pedagogical management in the educational sector. The documents produced were presented to the seminar participants and discussed in workshops in order to generate reactions. At the same time, representatives of the funding agencies presented the mechanisms and conditions of funding that they use for funds granted to countries that receive public development aid.

187. It is noteworthy that, in addition to the presence of the Ministers of National Education and the Economy, this seminar was also an occasion for the Minister of National Education to make a presentation aimed particularly at all the Walis. This reflected the political synergy that characterizes the NPDES programme at the highest levels of the Mauritanian state.

188. The discussion and work carried out in the workshops led to the production of three framework documents that in the main incorporated the content of the preparatory documents and integrated the bulk of the recommendations made.

189. These documents served as theme support tools when holding the regional seminars to build awareness about the NPDES.

190. The regional seminars were held with a focus on a target group consisting of administrative actors (department prefect, hakem), educators (DIBE, school heads) and representatives of civil society (local officials, parent-teacher associations). The main

goal was to ensure the mobilization of actors in the field by highlighting the importance of their role in implementing the strategy adopted. This was also an opportunity to express the desire to proceed with the regionalization of the programme's goals.

191. These seminars were held during the month of June 2002 in four places: the regions of the East (Hodh El Charghi, Hodh El Gharbi, Assaba), the North (Dakhlett Nouadhibou, Tiris Zemour, Adrar, Inchiri), the center (Brakna, Tagant, Gogol, Guidimakha), and the South (Trarza, and Nouakchott).

192. Each seminar was officially opened by the Minister of National Education. At the conclusion of these seminars the first request to constitute regional annual action programmes and budgets (AAPB) was introduced.

193. This awareness-raising campaign also made extensive use of national media (radio, television and the printed press). It created favorable conditions for acceptance of the programme, for the participation of everyone involved in its execution and for taking stock of the conditions required to generalize it and make it sustainable.

194. The planning of the activities and their implementation also took into account the specific problems of the system in the particular region in order to avoid geographic or gender-based inequalities.

6.4. Making the programme sustainable

195. The implementation of educational development programmes often faces a major challenge: making them sustainable. In this respect, it is important to plan measures to ensure the continuity of the programmes beyond the original projection period. Some of these measures could include:

- The reproducibility of the programmed actions;
- The stability of the technical personnel who take part in the process of preparation in order to ensure the multiplier effect;
- Incorporation into the State operating budget of the funds needed for training, building and maintenance, the purchase of equipment, etc;
- Setting up and empowering bodies to monitor the programmes;
- Developing criteria for responsibility in order to strengthen the capacity of the central, regional and local actors to plan and manage;
- Developing a framework for coordination and dialogue between the government, funding agencies and local communities;
- Allocating human and material resources;
- Developing a culture of management and evaluation at every level of responsibility in the sector;
- Strengthening the role of partnerships.

196. *In 2002, the government had already undertaken a vast programme aimed at promoting the spread of knowledge throughout Mauritanian society and the development of libraries in all moughataas (towns) of the country in order to ensure that all citizens have access to reading. Within this framework, media campaigns aimed at involving the public in this initiative were organized and fundraising efforts were conducted through the media (telephone, theatre, artistic evenings, etc). It is also worth noting that the government planned an annual budget allocation for promoting reading and knowledge. These initiatives should help achieve the objectives of the NPDES and help sustain its*

accomplishments by improving the knowledge of pupils' parents, which should also have an impact on the fight against illiteracy.

6.5. Assessment of the execution of the NPDES

197. It is necessary to wait at least two years before making an assessment of the precise impact of the NPDES on system performance. It is, however, possible to review the activities carried out with regard to forecasts for the 2001-2003 period.

198. This exercise will of course only concern the components related to basic education, the subject of this case study. It should be recalled that the objectives set by the NPDES for basic education included:

- Generalizing access to education and promoting fairness;
- Improving educational content and results.

199. To meet the first goal, the NPDES developed activities in order to:

- Improve planning capacity;
- Develop intake capacity by building school facilities;
- Developing measures to promote the enrolment of girls;
- Developing measures to encourage teachers to work in difficult areas.

200. To this end, the action programmes covering the first two years of the programme provide for:

- Increasing the number of multigrade classes and regrouping schools located within the same catchments area;
- Starting the construction of 400 classrooms;
- Processing 550 applications and concluding the corresponding co-financing agreements to build the classrooms;
- Evaluating needs for school rehabilitation and expansion in each region;
- Assigning 460 newly trained teachers;
- Seeing to the training of 1300 school teachers in the TTI, 650 to be assigned for the October 2003 school year and 650 for the 2004 school year;
- Awarding prizes to girl graduates;
- Adopting and implementing incentives on behalf of teachers serving in distant areas or difficult areas in order to stabilize them.

201. To meet the second goal on improving quality, the activities chosen were to be based on:

- Restructuring and professionalizing initial teacher training;
- Strengthening the continuing training of teachers and supervisory personnel;
- Experimenting with and generalizing new skills-based school programmes;
- Meeting the minimum supply of teaching and learning materials;
- Establishing a system to evaluate accomplishments and make use of the results.

202. The action programmes set out in this framework will aim to improve controls on programmes, raise the pupil-teacher and textbook-pupil ratios and reduce repetitions. The activities planned include:

- Restructuring and professionalizing the initial training of teachers (increasing the TTI curriculum to two years from one year);
- Revising the reference base of student teachers and developing programmes to train them;
- Modifying the decree governing initial teacher training;
- Strengthening aspects related to professional practice in the programmes;
- Training members of the TTI supervisory team;
- Strengthening the pedagogical supervision of experimental schools;
- Providing each finishing student-teacher with a teaching kit;
- Improving the facilities of TTI and experimental schools (renovation and expansion of premises);
- Acquiring teaching and photocopying equipment;
- Restructuring and professionalizing the initial training of inspectors (to create a two-year curriculum for assistant inspectors);
- Increasing the training time for inspectors to two years starting from the level of assistant inspector; defining the job description and designing new training programmes;
- Setting up an operational system of continuing training (mobilize technical assistance on behalf of the unit to identify BED requirements and on behalf of the training services; giving the TTI responsibility for continuing training; developing plans to train TTI inspectors and educators, as well as teachers and directors, in the management of schools, classrooms, reading areas and libraries; giving the wilayas a continuing education budget);
- Developing action-research in the field of pedagogical innovation (mobilize technical assistance for the management of multigrade schools, large groups and for action-research; check out multigrade experiences in neighboring countries);
- Experimenting with and implementing new programmes in the schools (training the school personnel responsible for experimenting with and evaluating programmes);
- Training 90 teachers in experimenting with new programmes in a sample of 45 schools distributed in three wilayas around the country;
- Training 200 inspectors and 102 TTI educators and “ENS” student inspectors; training 3500 teachers from PY1 to PY4;
- Setting up the group responsible for the integration of specific programmes;
- Developing and implementing an effective policy for the distribution of school books and the establishment of libraries and reading areas in the schools (mobilize technical support to define a textbook policy; train personnel in the existing service in publications planning and management);
- Training 10 people in textbook development and 6 in publishing techniques; developing 6 publications to support the reform;
- Equipping facilities in the production of publications;
- Distributing the four basic textbooks to all schools free of charge;
- Mobilizing technical support to set up libraries and reading areas; checking out relevant experiences in neighboring countries;
- Renovating and reforming the system for evaluating pupil proficiency (development and validation of a renovated system of monthly compositions; development and publication of school booklets for each pupil; training and managing exams; review of the competitive exam and acquisition of equipment on behalf of the exam service).

203. In addition, there are plans to ensure:

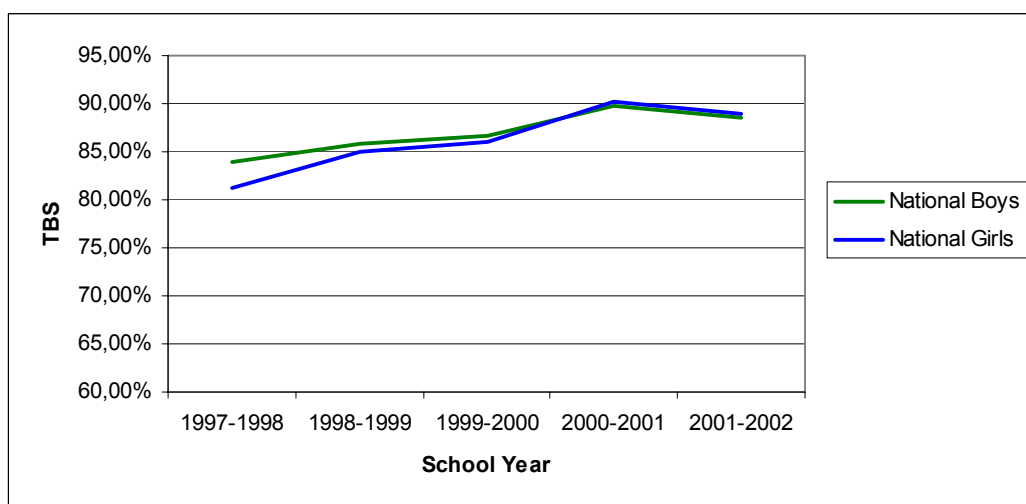
- The restructuring and professionalization of initial training;
- The promotion of the continuing training of teachers and supervisory personnel;
- Experimentation with and the generalization of new skills-based school programmes;
- Meeting the minimum supply of teaching and supervisory material;
- Setting up a system to evaluate proficiency and make use of the results.

204. Based on this detailed action programme, the achievements after 15 months of implementation can be summarized as follows:

6.5.1. Improving access and fairness

205. The number of pupils, which in 2001 was 360, 677, rose in 2002 to 375, 695, 183, 220 of whom were girls, which corresponds to a participation rate of 48. 7%. For the same period, the access rate to the first year of basic education rose from 98% to 117%, with the enrolment rate rising from 87% to 88. 7%, while the retention rate fell. The number of full-cycle schools rose in absolute terms from 537 out of a total of 2933 to 574 out of a total of 3204, but the proportion remained stable at about 18%.

Graph 3 Change in GER by gender



206. The goals set in terms of building classrooms, processing requests and entering into the corresponding co-financing agreements were largely met: 55 classrooms were completed and 972 others are in the process of completion. In some moughatas (départements), the schools were enclosed and equipped with toilets. On the other hand, plans for renovations and the expansion of schools were not yet realized.

207. With regard to teachers, forecasts for initial training were met, as the number of TTI graduates in June 2002 rose to 561, while currently 1300 student teachers are being trained in these institutions.

208. The awarding of prizes to girl graduates was conducted at the end of the 2001-2002 school year and proved to be encouraging in that the number one position in each of the entrance exam options in SY1 were girls. Overall, forecasts regarding the improvement of access and the promotion of fairness were met, thus creating favorable conditions for a lasting, fair development of educational programmes.

209. The inadequacies seen with regard to retention are due to the fact that the impact expected from the awareness-raising campaigns that were carried out will only be felt in the medium term.

6.5.2. Improving quality

210. The effort to improve quality involves measures concerning inputs, which are considered as decisive for the quality of learning. With regard to teachers, a decree of the Minister of National Education defining criteria for assigning teaching personnel was adopted in October 2002. Incentives on behalf of teachers serving in difficult areas were adopted and approved during the regional NPDES awareness-raising seminars. Hence criteria on remoteness have been defined and applied and the remoteness indemnity set as a consequence was granted to teachers assigned to difficult areas. Likewise, bonuses for teachers with multigrade classes are currently being reviewed.

211. In another area, the restructuring and professionalization of initial teacher training in the TTI is underway: the description of training content is being developed and will be approved in September; the decree on teacher training, which will extend the duration of training, has been approved. The development of a system of continuing training was launched with the creation of a continuing education unit at the level of the BED, the attribution of responsibility to the TTI for continuing education (Decree 2002-061) and the allocation of budgets for continuing education to the wilayas.

212. Teachers for SY1 to SY4 were trained in the new programmes. The process of strengthening the continuing education of TTI trainers and school inspectors and directors is in progress. For instance, TTI trainers and inspectors were trained in the new programmes at Nouakchott and Aioun (October 2002).

213. Training was also organized for inspectors about the need for reform in the school distribution plan. Five training sessions were held in December 2002 and January 2003 on behalf of 350 teachers in five Wilayas (Hodh Charghi, Hodh El Gharbi, Brakna, Trarza and Nouakchott). Two training sessions were also organized on behalf of linguistic trainers (January and February 2003).

214. Trials of new programmes are currently underway in PY2 and 5, and new initial training programmes have been drawn up and are currently being approved. With regard to textbooks, six publications that are in line with the reform have been prepared and four basic textbooks have been distributed to all pupils free of charge. In addition, local training has been organized for textbook developers, and the development of new textbooks and handbooks is under way for essential disciplines for all levels of basic education. The technical assistance needed to support this activity has already been mobilized.

6.5.3. Improving management

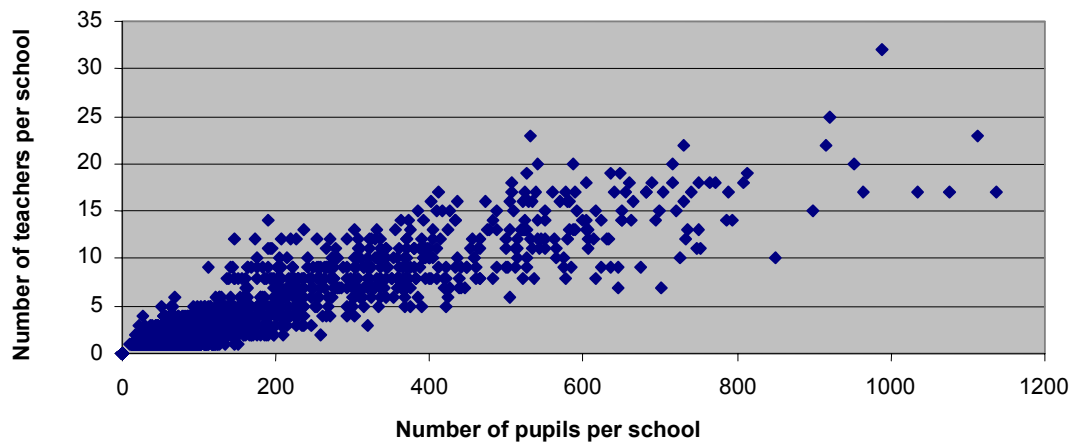
215. The goals targeted by the NPDES require improved capacity to manage the system. The implementation of the action programme established for this purpose has made it possible to carry out a certain number of measures designed to improve administrative and pedagogical management:

- Creation of a 26-person national team on the mastery and use of administrative and pedagogical management tools (December 2002);
- Development of RT on training RDBE personnel in managerial techniques;

- Building awareness among school inspectors and directors concerning the development of annual action programmes;
- Increasing the RDBE operating budgets to reinforce the decentralization undertaken by the NPDES;
- Strengthening the resources assigned to the DIBE for the close supervision of teachers;
- Developing action programmes and organizing follow-up missions in the wilayas.

216. Hence in the matter of teacher management, the efficiency index for the allocation of teaching personnel is the coefficient of linear correlation between the number of pupils and teachers per institution, which rose from 81% to 89%, as can be seen in the following figure.

Graph 4 Number of teachers in comparison with the number of pupils in each public institution



217. With regard to the allocation of resources, the funds agreed by the government for financing the NPDES reflected a significant increase in the sector's budget from the time the NPDES was established. The overall budget allocated to the sector thus rose from 14, 891, 000, 000 UM in 2002 to 19, 040, 000, 000 UM in 2003, i. e. , an absolute increase of 4, 149, 000, 000 UM and a relative increase of 28%. This increase was only 1, 796, 000, 000 UM between 2000 and 2001, i. e. 19%.

218. Basic education occupies the most significant part in this budget compared with other types of education, with 5, 123, 000, 000 UM in 2003, up from 4, 381, 000, 000 UM in 2002. The increase in absolute value seen over this period varied from 465, 000, 000 UM in 2001 over the preceding year to 742, 000, 000 UM in 2003. This increase in the basic education budget made it possible to deal with the need to recruit teachers and to increase the RDBE operating budget in order to achieve the goals set by the programme.

219. The implementation of the above-mentioned measures points towards a positive impact of the NPDES on the performance of the educational system. Nevertheless, the available data do not permit a definitive evaluation. The information from the school census indicates that the repetition rate fell from 15% in 2000 to 13. 3% in 2001, and that the number of pupils per teacher also fell from 42 to 39.

220. In another area, the evaluation of the proficiency of pupils in the second year of basic education generated certain results that are useful in terms of an educational

policy promoting quality. It was thus possible to verify that a full-cycle school is a guarantee of better pupil performance.

221. These same results also confirmed the harmful impact of repetition on pupil performance, and likewise for overcrowded classrooms and schools. Conversely, factors that positively influence pupil performance included the integration of teaching into the local social milieu, involvement in local community life, the activity of parent-teacher associations and the implementation of mechanisms for professional exchanges between teachers in the same school. In addition, the data from this evaluation was used to make a comparison between seven provinces in the sample. It is clear that most of the time coming from one province rather than another has a sharp impact on pupil performance. This evaluation thus yields an objective qualitative measurement of provincial bias, without however making it possible to fully explain the reasons for this bias.

222. An evaluation of the coverage of programmes in the 5th year of the basic educational cycle, in addition to the above-mentioned objectives, is useful for developing a basis of comparison between the coverage rates of the former programmes and those of the new programmes introduced in year 5 in 2003-2004. In addition, this evaluation is aimed at better determining the impact of the introduction of the 1999 reform.

223. The evaluation of year 2 of the basic cycle made it possible to measure the immediate impact of introducing the reform, as it is the same age category that is found in year 5. It is thus possible to reasonably assess whether the “shock effect” of introducing the reform was attenuated by the implementation of the NPDES or whether the structuring impact of carrying out the NPDES will come later than expected.

224. Other evaluation work is also underway. An evaluation of the teacher training institutes (TTI), conducted on three cohorts between 2000 and 2004, will help develop a clear vision of the performance of student teachers and the process of continuing education.

225. It will be used to measure the impact of the change from one-year training to two-year training on the relative performance of the student teachers. Also available will be the costs of training in order to permit a beginning cost-effective analysis of initial training.

226. In addition, Mauritania was selected to take part in the PASEC evaluation during the 2003-2004 school year. This will be used for an international comparison of the level of second and fifth year pupils in the basic education cycle in French and math. The national evaluation team will also add a test of Arabic.

227. It is clear that, even though there are different bases (test) and different initial objectives, the multiplicity of evaluations will enable decision-makers to make use of a continuous flow of objective qualitative information on the final “output” of the educational system: “pupil performance”.

7. LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS

228. Preparation of the NPDES was spread over a year. It kept the entire range of actors in the educational system spellbound throughout this period: multi-disciplinary professional teams, pupils' parents, civil society, development partners, decision-makers, etc. Throughout this process a rich, frank debate on all the questions related to the educational process generated a voluminous documentation dealing with the sector as a whole, from early childhood to higher education and including every different type of education or training in Mauritania. The NPDES is the synthesis of this process, which was unprecedented in this country for this sector.

229. The lessons of this rich experience and the recommendations that it is likely to inspire deserve to be built on. They could, where appropriate, shed light on the development of a methodological guide to conduct similar exercises in situations with the same characteristics, or for establishing a programme on a similar scale as the NPDES, based on a long-term vision and a comprehensive sector-based approach that integrates the country's socio-economic realities. To ensure optimum effectiveness of the project, it is necessary that as many conditions as possible are brought together.

230. Here we will summarize the main conditions that at one time or another had a positive impact on the performance of this exercise and on its results. One decisive condition is undoubtedly the level of commitment of the public authorities to education. The existence of a decisive policy commitment was a precious asset in defining choices, in mobilizing actors and resources, and in setting the time frame for technical proposals. The coordinating team succeeded in securing this political commitment from the beginning to the end of the exercise.

231. A second condition was the establishment of responsible bodies for developing the work as a whole. This was the role of the different committees created for this purpose. In this respect, it is worth paying special attention to the composition and operation of these bodies, which constituted the real workforce of the programme. In this area it is necessary to:

- Ensure that these bodies, whose establishment must be accompanied by broad publicity, involve, as much as possible, all the ministers concerned by educational and training activity and the partners in educational action, including civil society and the funding agencies as well as any specialties useful for the exercise;
- See to it that these working groups benefit from the greatest liberty of expression, reflection and action, and that they can confront the most destabilizing situations and the most audacious proposals, the main point being to emphasize objectivity and scientific rigor. This attitude must guide the conduct of the analysis, from the analysis of results to the recommendations that they suggest with regard to the definition of strategies and the formulation of action programmes;
- Maintain ongoing, effective communications between the work groups and the political decision-makers so that the latter are not taken by surprise by the actual situation and that the members of the work groups are not discouraged by the absence or slowness of responses;
- Prepare the policy-makers so that they want to listen and take stock of the actual situation expressed by the groups in complete candor;
- Organize effective communication between the various actors: inter-ministerial committee, coordination committee, validation committee;

- Ensure that a sufficient number of facilitators of the goals-based planning method are available for the entire period to ensure the proper performance of production and a better distribution of training-action;
- Clearly identify the resource persons to be mobilized to carry out the programme (from analysis to definitive plan) by adopting the broadest vision possible (technicians, national and foreign experts, civil society) and ensure the groups are representative so that the diversity of the educational system is taken into account;
- Ensure that the group members have access to all documentation useful for the exercise and that there is stability among the personnel mobilized for the exercise until its conclusion;
- Ensure the availability and reliability of information on the educational system prior to beginning the planning process and do not hesitate to undertake studies or surveys during the course of the exercise to obtain additional information if necessary. It is also necessary to maintain a constant flow of information to all the development partners throughout the preparatory phase of the programme and put to use the experience accumulated in the course of EFA and PRSP activities.

232. With regard to programming per se, a certain number of precautions are necessary. One should in particular ensure that the process of awareness-building accompanies the process of programming by organizing seminars, workshops and field missions and making use of the media (official and independent). One should also keep in mind that a relevant action strategy requires sharing the objective results of the analysis with the decision-makers and ensuring that each sub-sector strategy is approved by the policy bodies in order to ensure that as a result a coherent synthesis is established within the desired time frame.

233. To this end, it is advisable to have bottom-up communications mechanisms to decision-makers and top-down mechanisms to the technical groups so that the coordination committee can check and evaluate the progress of the work at every step. As part of this process, it is necessary to ensure:

- That the actions proposed correspond properly with the strategies defined in order to meet the problems raised by the analysis;
- That the resources needed to carry out the exercise are in place (budget for support personnel, communications resources) without forgetting that the essential resources needed in this field depend on technical capacities.

234. To assess how realistic the programme is, it is worth setting up a macro-financial framework and subsequently ensuring the reliable quantification of goals. For this purpose, the mastery and use of efficient awareness-raising tools will help in calculating the medium and long-term impact of each goal and assuring its quantification. In short, the development of an educational development plan demands a clear view of the problems, broad outlines and policies that are needed.

235. This is the basis on which discussions need to be held with the funding agencies in order to jointly define a consistent action policy that is likely to win their support. The support of the main funding agencies is often decisive for the commitment of other funding bodies.

236. In Mauritania, the support of the WB contributed a great deal to mobilizing the other bilateral and multilateral partners (French Cooperation, ADB, IDB) and permitted the programme to benefit from substantial facilities agreed under the HIPC initiative.

237. Finally, it is necessary throughout the preparatory phase to consider the mechanisms for implementing the planned actions. It is obvious that in comparison with

preparation, implementation demands much greater resources to deal with the diversity of action, the scale of the country and the number of participants.

238. Problems related to the capacity for absorption are not the least important. In this respect, it is worth maintaining and strengthening the awareness-raising policy. Likewise, and given the planning horizon (ten years), it is necessary to set up monitoring mechanisms that can be used to make any adjustments needed to remedy any problems.

239. Taking into account all these ideas and the way they are incorporated into practical measures throughout the conduct of the exercise made it possible to develop a comprehensive document that concretizes the approach on which the reform of the educational system was based.

240. The approach adopted for this purpose was based on a partnership approach that integrated an overall vision and ensured that the document was reliable enough to gain the support of all the education partners. The first positive indication came from what is generally the most difficult source, the external funding sources that accepted straightaway to come up with the resources needed to carry out the five-year programme. The Ministry of Finances, which is also rarely hasty in allocating such important sums for this sector, also agreed with unprecedented speed.

241. A commitment at the Dakar Forum stipulated that no country that made a serious commitment to basic education would see its efforts go unfulfilled due to a lack of resources. This commitment conclusively proved to be true for Mauritania and its NPDES.

242. **The NPDES can be said to constitute a contract through which everyone involved in educational activity solemnly undertakes to lift Mauritania's schools to new performance levels in accordance with the framework set by the latest educational system reform.** The result with respect to this commitment is already positive. After less than two years of implementing this programme, numerous actions have already been carried out to improve educational programmes and in general to reduce inequalities, in particular by the enrolment of girls, and to take into account hygiene and health concerns in the school environment as well as environmental concerns in general.

243. The impact of these achievements on learning results cannot be measured prior to carrying out the scheduled evaluations. The evaluations now underway will soon help draw initial conclusions on this matter. Nevertheless, serious challenges remain, and the level of performance of the NPDES depends on how well they are met.

244. The disengagement of the teaching profession that is observable in any sector study is seriously undermining the image of the school and endangering the results expected from these investments. This phenomenon is targeted specifically by the sector strategy through the implementation of protracted, multi-form activities involving awareness-building, training, and moral and material incentives for teachers. Hope for the future lies in efficiently carrying out this action programme in accordance with the planned deadlines.

245. The sector's capacities with regard to statistical analysis, prospective studies and evaluation are inadequate, both at the level of the Ministry of National Education and the other ministries that carry out educational and training activities and that are also covered by components of the NPDES. This situation could have a negative impact on the harmonious application of the reform.

246. To what extent can the shortcomings that have often characterized the conduct of educational policy be quickly mastered? The capacity of the educational sector

to generalize the achievements of the NPDES in improving the quality of basic education and to make these sustainable depends on the answer to this question. These are the challenges that face everyone concerned by the educational system at a decisive turning point for the future of Mauritania's schools.