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Save the Children US Village Schools in Mali 1992-2003: A Future to Quality Access?

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DRAFT

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
CONFEMEN	Conférence des Ministres de l'Education des pays ayant le Français en partage
MLA	Monitoring Learning Achievement
NESIS	National Education Statistical Information Systems
PASEC	Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs des Pays de la CONFEMEN
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SACMEQ	Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ABSTRACT

For a decade, the Malian government has designated financial and human resources to meet the two principal challenges facing the educational system – improving access, on the one hand, and improving the quality of learning in schools on the other. This gave rise to the community schools, new forms of educational organization born of the incapacity of the public services to meet the demand for education in rural areas. Today, they are an alternative to quality education for all.[1]

In 1992, Save the Children proposed a different model for village schooling… (that) represents a break from the existing formal education paradigm in several important ways.[2]

Save the Children US (SC) has been providing community (or village) schools in Mali since 1992 and has expanded and adapted its approach to seven other countries in Africa.[3] These schools provide relevant rural education in villages in Mali where no proximate schools existed. At the same time, this model was innovative, and challenged prevailing assumptions about what education works effectively. This paper focuses on the evolution of the village school approach in Mali and its relationship to Malian educational reform. It concludes by raising questions about how educational projects run by NGOs with outside funding are valued and evaluated.

[1] Fomba, *La gestion communautaire de l'école, une solution alternative a la problématique d'une éducation de base de qualité pour tous au Mali*, p. 1.

[2] DeStefano, *Community-Based Primary Education: The Experience of the BEEP Project in Mali A Collaborative Effort USAID/Mali-Save the Children USA*, p. 3.

[3] Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Uganda.

1. SUMMARY

1. This paper focuses on the evolution of the village school approach in Mali and its relationship to Malian educational reform. It raises questions about how educational projects run by NGOs with outside funding are valued and evaluated.

1.1. The beginning

2. The 1962 educational reform in Mali had made education obligatory for all children. Thirty years later, however, in 1992, barely 2000 primary schools existed for the 12000 villages in this largely rural country. In Sikasso Region in southern Mali where infrastructure was poor in general, enrolment rates were particularly low. The SC school program in Mali was inaugurated in 1992 and supported by USAID as part of the effort to decentralize basic education in this newly 'democratic' African nation.[4]

3. Save the Children US (SC) began providing community (or village) schools in Mali in 1992 and has expanded and adapted its approach to seven other countries in Africa[5]. It shared roles and responsibilities with the villages for building a one-room classroom, for defining a shorter, more pertinent curriculum taught in the local language, for selecting, training, and remunerating teachers from the villages, for selecting equal numbers of girls and boys to go to school on a calendar adapted to seasons and to children's chores, to providing schoolbooks and materials, and for training village management committees to supervise the enterprise.

1.2. Access and quality

4. Access was the obvious mission of the enterprise, but quality was a profound part of the proposal. The curriculum, enrolment parity, flexible recruitment ages, cohorts of determined size, triennial enrolments, viable student-teacher ratios, teachers attuned to village needs, child-centered pedagogy, local language and materials produced for this context – many if not most of these meet the criteria of quality education. Criticized by some as poor education for poor people, village schools have provided access to local schooling at affordable fees. "What is given up to assure lower costs, lower teacher qualifications and lower material requirements is made up for by an environment of higher community, teacher and student commitment."[6]

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[4] "Under the Fourth Education Project, in conjunction with which the BEEP (Basic Education Evaluation Project) project was developed, the World Bank, French Cooperation, USAID, and other donors made funds available to the education sector for expansion and improvement of basic education. School construction was to be jointly funded, 75% by the ministry, with the Fourth Education Project funds, and 25% by the communities…. USAID's emphasis was on trying to increase access by improving the quality and efficiency of the system, thus allowing more children to be served by the existing structure… In 1990, Save the Children began working with the Ministère de l'Education de Base (MED) to help communities share the cost of school construction…picking up the community contribution for the Kolondieba District, …one official school was constructed in 1991, and another in 1992…. Given the slow pace of expansion of access, different forms of community initiative had begun to emerge in Mali….village schools of various types…. " DeStefano, pps 2-3.

[5] Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Uganda.

[6] DeStefano, p. 3.

1.3. Expansion, evaluation, improvement

5. Three years after its inception, the Save the Children US program was flourishing. In 1994-1995 there 36 village schools served 2160 children in which 72 teachers were teaching. In 1995-1996, 114 schools existed with 6840 children in 110 villages[7]. In 2003, approximately 800 SC village schools serve nearly 50,000 children.

6. How successful are they at providing a quality education? School achievements are measured in terms of retention and completion and performance on the CEP, the national sixth-grade leaving exam given in French and in a bilingual version. Village school students' pass rates have risen from 5% in 1998, to 10% in 1999, to 20% in 2000, 31% in 2001 and 51% in 2002 and 2003. In 2003, 2,354 SC pupils took the exam in French only; 57% of the boys passed and 42% of the girls passed; 89% of the students from the 16 schools that took the bilingual exam passed. These scores compare favorably with the government schools in Sikasso. The SC village schools have provided access to quality education, and have evolved in response to the demands for further education spawned by their success.

1.4. Epilogue

7. USAID funding ended in 2003 and the evolution of these schools without it, without Save oversight, and without the network of competent local NGOs remains to be seen. The indicators of the success of the village schools rarely include precisely what USAID has pointed to – community engagement and ownership. Much more than an 'unsustainable' model is at stake here.

8. USAID will continue to support community schools albeit at a much lower rate, and not the most innovative among them. If the SC network of village schools does not sustain itself, and this cannot be known at the present time, should the experience as a whole be condemned? Is sustainability the best measure of success? At a time when decentralization is increasingly popular because the centralized government cannot provide education for all, is it reasonable to put limitations to this experience of decentralization while beginning others? To what extent do communities have a voice in this dialogue? Even tracing the village school experience back to its roots shows that, at best, the community school in Mali represents a limited dialogue between the initiating agency and the individual community organization.

9. Would "civil society" be more enhanced by the village school process though a more structured dialogue set within a framework of steadily increasing developmental action by the local community organization. The Mali Village Schools were an outstanding educational experience, with positive ratings on several scores.

10. It remains questionable whether that experience could not have yielded much greater rewards, especially at a time when more extensive, more cost effective basic education models are needed, and when it is more urgent than ever throughout Africa to discover efficient ways of building civil society which combine the inheritance of the past and the pointers to the future.

[7] *Les Ecoles Communautaires (Ecoles du Village) Dans la région de Sikasso/Mali: 1992-1997: Bilan et Perspectives*, Rencontre de Bougoni.

2. SIKASSO REGION: 1987-1992

11. Save the Children US (SC) came to Mali in 1986 in response to the Malian government's request for urgent relief. A series of serious droughts in the mid 1970s and 1980s had driven large numbers of Dogons from the Bandiagara Cliff and the area around Mopti to Sikasso, a cotton-growing region that is also a corridor for migrant labor to Cote d'Ivoire directly to the south. Children were dying in large numbers and SC initiated a child survival program based broadly on the UNICEF GOBI (Growth monitoring Oral re-hydration Breast feeding and Immunization) model. To manage the child survival program as it had been conceived, village committees were created. These led, in turn, to adult literacy programs in a few villages where volunteers and village leaders were trained to read and write their mother tongue so that they could participate in and manage the development activities in which SC was engaged – food security, water and sanitation and micro-finance. The centers used a curriculum of health and agriculture as the basis for their training. They were manifestly interesting to children who watched their parents learn how to write. "Though it was night time, there were lots of children, especially boys, looking in at these lessons through the windows."[8] The success of the health and literacy village-managed, NGO-sponsored programs coalesced and converged around the need for schooling for children living in these rural villages of southern Mali.

12. The 1962 educational reform in Mali had made education obligatory for all children. Thirty years later, however, in 1992, barely 2000 primary schools existed for the 12000 villages in this largely rural country. Only about 500 000 of the 1 533 000 7-12 year olds in the country went to school. The overall enrolment rate of 32%, when disaggregated, showed that only 26% of the school-age girls were in school.[9] Enrolments varied between rural and urban, poor and less poor, and the north and the south. Insufficient numbers of classrooms meant that student teacher ratios of 100:1 ratios were not (and are not) uncommon.[10]

13. In Sikasso, where infrastructure was poor in general, enrolment rates were particularly low. In 1991, before SC opened its pilot community schools, the gross enrolment rate in Kolondieba District, where it began, was around 14% and 8.5% for girls .[11] Schooling in the district was concentrated in urban areas: of the twenty-nine primary schools serving children in 207 villages, two dozen were located in five administrative centers.[12] The government provided virtually no education for village children.

14. This needs to be borne in mind when discussing whether or not it is fair to burden poor people by making them pay for their schooling, and whether or not non-governmental subsidies let central governments who should provide public services off the hook. This is particularly pertinent in Mali, where decentralization will displace the fiscal burden to local administrations on the assumption that they will better be able to levy and collect taxes than the central government.

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[8] Laugharn, *op. cit.* , p. 10.

[9] *Les écoles communautaires (écoles du village) dans la région de Sikasso/Mali: 1992-1997: Bilan et perspectives, Rencontre de Bougoni, 16 décembre 1996,* Save the Children Sahel Field Office, p.2

[10] Personal observation. MOE statistics suggest an average ratio of 80:1.

[11] DeStefano, *op. cit*. Numbers vary slightly on these figures but none are higher than 20%. Laugharn, p. 15, probably the most reliable source, cites "under 20%…under 20% for girls."

[12] Laugharn, *Negotiating 'Education for Many" Enrolment, Dropout, and Persistence in the Community Schools of Kolondieba, Mal.*, p. 15.

15. The SC school program in Mali was inaugurated in 1992, in response to a concatenation of international, national, and local events. In 1990, the international community in Jomtien, Thailand had designated Education for All as a goal for the year 2000. At the time, the Malian government was investing heavily in secondary and higher education[13] and "was pointed to as a paragon of inefficiency and wasted resources"[14]. In 1991, when Moussa Traoré's regime ended in a coup d'état, President Alpha Oumar Konaré became acutely aware of the difficulty of responding to popular expectations for more basic education while maintaining support for higher education. Student strikes broke out in 1991-1992 after scholarships were stopped for grade 10, and the selection criteria, based on performance and parents' income, were created and applied to university students and to high school juniors and seniors.

16. Teachers and opposition parties joined in the fray. A new Ministry of Basic Education was created, indicating the belief in the necessity of expanding basic education and of making the school system more responsive; the minister therefore worked to "bring the school back into the community and to bring the community back into the school"[15], one of many educational reforms and innovations to stud the next decades. USAID supported the government's efforts to decentralize basic education in this newly 'democratic'[16] African nation and supported Save the Children.[17]

17. In 1988, SC had built government schools in four villages using concrete, government-trained teachers, the national curriculum and methodology. Government primary schools in Mali like those in other ex-French colonies, bore the stamp of their heritage – the curriculum, French-produced textbooks, the sequence and numbering of classes, diplomas based on year-end exams, the Baccalauréat, the objectives. If the plan was to provide greater access to rural populations, it quickly became apparent that the schools' construction costs and the speed at which they could be built would never achieve EFA goals by the year 2000, always an explicit objective of the endeavor.[18]

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[13] "At the end of the 1980s, access to formal basic education in Mali was stagnant if not declining. Government capacity to provide basic schooling was severely constrained because of the persistent patterns of resource allocation that favored secondary and higher education, coupled with an overly centralized, supply constraint dominated approach to sectoral development. That is, the government's ability to expand access was constrained by the rate at which it was willing and able to allocate funds, organize the installation of schools, and hire teachers." *Ibid*. p. 2.

[14] Christensen, *et al.*, *Kids, Schools, and Learning*, p. 71.

[15] Christensen, p. 69.

[16] "Under the Fourth Education Project, in conjunction with which the BEEP (Basic Education Evaluation Project) project was developed, the World Bank, French Cooperation, USAID, and other donors made funds available to the education sector for expansion and improvement of basic education. School construction was to be jointly funded, 75% by the ministry, with the Fourth Education Project funds, and 25% by the communities…. USAID's emphasis was on trying to increase access by improving the quality and efficiency of the system, thus allowing more children to be served by the existing structure… In 1990, Save the Children began working with the Ministère de l'Education de Base (MED) to help communities share the cost of school construction…picking up the community contribution for the Kolondieba District, …one official school was constructed in 1991, and another in 1992… Given the slow pace of expansion of access, different forms of community initiative had begun to emerge in Mali…village schools of various types…" DeStefano, pps 2-3.

[17] USAID also supported the community schools of World Education, but these were more conservative. Their point of entry was the parent-teacher association, and the argument was civil society involvement. In all other ways, these schools were identical to government schools, offering no innovation.

[18] With "funds…for one such construction per year, meaning that it would have taken almost two centures to have a school in every community." Laugharn, p. 15. DeStefano also remarks, "In 1990, Save the Children began working with the Ministère de l'Education de Base (MED) to help communities share the cost of school construction according to the Fourth Education Project formula. The three classroom school model has a total cost of US$ 30,000…..only one official school was constructed in 1991, and another in 1992." p. 2.

18. SC therefore developed an innovative approach to education. It proposed sharing roles and responsibilities with the villages for building a one-room classroom, for defining a shorter, more pertinent curriculum taught in the local language, for selecting, training, and remunerating teachers from the villages, for selecting equal numbers of girls and boys to go to school on a calendar adapted to the harvest and planting seasons, and to children's chores, to providing schoolbooks and materials, and for training village management committees to supervise the enterprise.

3. QUALITY VILLAGE SCHOOLS: RESPONDING TO LOCAL NEEDS

19. SC made several basic assumptions about the capacity and value of community participation in education in its Kolondieba pilots.[19] Community participation in and engagement with its children's education is a fundamental and an often-unmeasured index of the success of these schools. SC drew on the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) model that took a community-management approach and significantly increased enrolments, particularly those of girls. Like BRAC, SC sought to engage with communities so that they could participate actively in defining and providing an education that they found appropriate and relevant where the government did not and could not. Also like BRAC, Save set gender equity high among its priorities proposing that equal numbers of boys and girls be enrolled, something which was not typically the case in Mali, where girls more often than boys stay home to help their mothers with household chores and women's crops.

20. Access was the obvious mission of the enterprise, but quality was a profound part of the proposal. The curriculum and its objectives of preparing villagers to better live in their environment, enrolment parity, flexible recruitment ages, cohorts of determined size, triennial enrolments, viable student-teacher ratios, recently literate, somewhat schooled teachers attuned to village needs, child-centered pedagogy, local language and materials produced for this context – many if not most of these meet the criteria of quality education. Criticized by some as poor education for poor people, village schools provided access to local schooling at affordable fees, and overcame most of the shortcomings (or short cuts) – low-cost classrooms, poorly qualified teachers, fewer materials. "What is given up to assure lower costs, lower teacher qualifications and lower material requirements is made up for by an environment of higher community, teacher and student commitment."[20] Communities' engagement in managing these schools reflected their desire to have their children be educated, to be involved in that education despite their own lack of education, and to their confidence in the model.

3.1. Selecting villages

21. The villages in which Save sought to undertake community school collaboration were selected according to certain criteria. Initially, a national 'school map' helped to determine which villages had a minimum of 60 school-age children (the initial cohorts also included older children) located at more than walking distances from public primary schools (medersas, or Koranic schools, were not included). SC staff visited the potential villages to engage in a participatory rapid appraisal with the traditional leaders, to determine why its children did not go to public schools and whether the village wanted a school. Above all, a consensus had to exist in the village to build and manage its school. In 1992, 20 villages were visited and three of these, and later a fourth, appeared particularly favorable to starting a school. The fourth school, set in a poorer village, ultimately failed. Villagers wanted schools in their villages since distance was a strong

[19] *Ibid.* p. 4. Seven assumptions: every parent is responsible for educating his/her child, human, material and financial resources are available for basic education in the villages, communities should be engaged from the outset and during all phases of the process of defining and managing an educational project, which builds self-confidence if communities are persuaded of the value of the undertaking, costs should be low without lowering quality, the political climate in Mali is favorable to decentralizing education and to collaborating with NGOs and the community.

[20] DeStefano, p. 3.

disincentive because it was dangerous for girls to walk long distances to go to school, and expensive to board children outside the villages.

3.2. Local management: Village School Management Committees (SMC)

22. Traditional village leaders were asked to designate representatives for the 5-member school management committee, (SMC) including two women and two literate people to manage the school. The SMC structure was based on the Bambara tradition of tons, task-oriented community organizations, cautioned by traditional leaders. The site chosen for the initial classroom was often a temporary shelter so that villagers and the SMC could determine where to situate the new classroom, with technical advice from SC.

23. Building took place at the end of the rainy season (October, November) using local materials – local brick, mud. SC provided imported doors and roofs. Classrooms were outfitted with student desks/chairs (2 students/bench), and a blackboard and chalk. (In 2000, flip charts, wall maps, and a 'library' or box of books, usually in Bamanakan, were added). (SC provided all school supplies until 1998 when it began gradually reducing its contribution until 2002, when parents became responsible for purchasing school supplies (pens, notebooks, slates).

24. The SMC compiled a list of all 6, 7, and 8 year-olds to be enrolled and respected the SC-imposed rule of parity between boys and girls. In the larger villages, an initial cohort of 60 children was chosen for the first single-classroom schools, divided into two groups of 30 (half boys, half girls).

3.3. Calendar

25. Village school annual and daily school calendars were adapted to the agricultural economy, running from October to the end of May after some of the harvest season (maize in September, millet in October, cotton in November/December) and before the onset of the rainy season so that children could work at planting and harvesting times. The 3-hour school day did not prevent children from doing their chores (girls' household and babysitting primarily).

26. The day was divided into two sessions for two teachers. By reducing the contents of the education to basic needs, school would not conflict with village life and therefore stood a greater chance of enduring. The 6 day/week, 28 weeks/year, holiday-free annual calendar, and the absence of student or teacher strikes made it possible to cover the curriculum effectively even when it expanded to grades 4-6 in 1996.

3.4. Local language teaching

27. From the outset, SC decided to have teachers teach in Bamanakan, the most widely spoken language in Mali and in the Sikasso Region rather than in French, which many Malians learn to speak in school as a second if not third language. The choice had significant implications: children could understand what their teachers were saying in the classroom from day one, and arguably evolved more quickly for not being forced to learn a foreign language and to learn in a foreign language. SC therefore developed its own materials in local languages.

3.5. Curriculum

28. SC's initial three-year curriculum was developed and adapted from the adult literacy curriculum (with its focus on agriculture and health), an outcome in many ways of the regular consultative process between SC field staff and the local Development Committees – the lowest level of local government representing the traditional village leadership. The curriculum was organized around village life, agriculture and natural resource management, health and basic business skills in addition to the three Rs, history, geography, and observation, designed to meet local needs of a rural setting and an agricultural economy.[21]

29. Basic literacy and numeracy skills were combined with life skills, and the knowledge that would enable village children to make better use of the village's resources, improve their health and their abilities to deal with the commercial world.

30. Each teacher received a teaching guide in Bamanakan for the subjects taught in local language (civics, agriculture, natural science, history and geography, health, math) and a reader created by SC for its curriculum. In addition to structured learning materials, teachers and students use local materials (tree leaves to teach medicine, cement bags for flip charts, clay for pottery) and local human resources (the village chief teaches the history of the village, for example.)

3.6. Selecting, training, and supervising teachers

31. Initially, teachers were drawn from the villages. SC took a pragmatic approach by selecting neo-literates (men for the most part) from the village who usually had at best 6th grade educations but whose understanding of their communities offset in certain ways their lack of education. Interested candidates were tested and trained by SC staff with support from the national ministry for four weeks over a period of three months (July, August, September). The month-long training program included child psychology, pedagogy, reading, writing, basic mathematics, health, agriculture, civics, local history, and specifically taught teachers to be sensitive to girls. Initial training was reinforced by annual 2-week refresher sessions; when teachers moved to higher grades, they also received two-week specialized training from the local ministry staff (CAPs).

32. SC pedagogy seeks to develop pupils' imagination and creativity, to engage students in speaking, rather than relegating them to the more common choral response role where the authority of the teacher goes unquestioned, where learning involves more memorization and rote.

33. In 1996, when satisfied parents requested more schooling and wanted their children to be able to take the CEP (and become civil servants, an expectation that was no longer realistic in 1992 but rather a vestige of a previous era), which was administered only in French, French and the fourth grade were introduced, in a manner of speaking. SC worked with the national ministry to expand the curriculum to a full primary curriculum of six years.[22] This meant that the village school curriculum was drawing closer to the national curriculum and was providing a means for village school students to go to junior high school if they chose to; the calendar and approach remained innovative and local. French was progressively introduced as of the third grade (today it is introduced in the second grade).

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[21] *Ibid.*

[22] To design the expanded curriculum, between 15-20 participants attended a series of five workshops ($1000/workshop) to develop new modules that were then tested, corrected, validated and used.

34. Teaching French and higher grades meant hiring and training teachers who could speak French, which usually meant going outside the village to recruit More skills – francophone teachers typically had 9th grade educations – raised salaries, and required a different kind of teacher management. Trained teachers moved with their classes, while new first and second grade teachers were recruited and trained on an ongoing basis.

35. Training required reinforcement and supervision. The local ministry's teacher supervisors from the Centre d'Animation Pédagogique (CAP) provided pedagogical supervision for which SC remunerated them. Later, as the network of schools grew, another level of management was required. Scaling up was possible thanks to the dynamic partnerships established with and between SMCs, the Académies Educatives (regional education authorities) and CAPs, USAID, and implementing NGO partners. Partnerships with local NGOs who became a level of management between the teachers, SC, and the CAP, grew from four to as many as 16.[23]

36. Partners benefited from capacity building and institutional development provided by SC. With different degrees of success, they oversaw the village schools in their areas, serving as a link with all the administrations involved, while SC provided technical and financial assistance. As they demonstrated more skills, the NGOs became involved in strategic planning. From 2001-2003, local NGOs were entirely responsible for their part of the project, having developed a plan for supervising teachers in the area where they worked and for promoting relationships with the CAP and the communal councils.

3.7. Costs[24]

37. Costs were being held down. "Schools are constructed and equipped (desks, benches, blackboard, teacher's table and chair) for roughly US$1200, or 30 times less than the cost of an official primary school. SC also underwrites each school's consumable materials…. (and bears) recurrent costs, relating to supervision and recurrent operating expense. Teachers were paid FCFA 3,500 (US$12.80) per month out of school fees and a general village association contribution compared to national salaries of about FCFA 30,000 (US$110)."[25]

38. Building a community school was far less expensive than the government cement schoolroom that cost approximately $10,000 to build and outfit with student desks, a blackboard, and a teachers' desk. "(S)chools built from local materials could be constructed at about a fifth of the cost of the prevailing concrete model. Not only did this make the construction of a school financially affordable by a typical village, but it also made the school seem less of a foreign body within the community."[26]

39. Teacher salaries were far lower than those in government schools. Initially, the salaries were largely symbolic at 3000 CFA/month, and augmented by support in kind – cereals, labor, and other services. SMCs collected 100 CFA per student per month from families sending their children to school, but encouraged communities to raise funds on a family basis rather than on a per capita basis, asking for 1000 CFA regardless of the number of children sent to school, to make the school a community-wide concern.

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[23] AID Mali, AADEC, AMPJ, ASG, CRADE, GADS Mali, GRADE Banlieue, GRAT

[24] Based on *Blazing the Trail*: *The Village Schools of Save the Children/USA in Mali*, Jean-Pierre Velis.

[25] Laugharn, p. 17.

[26] The CFA (Francophone African Community) is used in the former French colonies in West Africa (Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, and Senegal) and remains pegged to the French franc. The CFA was devalued by half in 1994

40. Families with no children in school, like taxpayers who do not benefit from the schools in their local communities, did not want to pay. SC proposed that the village association that managed all cash crop issues in the village earmark 2% of its cotton revenues to cover recurrent school costs including teachers' salaries. Most villages accepted, and the revenues provided the major source of funding until the cotton crisis in 2000.[27] Alternatives like collective field, market gardening, and per capita gain were used to support the schools after that.

Table 1 Running a village school[28]

Category	$/school yr.	$/student/yr.	% total cost
School startup	**423**	**7**	13
Development (/5 years, allowing for curriculum updating and revitalizing community support)	173		
Capital costs (/10 years, or estimated lifespan of a school building)	250		
School operations	**1471**	**25**	45
Teacher salary	103		
Materials and supplies	1254		
Maintenance	105		
PTA operations	9		
School support	**911**	**15**	28
Teacher (recyclage)	123		
Inspection (by MOE)	28		
Committee/PTA training	263		
Committee/PTA monitoring	497		
NGO development	**13**	**22**	Less than 1
Startup	4		
Operations	8		
Supervision	1		
PVO management (SC management costs not allocated elsewhere, business costs, and costs of maintaining institutional identity)	**417**	13	
Totals	**3235/school** **54/student** (based on 60 students/school)		100

[27] Cotton is the primary source of income in the Sikasso region, and the second largest export for Mali after gold. Pointing to the contradiction of development investments being given to countries whose exports are blocked by the US and the EU, Nicholas Kristof (*NY Times*, May 27, 2003) cites US agricultural subsidies of roughly $2 billion yearly farmers as causing a deep crisis in world cotton markets and Oxfam (2002) points out that "while the US advocates free trade and open markets in developing countries, its subsidies are destroying markets for vulnerable farmers… For the region as a whole [sub-Saharan Africa], the losses amounted to $301m, equivalent to almost one-quarter of what it receives in American aid… Mali lost 1.7 per cent of GDP and 8 per cent of export earnings". Subsistence single-crop farmers like those in Sikasso are vulnerable to shifts in world market prices and unable to lobby against them. Education, however, at least enables them to read the contracts or the scales weighing their crop.

[28] Tietjen, Karen, *Community Schools in Mali: A Comparative Cost Study*, taken from Table 7, page 61. Note that the data was collected in late 1996 and 1997.

4. EXPANSION, EVALUATION, IMPROVEMENT

41. Three years after its inception, the Save the Children US program was flourishing. "In its third year of operation, the project has grown to the point of being the main provider of formal education in grades one through three in the Kolondieba district."[29] The four initial schools of 1992-1993 had received 240 pupils and 16 teachers had been trained; the following year, 22 schoolrooms in 22 villages with 1320 pupils and 44 teachers had been trained. In 1994-1995 there were 36 village schools, 2160 children and 72 teachers. In 1995-1996, there was a leap to 114 schools, 6840 children in 110 villages.[30] The estimated per pupil cost for teachers of 1660 CFA was based on the numbers of teachers and pupils projected for school year 1999-2000, was based on a 7-month salary of between 8000-8750 CFA.[31]

42. In 1997, five years after it had initiated funding, USAID wanted to know what was working and what needed to be improved; it also wanted to assess and compare the costs of the alternative schools that it was supporting, and the government's schools.[32] It was relatively easy to recruit and retain students – access and retention – but there were high dropout rates in the first schools, especially among teenagers (a 13% dropout rate which meant 32 dropouts, 27 of which were adolescents who left because they could not pay fees, boys migrated to work outside the village, and girls got married.

43. Today's rates are far lower at 2.4%. Student achievement had not yet been systematically tested and plans were in the making to do so. Promotion rates were far higher than in government schools, due partly to the fact that village schools do not fail any students, and use Bamanakan. The USAID report noted the introduction of French in third grade and that students were doing "at least as well as students in the regular state schools."[33]

44. It was clearly a positive thing to have children attend school in their own villages, eliminating the risks and costs of having them leave the village for school; education was perceived to be relevant, parents felt involved in school management and the relationship between the school and the community was sufficiently powerful to have "changed the basic paradigm under which primary education is provided in Mali." (7). Parents were involved in their children's comprehensible, relevant education.

45. The report made powerful claims for the impact of SC's model beyond Kolondieba. The "appearance on the Malian scene of a successful village school model has helped alter the trajectory of education sector reform."[34] Given the success of the model, USAID Mali made a "decided effort" to have MEB overcome its reluctance to recognize non-official schools (the ministry had imposed standards that prevented communities from establishing schools) and lobbied hard to promote what became a legal framework for non-governmental schools, so that they would be officially recognized.

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[29] DeStefano, p. 4

[30] *Les Ecoles Communautaires (Ecoles du Village) Dans la région de Sikasso/Mali: 1992-1997: Bilan et Perspectives*, Rencontre de Bougoni.

[31] Cissé *et al*. p. 220-221, Annual per pupil cost for paying community school teachers.

[32] Tietjen.

[33] De Stefano, p. 6.

[34] De Stefano, p. 8.

This was a "first step in establishing a mechanism whereby the state can provide funding for non—governmental schools."[35]

46. The USAID view was that "Village schools have illustrated that quality basic education can be delivered in buildings that are locally constructed, with teachers who are less qualified and not civil servants, in languages other than French, and in a management environment determined and directed by private citizens (not MEB officials)."

47. The resulting sectoral policy led to the Nouvelle École Fondamentale (NEF) that introduced local language in grades one through three, consolidated the number of subjects, local recruitment and training of teachers, and greater community involvement in school management; strategies all drawn from the village school model."[36]

48. USAID was concerned with some critical issues. If NEF incorporated "many of the lessons from village schools into its definition" and these new schools would be bilingual, could existing schools be converted? How would civil servants reluctant to lose their job security or salaries welcome local language teaching and different curricula? The USAID evaluation was prescient about the problems that the decade-long (1999-2009) education reform, PRODEC, would later face (PRODEC eliminated NEF).

49. It also addressed the changes facing village schools that added French to their curriculum. Where would they find the teachers and how would changes to the curriculum sit with villages once they became less focused on village needs? Would the village model be considered second rate? (There is some of this.) Would it converge on the standard model? There was also some concern about a segmented primary education system in Mali, divided along rural and urban lines, the latter financed by the state and the former financed by the villages, an inherently inequitable provision of basic education…".

50. The only solution, it was argued, was to "develop a mechanism through which the state will be able to funnel resources to village schools (without) subvert(ing) the essential element of community control, oversight and management of the schools… (and to) equalize disparities between villages in different regions of the country." Prescient concerns notwithstanding, USAID provided another five years of support 1997-2002 and the SC schools continued to spread. MOE was also evaluating them.[37]

51. As network of village schools grew, SC was strengthening some of the weak areas pointed out in the mid-term evaluation (1997-2002)[38] : teacher training and supervision and student testing. Testing was one of the weak points in the village school system. The success of the schools in attracting students and in involving parents in their operation had resulted in a longer curriculum that enabled pupils to matriculate into government schools and to pass the all-important 6th grade CEP.

52. To prepare students for taking this exam and to assess their achievement along the way, SC investigated testing techniques. In 1999, a consultant was hired to begin designing and testing a test, and in 2000, SC and MOE staff were trained in testing, and in developing test items; they then began to develop test materials for teachers to

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] De Stefano, p. 9.

[37] Cf studies by Cheich Fomba, et al.

[38] Sicotte, Alfred, *et al*.

prepare pupils to take exams in unfamiliar formats. Subsequently, teachers were trained to give tests, to use sample test items, and to develop their own tests, and were taught to define short-term goals that pupils could demonstrably acquire (*objectifs pédagogiques opérationnels*).

53. SC was also interested in whether or not pupils were contributing more to their villages as a result of having gone to school. At the end of 1999, it conducted a study to verify levels of out-migration as one measure of effective schooling. The study confirmed that pupils educated in the village schools had acquired the skills to enable them to participate in ways that they could not have had had they not gone to school (raising fowl more efficiently, market gardening during the dry season, new agricultural techniques, participating in village organizations such as the CMDT association, as accountants or treasurers).

54. The role of the SMCs was also changing during this time, from mobilizing the community and getting the school built and running, to managing more effectively – organizing meetings to discuss student and teacher attendance, girls' education, the provision of books and school supplies, maintenance and equipment. Their responsibility grew, in part, to prepare for the end of USAID funding. Good governance principles influenced the traditional logic of the tons villageois, and new SMC members were elected and trained.

55. The numbers of SMCs had grown while resources had shrunk, however. SC strengthened SMC capacity to develop community action plans, understand their civic rights and advocate for their needs. In addition to training (literacy, good governance), the SMCs need time to feel secure about approaching local authorities and claiming their rights.

56. SMCs will have to work harder to advocate for themselves as the government decentralizes more and more responsibility for education to the communes and to the CAP without providing the resources. SC has organized SMC/APE Federations with them to give them greater weight in lobbying for the community schools, but they remain relatively timid for the moment about approaching government authorities.

57. The partnerships that had been nurtured on an on-going basis, and had helped SC to capitalize on a range of capacities to achieve significant results were also being reinforced, to ensure that all stakeholders participated in the operation financially and otherwise. Cadre de concertation meetings were held to which various education actors were invited. SC provided organizational development support to the implementing NGO partners, based on analyses of institutional needs. Sustaining the community schools relies on these dynamic partnerships among all education stakeholders.

58. The thorny issue of paying teachers has also evolved. In 2001, the World Bank and USAID encouraged the government to include community schoolteachers' salaries in their education sector investment program (PISE), using debt forgiven from the HIPC (Highly-Indebted Poor Countries) funds. The PISE program negotiated a $45 million loan for 2001-2004 of which $34 million was earmarked for basic education, including building schools and providing textbooks.

59. The government agreed to finance a portion of community schoolteacher salaries, but the 25000CFA has not been paid with any regularity. Payment comes on a rotating basis in Sikasso, where 400 of the 1400 SC teachers were paid by the government in 2000-1, 900 were to be paid in 2001-2002, and in 2002-2003, all 1426 registered SC teachers were supposed to be paid but were not. Therefore, 40-50% of the communities continued to pay their teachers who often had to wait months to receive their salaries.[39] Teachers' salaries continue to be low compared to salaries of civil servants, which may help to explain why teachers leave.

Table 2 SC teacher's leave, 1992-2002

Initial year of service	Still teaching	No longer teaching	% still active
1992	2	6	25,00
1993	3	18	14,29
1994	9	48	15,79
1995	26	168	13,40
1996	60	357	14,39
1997	97	564	14,67
1998	160	491	24,58
1999	163	318	38,89
2000	162	241	40,20
2001	306	186	62,2
2002	422	7	98,37
ND	16	43	27,12

Source: Save US Sahel Office, Annual statistics 2002-2003 (October)

[39] In 2000, the late payments came in two chunks: each teacher was paid 300 000 CFA, or an annual salary of 25000 CFA/month. In 2001, more teachers were paid but only for 10 months. In 2002, teachers were paid for 9 months; in 2003, teachers have received 5 months of their salary to date (July). This situation discourages teachers and makes SMCs less able to manage their schools partly because teachers paid under this system tend to consider themselves as CAP staff rather than SMC staff. This situation led SC, World Education and Africare to call a forum to discuss suitable and appropriate mechanisms of payment that ensure the employer's role of SMC. This mechanism was used the first year but the CAPs gradually kept the NGOs and the SMCs away. For example, SMCs were paid directly the first year and paid teachers in turn. Now radio broadcasts announce that salaries are ready for distribution by the CAP, whom some teachers consider to be their employers.

60. Today, approximately 800 SC village schools serve nearly 50,000 children.

Table 3 Enrolments in Save the Children village schools, Mali

Level	Girls	Boys	Total enrolments
1	4517	4805	9322
2	3295	4717	8012
3	2567	3507	6074
4	1813	2633	4446
5	3989	5435	9424
6	4395	6007	10402
Total	**20567**	**27104**	**47680**

61. How successful are they at providing a quality education? School achievements are measured in terms of retention and completion (retention is not included because SC pupils are automatically promoted to the next grade) and performance on the CEP, which is now given in both French and in a bilingual version. Village school students' pass rates have risen from 5% in 1998, to 10% in 1999, to 20% in 2000, 31% in 2001 and 51% in 2002 and 2003.

62. In 2003, 2,354 SC pupils took the exam in French only; 57% of the boys passed and 42% of the girls passed while 89% of the students from the 16 schools that took the PC exam passed. These scores compare favorably with the government schools in Sikasso (exam results are given on a regional basis and usually appear only in the official statistics for the following year but are available informally in the region.) The SC village schools have provided access to quality education, and have evolved in response to the demands for further education spawned by their success.

4.1. Pédagogie convergente

63. SC's decision to teach in Bamanakan in Sikasso and to later include French in the curriculum is an interesting inversion of the evolution of the educational reform in Mali which is currently moving towards local language teaching. Local languages had been outlawed in the classroom by the French administration in 1930 and resurrected after independence in 1960, but have never fully replaced French in the government schools.[40]

64. The failed experiment in neighboring Guinea, when Sekou Touré's national language policy had imposed local languages and ejected French wholesale from the classroom served as a warning to their neighbors; but internal ambivalence exists about abandoning French for local languages. The discussion is interesting for it suggests that the SC experiment did influence the current education reform in Mali.

65. Mali's experimentation with local languages took place in two phases. In 1978, participants at the Second National Seminar on Education recommended using local languages in formal education. Bamanakan was used in four schools (or in some classrooms in those schools) as of the next school year (1979) but teaching methods did

[40] Haidara, Youssouf, Directeur de Recherche, MOE, *Informations sur la pédagogie convergente*, PAAA, Cr no. 3318 MLI, Bamako, May 2003, p. 2.

not really address the transition to French.[41] The experiment was deemed successful, nonetheless, and led to further experimentation.

66. "The use of (national languages) proved to be particularly propitious for adapting school to the context, and for improving the quality and efficacy of teaching."[42] In 1992, Fulfulde, Songhay and Tamacheq were added and the issue of an appropriate mother-tongue pedagogy was addressed. This led to the beginning of what has become a celebrated experiment with bilingual education (*pédagogie convergente*) in Segou in 1987.[43] Both the convergence of the local language learning that promotes the intellectual development rather than subjecting a child to schooling in an unmastered or unknown language, and the pedagogy are important.

67. *Pédagogie convergente* focuses on helping the pupil to learn in an active (v. the magisterial stance of the traditional teacher, a legacy of colonial pedagogy) and to exploit creative potential. It focuses on pupils' experience and context to make learning relevant, is adapted to different areas of learning and focus on specific projects. Other principles are to esteem local languages and to improve educational access; better integrate school into the local context, improve the quality and promotion rates for basic education, and to promote functional bilingualism.[44]

68. The numbers of classrooms and schools that use *pédagogie convergente* in Mali have expanded only slowly: 10 schools in 1994, 67 in 1995, 309 in 1996, 180 in 1998 and 1256 of the approximately 5000 schools today. PRODEC, the national educational reform, plans to expand bilingual education to all primary schools (which will extend to grade 9) and is soon to produce a curriculum for the additional grades 7-9.

69. Training teachers to teach in local languages (of which there are 11) and producing a curriculum and school books in each language is a lengthy, costly undertaking however. For the sake of this discussion, it is important to point out that many of the values embodied in the PRODEC program reflect those already tried and tested in the village schools seeking to make children more intellectually active and independent even if the largest impetus for this educational reform was surely the acknowledged failure of the education system to produce children who could use what they had ostensibly learned in school.

[41] The pedagogy used in the experimental schools was the same as those in the regular schools. The curricula were simply transposed from the official curricula at the time…. Concerning the teachers, there was also the problem of moving from the mother tongue to French. The lack of appropriate methodology for teaching national languages and of adequate teaching materials made it difficult to reach the goals assigned to the experimental use of national languages in formal education. (Traoré page 5, my translation).

[42] Haidara, p. 3.

[43] See *Traoré*.

[44] Haidara, p.3.

5. EPILOGUE

70. USAID funding ended in 2003. Over-reliance on USAID funding had been cautioned against (Boukary and others) and the evolution of these schools without USAID funding, without Save oversight, and without the network of competent local NGOs remains to be seen. The indicators of the success of the village schools rarely include precisely what USAID pointed to – community engagement and ownership. Much more than an 'unsustainable' model is at stake.

71. USAID will continue to support community schools albeit at a much lower rate, and not the most innovative among them. The current focus is on quality, which is to be improved by establishing school clusters in which teacher training can be promoted. If the SC network of village schools does not sustain itself, and this cannot be known at the present time, should the experience as a whole be condemned? Is sustainability the best measure of success?

72. At a time when decentralization is increasingly popular because the centralized government cannot provide education for all, is it reasonable to put limitations to this experience of decentralization while beginning others? To what extent do communities have a voice in this dialogue? Even tracing the village school experience back to its roots shows that, at best, the community school in Mali represents a limited dialogue between the initiating agency and the individual community organization.

73. The question remains unanswered whether a greater enhancement of "civil society" by the village school process might not have been attained had that dialogue been more structured, within a framework of steadily increasing developmental action by the local community organization. The Mali Village Schools were an outstanding educational experience, with positive ratings on several scores.

74. It remains questionable whether that experience could not have yielded much greater rewards, especially at a time when there is a need for more extensive, more cost effective basic education models and when it is more urgent than ever throughout Africa to discover efficient ways of building civil society which combine the inheritance of the past and the pointers to the future.

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