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Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality

National planning and political reform, Mauritania

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Table of contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Analyzing the indicators of Mauritania's education system	4
2.1. The Gross Intake Rate (GIR):.....	4
2.2. Gross Enrolment Rate (GER)	5
2.3. Repetition rate.....	5
2.4. Access rate	6
2.5. Full schools	6
2.6. Evolution of the rétention rate	7
3. Gender and equity	8
4. Preschool education	8
5. Literacy and Basic Skills.....	9
6. Quality.....	9
7. Summary of education system indicators: an appraisal.....	10
8. Implemented strategies.....	11
9. Reforms and policies to implement	14
10. Bibliography.....	18

1. Introduction

Education in general, and basic education in particular, made significant strides from independence to the late 1980s. By that time, progress had not slowed down but seems to have had less of an impact on the school-age population, with the enrolment rate leveling off at approximately 50-52%¹ while demographic growth remained brisk.

Moreover, wide gaps between Mauritania's 13 regions existed in the early 1990s. Northern regions, such as Dakhlet Nouadhibou and Adrar, had the highest enrolment rates. Southern regions along the river and those adjacent to them to the north, such as Gorgol and Assaba, which are predominantly farming and grazing areas, had substantially lower rates².

Mauritania took part in the 1990 Jomtien Conference and signed the capstone declaration and action plan, thereby confirming its education policy's focus on universal enrolment.

In the push for higher enrolment, Mauritania's education system has put quantity above quality. Now the country's education officials acknowledge that fast primary education enrolment growth in the past several years has taken place to the detriment of teaching quality. Put another way, officials have accepted low primary-school effectiveness, overcrowded classrooms, fast-track teacher training, a lack of relevant school content, etc. That observation is borne out by high drop-out and failure rates.

The national Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) grew at a brisk pace from 1990 to 1997 before stagnating at a relatively high level with narrower regional gaps. Nevertheless, the risk of a general reversal must not be ruled out.

In addition, Mauritania has embraced the fight against illiteracy by setting up a Literacy and Primary Education Ministry, which has helped boost the literate population and enhance primary education.

¹ Source: Direction de la Planification et de la Coopération (DPC)

² 1990/91 enrolment rates were (source DPC):

- for regions with underenrolment: Hodh Charghi 35%, Hodh Gharbi 33%, Assaba 32%, Gorgol 34%
- for northern régions: Dakhlet Nouadhibou 83%, Adrar 63%, Tiris-Zemmour 88%.

Officials are starting to take account of the education system's early childhood component in its full dimension through a national early childhood policy.

2. Analyzing the indicators of Mauritania's education system

Mauritania's independence in 1960 was for all practical purposes the starting point of substantial enrolment growth. At the time, only 5% of girls and 17% of boys of primary school age were enrolled. Since then a major change in attitude towards modern education has taken place, certainly helped by the pressures and socio-economic transformations connected to gradual sedentarization and the disappearance of traditional lifestyles.

In the past several years, Mauritania's education system has improved overall. However, the rise in various indicators has been dependent on the order of teaching considered.

2.1. The Gross Intake Rate (GIR)

The Gross Intake Rate (GIR) has risen satisfactorily, increasing from under 100% in 2000-01 to over 115% in 2001-02. That might reflect a real push to boost children's enrolment. A GIR exceeding 100% means that children above or below the legal age (6 years old) have been enrolled at the start of the cycle. The national GIR conceals major gaps between regions (from 12 points in 1997-98 to 18 points in 2001-02).

Two kinds of behavior may be observed in examining regional profiles: i) a first group³ whose behavior is in line with the national GIR and ii) a second group⁴ whose profile differs from the national rate.

The gross access rate in the first cycle of the secondary level rose from 21.4% in 1997-98 to 25.3% in 2001-02. The percentage of girls has remained almost unchanged in the past five years (43%).

³ Hodh El Charghi, Assaba, Brakna, Adrar, Tiris Zemour, Gorgol and Inchiri

⁴ Tagant and Guidimakha have "camelback" profiles ahead of the national profile. Hodh El Gharbi has a surprising profile. In addition to maintaining a high girl's enrolment rate, the GIR declined to 2000-2001 before making a spectacular rise in 2001-2002 (up to 145% for girls). The GIR in Nouadhibou and Nouakchott, though following the general upward trend, stands out with a gap between boys' and girls' enrolment rates.

2.2. Gross Enrolment Rates (GER)

The national gross enrolment rate increased from 84% in 1997-98 to 88.7% in 2001-02, peaking at 90% in 2000-01. Like the GIR, the national GER conceals major disparities between regions. For example, it stands at 127% in the Adrar region and 70% in the Gorgol region.

The typical gap in GER by region (18.2 in 1997-98 to 18.1 in 2001-02) seems to indicate similar regional situations. However, that apparent consistency actually masks various regional trends. The level of differences between the *wilayas* is stable, but the nature of those differences has changed over time. Taking a closer look at these GERs reveals three typologies in relation to national rates: i) first, the *wilayas* with GERs that are consistently higher than national rates: Inchiri, Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, Adrar, Tiris Zemour and Tagant, ii) those with rates close to the national average: Hodh El Charghi and Trarza, and iii) the GERs of Assaba, Hodh El Gharbi, Gorgol, Guidimakha and to a lesser extent Brakna, which are generally below the national average.

Gender patterns are different with regard to the first group: the boys' and girls' GER in Nouadhibou and Tiris Zemour surpass 100%. The trend profile indicates a relative stagnation in both regions and in Nouakchott, whereas the situation is improving in Tagant and deteriorating in Adrar. Female bias persists in Gorgol (over 7 points) and Guidimakha (approximately 5 points).

In light of various indicators, the situation remains alarming in Gorgol with a declining GER and persistent gender gap. Guidimakha is on the right track in terms of reducing gender bias, but the situation is unstable.

2.3. The repetition rate

In the previous decade the average repetition rate by year of enrolment was 15%. The repetition rate during the first five years of primary education is fairly stable, ranging from 11 to 14%. It shoots upward during the sixth year of primary level to 25% above the national average. That is a special year when pupils prepare for examinations to enter the next level. In other words, the rate is attributable to the mechanism of assessing pupils before they enter the next cycle. The repetition rate varies widely by region with a typical

gap of 6% and a variation coefficient of 40%.

The sixth-year repetition rate by region shows high repetition levels in Nouadhibou (42%), Inchiri (41%) and Nouakchott (38%). Gorgol and Brakna have higher sixth-year repetition rates, which have risen especially compared to the repetition rates in previous years.

Repetition rates in the first level of the secondary cycle rose from 12% in 1997-98 to 16% in 2000-01.

2.4. The access rate

The number of pupils enrolled in primary school rose from 355,822 in 2000 to 375,695 in 2002, including 183,220 girls, or a 48.7% participation rate. The first-year primary-school access rate increased from 97% to 112%.

The primary school access rate rose substantially, from 89.5% in 1997-98 to over 117% in 2001-02.

Calculated on the basis of the population of 11-year-olds, the sixth-year access rate is 45%. That means the number of new entrants in the sixth year of primary school accounts for 45% of that population bracket.

With regard to gender, the girls' access rate follows the same pattern as the overall trend. Concerning equity, there is still an imbalance in favor of boys: 47% vs. 45%. That small difference masks considerable gaps between regions. The disparity is characterized by a typical gap of 14% and a variation coefficient of 31%.

On the whole, the variation range of sixth-year access rates for girls is higher than it is for boys, going from 33% in Hodh El Gharbi to 77% in Inchiri. Girls also hold the lowest and highest access rate records: 27% in Guidimakha and 82% in Nouakchott.

2.5. Full schools

Today 574 out of a total 3,204 schools are full, which is an average of 18% full-cycle schools enrolling 54% of primary school pupils. The full-cycle school percentage varies widely from one region to the next, with a typical gap of 28%, or a 155% variation coefficient. The proportion of pupils enrolled in full cycles also varies but to a lesser extent, with a typical gap of 26%, or a 48% variation coefficient

There are major regional gaps. The two Hodhs have the fewest full schools (5% for Hodh

Charghi and 7% for Hodh El Gharbi) and enroll 25% of their pupils. In Assaba, Tagant, Guidimakha, Gorgol, Trarza and Brakna, 10 to 17% of the schools are full and enroll under half their pupils.

2.6. Evolution of the retention rate

Several studies have shown that retention is the main problem beleaguering Mauritania's school system. That phenomenon must be correlated with several other parameters, including the fact that 61% of schools have just one or two levels and only approximately 18% have a full cycle, leading some specialists to advance the theory that "schools have abandoned the children"⁵.

The retention rate is approximately 43% in the countryside and 70% in the urban environment. The reasons given for the low retention rates, which affects children of both sexes, are many: the school fails to meet parents' expectations, does not offer the full education cycle, is located too far from the child's home, entails unaffordable direct or indirect costs.

The national retention rate declined from 48.4% in 1997-98 to 45% in 2001-02, peaking at nearly 52% in 1999-2000. Less than one in two children entering the first year of primary school in 1996-97 reached the sixth year. What's more, regional gaps have widened over the years, with the variation coefficient rising from 5% in 1997-98 to 33% in 2001-02. There are major disparities between the various regions. In 2001-02, it was higher in Nouadhibou (76%) and lower in Guidimakha (28%).

The girls' retention rate is slightly higher than the national average: 46% in 2001-02 vs. 45% for both genders combined. It has followed the same trend as the overall retention rate. In other words, it has dropped since 1997-98, when it stood at 49% for girls. It also varies widely depending on the region. It is even higher than the overall retention rate, with a 37% variation coefficient in 2001-02. That figure has increased over time: four years ago it was 26%.

⁵ Summary points of the study "Le système éducatif Mauritanien éléments d'analyse pour instruire des politiques nouvelles", World Bank, 2001.

3. Gender and equity

The gender dimension of enrolment must be considered in terms of the urban and rural environment.

In Mauritania's communities enrolment levels are often correlated with the social division of labor, in other words the roles that men and women play in traditional society. Though in general people agree that education is important for girls, they acknowledge limiting factors, including early marriage, poverty, the ignorance of parents, distance from schools, the mediocrity of teaching and teachers and schools' failure to carry out their mission.

Furthermore, though both sexes suffer from competing demands on their time and effort to perform household and agricultural chores, the situation is worse for girls, who work from dawn to dusk. They alternate their days between school and housework.

4. Preschool education

Today there is no longer any need to demonstrate the importance of preschool learning to prepare children for basic education. It helps to socialize young children and prepares them for reading, writing and sound methods. It gives them the tools they need to succeed in primary school.

Mauritania's family structure is changing as women enter the labor market, people leave the countryside on a massive scale and cities grow without any form of control. That situation has created an increasingly urgent need for facilities that can accommodate children up to six years old who are living away from home. In 2002, the estimated population of that age bracket was put at 270,139 or approximately 10% of the country's total population. Some 50.43% are boys and 49.57% are girls.

The lack of reliable, exhaustive data on the formal preschool education sector makes it hard to have an accurate picture of the situation.

The number of facilities created to host young children increased from 18 in 1996 to 214 in 2001. They are public (12), private (135) and community (67) structures. Their host capacity is 12,366 with 568 child-care workers, or a child/worker ratio of 21.8.

Many problems beset these facilities, especially the lack of qualified, professional staff, ill-adapted premises, overcrowding, a shortage of teaching materials and the absence of early-childhood education programs.

5. Literacy and Basic Skills

Literacy has made tremendous strides, with rates increasing from 38.2% in 1988 to 50.8% in 1995 and 57% in 2000. Nevertheless, major gaps between environments and the sexes persist. For example, 63% of men compared to 52% of women are literate. The literacy rate is 45% in the countryside compared to 75% in the urban environment. The situation varies sharply depending on the *wilaya*: Nouadhibou, Tiris Zemour and Nouakchott top the list with 75% and more, whereas Guidimakha, Gorgol, Hodh El Gharbi, Brakna and Assaba bring up the rear with less than 50%.

Basic skills taught in non-formal schools called *mahadras* have made major contributions to literacy in Mauritania. In 1995, the education ministry conducted a survey that counted 1,728 *mahadras* in three categories⁶.

6. Quality

Concerns about education quality⁷ are not new. All the education system reforms have focused on the need to improve quality.

Overall, the system suffers from structural malfunctions, especially involving its management. They are reflected in data on trends (staff and their distribution) and results (internal and external efficiency, repetition, drop-out rates, exams, qualitative evaluations). The lack of a strategic management culture and management information mainly account for the system's management shortcomings.

Two indicators have been tracked to assess the education system's quality: i) the repetition rate and ii) the pupil/teacher ratio.

The repetition rate has fallen by approximately 2 points, from 15% in 1997/98 to 13% in 2001/02. The number of pupils per teacher has decreased from 47 to 39 on average, but the figures are theoretical because they do not include teachers who have left the profession, which is a frequent occurrence in basic education. Therefore the actual number of pupils

⁶ General *mahadras* (151), where the Koran, Fikh, hadith, etc. are taught; specialized *mahadras* (246), which teach one discipline in addition to the Koran; and Koranic *mahadras* (1,331), where only the Koran is taught.

⁷ The term quality refers to the appropriateness or relevance of objects or processes in relation to the goals for which they are intended. Quality also implies a scale and often refers to standards.

per teacher is much higher.

Moreover, the ratio is much higher in the public sector: 40.7 compared to 18.1 in the private sector.

The ratio varies rather widely between regions, with a typical inter-regional gap of 8 and a 21% variation coefficient. It ranges from 20 pupils/teacher in Inchiri to 51 in Gorgol, a 2.5 increase.

7. Summary of the education system's indicators: an appraisal

The education system's quantitative indicators have outperformed qualitative indicators. The GER rose from 53% in 1991/92 to over 88% in 2001-02, which might reflect a real enrolment drive. The primary-school access rate has significantly increased, climbing from 89.5% in 1997-98 to over 117% in 2001-02. The first-year primary-school access rate climbed from 97% to 115% during the same period. The sixth-year access rate, which refers to the population of 11-year-olds, is approximately 45%.

The GIR increased from below 100% before 2000 to over 115% for 2001-02. Those indicator improvements could be correlated with the increase in the number of schools, which during the same period rose from 1,309 to 3,204, and of teachers, which surged from approximately 3,900 to 9,604, consequently driving down the pupil/teacher ratio. Efforts are still needed in terms of schools, especially with regard to filling schools and improving qualitative indicators. For example, the retention rate during this period has remained low and even fell for the 1997-98 to 2001-02 period, dropping from over 48% to under 45% after peaking at 52% in 1999-2000. Less than one in two children entering the first year in 1996-97 reaches year six. In addition, there are major gaps between regions. The repetition rate and pupil/teacher ratio need considerable improvement. What's more, substantial efforts are required in running the education system. Approximately 30% of pupils fail to adequately learn the programs taught⁸ in the disciplines evaluated (Arabic, **étude du milieu**, French, mathematics). The lack of textbooks for both pupils and teachers and the total absence of a teacher evaluation mechanism to assess education system quality hampers the achievement of EFA goals.

Though the gender gap has narrowed overall, considerable efforts must be made in several

⁸ Findings of the 2000 study by the IREDU of Dijon and the IPN.

regions, especially Gorgol and Guidimakha.

The secondary level's first cycle gross access rate rose from 21.4% in 1997-98 to 25.3% in 2001-02. The percentage of girls has remained almost unchanged during the past five years (43%), which shows that efforts must be made in this area.

8. Implemented strategies

The education system has undergone a series of reforms (1959, 1967, 1978, 1979 and 1999) focusing on improving its adaptation to its environment. The purpose of the 1959 and 1967 reforms was to give Arabic a choice place in the education system inherited from colonization in an effort, according its supporters, to develop bilingualism. Those reforms mainly affected basic education. In a logical follow-up, the 1978 reform reduced the length of primary school from seven to six years and increased the share of Arabic on all levels (hours, subjects taught in Arabic, coefficient, etc.) in the education system. The 1979 reform, which was the logical outcome of post-independence education policy, in other words Arabization, has split the system into two separate linguistic groups (Arabic and bilingual) and has been at the root of education growth throughout the system and on the secondary level, especially with regard to quantitative indicators. Moreover, the creation of language schools under the supervision of an Institute of National Languages has to some extent helped boost the education system's quantitative indicators. The rationale behind the 1979 reform was the need to take account of the education system's national socio-cultural specificities despite gaps here and there (number of language schools, number of specialized teachers, teacher training, management system, etc.).

Quantitative indicators improved to the detriment of the education system's quality. Now Mauritania's education officials agree that rapid primary-school enrolment during the past several years has hurt teaching quality. In other words, officials have accepted low primary-school internal effectiveness in the form of overcrowded classrooms, fast-track teacher training, irrelevant education content and so forth.

In 1986, the government implemented a sweeping social advancement program for the most disadvantaged parts of the population. With the creation of Ministry of Literacy and Basic Skills Education, massive nationwide adult literacy drives got under way, a real child-tracking system was set up with child vaccination and food/nutrition programs, access to basic health care and potable water has improved and so on. Though questionable

in their implementation, all these strategies have in their own way helped to improve the education system's quantitative indicators. In addition, the number of schools and teachers and the national education budget, especially that of primary-school teaching, have increased.

The last reform, which dates back to 1999 and is currently under way, has tried to repair the mistakes of the previous one. The goals of this reform, entitled the National Education System Development Program (**PNDSE**), adopted for 2001-10, are to **i**) unify the system, **ii**) take the challenges of globalization into account **iii**) improve teaching quality, **iv**) shift the focus to science and technology training and **v**) develop technical and professional training aimed at upgrading labor skills.

Civil society, especially NGOs, has grown at a brisk pace during the past decade but suffers from mistrust on the part of national partners and institutions. It seems as though there is suspicion between civil and national institutions. There is no framework for dialogue and cooperation between civil society and development institutions.

Nevertheless, civil society is doing its best in the campaign to enroll schoolchildren, especially girls. Civil society activities are still scattered and characterized by actions that are certainly praiseworthy but quantitatively insignificant on the national level.

Those actions remain limited to raising awareness of school's importance and educational support for poor children (in impoverished environments), especially girls who are preparing to enter the secondary level or dropped out of school for several years (to help get them back into the system). Those activities have had very good results. In addition, other NGOs are trying to appropriate experimental strategies that have been devised by Mauritania's development partners by trying to have an impact on the school environment through closely involving parents. Civil society is organized into specialized networks in various education areas (primary, early childhood, literacy), but unfortunately there is a total lack of coordination and dialogue with national institutions.

With the strategies of various projects and of the ministry, parents' associations, management committees and other community structures have been set up. Those structures, whose capacity has not been strengthened, are unaware of their real terms of reference and do not fully play their part in the education system through school management.

The **development partners** are totally involved in improving education; all their efforts focus on achieving EFA targets. In the last decade, the various development partners have been involved in several regions of Mauritania affected by low enrolment rates, especially

of girls, and the vulnerability of the population.

The World Food Programme (WFP) is involved in the basic education assistance project through school cafeterias. This is aimed at promoting childhood education in areas with the highest vulnerability and the lowest enrolment rates. The number of cafeterias and beneficiaries has risen from 309 and 14,969 in 1992-93 to 1,316 and 62,600, respectively, in 2001-02. The goal was to round out government efforts to restructure education and support the framework development program at the base and the fight against poverty in the countryside. Food aid should be an incentive for parents to keep their children in school and, consequently, reduce the drop-out rate.

The Clean, Healthy and Green Community School (ECPSV) project initiated by UNICEF is involved in education by trying to improve the school environment, associate parents with school management and lighten the financial burden of school supplies through school cooperatives and implementing income-generating activities. This project started with 15 schools in 1996 and has expanded to include 185 schools today. The initial target was regions with the lowest enrolment rates, especially of girls. Yearly evaluation reports show that gaps between the sexes have narrowed.

The **World Bank's** girls' support fund has a completely different approach but the same objective. This project is also involved in areas with very low girls' enrolment. Working capital is given to the community, which invests it in an income-generating activity whose profits are used to purchase school supplies for girls.

UNICEF and WFP have implemented a project called "Ecole Amie des Filles" ("School, A Girl's Friend") in areas with the lowest enrolment, and for girls on the national level.

To keep girls in school beyond the primary level, the United Nations system has initiated a project called "Educating Adolescent Girls to Support Community Development" on the secondary level.

Lack of communication besets all these projects. The beneficiaries sometimes understand neither the importance nor the objectives of one intervention or another. Of course that is difficult for development partners as well as national institutions. And unfortunately civil society, which alone is in a position to work locally in the long-term in this area, is barely associated with the process, if at all.

Neither the development partners' activities nor the education ministries' various reforms has been evaluated for results (direct impact on performance indicators) or process

(methodology). Either they are expanded to the rest of the country or replaced by another reform, without really learning any lessons (rectifying mistakes, making the most of successes, etc.). Nevertheless, education officials and development partners agree that various projects and reforms have had a positive impact on improving the education system as a whole.

The question is knowing in what specific conditions those strategies help to raise enrolment and in which situations they have no effect.

Incentive measures to encourage teachers to serve in disadvantaged areas have been developed and validated during regional seminars, but a poor definition of distance criteria jeopardizes implementation.

A ministerial department was set up in 1986 to fight illiteracy. The *mahadras*, which are widespread throughout the country, carry on their centuries-old work of teaching literacy and spreading Islamic knowledge and culture.

9. Political reforms to be implemented

Every strategy must fit in with the PNDSE while at the same time strive to address shortcomings, especially by adding a certain relevance to implementation and specific, especially qualitative indicators.

Every intervention program must address the enrolment issue, especially of girls, from a regional, urban, rural and community angle by basing itself on an operational-research approach, particularly in regions with underenrolment. Education officials accept an inter-regional gap of various indicators, but without ever taking into account local socio-cultural factors and their perception of enrolment, especially of girls.

Programs must be truly participatory, strengthening the beneficiaries' abilities and boosting their capacity to implement them. Various reports by the education ministry and development partners indicate that beneficiaries are associated with carrying out their projects through various community structures that have been set up (parents' associations, management committees, etc.). However, on the whole it must be recognized that this participatory association is only formal. Most inhabitants remain unaware of the locality's various structures (and some bureau members do not even know that they belong to them), much less the part they play. That can be blamed on the structures' mechanism, the lack of

a strategy to strengthen capacities for everyone to play their role better and the absence of strategic communication aimed at the beneficiaries.

Quality must be emphasized by setting up a better management system, adapting curricula and improving access conditions between the primary and secondary levels, so that education contributes to pupils' cognitive, moral and social development, prepares them for the working world and promotes social cohesiveness. Contact with school must improve pupils' knowledge, skills, know-how, behavior and attitudes.

It will be hard to meet those conditions with Mauritania's present education system. The teacher recruitment system and fast-track, 45-day training period do not give instructors enough time to learn the teaching methods they need to put across messages that children can understand. What's more, with the persistence of the present system of transition between the primary and secondary levels, the agreement of officials to increase the basic instruction period from six to nine years, in other words to the end of the first secondary cycle, is not enough to achieve those targets as long as the mechanism of transition between the two systems remains in its current form. It is absolutely necessary to change the system to let most children complete at least the basic program. Improving the teacher recruitment and training system and upgrading curricula can also help reach the goals.

Durably improving the education system's indicators must dovetail with an overall strategy to strengthen the beneficiaries' capacities, increase their awareness and obtain their support through an all-out participatory process in children's survival and the fight against poverty.

Schools must be brought closer to the environment both figuratively (schools that take account of the environment in all its dimension) and literally (full, nearby schools). Then, the schools themselves must be physically improved (latrines, running water, security, etc.). Lastly, school vacations should vary from one region to the next to take seasonal differences into account. All these factors will improve children's chances of going to school.

All these strategies could help boost education system indicators that have not improved (capitalizing on successes, girls' enrolment, repetition rates, etc.) or have declined (retention rates, regional and gender disparities, etc.). According to the PNDSE, primary education strategy is based on:

i) improving access and retention by building classrooms and recruiting teachers, among

other things. But during the past decade, though teacher recruitment and classroom construction increased, retention declined, leading to the conclusion that those measures are not enough to raise retention rates unless programs are implemented to change the beneficiaries' perception of school. In the rural environment, school is viewed as a "pastime", if not a "waste of time", because a child goes to school only if there is nothing to do at home (household and farm chores, etc.).

ii) improving teaching quality. Strategies to reach that goal are effective but hard to implement in the ministry's current approach. The process of bilingualism⁹ is under way. Several hundred teachers recruited over the past several years have had only 45 days of training, leaving them inadequately prepared to fulfill their responsibilities. Continuous training, which, though called for in strategy documents, has never been implemented, is necessary to improve their performance. In addition, one-third of the way into the PNDSE nothing has been accomplished to reach the goal of making teaching materials (textbooks, guides, etc.) available. All that is necessary to improve qualitative indicators.

Literacy strategies have reached their limit in their present form. Education officials must strive to improve functional literacy in national languages. But unfortunately, the competent officials have so far been reluctant to implement that option. National and international NGOs can take credit for all that has been done in national languages in this area.

With regard to early childhood, first it is necessary to set up a legal framework for host facilities and child-care staff. The capacities of the women's affairs ministry must be strengthened to meet management challenges, coordinate the activities of the various partners involved and upgrade their strategic management and planning skills.

To win the population's support, it necessary on the one hand to gear early childhood programs to the national socio-cultural context, and on the other to develop and implement a national early childhood care and development communication strategy. And lastly, a framework of dialogue and cooperation with civil society must be set up to achieve those goals.

Today, civil society is organized into several networks involved in the entire education system: NGO networks campaigning for girls' enrolment, functional literacy and early childhood care and development. They develop annual plans, but implementing them very

⁹ For example, French-speaking teachers with a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic after a several-week fast-track training period become bilingual teachers (Arabic, French).

often depends on backing from development partners or national institutions, which is not always forthcoming.

So that civil society can fully play its part, it is necessary to set up a contractual framework between those NGO networks and the various institutions to improve cooperation and coordination. It will not be possible to reach and maintain EFA targets without the effective involvement and empowerment of civil society in every area.

Parents' associations, management committees and other community structures must be re-energized by strengthening their capacities so that the true beneficiaries can become effectively involved in their children's education.

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