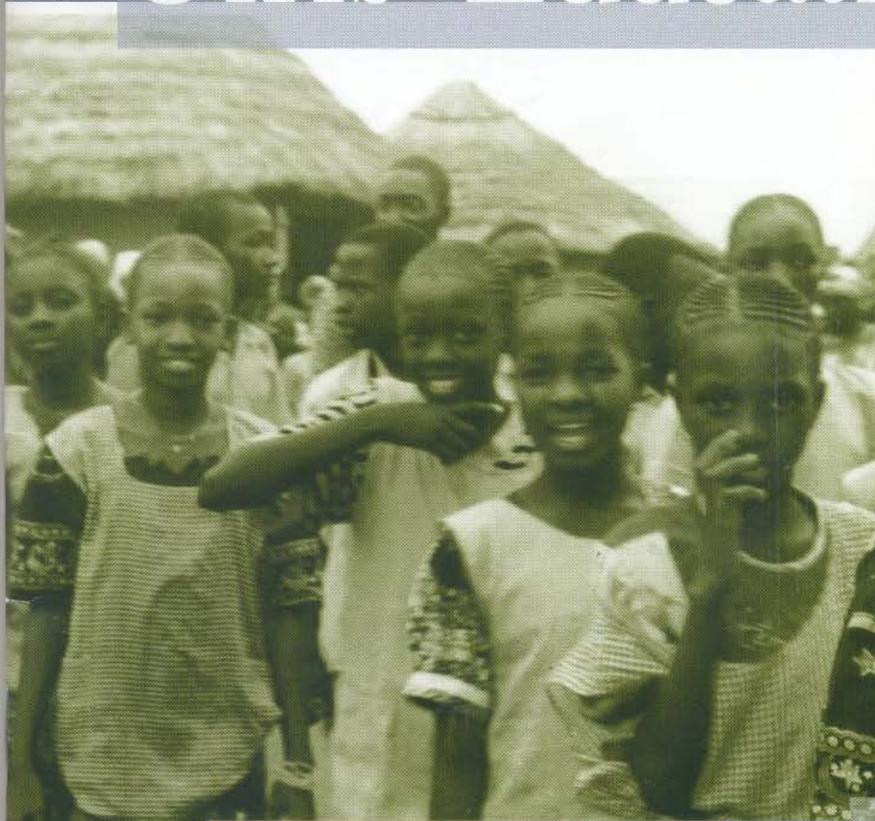# Local Alliances for
Girls' Education

GUINEA, 1998-2005

LESSONS LEARNED

AED
Academy for Educational Development

Local Alliances for Girls' Education
Guinea, 1997-2005
Lessons Learned

Paper prepared by Jennifer Rose
for the Academy for Educational Development
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"We are called upon to make investments in the human and economic development of people, particularly girls and women. To understand that when we educate a woman, we educate a family and when we educate a family, we educate an entire society. We lower the risk with an educated woman that her infant will die and we increase the chances she will be able to feed, clothe, and educate her children."

Hillary Rodham Clinton
February 9, 1999

Address to the Cairo Plus Five Forum
Netherlands Congress Center
The Hague, The Netherlands

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INTRODUCTION

Countless studies over the past decade and more all point to a single, undeniable conclusion: educating girls is imperative to the development of nations. Increasingly, data suggest that educating girls is not only beneficial to developing countries but that it has a greater impact than educating boys. Better educated women have smaller, healthier, better educated families – the same is not necessarily true of educated men – and educated women earn higher wages than their educated male counterparts.[1]

Guinea has embraced the mission of educating girls. The country has seen rapid growth in the number of girls enrolled in its primary schools since 1990. Through a concerted effort on the part of the Ministry of Pre-University Education, USAID, The World Bank and many community-based, national, and international NGOs, the number of girls going to school in Guinea has more than tripled in the past 14 years, from 20 percent[2] in 1990 to 70 percent[3] in 2004.

This paper seeks to understand the role that multisectoral, community-based organizations, called Local Alliances, played in that success.

BACKGROUND

Context

Guinea is among the poorest nations in the world. Since 2000, it has consistently ranked in the bottom 25 countries listed on the United Nations Human Development Index. Life expectancy is 48.9 years, infant mortality is 177 per 1,000 births,[4] and 16% of children die before they reach the age of five years.[5]

Gender and urban/rural inequities in education are equally stark. Only 14% of adult women are literate versus 36% of adult men.[6] Just half of all eligible girls were attending primary school in 2001 compared with 72% of boys despite the Guinean Government's policy of free primary education for all.[7] And, according to UNICEF in 2001, urban boys were enrolled at 2.3 times the rate of rural boys, and urban girls at more than three times the rate of rural girls.[8]

Yet Guinea is a country rich in culture, traditions, and resources. Guinea's largest ethnic group, the Fulani, is credited with establishing many of the trade routes in West Africa and spreading Islam throughout the region. The Mandingo, Guinea's second largest ethnic group, are considered to have one of the richest oral literature traditions in the world. Guinea is also a country making significant progress toward improving educational access and quality. According to the World Bank, "Guinea has been among the first West African countries to adopt innovative approaches such as preventative school health, teacher-driven school grants, interactive radio, sample-based assessment

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[1] Herz and Sperling, 2004, p. 21
[2] World Bank, 2002, p. 2
[3] USAID Budget Summary for Guinea Basic Education, FY 2006
[4] Ibid
[5] Child Rights Information Network, 2005
[6] USAID Budget Summary for Guinea Basic Education, FY 2006
[7] Child Rights Information Network, 2005
[8] UNICEF, 2003

of student learning, gender equity committees, NGO-managed construction programs, and reform of teacher education."[9]

Progress Since 1990
Beginning in 1990, with help from the World Bank, USAID and the Government of France, Guinea began to turn around its education sector with the Guinea Education Sector Adjustment Program (PASE in French). PASE I, which ran from 1990 to 1994, focused on building more schools and classrooms to increase access to education. PASE II (1995-2000) emphasized improving quality of education.[10]

Within The Ministry of Pre-University Education (MEPU), the National Equity Committee was formed in 1992 to address the educational needs of underserved populations, including girls and rural children, whose enrollments had not increased significantly despite the expanded supply of schools from PASE I. In 1993-94, the committee ran a campaign to sensitize Guineans in seven pilot zones about girls' education.[11] Despite the campaign and the increased number of schools, girls' enrollment continued to fall far short of the government's goal of "Education for All." Gross enrollment rates for girls had increased by almost half, but remained below expectations at 29% in 1994/95.[12]

The costs of girls going to school in Guinea are high, particularly in rural areas. Costs fall into two general categories: direct and indirect. The direct costs include such things as school uniforms, shoes, exercise books, pencils and in some cases food and transportation. One-time costs for birth certificates (required for initial enrollment) and desk fees (Guinean families are required to purchase a desk for each child in his or her first year of school) are additional barriers. Indirect costs are the lost economic benefits of keeping children at home and are particularly high for girls as they shoulder more household responsibilities than boys. Girls are often expected to fetch wood and water, cook and tend to younger children, freeing parents to attend to business activities or work in the fields. They may also participate directly in the economic activities of the family, such as selling goods in a family shop. Sending girls to school means sacrifices for families that do not always pay off in the end. Once married, young women typically live with their husbands' families. One person put it this way in an interview, "educating a girl is like watering the neighbor's crops."[13]

Aside from the economic costs, parents are concerned about the sexual harassment of their daughters at or on the way to school and of unwanted pregnancies. Religious leaders and other village leaders fear the loss of cultural practices and religious values if girls become educated. Sometimes girls are prevented from going to school because of the distance to school or transportation costs. In other cases, a lack of classrooms or teachers prevents their education.

Still, efforts to increase enrollments through PASE did meet real success and created more demand for schools, teachers and other resources than the Government of Guinea was able to meet. MEPU realized that the Government, despite investing about 17% of GNP in education, would need help to meet the financial demands of educating all Guinean children and developed a strategy to reach

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[9] World Bank, 2002, p. 2
[10] Marphatia, 2000
[11] Williams, 2001, p. 18
[12] World Bank, Human 2002, p. 2
[13] Kamano, 2000, pg.2

out to other sectors for assistance.[14] Experience with local NGOs and communities in building schools demonstrated that other groups would be willing to help meet the demand. By 1999, communal associations and NGOs were credited with having built 25% of all new schools.[15]

From 1997 to 1999, three important multisectoral organizations were formed to mobilize various stakeholder groups around girls' education: 1) The National Alliance, a group of national and local stakeholders from other ministries, women's groups, business and religious groups, the media, and affected communities 2) The Media Task Force, an adjunct to the National Alliance made up of 12 journalists who implemented media strategies to promote girls' education, and 3) Local Alliances in 19 pilot communities in two regions, Mamou and Guéckédou,[16] that worked to reduce barriers for girls in the schools in their communities. These organizations complemented the work of the National Equity Committee, members of which served on the National Alliance, because their memberships went beyond the education system to include voices and resources from other sectors.

These new groups built on the success of PASE, and from 1991 to 2004, gross enrollment in primary school rose dramatically from 32[17] to 77 percent.[18] The focus on girls' education had an even greater impact: girls' enrollment rose from 20[19] to 70 percent[20] over the same 13 years. Overall, the gender gap decreased by ten percentage points to 14%.

The Local Alliances, formed between 1997 and 1999 and expanded and strengthened through The Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE) and Community Participation for Equity & Quality in Basic Education in Guinea (PACEEQ in French) projects, played a key role in that success. This paper will examine in particular the formation of the community-based Local Alliances (also known as Girls' Alliances) that helped to raise awareness and address the challenges of girls going to school in Guinea.

LOCAL ALLIANCES

The Projects
Plan International, an NGO working in Guinea since 1989, assisted in the development of the multisectoral organizations created to address girls' education. Their work served as a precursor to the SAGE project, which was funded by the Office of Women in Development at USAID, and ran from March 1999 to July 2002 in five countries including Guinea.[21] Dr. Ali Badara Doukouré, who had worked with Plan International, served as the Country Coordinator for SAGE/Guinea, bringing continuity and extensive experience to the project.

The primary objectives of the SAGE were to:
1. Strengthen public and private sector institutions to promote girls' education;
2. Improve the knowledge base of girls' education in order to better implement related policies strategies, and programs;

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[14] Kamano,, 2000, p. 4
[15] Ibid, p. 3
[16] Rihani, 1998
[17] World Bank, Human Development Network: Education Notes, April 2002
[18] USAID Budget Summary for Guinea Basic Education, FY 2006
[19] World Bank, Human Development Network: Education Notes, April 2002
[20] USAID Budget Summary for Guinea Basic Education, FY 2006
[21] SAGE Project Final Activities Report, The Academy for Educational Development, 2002, pg. 1

3. Mobilize leadership to promote girls' education; and
4. Broaden and support local community participation.[22]

The principles of the SAGE approach recognized the contextual complexity of improving girls' education and included:

- A multisectoral approach that recognized the importance of traditional and non-traditional partners;
- Locally designed solutions and programs;
- Multi-method approach, appropriate for each locally designed program;
- Developing local resources to support girls' education including human, financial, and physical resources;
- Capacity building for local institutions for new roles in support of girls' education: leadership, technical programming, and sustained support; and
- Engaging all stakeholders in support of girls' education to "democratize" the civic, social and economic opportunities of girls in each country and community.[23]

The SAGE approach particularly emphasized engaging traditional and nontraditional partners across sectors in support of girls' education, recognizing that leaders from business, religion and the media influence education and can play a valuable role in promoting girls' education.   Funds were raised for school building and the purchase of uniforms, religious leaders delivered sermons on the importance of educating girls and media organizations devoted expertise and resources to spreading positive messages about girls' education.

USAID Guinea wanted to continue the work done under SAGE and issued a Request for Proposal in 2001 that incorporated goals for expanding the Local Alliances to five new regions (Labé, Faranah, Kankan, Nzérékoré and Boké) as well as for improving the effectiveness of the parent associations (APEAE in French). The project, called Community Participation for Equity & Quality in Basic Education in Guinea (PACEEQ in French), began in September 2001 and will continue until July 2006.

Forming the Local Alliances
Each country program of SAGE developed a unique program based on the conditions which prevailed at the time of design. The Guinea program focused on strengthening existing institutions by providing technical assistance to the National Alliance, the Media Task Force, and the Local Alliances. In addition, SAGE Guinea facilitated the formation of a national fund for girls' education (FONSEF) that helped finance activities such as purchasing school uniforms for girls. [24]

Between 1997 and 1999, communities with low enrollments of girls in primary school were targeted for intervention. Plan International staff and journalists from the National Alliance, who would soon form the National Media Task Force, sent teams to these communities to survey community members and conduct focus groups to identify reasons for the low enrollment. They returned to the communities to present their findings. Together, the visitors and the communities developed a strategy to mobilize multisectoral alliances at the local level to address the challenges.

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[22] SAGE Project Final Activities Report, The Academy for Educational Development, 2002, p. 4
[23] Ibid, p. 5
[24] Ibid, p. 1

Alliance members were recruited from among local business, government, religious, women and other community leaders and charged with improving equity in the primary schools within their communities. Most Local Alliances have executive committees with 10-20 members and up to 60 total members. They work with between five and 20 primary schools. Strategies for improving girls' enrollment and retention in primary schools included building latrines, providing escorts to and from school, and raising awareness within the community on the importance of girls' education. In all cases, strategies were developed by Local Alliance members based on their communities' specific needs.

Strategic decisions were made early on that created favorable conditions for the Local Alliances to succeed:

1) The alliances were formed separately from the pre-existing parent associations. It was believed that community-driven, multisectoral organizations were needed to devote full attention to removing the barriers to girls' education and that the APEAEs were not well-suited to that task.
2) In approaching the communities, project staff and journalists (hereafter referred to as "the team" or "the project team") paid special attention to respecting the traditions and customs of the community and took care to understand the viewpoints of community members. Indeed Local Alliance members would serve on the National Alliance because the team genuinely recognized that their input was critical to the success of the program.
3) Communities would be partners in solving the problem and empowered to identify and implement solutions that best suited their needs. They would be seen as a source of strength, assets and expertise, not just for their deficits, and they would be recognized and appreciated for their accomplishments thus far in educating their children despite a severe lack of resources.

A Community-driven, Multisectoral Focus on Girls' Education
Unlike the existing APEAEs, which were mandated by the Ministry of Education and dealt with many education issues, the Local Alliances were formed at the community level to specifically focus on girls' education. The team recognized that the roots of the problems facing girls' education were not based solely in the education system; therefore the solutions could not come from school administrators, parents of students and teachers alone. [25] Community leaders, religious and business leaders, representatives from women's associations, the APEAEs, school administration and local government[26] all had influence on girls' schooling and could bring their talents and resources to bear on the problem. One of the goals of the project team was to help the members of the various sectors realize the benefits they would accrue with improved outcomes for girls' education, including a wider, better prepared workforce, more productive farming, increased per capita income, higher immunization rates, and smaller, healthier families. In short, communities would benefit as a whole when girls are educated through growth in income and reduction in outflows such as healthcare costs.[27] Once these communities were sensitized and appreciated for the role they could play (see

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[25] Doukouré, 2005

[26] Schumann and Mitton, 2002

[27] Herz, Barbara and Sperling, Gene, What Works in Girl's Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World, Council on Foreign Relations, 2004, p. 3-4

the heading "Respecting Communities" below for details on this process), they were motivated and engaged to address the problem.

In Guinea, the barriers of girls' education are numerous and the roots of the problem are complex. Local Alliances were designed to stay focused on girls' education and to draw on a wide variety of participants for strategies and resources to solve the problem. Additionally, most Local Alliances have women leaders who have firsthand experience with the challenges of girls' education. APEAEs, aside from being monosectoral and largely led by men, had many competing priorities including the challenges of school management, curriculum management, recruiting and managing teachers, and raising funds for school building projects. Although these issues can all be linked to girls' education, they were often seen as separate and the focus of the APEAEs could too easily drift from the needs of schoolgirls. An organization which had as its sole focus gender equity was needed to keep the attention on the problem. The Local Alliance was that organization.

Respecting Communities
Project staff understood that many communities held deeply seated fears around educating girls. Parents worried that their girls would be defiled and become pregnant if they sent them away to school. Others worried they would be harassed at or on the way to the schools in their village. Religious leaders feared that educated girls would reject their religious upbringing. Village elders were concerned about losing traditions such as modest dress and respect for elders. And still others were concerned that language barriers between the educated and undereducated would increase as more girls were taught French. The team also knew that many educated people from various organizations had come to these poor communities and talked down to them, dismissing their fears and pushing on them unwanted reforms.

Project staff understood and respected these concerns and deliberately approached communities with deference. Women team members wore traditional, modest dress and sat together with the women representatives from the community to demonstrate that educated women could hold onto their traditions. The staff spoke in the language of the village so as to engage all opinions and ensure all members understood their message. And they quoted Koranic verses that supported girls' education to show that their mission did not go against religious beliefs.

The project team also paid careful attention to the protocol of the community. They visited the village leader first, usually a chief. They discussed the reason for the visit and let the chief send for other community members he felt should hear the visitors' message. The team waited patiently, sometimes for hours, sometimes overnight for a meeting to be assembled. They shared their concerns about the low enrollments for all children, particularly girls, and tried to learn what the community thought about the situation and how to improve it. They listened carefully to their fears, appreciated what the community had done already to improve education, and guided them in seeing the importance of educating their girls. And they helped community members recognize their role in doing more for girls' education. Then they encouraged the community to assemble an alliance to develop strategies that suited their needs.[28]

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[28] The strategy of the Local Alliances was initially developed by project staff, the journalists and the first communities surveyed by the project team; communities that were approached later were encouraged to form Local Alliances as the first communities had.

Paulo Freire wrote in Pedagogy of the Oppressed in1970 about cultural synthesis, "In cultural synthesis, the actors who come from 'another world' to the world of the people do so not as invaders. They do not come to *teach* or to *transmit* or to *give* anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people's world."[29] The team approached communities in the spirit of cultural synthesis, not as invaders. They sought first to understand the communities and later tailored workshops and other interventions according to the needs the communities voiced.

In the end, the team's respectful approach opened the door for dialogue and built trust, but the way they empowered the Local Alliances gave the communities a sense of recognition for their contribution they had not felt before. Men and women who had grown up outside the formal education system for the first time in their lives felt empowered to talk to school administrators and advocate for change. Some Local Alliance members served on the National Alliance, giving them unprecedented stature and a voice in the national discussion on girls' education.[30] Equally important, representatives from the ministries and other national organizations developed a true appreciation for the contribution their less educated, community-based colleagues could make.

The sense of empowerment the alliance members felt galvanized them to meet their goals, and the stories of their accomplishments are many. Here is one:

> The Local Alliance of Kaback reported an increase from 47 girls enrolled in the island's three primary schools in 1998 to 527 girls enrolled in 2001. The percentage of girls who dropped out of school decreased from 8% in 1999 down to 0% in 2001. Between 1998 and 2001, the number of primary schools grew from four to ten, built with community participation and partner support. In addition, 12 contractual schoolteachers out of 20 primary schoolteachers were recruited and paid by community members.[31]

Communities as Partners in Educating Girls

The project team recognized early on that beneficiary communities also had assets and strengths that they could bring to the challenge. There were physical assets such as funds to buy school uniforms, in-kind donations of bricks and cement to build schools, and housing provided to teachers, and there were the less tangible but equally important assets of the credibility community leaders brought to the alliance, and their experience and contacts in the community.

This concept reflects an approach to development called "co-production" by Edgar Cahn, a long-time advocate for social justice in the US. He believes that for development to be sustainable, communities and individuals who may be the beneficiaries of aid and other interventions must be seen as "co-producers" in the process of their own development. Specifically, he believes that every human being has the capacity to be a builder and a contributor; that wherever possible, we must replace one-way acts of largesse in whatever form with two-way transactions. "You need me" becomes "We need each other," and social networks require ongoing investments of social capital generated by trust, reciprocity and civic engagement. He also asks us to expand our view of work from the traditional pay for service activity to one where the work people do to build communities and raise healthy, productive children is considered vital and necessary.

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[29] Freire, p. 180
[30] Balde, 2005
[31] SAGE Project Final Activities Report, p. 17

Cahn talks of two economies – the monetary economy and the core economy in <u>No More Throw-Away People: The Co-Production Imperative</u>, first published in 2000. The monetary economy of corporations, private companies, and governments works on principles of contract, specialization and agreement. The core economy, which consists of family, neighborhood and communities, operates on different principles: sharing, loyalty, love, and pitching in. "The problem is that the monetary economy picks and chooses the people, the communities, and the specialized skills that it wants. Those people who have neither money nor marketable skills – the poor, the frail, the uneducated, the elderly, and the children and adults without money to be consumers – are rejected and discarded. When individuals and communities become depleted by such disinvestment, the social fabric tears apart."[32]

When co-production is employed, community members are empowered to invest in their communities through the core economy – by pitching in, sharing their limited resources, their networks and their care for the community. "It calls for action that rebuilds the core economy, thereby leading to genuine system change."[33]

The approach to forming the Local Alliances reflected this thinking. Project funds went toward technical assistance for the national committees as well as the Local Alliances to help them learn useful techniques for community mobilization such as meeting planning, fundraising, developing charters and bylaws and electing committee members. Some funds were set aside for activity grants but only for communities that could write persuasive proposals – a skill they can use long after the project ends. The team recognized that the communities could and should do the hard work of education reform if lasting change was going to occur and that the work needed to occur within the core economy. If projects funds had gone toward paying community mobilizers or funding school buildings, for example, the progress would likely end when the project ends.

How the Alliances were formed also reflects the recent shift in development theory to a rights-based approach. "Development agencies have moved from perceiving the ultimate recipients of their aid as beneficiaries to seeing them as either stakeholders or client/customers. On the other hand, a rights-based approach sees people as citizens. A citizen connotes someone with rights rather than someone receiving welfare or buying services. People become agents and subjects, rather than objects, of their own development. It is not for the agencies to decide whether and by how much people should participate in the decisions that affect their lives."[34]

SAGE and PACEEQ emphasized a rights-based approach. Communities decided whether to engage in the fight for girls' education. They determined who would join the alliance and what the alliance would do to suit the community's specific needs. The community members were agents of their own development, not the NGOs or USAID or MEPU. The organizations that supported them did so through awareness-building and skills-building workshops, facilitating dialogue among alliances and other committees, and providing guidance and support when needed. This assistance also served to build the capacity of alliance members, providing them tools and skills they could apply to other development projects.

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[32] Cahn, 2004
[33] Ibid
[34] IDS Policy Briefing: The Rise of Rights: Rights-based Approaches to International Development, p. 2

Whether deliberate or intuitive, the project team created an approach that is in line with progressive development theory and practice.

Outcomes

Sustainable development, according to USAID, is measured by a society's capacity to enhance the quality of life within and across generations.

For girl' education, sustainable development is measured by, among other indicators:
- Increased enrollment, completion, and promotion rates
- Improved performance scores
- Improved literacy and numeracy rates
- Improved quality of girls' education, e.g., equitable class participation and exhibition of more pro-social behaviors in schools
- Increased number of individuals with experience in girls' education
- Increased community participation in local schooling
- Partnerships created within civil society to promote girls' education
- National dialogue on girls' education created
- Delayed marriages and pregnancies[35]

The Local Alliances, through SAGE and PACEEQ, worked to meet the quantitative goals of increased enrollment, completion and promotion rates, exam scores, literacy and numeracy rates by helping to increase community participation in local schooling, increasing the number of people who understood and could advocate for girls' education, and by facilitating partnerships within civil society and a national dialogue on girls' education by linking Local Alliances with the National Alliance and Media Task Force. Ultimately, it is expected that this work will lead to delayed marriages and pregnancies, smaller, healthier families and higher incomes.

Some examples of specific outcomes of the Local Alliances are:
- The Local Alliance of Lelouma reported that in 1998 there were a slightly greater number of girls in grade one (162 girls versus 153 boys) and in 2001 there were slightly more boys (141 girls versus 149 boys) in grade one. In 1998, the total number of girls in primary school was 746 versus 869 boys. In 2001 this gap had narrowed to 878 girls and 938 boys. During this period, two school stores agreed to sell supplies at a reduced rate. In addition, the community built a three-class junior secondary school through a donation from Plan International.
- In 1998, the Local Alliance of Dougoutouny reported a severe gender gap between girls and boys enrollments. In 1998, there were 70 girls enrolled in first grade versus 164 boys. The total enrollment showed that only 1/3rd of those enrolled in primary school were girls (193 girls versus 576 boys). In 2002, due to the efforts of the Local Alliance, the gender gap in first grade enrollments had decreased to zero. There were 238 girls enrolled in first versus 234 boys. A gender gap remains, though, in total enrollment in primary school where only 549 out of 1494 students are girls. In addition to activities promoting increased girls' enrollments and retention, the Local Alliance completed building a new school building, with school furniture (tables, benches, and shelves)
- In 1998, the Local Alliance of Brouwai Sounki reported that there were 33 girls enrolled in first grade versus 73 boys. In the year 2002, enrollments for both girls and boys in first grade had

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[35] Educating Girls: A Development Imperative Conference Report (1998), p. 58

increased, with 200 girls enrolled and 241 boys enrolled. The gender gap, although decreasing, remains in overall school enrollments. In 1998, 156 girls were enrolled in primary school versus 736 boys. In 2002, there were 609 girls enrolled versus 1167 boys.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) **Influencing the opinions of thought leaders affects the whole community.** The effectiveness of the multisectoral approach used in forming the Local Alliances has been written about widely, and I will not expand on the importance of including business and media leaders here beyond what is already included in this paper. However, regarding the inclusion of thought leaders – village elders and religious leaders – I will quote Dr. Doukouré, Country Coordinator for SAGE/Guniea and PACEEQ/AED who put it most succinctly when he said, "Many issues (preventing girls from attending school) are related to social and religious values, which means traditional leaders and religious leaders are needed to help change people's attitudes toward girls' education." One of the most powerful outcomes of the SAGE and PACEEQ projects was the attitudinal shift of religious leaders and village elders and their subsequent influence on their communities. May Rihani stated, "Seeing mullahs preaching the benefits of girls' education when they themselves had been among the most stalwart opponents was most rewarding. Nothing did more to change the collective behavior of the community than that." The strategy of approaching the village leaders with respect, quoting Koranic verses that supported girls' education and holding awareness raising workshops that guided the leaders to a new vision for girls in their communities was effective and helped to produce extraordinary gains in girls' education.

2) **How communities are approached and supported can be as important as what is supported.** Respecting a community's beliefs and fears, following their protocols, guiding them to a new understanding of the benefits of girls' education (instead of imposing outside views) yielded access to communities and productive dialogues. Introducing community members to role models, such as educated women who held onto their traditional ways and religious practices, demonstrated in ways no amount of talking could do that their fears may be unfounded. Encouraging the formation of Local Alliances but leaving it to the communities to select their own members and find their own solutions to improve girls' education built trust. Elevating some Local Alliance members to the National Alliance showed respect and a sense of true partnership that empowered them to carry on their important work.

3) **Building effective networks improves sustainability.** Connecting Local Alliances to each other and to national organizations, such as the National Alliance and the Media Task Force, gave members resources, a forum for discussing challenges and exchanging best practices, and access to technical expertise and encouragement. Individuals and communities that feel part of a greater movement for change are more apt to push on during challenging periods because they feel less alone and isolated in their struggle.

4) **Benefits accrue beyond project goals when communities are empowered to carry out the difficult work of development themselves.** One of the fundamental principals of SAGE was that money should not be put toward specific project activities, such as building school latrines or purchasing text books, rather that it be used to build the capacity of communities to form and operate effective alliances, recognize their role in improving girls' education, create and implement action plans, and develop fundraising and project management skills – all skills that are transferable to other activities and situations, both at work and at home. According to Ilisa

Gertner in *NonFormal Education: The Unintended Contributions of the SAGE Project*,[36] "Two examples of actions that Local Alliances have taken were given in an interview with Francine Agueh (Senior Technical Advisor, SAGE). First, she explained that there are community groups that were not proactive before who now go directly to the regional education officer to discuss girls' education issues and teachers' problems. They have been given collective awareness and confidence to confront others and argue their case. In the second instance, she said that some of the local alliances are registering themselves as civil society organizations, making them institutionalized. These two examples demonstrate the new feeling of empowerment these community groups have and show how the contributions of the SAGE project extends beyond the original workshop objectives. They have a new sense of community solidarity that can be sustained and used for negotiating with other groups. They can mobilize their own power to 'meet and match the power of the hierarchies of NGOs and the state.'"[37]

CHALLENGES REMAIN

As the PACEEQ project wraps up, project team members are examining the possible barriers to sustaining the work of the past nine years. Dr. Balde and Dr. Doukouré see the following remaining challenges:

1) **Expanding gender equity to equity for all children.** As girls' enrollment rates increase and the gender gap closes, many stakeholders are beginning to feel complacent in their roles. However, goals for universal primary education are still largely unmet, and populations other than girls remain underserved, such as rural children and children with disabilities. A shift toward equity in education will change the nature of the discourses to ensure *all* children have access to quality education. Additionally, a continued focus on girls' education may marginalize the effort to that of a "women's issue." In a country which has historically devalued women, a shift in the spotlight off of girls' education may lead to a renewed stigmatization of the female-associated endeavor. Expanding the meaning of equity can prevent that from happening.

2) **Overlapping efforts of APEAEs and Local Alliances.** Under PACEEQ, the distinctions between the parents associations and Local Alliances blurred. This was likely due to the change in USAID supported projects working with these groups. Under SAGE, AED was the prime contractor and devoted great attention to supporting the newly formed Local Alliances. Their efforts were considered highly successful. Under PACEEQ, World Education was the prime contractor and charged with improving the effectiveness of the APEAEs; AED was sub-contracted to advise on expanding the network of Local Alliances. Unsurprisingly, the APEAEs took precedent over the Local Alliances and more resources including training, technical assistance and vehicle access went to the APEAEs. Because girls' education continued to be a priority issue for MEPU, APEAEs were trained in gender equity issues and how to improve outcomes for girls. Additionally, federations of parent associations (called coordinations) were formed at the sub-prefecture level. The goals of these coordinations and the Local Alliances, which also served multiple schools, began to overlap and discussions about the resulting redundancy emerged.

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[36] Throughout this passage, Gertner quotes Robert Chambers from his book: <u>Whose Reality Counts, Putting the First Last</u>, 1997; see her paper for footnotes: http://sage.aed.org/Practice/NFEGertner.pdf, p. 14

[37] Gertner (2001), p. 14

The PACEEQ/AED team is working to encourage MEPU to draft a policy document outlining the responsibilities and connections among all the stakeholder organizations – the National Alliance, The National Media Task Force, the Local Alliances, the APEAEs, and their coordinations. Hopefully, this will bring clarity to the roles of the Local Alliances and the APEAEs. The Chief of Party for PACEEQ, Séni Diop, also would like to see the Local Alliances have more representation in schools. There is continued work to be done with girls' education, such as improving retention and completion rates, and the mostly women-led Local Alliances have a key role to play, according to him.

Guinea faces great challenges in bringing universal primary education to all its children. It is this author's hope that stakeholders can agree on a strategy that draws on the resources of both these organizations to support education. Dismantling either network will only deprive communities of desperately needed resources and support.

3) **Efforts to increase demand must be met with efforts to improve supply.** Local Alliances worked tirelessly to increase enrollments of girls in their primary schools, but in many cases the schools girls went to lacked teachers and classrooms or discouraged girls from attending through male-centered curricula or an environment tolerant of sexual harassment and corporal punishment. Some of these challenges can be influenced by the Local Alliances as they develop the skills they need to negotiate with school administrators. Others need the intervention of more influential parties.

4) **Committees at all levels need to initiate activity instead of responding to activities of the NGOs.** The above mentioned policy document would hopefully outline the roles and responsibilities of the committees thereby making it clear the activities they should implement. As it stands, the committees still look to the USAID contractors for direction. Ideally, the National Alliance and Media Task Force will plan strategies to continue to promote equity in education, including continued interaction with and expansion of Local Alliances. When needed, they will proactively seek the technical assistance of NGOs such as the Academy for Educational Development.

5) **USAID, AED need to streamline processes to improve service and resource delivery.** Getting resources to the field is an arduous process due to a multi-level approval process for even small items, even when they have been previously agreed on. As an example, uniforms were promised to a group of schoolchildren for the beginning of the school year in September 2005. As of now the uniforms have not been delivered due in part to a re-examination of the project framework by USAID which was just completed in November. If the goals of donor governments include increased efficiency in recipient governments, a greater effort should be made to set a good example.

CONCLUSION

Some Local Alliances are stronger than others. Although some alliances have been in existence for nearly nine years and others only for one year, and the level of support alliances received varied, it is unclear if or to what extent these factors contributed to the sustainability of some alliances and the struggles of others. More research, particularly field research, is needed to determine why some Local Alliances are more successful than others. Overall, however, there is enough evidence to conclude that the Local Alliances are capable of having a profound affect on Guinea's mission to provide education for all its children. Efforts to expand and strengthen these organizations are warranted.

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