Civil Society and the Governance of Basic Education

Mali Country Field Study

Executive Summary

Mali has rapidly introduced dramatic education sector reforms over the past 15 years. These include donor and NGO efforts to expand community schools, the widespread introduction of contract teachers, and the launch of a ten-year education sector program, PRODEC (*Programme Décennal de Développement de l'Education*). The Malian government has also progressively devolved the governance of education to sub-national authorities.

Overall, these reforms have expanded policy space for civil society. However, they have had contrasting implications for different civil society organizations (CSOs), which in turn has exacerbated divisions within civil society. Two key constellations of CSO actors have thus emerged, each facing different pressures to change the terms of their engagement in the education sector.

The first constellation of CSOs consists of national and international NGOs, often involved in complimentary service-provision. For these actors, the move to a sector program has brought donor shifts towards budget support, decreased donor-NGO interaction and less direct funding for NGO activities. At the same time, NGOs acknowledge greater opportunities for partnership with government, but a lack of communication and mutual understanding has hindered their relationship. While NGOs are actively involved in supporting the implementation of decentralization reforms and the sector program (PRODEC) more generally, they are also concerned about donor conditionalities and a lack of government accountability. Consequently, they have a strong sense that it is important for them to be active participants in national-level policy processes, but coordinating and collaborating amongst themselves remains a challenge. In contrast to our three other case countries, within Mali, INGOs and national NGOs have thus far been unable to sustain into the 2000s an effective umbrella platform specifically for interfacing with central government and donors on educational issues – despite their successful collaboration within this type of platform, in the 1990s.

By contrast to NGOs, the second constellation of Malian CSOs in education has remained critical of PRODEC. Teachers' unions and representatives for parents disagree with aspects of the government's policies relating to education decentralization – a centerpiece of PRODEC. Historically, these organizations have wielded considerable influence, through the threat of national strikes, or by mobilizing their well-organized constituencies. Although these actors felt that their interests were not listened to in the design process of PRODEC, they enjoy regular communication with the Malian government, who seeks to contain their opposition to PRODEC and to win them over to the larger reform program. These CSOs also acknowledge their need to work more effectively with other civil society actors, such as NGOs.

Government policies and officials primarily seem to see CSOs playing roles at the *sub-national and school levels*, ensuring that school-level actors are well-trained, mobilized and resourced to keep the system running smoothly and government policy on course. CSO efforts to play a policy role at decentralized levels are just emerging and are only weakly-linked to national-level policy processes. Thus, decentralization of governance seems to confuse rather than enhance CSO policy leverage, at this point in time.

IO International Organization (multilateral organization)
MATCL *Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale et des Collectivités Locales*, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Local Communities
MEN Ministry of National Education
MTEF Medium-term expenditure framework
NFE Non-formal education
NGO Non-governmental organization
NNGO

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1. Introduction

In Mali, where government and the international donor[2] community have set ambitious targets for the expansion of access to basic education, a diverse and dynamic constellation of civil society organizations is active in the education sector. Government and donor groups have encouraged civil society participation in education – both as complementary service-providers and (since the mid-1990s) in national policy-setting. However, there has been a rapid introduction of dramatic education sector reforms in the country over the past 15 years – including earlier donor and NGO efforts to expand community schools, government introduction of contract teachers in the 1990s, and the more recent legislation devolving educational governance to sub-national authorities. This has left civil society organizations (CSOs) with conflicting views on some of the basic components of the internationally-funded education sector program, *PRODEC*.[3] Although civil society actors played a part in the initial design of PRODEC in the late 1990s, their capacity to play a coordinated policy role at the national level needs to be strengthened. CSO efforts to play a policy role at the newly-decentralized sub-national levels are just emerging and are only weakly linked to national-level policy processes.

This paper offers a case study of the policy roles being played by members of Malian civil society in the context of its recent education sector program, PRODEC. It draws from interviews conducted with a variety of civil society organizations (including teachers' unions, representatives for students and for parents, national and international NGOs, associations, coalitions, networks, religious organizations and schools, as well as a small number of school management committees).

This study also draws upon interviews with government officials and donor organizations and upon documentary and background literature. The research is part of a four-country study covering Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali and Tanzania, funded by the Comparative, International and 0rv

2. Research design

Field research for this study was conducted in Mali from March-June 2006 by Suzanne Cherry, and was hosted by ERNWACA, the Education Research Network for West and Central Africa.[4]

respondents). Additional themes considered included: how the decentralization of education is changing the context for CSO engagement and how the expansion of community schools influenced NGO participation in policy processes. In what follows, interviews are cited according to type of respondent: "C" is used to denote CSO; "G" to denote government or civil servant; "D" to denote donors (specifically bilateral donors); and "IO" to denote multilateral (donor) organizations.[6]

3. The Malian Context

3.1 Mali's political and economic context

Mali is a land-locked country of nearly 13.1 million people in West Africa. The country is home to Mande (Bambara, Malinke, Soninke), Peul, Voltaic, Songhai, Tuareg and Moor peoples, and 90% of its population is Muslim.[7] Mali's peoples have played an important role in the history of the sub-region, in the great West African empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai, successively, during the 8th to 16th centuries. Cities such as Timbuktu, Djenné, Gao and Ségou have long been centres for the development of technology and culture. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Timbuktu is famous for its historic University of Sankoré, its great mosques and ancient libraries. For many centuries, Malians have developed a culture of democracy and conflict resolution (Pringle, 2006). Today, the country's diverse ethnic groups co-exist peacefully (Sandbrook, 1999; Smith, 2001), and tolerance, trust and pluralism are strong features of traditional Malian society (Smith, 2001).

Mali is generally regarded as a stable democracy, having made a successful transition to democracy after nearly twenty-five years of military dictatorship. The Moussa Traoré regime (1968 – 1991) was overthrown by a popular revolt in 1991, in which students and teachers played an important role (Danté, Gautier, Marouani & Raffinot, 2001). A transitional committee then handed over power peacefully following Mali's first multi-party elections in 1992, elections hailed as free and fair (Sandbrook, 1996; van den Walle, 2003). Mali's 1992 Third Republic, lead by President Alpha Konaré, quickly launched decentralization reforms widely noted for their genuine devolution of power (Glenzer, 2005; Seely, 2001). During its two mandates, the Konaré government was commended for establishing political and religious freedoms (Pringle 2006), respecting human rights (Danté et al., 2001), promoting press freedom (Danté et al., 2001; Pringle, 2006; Sandbrook, 1996) and encouraging greater popular participation in governance (Wing, 2002).[8] The Amadou Toumani Touré government, elected in 2002 and re-elected in 2007, although less studied in the scholarly literature, is similarly regarded as committed to democracy and human rights (CIDA, n.d.; Dizolele, 2005). Mali has recently been called "one of the most successful democracies in Africa" (Pringle, 2006, p. 31) and along with Benin, "the

[6] In some cases, the person interviewed represented more than one position. For example, CG means the person holds a position both in a CSO and in government.
[7] This information is drawn from the CIA Factbook, retrieved April 24, 2007, from: https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ml.html#People
[8] Despite these strengths, the Konaré government was also strongly criticized during the 1997 elections; these were described as only "partially fair" (van den Walle, 2003, p. 320), accused of irregularities, boycotted by the opposition and in the end, were said to have "produced vi8

only African francophone country to sustain and in many ways deepen its democracy since the early 1990's" (Glenzer, 2005, p. 2).

These achievements notwithstanding, research during the Konaré years asserted that Mali had yet to overcome "the patrimonial structure that is its political heritage" (Danté et al., 2001, p. 6), its legacy of "personalistic and clientelist politics" and problems of "debilitating splits and factional struggles" within its political parties, including the major parties (Sandbrook, 1996, pp. 77, 80). Under the present Touré government, there is no organized political opposition and the government rules based on consensus and collective decision-making (OECD, 2004). The quality of political debate under this arrangement is difficult to ascertain, although under the previous (Konaré) government, political opposition was considered weak (Danté et al., 2001). Corruption is also regarded as a widespread pr [illegible]

Table 2: Mali Basic Statistics

	1990	2004
GDP per capita	..	371
ODA as % of GDP	19.9	11.7
Total debt service (as % of GDP)	2.8	2.1
% of population on less than $2/day (1990-2004)	..	90.6
Total population		13.1 million
Urban population (% of total)	For **1975**: 16.2%	29.9%
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	..	For **2001**: 137 (poorest 20%); 90 (richest 20%)
HIV prevalence (% ages 15-49)*	..	For **2005**: 1.7 [1.3- 2.1]
Children orphaned by AIDS*	..	94,000 [70,000 – 120,000]

Sources: UNDP (2006);
*UNAIDS (2006)

3.2 Civil Society in Mali

Mali offers conditions conducive to an active, engaged civil society. Blair (2000, p. 29) notes Mali's "rich tradition of associational life and strong interpersonal networks at the village level." Prior to the democratic revolution of 1991, civil society groups played a long-standing role of opposing the Traoré dictatorship and addressing deficiencies in public services (Floridi & Corella, 2004). Formal or "organized" civil society activity before 1991 included movements within the agriculture sector and amongst students and women (Floridi & Corella, 2004). NGOs were first involved implementing state and donor programs during the emergency responses to drought, in 1972-73 (Tounkara, 2001). With the shrinking of the state under structural adjustment policies in the 1980s, INGO activities continued to grow, and the number of national NGOs increased considerably in the late 1980s, supported by international funding. [11]

However, it was the launch of multi-party democracy in 1991 that led to a great multiplication of CSOs of all types. At this time, students, unions, human rights' organizations and media joined forces to help overthrow Traoré, and developed a shared agenda for reform (Smith, 2001). Amongst their demands, civil society groups called for decentralization reforms (Boukary, 1999; USAID, 2002). Thus, six months after being elected, the Konaré government formed its Decentralization Mission, which held regional and local meetings to get citizens directly involved in the reorganization of local government units into new communes[12] (Blair, 2000; Seely, 2001). Decentralization reforms, on-going to this day, call for substantial NGO involvement in building the capacity of communities to assume their new responsibilities; as a means towards this end, donors have supported the development of partnerships between elected officials and CSOs (Glenzer, 2005).

[11] According to Glenzer (2005, p. 198), INGOs came to Mali at the rate of two per year between 1970 and 1980, then 3-6 per year between 1980-1983, then 26 in 1984 and 15 in 1985. By 1999, 114 INGOs were present in Mali. National NGOs, meanwhile, numbered 1 in 1978; 6 in 1983; 50 in 1986; 500 in 1991, and 600 by the late 1990's (Glenzer, 2005, p. 198).

[12]

Between 1988 and 2001, NGOs across the social sectors doubled in number in Mali (De Bruijn, Sidibé & Van Dijk, 2001). Throughout this period, many international donors provided substantial support to NGOs, so that by 1994, for example, 20% of USAID's budget went to NGOs, and NGOs were the country's single biggest employer (Glenzer, 2005). Today 1879 NGOs are officially registered, although it is difficult to assess how many are operational (Floridi & Corella, 2004). At least part of the reason for the multiplication of NGOs in Mali is the speed and ease of its official process for NGO registration; the government must complete an NGO's registration within three months of application or it becomes automatic (Miller-Grandvaux, Welmond & Wolf, 2002; Tounkara, 2001). By comparison, in countries such as Senegal or Niger, this can take three to four years (Tounkara, 2001). Mali also has fairly longstanding coordinating bodies for NGOs and associations, founded in the mid-late 1980s and early 1990s. The three best-known are CCA/ONG (1983) for national NGOs and INGOs; SECO/ONG (1989) for national NGOs only; and CAFO (1991) for women's NGOs and associations.

Village-level associations, always a strong feature of Malian society, have made considerable gains in infrastructure in the education, health and water sectors (Int. 24C; De Bruijn et al., 2001; Floridi & Corella, 2004). They proliferated in the 1990s and are numbered today at 12,000 formally registered organizations (Floridi & Corella, 2004). Similarly, one study estimates that 91% of women's NGOs and associations in existence at the present time were created during the 1990s (De Bruijn et al., 2001). Women's CSOs are credited with effectively influencing laws relating to discrimination against women, and remain key actors within civil society via grassroots-level associations and national coalitions such as CAFO (Int. 8C; 27C; 32C; 38IO).

The past two decades have also seen civil society within agriculture grow in dynamism and develop strong unions (Danté et al., 2001; De Bruijn et al., 2001; Floridi & Corella, 2004; Raffinot, Muguet & Alhousseynou, 2003), structuring effectively from the grassroots up to the national level and negotiating strongly with government, including around agricultural legislation (Int. 64C; Boukary 1999). Within the health sector, the widespread movement to implant community health centres and associations is unprecedented in sub-Saharan Africa (Int. 52C; Floridi & Corella, 2004; Raffinot et al., 2003).

Miller-Grandvaux et al. (2002, p. 4) comment that today, "Mali has a vibrant civil society with promising experiments in democratization," while Capacci Carneal (2004, p. 89) calls Malian civil society "diverse and dense." The effectiveness of civil society can be seen in the important role it has played in resolving several major social crises: the resolution of the Northern conflict involving the Touregs, the 1997 impasse between the presidential party and opposition groups and the resolution of frequent disturbances in the education system (Floridi & Corella, 2004).

At the same time, Malian civil society seems to be struggling to know its own strengths and weaknesses, to develop essential capacities, to understand its role within Mali's changing context, and to devise effective ways to collaborate internally. In our interviews, civil society was described as "embryonic," "fractured," "nebulous," "scattered," unstructured and lacking in organization (Int. 7C; 16C; 21CG; 27C; 34C; 38IO; 44C; 65C; Dembélé, Touré Traoré, Diallo & Sakho, 2002). Many women's CSOs, village-level associations and NGOs are considered to

have weak institutional capacity, or to lack transparent and democratic practices (De Bruijn et al., 2001; Floridi & Corella, 2004). In addition, numerous NGOs lack technical skills, because they were created by young graduates as a response to unemployment, rather than being created out of a clear vision or mandate (Int. 16C; 20C; 24C; 31C; 33C). In general, the degree to which CSOs effectively and democratically represent their constituencies is uncertain (Dembélé et al., 2002). As a potential contributing factor to this problem, the lines between the quest for power and the exercise of social responsibility are at times difficult to distinguish (Floridi & Corella, 2004). Sometimes CSOs are used by their leaders to launch into politics; or else, a CSO leader will occupy a role in both politics and civil society at the same time (Int. 19C; 24C; 31C; 37C; 70C).

Capturing these concerns, the Malian PRSP offered the following comment on the political context for civil society:

> *[…] the Malian democratic process is still fragile because of the absence of a democratic culture and citizenship, the absence of civic spirit and the pursuit of special favors. The fragmentation of civil society and its weak ability to mount a credible challenge to the established authority are also a manifestation of the democratic malaise.-1.15Cr tS and i2 05 Efa9Tw G(*

PRSP working groups, their presence did not equate with influence, and they took second place to government and donor representatives (Danté et al., 2001).

4. The Policy Landscape for Basic Education in Mali

4.1 The education sector after the democratic revolution of 1991

Article 18 of Mali’s 1992 Constitution of the Third Republic declares that “every citizen has the right to instruction,” and that CLIC, n.d.C /PFromstitu0. 26TjE2, o pubocratic reor afte(Conshousej0.0 ttsfireion

Table 3: Mali Education Statistics[13]

	2000	2004
Primary GER (%)	52.8	63.8
Secondary GER (%)	15.0	22.3
Tertiary GER (%)	2.4*	2.1
Private Sector Enrollment Share – Primary	21.9*	34.8
Gender Parity Index (GER in Primary and Secondary)	0.7	0.7
Primary completion rate (%)	28.5	44.0
Progression to secondary level (%)	51.5	59.7*
Teacher to Pupil Ratio – Primary	65.3	52.2
Total education spending as % of GDP	3.0*	n/a

An important contributor to improved access to basic education in the 1990s was the widespread multiplication of "community schools" created and managed by communities, which increased in number from 176 in 1995 to 2344 in 2002, and represented 31.7% of primary schools in Mali by 1998-99 (Cissé, Diarra, Marchand & Traoré, 2000; CLIC, n.d.). External funding for community schools, typically delivered through NGOs, came from a wide range of donors: USAID, GTZ, *Agence Française de Développement*, French Municipalities and the World Bank, and from INGOs such as Save the Children USA, Save the Children UK, World Education, Africare, CARE and Plan International (Capacci Carneal, 2004; Cissé et al, 2000). USAID alone funded 1,658 community schools in 2001 – over 30% of the total number of primary schools in the country (Miller-Grandvaux & Yoder, 2002, p. A-6). These schools were also supported by *Groupe Pivot Education de Base*, an NGO consortium which was in its turn heavily funded by external donors (Miller-Grandvaux et al., 2002). In 1994, after successful advocacy by donors, INGOs and *Groupe Pivot Education de Base*, the Malian government afforded community schools legal recognition (as private schools) and thereby some access to public resources, technical support and monitoring from MEN authorities (Boukary, 1999; DeStefano, 2004; Miller-Grandvaux et al., 2002).[14]

Another major reform in the education sector in the 1990s involved the widespread hiring of contract teachers. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Mali faced a serious teacher shortage, in part due to the closing of teacher training institutes and a policy of "voluntary departures" under its structural adjustment program (Ongoïba, 2005; World Bank Group, 2006, p. 89). Upon the advice of the World Bank, Ma

allowed for rapid system expansion. Contract teachers represented 61% of the total teaching staff in 2005, and are predicted to represent 88% of total staff in 2015 (World Bank, 2006, p. 14).

4.2 Mali's Education Sector Program, PRODEC

The 1999 launch of PRODEC (*Programme Décennal de Développement de l'Education*), Mali's 10-year education sector program, was a milestone in the evolution of the country's education system. Designed to promote education for all, PRODEC's objectives include a primary GER of 95% by 2010, reduced disparities between regions and between urban and rural areas and an increased GER for girls of 93% by 2010. PRODEC's core objectives for basic education stress quality education for all, national languages as a medium for teaching the early grades[15] and long-term professional development for teachers (MEB/MESSRS, 2000). It also calls for genuine partnership around schools between the state, local governments, communities, parents' associations (*APEs*), school management committees (*CGS*), NGOs, teachers' unions, students, the private sector and technical and financial partners (MEB/MESSRS, 2000, p. 48). PRODEC is being implemented through PISE (*Programme*

4.3 Decentralization of Education

Among the most important components of Mali's education sector program, PRODEC, is the government's progressive decentralization of the education system. Mali has devolved responsibility for education sector management from the central government to sub-national authorities that are elected for a mandate of five years, at the regional, *cercle* and commune levels (MATCL, 2003, p. 27).[18] These authorities are able to raise resources through taxation and from donors, NGOs, the private sector and so forth (MATCL, 2003, p. 12; MEN, 2005, p. 6). The transfer of responsibilities is also to be accompanied by the corresponding transfer of resources from the central level (MATCL, 2003, p. 12); however, at the time of field research, the transfer of resources was far from sufficient to allow sub-national authorities to fully exercise their new competencies.

By 2007, the Malian government plans to fully transfer primary schools to communes (World Bank, 2006). Decentralized commune authorities are responsible for the first six years of primary education (known as the "first cycle"), as well as for preschool and non-formal education (NFE) programs. Commune authorities manage construction, maintenance and equipping of schools, teacher hiring, payment and career management, school mapping and developing strategies for girls' education, amongst many other tasks (Aide et Action, 2005c, p. 8; MATCL, 2003, p. 124; MEN CADDE, 2003; World Bank, 2006). Already by 2002, the majority of contract teachers were being recruited by decentralized authorities, with plans for them to represent 88% of the total teaching force by 2015 (Ongoïba, 2005). As a parallel process, the MEN is decentralizing its own staff to provide support and advice to elected authorities in the exercise of their new competencies, a process known as *deconcentration*. Teacher training is also to be conducted at the decentralized levels (World Bank, 2006).

Along with the introduction of PRODEC and PISE, the Malian government has also legislated the creation of a new management structure for every school, the school management committee or *Comité de Gestion Scolaire (CGS)*. Each *CGS* must have two places for members of the existing parents' association (the *association de parents d'élèves* or *APE*), and includes a wide group of school-level actors (principal, representatives for teachers, pupils and other civil society actors such as local NGOs) (MEN Sec Gen, 2004a). The establishment of school management committees became a requirement by government in 2004. The *CGS* is charged with the creation and consolidation of partnerships to address the needs of the school, with designing school development plans and budgets, school management, maintenance of infrastructure, recruiting pupils and participating in the recruitment of teachers (MEN CADDE, 2003; MEN Sec Gen, 2004a).

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[18] The central government retains responsibility for formulating national policy, and for the support, supervision, coordination and evaluation of its implementation (1G; 3G; 4G; 13G; 14C; 26C; 70C; Aide et Action, 2005a; MEB/MESSRS, 2000, p. 49; MEN CADDE, 2003, p. 10).

5. Civil Society Actors in Mali's Education Sector

5.1 Civil society organizations active in basic education

Civil society organizations have long played an active role in the development of education in Mali. Islamic education has exis

Malienne pour la Promotion du Sahel (AMAPROS), *Association Subaahi Gumo* (*ASG*), *le Cabinet de Recherche Action pour le Développement* (*CRADE)*, *le Grade Banlieue*, *l'Institut pour l'Education Populaire* (*IEP*), *Oeuvre Malienne d'Aide à l'Enfance du Sahel* (*OMAES*), and numerous others. 123 INGOs, national NGOs and associations are listed as active in "literacy, education and training" according to CCA/ONG, a major INGO/national NGO coordination.[20] Amongst other things, national NGOs and INGOs are noted for their achievements in rendering more visible, and proposing solutions for, the problem of girls' and women's disadvantaged access to formal education and literacy programs (Int. 43D; Dembélé et al., 2002).

Over the past 15 years, two different constellations of civil society actors have adopted quite different stances towards changes in Mali's basic education system. Many CSOs, and NGOs in particular, have been direct contributors to increased access to education through their role in the promotion and support of community schools during the 1990s and early 2000s (Int. 37C; 52C; Miller-Grandvaux et al., 2002; Tounkara, 2001). CSO contributions to the community schools have resulted in considerable expansion of access to basic education. However, they also divided civil society; considerable tensions emerged between NGOs and teachers' unions in the 1990s, particularly around questions of education quality and around the hiring of contract teachers in community schools (Int. 5C; 37C; Miller-Grandvaux et al., 2002; Tounkara, 2001).

A second constellation of CSOs has responded much more critically to changes introduced in the education sector. Two of the longest-standing and/or most politically-influential groups of CSOs – the teachers' unions and the national students' association (AEEM) – played powerful roles in the transition to democracy. They also actively contested education policies in the 1990s, particularly those related to the introduction of user fees in higher education, the hiring of contract teachers and the threats to education quality posed by the establishment of community schools. Teachers' unions, FENAPEEM (the national federation of parents' associations) and the AEEM (representing students) – the three groups of constituency-based civil society actors in the education sector – are regarded as being extremely effective at mobilizing their members towards particular objectives (Int. 3G; 36G; 44C; 70C). They continue to wield considerable power in the Malian education system.

5.2 Collaboration and Coordination Among CSOs in Education

Not surprisingly, given their very different histories of engagement in national education sector reform, Malian CSOs have a somewhat checkered history of coordination and collaboration around education issues. There have been efforts to coordinate a common civil society "policy voice" in the education sector. For example, *Groupe Pivot Education de Base* was created in 1992 to build collaboration between NGOs active in education, and had advocacy for Education for All (EfA) within its founding objectives. Despite its initial successes, over time, *Groupe Pivot Education de Base* ran into difficulties sustaining policy influence on behalf of its members (as highlighted in the boxed figure below). In addition, coalition-building between *different types* of CSOs in education is fairly recent; in 2005-2006, a wider civil society coalition dedicated to EfA was launched. Through this coalition, there has been some progress made towards establishing an umbrella group to speak for broader civil society in the education sector;

[20] This information is drawn from the CCA/ONG website, consulted May 21, 2007 at: http://www.malipages.com/ccaong/alphabetisation.asp

CCA/ONG still exists and has a broad membership; however, it is said to face considerable challenges in seeking to represent their diverse views, including in education sector issues. This is due in part at least to the substantial investment of time, resources and active participation from member NGOs that is required in order for a coalition to function as an effective representative of its members. In our interviews, a few respondents reported that CCA/ONG has difficulty mobilizing its members around a common platform and maintaining strong ties with NGOs at the sub-regional levels (Int. 1G; 16C; 43D; 44C; 57C). However, CCA/ONG should not be singled out for particular criticism, since NGO coordinating bodies in general were acknowledged by NGOs to have difficulties relating to representation, organization, and appropriate competencies for participation in policy processes (Int. 16C; 33C; 44C; 64C).

Overall, there appeared to be consensus among our informants that many individual NGOs in Mali have not developed the habit of effectively coordinating their work (Int. 1G; 3G; 25C; 43D; 64C). National-level and sub-national-level NGOs have not built sufficiently strong relationships to allow for information and experience from the grassroots to feed upwards into policy discussions to the degree that it might (1G; 64C; Capacci Carneal, 2004, Miller-Grandvaux et al., 2002). Government and donors criticized NGOs for their tendency to work in isolation from government and from other NGOs (Int. 1G; 3G; 12G; 25C; 43D; Glenzer, 2005). We found that tensions within the NGOs sector rival any we could find between other sets of civil society actors. Echoing Glenzer's findings in 2005, our research suggested that some of these tensions hinge on dissatisfied relationships between national and international NGOs (Int. 4G; 17C; 37C; 43C).

Many CSOs we interviewed did recognize the advantages of collaboration between themselves (Int. 5C; 44C; 57C), and expressed some optimism about wider efforts to engineer a common CSO voice in national policy processes, particularly in the recent second PRSP design process (Int. 11C; 16C; 22C; 40C; 64C). However, there was some skepticism about the possibility of achieving, in the short-term at least, a truly functional national-level coalition of CSOs in basic education (Int. 20C); for this to succeed, clearly, civil society in education would need to address the many challenges respondents attributed to NGO coordinating bodies (Int. 1G; 16C; 33C; 43D; 64C) and the tensions existing amongst CSOs in education more generally. One NGO expressed deep reservations about the potential for collaboration between CSOs who defend very contrasting interests – such as teachers' unions, NGOs and students' associations – and

5.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of CSO Capacities in Education

During our research, interview respondents from all categories (CSOs, government and donors) were asked what they regarded as the strongest roles played by CSOs in education, whether social mobilization, research, innovation, a

9C; 26C; 31C; 40C). One respondent commented: "it's difficult to get innovations accepted [by government], we have to do large amounts of lobbying for this" (Int. 9C).

CSOs' level of capacity in **advocacy** also created some debate. Teachers' unions, national NGOs and coalitions gave examples of conducting advocacy relating to community schools, and relating to children and women's rights and to girls' education. Indeed, girls' education was the most frequently-cited subject of advocacy (Int. 5C; 8C; 17C; 31C; 44C; 57C), and one where government agreed that CSOs are effective (Int. 3G; 4G; 13G).

However, apart from these examples, there was considerable disagreement about whether or not advocacy is a strong capacity *overall* for CSOs in education. Some CSOs believe it to be (Int. 5C; 16C; 28C; 44C; 57C); others see it as a weakness (Int. 17C; 19C; 20C; 22C; 23C; 33C; 40C). Government sees CSOs as strong in advocating for *resources* (Int. 4G; 12G), and commented that NGOs are increasingly playing the role of "counterweight" (Int. 4G). By contrast, a donor agency respondent commented that CSOs overall are *weak* in the role of "counter-weight" to government (Int. 58D).

One CSO interview asserted that CSOs in education make only *scattered* efforts in advocacy (Int. 22C). On a similar note, a donor remarked that individual CSOs such as teachers' unions, AEEM (representing students) and FENAPEEM (representing parents' associations) carry out advocacy when the MEN makes a decision that they are unhappy with (Int. 43D). Importantly, CSOs did not give a *current* example of an education issue where civil society *collectively* has been successful in advocating for change. This finding is corroborated by a 2005 *Aide et Action* study noting that Malian CSOs are not working synergistically in advocacy at the national level, nor with sub-regional or continental advocacy initiatives, and that the quality of their advocacy efforts is affected by their need for government and donor funding (Aide et Action, 2005b).

We also found some evidence that national CSOs define advocacy differently than do international CSOs. *Aide et Action* (2005b) reports that what Malian CSOs call advocacy is actually sensitization; this is because CSOs, rather than advocating for change, are often asking for things that decision-makers and donors already agree upon. Malian CSOs seem wary of engaging in "conflictual" advocacy and being badly-regarded by government (Int. 9C; Aide et Action, 2005b). Illustrating this, the Global Action Week campaign has been *jointly organized* by CSOs and the MEN in recent years. Government cited advocacy for EfA as a CSO strength. However, there has been considerable disagreement amongst CSOs themselves about whether they are doing *genuine* advocacy when conducting Global Action Week collaboratively with the MEN (Int. 8C; 25C; 40C versus Int. 5C; 19C; 20C; 26C). National CSOs were represented on both sides of the debate. One CSO commented that Global Action Week "is not about being antagonistic, but about holding government accountable (…) this isn't going to happen as long as it's the government that's organizing the week and handing out the money to organize the activities" (Int. 20C).

Informants also told us that CSO's use of media was underdeveloped. NGOs are very appreciative of media for disseminating their ideas and multiplying the impact of their work; however, they report that the cost of using media is far too high (Int. 6C; 8C; 9C; 17C; 44C). For its part, perspectives from the written press informed us that due to the media's resource

shortages, journalists are obliged to write about topics that sell papers quickly, rather than providing in-depth coverage of important development issues being addressed by NGOs (Int. 41C). Our research also suggested that relationships between CSOs and Members of Parliament

the new kinds of roles and expectations set in place for civil society by PRODEC. We then examine CSO engagement in subsequent policy processes in the implementation and evaluation stages of the sector program, arguing here that there continue to be substantial obstacles to CSO engagement in national-level policy-setting, as well as new challenges for CSOs relating to the decentralization of educational governance.

6.1 CSO participation in the design of PRODEC (1996-1999)

The design process of PRODEC marked a dramatic shift from the centralized and government-led policy processes that had characterized Mali in the past (Tounkara, 2001). Because the Malian government wished to introduce decentralization reforms that would greatly increase the need for citizens' participation in the education system, it was within government interests to make a great effort to consult very widely and to build relationships with the Malian population around education-related questions.

However, our research found that civil society actors held conflicting views about the extent to which they had influenced the design of the PRODEC. One group remarked upon extensive consultations and felt that CSOs had indeed been listened to. A second group told us that their views were not taken into consideration and saw PRODEC as an externally-influenced plan. As we shall see below, at least part of the explanation for these different views stems from the longstanding divide between CSOs who view themselves as "complementary service-providers" within the basic education system and who have strong international ties, versus well-established constituency-based organizations and nationally-based organizations. Their different opinions are laid out in the Table below:

Table 4: Contrasting Malian perspectives on their participation in PRODEC design

Issues in question	**CSOs with strong national roots or constituencies***	**CSOs with strong international connections****
Degree to which the design **process** for the education sector program (PRODEC) was conducive to CSO participation.	The design process itself was flawed and this hindered effective CSO participation (e.g. late invitations, documents for preparation unavailable).	The design process was very consultative of CSOs.
Degree to which PRODEC **content** was influenced by CSOs	CSO contributions did not influence the final content of the sector program: "we participated but our opinions were not taken into consideration;" Major policies, particularly those associated with decentralization reforms – including decentralized teacher management and the introduction of new school management committees – were introduced; CSO views on these were ignored.	CSOs made significant contributions towards the content of the sector program: "when we read PRODEC, we can see that it's the fruit of a wide consultation" Decentralization reforms were supported by CSOs.

* Includes teachers' unions, representatives for parents, national education researchers and some national NGOs with strong Malian roots.
** Includes INGOs, national NGOs and national education researchers.

In our interviews, government officials provided us with evidence that government *did* seek to hear from a wide variety of civil society actors during the sector program's design (Int. 1G; Int. 18CG; Int. 35G; 39G; 66G; ME Sec Gen, 2001a). As noted by Tounkara (2001, p. 19) "leadership from strategic personalities favourable to NGOs" [translated by the researcher] played an important role in ensuring CSO consultations. For example, the Minister of Education, who had been a civil society actor personally, ensured the invitation of CSOs such as *Groupe Pivot Education de Base* into the sector program's design processes (Tounkara, 2001). In addition, the regional coordinator of ERNWACA, the Malian-based regional education research network, led PRODEC's design team, and was very inclusive of CSOs in the process (Int. 52C; Tounkara, 2005). Donors and external researchers agree that CSOs were consulted and significantly involved (Int. 13G; 43D; Public World, 2004; Tounkara, 2005; Wing, 2002). In addition, a number of CSOs commented positively that they, and wider civil society, had a significant role in the sector program's design process.

These "positive" responses came mainly from representatives of INGOs, or from Malian CSOs with strong international connections or from Malian chapters of INGOs (Int. 6C, 26C, 30C, 32C, 37C, 44C, 52C, 54C, 57C). Along with government these actors view PRODEC as a strongly Malian-lead, designed and owned sector strategy (Int. 18CG; 35G; 54C; 57C; 66G). Thus, according to one government informant:

> *If someone wanted to go and start another [education sector] program, the population would say "is it PRODEC? Because we agreed with you on PRODEC" – if you try and do something different, they'll ask you questions, because they have appropriated PRODEC for themselves and want to see its results.* (Int. 66G)

By contrast, CSO *criticism* of the PRODEC design process came mainly from national NGOs or CSOs with strong national roots. They spoke of invitations that arrived too late, unavailable government documents and too few seats made available to CSOs in discussions (Int. 29C; 65C). They also felt that their contributions were not taken into consideration, that CSOs were called to validate decisions already made, and that the final version of the document was the work of government administrators and/or strongly influenced by expatriates (Int. 5C; 8C; 9C; 10C; 14C; 16C; 40C; 64C; 70C). Teachers' unions, representatives for parents and some national NGOs were highly critical of aspects of the decentralization reforms introduced with the PRODEC, including the decentralized management of teachers by elected sub-national authorities, the introduction of new pedagogical methods without adequate means to support them and the plan to establish new school management committees (*CGS).* Amongst these actors, some regard these policies as having been brought into the sector program under the influence of expatriates. Joined by some INGOs and national NGOs, representatives from amongst these actors assert that PRODEC is not distinctively Malian, being a replica of 10-year education programs found in other countries (Int. 5C; 21CG; 22C; 33C). One CSO commented: "from one country to another, it's the same thing: in Mali, in Burkina, in Senegal, in Niger, there's PRODEC" (Int. 21CG).

Admittedly, there *is* evidence that donors, INGOs and NGOs had a good deal of influence in education policy during the time period of the sector program's design. Previous research in Mali finds that government partnership with NGOs in education was strong in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Miller-Grandvaux et al., 2002), and PRODEC was formulated from 1996-1999. In

- contribute towards infrastructure, financial and human resources (Int. 3G; 4G; 35G; 66G; MEN CADDE, 2003, p. 12)
- create concrete plans for regional disparities in education (Int. 39G)
- build management and governance capacities in locally-elected officials (Int. 3G)
- at the school level or community level, to sensitize, mobilize and support the training of communities and school management committees (*CGS*) (Int. 3G; 4G; 39G; 66G)
- teachers' unions, parents' associations (*APEs)* and NGOs are to keep teachers, parents and communities, respectively, sensitized and mobilized to participate in addressing school-level needs and challenges, to prevent conflicts and to promote the smooth-running of the system (Int. 35G; MEN CADDE, 2003, pp. 11 – 12)
- communities have a voice in determining the school calendar, in curricula and program content, in monitoring and evaluating school activities, in deciding where schools will be built, and in teacher recruitment (MEN CADDE, 2003, p. 10; MEB/MESSRS, 2000, p. 49)
- communities and elected decentralized authorities are asked to mobilize resources towards the construction, equipping and maintenance of schools (Int. 66G; MEN CADDE, 2003, p. 10).

Deconcentrated MEN officials summarized the role of civil society at the school level as follows:

> *in decentralization, CSOs have the biggest role; for example, the school management committees (CGS) were created as a structure to be close to the school […] ; in the future […] CGS will be the key structure for school management, for fund-raising, planning budgets, doing advocacy to the commune so that school projects are included in the PDECOM & PDESEC*[27] *[i.e. in local education and development plans]; communities must say, 'this school is our business first'.* (Int. 46C)

These same officials felt that CSOs need greater skills in project design, monitoring and evaluation to be effective actors within decentralization. In general, government called for CSOs to have stronger capacities in planning education systems (Int. 39G). From a state perspective, CSOs need to be better-informed about the major directions being taken in education around the world, and to learn how other CSOs are organized outside Mali (Int. 13G; 39G). Government officials also called for funds for enhancing CSO engagement in non-formal education, another sub-sector of education in which decentralized authorities and their CSO partners are to play a major role.

The government's optimism about new roles for civil society under decentralization stands in

Criticisms of PRODEC's decentralization reforms came in two categories. The first reflected a sense that decentralization of educational governance was not occurring with the necessary guidance, capacity development and resources. Some CSOs and donors argued that PRODEC is still being implemented in a top-down manner (Int. 21CG; 29C; 33C; 62D; 69D). Structures for consultation are not functional at the decentralized levels, thereby limiting opportunities for collaboration between elected authorities, deconcentrated MEN officials, school-level actors and CSOs (Int. 3G ; 43D; MEN Sec Gen, 2006a; Public World, 2004; World Bank/IDA, 2007; Ziegler, Touré, Tangara & Coulibaly, 2004). All actors need training for decentralization, from deconcentrated MEN officials, to elected officials, to NGOs, to school-level committees *(CGS)* and parents' associations (*APEs*), and the division of their roles needs to be clarified and formalized (Int. 7C; 49G; 55D; 63D; Aide et Action, 2005a; Ziegler et al., 2004). Furthermore, while education development plans are required to be produced at the decentralized levels of governance (commune, *cercle*, region), with the goal of "bottom-up" planning for the sector, many respondents complained of a lack of coherence and synergy between national-level sector policy and education plans produced at the decentralized levels (Int. 21CG; 33C; 42D; 63D; 68G; 69D; MEN, 2006a).

As a related problem, the management of education sector resources remains centralized (Ziegler et al., 2004), while government and CSOs reported that adequate resources are not yet being transferred so that elected officials and their partners can fully exercise the competencies transferred to them (Int. 3G; 7C; 30C; 37C; Ongoïba, 2005). This undermines people's motivation to invest in educational planning: "why should we plan when we cannot implement?" (Int. 37C).

The second category of criticisms revolves around specific aspects of PRODEC's decentralization policies. For example,

Despite these major areas of contention, in 2005, government and diverse civil society actors agreed to come together and work on a strategy to prevent disruptions to the education system and to improve its overall quality. This was through the development of an agreement to ensure peaceful and performing schools, the *Accord de Partenariat pour une Ecole apaisée et performante*.[30] This agreement was signed by teachers' unions, FENAPEEM (representing parents' associations), the AEEM (representing students and pupils), CAFO (a coordinating body for women's NGOs and associations), the Malian Association for Human Rights (*L'Association Malienne des Droits de l'Homme*), faith-based organizations (*Le Haut Conseil Islamique du Mali*, Protestant and Catholic church associations) and representatives for youth and for private schools. The agreement is the result of consultations in all regions and in Bamako district, between educational administrations, teachers' unions, CSOs and the AEEM (the national students' association). In this *Accord*, the Malian government made many commitments, including increased public resources to education, acceleration of decentralization reforms, and the creation of permanent consultation frameworks for information, education and communication about education-related challenges. CSO signatories made commitments to support government in the on-going development and implementation of solutions and to mobilize and govern their constituencies accordingly.

6.3 Diminishing Engagement in National Policy Processes?

Reports from many respondents during our research suggested that the *current* degree of government and CSO partnership in national-level education policy processes appears to have changed, as compared to the time of PRODEC design. Sources who spoke positively about civil society involvement during the sector program's design period reported that there are now *lower* levels of civil society contribution to the on-going monitoring and evaluation of the sector program (Int. 44C; Public World, 2004).[31]

Several sources led us to conclude that CSO participation in PRODEC implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes has not become *regularized or institutionalized.* In other words, there is a lack of clearly-defined, functional structures and mechanisms for consultation and shared decision-making between government, donors and CSOs. PRODEC planned for consultation frameworks, yet these are not operational at national, regional or local levels (Int. 3G; 14C; 33C; Aide et Action, 2005b; World Bank/IDA, 2007). Respondents also reported that mechanisms for CSO participation in monitoring and evaluation of PRODEC are lacking (Int. 14C; 44C; Public World, 2004). Although the government asserts that CSOs were involved and consulted in the PISE I evaluation (the evaluation of the sector program's first phase) and the

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and worked with government to improve salaries, training and career plans for contract teachers, and today both HIPC and additional donor funds are going to improved salaries and certification/training opportunities for them.

[30] This information was drawn from the President of Mali's website, retrieved March 2, 2007 from: http://www.koulouba.pr.ml/article.php3?id_article=674.

[31] A small group of respondents stressed that CSOs *are* making progress towards increased participation in policy processes. They pointed out that CSOs are contributors to non-formal education (NFE) policy and high-level NFE decision-making processes (Int. 26C; 33C; 38IO; 57C). They also mentioned how CSOs are organizing very effectively for the second PRSP design process. These respondents saw CSOs as having new levels of awareness about their need to participate, and doing so, increasingly, within all major social sectors (Int. 8C; 16C; 24C; 29C; 40C; 64C).

PISE II design (the design of the sector program's second phase) [32] (1G; 39G), donor and civil society voices contend that CSO participation in the PISE II process was too late, too rushed, non-existent and/or inadequate (Int. 20C; 29C; 38IO; 43D; 58D; 59D). While CSOs are invited by the MEN to participate in validating education plans or policies (Int. 57C; Aide et Action, 2005b), they are often not present at the founding stages when the major directions are being determined (Int. 38IO).[33]

Where decision-making and governance structures *do* exist for basic education within the sector program, respondents reported that CSOs are not active participants in them (Int. 3G; 33C; 35G; 38IO; 42D; 56IO; 58D). Examples cited by respondents included the PISE piloting committee (*Comité de pilotage du PISE),* the partners' framework *(cadre partenarial),* joint evaluation missions and thematic groups (*groupes thématiques)* (Int. 3G; 33C; 35G; 38IO; 42D; 56IO; 58D). The only exception here is that some NGOs do actively participate in the non-formal education (NFE) thematic group (Int. 20C; Int. 25C; 26C; 33C; 56IO).[34]

In addition, when CSOs were asked what are the major structures or mechanisms for government and civil society partnership within education, their responses varied greatly. This suggests that CSOs do not *know or agree upon* the location of key decision-making spaces, and they do not collectively aspire to access those spaces. A recent report by *Aide et Action* (2005b, p. 6) agrees with this assessment, arguing that CSOs lack knowledge of the major decision-making mechanisms, and calling for research into these structures and the degree to which civil society proposals are taken into consideration inside them. In general, it seems that CSOs have up to the present been participating in education policy processes more as individual CSOs, rather than being part of a well-established coalition in which different types of CSO develop a common platform and strategize about how and where to present it to government.

Despite the lack of regular mechanisms and coordination for CSO engagement in national policy making, we learned during our research that some CSOs have maintained strong direct relationships with the MEN. Teachers' unions, AEEM (the national students' association) and FENAPEEM (the national federation for parents' associations) were reported to have regular meetings with MEN officials (Int. 1G; 35G; 39G; 43D). In addition, when respondents were

working very hard to contain opposition to the PRODEC from this group of actors by maintaining regular communication with them.

In contrast to the experiences of this constellation of strongly-rooted national civil society actors, NGOs' collaboration with the MEN and participation in policy processes seems to have declined. For example, NGOs were said to be absent from the PISE I evaluation and/or PISE II design (Int. 9C; 15C; 25C; 30C; 37C; 58D). This may be because the NGO sector is considered difficult to engage, due to its lack of structure and internal coordination and its technical weaknesses (Int. 31C; 33C; 43D). A donor representative stressed that through being absent from PRODEC's thematic groups, NGOs are unable to really understand and appropriate the education sector program, or to align themselves within it (Int. 56IO). Indeed, the NGO sector is felt to be less organized and vocal today than it was around the time of PRODEC's design (Int. 43D; 52C). There has been a decrease in direct donor funding, adversely affecting the internal strength and external influence of coalitions like *Groupe Pivot Education de Base* and CCA/ONG (Int. 23C; 43D; Miller-Grandvaux et al., 2002).

7. Current Relationships between Government and Civil Society Organizations

As we have mentioned above, current relationships between government and civil society actors present a mixed picture. Formal government acknowledgement of roles for civil society in *national-level* policy-making spheres is weak, and even if it were stronger, regularized mechanisms are still lacking for CSO participation. Furthermore, two different constellations of civil society actors have emerged in Mali, each with quite different responses to PRODEC. Not surprisingly, these groups have different types of relationships with government.

Teachers' unions in Mali were considered by other respondents to have great influence upon government (Int. 13G; 36G; 38IO; 70C), as were the national students' association, AEEM, and the national parents' federation, FENAPEEM (Int. 3G; 70C). Doors are very open to these groups at the MEN. As one teachers' union representative commented, the MEN is genuinely attentive to their concerns, even though "certain of [our] demands are beyond the scope of the

CSOs have begun to play an important role in promoting participatory planning processes at the school level, and in helping school-level actors[36] make their voices heard within local authorities' planning processes. While the production of education plans at the decentralized levels has only begun in the past 2-3 years, there are some positive reports of genuine "bottom-up" planning, supported by NGOs (Int. 37C; 46G; 48C; 49G; Ziegler et al., 2004).

When NGO respondents were asked about their relationships with MEN officials at the sub-national, decentralized levels, there were mixed comments. A number of NGOs stated that officials at the deconcentrated level are competent, knowledgeable, available for consultation and good collaborators (Int. 6C; 15C; 54C). These officials contribute expertise, facilities and equipment to education programs; they provide training to teachers and non-formal education (NFE) staff, and they invite NGOs to workshops (Int. 6C; 15C; 19C; 37C; 48C). However, while some respondents asserted that officials had provided technical support and monitoring to their programs (Int. 48C), others stated that these officials do *not* provide the necessary services in this regard (Int. 15C; 19C; 25C; 37C). Deconcentrated MEN officials are often regarded to lack the logistical, human and financial resources to carry out these and other responsibilities (Int. 6C; 14C; 15C; 17C; 25C; 37C; 54C; Public World, 2004; Ziegler et al., 2004); they have even been known to ask NGOs for financial support to do their work (Int. 14C; 15C; 17C). Some NGOs also reported conflicts over leadership at the local level, with MEN officials attempting to retain key roles in the management of schools and recruitment of teachers, without being questioned by NGOs (Int. 19C; 27C). It appears that these new relationships have not been sufficiently formalized or clarified (Int. 14C; 27C; 37C; Ziegler et al., 2004).

Our research did not yield any examples of sustained, strategic collaboration between Members of Parliament and civil society actors. However, NGOs gave some mixed reports about their relationships with elected officials at the *local* levels. Some made positive comments about their strong partnerships; these officials are open to meeting with NGOs and inclusive of NGOs in their activities (Int. 6C; 14C; 17C; 26C; 37C). Elected officials were seen as having been quick to assume their competencies in domains such

Because donors' aid is directed straight to the state, who coordinates the aid, more and more, donors don't fund civil society activities" (Int. 57C). Representatives from *all types of CSO* expressed a desire for greater transparency about donor resources going to the state and how they are used, as well as greater transparency within state ministries (Int. 5C; 22C; 33C). Some interest in budget tracking was also expressed (Int. 11C; 25C).

c. Support CSOs to better structure and organize amongst themselves
CSOs called for donors to help civil society structure and organize itself internally (10C; 11C; 40C). For example, one respondent suggested a consultation framework where different types of CSOs can develop proposal-making capacity and carry out research (Int. 57C). Another CSO asked for support to frameworks for direct school-level actors (teachers' unions, parents, students) (Int. 65C). There were also requests for more donor support to coalitions (Int. 8C; 9C; 10C; 11C) – and these requests did *not* only come from coalitions themselves. CSOs recognized how donors have provided good technical support to them (Int. 8C), and have helped NGOs become more professional, in the case of their support to *Groupe Pivot Education de Base*, for example (Int. 23C). As they said about government, however, CSOs felt that donors should more carefully evaluate both NGOs' and coalitions' capacity, level of representation and degree of alignment with PRODEC *before* funding them (6C; 11C; 14C; 31C).

d. Support capacity-building for CSOs
CSOs – NGOs and teachers' unions in particular – had numerous suggestions as to where they need capacity-building, including: policy design and analysis, macro-level advocacy and education quality (Int. 14C; 16C; 19C; 26C; 40C; 57C; 64C; 65C). There were also calls for support towards CSOs playing a greater role in monitoring PRODEC (Int. 44C), and for assistance developing their technical capacities (in girls' education, for example) (Int. 48C; 65C).

9. Analysis and Conclusions

Mali has rapidly introduced dramatic education sector reforms over the past 15 years. These include donor and NGO efforts to expand community schools in the mid to late 1990s, the widespread introduction of contract teachers in the early 1990s, and the 1999 launch of a ten-year education sector program, PRODEC (*Programme Décennal de Développement de l'Education*). The Malian government has also progressively devolved the governance of education to sub-national authorities.

Overall, these reforms have expanded policy space for civil society. However, they have had contrasting implications for different civil society organizations (CSOs), which in turn has exacerbated divisions within civil society. Two key constellations of CSO actors have thus emerged, each facing different pressures to change the terms of their engagement in the education sector.

The first constellation of CSOs consists of national and international NGOs, often involved in complimentary service-provision. For these actors, the move to a sector program has brought donor shifts towards budget support, decreased donor-NGO interaction and less direct funding for NGO activities. At the same time, NGOs acknowledge greater opportunities for partnership with government, but a lack of communication and mutual understanding has hindered their relationship. While NGOs are actively invol

their specific interests and to bargain with government as individual organizations. Representatives from donors, government and even civil society feel that CSOs can only be effective at the national policy table once they organize more synergistically amongst themselves and demonstrate their ability to add value to policy dialogue. In our interviews, NGOs, teachers' unions, parents, students and other CSOs called for support to address these needs; some donors expressed their readiness to advocate for and support the development of a greater national policy voice for CSOs.

Working towards the goal of a more coordinated civil society at the national and sub-national levels – and reinforcing linkages between the two levels – will not be easy. It will require the building of bridges between two very different constellations of CSO actors, the establishment of a common platform, and building CSOs' capacities for advocacy, policy analysis and research. The recent interest Mali has shown in developing a plan to abolish schools fees may provide a new mobilizing frame for Malian civil society, in particular for the EfA coalition – as has been the case in Tanzania and Kenya. In addition, the promising example of recent CSO organizing around Mali's second PRSP, and of more-established EfA coalition-building in other countries, suggests that with support from government and the international community, a vital Malian coalition for civil society in education is achievable.

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