Teacher Improvement Projects in Guinea: Lessons Learned From Taking a Program to National Scale

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Since 1994, Guinea has been planning and implementing a distinctive and promising program that combines school improvement with professional development for teachers. As one component of the current World Bank–supported program in Guinea, the Small Grants Staff Development and School Improvement Program engages primary school teachers to partici-

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pate in a process of educational renewal through competitive small grants of approximately $1,000 that are awarded to school-based teams of teachers.

The objective of the small grants program is to provide the organizational support and incentives necessary for teachers to take more responsibility for their own professional development. Thus, the program acts as a catalyst for improving the quality of primary education in Guinea as a whole. More specifically, instead of imposing changes from the top down, this program seeks to give teachers more professional autonomy to analyze teaching and learning problems in their schools, choose one problem to be addressed in a 1-year project, define their project objectives, plan activities that address those objectives, identify and acquire the supplemental resources they need, manage the funds for the project, and evaluate the results. This approach differs from past programs, which provided in-service workshops for large groups of teachers, workshops that often were not relevant to individual and local needs and that lacked the follow-up required to be effective.

This program was initially developed and piloted in one experimental region of the country and then extended to all regions during the period from 1995 to 2000. It is now a nationwide program. By the year 2000, over half the primary school teachers in the country had participated in the writing of proposals, and 589 projects have been funded so far. To do all this, the program used about 270 facilitators and evaluators in 2000. Table 1 shows the distribution of these projects across the years.

Small Grant Competition, Organizational Support, and Program Structure

The small grants competition begins with a series of workshops for groups of teacher teams (each team generally consists of 4 to 10 teachers from a single school or neighboring schools). At the workshop, a program facilitator, typically a pedagogical advisor or a normal school teacher.

Table 1
Grant Distribution Across the Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1st-Year Projects</th>
<th>2nd- and 3rd-Year Refunded Projects</th>
<th>Total by Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996–1997</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997–1998</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998–1999</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999–2000</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand totals</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
presents the program's operational manual, its proposal-writing guide, and a companion set of explanatory notes. The teachers then begin to write a grant proposal. They determine the actual project content and prepare their own budget for the supplementary resources they need to carry out their project (e.g., textbooks, services of resource persons, school supplies for students, reference books for teachers). On completion of the preliminary proposal with help from the facilitator, it is submitted to a prefectoral jury, presided over by the prefectoral director of education (DPE) and composed of local educational leaders and a retired teacher. The jury selects the most promising proposals and provides critical feedback. These proposals are then revised with still more help from the facilitator and forwarded to a regional jury that makes the final decision of which teams will receive grants. This jury is presided over by the regional inspector of education (IRE) and composed of local educational leaders, including the director of studies of the regional normal school, the director of the lab school attached to it, the regional director of in-service teacher education, and a representative of the regional parents' association.

Selected teams are granted full funding, whereas other teams who reach the second stage receive consolation prizes in kind. The selected teams are then provided with project implementation support, including a project launch workshop at the beginning of the school year, close-to-school assistance throughout the project cycle from the project facilitator (and often other resource persons as well), and three visits by an evaluator (typically a prefectoral or regional jury member who is not a facilitator). To further encourage the successful implementation of the projects, the teams are given the option of renewing their grants for a second and a third year. Participants present the results of their projects at regional dissemination seminars at the end of each year. To date, most funded projects have focused on how to teach reading and to use newly acquired reading textbooks more effectively. However, the most recently selected projects are more diverse in subject matter and problems addressed, including more projects focusing on mathematics and social studies.

The structure of the program, which is implicit in the foregoing, is summarized in Figure 1. All levels of the primary education subsector participate in the program. Initially, the program relied heavily on a national training support team and international consultants to prepare and facilitate workshops and program activities at the regional level. More recently, the most effective facilitators and evaluators from the experimental region where the program has been active during the first 3 years have been designated as trainers (*encadreurs-formateurs*) and have assumed leadership for training program personnel in other regions of the country. At the central level, a small national staff under
Figure 1. Program structure.
the leadership of the National Director of Elementary Education manages the program and oversees its execution in each of the regions. In addition, Michigan State University has fielded a small team of international consultants. These consultants (one each from the United States, Burkina Faso, Togo, and Brazil, plus a Guinean living abroad) provide short-term support, but there is no resident expatriate staff and no separate project unit.

Experience of Going to Scale

The program was developed and tried experimentally in the natural region of Middle Guinea (10 prefectures in the interior of the country, including the cities of Labé, Pita, Dalaba, and Mamou). After 2 years of experience in selecting and implementing projects, the program was extended to four additional regions: Boké, Kindia, Faranah, and Kankan. The last two regions to be added, Conakry and N’Zérékoré, finished implementing their first projects in 1999–2000.

The first cycle of projects took place in Middle Guinea in 1995–1996. In 1996, the primary school teachers in the region were divided into 289 teams, which included 1,939 teachers and represented 570 schools. These teams all submitted preliminary proposals to the 10 prefectural juries of the region, which then selected 129 proposals for further revision and submission to the regional jury in Labé. That jury selected 54 for funding. These 54 projects were implemented in 1996–1997 and were discussed at the first regional dissemination seminar in Labé in the summer of 1997.

At the same time the first contingent of projects was being implemented, a second cycle of selection was begun in the experimental region. This was one of the most difficult years for learning to manage the program, because at the same time that 54 teams were putting their funded projects into practice, another 292 teams were writing new preliminary proposals. From this new set, an additional 31 projects were selected for first-year funding. In addition, 28 of the original projects that had already received support were selected for refunding, making a total of 59 projects to be implemented in 1997–1998. Two regional dissemination seminars were held that year in the summer of 1998, one in Labé and one in Mamou.

During 1996–1997, a critical decision had to be made about going to scale. It was always part of the plan to extend the program to all the regions during the first 5 years of implementation, but developing the program took longer than anticipated. In 1997–1998, the program had already been confined to the experimental region longer than originally
anticipated. Nevertheless, important problems remained, particularly in terms of collecting adequate evaluation data and keeping up with the financial accounting procedures. The original plan was to extend to four additional regions—Faranah, Kankan, Kindia, and Boké (part of Boké had already been in the experimental region). However, it seemed that the capacity of the program was not yet sufficient to absorb all of these regions. So after much debate, it was decided to start in each of these regions with a more limited number of teachers corresponding to the number of facilitators that could be trained and made available, rather than with all teachers.

With the added regions, 618 teams were created in 1997–1998, and at the end of that year, 123 new projects were selected for funding in 1998–1999, representing 234 schools and including 1,104 teachers. The results were discussed at six regional seminars held in the regional capitals in the summer of 1999, with roughly 200 participants in each seminar.

By 1998–1999, there were 121 facilitators and 41 evaluators working in the six regions. To prepare for this expansion, a new category of program staff had to be created: the *encadreurs-formateurs*, or trainers, for the program. These were chosen initially from the best performing facilitators and evaluators of the experimental region. With help from the national staff and international consultants, they provided the training and the technical assistance needed by the new regions. To our knowledge, it was the first time that ministry personnel from the interior of the country provided this type of leadership for a national program. The year 1998–1999 again represented a new level of challenge for the program. The four added regions were learning to manage simultaneously the implementation of projects selected the year before and the selection of new projects for 1999–2000. At the same time, the expansion entered its final phase with the addition of the two last and largest regions: the capital region of Conakry and the forest region of N'Zérékoré. The limits on the capacity of the program again had to be taken into account. Especially in Conakry, there proved to be limitations on the number of facilitators and evaluators that could be trained and made available to the program. As a result, only 103 teams could be put in place in Conakry and 159 in N'Zérékoré (instead of 192 teams in each of these two regions, according to our original projections). Nevertheless, for the whole country, with all regions involved for the first time, the totals were imposing. The six regions that had been participating in the program the previous year were in the process of implementing 123 new projects and 38 refunded projects in 1998–1999, with teams totaling 1,403 teachers and representing 299 schools. At the same time, in all eight regions, a total of 762 teams competed for 254 new first-year projects. Also during this time, 61 projects
were selected for refunding, for a total of 315 projects to be implemented in the year 1999–2000.

Thus, that year marks the end of the going-to-scale phase, but not the end of the program. In addition to the 314\textsuperscript{1} projects being implemented in all eight regions, each region was once again selecting projects for the year 2000–2001.

The figures cited here bring home the challenges of going to scale in less than 5 years in a country such as Guinea, where administration usually proceeds at a slower pace and where working conditions are difficult. As a matter of fact, the scope and speed of expansion for a program of this complexity was unprecedented in Guinea. The rest of this article attempts to draw lessons from this experiment of going to scale. It is based on the experience of the authors, who participated in the development and implementation of the program. It does not attempt to evaluate the outcomes of the project. An external evaluation is planned but has not yet been conducted.

Organizational Support Lessons Learned
From Going to Scale

The strategy underlying this program was not an especially original one. Conceptually, it draws on much research and writing concerning the improvement of in-service education for teachers (see Fullan, 1982; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; McLaughlin, 1991; Rust & Dalin, 1990). But practically speaking, to our knowledge, nothing quite so ambitious in this type of program had been attempted before. The essence of the program was to provide teachers with the organizational support and incentives they needed to assume primary responsibility for their own professional development and for improving their teaching practice, students’ learning, and schools (for details on the organizational support and incentives system put in place, see Dembélé, 1997, 1999; Schwille & Dembélé, 1998). The provision of such extensive support and follow-up for teacher development is a doctrine often preached but rarely practiced on a national scale. Going to scale was a process of replicating the organizational support created in one experimental region progressively in the other regions of the country. But the fact that this organizational support took hold and mobilized the efforts of teachers and other ministry personnel at all levels requires an explanation that goes beyond a description of the formal process. We attempt to provide this explanation as we discuss the lessons

\textsuperscript{1}The implementation of one project was postponed to the year 2000–2001 because it had no representatives at the launch workshop.
we learned from going to scale, some of which could be considered features of any effective program, but that are particularly necessary to expansion. In doing so, we also provide images of organizational support as it unfolded.

Lesson 1: It Is Possible to Make Such a System Work on a Widespread National Scale in a Resource-Scarce Country.

The program has been able to mobilize almost all teachers and most leaders of the primary education system from the center to the level of the subprefectures. Although the structure is a special one, one important factor of its success in mobilizing the whole system is that it has drawn on people who are already in place in the various ministry offices at central, regional, prefectural, and subprefectural levels. This has facilitated the program becoming a part of the regular activities of the offices concerned, although there is still room for improvement in this respect (see Dembélé & Bender, 1999).

Lesson 2: If a Program Is Intended to Become Nationwide, It Should Be Designed From the Beginning With Going to Scale in Mind.

Some features of a program seem to lend themselves to going to scale; others do not. A cookie-cutter program that has a rigid structure may be difficult to replicate exactly in new regions, whereas a program that is more flexible from the start will be easier to expand throughout the country. A program that is very complex or costly may also be more difficult to re-create on a widespread basis. Our program certainly pushed the edge in this regard because various complexities were adopted in the effort to make it work, but we were not certain that we could organize such a complex program throughout the country. But we did have the advantage that, from the start, it was clear that the Guinean government wanted a nationwide program and that we would do well to design the program with this in mind. Hence, we were forced to think about the following questions when we designed the pilot program for the experimental region:

- What is the best way to select schools and participants for a nationwide program?
- How can assistance best be provided to teachers in a nationwide program?
- Who can provide this assistance, and how should they be selected?
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- How can funds best be managed in a nationwide program?
- How much time and motivation can teachers be expected to devote to the program once the experimental phase is ended and the program is operating in new regions on a routine basis?
- How can transportation, communication, and other logistical problems be solved on a nationwide basis?
- How can the educational leaders of the primary education system best be involved in the program on a nationwide, routine basis?

We did not pretend to have definitive answers to all these questions. But as the program continued to experience problems in its expansion, the search for better solutions was facilitated to the extent that the design took these considerations into account from the beginning.

Lesson 3: Going to Scale Required (a) Piloting the Overall Organizational Support System as Well as Its Constituent Elements in a Participatory Manner, (b) Expansion in Carefully Planned Stages, and (c) Flexibility and Ongoing Adaptation.

All this may seem obvious, but the specialized literature is full of examples of educational reform efforts that failed because of haste and the desire to show impressive statistics quickly. In hindsight, we believe that this program would have had the same fate if we had tried to begin a national program from the start. In many cases, ministry officials assume that consultants will arrive with complete program designs in their back pockets, but this was definitely not the case in this program. At the beginning, there was agreement on the general concept and nature of the program, but the details of program design were worked out gradually with collaboration between Guineans and international consultants at all levels.

Most of the program's basic documentation was coauthored by international consultants and nationals. For each of these documents, input was sought from actors at various levels of the system. Thus, the very first draft of the operational manual in 1994 was distributed to all prefectural directors of education, all regional inspectors of education, and central ministry office directors for feedback.

The development of the proposal-writing guide illustrates more graphically how beneficiary participation was sought. One of the very first steps in developing the program, even before work on the overall operating manual, was to draft a proposal-writing guide for teachers. This decision was motivated by our knowledge of teachers' lack of familiarity with proposal writing and with their limited formal education in general. To make the guide useful and user friendly, we sought teacher input on several occasions, and
we tried it out with simulated teams of teachers several times before the first real grant competition began in February 1996. Teachers who participated in the various tryouts turned out to be enthusiastic about designing their own professional development and school improvement projects. They brought to our attention areas of writing a grant proposal that were hard for them. Thus, each tryout led not only to a revised and improved version, but also to a better conceptualization of other aspects of the program. The guide itself, when first used, was skeletal and not very long. Explanatory notes were added later to provide more detail on what was wanted in each category (e.g., selection of problem, formulation of objectives, cost analysis), allowing participants to improve their understanding gradually. This was particularly important in the case of the evaluation section, which presented particular difficulties in helping teachers learn what it meant to evaluate their own project (for a detailed discussion of this issue, see Schwille, Dembélé, & Bah, 1999). The evaluation procedures went through major revisions in an attempt to overcome these difficulties.

Lesson 4: Effective Initial and Continuing Training Is Critical for All Program Participants.

This is another seemingly obvious thing to do. But the literature shows that a lack of preparation of and communication with participants is often one explanatory factor of innovation failure in education. Hence, to allow the structures to function effectively and the people involved to competently play their respective roles, the program provides a set of training activities to the entire spectrum of personnel involved. These activities contribute, albeit indirectly, to organizational support. To date, the most notable training activities include the following:

- Initial 5-day preparation workshop for new regional coordinators.
- Initial 2-week preparation workshop for facilitators.
- Second 6-day session for facilitators.
- Initial 5-day preparation workshop for jury members.
- Initial 6-day preparation workshop for evaluators.
- Two-day in-service meetings for all facilitators and evaluators every other month.
- Three-day in-service meetings for evaluators twice a year.
- Annual launch/financial management/evaluation workshop.
- Combination of formal and on-the-job training for second, third, and further cohorts of facilitators.
- Various planning workshops for national and regional program leaders.
Each of the training activities is different in terms of content, but they tend to have one common denominator: They are participatory, product oriented, authentic, and grounded in earlier experiences and products. Indeed, within all training seminars and workshops, participants have the opportunity to do one of the following: draft actual program documentation, produce documents for themselves, or simulate various program tasks. The products of any training session, be they actual or simulated, are often used for subsequent sessions. This enhances the authenticity of learning tasks, embodies a philosophy of continuous improvement, and contributes to motivating participants to take these tasks seriously (see Schwille & Dembélé, 1997, for a more extensive discussion of one of the training workshops).

In addition, various other meetings of management personnel rapidly took hold on a regular basis and became central to management of the program as well to continuing training of the personnel involved. These included:

- Periodic meetings of regional coordinators (later expanded to include the business managers of each of the eight educational regions).
- Central workshop for financial management (held once a year to discuss financial issues).
- Retreats for program revision.

Two retreats for program revision have been held. They were held partly outside the country to free up busy participants from their daily preoccupations so that they could concentrate on assessing overall progress in the program and how to resolve longer-term problems. The first was held in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) in early 1997, and the second took place in Lomé (Togo) in May 2000.

Lesson 5: The Program Demonstrates the Value and Pitfalls of Competition in Making the Program Feasible, Effective, and of Direct Concern to Local Educational Leaders.

No country is capable of implementing a new, complex nationwide program of organizational support for teachers effectively all at once in every classroom. If this is true of affluent industrialized countries with much experience in educational research and innovation, it is even truer in resource-scarce countries with relatively little experience in educational research and development. Thus, a method of selecting a smaller group of schools and teachers to begin with is imperative. In our view, the method chosen should do at least two things: (a) It should keep the number of participants small enough at first for the program to be manageable within the
financial, logistical, and human resources available. (b) The method should also ensure a certain quality of effort among participants. As such a method, competition is controversial with both its proponents and opponents, but to us, competition was the fairest way to keep the program at a manageable level, limiting the participants to teachers and schools that had shown they were ready and willing to do this, and at the same time give some assurance that the projects would reach at least a minimal level of quality in the results achieved. At the beginning of the program, we discussed with Guinean colleagues whether they wanted to give disadvantaged schools some special consideration in this competition, and they decided that they wanted all schools to start with the same chances.

To us, there is a trade-off between competition and the level of organizational support needed. In other words, the less competition there is for grants, the more intensive the level of organizational support needed. Because the level of organizational support that could be provided on a national basis was limited, this trade-off seemed to favor more competition.

Nevertheless, the total number of projects to be funded was the subject of much concern. This number was fixed in terms of quotas by region and by year, established in terms of the judged capability of the region to manage and implement such a number. Our initial intention was to start with 22 funded projects that could be monitored closely during the first year of implementation to ensure success and draw lessons before extending the program to other regions. But there was so much enthusiasm and interest, both on the part of teachers and on the part of their communities, that this number was immediately increased by more than double to 54 projects the first year. This increase and subsequent increases and decreases to balance enthusiasm with management capacity made it difficult to make each region's share of the total number of projects proportional to the number of teachers in the region—another goal of the quota system.

The double-edged sword of the competitive nature of the program thus made itself known early in the process. Competition was used to ensure that only the most promising projects would be funded and to keep the program at a size that could be managed effectively on a nationwide scale. However, competition also meant that many of the applicants would be disappointed. As the program matured, special measures were taken to give more advantage to teams that had failed twice in the competition, and further plans are being made in the next 10-year phase of World Bank work in Guinea to respond to the needs of such teams.

Competition had still another advantage. The jury system used to manage the competition proved to be an effective way to involve the principal educational administrators at prefectural and regional levels in making decisions about the program. How well this jury system would work was
another unknown at the beginning of the program. To ensure ownership of the program and to avoid too heavy a load at the central level, it was considered important to keep the selection localized as much as possible and to rely on the educational authorities already in place to make the selection.

Thus, the preliminary proposals were judged by a jury in each prefecture headed by the DPE (i.e., the superintendent of schools for one of the 33 prefectures in Guinea). Here again, we used an incremental training strategy. One prefectural jury was included in the first training session for facilitators in 1995. The idea was that this jury would be helpful in training the other nine prefectural juries in the experimental region when their initial training session was held in early 1996. At the latter session, it became apparent that there was much variation in the performance of the initial set of 10 prefectural juries. The national small grants team, therefore, had to organize special additional training for some of these juries to maintain an acceptable level of quality in selection for that first year. At the time and on occasion thereafter, facilitators have complained that jury members did not receive training equivalent to theirs and therefore were not sufficiently prepared. In response to this and other concerns about the selection of projects, a jury refresher session has been included in the panoply of program offerings. The same approach to jury training has been implemented in the new regions.

If we had any questions about whether the juries were going to take their work seriously, this concern was greatly abated by the first regional jury in Labé (chaired by the regional inspector or superintendent of schools for one of the eight educational regions of Guinea). Using special criteria and rating procedures, this jury worked extremely hard on 130 final proposals for about a month and selected 54 teacher projects to be funded. The problem was not one of getting the jury to spend time on this work, but rather to find ways to make the process less time consuming.

**Lesson 6: Because Facilitators Provide Most of the Program’s Organizational Support to Teachers, the Number of Facilitators That Could Be Made Available Has Determined the Rate of Program Expansion.**

The program is premised on research that says that workshops alone are not sufficient to get teachers to do something new, and that close-to-school assistance (*encadrement rapproché*) is needed for follow-up. In our case, this meant not only continuing to provide assistance for proposal writing but also maintaining the momentum achieved by the initial workshops. Thus, each team was visited twice by a facilitator during this phase. In the first year, the result was that all 289 teams that participated
in the workshops submitted preliminary proposals to the prefectural juries—thus proving false our working hypothesis (for lack of relevant experience) that there would be about a 50% dropout rate from the workshops to submission of preliminary proposals. After this precedent, this increased level of participation became the norm for the program.

In addition, we believed that teachers needed further close-to-school assistance to implement their projects. The facilitators continued to provide the bulk of this assistance. In the first year in the pilot region, two workshops were offered to start this process. The first workshop focused on the program’s financial documents and procedures, with an emphasis on financial accountability and reporting by teacher teams. Participants included the treasurers of all 54 successful teams, plus the business managers of all 10 prefectural directorates of education, all the facilitators, and the regional jury members.

The second workshop took place about 2 months later and focused on project evaluation and other aspects of project implementation. It brought together representatives of all funded projects, plus all the evaluators and facilitators and the regional jury. Various data-collection methods were introduced and practiced during this 4-day workshop. Subsequent experience indicated that it took too much time and too many resources to do the two workshops separately, so they were combined into one launch workshop of 7 days on the management and evaluation of projects. It brought together both presidents and treasurers of the funded teams. This was one instance in which the initial conception proved unsuitable for expansion to national scale. The combined formula proved successful and has been continued in subsequent years and in the regions added to the program.

Given the importance of the facilitators, when the question of how quickly and how much to expand the program was discussed among the Guineans and external consultants, the availability of competent facilitators was a central issue. After much debate, it was decided that in the first four regions to be added, it was not possible to target all teachers from the start, as had been attempted in the experimental region. Instead, a more limited number of teacher teams would be created the first year corresponding to the number of facilitators that could be trained and made available. The teachers left out would be added as soon as possible in subsequent years. Based on experience in the experimental region, the program’s management decided that one facilitator could reasonably handle eight teacher teams during the proposal-writing stage. Thus, once it was decided to train 43 facilitators in the first cohort for these four added regions, a total of 344 teams could be created for these regions. When these regions started to implement projects, a further refinement of this rule-of-thumb norm was that a facilitator could provide assistance during the same period to no
more than three teams implementing projects and three other teams working on new proposals.

Lesson 7: It Is Difficult to Provide Close-to-School Assistance Without Infringing on Teacher Autonomy.

The role of the facilitator continues to be difficult. Facilitators have to provide guidance while making sure the content of the proposals is left to the teachers, for the projects have to be theirs, not the facilitators'. To ensure this, facilitators have been repeatedly encouraged not to be too directive or dirigiste. This recommendation seems for the most part to have been taken to heart and has even become a slogan for the program. We have observed a pronounced change in the way many of the facilitators interact with other participants in the small-group sessions we have been able to observe over the course of the program.

Besides the two workshops mentioned earlier, to help teachers implement their projects, the program has provided teachers with three kinds of close-to-school assistance: follow-up visits by facilitators, supplemental training visits by resource persons, and evaluation visits by evaluators. Over the course of the program, the frequency and duration of these various visits have been the subject of much debate, which, in turn, has led to proposals for change. Three factors converge in pressure to limit the number of visits: (a) they constitute a major cost to the program; (b) the facilitators, evaluators, and resource persons have difficulty actually covering each of the teams, particularly because they all have responsibilities outside the program; and (c) it is considered desirable to let the teams work as autonomously as they are able. Nevertheless, problems experienced to date (especially difficulties the teams have in collecting needed evaluation data) have mitigated against making such reductions. Thus, the question of where to draw the line between too much and too little assistance to teachers is still open.

Lesson 8: Creating the Trainer Role (Encadreur-Formateur) for Persons Who Had Already Proved Their Worth in the Program Turned out to Be Indispensable in the Process of Going to Scale.

The program staff at the national level was far too small to carry the load of training for adding new regions, and the national advisory train-
ing group, which had helped lead other early activities, soon became less available due to the press of other duties. This led us to propose a new category of trainers (encadreurs-formateurs), selected from the most experienced and competent facilitators and evaluators in the program. Initially they were all from the experimental region, but others were added from the new regions as these regions gained more experience in the program. The creation of this new category not only met the quantitative need for additional trainers, but also proved very useful in other respects as well. First, it ensured that in the new regions, people who provided the training had worked at the grassroots level in the program and were thus personally familiar with the challenges and problems of implementation. These trainers were not only familiar with what the program was intended to be, they were also knowledgeable about what it had become. In addition, this category gave recognition and status to persons who had performed well in the program. Their counterparts in other regions recognized them as authorities. They had opportunities to visit other regions of the country that they did not often visit. It is unusual, perhaps unprecedented, for regional officials at their level to have this sort of opportunity. The use of these trainers, we believe, also gave the program more credibility in the new regions because the newly designated facilitators, evaluators, and regional coordination staff knew that the trainers had already been able to do what they were now being called on to do, that is, implement a new and demanding program under difficult circumstances. Finally, the use of trainers from the experimental region was consistent with the overall philosophy of decentralization that underlies the program.

As with other measures taken, this one had its downside. The main one was that the trainers took much justifiable pride in what had been accomplished, so much so that at times they were little inclined to emphasize the program's philosophy of continuous improvement. They had to be convinced that no matter how much the program had accomplished, the apparatus put in place had great potential to do even better.

Once these trainers had proved their worth, we were led to begin using practicing teachers in the same role, again drawing on individuals with success in the program, those whose implemented projects had been appreciated by the program evaluators. As a first step in this direction, we used teachers from funded teams as additional trainers for the launch workshops in the new regions. We expect that in the next generation of World Bank programs, there will be much more use of practicing teachers in this type of role.
Lesson 9: The Program Illustrated the Importance and Pitfalls of a Decentralized System With Considerable Financial Autonomy for Regional Coordinators and Teacher Teams.

At the same time that new financial procedures were devised for the teacher teams, it was also necessary to put into place a new system for getting the funds out to the regions. Fortunately, the World Bank had just authorized an experimental procedure for establishing regional project bank accounts on a 90-day advance basis, and the Small Grants Program was perhaps the first program to take advantage of this possibility. Each of the regional coordinating offices, therefore, was set up with a bank account that could be replenished on a revolving basis with 90-day advances for approved budgets, provided that the use of earlier funds was adequately accounted for and justified. This system has proven essential to allowing the regional coordinations to operate with sufficient autonomy, but it has been difficult to make work it without delays in the receipt of funds. These problems continue to this day, but the program as a whole has always been able to complete the yearly cycles of project selection and implementation in each region in spite of the delays. This is a notable achievement. Moreover, some of the newer regional coordinations have a better record in financial management than the experimental region. Thus, one should not assume that going to scale always means a dilution of effectiveness in the added regions.

Another major test for the program during the first year and even in subsequent years and in the new regions was to show itself capable of delivering, with as little delay as possible, the material resources requested in the finalist grant proposals. Therefore, in the first year, much effort was put into getting the first installments in kind and cash to the 54 teams that had been funded, with the remaining 76 finalist teams receiving consolation prizes in kind. Because various types of school supplies and textbooks are not available in the vicinity of the schools or even in the region, it was decided to proceed with a group purchase. Thus, all the budgets of the funded projects had to be scrutinized to consolidate all the requests for material that could not be purchased readily by the teachers themselves. The regional coordinator was made responsible for these purchases, with help from the national team for purchases that could only be made in Conakry. Initially, there were problems with teams that requested books that proved not to be available at all, but gradually procedures were developed, and the regional coordinators became accustomed to helping teacher teams find substitutes for requested materials that were not available. In spite of such problems, what the teacher teams received in kind amounted to an impressive quantity of textbooks, teachers'
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guides, and other books. With the balance of their grants in cash, the teachers themselves could purchase various school supplies, for example, notebooks, pens, and pencils, as well as pay for the services of the resource persons they had requested. Thus, from the very first year, the ability to deliver on nearly all of what the teachers had requested gave more credibility to a program that was already popular among teachers, educational leaders, and communities alike.

Nevertheless, this aspect of the program brought home the hard facts of decentralization: Even after scrutiny by prefectural and regional juries, teachers do not always request what national and regional leaders think is most desirable or what is most readily available. The honoring of such requests was a major test of the program leadership’s commitment to giving teachers more responsibility for and control over their own professional development.

Lesson 10: If a Program Like This Is to Have Nationwide Impact, It Is Essential to Create Forums for Teachers to Share the Results of Their Work With Other Educators.

To give teachers the opportunity to share their work with colleagues beyond their immediate circle, the Small Grants Program provides for two types of dissemination gatherings: regional seminars and a national one. The national seminar was not held until September 2000 because the number of regions was at first too small to justify it; in 1999 (the first year it might have been held), the press of other activities did not permit it. Regional dissemination seminars, on the other hand, have been held each year and have enjoyed great success. Overall, a great many educators were involved because the seminars include a representative of each project implemented during the year, plus all facilitators, evaluators, representatives of newly selected projects, and guests representing other projects and agencies—numbering roughly 200 or so in all for each seminar. Communicating what is expected at such a forum when participants had not had any such experience is difficult. For this reason, formalizing preparation as part of this conference proved necessary and effective. In the first year, the teams and facilitators did not realize what it took to be prepared for this event. Because sufficient preparations had not been made in advance, 2 days were set aside in advance of the conference for the teams to get ready. Each team used this time to prepare a stand for exposition and to discuss with seminar organizers what they could contribute to thematic sessions on each of the following topics: project impact on student learning, project impact on teacher learning, teachers’ experience
with the training activities of the project, and indicators that the teacher
teams had had their own autonomous impact on the project. In addition,
four of the most successful teams practiced giving an overall presentation
on their project in a manner suitable for a plenary session. The complexity
of this seminar and its importance in demonstrating what had been
achieved made replicating it in diverse sites a major challenge because
that meant there would not be as many experienced persons available to
help in each site. One of the early things we did was to send the regional
 coordinators for the new regions to attend the seminars in the experi-
tmental region. The program held one dissemination seminar in Labé in 1997,
two in the experimental region in 1998 in Labé and Mamou, six in 1999,
and eight in 2000.

Lesson 11: The Program Depends on
Intangible Commitments to Make It Work.

It is clear to us that the elements described, useful though they may be,
are in no way sufficient to ensure the success of the Small Grants Pro-
gram. Guinean educators at all levels have brought to this program a set
of intangible commitments, beliefs, and judgments that have allowed
this ambitious program to operate largely as planned and to overcome
numerous obstacles—an expansion more successful than we would have
originally thought possible. Hopefully, many of these intangibles have
been or are in the process of being internalized as program norms, but in
the absence of data bearing on this question, it is impossible to say how
much this is the case. Nevertheless, we have good reason to believe that
the program owes much to the adherence of so many Guinean educators
to the following:

- Belief that teachers can take more responsibility for themselves.
- Belief in the importance of what is being done and in the value of
  the program.
- Commitment to getting the job done, even when not enough
  money is available or when there are other things to do (family
  problems, sickness, etc.).
- Willingness to select staff based on reasoned judgments about who
  is competent and who is dependable.
- Willingness to risk what has already been accomplished to make
  the program available throughout the country.
- Confidence that others can do what they have not heretofore been
  able to do.
• Willingness to live with the fact that no one will be completely satisfied with the results (without giving up on further progress).

Clearly, all this is due to a fortuitous set of circumstances. The Ministry of Pre-University Education had the political will to follow through on the commitments in its World Bank program. The World Bank brought resources and further resolve to take innovative measures in favor of raising the quality of primary education in Guinea. Most important, it proved possible to recruit teams of exceptional individuals with the needed abilities and commitments at all levels. It is not surprising that going to national scale remains rare in countries with conditions similar to Guinea.

References


