

**ACCESS OF GIRLS TO
BASIC EDUCATION
IN GABON**

Fanta DIALLO MAIGA



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Regional Office, Dakar**

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PREFACE

Promoting gender equality and improving the status of women has been a constant concern for UNESCO. The Third Medium Term Plan (1990-1995) lays emphasis on women's participation, considered a sine qua non for sustainable development. Attention is first of all given to education for women and girls, key of their participation, on an equal footing, in all aspects of economic, social and cultural life. In other respects, the fight against physical and moral violence practised on women, the contribution of women in the media and in the safeguard of heritage are as many fields of action in which UNESCO has been steadfastly involved during these past years.

These are all the more reasons why UNESCO's Regional Office for Education in Africa (BREDA) is publishing the studies carried out in the course of its execution of this priority field of action.

Most of the Authors are women: African women of different nationalities involved at various levels in the development of their countries. This is already a choice: to give the floor to the academic world, the world of research, the political world in order to make them express an African and "female" point of view. Moreover, these women aim, through their action, at highlighting and enhancing the precious, but all too often unknown role of their sisters: the millions of women and girls committed day after day to the fight to ensure a better life to their families and themselves, to affirm their right to education, to improve through their participation at the grassroots level, the standard of living of their communities.

In publishing this series of studies the Regional Office aims at enhancing the dissemination of knowledge and information on the real situation of African women particularly in the educational sector. The obstacles encountered, the failures endured and the successes achieved are just as many milestones towards real equality and the valorization of difference.

And yet it is not first a matter of knowing and understanding. These publications are intended to be working documents which contain orientations for action.

Even today, women are among those left on the scrap heap, the most important group in the world. The question is how can the world self-develop without its other half ?

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ACRONYMS

ANFPP	National Agency for Vocational Training and Retraining
CEN	National Teacher Training College
CES	Post-Secondary Teacher Training College
CET	Technical Training College
CUSS	University Centre for Health Science
ENCR	National School for Rural Cadres
ENS	Advanced Teacher Training College
ENSAS	National School of Health and Social Welfare
ENSET	Advanced Technical Teacher Training College
ENSIL	Advanced National School of Engineers, Libreville
ENSG	Advanced National School of Management
EPCA	Preparatory School for Administrative Careers
INSG	National Institute of Science and Management
IPN	National Pedagogic Institute

INTRODUCTION

It is in the field of education that children's social statistics are more often systematic and broken down on the basis of sex. Out of more than 100 million children who had no access to elementary education in 1993, at least 60 million were girls. Two-thirds of the 1 billion illiterate adults in the world are women. These inequalities will continue to exist as long as girls are denied access in one way or another, to education or are compelled to abandon school at a very early age.¹

Although equal school attendance rates between boys and girls, or even higher rates for girls have been achieved for example in the Caribees, in Latin America, Botswana, Lesotho, in the Philippines, in Gabon and Sri Lanka some serious inequalities still exist in most developing countries. At present, the percentage of boys and girls from 6 to 11 years attending the elementary school stands at about 88% and 72% respectively in the Middle East and North Africa, at 48 and 37% in Sub-Saharan Africa and at 78 and 59 in Southern Asia.²

In 68 out of 83 developing countries, these rates, at the elementary level are lower for girls than for boys. At the secondary level, the attendance rates are lower for girls than for boys in 58 out of 78 countries.

The inequality existing between girls and boys in the field of education is accentuated by the insufficiency of educational services and by attitudes, the idea being that girls are born to get married and therefore, it is no use educating them. These attitudes are further strengthened by stereotyped ideas about girls and boys and about men and women portrayed by textbooks and curricula.

However, aside from the fact that it is an objective in itself, equality of the sexes is indispensable for the development of young children. The 1990s could be the decade during which girls would finally have equal chances to achieve self-realization and to develop their own potential in all countries.

This study is aimed at reviewing the present situation regarding the access of girls to education in Gabon by providing as much information as possible on the nature and various forms of this education and on its perspectives.

The first part of this study describes the recent trend of the educational system in Gabon and emphasizes the place of girls in this system.

The second part analyzes the contents of this education and the factors affecting the development of education for girls.

In conclusion, some recommendations are made with a view to maintaining equal representation of the sexes throughout the school attendance period, including the primary, the secondary and the non-formal system.

¹ *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1990*

² *Ibid.*

FRAMEWORK AND STRUCTURES OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN GABON: THE PLACE OF GIRLS

Geographic and demographic framework

Gabon occupies an excellent position on the African continent. Located in the gulf of Guinea and spanning the equator, it is constituted for over 75% of the Ogooué river basin while its territory is covered to the tune of almost 85% by the great equatorial forest.

The territory of Gabon covers an area of 267,667 km², and is bounded on the north by the Republic of Cameroun, on the north-west by the Republic of Equatorial Guinea and on the north-east by the Republic of Congo.

Gabon is an underpopulated country. The 1980 census published on 8 May 1981 gives a total population of 1,232,000 inhabitants, including 122,000 living outside the national territory and about 112,000 foreigners; this corresponds therefore, to an average density of 4.6 inhabitants to km². However, other sources (particularly international development agencies) report of less than 1,000,000 inhabitants.

In any case, it is noticed that there is a real problem of low population which is a major handicap for the country's development. As a result of its under-population, the population structure, i.e. the distribution by age groups, is somewhat different from that of other developing countries.

The majority of the people are young, those below the age of 25 representing 52% of the total. However, this percentage seems relatively low as compared with that of other African countries where it varies between 57 and 59%.

The spatial representation of the population reveals that the Estuary province absorbs for its part alone, more than a quarter of the total population, while the Upper Ogooué accounts for 15%, the "Maritime" Ogooué 14% and the Woleu-Ntem over 13%.

Libreville, Franceville, Port-Gentil and Oyem are urban centres which play a real polarizing role. It is for this reason that in 1981, the capital, Libreville, had nearly 170,000 inhabitants, i.e. 20% of the country's total population; today, this percentage is estimated at 30%.

The crucial problem in Gabon is its population growth, which can be resolved only through a series of educational, health and social measures.

Structures of the educational and training system

Education is unquestionably the principal factor of development of a country. Its importance is such that during the course of the first twenty years of independence the considerable efforts made by African countries to develop their human resources were based essentially on this sector

The effort of the Gabonese government in education was considerable.

Since the 1970s, Gabonese authorities have shown deep concern about the problems of the educational system. The General Forum for Education and Training held from 15 to 23 November 1983 was the outcome of several seminars organized with a view to analyzing the handicaps of this system; it marked the commencement of an education reorganization process in Gabon.

Table 1: Total Population of Gabon

Year	Population (inhabitants)	Density (inhabitants/km ²)
1906	377.000	1,4
1921	380.000	1,4
1926	399.000	1,5
1936	450.000	1,7
1950	460.000	1,7
1960	630.000	1,9
1970	950.000	2,8
1980	1.232.000	4,6

Source : Ministry of Planning (Gabon)

The operating budget of National Education increased, for example, from 418 million CFA francs in 1965, to 6,521 million in 1975; this amount was further increased to 18,065 million in 1980. In terms of relative value, it represents nearly 30% of the national operating budget while the National Education investment budget was equivalent to more than 6% of the national investment budget.

The location of public institutions was studied judiciously (at least one college per province) and their geographical distribution was based on a real concern for democratization. However, considerable efforts should be made with regard to the rationalization of the school map.

The place of girls in the education system

To locate the place assigned to girls within the educational system in Gabon, it is necessary to give a brief overview of this system as defined by law 16/66 which sets down the modalities for the organization of education in Gabon.

Indeed, viewed mainly from the standpoint of enrolment by level of studies, drop-outs and branches of courses pursued, the problems posed by the education of girls cannot be understood without recalling its general framework.

The educational system

- The structure of the present educational system in Gabon comprises :
- a primary education which lasts for 6 years and is intended for children aged between 6 to 11 years;
 - a secondary education whose first cycle lasts 4 years and the second cycle 3 years, making a total of 7 years. It is intended for young people aged between 12 to 18 years and is sub-divided into general secondary, technical and teacher training education, and placed under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education, as is the case with primary education;

- a higher education which covers between 2 to 7 years in the universities and Advanced colleges and placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher education and Scientific and technological research.

Aside from these different levels of education, there is a vocational education system which recruits students from the different levels of the primary, secondary and higher education, with or without certificates. The responsible authority is the Ministry of Vocational Training and Cottage Industry whose executing organ is the National Agency for Vocational Training and Retraining (ANFPP). But some ministries such as those of Public Health and Population, of the Civil Service, of Posts and Telecommunications and of Agriculture organize technical and vocational training programmes to meet their own personnel requirements.

The passage from the primary school to the first secondary cycle is achieved through the entrance examination to "sixième" (i.e. the first year of secondary education), while the passage from the secondary to higher education is sanctioned by passing the "baccalauréat" examinations (i.e. Advanced Level Examinations).

The State is the principal promoter of education at all levels. It is the exclusive promoter of higher education. Catholic and protestant authorities, as well as some individuals, intervene at the primary and the secondary levels but the material and financial support of the State is still indispensable.

Trend of the population of school age

It was during the 1970-1980 decade that the rate of population growth accelerated, not only due to immigration as a result of the economic boom at the time but also, through the improvement of living conditions. This growth led to the rejuvenation of the Gabonese population; the youth aged less than 15 becoming over-represented. This is the logical consequence of a decreasing infant mortality and an increasing fertility. The number of young people aged between 6 and 16 years (the compulsory school age in Gabon) stood at 216,000 in 1976. It was estimated at 309,000 in 1990 i.e. 22.6% of the total population. The school age population increased rapidly from 246,000 to 306,000 youths during the same period.

At the primary level, the gross enrolment rate is higher than 100% and has been steadily increasing since 1976. This can be explained by the fact that this level of education absorbs pupils who have exceeded the age limit. The percentage of pupils aged 11 plus generally exceeds 20% of primary school enrolment. The enrolment rate for girls is always lower than that of boys but the gap has progressively reduced.

This trend of school enrolment at the national level conceals some profound disparities between the provinces.

In 1968, the Estuary absorbed 15% of primary school pupils and occupied the third position after Woleu-Ntem and Ngounié.

Within the space of 20 years, this proportion has almost tripled while the hinterland is losing all its pupils (Table 2). In other words, there is an exodus of pupils from other provinces to the Estuary. A more serious phenomenon also observed involves the increase in the number of pupils in quest of education in Libreville. This number accounts for 90% of primary school pupils in the Estuary. This phenomenon due to school migrations to the capital is a cause for great concern given the special efforts that should be made to absorb this in-flux of pupils.

Within each province, the school population is concentrated mainly in the cities. There is therefore a double imbalance: between the provinces, and the level of each province, between the rural and urban areas.

Table 2: Percentage of enrolment at the primary level, by educational district and by year

Educational district	1968	1979	1988
Libreville	13,3	20,5	33,1
- North	***	***	14,1
- Centre	***	***	9,5
- South	***	***	9,4
Estuary	2,0	4,4	3,6
Upper - Ogooué	10,1	11,6	11,6
Mid-Ogooué	6,6	5,2	4,0
Ngounié	16,2	13,1	10,0
- North	7,0	5,9	4,9
- South	9,2	7,2	5,1
Nyanga	10,1	7,1	5,7
Ogooué - Ivindo	8,1	6,8	6,0
Ogooué - Lolo	5,3	5,4	5,5
Maritime Ogooué	8,5	9,2	9,2
Woleu - Ntem	19,9	16,6	12,4
- North	8,0	6,5	4,5
- South	11,9	10,1	7,9
Total Gabon	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source : National Education Statistics Yearbooks

*** Unavailable data.

Trend of female enrolment by year and by level of education

a) Female enrolment at the Primary level

According to the National Education statistics, about 95% of the school age population is indeed educated and, since 1960, the enrolment have continued to increase, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Trend of enrolment for girls in the Gabonese educational system

YEAR	ENROLMENT	% OF GIRLS
1960	50 545	36
1965	73 006	44
1970	94 914	47
1975	121 407	48
1980	148 520	49
1985	178 811	48
1989	207 023	50

However, the most noteworthy phenomenon is the considerable share of girls in Primary education. Indeed, although in 1960, girls accounted for a little over one-third of school enrolment, today, they represent nearly 50% (49.67 in 1989) and this corresponds roughly to the percentage of women over the entire territory.

It can be concluded therefore, that as regards enrolment, the balance of the sexes has been achieved, first as education has extended to all the social strata of Gabon, without distinction, at least in the Primary.

b) Girls at the secondary, technical, teacher training and higher education levels

As regards the secondary, technical, teacher training and higher education levels, the share of girls is considerable. Table 4 shows that the percentage of girls decreases ostensibly as the content of education gets increasingly complex. Thus, in secondary education, the share of girls represents on average, only 46.33%, while it accounts for 33.62% in technical education, 47.65% in teacher training and 42.97% in higher education.³ Of course, these figures provide only some orders of magnitude, but they are indicators of the place occupied by girls at all levels of education in Gabon. Moreover, they give us an idea on the course of studies that they follow to enable them to enter active life.

The place of girls in some branches of education and vocational training

a) Branches of Education

The general observation is that there are less students in the scientific and technical sections and girls are even the least numerous in these sections. The average in percentage terms given above, is significant in this regard. However, the analysis can be improved by examining technical education, higher education and vocational education.

³ Source: *Higher Education Statistical Yearbook*, 1989.

Table 4: Enrolment by level, of all educational cycles

Educational Cycle	1970				1980				1985				1989			
	Total	boys	girls	% G	Total	boys	girls	% G	Total	boys	girls	% G	Total	boys	girls	% G
Primary Education	94 914	49 546	45 368	47,80	150 219	75 112	75 107	50,00	176 811	90 465	86 346	48,84	207 023	104 181	102 842	49,68
Secondary Education	10 783	7 821	2962	27,47	19 173	11 255	7 918	41,29	25 815	14 620	11 195	43,37	36 783	19 743	17 040	46,33
Technical Training	1 273	1 051	222	17,44	4 062	3 378	1 224	26,59	7 850	5 527	2 323	29,59	9 790	6 499	3 291	33,62
Teacher Training	136	118	18	13,24	4 088	2 831	1 257	30,75	5 679	2 817	2 862	50,40	1 062	556	506	47,65
Higher Education									2 296	1 674	622	27,09	3 086	1 760	1 326	42,97

Source: *National Education Statistical Year-books; Higher Education Statistical Year-books*

**Table 5: Some figures relating to education in Gabon from 1976 to 1990
(population in thousands)**

Total population School age population	1976			1984			1985			1990		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
6-11 years	65	63	128	63	72	135	75	82	157	91	91	182
12-18 years	55	63	118	75	74	149	78	86	164	84	93	177
TOTAL	120	126	246	138	146	284	153	168	321	175	184	359
School population												
Primary	65,8	62,5	128,5	78,9	76,2	155,1	90,5	86,3	176,8	**	**	**
Secondary	**	**	22,5	**	**	29,4	**	**	39,3	**	**	**
Higher	**	**	0,9	**	**	1,9	**	**	3,7	**	**	3,1
TOTAL	**	**	151,9	**	**	186,4	**	**	219,8	**	**	**
Gross schooling rate %	**	**	17,0	**	**	17,8	**	**	18,6	**	**	**
Gross enrolment rate %												
Primary	101,2	99,5	100,4	125,2	105,8	114,9	120,7	105,2	112,6	**	**	**
Secondary	**	**	19,1	**	**	19,7	**	**	24,0	**	**	**

Source: National Education Statistical Yearbooks

** : unavailable data

Technical education is the one that seems to be repulsive to most students, particularly girls. But over the last few years, there has been a positive trend: 17.44% of the total in 1970, 26.59% in 1980, 29.59% in 1985 and 33.62% in 1989. However, the difficulties experienced by girls in enrolling in the technical and scientific branches lead them to give greater importance to literary branches or to trades of the tertiary than to those of the secondary.

In higher education for example, the faculties of arts and humanities, of law and economics and CUSS attract many more students and more specifically, girls than the advanced colleges or faculty of science, as shown in Table 5. even if there has been some slight progress in recent years, mainly among young girls as regards the two latter branches.

In 1985, girls accounted for 5.38% of enrolment in ENSIL while INSG, ENS and ENSET attracted 94.76% of female enrolment. The advanced colleges were deserted for the benefit of the faculties and especially secretarial schools.

Hence, the shortage of technical, middle-level and senior officials suffered by Gabon particularly, female officials, is not surprising.

b) Vocational training

The government thought that it had found a solution to this problem of staff shortage and vocational training by creating in the early 70s, the National Agency for Vocational Training and Retraining (ANFPP).

This tripartite institution (government, employers' associations and workers) was aimed at designing, planning and implementing vocational training and retraining activities. Four centres were thus created: Libreville (Nkembo Odimba), Port-Gentil, Franceville and Tchibanga.

After several years of operation, it appears that ANFPP has failed to meet the aspirations that led to its creation. In fact, girls, once again, continue to show an atavistic preference for the tertiary sector: typing, shorthand, accounting, to the neglect of primary and secondary sector trades of which the State is in dire need.

Some drastic measures are therefore required in order to examine generally, the problem of education in relation to that of training and, specifically, to review that of the orientation of students and the level of recruitment in order to reduce some aspects of drop-outs.

Drop-outs

If this study focuses on drop-outs generally as a starting point, it is because the official education or schooling makes no distinction between boys and girls and really recommends the same content and methods for all in mixed classes. (At present, in Gabon, all institutions including private institutions, are mixed). But although there is a real will to ensure an equal representation of sexes, the weak point of this educational drive lies in the level of its development which, according to some indicators - in the absence of any case study in this regard -, registers a high level of drop-outs especially with regard to girls.

It is distressing to observe the high level of drop-outs at the different levels of education each year. Indeed, a large proportion of the population of school age is "thrown out" of the education system after having received some rudiments of

education but, in all cases, without having acquired a real professional or vocational qualification. This phenomenon is more considerable in the primary and the first cycle of secondary education, more precisely between the 3rd and 4th year of primary education (CE1 and CE2) and at the 3rd and 4th years of secondary or college education. However, it is worth distinguishing between these two levels. At the first level of education it is the drop-outs who are the most numerous as shown by the table below on the trend of drop-out rate.

Table 6: Trend of drop-out rate at the primary level

YEAR	CP2/2nd year of primary education	CE1/3rd year of primary education	CE1/3rd year of primary education	CM2/4th year of primary education
1983	4,14	11,72	4,24	19,07
1984	3,80	8,19	2,31	6,54
1985	2,18	7,76	6,29	7,65
1986	1,37	8,03	4,77	3,90
1987	2,54	5,11	0,96	3,72
1988	3,65	11,18	7,00	10,12

Source: National Education Statistical Year-books

In secondary education and to a lesser extent, in higher education, it is expulsions which are the most frequent: the drop-outs intervene in only negligible proportions. But it is worth noting that it is girls who leave the educational system more precociously, while boys are better able to "keep the distance".

Although the reasons that motivate these drop-outs or quite simply, these exits from the educational system are better circumscribed at the university level, the situation is not the same at the primary and secondary level where, it is first necessary to distinguish on the one hand, the framework in which the student develops, and on the other hand, the context in which he operates, in order to see more clearly how the problem of drop-outs in the rural and urban area is posed (Table 7).

Aside from the problem of enrolment which are excessive in the cities (Libreville and Port-Gentil) and fairly low in the provinces, not to mention the deficient educational structures and problems relating to pedagogic supervision, the reasons underlying the expulsion of pupils from the education system, according to institutional reports, stem from either insufficient work and repeated and unjustified absence, or age limit and undiscipline. Whether in the urban or rural areas, the causes of drop-outs in Gabon are identical, but their nature is often quite different. It must be asserted therefore, that the modern school has not been able to integrate in a conscious manner, the foundations of the Gabonese education and society. The trends observed everywhere together with the on-going changes have only aggravated the disconnection between these two worlds. Women are invariably the victims of this mismatch of the modern school with the needs of the Gabonese society.

Table 7: Female drop-outs in the first cycle of extended secondary education (1989-1990)

Institution					
	Inst. Immaculée	L.E. L/René	Col.R.R Walker	CES Mitzic	CES Akieni
Total Enrolment	313	402	527	341	210
Total Expelled	28	77	73	101	21
Girls Expelled	28	42	45	48	11
Total Drop-outs %	5,45	19,15	13,85	29,61	10,00
Drop-outs (Girls) %		54,54	61,64	47,52	52,38

Source: *Quoted reports of institutions*

Total average drop-out rate: 18.15%

Average drop-out rate (girls): 54.02%

(Immaculée is an exceptional case not taken into consideration in this calculation.)

Causes of drop-outs at the primary school

Among the causes often mentioned during interviews with education directors and other officials, are the problems relating to teaching syllabi and methods which are, to a large extent responsible for this mismatch.

The syllabi are taught in a language other than the mother tongue; this is the first handicap. Moreover, it is a single syllabus, in spite of the diversity of the environments: rural and urban areas, forests, savannas, lakes, coastal areas. Yet, it is acknowledged that knowledge is acquired by observation and analysis of the realities of the milieu.

Furthermore, the syllabi are academic, abstract and cut from their concrete applications. The pupil learns in order to recite, instead of knowing in order to act.

The school is the "sanctuary" for learning to recite difficult things unknown to parents. School attendance is undoubtedly, an important factor of uprooting the youth from their surroundings and encouraging the out-migration to the cities. While today, knowledge abounds everywhere, throughout life and the school has lost the monopoly it exercised over information, the syllabi are still encyclopedic; they are learned without being understood. The pupil is transformed into a memory, instead of developing his aptitude to think, act and learn within the prospect of a permanent education.

Lessons are taught in different disciplines, without coherence and as dictated by the time table: the pupil goes from the functions of the descriptive adjective to the calculation of percentages, and subsequently to 30 minutes of study on the goat...; placed before these disconnected "crumbs" of knowledge often meaningless and de-linked, the pupil learns without understanding. For, to understand is to consider things together. In several African countries, some "integrated" programmes or syllabi have been developed aimed at least, at the integration of knowledge, through "environmental study" taught as a single subject which encompasses some knowledge

of history, geography, civics, moral education, hygiene, nutrition, housing, child care, agriculture, small scale animal husbandry, etc.

Of course, the adaptation of new syllabi is a long term task. Already, some projects are being undertaken, but their experimentation and evaluation will take some time. They involve not only short term, but also medium and long term measures which fall outside the framework of this working document.

As for the teaching methods, they play today, a more important role than syllabi as regards the training of the youth.

They provide knowledge and know-how. If well chosen, methods teach the child to think and to express himself. They direct the pupil towards useful initiative and action. They develop their aptitude to get informed and to continue to learn.

However, what is noticed rather unfortunately in the present-day classes is that they are often overcrowded, handled by teachers who are insufficiently trained and are therefore left with no alternative to teaching indigestible programmes. The reason for all this is that the teaching methods currently used are still authoritative and dogmatic. They only teach the pupils to listen and recite; consequently, they have only a very limited educative value: everything happens as if the attempt to educate the pupils is abandoned due to lack of time. This negates the idea of participation and self-training which are now at the very centre of any genuine education.

Therefore, after acquiring this recitation oriented knowledge, only executants lacking initiative and concrete action and also incapable of personal thought and expression are trained.

If the role of the school is to teach the youth to "become men of action" as required by official instructions, time should be invested in training and developing, through repeated exercises, the capacity to adapt to new situations through problems accessible to the pupil and motivating his effort.

In conclusion, it is clear that in a developing country like Gabon, if the two objectives underscored are to be attained, it is important to transform both the syllabi and methods of primary education. The ability to adapt to change should be entrenched in the youth. But to adapt means to be capable of thinking logically, expressing oneself and communicating; it is also the ability to take initiatives and to implement action projects correctly; finally, it is the act of having learned to learn in order to supplement on one's own, an insufficient piece of information. It is the responsibility of the primary school to train and develop these aptitudes through exercises adapted and repeated throughout the education system, thus achieving the physical, aesthetic, social, cultural, intellectual and rural development of the youth and their civic and economic education.

OBSERVATIONS ON EDUCATIONAL CONTENTS AND MEASURES TO BE TAKEN TO MAINTAIN EQUAL CHANCES

At the primary education level

In the short run, technicians of IPN, educationalists and primary school officials as well as planners could undertake simultaneously:

- an inventory of the tasks to be executed;
- the definition of the methodological conditions desirable for each of them;

- the programming of a coordinated implementation of all these operations and the computation of their costs.

The objectives have already been defined by the eighth seminar of inspectors (1979) and the General Fora on education and training (December 1983). Some partially completed projects are under implementation. But the choice of a methodological approach to the implementation of this reform is fundamental and conditions the success of the proceedings. It is possible to opt for an empirical approach: in this case, the introduction of various innovations designed separately and disseminated as soon as they are found to be implementable should be endorsed.

If account is taken of the desirable choices concerning future programmes, their integration, their link with concrete action and the progressiveness of contents, it will be observed that rational approach seems necessary, a fortiori if the unity of methods in the various disciplines is to be achieved, in order that all will lead to the development of capacities for thought, expression and concrete action.

The current achievements of IPN suffer undoubtedly from a certain level of empiricism which is prejudicial to their unity. For the moment, they relate to the initiation cycle, to instrumental disciplines (oral expression, reading and writing); and also to the introduction to mathematics, the art of counting and operational exercises.

They are not yet directly connected to the cycle concerning the "opening" to life and the environment, for which the study of the environment with a view to its transformation within the prospect of an improved well-being achieves the unity of activities relating to the acquisition of knowledge, techniques and know-how, as well as the development of the mind and the capacities for communication and action.

The choice of a more rational approach and its implementation are therefore still possible, in the very short run. In any case, it is desirable, as soon as practicable, to introduce in the syllabi of CE2, CM1, and CM2, some lessons and drills for studying various environments and some training with a view to their transformation within the prospect of an improved well-being. Thus, at the end of the primary school, the young girl who abandons her studies would have learned to improve her surrounding, health, hygiene, agricultural production, small scale animal husbandry, gardening and craftsmanship. Such a know-how will keep a good number of young people within their family milieux, where they would certainly prove their mettle. In terms of the results they achieve, the State could facilitate their access to personal farms. The idea is to integrate them in the non-structured sector of employment, which currently provides employment for 65% of the workers. Yet, very few young people are directed to this sector. Rural exodus leads them to the suburban areas where they go to swell the countless number of the unemployed.

To succeed in such an operation, it is only necessary to retrain the teachers, disseminate pedagogic supports and provide to rural schools, a land, some materials and some tools. The provision of good information to parents and pupils facilitated by the mass media will accomplish the rest. Rural individual or cooperative production, is an important means of limiting imports, and even of boosting the export of certain consumer items. In the current economic situation, it is a non-negligible "leverage" for development. The costs of the operation should be computed and its planning established.

At the secondary education level

Although they depend on the medium and long term options that the Government would take, some short term measures can also be proposed, to meet the major obstacles to the internal output of the structures of the current system and the mismatch of the training provided with the imperatives of the employment market.

The obstacles

The objectives of post-primary education should be re-defined. Of course, it is necessary to continue training the best students to enable them to obtain the baccalauréat and to prepare, at the University, for first and second levels of professional qualification, in relation to the employment market.

However, the training branches of secondary education are full of students who will be turned out without any preparation for active life and even, with behaviours which are not in-line with those of the so-called "men of action", while a lot of positions are held by foreigners at levels 4, 5 and 6 within the professional qualification bracket.

Indeed, out of 1,000 students entering "sixième" (first year of secondary education) within the CES cycle, only 11 will enter the sixth form after four years, including 7 who hold the BEPC (the Ordinary Level Certificate). The others drop out or repeat. Over 52% of the students are between three and seven years older than the prescribed aged for this educational level, even if two repetitions are accepted. And a good number of them finally abandon their studies thus costing a great deal to the State since they have only an uncertain general education without any preparation for any given trade.

The fundamental cause of this deplorable situation, aside from the poor results of the primary school, is the unflinching desire of parents to direct their children to the general education branch. Of course, some decades ago, pursuing studies up to the secondary level was geared towards the preparation of one's future, particularly in the Civil Service. It is understandable that parents should still be imbued with this idea. However, staff in the Civil Service has now reached its maximum level and the country's economy is being restructured.

Measures aimed at improving external output

In the short term, to succeed in such an operation, a genuine information campaign for the benefit of young people and their parents should be undertaken in order to win acceptance for this change of objectives.

The grouping within some CES' of pupils who obtain results that justify their maintenance should be studied in relation to boarding capacities.

The transformation of other CES' into centres of preparation for active life should be prepared at several levels.

- At the material and financial level: the existing buildings should be equipped, while training grounds should be obtained. This operation involves considerable credit allocations, but its impact on employment would be considerable.

- At the pedagogic and human level, the duration of study and training programme cycles for each of the centres should be defined; it is also necessary to recruit and train supervisors, perhaps from the retraining of officials who are products of the Oyem based ENCR, at least as regards the centres established in the rural areas.
- At the administrative level, the sharing of responsibilities between the ministries concerned should be initiated: Vocational training for centres of learning in the cities; National education for the CETs; Agriculture and National education for centres in the rural areas.

The need to rethink teaching syllabi and methods

In the first secondary cycle, the lessons should make it possible to identify the intellectual and technological aptitudes of the pupils, so as to facilitate their orientation. This implies that the syllabi should abandon in part, their academic character, to give place to practical application courses, linking the sciences, technologies and know-how, rather than focusing on programmes of manual and technical education.

One does not see why the usual assignments regarding the maintenance of the institution's facilities could not, at least partly, be entrusted to pupils within the framework of the time table, (cleaning, painting undertaking electrical connection work in the classrooms, cleaning the toilets, cleaning and beautifying the surroundings). To be educated also means to learn to live in tidy surroundings and in a pleasantly decorated house.

Teaching methods should emphasize the aptitude for judgement and expression, by getting the pupil acquainted with the general understanding of a situation so as to enable him analyze it for purposes of evaluating the elements and relationships involved and subsequently attempting a summary and undertaking an application thereof (learning to act).

This improvement of profiles, programmes and methods should make it possible to stir the pupil from his receptive and passive attitude and thus trigger "the change in mentality" required for an effective participation in development.

Improvement of internal output

Let us first note that it is sometimes difficult to clearly differentiate the measures aimed at improving output, both internal and external. The improvement of syllabi and methods has some beneficial consequences on the two aspects of educational output and, lower down the scale, on the orientation of pupils.

The deficiencies as well as the measures likely to meet them are only listed below: they were studied by the "rationalization" commissions, and this working document is aimed at examining the training/employment relationship and hence, external output.

Pupils: enrolment, orientation, will

Enrolment are rather excessive, especially in Libreville where they reach and sometimes exceed 60 pupils per class. This situation is due to the fact that:

- a lot of pupils who failed the entrance examination to "sixième" (the first year of secondary education) are admitted;
- repetitions, which are now very numerous, are no longer subject to regulation;
- pupils are transferred from one institution to another when they should be expelled in view of the results they obtained;
- parents in the hinterland are convinced that it is preferable to send their children to Libreville.

Rural exodus which is so nefarious at the primary level, is now very sensitive in the first secondary cycle. It has been reckoned that in Libreville if the number of pupils per class is to be reduced to 40, to make it possible to receive students of the first cycle of CEN and the Technical School, 9 peripheral CES institutions should be constructed over a 3-year period; each of these institutions should have 16 sections which would involve an annual investment of 4.5 billion francs for 3 years. This is difficult to achieve at present, due to the economic and financial crisis facing Gabon.

To control rural exodus and the excessive enrolment, the measures required are:

- provision of information to parents and the youth: the aim is to sensitize them to the fact the education provided in institutions of the "prefectures" (districts) is preferable to that provided in important cities where the output is lower and living conditions are risky for young people left to their own devices;
- the rigorous management of transfers and enrolment, through the strict enforcement of a regulation to be reviewed, disseminated, and controlled and through the scrupulous observance of the results of entrance examinations to "sixième" and other entrance examinations related thereto;
- sanctions against scholarly dilettantism or a more severe selection (cf. preparation for manual work).

Orientation of pupils

At present, it is the entrance examination to "sixième" which directs the course of students.

First, because it constitutes a barrier to nearly 70% of them but also, because the youngest and those who scored the best grades are admitted to the Advanced Institute and Colleges. The most mediocre and oldest are admitted to the CENs and CETs, without any objective selection criterion. It may even be asserted that the current pseudo-orientation system is prejudicial to the quality of training for technicians and future educators.

The will to succeed

The student should know the objectives of his training, and understand that he benefits considerably from State assistance, and this should sustain his efforts and direct his conduct. The teachers, supervisors and the administrative personnel have the duty of firmly ensuring that this is achieved.

Teachers

They have a fundamental responsibility in securing the improvement of the internal output of secondary education, in the light of the serious problems repeatedly underscored relating to status, recruitment, initial and continued training, control and management of the careers of Gabonese teachers as well as the gradual replacement of some 70% foreign teachers.

In this connection, it is worth underscoring here, among the short term measures, the importance of training for the benefit of the teachers of ENS and ENSET. After having been well prepared for their difficult task and for assuming their responsibilities, these specialists should be maintained at their posts by conferring on them a specially advantageous status.

Administrative and supervisory personnel

They also have a very important role to play in improving internal and external output, since they are responsible for the administrative and pedagogic management of the institution.

Yet, they are selected and transferred without special preparation, hence, the current efforts made within the framework of retraining this staff. A commission has been set up to examine this problem within the framework of "rationalization".

Control and supervision

It is certain that teachers and administrators should be controlled, their efforts evaluated and graded by a competent staff and these grading should be taken into account in career management.

This very important problem has also been examined as well as the problem of supervision by pedagogic advisers (their profile, role and recruitment).

Constraints limiting the development of a normal education for girls

These constraints may be grasped either generally or sectorally. In both cases, they are many and women bear them painfully while struggling to put paid to most if not all of them.

At the social level

Whether in the rural or urban area, women suffer sexual discrimination which the society of men continues to maintain and which women themselves have ingenuously borne.

To this first discriminatory practice should be added a social discrimination which compels women to play second fiddle, to keep in the background in the presence of men and to remain eternal minors. Made inferior in relation to men, who, nevertheless acknowledge the capital but coercive role devolving upon them as producers of socioeconomic goods and reproducers, women are dominated by the male society.

This society forbids women not only to participate in development, but also to achieve self-realization. What is more, the classical education that they have received and continue to receive in some rural areas in the hinterland and even in the cities compel them to have children; children being considered as the first element of wealth, to be precociously ready to play the roles of wives and mothers, and, in any case, to be their mothers' helpers as far as girls are concerned; some drop-outs, or repeated school failures particularly in the rural area stem from this attitude on the part of many parents. Hence, it should not be surprising that illiteracy in Gabon is the lot of women, especially rural women; 80% of them are affected.

Consequently, the situation reserved for women in the rural area is not enviable: they are overwhelmed by excessive workloads, they suffer from lack of structures of all sorts and are "condemned" to working till very late hours in the night, and are consequently deprived of leisure.

In the urban area, it is common to learn of parents not wishing to invest in the education of their children. These children are found in the streets and this exposes them (particularly the young girls) to sexual perversion and prostitution thus leading them into juvenile delinquency.

In conclusion, it is worth noting with regard to society in general that the exercise by women of their recognized and inalienable rights is not always easy.

At the employment level

It happens that enterprises deny some women the access to a category of employments because of their situation as mothers and wives deemed incompatible with the profitability or performances of the enterprise.

Generally speaking, the vast majority of women lack information as well as an appropriate professional qualification. This double handicap makes their integration in the labour world difficult; they are therefore compelled to undertake only small scale jobs.

At the agricultural and commercial level

At the agricultural and commercial level, the constraints are numerous and considerable. These are, on the one hand, the "chronic" absence of a satisfactory road network over the entire territory and appropriate transportation facilities to carry products to the urban consumer centres, or the lack of food processing and conservation units; and on the other hand, the difficult access to bank credit, either due to their insolvent situation, or because they operate - as is the case of most women - in the informal sector.

At the political level

Currently, a limiting attitudinal factor buttressed by the media, is observed on the part of men who fear that women would take an excessively considerable part in political life to the detriment of their conjugal obligations. This attitude has, as a consequence, the relegation of women to a secondary role in the political circles of the country and in political and economic decision-making mechanisms.

At the level of women themselves

The presupposed socio-educational models denounced above have compelled women to adopt and subsequently, "keep" a behaviour incompatible with the nature of the liberal society which advocates the spirit of individual initiative and entrepreneurship, competition or emulation. Many women, including even those who have sound intellectual and moral capacities, refuse to take any initiatives, whereas entrepreneurship is the master word in our present-day society. This attitude reflects a defeatist attitude observed particularly among a good number of young girls who, after a first failure at school, tend to abandon their studies or after having successfully completed the elementary school, refuse to go further.

Finally, it is worth noting, because the list is rather long, that the persistence of inferiority complex that a lot of them experience with regard to their male colleagues inevitably dampens their determination. Certainly, this complex is gradually on its way out, especially in the cities, but this propensity on the part of women to feel inferior will persist for some years to come.

Recommendations

Given the crucial role that they play, both at the economic and demographic level, it appears clearly after the above conclusion, that the full participation of women in the future development of Gabon is conditioned by a series of requirements.

1. The need to achieve an improved data collection by sector, and also at the district, departmental, provincial and national levels in order to clearly define the useful and reliable parameters that make it possible to design development projects for women. A systematic distinction should be made between anything that falls within the competence of men and consequently all that falls within the province of women without discrimination.
2. The need to collect quantitative but also qualitative data in order to promote the understanding of the status of women and to set up development plans. Indeed, although quantitative indications give an idea of the number of women, they neglect too often, the socio-cultural parameters which determine the nature and scope of their participation.
3. The need to strengthen collaboration or establish a consultation framework between the different ministries concerned in order to facilitate an improved circulation of information; the need to communicate to different departments, the studies conducted by each department or service, for purposes of exchange and, especially, for the homogenization or popularization of the (statistical) language used.
4. The need to prepare a national nomenclature of jobs or trades, particularly, by distinguishing in the statistics, the different sectors of activity (private, public and para-statal).
5. The need to support or sustain projects geared towards alleviating the workload of women in the rural area.
6. The need to promote measures facilitating the access of business women to credit, when they present viable collective or individual mini-projects for financing.

Place of demography and population education (Emp) in curricula

In the primary cycle, there are no EMP and demography courses as such, but population issues are addressed in awareness generating programmes, particularly, as regards the rules of social conduct: hygiene, protection against dangerous objects, principal causes of accidents, conduct to adopt in case of an accident, protection of the environment. In CM2 classes (sixth year of primary education), these notions are studied in greater depth, particularly, in courses relating to the science of observation whose main focus is the functioning of the human body, the prevention of diseases (sexually transmissible diseases - STD, influenza, malaria fever, cholera) and the care or attention to be given to the sick.

Population problems such as migrations, population densities and spatial distribution are studied especially in human geography courses.

At the secondary level, population problems are especially addressed in biology and geography courses.

Biology courses in the first cycle of the secondary level include such notions as nutrition, the pitfalls of drug addiction (alcoholism, smoking, drugs), medical and agro-food uses of micro-organisms, human reproduction, development and improvement of the environment. In the second cycle, certain notions are studied in greater depth, particularly nutrition, fertilization, immunology, STDs, epidemiology and biological rates.

In human geography courses, the students study the distribution and characteristics of human groups. They also conduct a detailed analysis of the population of a given country (structure by age, birth rates, mortality rates, growth rates) and also focus on such phenomena as population explosion and stagnation, population and anti-population practices, the problems of urbanization.

An effort is therefore being made currently within the framework of geography and biology courses. Concerning biology, and particularly as regards courses relating to STDs, it is recommended that the teacher should provide to the students, some information on the currently renewed outbreak of diseases, their mode of transmission, their long term repercussions and their prevention.

However, in spite of the close link between population and development, the place of demography and population education is relatively restricted in the Gabonese education system. The principal reasons for this relative neglect or oblivion stem from the non-appraisal of the socioeconomic implications of population data.

Education as is currently provided does not sufficiently underscore such problems as hygiene, nutrition, prevention of diseases. Moreover, population data are essential for planning educational needs as well as for employment and environment planning purposes.

Population data are therefore useful in all aspects of socioeconomic development. This is why the need to give greater consideration to education that focusses extensively on population issues is of vital importance in order to enable future citizens to very quickly grasp the relationships between their activities and population, as well as the links between population and development. For, the development battle will be won only if special attention is given to population issues, for which an adapted module should be introduced in the curriculum of each type of training.

The structures of non-formal education

Insufficient studies, and even the inexistence of data on non-formal education is an obstacle to a wider knowledge and understanding of the subject. It would be necessary, as a matter of urgency, to conduct such a study in order to offer alternatives to girls in underprivileged areas. The only data on the issue come from the Ministry of National Education and relate to literacy.

Literacy as recommended in the texts could have taken over from the conventional system particularly as regards female education. It began in 1963 with the objective of inculcating some elementary notions as well as reading, writing and counting mechanisms with a view to enabling adults to get better informed.

From 1963 to 1978, some projects were initiated, particularly in Libreville with the creation of the Literacy Centre for the Women's Union of the Democratic Party, (UFPDG).

The creation of this female literacy centre - the most unique of its kind - was aimed at providing assistance to women and young girls desirous of having basic education. The centre had four levels, accessible after some tests have been conducted. The results, according to past officials of the centre, were encouraging. In the absence of any document, it is difficult to evaluate the contents of literacy programmes, the number of participants and especially the reasons for the closure of the centre.

In 1984, a national training seminar in literacy was organized by the People's Education directorate with a view to adopting a new strategy. This seminar proposed that a diagnostic survey be conducted on the situation of literacy in Gabon in order to know the real needs of women with a view to designing specific programmes and preparing some pedagogic supports for them. No document has as yet given effect to these proposals.

Aside from the UFPDG literacy centre, no action towards non-formal education has been undertaken officially for the benefit of young girls and women. There are a few religious initiatives aimed at assisting women to acquire some notions of family economics. As these private initiatives were not placed under the supervision of the State or any official agency, they are not mentioned in documents relating to popular Education.

During this study, we encountered some difficulties in defining the situation of young girls in Gabon, since their status was not easy to define (between the status of school girls or of women, even for those who are very young). It is for this reason that reports give virtually no attention to it except for purposes of school statistics requirements.

According to the officials of popular or mass education, the shelving of different projects is due to the partial support of public authorities who should acknowledge that illiteracy really exists in Gabon and deserves today, a nation-wide attention which should compel the need to :

- define the priorities and objectives; and
- create specific structures for young girls and women, in order to promote education for all.

Another cause of the failure of literacy activity in Gabon is probably linked to the partial support of UNESCO's technical assistance which could, as in the past, have supported and strengthened its field operational capacities. The times marking the success of

literacy in Gabon date back to the period when the financial and material support of UNESCO and some other agencies were regularly forthcoming. However, the prospects in the field of literacy are quite promising even if no specific reference is made in official documents to young girls but to unschooled youths.

Proposals aimed at renewing the programmes or curricula have been made. They relate to :

- the setting up of a national committee entrusted with the task of popularizing literacy activities;
- the conduct of a survey to take stock of the illiteracy situation in Gabon;
- the continuation of the training of trainers with a view to establishing literacy centres throughout the provinces;
- the preparation of pedagogic documents to cover the needs of the centres;
- the need to see to the control and monitoring of literacy activities in the field;
- the organization of the "International literacy day" in all provinces of the country.

TOWARDS EQUALITY OF GIRLS AND BOYS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Since basic education is indispensable for improving the status and productivity of women, it is clear that education for women and girls may have enormous beneficial effects on the quality of human life, the survival and development of children and economic productivity in general.

The commitment made again by the world leaders in 1990 in the World declaration on education for all, namely, to universalize the access to education and promote equality in the field of education can and should be honored. As stated in the Declaration :

The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. All gender stereotyping in education should be eliminated.

In line with this commitment, the countries concerned should, during the course of the 90s, set specific objectives and time tables to reduce progressively the gaps between school enrolment rates for boys and girls, at the primary level and ensure gender equality in the field of education by the year 2000. At the same time, it is also necessary to set specific objectives and time tables to reduce illiteracy among women. To this end, it will be worth implementing a more global approach in order to educate girls within the framework of both the formal and non-formal education system, the emphasis being laid on the equality of boys and girls at the social and educational level within the non-formal system.

There is need to intensify the training and recruitment of female teachers to enable them to motivate and inspire and, also, launch a campaign to encourage parents to give support to female education and participate in it.

Furthermore, there is need to increase the schooling rates of married maidens and adolescent mothers and ensure that they do not abandon their studies; it will be also necessary to organize some nurseries and supplementary food programmes.

Families, governments, inter-governmental institutions, NGOs and voluntary development agencies, should set themselves the priority objective of creating an environment more favourable to girls.

In the long term, all countries should undertake to eliminate the inequalities between boys and girls and the discrimination meted out to girls, by adopting legislative policies and measures and appropriate development programmes.

In the immediate future, it will be necessary to take measures aimed at reducing the existing inequalities within specific periods, and to ensure that the existing social development programmes reach girls.

Multidisciplinary research should be conducted on the status of girls and the results of this research disseminated far and wide to reach the doorstep of public authorities and development planners in order that their needs be taken into account in all development planning activities.

Finally, efficient information and communication campaigns should be prepared to promote understanding of the special needs and the unique human potential of girls.

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DATA SOURCE

The Investments Planning and Programming Department centralizes the reports from different educational institutions. It also sends to each of these institutions, a questionnaire to be completed during the first quarter of each school year in order to ensure a quick processing of the information.

From the reports and completed questionnaires, it prepares a summary document which is the *Statistical Yearbook*. Even if it is not as detailed as the reports of primary and secondary institutions, the yearbook has the advantage of containing information for the whole of Gabon. There is also a *Higher Education Statistical Yearbook*.

The UNESCO *Statistical Yearbooks* contain some information on several countries, culled from its statistical data bank. These pieces of information are also based on the feedbacks received from member States as well as on official national publications and reports.

The data for this study were derived from the Directory of the Ministry of National Education mainly, and also from the reports of the Oyem seminar organized by the UNDP office in Gabon and reports of educational institutions.

Apart from these sources, no study has been conducted on this subject, neither has any survey been conducted in this regard.

DATA APPRAISAL

Some pieces of information are not distributed by sex, and this makes it impossible to distinguish the position of girls in relation to boys. For example, the number of repetitions and drop-outs by sex, which does not exist, would have made it possible to differentiate the situation of girls generally considered as the most underprivileged.

The yearbooks or directories do not contain numbers or enrolment by age or by sex either, but rather percentages by age which are of limited use and not always easy to apply. Aside from these remarks, the data used made it possible to do some stock taking with a view to re-conducting this case study.

The appraisal of the data collection system shows that the data on education are drawn from the current activities of the administrations concerned and hence, do not meet the basic requirements of analysis.