Negotiating 'Education for Many' Enrolment, Dropout and Persistence in the Community Schools of Kolondièba, Mali

Peter Laugharn

Consortium for Research on
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Address for correspondence:
CREATE,
Centre for International Education, Sussex School of Education,
University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QQ,
United Kingdom

Tel: + 44 (0) 1273 678464
Fax: + 44 (0) 1273 877534
Author Email: Peter.Laugharn@bvleerf.nl
Website: http://www.create-rpc.org
Email: create@sussex.ac.uk

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List of Acronyms

APE	Associations des Parents d'Elèves
EFA	Education for All
NGO	Non governmental organisation
SC	Save the Children
SMC	School management committee
PTA	Parent teacher association

Dedication

Dedicated to my parents-in-law Silas Sekimonyo and Madeleine Kagaju and their strong commitment to give their daughter an education

Acknowledgements

Preface

This research monograph, by Dr Peter Laugharn, is one of several in the CREATE Pathways to Access Series that address strategies for improvements in access education. It explores in some considerable depth the experience of a programme in the Kolondièba District of Mali - the Community Schools Project supported by Save the Children/US – whose purpose was to increase access to schooling, especially for girls, through intensive work by School Management Committees. In terms of the CREATE framework it has direct relevance for our knowledge of the processes of inclusion and exclusion at work in Zones 1, 2 and 3

The monograph is based on an excellent and fascinating PhD thesis completed at the Institute of Education of the University of London a few years ago. But, like many theses, Peter's remained unpublished, until now. The issues raised in the thesis, remain as pertinent today as in the late 1990s and not only in Mali but elsewhere. In a relatively short space of time and with intense action the numbers of schools and initial enrolments in the Kolondièba grew very rapidly. However, dropout rates were higher than expected. The achievement of high initial enrolment rates has been easier to achieve than sustained enrolment and progression. Peter reflects on the lessons learned from the experience of Kolondièba for the vision and ambitions of Jomtien and Dakar. The publication of this work, mid way between Dakar and 2015, the target date for the achievement of the Millennium Goals could not be more timely.

Professor Angela W Little
Institute of Education. London
CREATE Partner Institute Convenor

Summary

Inspired by the 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All and by the experience of non-governmental organisations such as BRAC, Save the Children/USA established a community schools project in southern Mali, working with 777 villages to establish and run their own primary schools between 1992 and 1998. These schools enrolled over 45,000 pupils who would otherwise have had little chance of going to school. Nearly half of these pupils were girls. School Management Committees (SMCs), composed of community members, had several responsibilities for the schools, including enrolment and retention of pupils.

This monograph, based on a doctoral thesis written by one of the project leaders, which uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the following questions: How did the activity of the SMCs influence enrolment within the community school villages?   How were gender-equitable enrolments arranged and maintained? Though it had originally been expected that the SMCs would be effective at promoting persistence in school, initial levels of dropout were high. What were the reasons for dropout from the community schools? How effective were the SMCs in reducing dropout and promoting persistence?

The study found that the SMCs carried out their enrolment responsibilities effectively and that enrolments were equitable not only in terms of gender but also in terms of household wealth and parental educational history; enrolments did however show a bias against the pastoralist Peulh minority. While parents were very willing to enroll many of their children in the new schools, they were not receptive to the idea of "education for all" as they consciously oriented some of their children toward house and field work. This orientation of children away from school was slowing down expansion of the community schools in some villages. Parents were found to be willing to enroll girls, despite a traditional preference for enrolling boys, in exchange for a school being established in their village. But indications are that boy-preference is still prevalent, and that it reoccurs where the SMC ceases to insist on gender parity.

SMCs were much less effective in preventing dropout. Dropout occurred principally for reasons outside the school. Many of the pupils had been enrolled over-age, and the transition to early adulthood led to the decision to leave school.   In the parents' and pupils' "hierarchy of commitments", schooling was not as important as marriage for girls and the *exode* (going off to seek work) for boys.

The three SMCs studied in depth provide useful insights into the capacities and limits of community based school support associations in fulfilling their responsibilities for enrolment and persistence, for example the variability of leadership and dynamism among the SMCs, and the key role they played in maintaining gender equity in the schools.

This paper argues that the Education for All discussions on access to schooling have become too focused on the policy level, and concludes by calling for more dialogue, reflection, and partnership with parents and community associations.

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Negotiating 'Education for Many': Enrolment, Dropout, and Persistence in the Community Schools of Kolondièba, Mali

1. Introduction

This monograph is based on a PhD thesis from the University of London (Laugharn, 2001). It examines the experience of a single initiative which was shaped by the goal of Education for All (EFA) and which sought to contribute to its realisation, the Community Schools Project of Save the Children/US in Mali. This community schools project, originating in Kolondièba District in Mali, aimed at increasing access to schooling, especially for girls, through community-based efforts.

As originally conceived, the community schools model could provide both simple, rapid expansion of education supply to many villages, and simultaneously, through the work of a School Management Committee, ensure high enrolment and low dropout rates within villages. While the coverage of the community school system surpassed even the most optimistic expectations, their number grew from four to nearly 800 in seven years, the project began to report enrolment rates that were lower than expected, and dropout rates that were higher. This research examines the reasons that there was 'enrolment for many' rather than for 'all', and why a good number of those enrolled were deciding to leave school before the end of the sixth grade.

This paper deals primarily with the first three 'zones of exclusion' identified by the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE[1]). The first of these zones refers to those children denied any access to schooling; the particularity of the Kolondièba community schools was the pragmatism with which the project approached trying to get to universal primary enrolment, especially in working with community organisations to stimulate and regulate local demand for schooling. The second zone of exclusion concerns withdrawals after enrolment, whether they be dropout, pushout, or walkout. The Kolondièba study goes into great detail about the factors, notably early marriage and labour needs, which competed with the goal of every child completing primary school. The third zone concerns children who are at risk of dropout; here the Kolondièba study examines individual, household, and community decision making about dropout, and how effectively community organisations can fight it. The study concludes overall that achieving high initial enrolment has been an easier accomplishment than keeping children in school.

1.1 The community schools project in Kolondièba District: assumptions, strategies, and expectations (local supply and local demand issues)

The American non-governmental organisation (NGO), Save the Children, is an organisation committed to the ideal of education for all. At the beginning of the 1990s, Save the Children was working in about forty countries worldwide, primarily through community-based integrated development approaches (Gibbons, 1998; Save the Children, 1998).

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[1] See: www.create-rpc.org for further information on this DFID-funded research programme.

Save the Children had been operating in Kolondièba[2] District in southern Mali since 1986. The District is in Mali's Southern (Sikasso) Region, on the border with Côte d'Ivoire. Within the nine thousand square kilometers covered by the district, there are no paved roads or electricity, and an economy based on subsistence farming, with cotton as the single important source of cash income. Kolondièba District had about 125,000 inhabitants in 207 villages at the beginning of the 1990s.

Save the Children's programme in Kolondièba at the beginning of the decade focused on primary health care, well-digging, micro-enterprise, and some fairly conventional support to education, mostly consisting of providing school supplies. Wanting to make a greater difference, the NGO[3] began financing the construction of government schools, but had funds available for only one such construction per year, meaning that it would have taken almost two centuries to have a school in every community.

Seeking a more rapid solution, the NGO began to ask itself how the Jomtien watchword of 'Education for All by the year 2000' could actually become a reality in that district, at least to the more modest extent of a school in every village. Kolondièba District had a gross enrolment rate of under 20% in the early 1990's, and under 10% for girls. In its 207 villages, there were 29 primary schools, of which 12 were concentrated in the five administrative centres. A village only four kilometres from the district town of Kolondièba had not sent a single child to primary school for several years. Clearly both supply and demand were well below international levels, and even sub-Saharan African ones.

The NGO had a large field staff, all of them Malian, mostly from the region around Kolondièba. This staff had established relationships of trust and candour with many of the villages of the district, and was thus able to organise wide discussions with parents, community leaders, and children about the reasons so few youngsters attended school. Among the factors identified were distance to the nearest school, the costs of supporting a child attending school, the perceived likelihood of failure and thus wasted time and trouble, and the 'cultural gap' between the school and the community. This gap was underscored by the fact that instruction in government schools is in French from the first day, while most adults in the communities spoke only Bambara.

In spite of their scepticism regarding the conventional government school, parents and community leaders typically expressed a strong belief in the intrinsic value of education and an interest in promoting schooling within their communities. Typically they reacted very positively to the idea of the establishment of a new type of school within their villages, which would seek to address the problems they had identified.

Two other factors at this time contributed to a feeling of opportunity to do something about schooling in Kolondièba. First, the NGO staff learned of the schools supported by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), half-way around the world, through a UNICEF booklet (Lovell and Fatema, 1989). The BRAC model enabled communities to establish and manage schools, and greatly increased enrolments, especially for girls. Secondly, the coup d'état in Mali in 1991 ended twenty-three years of dictatorship and stagnation, and ushered in a new era in which non-governmental initiative and decentralisation were actively supported. Thus the NGO staff saw evidence of a strong

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[2] Pronounced 'Koh-lohn-JAY-bah'
[3] For simplicity's sake, Save the Children will be referred to as 'the NGO' from here on.

latent demand for schooling, blocked by specific obstacles, and were inspired by the Bangladeshi model and the idea of Education for All, and enthusiastic to build on the promise of a newly democratic Mali.

All of these factors combined to permit lively discussions of what might work in a Malian context. Three working hypotheses formed the subtext of these discussions:

- that every community has within itself the human and financial resources necessary to initiate its children's schooling;

- that costs could be significantly lowered without commensurately lowering quality; and

- that the timing was right for partnerships in education between the new government, NGOs, and communities.

The NGO decided on a dual strategy, working on both local supply of schooling and local demand for it.

1.1.1 Local supply issues

On the supply side, the emphasis would be on lowering infrastructure and teacher costs so that communities could establish their own schools. The NGO estimated that schools built from local materials could be constructed at about a fifth of the cost of the prevailing concrete model. Not only did this make the construction of a school financially affordable by a typical village, but it also made the school seem less of a foreign body within the community.

Similarly, teachers in conventional Malian schools were civil servants, usually with at least a twelfth grade education. The Malian government, already spending a quarter of its budget on education and working under hiring constraints imposed by structural adjustment plans, would not be able to significantly increase the number of teachers. At the same time, local initiative was constrained by the level of teacher salaries, which were several multiples of the Malian GNP per capita, making it quite difficult for a village to consider paying them, especially in numbers sufficient to staff a typical primary school with six grades. Thus the NGO proposed that communities nominate Bambara-literate villagers as teachers, estimating that a satisfactory wage could be worked out between the community and the teacher. Initial discussions in Kolondièba indicated that villages were willing to pay a wage that would be approximately 10% of what the government paid its teachers. The NGO judged that the decision to make recourse to a non-professional, less-trained group from which to draw the teachers was justified by several considerations. First, instruction would be in local language rather than French. Secondly, the NGO argued that the quality of teaching was not just a matter of training, but also of personal skills and attitudes that were available in the community, including wit, organisation, affection and existing relationships with the children. Finally, the NGO resolved to provide, as had BRAC, a month-long initial training and frequent refresher training courses for its new teachers.

With these reductions in infrastructure and salary costs, establishing a primary school would become an initiative within the financial reach of almost any community. The changes also made both the school building and the teacher resemble the village more, which it was felt would help to bridge the gap between community and school.

In a report on the conception and first year of operation of the 'village schools' (as they were originally known), the NGO described its vision of a 'comprehensive recruitment of students':

> The Village School would be limited to a three-year cycle, to keep costs per student down and to permit as many children as possible to benefit from the experience. Since the children are not likely to have any other comparable structured learning experience in their lives, it is essential that as many literacy and numeracy skills as possible, and as much practical knowledge, be transmitted during this three-year period;

> The enrollment of each school would in principle be limited to the children of the village, rather than taking in a six- or seven-village catchment area, as do Ministry of Education schools. SC's ideal is to have a school in every village, in order to give each community a chance to play an active role in the education of its children, and to avoid the problems associated with young children attending far-away schools;

> Each school would have two classes, one of young children (6-10 years) who might still have the possibility of joining the formal education system after three years in the Village School, and one of adolescents (11-15 years) who could not enter the official school system, but who would be able to participate in village health, agriculture, and credit committees upon graduation from the Village School;

> Every effort would be made to assure gender parity among students. SC would discuss in detail with community members their reasons why their daughters were less frequently enrolled in school, and more often removed from it, in order to devise a more 'girl-friendly' school.

(Save the Children/US - Mali, 1993: 3)

Regarding the curriculum, the NGO collaborated with the National Languages Unit of the National Pedagogical Institute (IPN). As the NGO put it:

> Basic reading, writing, and calculating skills would be taught in the first year. These skills would be consolidated in the second and third years, during which specific knowledge of village life, health, work, and enterprise would also be taught. The curriculum would be designed to provide relevant life skills for rural youth;

> The language of instruction for at least the first three years would be the children's native tongue (Bambara) rather than French, so that real learning could take place from the outset. This also permitted villagers to serve as teachers, since many more persons in Kolondièba are literate in Bambara than in French;

> The possibility that some of the younger children might seek to enter the formal system after three years meant that the Village School would have to include intensive French lessons as an optional part of its third year curriculum.

(Save the Children/US - Mali, 1993: 4)

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1.1.3 Local demand issues

The NGO also looked for ways of removing local obstacles to demand. In the NGO's reasoning, the main decision-makers around schooling were at the family level, and that it was at this level that issues would have to be addressed, both in terms of understanding the obstacles clearly and in proposing ways around them. The NGO saw this as a two-step process, the first step being to change fairly extensively certain features of the school known to reduce family willingness to enroll children, and the second to work directly with the families to encourage them to take advantage of and commit themselves to this newly configured educational opportunity.

Step One: Re-configuring the school to increase demand

Taking the main constraints to demand identified one by one, the NGO discussed possible changes with community leaders and members in a number of villages. The first problem raised was the physical distance to the school: it was not unusual for a school to be located twenty kilometers from a child's home, which meant that to enroll a child would have to board in the school village from a young age, with the attendant problems of cost and concern for safety and well-being. Parents complained repeatedly of having sent a child to a host family in the school village with two 100 kg sacks of grain, only to see the host family eat the grain, the child go hungry and often be used for excessive domestic chores. Dropout, whether because of discouragement or academic failure, was often the result, after considerable outlays by the family. Even in cases where the school was closer, it was still often a walk of several kilometers, which tended to discourage parents of girls from sending them to school. To this concern of distance, the NGO was able to reply that the model proposed would bring the school into the village itself, and that the school and its pupils would be under the watchful eyes of the community. This change was welcomed by the communities.

The idea of a school in every village also served to make the proposed school management committees (SMCs) more likely to be able to work effectively, since there would be a one-to-one correspondence between community and school, and the SMC would work with the backing of community authorities. In the conventional government school model, a school served at least half a dozen communities, but it was primarily answerable to those higher in the hierarchy of the Ministry of Education, and the community committee (association des parents d'élèves, or 'A.P.E.'), was more a support body charged with petty financing than one involved in running the school. Moreover, the 'host village' in which the school was located tended to be better served by the school (both in terms of enrolments and in terms of contact with parents) than the 'satellite' villages.

A second major constraint mentioned by parents was the conflict between the school's schedule and households' seasonal and even daily labour needs. Government schools started each year in the month of September, although the harvest season (especially for cotton) continued through October and often later. Further, government schools continued until June, when the all-important first rains, when planting was done, might come in May. Thus it was agreed between the NGOs and the initial communities that classes in the community schools would last from November to May, and would end with the rains.

Likewise, and again following the lead of BRAC, the school day was shortened as a sort of deal with parents who noted that they had previously not enrolled their children because they had need of their labour for domestic chores on a daily basis; by limiting the school day in first grade to two hours, this reservation was taken care of. The NGO was confident that the shorter year and school day could still lead to effective learning because children would understand the Bambara-language lessons from the beginning, rather than needing the two years it usually took for children to understand the teacher's spoken French. Furthermore, community management should also reduce or eliminate the absenteeism common to government schools in small villages.

The perceived likelihood of early failure was also a considerable disincentive for parents to enroll their sons and daughters. Children were sent off to a faraway village, instructed in a tongue that their parents (and probably their host family) did not understand and could not help them with, and subjected to periodic examinations designed more to reduce the size of the cohort progressing to the next level than to measure learning and achievement. A typical village would be able to count on one hand the number of its children who had ever progressed to secondary education, and often have fingers to spare. Thus the proposed idea of a learning experience in their own language, taking place within the parents' view, and with immediately visible results in terms of simple writing and maths skills, was quite appealing. The idea that teachers were likely to be the relatives of pupils, and thus more likely to be understanding and supporting of them, appealed to those parents whose children had had experiences with government school teachers they perceived to be severe. Moreover the NGO espoused the idea of automatic promotion, both because of the high levels of repetition in Mali at the time (around 30% in primary school) and the expense that this occasioned, and also because the NGO looked at primary education as a right that all children should enjoy, and not a 'tournament' that belonged to only those who could survived each successive round.

Finally, the NGO had strong convictions in favour of equal educational opportunities for girls and boys, which was a challenge in that in Malian government schools the typical ratio of boys to girls is two to one, a ratio that is more unequal in rural areas and in higher grades. Staff had observed that the BRAC approach was 'redistributive', ensuring that 70% of children enrolled in their schools were girls. After considering this option in a lively discussion, staff decided that in Kolondièba both sexes were disadvantaged, and that gender parity in enrolments should be the goal.

Gender issues presented a challenge to the NGO in that it had an equity agenda it wished to promote, at the same time that it wanted to be attentive to the concerns, unease, and even opposition of the communities. In initial discussions, the NGO did not state a position on the equity issue, but simply asked communities how they felt about enrolling girls and whether they would be willing to do so in these new community schools. Most of the concerns raised by the communities were related to the pragmatic problems addressed above, particularly regarding distance and the loss of a daughters' help with chores; there were very few statements of value-based reticence to enroll girls. The NGO was thus encouraged: the objections raised by parents to girls' enrolment could plausibly be addressed by the community schools model, and thus it seemed legitimate to stipulate in return that enrolment in the school should be on a gender-equitable basis. This led to a rule that an official of the local World Bank mission was later to call the 'Save the Children conditionality,' that in order for the NGO to support the establishment of a school, initial enrolments had to comprise equal numbers of boys and girls.

Step Two: Promoting demand at the family level

The concept of the School Management Committee

There are at least three factors that came together in the NGO's thinking when it came time to define and describe the community-level body that would promote demand: dissatisfaction with the prevailing parents' associations; a well-established reflex in Bambara culture to organise task-oriented working groups, already recognised by the NGO as a strong base in its health programming; and certain ideas about education arising from the American and British origins of the NGO's international staff. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

First, the *Associations des Parents d'Elèves (APEs)* were, under the Traoré régime (1968-91), at best elitist and at worst corrupt. They were elitist because by definition they limited their efforts to the small minority of children who were already in school, and saw little role for themselves in promoting demand. In fact, it is arguable that the APEs would see the introduction of many new pupils to the schooling system as counter to the interests of their children already in the system in terms of pupil/teacher ratios, available spending per child, and so on. In not a few cases, APE officials associated with the Traoré régime also used their positions to enrich themselves with parental contributions meant to be used for school construction (Gérard, 1997). The NGO was looking for an alternative organisation that would promote schooling widely, and be viewed by families as credible and effective.

Secondly, the NGO considered that the Bambara habit of organising of task-oriented work groups, called *tòn*[4], could be put at the service of the expansion of the schooling system. The literature on *tòns* will be reviewed in the next chapter; here it suffices to say that they are traditional groups, originally organised for collective farming, which in the modern era have been oriented to a variety of economic and social tasks. The *tòn* was a form well understood at the community level, easily organised, and with standing and credibility within the village. *Tòns* also had physical and social access to the family level at which schooling decisions are made.

The NGO had already had considerable experience with the constitution and support of "health *tòns*" in the context of its child survival programming. A health *tòn* comprising six or eight members was charged with three main activities: passing health messages (for example the importance of breastfeeding or growth monitoring) at village gatherings, market days, and in home visits; tracking village children's immunisation history and following up cases of non-immunised children; and organising health-related activities (for example, malaria preventing activities such as cutting standing grass within a village and filling in ditches that accumulated the standing water in which mosquitoes breed). Membership in the health *tòns* was partly according to recognised health knowledge and skill (for example, the traditional birth attendant or the government-trained *matrone*), partly according to effectiveness in communicating and credibility with peers.   The health project's scope was ambitious, covering all of the more than two hundred villages within Kolondièba District, so the NGO had experience at creating and supporting *tòns* on a wide

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[4] Plural *'tònw'* in Bambara, but for simplicity's sake I shall use *'tòns'* in this text.

scale, and already had a sense of which villages were 'easy to organise', and which were more problematic.

Finally, it must be said that there was a strong leaning among the international staff of the NGO in favour of decentralised school management. My own undergraduate studies of the history of education in the United States had left me with images of one-room schoolhouses and their rough-hewn citizen Boards, for example, those in David Tyack's *The One Best System* (1974), while other international NGO staff hailed from an similarly decentralised British tradition.   Having confident advocates of local governance in senior positions made it easier for the NGO to propose local self-management, to describe it in effective terms on the ground, and to justify it to the authorities.

What would the SMCs look like and do?

The name SMC was translated literally into French as *Comité de Gestion*, but the Bambara translation used was more syncretist: *lakoli-so-tòn*, or "school *tòn*," revealing a sort of double expectation that the SMCs would be simultaneously *committees* in a way recognisable to Western eyes, and *tòns* in the Bambara tradition. The NGO put more emphasis on the tasks it was promoting, which one could see as the exogenous element in the design, and less stress on the form that the SMC should take, how it should be put in place, or how its decisions should be taken or implemented, in effect leaving these to local custom and inclinations.[5]   It was hoped that in this way the SMCs would need less training and support in culturally foreign processes, and could focus more on schooling outcomes that the communities and the NGO both desired. Clearly, whatever the structure of the SMCs, they would need effective relationships and credibility with village elders, with parents and heads of extended families, and with the field staff of the NGO.

It was the NGO's intention that the SMCs act as a sort of village level organiser of primary enrolment, a kind of agent of Education for All and of the NGO within the community. The SMC would be a 'pole of conviction' about the importance of sending children to school, particularly when parents were confronted with choices and tradeoffs about how to best provide for their children's futures. There was a risk that this approach was 'putting the NGO's words into the SMC's mouths', but the general sense was that SMC members would support the Education for All message, and that the more pro-schooling members of the community would even gravitate towards membership on the SMC.

The SMC would have two broad areas of responsibility: tasks within school, and tasks outside it. Inside the school, the NGO would in fact play a larger role than the SMC, because it wasn't feasible for the SMC to train teachers or provide pedagogical supervision. The SMC's role in pedagogical issues was more advisory, expressing curricular preferences and suggestions, and supporting the efforts of teachers. The SMC did propose teacher candidates whom it then reviewed with the NGO for a final selection, and it paid them and had the right to replace them.

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5 It should be noted that other NGOs working in Mali at the same time in similar projects often did seek to structure these questions of form and decision-making in the name of democracy and civil society (for example in insisting on membership elections, specified terms of office, and spelled-out procedure) (see, for example, (World Education and ONG Nationales Partenaires, 1995).

Outside the school the SMC was to have a more active role. It would seek both to organise the community around schooling (coordinating an equitable enrolment, collecting the funds to pay the teachers' wages, and monitoring pupil attendance), and to change families' attitudes and community norms about school attendance. It was fairly simple to design the organisational work around schooling: defining a community awareness campaign; suggesting a 'recruitment' process that seemed both to respect local channels of authority, and to guarantee an equitable selection of pupils; setting up a process for monitoring pupil attendance, and so on.

While it was designing the organising work of the SMC, the NGO was also looking at the wider model that was emerging. The NGO calculated that the average village in Kolondièba District had a population of about 600 persons, and that if children of primary school age made up about 20% of that population, then the resulting school age population would be 120 children. These children could all have the opportunity to go to school if this 'average' community constructed two classrooms and used them both for two shifts, and the pupil/teacher ratio would be a respectable 30:1. When this calculation was done, a new thought dawned on the NGO staff: the community schools model could not only provide a school for every village, but it might provide an opportunity for schooling for *every child*. This realisation, and the exciting goal that it represented, raised the NGO staff's enthusiasm to an even higher degree.

While the organising work of the SMCs was fairly clear, the NGO's thinking about the SMC's norm-changing responsibilities was optimistic but rather vague. For example, in the area of dropout, the NGO staff reasoned that the involvement of the community meant that dropout rates would be low, since a heretofore inexistent combination of peer pressure and 'keeping up appearances' around schooling, emphasised and channelled through the work of the SMC, would press parents to keep their children in school. The awareness raising work of the SMC would also stress that dropout was a loss to the child, to the family, and to the community, and that it should thus be strictly avoided. Eventually, it would become the normal expectation that children should go to school, and the need for active work by the SMC in this regard would decline. The NGO speculated that the SMC would be able to determine in advance why children would drop out from school, detect in advance which children were likely to do so, and intervene either before the dropout, or perhaps afterward, bringing the dropped out child back into school. As we shall see, much of this thinking on SMCs and dropout, though plausible, has not been borne out by experience.

Once the NGO had developed these ideas and discussed and adjusted them with the initial communities, it then asked those communities to designate SMCs. The NGO gave an orientation to each SMC, and discussed the organising tasks in detail with them. Thereafter the NGO field staffers came through each community fairly frequently, with an average of one visit every two weeks initially. During these visits the field staff would work with both the teacher and the SMC.

1.2 The expansion of the community schools

The system described above was piloted in four schools during the 1992-93 school year, relying more on staff and community energy than on the relatively modest amount of its own funding that the NGO had available to invest in it. SC let it be known that it would

only consider supporting the establishment of schools on the basis of a request from the community; the next year, fifty of the two hundred villages of Kolondièba District had made inquiries about establishing schools (Save the Children/US - Mali, 1993).

The endeavour rapidly drew the attention of neighbouring communities, of funders, and of the Ministry of Education. A visit by the Minister of Education in May 1994 led to a discussion of extending the cycle of the community schools to six years, effectively making them equivalent to government primary schools, rather than BRAC-like feeder schools. As this idea made the schools more 'recognised' by the State, it was welcomed by the NGO, the communities, and most Ministry officials.

In the second year of its project's existence, the NGO secured USAID funding for the community schools, which allowed the system to expand beyond the innovation stage. As one of USAID's education specialists wrote of the community schools experience in 1995:

> While the conventional wisdom in Mali had long been that demand for primary education was low, the success of the village schools indicates that the supply and demand dynamic was grossly misunderstood. Interviews with village families and school committees indicated that demand for education was high provided that:
>
> Children are able to attend school in their own village;
>
> The education is perceived as relevant to village needs;
>
> Parents feel they have a say in how the school is organised and run.
>
> Beyond reversing the conventional thinking regarding demand for education in rural areas, the village schools in Kolondièba have changed the basic paradigm under which primary education is provided in Mali. At the heart of that change is the relationship between the school and the community. In the past, education was seen as the responsibility of the state and the school as something foreign to the village. The village school, on the other hand, belongs to the local community, and is organized, funded, run, and supported by the local community. It is also something about which the community is exceedingly proud.
>
> (DeStefano, 1995: 5)

The number of schools grew quickly over the next six years, as indicated in the table below:

Table 1: Number of community schools by year of establishment

Year	Schools	Year	Schools
1992-93	4	1996-97	390
1993-94	22	1997-98	655
1994-95	60	1998-99	777
1995-96	179		

(Source: Laugharn, et al., 1999: 6)

It should be noted that in 1990, there were only about 2000 primary schools in all of Mali, so the addition represented by the community schools project is great. In the period 1992-99, annual rate of establishment of these community schools has been approximately *thirty*

times as great as that of government schools since Malian independence. Since 1994, Save the Children has been working with Malian NGO partners to expand the community schools initiative beyond Kolondièba District; in 1999, SC worked with sixteen Malian NGOs covering almost 800 communities in all seven districts of Mali's southern region. In that region, there are now about twice as many community schools as government schools.

Furthermore, the community schools have a degree of gender equity in enrolments rarely matched in rural West Africa. In 1998-99, the community schools throughout Mali's southern region had 21,785 girls and 24,220 boys (grades one through six), giving a girl to boy ratio of 90:100. (Laugharn et al., 1999: 11). By contrast, the ratio among the 147,000 first through sixth grade pupils in the conventional government schools in Mali's southern region in 1997-98 was 61 girls to 100 boys (Mali - MEB, 1998: 18-21).

In 1997-98, there were 131 community and 29 government schools in Kolondièba District. Three out of four villages within the District thus have a school of one kind or the other, indicating that the community schools project has made a very strong contribution toward achieving the goal of a school in every community.

1.3 Research questions

Against this background the study asked two sets of questions, one about enrolment and the other about dropout:

Enrolment:
- What were the enrolment rates in the community school villages, and how did these compare with project projections?

- What are the correlates of enrolment in the community schools?

- What is the evidence of 'family strategies' regarding enrolment? How are such strategies influenced by the presence and activity of the SMC?

- How was gender equity in enrolments achieved and maintained? How much of the gender equity is due to changes in norms, and how much to the process set up by the NGO and the SMCs?

Dropout:
- What was the rate of dropout from the community schools?

- What were the causes of dropout from the community schools?

- What is the evidence of 'family strategies' around persistence and dropout?

- How effective were the SMCs in reducing dropout and promoting persistence? Were they able to intervene in the process?

2. Literature Review

2.1 What EFA documents say about demand for schooling

As mentioned in Chapter One, the 'spirit of Jomtien' had an important impact both on Malian education policy debates and on the approaches of the NGO on the ground. The existence of an Education for All movement inspired the development of the community schools project and greatly facilitated the mostly favourable national-level policy response to the community schools. But a review of the basic documents of the Jomtien and Dakar conferences shows that they provide relatively little guidance on the greatest challenge that the community schools project faced in Kolondièba, promoting sustained household demand for schooling.

The basic documents emerging from the Jomtien conference were the World Declaration on Education for All (1990c) and its accompanying Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs (1990a). Both of these documents were focused on 'priority action' at the national level or international level, and were thus fairly top-down. As far as demand for education was concerned, the emphasis was on national and local level plans which might specify the "means to promote the demand for, and broad-scale participation in, basic education" and the "modalities to mobilize family and local community support" (World Conference on Education for All, 1990a: 6). Parents are seen less as rational decision-makers central to the expansion of educational access, than as one category of many which could potentially support the schooling system. The signal between national plans and families was seen to pass through two related channels: mobilisation and expanded partnership.

2.1.1 Mobilisation

In the context of Jomtien, mobilisation has been defined by UNICEF as:

> Active involvement of all relevant sectors of society in promoting and supporting education. Mobilisation is thus broad rather than focused. It also implies a sort of imperative or emergency situation ... The martial overtone of the term social mobilization is not accidental. It reflects a sense of urgency about overcoming a common problem (UNICEF, 1993: 3).

There is an inherent dilemma and contradiction for the organisation which feels a 'sense of urgency' that its social agenda be advanced, and yet also wishes to respect individuals as rational and well-meaning decision-makers who might still decide against that social agenda. It is not clear how the strategists of Jomtien meant this contradiction to be resolved, but it was to become a clear preoccupation in the community schools project in Kolondièba.

2.1.2 Expanded partnership

Both of the original Jomtien documents also spoke frequently of 'expanded partnerships' around schooling, as it was quite clear that Ministries of Education could not shoulder the intended expansion alone. Article 7 of the Declaration mentions partnerships first with other ministries, and then 'between government and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local communities, religious groups, and families.'

Though 'parents' and 'families' are cited, almost ritually, at several points as participants in this expanded partnership, there is no detail or explanation of the role envisioned for them. In general, there seems to have been a lack of curiosity about parents and schooling at Jomtien. There was no specific roundtable held or paper presented at Jomtien on parents as such. There appears to have been no clear recognition of the gendered roles and interests of parents (the words 'father' and 'mother' appear in neither the Declaration nor the Framework), nor of the complexity of the family as a decision-making environment. There was also no specific mention or explicit discussion of parents associations as stakeholders, although there were occasional allusions to parents associations as aspects of NGO projects (e.g. BRAC's).

Thus, the NGO drew much of its energy for the community schools project from the 'Jomtien spirit', but actually found little real guidance in Jomtien documents for the crafting and carrying out of a project designed to work through community associations to remove the local obstacles to schooling. There was an on-going tension between the NGO's commitment to the outcomes of Jomtien, and its commitment to being responsive to community priorities.

2.2 Literature on enrolment

2.2.1 Correlates of enrolment

Table 2 below summarises research on 'determinants' of schooling. Such research typically looks at several levels: characteristics of the child him or herself, characteristics of the household or the parents, and characteristics of the school. These analyses permit examination of the relative strength of different factors, and to speculate on the results of efforts to promote changes in various factors.

Table 2: Correlation of enrolment with child, household, parental, and school characteristics

Child characteristics

Characteristic	Hypothesis	References
Gender	A girl would be less likely to be enrolled than a boy Being a girl is in rural West Africa negatively correlated with enrolment, for many reasons, including greater perceived need for girls' labour within the household (gendered division of labour giving higher opportunity costs for girls' schooling), the expectation that boys (and not girls) will support parents, and thus the channeling household investment toward boys; the greater expectation that boys will need 'school knowledge.' But the emphasis on gender parity within the community schools may have overcome these obstacles to girls' enrolment.	References: CERID, 1984; Ilon and Moock, 1991; Morocco - MEN, 1993; Colclough et al., 1998; Herz et al., 1992; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995.
Birth order	A first-born child would be less likely to be enrolled than later children. Older children (especially girls) are likely to be needed by their households to look after younger ones.	CERID, 1984.

Household social characteristics

Characteristic	Hypothesis	References
Ethnic identity	A child from a minority ethnic group would be less likely to be enrolled Belonging to a minority group may imply linguistic or other cultural disadvantage, and therefore lower community or household interest in schooling, or worse schooling outcomes	CERID, 1984 ; Tembon & Al-Samarrai, 1999; Tembon & Diallo, 1997.
Religious identity	A child from a Muslim household would be less likely to be enrolled than a child from a Christian household In West African nations with significant Christian and Muslim communities, Islamic communities and households tend to be less integrated into the project of formal primary schooling than Christian communities and households	Colclough, 1994; Blakemore, 1975; Kobiané, 1999; Al-Samarrai and Peasgood, 1997.

Household economic and demographic characteristics

Characteristic	Hypothesis	References
Livelihood	A child whose household's livelihood is farming would be more likely to be enrolled than a child from a herding family Sedentary agricultural households find it easier to integrate schooling into their lives than do pastoralist householdsa	Chernichovsky, 1985; Bonini, 1998; CERID, 1984; Morocco MEN, 1983.
Household wealth	A child whose household is relatively better off in local terms would be more likely to be enrolled than a poorer child Wealthier households tend to be better able to choose schooling over child labour, unless the generation or maintenance of their wealth depends on child labour	All the cited studies find a general positive correlation between household wealth and enrolment, indicating that one of the main obstacles to schooling is poverty.
Dependency ratio	A child whose household includes more very young children and elderly people would be less like to be enrolled than a child in a household with fewer of these. Many young children or elderly increase household need for older children's (especially girls') labour; existence of women who are not mothers in household may ease this burden	Marcoux, 1994; Morocco study, 1993.

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Parental education

Characteristic	Hypothesis	References
Parental educational history	A child whose parent or parents have attended school would be more likely to be enrolled than a child with unschooled parents Parental history of schooling is highly correlated with enrolment, either because such a learning system is intrinsically valued as a norm, or in an attempt to 'pass on' or increase a socioeconomic advantage	All of the studies hold the educational history of the parents to be of great importance to the enrolment chances of the child. Chernichovsky called the education level of the head of the household the most important variable, and the IDS studies in general emphasise this characteristic. See further discussion below
Parental literacy training	A child whose parent or parents have sought literacy skills as adults would be more likely to be enrolled than a child whose parent(s) had not sought literacy Parental efforts to acquire literacy as adults indicate an 'education-seeking' behaviour are logically well-correlated with seeking enrolment for their children.	Tembon & Al-Samarrai, 1999; Tembon & Diallo, 1997.

School–related characteristics

Characteristic	Hypothesis	References
Direct costs /	Direct costs of schooling should be negatively correlated with enrolment, particularly for girls.	Ilon and Moock, 1991
Distance from home to school	Distance to school should be negatively correlated with enrolment, particularly for girls.	All the studies cited in Figure 1 found that distance to school was negatively correlated to enrolment.
School quality	*Parental perception of school quality is not likely to play a major role in enrolment,* as it would be an issue when parents have choices between different sources, or when level of quality is perceived to be so low that they decide to opt out.	The Morocco and Nepal studies found that school quality was correlated with enrolment.

2.2.2 Gender and enrolment

> 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 *(World Conference on Education for All, 1990c).*

Given the strong emphasis in the Education for All movement on reducing gender disparities in education, and the attention paid to gender issues by the Kolondièba project, it is worth examining the correlation of gender and enrolment in more depth.

Girls' education is held to be an important priority both for social and economic development and for reasons of equity. Particular emphasis has been put on Sub-Saharan Africa and on South Asia, the two regions with the greatest gender disparities.

Research and proposals for policy reform have been published by almost all of the multilateral and bilateral development agencies, as well as a large number of universities. Three examples of this literature analysing gender disparities and proposing solutions are described below. The first is a World Bank Discussion Paper entitled *Letting girls learn* (Herz et al., 1992), published just after Jomtien. Two others focus on Africa in particular: Odaga and Heneveld's *Girls and schools in sub-Saharan Africa: from analysis to action* (Odaga and Heneveld, 1995), also published by the World Bank, and Colclough et al.'s *Gender inequalities in primary schooling: the roles of poverty and adverse cultural practice* (Colclough et al., 1998). This latter work is part of a series of publications on gender and African primary schools by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex (Al-Samarrai and Peasgood, 1997; Colclough, 1994; Rose and Al-Samarrai, 1997; Tembon and Al-Samarrai, 1999; Tembon et al., 1997).

2.2.2.1 Analyses of gender disparity

The framework used by Herz et al (1992) was essentially economic: parents make explicit decisions about schooling by weighing the perceived direct and opportunity costs to schooling against the likely benefits. The perceived benefits for boys and their families are higher, since boys are judged more likely to obtain salaried work and are customarily more responsible for taking care of their parents in their old age. The opportunity costs for sending boys to school are also often lower than those for girls, since the latter typically have more chores to do at home. Thus poorer parents will usually opt for sending boys but not girls to school. Certain supply-side constraints also influence their decision, notably the distance to the nearest school, and questions of school quality and appropriateness for girls.

The evidence presented by Herz et al (1992) on the importance of correlation of direct and opportunity costs with non-enrolment is strong, and certainly indicates that these factors influence parental decision-making. But the description of the parental decision-making process itself is very thin: for example, it is not clear whether it is a single decision or a series of decisions, nor whether the decision not to enroll is made with some deliberation or is a more passive 'non-action'.

The two Africa-focused studies tend to place a larger emphasis on culture than Herz et al (1992) for explaining constraints to girls' schooling. Odaga and Heneveld (1995) identify six main obstacles to girls' enrolment and attainment:

- Poor returns to female education in labour market;
- Persistent apprehension and ambivalence on the part of parents, child, teachers, and society at large regarding female education, its cost-effectiveness, and the value of keeping girls in school;
- The poor quality of the teaching and learning environment;
- Sexual harassment and liaison and 'small girl' pregnancy;
- High levels of wastage because of repeaters and dropouts which discourages parents, students, and teachers;
- The low levels of girls' self-esteem.

(Odaga and Heneveld, 1995: 74-75).

The idea of 'ambivalence' above is important, as it captures the feeling, also present in Kolondièba, that girls' schooling offers opportunities but also presents risks and costs. This ambivalence is likely to make the schooling decision, whether positive or negative, an unsteady one, and measures which can allay parental apprehensions and resolve the ambivalence are likely to play a crucial role.

The IDS studies go the furthest in discussing the interaction of poverty and culture in schooling decisions. IDS' Christopher Colclough and Keith Lewin of the University of Sussex had made an important contribution to the adaptation of the Jomtien Declaration to African financial realities in their *Educating all the children* (Colclough & Lewin, 1993), which outlined practical and feasible ways for approaching 'schooling for all' in very resource-poor environments. But later in the decade, Colclough and his colleagues focused increasingly on the cultural obstacles to girls' schooling, concerned that economic growth alone would not necessarily lead to better access to education for girls, because of what they termed 'adverse cultural practices' (Colcough et al, 1998). The strongest of these 'adverse practices,' they hold, in terms of keeping girls out of school is the gendered division of labour. Others operate specifically at the level of the household (parental ideas of what girls should learn, parental ignorance of the value of schooling, parental judgments that boys are more intelligent than girls), the society (early marriage and initiation), the school (gendered expectations of pupils' success and appropriate behaviour), and the labour market (lack of opportunity for female employment, especially in rural areas, lack of role models, and differentiated salaries).

2.2.2.2 Solutions proposed: policy reforms

All three studies point to policy changes as the means of improving gender equity. Herz et al (1992) propose four major actions: putting schools within reach of children, improving the quality of schooling, building parental motivation and cutting costs to families, and reducing opportunity costs. On the demand side, the discussion of parental motivation is again rather thin, with a suggestion of occasional awareness campaigns and passing mentions of offering literacy classes for parents and considering legislation making schooling compulsory (though it is noted that such legislation is unlikely to make a difference without a concurrent increase in supply). In terms of the reduction of opportunity costs, mention is made of making the annual and daily school calendar better correspond with girls' tasks, providing child care or permitting children to bring younger siblings to school, and the introduction of labour-saving devices to decrease the amount of time girls and their mothers had to devote to household chores such as pounding grain.

Noting the gap between, 'increasingly rich and detailed analyses of the problems of female education in the region and the dearth of actions to address them' Odaga and Heneveld (1995: ix) concentrate less on prescribing any given set of actions, and more on providing a framework for analysis. They suggest that analysis should start with identifying priority problems, usually through analysis of gender disparities in standard indicators of enrolment, persistence, and achievement; a companion volume comparing girls' and boys' educational indicators throughout Africa (Hartnett and Heneveld, 1993) is a useful starting point. The authors then suggest that the causes of the problem be widely and thoroughly discussed, and include a useful set of questions for assessment of gender and schooling

issues at the household, school, and policy levels. This analysis then leads to an action plan.

The Colclough et al study concludes almost militantly that:

> Adverse cultural practice, in the domains of society, the labour market, the school, and the household, runs deep. Its removal—which is necessary if gender equity in schooling is to be achieved—will require specific policy interventions, rather than merely waiting for the long sweep of history to do its work. *(Colclough et al., 1998: 26).*

While the study itself is less explicit about the nature of the policy interventions, some are mentioned in a newsletter prepared for the IDS website, (Mlama and Colclough, 1999) including a more flexible school calendar, lowering pupils' age at enrolment, and increasing girls' age at marriage.

Some of these suggestions, notably the question of the age of marriage, would seem difficult to address efficiently through policy intervention. Indeed, they raise the question of why these three studies all emphasise the importance of parental and household-level decision-making, and then fall back on policy as the means to improve the situation. While policy would seem to be the most direct means to deal with the supply of schooling, why should one look to policy makers to craft demand and guide parental decision-making? Herz et al (1992) advance one argument, saying that if governments want to promote gender parity in enrolments in part for their own development agendas, and if they are then asking parents to go against what would seem to be household self-interest, then it is natural that governments design policies which provide incentives for such parental behaviour. But more fundamentally, it would seem that these studies focus on policy as a solution because they are written with policy makers as an audience. The World Bank, for example, sees national governments as its interlocutors, rather than parents or civil society, and thus focuses on policy formulation. Policy-oriented authors may not be conversant with, or even aware of, the grassroots mechanisms such as the *tòn* which may have a more proximate influence on parental behaviour than does government policy.

The literature is clear about the importance of the parental decision to enroll, but in fact most parents never hear anything about educational policy, and its impact on their behaviour is likely to be minimal, especially in states like Mali where the government may not have the resources to implement its policies, nor to support them in the face of popular skepticism. On the other hand, rural Mali still has great reserves of social solidarity and an associative tendency expressed through the *tòn*; would it not be better to work through those networks, in the context of a supportive policy, than through policy alone? Likewise, although none of these three works assigns a large role to NGOs or to parents' associations, these groups are likely to have a useful role to play in promoting girls' access.

Finally, a word should be said about the attitude regarding culture within EFA debates. Colclough et al (1998) have opened a new and very useful debate about the role of culture, and has performed a service by tackling this question directly, while many quantitative researchers strove to limit themselves to the conventional objectively verifiable, cross-national variables. But these authors can also go too far in their zeal to promote equitable access to schooling for girls, to the point where they address culture merely as a thorny constraint to schooling, rather than the context in which parents make their decisions. The study discussed above, for example, speaks of, 'aspects of cultural practice which conspire

systematically' to reinforce gender inequities (Colclough et al., 1998: 21), a description which would seem both inaccurate and biased. The term 'adverse' is itself loaded, implying that a decision which is not 'pro-schooling' is necessarily 'anti-daughter.' This is a risky assumption, as will be seen through the case study accounts below. Similarly, David Stephens entitles an otherwise insightful article (Stephens, 1999) on the girls' dropout in Ghana 'the culture trap', giving the impression that culture is 'wrong' because it poses an obstacle to schooling. If we want to dialogue seriously with parents about their decisions, we have to take their culture and their reasoning seriously, and we should not assume that we know better than they what is good for their children. This does not mean withholding all judgment, but it does mean striving to see things more clearly from others' perspectives.

2.2.3 Local perspectives on schooling: cultural practice and family strategies

Beyond looking at the patterns of access in the community school villages, the second aspect of the research question on enrolment has to do with the perspectives of the people who established the community schools: the School Management Committees and the parents of the pupils. How did the SMCs go about their work? How did the parents react to the advent of the schools, and to the requirement of gender parity? For insight into how to approach these questions, qualitative research is more useful to consult than quantitative.

While the studies of correlates above find that household schooling behaviour is determined or at least strongly influenced by particular characteristics, another viewpoint, that of 'family strategies', has been articulated during the 1990's by a number of anthropologists and sociologists, notably Holger Daun, Etienne Gérard, Marie-France Lange, and Nathalie Bonini. Daun, Gérard, and Lange focus on francophone Africa, where they consider the world's coolest response to universal primary education; Bonini examines the case of the Maasai in Kenya, whose situation is largely similar. Like the determinants theorists, the thinking of these researchers has been shaped by the perception of declining demand.

They differ from determinants research, however, in that they take the viewpoint that *not* participating in schooling is a legitimate option. While the determinants studies consider the absence of schooling a deficiency, the family strategy theorists consider it a choice. Their writing is provocative, complex, and difficult to reconcile with conventional education policy assumptions and measures.

In these writings, as in those of Colclough et al (1998), culture is considered important. But these 'family strategists' differ from Colclough in seeing culture not as a sort of static that gets in the way of schooling, a lack of modernity, but rather a fundamental factor in its own right. Indeed, strategies are commonly seen as choices made to preserve cultural features, at the level of lineage, clan, or ethnic group, even if such strategies should conflict with the expansion of schooling.

Conversely, the 'cult of the school' is highly problematised in these writings. In determinants analyses, there may be problems with schools, shortages or low standards, but if there is a poor fit between school and culture, it is culture and not the school that is described as 'adverse'. In the family strategies writing, the reverse is true: the school is

something which households and communities 'take or leave' according to its fit with their needs. In Gérard (1997), the most outspoken of the group, the school is even seen as a destabilising foreign body that poses attractions and dangers of which rural communities are well aware.

Since this writing is mostly about understanding phenomena, and only secondarily about correcting deficiencies, the family strategists often put less energy into proposing reforms that do the authors of the determinants literature. This represents a strong departure from earlier francophone critics of Western schooling in the Sahel, such as Guy Belloncle, whose writings went into great detail about reforms that would integrate schools better into communities (Belloncle, 1979; Belloncle, 1984). Put another way, Lange writes about *déscolarisation,* the Togolese population's growing disenchantment with sending their children to school (Lange, 1993), but not about '*de-schooling',* a re-envisioning of learning and schooling which would revitalise this situation. Daun (1992), for his part, seems not to encourage reforms making the Western school more 'relevant', since in his view this deprives households of a strategic choice of a schooling that looks outward. Daun (1992), Bonini (1995a; 1998), and Gérard (1997) depict similar but distinct relationships between households and schools, each described below.

Daun, in his 1992 *Childhood learning and adult life,* looks at the varieties of 'learning systems' available in two villages in different cultural and economic zones in Senegal. The quite distinct patterns he finds in the two sites (broadly, highly Islamicised on the one hand and having more traditional indigenous systems on the other) remind one to hesitate before making generalisations even about one country.

Daun (1992) holds that in matters of schooling behaviour, parents are essentially 'risk spreaders' likely to orient their children to a variety of the available learning systems (in Senegal, these were Western, indigenous, Koranic, and Arabic) so as to maximise their opportunity to benefit. The parents' education strategy for their children was a subset of their 'strategy for survival.' Daun (1992) finds that parents balance 'cultural gains and losses' against 'material investments and benefits.'

In such a context, it is unlikely that parents will send all of their children to one type of school, thus implying a sort of invisible ceiling on enrolments in the Western schools included in the EFA strategy. It is also possible that *not* sending any children to a Western school could be a rational and deliberate choice on the part of parents, especially given that Western schooling is more time and money-intensive than its alternatives.

Bonini (1995a; 1998), looking at pastoralist Maasai communities in Kenya, also notes that families stress the importance of preserving their way of life, even if this conflicts with the schooling agenda. Parents tend to be passively tolerant of schooling, as long as it doesn't interfere with their herding-based lifestyle. In practice this means that about a third of boys and girls in the communities studied attend primary school, but that post-primary schooling is strongly resisted for girls in that it conflicts with traditional marriage patterns. Bonini sums up parental attitudes regarding girls' schooling in the phrase 'a brief encounter of no great consequence'.

Bonini (1995a; 1998) also asks whether it is legitimate to speak of 'strategies' when parental options are so limited, and whether it would not indeed be better to speak of 'choices' made, mostly in relation to perceptions and expectations regarding school.

Gérard's (1997) research, described in his work La tentation du savoir en Afrique, was carried on in a district of Mali about 100km from Kolondièba, about a decade before this research was undertaken. His view is essentially one of struggle between the state and traditional society. Whatever might be its advantages and utility in urban areas, the school in rural areas is for Gérard a 'destructuring' body, whose expansion is correlated with social fragmentation and the weakening of traditional communities. Unlike Daun (1992), Gérard (1997) feels that indigenous education has largely ceded its place to Islamic and Western forms of learning. Gérard (1997) is more concerned with local knowledge and its transmission between adults, which he describes as traditionally 'unveiled little by little, half aloud, and secretly.' Today, however, he finds that local knowledge is being replaced by a Western knowledge 'open and without age' but taught in codes that are inaccessible to most villagers. Gérard holds that the role of the School (capital 'S' representing its intimate linkage with the State), is to permit 'society to reproduce itself and to evolve at the same time,' but that this role is not being honoured in present-day Mali.

Gérard (1997), like Daun (1992), sees Islamic education, Koranic schools and more-developed *médersas*, as an important counterweight to Western schooling. Indeed Gérard (1997) holds that the main strategy of Malian communities has been to adopt Islamic education as a way to escape the cultural onslaught of Western schooling. Gérard (1997) refers frequently to the Malinké habit of equating ignorance and darkness, or *dibi*. In contemporary discourse, illiteracy and lack of Western knowledge are referred to as *dibi*, and illiterates often refer to themselves as *kunnafinw*, or 'heads in blackness' (Turrittin, 1989). Gérard depicts the written word and more complex codes such as modern law and bureaucracy as inaccessible to most Malians, beyond the 'darkness' of illiteracy. On the surface, this is extraordinarily disempowering and self-deprecating imagery, but it also seems to be self-protective, a code used by the villager meant to appease those who 'know paper.'

Similarly, Gérard (1997) holds that parents often enroll their children in Western school as a form of appeasement of the authorities, rather than seeking particular advantage in it. Schooling is self-protective: a few literate members of the community can be called upon by the rest to protect them from the depredations of the State and other literates from outside the community. But to enroll more than a few of the children in school would be disruptive to socialisation and the reproduction of the culture. Rather than moving us toward Education for All, Gérard (1997) is painting a picture of a society where Education for As Few As Possible is a more interesting strategy. It is for this reason that a large proportion (35% in Gérard, 1997) of the children who attend rural primary schools actually had to be formally summoned by the government, and would not otherwise have gone to school. Several other sources have also documented this strong habit of 'summoning' pupils to school (Mali - MEN and Coulibaly, 1989; Trefault, 1999; Wynd, 1995).

In Daun (1992), then, we have an image of parents as *risk spreaders*, orienting children to various learning systems; enrolment in Western schooling is one of several paths they put their children on. In Bonini (1995a; 1998), parents are *tolerant* of the schooling system until it comes in conflict with their own priorities; they are as likely (or better, as unlikely) to enroll girls as boys in primary school, but they do not support continued enrolment beyond puberty. In Gérard (1997), they are *mistrustful* of the schooling system, seeking to draw advantage from it at the same time that they protect themselves from its risks;

enrolment in Western schools is a form of insurance for the household and the community, which is kept to a strict minimum.

2.2.3.1 Comparing determinants and family strategies

The 'determinants' and 'family strategies' schools of thought each have their strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, analyses of determinants have yielded correlations which are consistently strong and thus of use for comparing and contrasting situations. The determinants analyses provide a useful framework for worldwide comparisons and learning, which is vital for a movement such as Education for All. They also underscore the fact that certain phenomena are so widespread as to be called systemic (such as gender discrimination), requiring a broad and systemic effort for improvement. Finally, the determinants analyses provide a means for evaluating the relative strength of various factors; such an assessment often does not emerge clearly from qualitative analysis.

On the other hand, there are serious limitations to determinants analyses. The term itself is an exaggeration, because none of these factors can be said to be strong enough to determine a given child's enrolment. Being highly abstracted, they may not capture reality adequately, especially since they tend to focus only on the quantifiable, excluding intangibles such as culture. At the policy level, only a few of the characteristics themselves are changeable (e.g. distance and literacy), and changing them requires either great expense and long-term effort (increasing the supply of schools) or a great deal of integration with other activities (adult literacy or increasing household income), or both. Some of the strongest correlates are permanent characteristics (e.g. sex and ethnic identity), and thus require attitudinal and social change that are usually beyond the range, or indeed the ambitions, of policy. One further effect of the bias toward the measurable is that usually this means that determinants analyses do not study attitudes; this is important for NGOs because often the most profound impact of NGOs is in social organisation and attitude/behaviour change, not in economic change. Finally, determinants analyses can help explain the state of being enrolled or not, but do not shed much light shed on decision-making processes.

The family strategies school, for its part, has real strengths in that they give a much more detailed and dense account of behaviour, and the likely reasons for it. To a much greater extent than the determinants analyses, they derive their categories and terms from local context. They recognise households and the individuals within them as actors, and they can cover much ground of interest to NGOs, including decision-making processes, attitudes, and social organisation.

On the other hand, the emphasis on strategy may exaggerate the frequency and degree of purposive behaviour. They can also, just like the determinants analyses, oversimplify models to make a point; for example, in Gérard (1997), the space between the village and the State is empty, when in practice this space is inhabited by parent teacher associations (PTAs), NGOs, and others. And the very richness of the description can be a handicap for an NGO or government official looking for guidance on how to proceed: these studies can be so dense, multi-leveled, and many-voiced that they do not lend themselves easily to eventual plans of action.

2.3 Literature on dropout and persistence

The second research question asked why, in a system of community-managed schools where it was assumed that dropout rates would be low, they have in fact been high. This section of the literature review explores relevant research on dropout.

In a general sense, there seems to be less written about dropout than about enrolment, both at the macro and the micro levels. Brimer (1971) lamented that much more attention is devoted to getting children into school than to making sure that they stay there; this has remained true in the decade of Jomtien and Dakar.

2.3.1 Policy literature on dropout

Further, within the study of dropout, most of the discussion has been about describing the effects on the wider system, inefficiency and pupil flows, rather than on the process and decision-making leading up to leaving school. While the question of 'who gets into school?' seems to have been analysed most often by economists, the question of 'who stays in school?' has more often been dealt with by educational planners. The tone is often a mixture of the impersonal and technocratic (frequent use of charts of pupil flows and production-line terms such as 'input-output' ratios, referring to pupils) and the moralistic (labelling dropout as 'unacceptable sacrifice' of individual promise and society's future). Here the educational planner is in the odd position of trying to accurately record a 'loss' that policy makers would prefer not to acknowledge at all. For if the expansion of universal primary education is a vast 'signal of modernity', then large-scale dropout can be seen as static on the line, or even the threat of short circuit.

In the literature, the words 'persistence,' 'survival', and 'retention' tend to be used interchangeably, though of course they have different connotations, implying pupil effort, pupil hardiness, and system efficiency respectively. In Mali, the word *retention* is the most common. In this thesis, the word 'persistence' will be used, as the focus is on the child's and the household's decision-making around schooling.

For leaving school, 'dropout' is used in English-language literature to describe both the individual's leaving school and the broader system-level phenomenon of pupil loss. 'Wastage' (frankly a rather dehumanising term) is used only at the system level. In Mali the most common French term for a child's leaving school is '*abandon'*, with a clear connotation of desisting on the child's part; the term '*renvoi'* is also used, when the system (usually a teacher or headmaster) determines that the child should not continue. In this thesis, the word 'dropout' will be used initially, but more specific and descriptive terms will be sought during the research.

UNESCO in the 1970s and 1980s produced a large number of books and reports on 'wastage' (Berstecher, 1970; Brimer and Pauli, 1971; UNESCO, 1972; UNESCO, 1980; UNESCO, 1984). The focus of these works was mostly on charting the loss to the school system, and only secondarily on the reasons for the dropout that are the subject of this literature review. When the causes were listed, they tend to be more focused on the workings of the school system and not on understanding the community or family context of the pupil. For example, Brimer (1971) noted three broad categories of factors contributing to 'wastage': home and community, school system, and personality of the child. But almost all of the thirty recommendations from that conference deal with the

school system and not the home, the community, or the child. These studies showed relatively little curiosity about the social reasons behind dropout, rarely admitted that there could be legitimate reasons for leaving school, or that other alternatives could be more compelling or remunerative.

A more recent work by UNESCO is Michael Lakin's *Wasted Opportunities: When Schools Fail* (1998), which notes that 'finding ways to minimize 'school wastage' must play a central role in any serious effort to reach the goal of education for all.' The book devotes more time to describing the scale and cost of dropout and repetition than in systematically identifying their causes. While *Wasted Opportunities*, like its predecessors, deplores dropout in terms of both inefficiency at the system level, and ethics and equity at the individual level (speaking of the 'terrible personal toll' of dropout), its text is almost entirely devoted to the question of efficiency, and affords relatively little insight into the situations and decisions leading to dropout.

A useful point that emerges out of the educational planners' discussion of dropout is the significance of the point in the primary cycle at which it occurs. It is noted that dropout is often steep either at the beginning or towards the end of a cycle. High rates of dropout early in the cycle are likely to be related to pupils' never adjusting to the school, or to 'token' enrolments done by parents to appease officials and only lasting as long as minimally necessary. These rates may then level out, as the more 'school-worthy' children remain in class. Moreover, if there is a high-stakes end-of-cycle qualifying exam, the incentive to remain in school may increase over the length of the cycle, resulting in lower dropout. Fentiman et al (1999) in her study of rural Ghana and Rose's (1997) study on Ethiopia both report initially steep dropout curves that subsequently flatten out.

Other studies report a different pattern of dropout, which increases toward the end of the primary cycle rather than decreasing. Here it would seem that obstacles to persistence occur more frequently in the second half of the cycle, not because of adjustment to the school *per se*, but because of problems that occur later, either of academic nature (e.g. growing complexity of school subjects), or of a socioeconomic nature (e.g. dropout for marriage or work). This pattern is seen in the data presented by Tembon et al. (1997) about boys' enrolment in Guinea, with an average dropout rate of 1% in the first three years of primary school, and 5% in the last three years of primary school. Girls' dropout in that study tended to be higher throughout, at an average of 5% annually in the first three years, and 6% thereafter.

2.3.2 Determinants analysis and dropout

A number of the determinants studies covered in section 2.3.1 above also looked at persistence, while some other research has focused entirely on persistence.

Ilon and Moock (1991) in Peru, for example, found that the factors most commonly correlated with dropout were being the oldest child, being a farmworker, and higher fees and other costs. The factors they found correlated with persistence were high levels of household expenditure, mothers' schooling history, and the presence of a nearby secondary school. The study found similar patterns for boys and girls.

In Morocco – MEN (1993), most of the factors identified as being correlated with persistence had to do with the household. Girls' and boys' staying in school were

correlated with fathers' presence in the home, and for boys there was also a correlation with father's having finished primary school. Girls' role conflict between child care responsibilities and schooling is implied by the negative correlation between children under six in the home and girls' persistence on the one hand, and the positive correlation with other adult women in the household. The study also mentioned two school-related factors that promoted persistence: for boys, the presence of a canteen in the school, and for girls, the same awareness-raising campaign mentioned above.

The CERID study (1984) found that the majority of factors encouraging persistence are school-related, stating that 'the higher a child moves up the school grade ladder, the more regular he becomes in attending school.' The specific factors found to be the most important are the distance to the school, and the student-teacher ratio. In addition, it is concluded that improvement in physical and instructional facilities would have a positive effect on attendance.

While the determinants studies are probably useful in indicating which pupils might be 'at-risk' for dropping out, they shed fairly little light on decision-making around it, since they take dropout as a state and not a process.

Age at enrolment is a further factor associated with dropout. In general, studies find a correlation between older age at initial enrolment and higher rates of dropout, see, for example, Gorman and Pollitt in Guatemala (1992) and the Rose and Al-Samarrai in Ethiopia (1997). Fentiman et al. (1999) finds 60% of all primary pupils in her study in Ghana were enrolled later than the prescribed age of six years, and further that between a quarter and a third of the primary pupils in each area were older than the theoretical maximum of eleven years. As she points out, late enrolment is a problem because as a child grows older, the economic value of his or her time increases, often leading to dropout.

Bray notes in his study of dropout in Papua New Guinea (Bray and Boze, 1982) the varying points of view regarding age of entry into primary school. Statisticians and administrators would like a uniform and probably younger age. Those concerned with age-appropriate learning and mastering relevant skills would probably favour a later enrolment age. But higher age at entry can cause dropout when pupils are perceived to be sexually (or socially) too mature to be in school.

2.3.3 Theories on why dropout happens

There are a variety of underlying theories in the literature as to why dropout takes place. The first of these is that the schooling system itself seeks failures. This is a particularly common viewpoint in areas where selection mechanisms exert a strong force in controlling flows from one level of schooling to another, or in which certain minority groups have markedly higher levels of dropout than does the overall population of pupils. Anthropologist Henry Trueba claimed, for example, that the American secondary school system 'strains to produce failures' (Trueba et al., 1988). Literature on dropout in Latin America typically focuses on academic failure as well (see, for example, Anderson and Randall, 1999).

Another viewpoint is that dropout takes place because the schooling system is too dissonant with the home environment of the pupil. This interpretation is especially common in looking at dropout in the initial grades, when children are struggling to get used to school. Singh (1994), for example, in his study of a tribal area in India identified the 'polarity' or dissimilarity of the school and the children's homes as a main cause of dropout.

Both 'planned failure' and 'dissonance' could be plausibly advanced as causes of dropout from Mali's conventional government schools. In the former case, the selection system is rigorous, and pupils feeling that they will not succeed might withdraw themselves from school. The latter situation, of children being unable to adjust to an environment foreign in rules, language, and expectations, has often been described in Mali. However, the community schools of Kolondièba were designed specifically to avoid these problems, through automatic promotion and making the school resemble the home and community as much as possible, and hence that it would be somewhat surprising if such causes for dropout were to be found.

Yokozeki (1997), in her study of dropout from junior secondary school in Ghana, finds multiple causes for dropout, but also states that the predominant reason for girls' dropout was pregnancy, and for boys, seeking a livelihood. She finds transition to adult roles to be a strong motivator of dropout, more important than such other factors as in-school experience and family composition.

Daun (1992), Bonini (1995a;1998), and Gérard (1997) devote much less time to describing dropout than to enrolment in more general terms, but they do voice provocative opinions. They tend to see dropout as a parting of the ways between households and schooling, occurring when households arrive at the limits of their commitment to schooling. Daun (1992) sees dropout as a rational choice on the part of parents, writing:

> What is called dropout may be seen as either a permanent reaction to the Western system or a reaction provoked by perceived future prospects for those trained in this system. In the first case, a girl may be taken from the school as soon as she has terminated the fourth or the fifth grade, for instance. This may be a tacit established rule. In the second case, a father may have enrolled the child, but four or five years later, circumstances (future gains from this investment) have changed and make it meaningless for the father to let the child continue. (Daun, 1992: 195)

Similarly, Bonini (1995a; 1998) sees the dropout of Maasai girls at the end of primary school as a scheduled withdrawal, in line with parents' ideas about what levels of schooling are useful and in harmony with their culture. For his part, Gérard (1997) considers parents' choices more important to enrolment and persistence than anything within the schooling system:

> The School, and the spirit that it symbolises, have not succeeded in imposing their law. If a child does not study, it is because [his parents] refuse. And if he sits at a school bench, it's because his parents have decided thus. He will study what they want him to acquire, in the type of school that they choose. (Gérard, 1997: 61)

The fact that initial enthusiasm was high, but that dropout is also occurring, indicates that some sort of ceiling or decision-point is being run up against, and makes it probable that

parental attitudes or priorities are shifting after their children have been enrolled for several years. This will be examined in detail in Chapter Five.

2.4. SMCs and the promotion of enrolment and persistence

While much has been written on enrolment and dropout, there is very little in the literature about what a community-based parents' association such as the SMC can be expected to achieve in promoting access to schooling. This section reviews the literature about community participation in schooling, about parent associations in Africa, and about the *tòn* itself.

2.4.1 The concept of community participation in schooling

A number of factors have combined to define schooling as primarily a state-provided good, particularly in developing countries. Schooling has been a major tool in nation building and political socialisation. It also serves a selection function important to economies and individuals, wherein the state is seen as an indispensable organiser and referee. Finally, establishing a school, especially in rural or poor areas, has been seen to require financial and human resources that are only available through the state. Thus it is natural that the supply of schooling should be seen as primarily a state responsibility.

While African national school systems were expanding rapidly in the 1960's and 1970's, community participation in schooling was seen as an extra, a way to meet excess demand, to bring communities' resources into the financing of the school system. In general such community activity was more common in Anglophone Africa, since in the Francophone zone decision-making was centralised, policy did not encourage local initiative in school establishment, and community demand for system expansion was lower. But as resources and demand both declined in the 1980s, authors began to pay more attention to a broader set of roles and responsibilities for local involvement in schooling.

In *New resources for education: community management and financing of schools in less developed countries,* Mark Bray (1986) contended that, though the culture-specific nature of community financing made it hard to generalise, '...in all countries there is scope for increasing the resources provided by communities.' His book was essentially a very well-organised 'how-to' manual, going through preliminary issues to be considered, establishing and running a school, raising resources, and controls on quality, and in it he attempted to broaden the perspectives both of the policy maker, used to having a monopoly, and of local groups, which may not previously felt they had a mandate to act in education. The work was more concerned with finding resources than stimulating demand, indicating that Bray was intending it for use mostly in areas where communities and parents did not have to be convinced of the utility of schooling.

The Jomtien conference in 1990 was something of a watershed in terms of the status of community participation as a topic in basic education circles. Communities and non-governmental organisations were important elements in the Jomtien Declaration and Framework, and increasingly seen as necessary actors in the expansion of schooling. This prominence set the tone for much writing and funding over the following decade, including the community schools project in Mali.

Sheldon Shaeffer's *Participation for educational change* (1994) is a systematic discussion of the wider potential partnerships that could be promoted between ministries of education, teachers, communities, and parents. In a sense, this work, published by UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), supplies the detail and nuance on partnership and participation that were lacking in the basic Education for All documents (World Conference on Education for All, 1990a; 1990b; 1990c) documents examined at the beginning of this chapter. The author made a number of assumptions explicit, including taking participation as a good in itself, a necessary but not sufficient aspect of development, and that asserting greater participation could help improve the quality of or the demand for basic education. He noted that participation could have its difficulties, including problems of social heterogeneity, lack of skills and self-confidence, expense, conflict with political culture, and administrative obstacles.

Rugh and Bossert (1998) looked in greater depth at community participation in six cases in their *Involving communities: participation in the delivery of education programs*. They looked at six very well known projects, the BRAC schools in Bangladesh, the *harambee* schools in Kenya, the *Escuela Nueva* in Colombia, the Community Support Program in Balochistan, the IMPACT project in East Asia, and the Fé y Alegría schools in Bolivia, seeking to understand the positive impact of community participation as well as its costs and downsides. They determined that community participation was especially useful for reaching disadvantaged groups, 'especially in areas where demand exists but circumstances are such that governments have failed to provide an adequate supply of conventional schooling opportunities' (Rugh and Bossert, 1998: 146). They noted, however, that community participation was not enough on its own to guarantee a quality education programme.

Williams (1997) made the distinction between 'high demand' and 'low demand' areas, arguing that each had different needs. In 'high demand' areas, where households and communities wanted more schooling than the state could provide, the policy prescription was to allow such groups to contribute their human and financial resources, under the guidance of the state. In 'low demand' areas, by contrast, 'an appropriate initial response by governments would be to adapt schooling to better meet community values and needs' (Williams, 1997: 40). Williams indicates that active community involvement in education, and certainly community management of the school, are more common in 'high demand' areas.

2.4.2 Parents associations and access to schooling

There is very little literature about parents' associations in Africa that indicates how well they ought to be able to influence attitudes. First, there is little literature on parents' associations in general, especially as far as Francophone Africa is concerned. Most of the little writing available on parents associations in French-speaking Africa is of a how-to nature, guiding the establishment of new associations, see, for example, the 'promoter's guide' put out by FAPE, the Federation of Associations of Parents of Pupils (1997). This research has identified no references of an analytical or evaluative nature about parent associations in Francophone West Africa.

For Anglophone Africa, more work is available, particularly because there has been a good deal of writing on the management of the *harambee* schools in Kenya (Anderson, 1969;

Anderson, 1973; Barkan and Holmquist, 1989; Nkinyangi, 1982; Wellings, 1983), and on school governance in South Africa (Johnson, 1997) and Uganda (Passi, 1995). But most of this literature is still wide of the mark, since the communities in which these parents associations work tend already to manifest high levels of demand for schooling. Thus the parents associations are not called upon to make efforts to increase access. The one example I have seen linking parents associations to efforts to increase access is a training manual used in Uganda (Uganda - Ministry of Education, 1997), which contains an exceedingly didactic session on the promotion of girls schooling.

Rugh and Bossert (1998) shed some light on this question from another angle, that of the 'project committee' rather than the school support association. The two authors made a detailed study of six projects promoting community participation in schooling, including both the BRAC schools and the *harambee* schools, and found a fairly standard 'process of involvement.' The projects would arrange initial discussion meetings with communities, survey local human and/or material resources, and define or suggest a role for the community. The project would then 'create a mechanism, such as a committee or organisation, to consolidate community efforts and facilitate the affairs of the school.' The project would then provide training or induction to the support organisation, and offer 'motivational activities' to keep the community interested (Rugh and Bossert, 1998: 145). Since the community schools in Mali were originally patterned on the BRAC schools, it is not surprising that a similar process was followed in Mali. However, the role of the SMC was more than simply consolidating community efforts, and much more continuous than implied in the above list. Indeed, some of the most challenging moments faced by the SMCs came years into the project, at moments when community commitment waned.

Bray (2000) authored a report on *Community partnerships in education: dimensions, variations, and implications* for the 2000 Dakar Forum that closed the 'Jomtien decade.' He underlined the potential of parents' associations in increasing access to schooling, arguing that 'community members commonly have a deeper understanding of the circumstances of particular families, of relationships between individuals, and of micro-politics' than do teachers and education officials, and that this understanding can be used in favour of enrolment. He claimed that community participation could aid significantly in the recruitment, attendance, and retention of pupils (Bray, 2000: 30-31), but the examples that he offered were almost all about community participation increasing access, rather than its reducing dropout.

2.4.3 Building on village traditions: the 'tòn'

The *tòn* as a form of traditional village association, which might be put to the service of schooling, was introduced in Chapter One. This section seeks to examine the literature on such village associations in West Africa, with an eye to assessing those associations' potential for promoting household support for schooling.

Associations like the *tòn* are common throughout sub-Saharan Africa. As Bratton points writes:

> While many pre-colonial cultures in Africa may have lacked states, they certainly
> did not lack civil societies, in the broad sense of a bevy of institutions for protecting

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collective interests…the 'invisible organisations' in this network of mutual obligation may be difficult to discern to the untrained eye because they are *ad hoc* and informal rather than regular and formalized. (Bratton, 1989)

Hyden and Bratton (1992) have written of the 'economy of affection', of mutual obligations and networks. Such networks may be highly localised, if they are based on day-to-day interactions, or far-flung, if they are based on family ties in an area of the world where migration is common.

The specific form of local institution of interest here is what is called the *groupement villageois* in French, and the *tòn* in Bambara. *Tòn* is often translated in English as 'committee', but in its origins it was a sort of standing work group, usually mobilised to perform agricultural tasks together. Often several *tòns* will exist in a village, divided by sex and age group. Over time, the work of the *tòns* has become broader, and now almost any task that can be organised collectively can have its own *tòn*.

The potential of the *tòn* has interested various policy makers and managers in West Africa since independence, and a number of authors have argued persuasively for a development policy based on them (Buijsrogge, 1989; Ouédraogo, 1990). In Mali, the socialist régime of Modibo Keita in the 1960s tried to 'modernise' the *tòns* into cooperatives, but this initiative was dropped with Keita's ouster in 1968. The next organisations to be captivated by the *tòns* were the para-statal 'regional development organisations,' particularly the *Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement du Textile* (CMDT, the cotton authority) (Hall et al., 1991; Jacob and Lavigne Delville, 1994). For twenty years the CMDT has sought, with some success, to transform selected *tòns* in cotton-producing areas into '*associations villageoises*' with legal standing, clear and uniform structure, and explicit income-generating responsibilities. At the same time, NGOs and other proponents of community development have been trying to create social-sector *tòns*, particularly in primary health care where they have played a major role in ensuring wide vaccination coverage.

The potential of the *tòn* for promoting access to schooling is clear in that the *tòns* are present in every village and their basic workings are understood by all villagers, so that it is not necessary to introduce foreign ways of organising in order to promote ideas or organise community activities. And unlike policy-makers, the *tòns* have clear and constant access to the parents, households, and children who are making decisions about starting or ending schooling.

There is scarcely a village-based project in Mali today that does not base its operations on one variation or another of the *tòn*, often without much consideration of its strengths and weaknesses, but some of the literature does suggest that there are limitations to what *tòns* can be expected to accomplish. First, one should be wary of over-romanticisation of the *tòn*. Writing after the fall of the Keita régime, Jones (1976) questions the *tòn* as a community organisation, saying that traditionally it served the extended household and not the community as a whole, that it often worked for a fee (usually cash), and that in the end it produced a negligible part of the total agricultural output. Jonckers (1994) also questions the 'myth' of a communitarian tradition in southern Mali, finding most households working in their own self-interest. She also notes that the *associations villageoises* set up by the CMDT are less well integrated than traditional *tòns* into village life, and are lesser vehicles for the transmission of values.

A second limitation is the informal nature noted by Bratton. As Buijsrogge (1989) states, the distinction between the village as a whole, the various age-groups, and the particular *tòns* is vague and shifting. Within *tòns,* most posts are vague and responsibilities are shared, rules are not made explicit, much less written down, and terms of office are not respected even if they exist. Voting on membership or issues is rare, since such an 'adversarial' tactic is taken as a sign of inability to reach consensus, which is highly valued (Buijsrogge, 1989). The CMDT recognised these limitations and tried to give the *association villageoise* enough structure to be efficient and profit-making, limiting membership to cotton-producing members of the community; Jonckers holds that this selectivity, while rational, has exacerbated divisions within communities. Likewise, many NGOs spend a great deal of time on trying to bring Western norms of structure, planning, and accounting into organisations which are not traditionally set up to deal with these (e.g. World Education and ONG Nationales Partenaires, 1995).

Thirdly, it is not clear how well-suited the *tòns* are in working to change the attitudes of their peers. For originally *tòns* were about carrying out tasks that all knew how to do already, and around which there was little controversy. A *tòn* moving into the area of promoting access to schooling is going into *terra incognita*, and can expect to encounter strong resistance. Being chosen from the households it is working with, the SMC will reflect local attitudes about schooling to some extent, but is also likely to seek to promote very different ideas. This gap in attitudes between the *tòn* and the households is where it gets its work done: if there is no gap in attitudes, there will be no progress; if the gap is too great, the *tòn* will not be able to lead.

Finally, whom the *tòn* is actually representing is a complex question. Strictly speaking, the *tòn* is an emanation of village authorities, beholden to them and needing their cooperation in order to be effective; on the other hand, the idea of mass schooling that the *tòn* is to promote comes largely from outside the village, or at least is not guaranteed a favourable reception throughout the community. The SMC finds itself trying to get households to honour commitments made by others far up the social ladder in Jomtien, Dakar, and Bamako, in spite of the array of obstacles to demand outlined in the first two sections of this literature review. It is not an easy task.

2.5 Conclusion

This Chapter has taken a look at what the literature says about the interaction of community participation and access to schooling: what should, theoretically, happen when a group of community members seek to promote increased enrolment and retention. A number of observations are important for the analysis in the following chapters, and for the ongoing effort to give all children educational opportunity. First, the overall EFA documents are for the most part quite abstract on the topics of community participation and 'expanded partnership', and thus a detailed recounting and analysis of the Kolondièba experience should be useful. Second, there seems to be a strong divide between those who analyse access in terms of 'determinants' and 'correlates', and those who see access in terms of 'strategies'; an analysis which weaves these two approaches together ought to have value. Thirdly, surprisingly little has been written about dropout, especially the analysis of motivation and parental and pupil strategies; presumably attention to this issue

will be of growing importance as the emphasis in EFA shifts from getting children into school to keeping them there (that is, from CREATE's 'first zone of exclusion' to the second and third zones). Finally, while some quite good analyses have been written about how specific community participation models (especially BRAC in Bangladesh and harambee in Kenya) have promoted access in low-enrolment areas, it would seem important to document approaches that work in the Sahel, a region that has both very low rates of access and significant untapped community solidarity resources.

3. Field Methods

This section is a brief description of the methods used in the study. For more detail on the methods and instruments used, please refer to the thesis (Laugharn, 2001).

3.1 A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods

There are a good number of reasons for the use of qualitative methods in this research. The primary reason has been to understand the rationales and perspectives of those involved, rather than simply imputing them or assuming that they are the same as elsewhere. In the same sense, qualitative methods made it possible to identify important local terms and concepts (e.g. about child development) that have an important influence on parents' reactions toward schooling. Face to face interviews and animated focus group discussions made it possible to identify the concerns and priorities of those I was speaking to, and to pursue them further; these face to face exchanges also gave me a stronger sense of confidence in my recommendations than I would have had from quantitative data alone. Finally, it is hoped that the qualitative data will help bring parents' voices more strongly into consideration within the Education for All debate.

At the same time, a study of access to schooling is incomplete without quantitative analysis, starting first with enrolment and dropout rates and working through methodical comparison of the correlates of enrolment. The use of quantitative data provided by the CERPOD population observatory (described below) allowed gendered patterns, whether between girls and boys, or between fathers and mothers, to be compared systematically throughout the research, and these patterns could then be compared with those arising out of the interviews and focus groups. The use of quantitative data has the advantage of permitting comparison, albeit a cautious one, with other studies, and allowing a researcher to comment on how local phenomena conform to and contrast with international expectations. In this particular study, quantitative methods identified a number of surprises (for example, the unexpected persistence of a preference for enrolling boys) that might not have been identified so starkly through discussion. It is also hoped that the quantitative data will furnish a baseline for further research in Kolondièba on enrolment, dropout, gender preference, and parental attitudes, and might inspire others to do similar work elsewhere. In a similarly pragmatic vein, the quantitative data provide a means of evaluating the scale of enrolment and dropout in Kolondièba, and should thus be immediately useful in the formulation and costing of likely responses and changes in the project design.

One of the main challenges of this research is to integrate the conclusions of the quantitative and qualitative analyses in a meaningful way. This integration was sought by alternating the use of qualitative and quantitative methods, each time building the findings of the previous phase into the instruments of the present phase. The original idea for the research came from surprising enrolment and dropout patterns noted in quantitative data, which were then investigated in the initial fieldwork, consisting of semi-structured interviews with SMCs and parents, held in three villages in the fall of 1997. These interviews in turn yielded a fairly clear consensus about the major causes of dropout, codes for which were then built into the data collection in 1998 on dropout in the larger sample

of 28 villages and several thousand children. In this iterative fashion the quantitative and qualitative data were kept in close relation to one another.

3.2 Sampling Choices

In broad terms, this research was carried out with two sample populations. Interview and focus group data were gathered in three case villages, while the quantitative data were collected from the forty villages comprising the Kolondièba Population Observatory.

3.2.1 The case villages: Kelen, Fila and Saba

The qualitative data were gathered from three case villages, referred to in the study as Kelen, Fila, and Saba. Their names have been changed for confidentiality, the three words used in this study simply mean 'one', 'two', and 'three' in Bambara.

Kelen is the oldest of the three villages, established around 1850. The village has had pupils in a Western-type school only for the last sixty years, a nearby school for the last 35 years. The first child going off to primary school in 1934 had to go about 45 kilometers away; today the closest government school is about 10 km away. Today its population is about 700 (with a single hamlet), and like the others, its main cash crop is cotton. It is a prosperous village, but its recent history has been characterized by factionalism between the founding clan and later immigrants. The split between these groups colour almost all aspects of village life, and the community school in Kelen has not escaped their negative effects. Kelen's school has been characterized by problems, and it serves to illustrate the negative effects that community management can have when the community itself is not cohesive.

Fila, with a population of 1000 persons in about 50 compounds. As in most villages in Kolondièba, cotton is the principle cash crop. NGO staff consider Fila to be a hard-working and optimistic village, characterized by harmony between the elders who judge and decide, the middle-aged who manage the affairs of the community, and the youth of the village. The Fila School Management Committee is enthusiastic, admits its faults and its challenges, tries to work within traditional decision-making systems, and actively seeks to involve parents in the life of the school.

Saba, a village of 830 inhabitants, fairly prosperous by Kolondièba standards. Saba has a problem of increasing dropout rates in higher grades. Most of the dropouts in Saba are girls, and they dropout not to go directly into marriage, but rather to go to a large city to work as a maid, to earn enough money to fund their marriage trousseaux, and then to marry. This phenomenon of 'girls' exode' causes great consternation among parents, men and women accusing one another mutually of responsibility. It also poses a serious challenge to the SMC, as detailed in the analysis of dropout in Chapter Five.

3.2.2 The Population Observatory

This study benefited greatly by linking up with demographic research being carried out in Kolondièba by CERPOD, the regional demographic centre of the Institut du Sahel. CERPOD had established a Population Observatory in Kolondièba District which collected data on 10,000 persons in 800 households (Sow, 1999). The observatory functioned in forty villages in three of Kolondièba's five sub-districts, selected to represent different

levels of agricultural production and of population migration; approximately one third of the households in each village are included. Each quarter, Observatory enquêteurs collected data on child health status, maternal health knowledge and behaviour, and demographic events (births, deaths, migrations, and pregnancies). Baseline data (collected in 1997) were also available on household possessions and agricultural production, parental educational history, ethnic group, religion, and so on.

The Population Observatory provided relevant information on most of the child and household characteristics identified in the literature on determinants analyses. In addition, the sample of villages that the Observatory was working in reflected closely the distribution of community schools, government schools, and villages without schools in Kolondièba District as a whole.

3.3 Methods for studying Enrolment

Each of the research questions is examined in turn below.

What were the enrolment rates within the Observatory, by type of village and by sex? How did the enrolment rates in the community school villages compare with project projections?

The data were collected during the Autumn 1998 *passage* of the Observatory data collectors, using a Schooling History Questionnaire. The mother of each child between the ages of 6 and 18 in the Observatory sample was asked to indicate whether or not the child had attended any sort of school, which type of school he or she had attended (government, community, and/or Koranic), whether the child was currently attending any school; if not, why the pupil had dropped out; if the child was still in school, whether he or she had been absent over the previous quarter; if so, for how long and for what reason. Responses were provided for 3,070 children. Data were systematically analysed according to sex and age of the child.

What are the correlates of enrolment, by type of village and by sex?

The Schooling History questionnaire indicated whether a child had ever been enrolled or not, thus providing the dependent variable for an analysis of the correlates of ever- and never-enrolment for the 3,070 children concerned. The Observatory itself had collected data on a large number of other variables, mostly of the sort relevant to health and demographic research. Of these, twenty or so were isolated as having theoretical and empirical significance for enrolment decisions, taking into consideration the literature presented in Chapter Two.

Analyses were done of the correlation between various variables and the enrolment status of children. In the study, analysis is done through chi-square and Yule's Q (a measure of the strength of correlation, with a Q of +1.00 indicating perfect positive correlation, and of −1.00 perfect negative correlation). Findings that were statistically significant, or which were not significant when the literature suggested that they should be, are reported in abridged form and discussed in the appropriate sections of the study.

What is the evidence of 'family strategies' regarding enrolment in the community school villages? How are such strategies influenced by the presence and activity of the SMC?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the School Management Committees in the three case villages, and with ten to twelve heads of households in each of the three case villages.   An effort was made to select households with a variety of levels of enrolment, ranging from those who sent none of their children to those who sent all of them.   In addition, data were drawn from three large scale survey instruments used within the Population Observatory: a Schooling History questionnaire, a Schooling Choice questionnaire, and a Likert-type questionnaire on Attitudes toward Schooling.

How was gender equity in enrolments achieved and maintained in the community school villages?   How much of the gender equity is due to changes in norms, and how much to the process set up by the NGO and the SMCs?

The investigation of how gender equity was managed by the SMCs and how girls' enrolment was perceived and addressed by the heads of household is approached through the interviews on 'family strategies.'   In addition, the second half of the Schooling Choice questionnaire sought to identify whether parents had a preference had a gender preference in enrolment. Parents were asked to imagine that they had two children eligible for schooling, a boy and a girl, but that they could only enroll one.   Which one was it to be, and why?   An analysis of the patterns of response to this question, distinguishing between fathers' and mothers' responses, is presented in the study, based on responses provided by 1,482 mothers and 601 fathers.

3.4 Methods for studying Dropout.

What was the rate of dropout from the community schools?

These involve fairly straightforward calculations from the rosters of all ever-enrolled pupils in the 28 community schools: the percentage of children dropping out at each grade level, the average annual dropout rate, and the number of dropouts per pupil reaching the final year.

Since similar rosters for the government schools are not available, direct comparison is impossible. Moreover, reliable figures for dropout are harder to come by than information on gross enrolment rates, so the comparability of these figures is less than for enrolment.

What were the causes of dropout from the community schools?

What are the patterns of sex, age, grade, and stated reasons for pupils dropping out from the community schools? Because of the small size of the population having reached sixth grade, and the fact that the Observatory data and the rosters data proved difficult to match conclusively, it was not possible to conduct the same sort of determinants analysis regarding dropout as that which had been carried out for enrolment. Instead, an analysis was carried out of the data within the rosters themselves. Each community school in Kolondièba District maintained a roster of all children who had ever been enrolled in that school, since the beginning of the project in 1992. In the rosters of the 28 schools within the Observatory, there were 2,393 ever-enrolled pupils. For the 441 pupils who had

dropped out, their teachers supplied a 'stated reason.' These reasons were coded by NGO staff using a list of codes derived from the initial interviews of this research in the case villages.

What is the evidence of 'family strategies' around persistence and dropout?
How effective were the SMCs in reducing dropout and promoting persistence? Were they able to intervene in the process?

To explore how choices on dropout are perceived and experienced, I had intended to use an interview guide similar to the one I had employed for enrolment, asking the SMCs a range of questions about dropout. But events overtook me, and I was in fact greatly aided in my quest by the fact that dropout, unlike enrolment, was perceived as a hot issue in the case villages about which many persons had opinions. My interview guide was quickly superseded as I tried to keep up with the debates going on in the villages. Thus it was easy to conduct rich free-ranging interviews, arrange successful focus group discussions, and even stumble on spontaneous discussions of the question.

For dropout, the case study approach was ideal, since the situations in each village were distinct and raised different but related issues:

- in Saba, the community was concerned about young girls' leaving home and school to earn money to buy the possessions they would need for their marriage household;

- in Fila, the village was divided over the SMC's expulsion from school of three boys who were absent for the cotton harvest; and

- in Kelen there had been general concern about older boys dropping out to seek work and adventure in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire.

I came to think of each of these, the search for the marriage trousseau in Saba, the harvest labour need in Fila, and the 'flight' of young men in Kelen, as a 'key issue' which highlighted an important cause of dropout, gave an idea of the stakes perceived by those involved, and provoked a distinct response on the part of the SMC. The existence of these key issues, and the commentary they generated, made it much easier to draw out lines of thought and ideas about persistence and dropout than it had been regarding enrolment.

4. 'We Couldn't Send All Our Children': An Analysis of Enrolment in the Community Schools

> Education is a fundamental human right. It is the key to sustainable development and peace and stability within and among countries, and thus an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, which are witnessing rapid globalisation. Achieving Education For All goals should be postponed no longer. The basic learning needs of all can and must be met urgently.
>
> The Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments (April 2000).

Meanwhile, in the village of Saba in Kolondièba (1997) the researcher asks, 'What do you think of the idea that all children should go to school?' After a few moments silence the elder replies:

> Eeh…Ayiwa (Uh, well…)… that's difficult. I don't think we can have all in school, but we'd like most.

This chapter explores the four questions on enrolment posed by the study:

- What were the enrolment rates in the community school villages, and how did these compare with project projections?

- What are the correlates of enrolment in the community schools?

- What is the evidence of 'family strategies' regarding enrolment? How are such strategies influenced by the presence and activity of the SMC?

- How was gender equity in enrolments achieved and maintained? How much of the gender equity is due to changes in norms, and how much to the process set up by the NGO and the SMCs?

4.1 Enrolment rates

In the thesis on which this monograph is based (Laugharn, 2001), enrolment rates (both ever-enrolled and currently enrolled) were calculated and analysed. They are summarised briefly here.

According to the NGO's model, 30 children should have initially been enrolled per classroom established, thus 2580 for the 86 classrooms within the Observatory sample. However, the present study found 2278 ever-enrolled children, 88% of the projection. This amounts to a 41% initial enrolment rate, not the 54% projected by the NGO. Figure 1 shows how the initial enrolments from 1992 to 1995 went more or less according to plan, but the projected and actual enrolment rates started to diverge in the following three years.

Figure 1: Difference between projected and actual gross enrolment rates, community schools within the Observatory
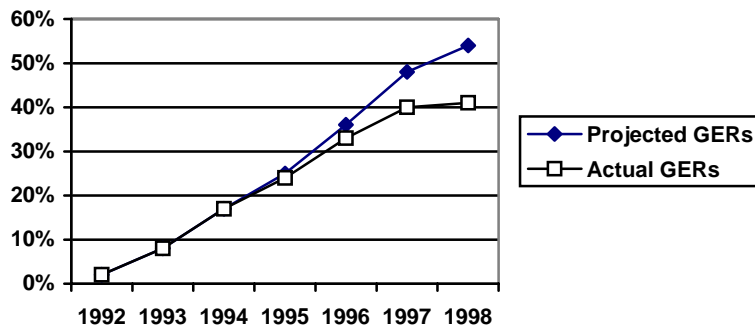
The forty villages in the Observatory fell into three categories: those with a government school within the village (N=5), those with a community school (N=28), and those with neither type of school (N=7). Enrolment rates were separately calculated for the three types of villages. The point of comparing the enrolment rates between the community schools and the government schools is that the latter are in many ways more typical of schools in Mali and regionwide, in terms of the profiles of their teachers and the design of their curricula, their place in the vertical hierarchy of the Ministry of Education, and their fairly limited integration with their host communities. The government schools are in these ways more likely than the community schools to resemble the schools studied in the analyses presented in the literature review, and thus serve as an important point reference in linking the community schools with the literature on enrolment. On the other hand, the villages without schools are usually smaller, with very little infrastructure. In many ways they resemble the situation of the current community school villages before the project was started in 1992, and for this reason comparisons with the other two types of village are instructive.

But the comparison of enrolment rates between the government and community schools is not entirely straightforward, since they have different catchment areas. The community school is founded on the idea of 'a school in every village', and its management structure is based on seeing the boundaries of the village community and those of the school catchment area as identical. The government school, on the other hand, is based for reasons of efficiency and cost on a 'hub and spoke' model, wherein a school in a central village serves at least a half-dozen surrounding villages. This means that the government and community school catchment areas overlap, and that while the distance-from-school factor has been eliminated in the community school villages, it still exists for the 'satellite' villages of the government school. This has been at least partially resolved by calculating GERs separately for the two types of villages which do not have community schools. Within the community school villages, the GER is calculated on the basis of current enrolment in a community school. Within the government school villages and the villages without a school, the GER is a measure, instead, of current enrolment of children from that village attending a government school. In the case of villages without schools, this meant that children were walking to the government school village, since children who had moved to a village with a school in order to study there were counted as inhabitants of the village with the school.

Table 3 compares the gross and net enrolment rates of boys and girls in community school (CS) villages, government school (GS) villages, and villages with no schools (NS).

Table 3: Gross and net enrolment rates for boys and girls by type of village

		All	CS	GS	NS[6]
GER	All	42%	41%	55%	5%
	Boys	48%	43%	63%	8%
	Girls	36%	39%	46%	0%
NER	All	34%	29%	41%	4%
	Boys	37%	30%	49%	9%
	Girls	30%	28%	33%	0%
Under/over-age	Enrolled at 6 years old or younger	4%	6%	0%	
	In school at 13 years old or older	25%	18%	10%	

A number of points emerge. First, enrolments were higher in GS villages (55%) than in CS villages (41%), and extremely low in villages with no school (5%). Secondly, community school villages had more gender equitable enrolments (43% for boys, 39% for girls) than did government school villages (63% vs. 46%). Third, in both community school villages and government school villages, net enrolment rates were considerably lower for both sexes than gross enrolment rates. The primary reason for this (more strikingly in the CS than GS schools), is over-age enrolment; this issue will be explored in detail in Chapter Five.

4.2 Correlates of enrolment

Did the conventional variables used in determinants analysis shed any light on which children were being enrolled in community schools, and which were not? This section presents evidence on the correlation of child and household characteristics with enrolment in the community schools. Given the emphasis placed on gender parity in the project, these results are also presented disaggregated by sex[7]. Similarly, as in section 4.1, the correlates in the community school villages are compared with those in government school villages in order to appreciate the different pattern of enrolment presented within the community schools. Comparison with the villages with no schools was not systematically attempted since the cell frequencies were usually too small to conduct a chi-square test.

Correlation of sex and enrolment in community and government school villages

In this section, results of chi-square tests are presented, comparing ever-/never-enrolment with various dichotomous variables (for example, in Table 2, whether the child is a boy or a girl). Results for community and government school villages are presented side-by-side in the same tables. For each variable, the percent of ever-enrolled and never-enrolled

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[6] Excludes the anomalous village of Mugan—a close satellite village feeding a government school, where a quarter of the boys were enrolled (but only 3% of girls).

[7] I have used the phrase 'sex of the child' or 'the child's sex' in preference to the word 'gender', since in this particular usage the distinction is one that is biological rather than social. However, I do use the word 'gender' as an adjective describing the socially-constructed aspects of being a girl or a boy, a woman or a man.

children having the characteristic is presented, followed by the chi-square value, and the statistical significance of the chi-square, represented by *p*. Where the chi-square value is statistically significant, Yules *Q* is also presented, as a useful measure of the strength and sign of correlation. The tables presented in this section concentrate on findings that were statistically significant in the community school villages, or were not significant when the literature suggested that they should be.

Table 4 below shows that in line with the design of the project, sex is not correlated with enrolment in the community school villages: being a girl does not statistically reduce a child's chances of being enrolled in a community school.

Table 4: Correlation of Child's sex with enrolment

Variable	Villages	% Ever enrolled	% Never Enrolled	x^2	p		Q
Child is female	Community school	45%	48%	1.17	0.28	n.s.	…
	Government school	38%	49%	13.74	0.00	***	(0.23)

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10

In government school villages, however, being a girl is moderately correlated with non-enrolment (*Q* of –0.23), a finding which is highly statistically significant (*p*<.001). This can be taken as evidence the community schools had 'levelled the playing field' between boys and girls in terms of enrolments.

4.2.1 Correlation of household wealth and enrolment

The SMC had as an explicit priority the establishment of gender parity, and thus worked to 'level a playing field' between male and female children, and the enrolment data presented above indeed attest to their success. But data from the Observatory indicate that other "leveling" also resulted from the SMC's work, as well as the unexpected introduction of enrolment biases into the community schools which are not markedly present in the neighbouring government schools.

As was seen in the literature review, a number of household and parental characteristics are typically positively associated with enrolment. Typically, the wealthier a child's household, or the more educated a child's parents, the more likely that child is to be enrolled in school. By the same token household poverty and parental lack of education are commonly seen as obstacles to enrolment.

The data from the Observatory present an important contrast here: in the government school villages, household wealth functions as a strong predictor of enrolment, but in the community school villages it does not. Table 5 below shows the correlations between a child's ever- or never-enrolment in the school (government or community) within his or her village, and four variables linked with household wealth and well-being.

Table 5: Household wealth and enrolment in government and community school villages

Variable	Village	% Ever enrolled	% Never Enrolled	χ^2	p		Q
Household has at least one moped	Community	26%	33%	5.57	0.02	**	(0.15)
	Government	45%	28%	30.90	0.00	***	0.35
Household has a tin-roofed building	Community	36%	36%	0.00	0.99	n.s.	…
	Government	41%	29%	15.93	0.00	***	0.26
Head of child's household cultivates with others	Community	43%	46%	1.08	0.30	n.s.	…
	Government	32%	19%	22.13	0.00	***	0.33
Household has more than ten cattle	Community	30%	38%	8.79	0.00	***	(0.17)
	Government	29%	28%	0.33	0.56	n.s	…

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10

In government school villages, children who have been enrolled are more likely to belong to better-off households as indicated by three out of four measures. In the cases of possessing a moped or the tin roof (two of the most visible modern signs of wealth in Kolondièba), and cultivating with others, the percentage spreads are greater than ten points, the differences all highly significant (at p<.01), and the Qs indicate a moderately strong correlation. Households of ever- and never-enrolled children are not significantly different in terms of cattle holdings (the typical traditional form of wealth).

Table 5 above shows, on the other hand, that in the community school villages, households of ever- and never-enrolled children are either not significantly different (cultivating together, tin roof), or actually somewhat less likely to enroll children (those having cattle or a moped). A plausible hypothesis is that the lack of difference between ever- and never-enrolled populations on the two variables (roof and cultivation together) indicates that the effect that those variables would normally exercise is "overruled" by the distributive role of the SMC. The negative correlation with livestock holdings is seen elsewhere: the time required to look after cattle is a documented blockage to boys' enrolment. The surprising correlation regarding the moped would seem to indicate that the mobility provided by it opens up economic opportunities that compete with boys' schooling.

This economic interpretation is strengthened by the fact that when this analysis is performed again distinguishing between boys and girls within community schools (Table 6 above), the cattle and moped variables are only significant for boys' enrolment. These findings imply that, in general, the recruitment organised by the SMCs tends to reduce the importance of household wealth as a correlate of enrolment, except there is still a moderate negative correlation between boys' enrolment and the possession of productive assets within the household.

Table 6: Household wealth and boys' and girl's enrolment in community school villages

Variable	Sex	% Ever Enrolled	% Never Enrolled	χ^2	p		Q
Household has at least one moped	Boys	24%	35%	9.28	0.00	***	(0.25)
	Girls	29%	30%	0.03	0.86	n.s.	…
Household has a tin-roofed building	Boys	35%	36%	0.15	0.70	n.s.	…
	Girls	36%	35%	0.17	0.68	n.s.	…
Head of child's household cultivates with others	Boys	42%	45%	0.73	0.39	n.s.	…
	Girls	55%	53%	0.33	0.57	n.s.	…
Household has more than ten cattle	Boys	28%	40%	12.18	0.00	***	(0.28)
	Girls	33%	35%	0.34	0.56	n.s.	…

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10

4.2.2 Correlation of parental educational history and enrolment

An even stronger instance of such 'leveling' in the community school villages is seen regarding parental educational levels, as is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Parental educational levels and enrolment in government and community school villages

Variable	Village	% Ever	% Never	χ^2	p		Q
Father has attended primary school	Community	9%	5%	2.85	0.09	*	0.31
	Government	24%	4%	37.73	0.00	***	0.74
Mother has attended primary school	Community	7%	7%	0.90	0.34	n.s.	…
	Government	21%	6%	33.74	0.00	***	0.60
Father can read a letter	Community	13%	18%	2.60	0.11	n.s.	…
	Government	35%	18%	17.26	0.00	***	0.43
Mother can read a letter	Community	8%	4%	6.25	0.01	**	0.31
	Government	16%	5%	23.10	0.00	***	0.57

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10

In the government school villages, there are striking differences between the educational levels of the parents of ever- and never-enrolled children. The percentage of ever-enrolled children whose fathers have attended primary school is six times as high as that of never-enrolled children. The percentage spreads are quite wide throughout, and all four of these differences are statistically significant. The Qs are strong throughout.

Conversely, in the community school villages, parental educational level matters much less, in terms of percentage difference, statistical significance, and the values of Q. In fact, the percentage of children of illiterate fathers who are enrolled is higher than that of the children of men who can read, although the difference between the two groups is not significant. For the children of community school villages as a whole, parental education has ceased to be a good predictor.

When this same analysis is repeated for community school boys and girls an interesting pattern emerges (Table 8).

Table 8: Parental educational level and boys' and girl's enrolment in community school villages

Variable	Sex	% Ever	% Never	x^2	P		Q
Father has attended primary school	Boys	6%	5%	0.09	0.77	n.s.	…
	Girls	12%	4%	4.47	0.03	**	0.50
Mother has attended primary school	Boys	10%	7%	1.57	0.21	n.s.	…
	Girls	7%	7%	0.04	0.84	n.s.	…
Father can read a letter	Boys	14%	18%	0.83	0.36	n.s.	…
	Girls	11%	18%	2.04	0.15	n.s.	…
Mother can read a letter	Boys	7%	5%	0.50	0.48	n.s.	…
	Girls	10%	4%	8.68	0.00	***	0.49

*** $p<.01$, ** $p<.05$, * $p<.10$

Once correlations are run separately for boys' and girls' enrolment, it becomes clear that while parental educational level is in fact 'leveled' for boys, it is still highly significantly correlated for girls' enrolment.

This leveling was not a pattern explicitly sought in the design of the community schools project, but it is a fitting and probably necessary step in the expansion of educational opportunity in an area where so many families are poor and so few parents have had schooling. Leveling makes it more likely that children of 'ordinary' parents will attend school, rather than just the children of those parents whose motivation is high or whose resource base is strong. The rural Malian school has often relied on the high motivation of a relatively small minority, and judicious use of summons for the children of less-motivated parents, to mask the fact that demand for conventional schooling is actually low, too low to surmount even fairly simple obstacles. A system that relies on a level of demand that most of the population will not attain, for a service as basic as education, is an elitist system.

But in another sense, the low level of commitment and resources necessary to enroll children in the community schools can also become a weakness, since less-committed parents may be less ready to make sacrifices in favour of keeping children in school, when the going gets tough. This is a topic which will be explored in the next chapter.

4.2.4 Ethnicity, herding and hamlet residence group and enrolment

One area in which the community schools did not achieve 'leveling' was ethnicity. The inhabitants of Kolondièba District were about 90% Bambara-speaking farmers living in compounds in fairly tightly-knit villages. Most of the remaining 10% were Peulh-speaking herders who tended to live in smaller groups ('hamlets') at some distance from the village centre, and whose lifestyle revolved around raising cattle. The data in Table 8 below show that the community schools are in fact less equitable than conventional government schools in terms of their inclusion of the pastoralist Peulhs.

Table 9: Table 9: Ethnicity, herding, and hamlet residence

Variable	Village	% Ever	% Never	.²	p		Q
Child is Peulh	Community	3%	13%	37.11	0.00	***	(0.67)
	Government	24%	34%	10.87	0.01	***	(0.23)
Child is Bambara	Community	83%	74%	13.79	0.00	***	0.26
	Government	60%	56%	1.72	0.19	n.s.	…
Father is a herder	Community	0%	14%	28.12	0.00	***	(1.00)
	Government	2%	9%	9.48	0.00	***	(0.69)
Child lives in a hamlet	Community	0%	9%	44.04	0.00	***	(1.00)
	Government	1%	6%	17.18	0.00	***	(0.74)

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10

Like many traditionally pastoralist groups in Africa (see for example Bonini on the Maasai (1995b; 1998), the Peulhs have a lower enrolment rate than more sedentary ethnic groups; this is borne out in the first line of the table above. The surprising finding here is the much greater degree to which being Peulh is negatively correlated with enrolment in the community school villages. This ethnic imbalance is also shown in the correlations of being a member of the majority Bambara ethnic group: in the government school villages, being Bambara is not significantly associated with enrolment, while in the community school villages, being Bambara is a moderately good predictor of enrolment.

But the data also indicate that that the pastoralist livelihood and hamlet residence typically associated with being Peulh are greater obstacles to enrolment than being Peulh *per se*, and that these factors as well are felt more sharply in the community school villages. For example, not a single child in a community school village (including the neighbouring hamlets) whose father's principal activity was herding was ever enrolled in a community school; nor were any of children resident in hamlets ever enrolled. In government school villages, father's herding was a strong but not inevitable blockage to enrolment, while hamlet residence virtually excluded GS enrolment.

Why is this pattern of exclusion so strong in the community school villages? There seem to be several layers of response to this question, involving the design of the community schools project, the degree of effort by the SMC to involve Peulh children, and the level of interest among Peulh parents for what the community school offers.

First, it can be seen from the above figures that the Bambara predominate more heavily in the community school villages, and their cultural norms are the dominant ones in these villages. The Bambara and the Peulh have very different traditions of social organisation, with the former being more communitarian and oriented toward solidarity, and the latter in general being more individualistic (Adams and Glassco, 1999; Castle, 1996). It must ruefully be noted that the NGO, and in particular its international staff, did not take this variety into account, instead accepting Bambara forms, including the *tòn* itself, as universal. In a sense the entire community schools model is built on the common reflex of the NGO and the Bambara community leaders to emphasise solidarity in their world view and problem solving.

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The role of the SMC is also ambiguous. When asked whether being from a Peulh or a herder household should keep a child from enrolling in the community school, the SMC declares that it should not. And yet SMC members in the three villages also admit that they rarely if ever visited the hamlets, although they were not more than a few kilometers from the village. Peulh heads of households were much less well-integrated into village assemblies and other means of circulating information and building solidarity and commitment around the school.

The pastoralist lifestyle certainly played a role as well, in that it increased the likelihood that children, particularly sons, would be needed to mind the cattle. Further, in contrast to the Bambara, whose own traditions of initiation have been on the decline, the Peulh show a marked tendency for their own version of 'home schooling,' linked closely to the study of the Koran. These various elements, and a sense of coolness toward the community schools, are conveyed by the words of a Peulh father who was interviewed in Fila:

> Each form of instruction is an education—Western, Koranic. We instruct all our children in the Koran at home. At night and in the afternoon as well, our children read the Koran until going to bed, and practice writing Koranic verses on slates…. Yes, I mean all children, boys and girls. Everyone starts at about age seven. Girls study until they marry, boys can go on until their old age. It's a sort of heritage: we do as our parents did. Every society does this.

> Yes, even though I'm Peulh, I see the importance of the community school. But we hadn't discussed enrolment amongst ourselves. Word about the school hadn't come to us (in our hamlet). We weren't invited to the original village meeting about the school--the fact that we have not participated is not a refusal, just a lack of information. Though you could say that if you have the intention without carrying it out, then you really haven't had the intention.

> If one of our children came to the community school, well, I'm not sure he'd also do Koranic study. It's not a question of there not being enough time; it's a question of irrecuperability.

Peulh parents are still not convinced by the Western school. It was this same sort of skepticism among their Bambara neighbors that led to the creation of the community school model in the early 1990s, which was to confer the skills and advantages of schooling in a more culturally relevant and less disruptive fashion. While these community schools seem to be working fairly well in the Bambara villages and evolving as circumstances, policy, and community motivation permit, they don't seem to have made an inroad into Peulh families. The irony is that it seems that making these new schools more community-oriented and managed has made it less likely to enroll Peulhs than the government school has been.

4.3 Enrolment strategies

How do parents and SMCs describe the enrolment process as it occurred in their villages? In particular, how does each group describe what the SMC did, and how it was received by the parents?

4.3.1 What did the SMCs say about how recruitments were done?

4.3.1.1. The first classroom and recruitment

According to the design of the project, one classroom was to be constructed and sixty pupils recruited in the first and fourth years of each village's participation. There was little problem with the construction of the first classroom, as it was the most visible aspect of the school's establishment, and considerable community excitement usually attached to its completion. Just as the first classrooms tended to be easily built, the target of sixty children for the first enrolment in a community school were easily met, and in fact generally surpassed.

The SMCs reported that, in organizing the first recruitment of pupils, they followed traditional procedures for decision-making. They called the heads of compounds together, either in the chief's compound or in a nearby open space. Following traditional practice, all of the heads of compounds at this meeting were men, a female de facto household head would probably have found a man to represent her. If the meeting was in an open space, women might gather in the background to observe, but in general they did not, as is said in Bambara, 'have the word' (*kuma*), or the right to speak. The SMC described the school that was to be established. They told the men that each compound was to have the opportunity to enroll children, and that the classes were to have equal numbers of boys and girls. The SMC indicated in general terms to each compound how many children they could send.

Heads of compounds then went home, and gathered together the (male) heads of households, and discussed which children should be sent. The SMCs stressed that it was the heads of households, and not the heads of compounds, who usually chose the children to go. They also said that the explicit decision-making responsibility belonged to the fathers, but that mothers in fact have considerable indirect influence over the process. The heads of households relayed their choices back through the heads of compounds to the SMC, who put together the list of pupils.

4.3.1.2 Avoiding an emphasis on children out of school

In order to move toward education for all, it may often be more important to know how many children are not in school as how many are, and to focus efforts on those children. But all three SMCs gave identical, somewhat evasive answers to the question of how many children were not in school, and most likely with good reason. Each committee said that 'it is difficult to know this'; in Saba, the SMC quoted the adage that it is easier to know how many cattle are in the enclosure than outside of it. Similarly, in the 1998-99 Annual Report on the community schools (Laugharn et al., 1999), only 33% of SMCs claimed to have conducted a census, and even that figure is probably an overestimation, since only 21% could show one. When I pointed out to the SMCs that my assistants and I had done a census in a matter of days, they shrugged their shoulders.

It would seem that this avoidance of censuses is deliberate. First, as Gérard points out, paper is better mastered by those from outside the village than by those within it, and often seems to be used against them. Lists simply make it easier for outsiders to criticize and manipulate you, a sort of 'bush League Tables', and in any case, when you live in the

village, you know full well who is in school and who is out, and probably why, and how difficult or easy it would be to get that child into school. Secondly, all the SMCs knew that some children were in school because others weren't, that is, that 'education for many' had been negotiated on the basis of the rest of children doing other things that parents considered necessary. A written census might upset this balance, leading overzealous NGO or Ministry staff, or even SMC members, to press too hard on the education for all agenda.

4.3.2 The second classroom and recruitment

4.3.2.1. Lengthening the cycle

As originally conceived, the school cycle was to be three years long. This would be enough for children to learn to read and write in Bambara, do simple calculations, and gain some basic spoken French. The three-year cycle was patterned on the experience of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)'s community schools in Bangladesh, which generally also recruited two separate age groups: young children who could afterwards be streamed into government schools, and adolescents, often dropouts from the government system, for whom the three years would be a second chance at formal schooling.

Within a year or two, it was becoming increasingly clear to all that conditions in Mali were causing the situation to play out differently than in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a densely populated country with a longer tradition of public schooling than Mali. In the experience of BRAC, the nearest government school in Bangladesh may often be at reasonably close distance, in the same village as the community school, while in Mali the typical community school is at least 10km from a government school (indeed, distance from existing schools has been a major criterion in site choice for community schools). It is thus difficult for children to 'graduate' from a Malian community school to a government one at fourth grade. Moreover, since so few children in outlying villages had actually gone to school, it didn't seem just for the community school to be a 'second chance' institution. It had to be a first-chance, and most likely 'only-chance', school.

So in the spring of 1994, when Kelen was finishing its second year and Fila and Saba in their first, the NGO proposed to the communities and to the Ministry of Education that the cycle be lengthened from three to six years, in line with the length of the government schools' cycle. Written French would be gradually introduced, eventually becoming the medium of instruction in fifth and sixth grades, as well as the language of examination at the end of the cycle.

Ministry and communities supported the idea, which brought the community schools more legitimacy in the eyes of many villagers, and gave the Ministry some important new ideas about how to expand the supply of schooling in Mali. But the extension of the cycle introduced some practical problems as well, among them the difficulty of fitting a six-year primary schooling cycle into the course of child and adolescent development as understood by parents and pupils. This is particularly a problem for girls: the period between the perceived onset of *hakili* ('intelligence' or 'spirit'), when a parent would feel a child could benefit from schooling, and the taking up of adult responsibilities is barely six years long, and can be shorter. In fact, in Kelen, boys felt the problem acutely as well, for many of those boys recruited for the original 'adolescent' class, some recruited at age fourteen or sixteen, simply felt themselves too old to stay in primary school for six years.

All of the SMCs said that they had held assemblies in 1994, outlining the proposed change and asking for a commitment to a longer cycle, and all said that they received it. But it is clear that the schools established in 1992 and 1993 suffered from higher levels of dropout than later schools (see Chapter Five), and much of this seems due to over-age recruitment. In Saba, the SMC did not seem surprised by the dropouts of older pupils, even though parents had given their commitment that the children would stay: the force of social pressures for the child to leave school seem to have been perceived to override the commitment given.

4.3.2.2. Not so easy everywhere the second time around

The community school model was designed so that all the children of school age in an average village (with population of about 600 persons) could go to school in two classrooms, double-shifted, of thirty children each (15 boys and 15 girls), thus enrolling 15x2x2 children, or 120. In the original model, an initial single classroom would be built, and 60 pupils recruited; after three years, a second classroom would be built, and two new cohorts of pupils recruited, who would then be replaced after three years. When the cycle was lengthened to six years, this basic model was retained, but now the original cohort would continue into fourth grade, and the second one would begin first grade. When the first cohort finished sixth grade, it would exit and a third cohort would be recruited to begin first grade (while the second cohort was now in fourth grade).

SMCs in Fila and Saba both said that the second recruitment was easier than the first, since they knew better what they were doing. Fila had drawn the lesson of the risks of over-age recruitment, and asked the village health committee, which recorded the births of all babies in the village, to supply it with lists of children who were under the age of eight. In Saba, the SMC felt that the community members understood the value of schooling better. In 1993, they said, some children had complained upon being recruited; in 1996, it was those who were not chosen who complained. The figures for the second recruitments bear this optimism out: in 1996, Fila recruited 31 new first grade boys and 28 girls (a girl:boy ratio of 0.9 to 1), and Saba 33 boys and 28 girls (0.85 to 1). Kelen's evolution, described in detail below, was altogether less positive.

The building of second classrooms, however, did not follow as smoothly. Almost half of the villages whose community schools were established in 1992 or 1993 experienced a delay in establishing their second classroom. Mostly this was due to a lack of clarity within the NGO itself on the intended rhythm of establishment, leading to low SMC awareness or commitment to the establishment of the second classroom. But it was also the case that in a few villages, the late establishment of the second classroom indicated the SMC's inability to interest the community in this project, either because of other higher-priority community efforts such as an irrigation project, or because the community's experience of the first three years of schooling had generated less enthusiasm than expected.

It should be noted that additional classroom establishment was more correlated with community enthusiasm for schooling than with the actual number of school age children within the village. Thus two of the 28 community school villages in the Observatory, on their own initiative, actually established second and even third classrooms ahead of

schedule (a first classroom and recruitment in 1995, the second in 1996, and the third in 1997). By contrast, other large villages which could have used more than two classrooms stuck to the triennial recruitment blueprint as it was conveyed to them by NGO staff.

The NGO had assumed that the second recruitment would be simpler and more successful than the first, as the parents would have had a chance to grow to appreciate the value of schooling for their children, and the SMC would be more experienced in its work. In fact, the second recruitments were unexpectedly problematic, in Kolondièba District, they tended not to reach the goal of enrolling sixty children. The average second recruitment brought in 53 pupils in 1996-97, 42 in 1997-98, and 45 in 1998-99. The third classrooms mentioned above, while noteworthy in terms of the initiative they represent, were also low, averaging 48 pupils between them. This is a significant shortfall in recruitments; if it is true in general, it indicates that enrolments will be one-eighth lower than originally foreseen in the model. It may be that general levels of enthusiasm for the novelty of schooling wear down by the fourth year. Another possible explanation is that the first recruitment is easy because it does not 'dig deeply' into the population of school-age children; the second recruitment may be less successful because the SMC is trying to recruit children whom the parents would like to see dedicated to other pursuits than schooling. This question is explored in the interviews below.

4.3.3 Deterioration of SMC leadership in Kelen

The three SMCs successfully carried out their initial enrolments at the beginning of the community schools project. Fila and Saba both reported that their second recruitments were easier and more successful than the first, particularly as they learned to seek to recruit younger children in order to reduce the likelihood of dropout. Their experiences followed the pattern of increasing competence envisaged by the NGO. Kelen, on the other hand, had a more difficult time during its second recruitment, and its case is instructive in terms of the sort of support and resources an SMC needs to function well.

The SMC in Kelen suffered a number of setbacks in the mid-1990s. Both the original SMC president and the village chief had died within the first couple of years of the school's operation, and neither of their replacements was dynamic. The village was riven by factionalism between its original inhabitants and recent immigrants, and in the wake of one heated dispute, the children of some members of one faction were pulled out, including, for a time, one of the teachers! When it came time to arrange a second recruitment, in 1995-96, the Kelen SMC could not generate sufficient enthusiasm, and no second classroom was built, nor second pupil cohort recruited. The following year, in 1996-97, the SMC says its members going from compound to compound looking for potential pupils, but the SMC was 'humiliated', only able to find seventeen candidates, and they gave up for that year.

To add to the problems, conflict also arose in Kelen about the costs of schooling. As originally conceived, the community schools did not place a tremendously heavy burden on the average parent. The monthly per-child fee, about twenty US cents, was set in consultation with villages, and in itself was affordable. But complications arose. First, if a parent had many children, it could become financially difficult to put them all in school. Liquidity problems were greatest around harvest time, before the cotton crop was sold, and this was the period where parents were deciding whether or not to enroll children. Secondly, if a teacher was promised a certain sum monthly, with every pupil dropping out,

fees for the parents of remaining children increased (this was more of a problem for persistence than for recruitment, but it tended to colour decisions about future recruitments as well). And as we shall see in the next chapter, dropout rates in Kelen were high. Thirdly, with the lengthening of the cycle and the addition of written French, a two-tier wage scale came into being: those who could teach in French would usually get at least US$30 per month, and often US$50, while the village natives who taught in Bambara would often get between US$7 and US$12 (for those villagers who did know enough French to teach in it, this meant that it was more lucrative to teach in another village than their own, a dynamic not foreseen at the beginning of the community schools initiative). These factors meant that in Kelen the cost to parents of keeping children in school was rising over the years. Problems with payments were exacerbating other bad feelings and leading to demoralising rows. At this point the NGO proposed the Kelen SMC try to shift the financing of teachers' salaries from individual fees to the revenues from the acreage of cotton that the village farmed together. The Kelen SMC did introduce such a subsidy, in effect reducing the fee inflation caused by dropout and wage increases, and they reported that a number of children who had been withdrawn from school actually returned.

This subsidy was also said to have greatly facilitated the 1997 recruitment, reviving parental interest and garnering fifty-one new first graders. The only problem was that this incoming class was a rare example of gender disparity in the community schools, with 39 boys and 12 girls. The resulting girl:boy ratio, of 0.3 to 1, was considerably lower than that prevailing in the government schools. According to the SMC, mothers no longer felt that the school was a novelty, and withdrew their support for sending their girls; the SMC said, somewhat abashed, that 'some heads of households don't even have the last word about whether their daughters should go to school.' To increase parental interest in enrolment, the SMC had let children be recruited according to 'free will,' and had given up trying to promote the enrolment of girls.

The drop in levels of gender parity between the first and second enrolments is an indication both of the influence an SMC can have when it resolves to use it, and of the likelihood that parents will switch back to enrolling children on the basis of their own gender preferences if the SMC allows this.

Finally, though the recruitment was done, no classroom was built in 1997-98, because the village had opted to direct its labor into the construction of a small dam to permit rice farming; classes were held in a small unused building.

Kelen's case demonstrates the difficulties that reliance on community-based management can cause in communities characterised by lack of leadership and factionalism.

4.3.4 Family strategies regarding enrolment

4.3.4.1 Why are some of your children in school and others not?

The most common response to the question about why certain children were in school and others not was 'well, we couldn't send everyone.' This was uttered as though it were a truism, simple common sense, and sometimes it required several minutes of conversation to establish that I actually did feel it interesting to discuss why they couldn't enroll every child. This was a clear indication that while the advent of the community schools was

recognised by parents as an opportunity for education for many, explicit discussion of Education for All had not yet reached their villages.

Typically, a head of household would state that his household had oriented some children toward school, and some to work. The most common explanation given by parents for not being able to send everyone to school had to do with other tasks the parents wanted the child to carry out. These were generally of three types: errands (Serpell's category of 'sendability'), child-minding, and more taxing physical labour (tasks such as pounding grain or minding cattle). Of these, the activity that seemed most commonly to prevent parents from enrolling children was errand-running. Children are perceived to serve an important communication function within the village, running messages between adults, fetching water, bringing food to labouring parents, announcing the arrival of visitors, and this function is which is slowed down by their being immobilised in school. It is also felt that such activity helps a child develop trustworthiness and a sense of responsibility, attributes which are highly prized. Parents also rely on children's success at this task of errand-running to gauge that their child is entering into the age of *hakili* ('intelligence').

More taxing physical labour was less often mentioned, probably because children of enrolment age (six to eight) are considered too young to be doing such work. Gender-segregated tasks become more common as a child ages: whereas errands can in most cases be done by either sex, such tasks as pounding grain (for girls) and minding cattle (for boys) are highly sex-specific. In fact, it was noted that if a parent should not have any children of the 'right' sex to do one of these tasks, then it was more proper to 'foster in' a child of the 'right' sex than to ask their biological children of the other sex to do it. This sense of rightness and wrongness of tasks seems to grow stronger as children become older. One of the reasons that gender equity seems not to have posed a problem in recruitment is that at enrolment age, the tasks that compete with enrolment are not particularly sex-specific.

During interviews, parents mentioned girls' tasks more commonly than boys during interviews, especially regarding girls' help with child care. On the other hand, some parents mentioned the need for keeping a boy for work in the fields, and thus enrolling a daughter. Sometimes the child with the "right" age and sex was already working and was left doing so. This was especially the case for boys who were involved in herding.

Male heads of households often stated that they made their choices of whom to enroll with an eye to avoiding arguments with their wife or wives about insufficient labour at home:

> My choice was random, but someone was needed to help in small chores and errands. If I'd tried to send all kids to school, I'd've had hell to pay (*j'aurais ramassé les pots cassés*). We'd have no errands, messages, etc.

> Rokia's helping her mother. Girls' schooling is good. If a woman has two daughters, we can put one in school. But if she has only one, then it would be taken badly to put that daughter in school. I mean, taken badly by the mother.

Along the same lines, some heads of households spoke of apportioning equitably per wife:

> We chose these four and not others because we couldn't put all of our children in. I took one child for each mother. We didn't want to upset the teachers with excuses, you know, like 'our child can't go to school today because of work in the fields or with the cattle or minding the younger ones' (K/44-46).

A small minority of families though felt that they could do without the labour of any of their children, and enrolled all of them. But heads of household were unanimous in saying that an enrolled child should not have excessive work demands, and that it was up to the head of the household to make sure that the labour the child might have done would be accomplished by someone else.

4.3.4.2 Which child would you orient toward school?

Given that parents did not believe that they could send all of their children to school, if they did have more than one child available, how did they decide which one to send?   An open-ended survey question, paired with the gender preference question above, was posed to parents of children enrolled in the community schools,

Table 10: On what basis did you choose to enroll this particular child in the community school?

	Examples	Fathers (n=153)	Mothers (n=313)
Particular qualities of the child	Outgoing personality The child wanted to be enrolled The child was available The child had the right age	26%	24%
Broad attitudes supportive of education	Everyone is enrolling their children in school these days For knowledge and ideas It's a lottery--let's see if they win School is good in itself People should be literate Children will need to be able to take care of themselves Religious reasons	25%	8%
The child was summoned		10%	4%
My husband (or other male relative) decided		0%	19%
No particular reason/ don't know		39%	44%
TOTAL		100%	100%

Of parents who cited particular qualities of the child, more than two thirds made a reference to the child's having a personality suited for schooling, saying variously that the child enrolled had spirit or courage (dusu), or the sort of discipline needed to do well in school. Among the parents who cited broad attitudes, one in three gave the 'everyone is doing it' response; the rest of the responses were given by much smaller proportions.

Nearly one in five mothers declined to answer the question about why the child was enrolled on the grounds that it was the father who made schooling decisions. Some of the responses in this vein were quite vehement. One woman responded, 'Why would you ask me such a question, I have no idea why the child was chosen. Ask his father instead!' But in fact neither sex expressed great clarity about why their child had been enrolled. Ironically, parents were less likely to invoke 'don't know' or 'it wasn't my responsibility'

answers to a hypothetical question about gender preference (section 4.4) than about the fact of the enrolment of their actual child.

4.3.4.3 Factors that can keep parents from sending children

A number of other factors could keep a parent from sending a child to school, or acceding to the SMC's suggestion that that child enroll. First among these was if the child were fostered in from the household of a relative, and was not the biological child of the head of household. Since the biological parents of the child most likely lived in another village, and often quite far from Kolondièba District, they might be unaware of the community schools or uninterested in them, or simply not feel accountable to the SMC. Parents reported regularly of girls who were fostered out at moment of recruitment. The parents said that they either had not thought to call the girls back, or had been unable to, as their obligations to their siblings overrode demands of school. The reverse, though, was also true, as a number of parents reported siblings sending their children to Kolondièba from Côte d'Ivoire in order to be able to attend a community school.

Sickness and small size were also frequently mentioned as reasons for children not to attend the community school:

> The only thing that should keep a child out of school is sickness, that is, handicaps such as blindness, muteness, and deafness.

> Since none of our children had any sickness, they could all go except for age difference.

> We thought that Sanata was too young to go to school. She's a girl who doesn't grow quickly.

> Balakissa was too young for school. She couldn't handle it, she always came home crying. We took her out

> Dramane was too small to go to school, no matter what the papers [birth records] say.

4.3.5 Parental attitudes survey

The interview data with parents were used to put together a Likert style questionnaire listing 25 common but provocative parental attitudes about enrolment, attendance, and dropout expressed during the conversations.

Table 11: Parents' agreement with statements about enrolment

		Father (N=336)	Mother (N=864)
	ATTITUDE		
10	It is acceptable to orient some children to school and some to work	78%	73%
04	Every child in our community should go to school.	76%	78%
07	A sickly child should not be enrolled in school	63%	64%
13	If they weren't summoned (by the authorities), most parents wouldn't send their children to school	54%	53%
19	If a parent considers that his child is not intelligent, he shouldn't enroll his child at school	45%	48%

Each of these attitudes and the magnitude of the response merits analysis.

It is acceptable to orient some children to school and some to work

A strong majority of parents of both sexes affirmed the basic idea that has been described above: that orientation of children between school and work is acceptable

Every child in our community should go to school

Paradoxically, a similar majority of parents agreed with the statement "every child in our community should go to school." In fact, 58% of the community school parents agreed with *both* statements, which would in fact seem to be mutually exclusive of one another. Judging from the frequency with which orientation was spoken of in the interviews, and the rarity with which parents spoke of enrolling or wanting to enroll all of their children, it appears that at least some parents are giving a 'politically correct' affirmation to the Education for All statement. This impression merits further investigation.

A sickly child should not be enrolled in school

As in the interviews in the case villages, parents indicated consistently that sickly or handicapped children should not be enrolled. This may be because parents feel that sickly children will find school too hard on their health, or it may be that a parent who is consciously orienting children toward and away from school will consider a sickly child a 'poor risk' within school, unlikely to progress far. The politically correct answer from an 'Education for All' point of view would probably have been that all children, regardless of their health and physical status, have a right to schooling, so that this response indicates a divergence in viewpoints between the parents and the EFA community. The wording of the question may have led to some ambiguity as well, since some the word sickly (*maladif*) can lend itself to a range of interpretations.

If they weren't summoned [by the authorities], most parents wouldn't send their children to school

A majority of parents affirm the importance of the summons to enrolment, though the phrasing of the question has not allowed one to judge how the parents feel about summons. From the point of view of the NGO, one of the goals of the community schools project was to develop a school to which it was not necessary to summon children. This answer indicates that parents see the summons as a central part of the schooling dynamic.

If a parent considers that his child is not intelligent, he shouldn't enroll his child at school

Near majorities agree that parents should not enroll children who are not intelligent. This question is similar to the one on sickliness: unintelligent pupils may be a poorer risk with a smaller likelihood of return, and/or they may have unhappy experiences in school. Here again the idea that schooling is a right for all children, whatever their level of intelligence, has not penetrated to Kolondièba.

4.4 Managing gender parity

4.4.1 How gender parity was established

Recruiting equal numbers of boys and girls was an intriguing issue. It was clear that the typical Malian rural household preferred to send boys to primary school. As we have seen, the government schools of Kolondièba District are no exception. And yet there seemed to be broad confidence at the level of the SMCs that equitable enrolments were possible. But how did the SMCs go about asking households to send girls to school, when this must have seemed counter to the self-interest of many of those households?

In Fila, the SMC acknowledges that there was a 'not in my courtyard' sort of reaction, that while the village espoused the idea of sending girls to school, some didn't want to do so personally. In particular, one younger male member of the SMC said, some mothers 'swore with their arms but destroyed with their feet', manifesting public support but private disapproval of the girls' enrolment. The Fila SMC took the original lists of children suggested by the heads of compounds, and found them somewhat imbalanced in favor of boys, so it went to a number of compounds and requested girls, saying 'if we want to have the school, we have to do this.' Of the two compound heads interviewed who mentioned that they had been asked to substitute one of their girls for a boy they had originally proposed, one found it normal, and the other was annoyed, but both complied. The Fila SMC's explanation of their action is that the village is living in darkness (*dibi*) and ignorance, and that that dire situation justifies a certain amount of intervention by the SMC. Their final rosters for the first recruitment listed 33 boys and 31 girls.

Skepticism about girls' schooling had been discernible in Kelen since the very first meeting to discuss the possibility of opening a school, in May of 1992. It was not clear at the end of this meeting whether the village felt that it could meet the NGO condition of gender equity, but after two weeks' reflection, the village announced to the NGO that they would indeed like to participate, and would be able to enroll the agreed-upon number of girls. Looking back on these discussions within the village, the SMC claimed that the novelty of having a school won the villagers over to the idea of gender equity, despite some initial misgivings. Thirty-three boys and thirty girls were enrolled. Of Kelen's first recruitment, the NGO had written in 1993, rather optimistically:

> Save the Children had asked each of the [initial community school] villages to commit to keeping each Village School student in school for the entire three year cycle, and Kelen, perhaps erring on the side of over-scrupulousness, decided to enroll 30 girls aged 6-8, and no adolescent girls. In an area where girls are often engaged by age 11 or 12, and married by 14, Kelen was showing a certain amount of realism. In the future, however, we hope that the Village School will have sufficiently shown its worth that parents, and fiancés, will be willing to delay marriages long enough for girls to finish the whole cycle. (Save the Children/US - Mali, 1993: 9).

The SMC in Saba said that it was 'able to balance things' in terms of gender equity. It would have negotiated with parents to send more girls if this had been necessary, but in the end it was not, and 31 boys and 32 girls entered first grade.

Of more than thirty heads of household interviewed, most said that they had not sought to favour boys' enrolment, and that if the SMC had asked for them to substitute a child of the other sex, they had done this willingly. This being said, none of the fathers said that they sought to favour their daughters' enrolment *per se*, either. They reported that the sex of the child enrolled was mostly determined by who in the household happened to have the right age at the recruitment period, and conditioned as mentioned in section 4.3 by the labour needs of the household.

There were two parents of enrolled girls who were explicitly opposed to girls' schooling (one in Kelen and the other in Fila). The first felt that his compound was suffering because of their absence (particularly in terms of child minding) and added that he had the impression from the teacher that his daughter had not done well in any case; he lamented that, 'my problem is that I have only girls (K/43).

The second father, in Fila, felt doubly thwarted. In 1993, he had offered two sons for school, and the SMC had taken only one (since it was trying to keep a lid on boys' enrolment to maintain gender balance). As the father said:

> I wasn't in agreement with enrolling girls, I'll just lose them to their marriage families anyway, but boys would stay with me. When the SMC asked me for girls, I wasn't happy about this, not at all. Even for the previous recruitment [in 1993], I wasn't in satisfied with how it went. I wanted to send two boys, but the SMC said no, one boy and one girl. I refused to send a girl, so I've only got the one boy in 5th grade now. You know, even if my sister-in-law is educated and I see the value of it, I'm not for putting my girls in school (F/49).

In 1996, since his compound had three girls of eligible age, the SMC asked for all three. While they were all enrolled, the man's skepticism was palpable, and the odds on their finishing out the cycle did not look good. This compound seemed somewhat marginal to village life, both physically on the edges of the village, and socially, since the family belonged to a minority fundamentalist sect. It did seem that the Fila SMC had tried to balance its gender ratio by leaning on weaker households, a strategy that might give them give problems in the long run.

The SMCs all reported asking for heads of household to volunteer children first, and it is likely that they accepted all offers by parents willing to enrol girls, while in cases of a surplus of boy candidates, they went back to parents to reduce the list. This is likely to be one reason for the persistence of a strong correlation between parental educational history and girls' enrolment within the community schools: the SMCs had an interest in accommodating schooled parents' desire to pass that experience on to their girls.

If the request for volunteers did not yield an equitable enrolment, the SMCs reported going back to specific parents if necessary to balance out the recruitment. The study found that as the enrolment system was set up in the community schools project, the average household head has a fairly restricted choice, assuming that age guidelines are respected. Only one in twenty heads of household had both a boy and a girl available for recruitment; the others either had only one child who met the age criterion (87%) or two or more children of the same sex (6%). Thus in the community school villages, the SMC had a

very accurate idea of which heads of household would enrol boys and which girls. This was in effect the community-school equivalent of the headmaster's summons (convocation), except that it tended to entail much less expense and concern on the part of parents. The community school summons was more likely to be effective, as well, since the SMC were in daily social contact with the household in question, not working in a school several kilometers away as were the headmasters. It was harder to 'duck' a community school summons.

There were still household level strategies that could allow a parent to enrol a boy in place of a girl. For example, a parent who only had girls within the specified age range could propose a boy who was older. Or a household head who did not wish his daughter to be enrolled could propose that the enrolment take place at the level of the compound rather than the household. At this higher level, the study found that 30% of compounds had at least one boy and one girl available for enrolment, while 57% had only one child and 14% had two or more children of the same sex. This is particularly important in the case of community schools in larger villages, where for the sake of equity among compounds, entire compounds (rather than single households) might be asked to enrol one child. These complications notwithstanding, in most cases it proved simple for SMCs to organise gender-equitable enrolments.

4.4.2 The gender paradox: stated boy preference but parity in practice

Given the relative ease with which the SMCs were able to organise balanced enrolments, one would be tempted to reason that a norm in favour of co-education was arising, or at least that parents in community school villages would not manifest strong boy preference. Surprisingly, there are indications that a latent boy preference has continued to be quite strong in the community school villages.

The Observatory offered a chance to examine parents' attitudes towards gender preference in enrolment. The following question was posed by the Observatory data gatherers to 866 mothers and 330 fathers of children in the community school villages.

> If you had a daughter and a son, both of enrolment age, and you could only send one of them to school, which one would you choose? Why?

Table 12: Parental gender preference: Would you enroll the boy or the girl?

"I would send…	Fathers	Mothers
…the boy	56%	45%
…both children	9%	5%
…the girl	5%	5%
…neither child	1%	1%
I don't know	28%	43%

The responses to this question, after seven years of SMC work and a strong track record of gender parity in access, were quite surprising. Fathers favoured sending the boy over the girl by 11 to 1, and mothers by 9 to 1. While this preference reflects both practice and common ways of thinking in Africa, the strength of the preference is remarkable, and it is entirely at odds with parents' behaviour over the last seven years.

The groups of reasons given by those who expressed a preference show eminently rational processes at work. It is worthwhile to examine the parents' explanations in some detail. The responses of the parents were all individually coded, and then grouped into families of similar responses. Those parents preferring to send the boy gave the following explanations:

Table 13: Parental gender preference: Why I would enroll the boy

Category of statement	Examples	Fathers (n=184)	Mothers (n=394)
Gender judgments about school	A boy goes further in school A boy has the right social qualities to succeed at school A boy needs schooling because of roles later in life Schooling suits a boy better	35%	25%
Long-term Family interest	A daughter will marry outside the family Our family should benefit from the child's schooling A boy takes better care of his parents	34%	10%
Child's own interest	A boy will need to take care of self A boy should take his chances—let's see if he succeeds We don't want our child to be ignorant like us	14%	13%
Intrinsic value of school knowledge	Education is good For knowledge and ideas	11%	26%
EFA	All children should study Both sexes have the right to schooling Both sexes are the same	2%	0%
Short-term labour needs	I need the labour of my daughter	1%	22%
Other		1%	0%
Total		100%	100%

Fathers based their preference primarily on two things: first, a judgment that school and boys were more suited to one another than were school and girls, and secondly, that boys' schooling was in the long-term interest of the family. Fathers were markedly more likely to mention a daughters' marrying out of the family than were mothers.

Mothers show a somewhat different rationale for preferring to send boys. A quarter of mothers gave an answer to the effect that 'school knowledge is good', which on the face of it is 'non-gendered' but in fact was a rationale that was much more often advanced for sending boys than girls. This response thus resembles the idea that school is a place better suited for boys, which was the response given by another quarter of mothers. Finally, one in five mothers said simply that she would choose to send the boy not because of his own qualities, but because she would have need of the girl's labour at home.

When the same analysis is conducted of the much smaller group who preferred to send the girl to school, different patterns emerge:

Table 14: Parental gender preference: Why I would send the girl

Category of statement	Examples	Fathers (n=18)	Mothers (n=39)
Gender judgments	A girl needs to 'awaken' A girl has the right social qualities to succeed at school A girl needs schooling because of roles later in life	39%	26%
Short-term labour needs	I need my boy's labour	33%	0%
Long-term Family interest	A girl takes better care of her parents	11%	44%
Child's own interest	A girl will need to take care of herself	6%	23%
Intrinsic value of school knowledge	Education is good For knowledge and ideas	6%	0%
EFA	All children should study Both sexes have the right to schooling Both sexes are the same	6%	3%
Other		0%	5%
Total		100%	100%

Again the fathers' response was based primarily on two categories, gendered judgments of schooling as previously and short term labour needs. A third of these fathers would enroll their daughter not because of her own qualities, but because the fathers wanted to retain the labour of their sons.

The mothers in this group seemed to be expressing their general approval of their daughters in this response. Almost half felt that daughters in fact take better care of their parents than sons, even though it is the sons who stay close to the parents and the daughters who marry away into other households. A number of mothers said that girls need to "awaken" (*ka wuli*) to new possibilities in this age, a response which no father gave. And mothers in this group were more likely to express their rationale in terms of supporting their daughters' own interest. Neither mothers nor fathers emphasised the value of school knowledge *per se* for girls.

In the whole group, a number of parents insisted that they would send both children, even though this was not one of the options offered by the question. These parents gave the following reasons for not wanting to decide between their children:

Table 15: Parental gender preference: Why I would send both children

Category	Father (n=30)	Mother (n=45)
Child's own interest	43%	24%
Intrinsic value of school knowledge	27%	24%
EFA	23%	42%
Family interest	7%	9%
Total	100%	100%

Fathers were a bit more likely than mothers to propose sending both children, at 9% and 5% respectively. Interestingly, mothers were more likely than fathers to cite the precepts of the Education for All movement ('all children should study', 'both sexes have a right to study', and so on), while fathers were more likely to explain their choice in terms of the needs of their children in later life. Contrary to the parents who emphasised one sex or the other in their choices, a quarter of those parents who would enroll both children find that the school knowledge has intrinsic value for girls as well as boys.

These responses are provocative. The degree to which parents favoured boys' enrolment, and the consistency of their rationales, including gendered judgments about the process of schooling and the knowledge it imparts, and long- and short-term household interests, inevitably lead to the question: how can parents hold these beliefs and still manifest gender-equitable patterns of enrolment?

The question becomes even more interesting when the responses of parents in the community school villages are compared with those in the government school villages and in the villages without schools:

Table 16: Comparing fathers' and mothers' gender preferences in enrolment, by type of village

I would send …	Fathers			Mothers		
	Community	Government	None	Community	Government	None
Boy	56%	35%	28%	45%	27%	14%
Girl	5%	7%	0%	5%	3%	2%
Neither	1%	2%	0%	1%	1%	0%
Both	9%	26%	15%	5%	13%	1%
DK	28%	30%	57%	43%	56%	84%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The government school parents manifest the opposite pattern from that of the community school parents. While in practice government school parents favour their son's enrolment more frequently than do community school parents, in their statements they are more equitable, both in terms of a reduced (but still strong) preference for boys over girls, and in terms of a much more common assertion that they would send both children to school.

In the villages without schools, the boy preference is still weaker. This is not because girl preference has grown, for this is smaller in the school-less villages as well. It is because

the 'don't know' percentage in these villages is very high, with almost three out of five fathers giving this response and more than four out of five mothers.

Why do the community school parents state a preference for enrolling boys, and yet send equitable numbers of boys and girls to school in practice? The conclusion seems to be that, even though the parents' gendered attitudes were clear in the abstract, they were not given the opportunity to play out in reality. Partially this is because the situation described in the question was not a real one for most households called on to enroll children: they may have had only one child, or children of the same sex, rather than one child of each sex. For those who did have a boy and a girl of enrollable age, it would seem that the SMC's gender parity guidelines "overruled" the abstract parental preference. It should also be remembered that more than a quarter of fathers and nearly half of mothers in the community school villages said that they did not know which sex they would enroll, and an SMC seeking to enroll girls might well approach such parents who do not manifest a fixed gender preference.

4.4.3 Kelen desists

The survey on gender preference in enrolment choice above gives an indication that the establishment and preservation of gender parity in the community school villages is unlikely to be automatic, and that the SMC will have a major role in maintaining it. Further evidence is given by the case of Kelen, and the effect of its letting the gender equity guideline drop, during its 1997 recruitment. When asked how the SMC came to the decision to do this, SMC members had the following to say:

> Our point of view in Mali is that the responsibility for boys is the household head's. The girl belongs to her mother. The compound head prefers to send a boy. The mother has responsibility for obtaining the girl's trousseau, so she has a particular interest in the girl's future.

When asked whether they meant that the decision-making power of the head is limited if the wife is not agreed, the SMC members replied:

> There are families where the head can't even get a word in edgewise (*n'a même pas la parole*), concerning what happens to the girls. You'd need the approval of the mother.

So how was parity established in 1992?

> Now, the thing was new then, just starting, and many mothers were interested. They were happy that there was going to be a school. Today, with the little problems we've had over fees and labour, they've lost their interest and their vision of the future. They prefer to keep their girls in rice cultivation and domestic chores.

> In 1992, the SMC asked the compounds to give a child, they did specify that they needed to furnish boys and girls. Since it was novel, the compounds said OK. This year [1997], enrolment was discussed in assembly. We asked everyone to furnish a child, but we didn't specify boy or girl. This year, the recruitment was 'free will' (*la volonté libre*). He who wanted to could send his child.

The resulting 1997 recruitment in Kelen was a rare example of gender disparity in the community schools, with 39 boys and 12 girls. The ensuing girl:boy ratio, of 0.3 to 1, was considerably lower than that prevailing in the government schools, and provides an additional indication of the influence of the SMC in maintaining parity.

4.5 Conclusions on enrolment

The first section of this chapter showed that the gross enrolment rate in the community school villages was 41%, not the 54% that the NGO would have estimated, much less 'schooling for all children' as the NGO had been aiming for. The chapter has looked into the reasons for this shortfall, and has identified a strategy of 'orientation' going on at the household level and a question of variable dynamism and effectiveness at the level of the SMCs.

4.5.1 Orientation at the household level

The parents interviewed appreciate the schools of Kolondièba, especially given the context of a mistrustful and distant historical relationship between the schooling system and rural communities in Mali. The community schools have answered well the first concern about conventional schooling expressed by village parents in Kolondièba, that of reducing the physical distance and cost involved in schooling to the point where any household can afford it.

The community schools model has also sought to accommodate the second concern expressed, that of managing the competition between the school and the household for the time of the child. But this is a more unstable accommodation, as it is built upon the parents' knowledge that they can still draw on other unschooled children for errands, chores, and labour. The difficulties in enrolling full cohorts in the second recruitments indicate that the school may be beginning to compete with parents even for this reserve; in any case this will inevitably happen if the NGO and the SMCs pursue an agenda of universal primary enrolment.

While parents do seem to be practising a strategy of orienting some children to school, and some children to work, it is likely that this withholding on full commitment is not entirely about labour needs. After all, the community schools have shown themselves to be flexible in terms of daily and annual schedules, and there are many ways to ensure that smaller chores get done, short of keeping children entirely out of school. It is likely that the strategy of orientation also has a prudent 'wait and see' element to it, of ensuring partial involvement in the school to see what it has to offer, and at the same time of preserving other options and following more familiar paths. This is, of course, a rational approach, it is in fact not unlike the attitude shown by most middle-aged adults today in developed countries towards adopting modern information technologies. The parents seem fairly satisfied with the current arrangement that allows many more children than previously to attend school, but which does not deprive households of labour, or make the school the dominant agent of socialisation for the seven-to-twelve age group. They are not in a hurry to see access to schooling become universal, particularly if this means hardship or discord within the household. Crucially, they also do not tend to see unenrolled children as missing out, but rather as 'pursuing a different path.'

4.5.1.1 Variable ability and commitment at the SMC level

There are differing degrees of dynamism among the SMCs. While they all started out by taking up the school promotion strategy offered by the NGO, some have gone further with this and made the strategy their own. They have for example established three classrooms within one village in the space of three years, effectively offering every child a place, or they have travelled to a neighboring sub-district to recruit a particular teacher who could give lessons in French.   The majority of SMCs, including Saba and Fila, have more or less followed the design laid down by the NGO, and have not sought to embellish it or adapt it greatly.   Other SMCs like the one in Kelen experience real difficulties in implementing the strategy, or indeed decide that they are not interested in pursuing the agenda as it is laid out.

These differences show up more clearly in the context of the establishment of second classrooms and the recruitment of second cohorts. During the initial phase of the development of a community school, the NGO is closely involved with the SMC, and its influence on the process is strong. Its frequent presence also helps to ensure that overall targets and goals are met. But partly because the rapid expansion of the system meant that the NGO was always helping out new villages, more experienced ones tended to get less attention over time, and by the time of the second classroom establishment they were largely working on their own in terms of community organisation.

In exchange for eliminating distance and negotiating flexibly on questions of children's labour and time, the school asks for a certain level of commitment, enthusiasm and sacrifice from households. With the presence and activity of the SMC, the initiative in 'strategising' around enrolment passes from the family to the committee. Far from Gérard's image of Malian parents sparring with an essentially adversarial School and State, the parents of Kolondièba largely support the recruitment efforts of the SMC. This support is based on a great degree of harmony between the objectives of the SMC and the self-interest of the parents. But this harmony is not automatic; indeed it comes under increasing strain as pupils grow older, as we shall see in the next chapter.

5. Persistence, withdrawal and flight

> *Researcher:* OK, can you tell me what the disadvantages are if you let your daughter continue studying through the end of 6th grade?
>
> *Mother:* Well, let me answer you with a question: if we turned a suitor down today and my daughter never had another offer, would I have made the right choice, even with her six years in school?
>
> (Kelen, 1997).

The research questions on dropout asked:

- What was the rate of dropout from the community schools?

- What were the causes of dropout from the community schools?

- What is the evidence of 'family strategies' around persistence and dropout?

- How effective were the SMCs in reducing dropout and promoting persistence? Were they able to intervene in the process?

While there were indications that the SMC's were fairly successful at enrolling children in the community schools, they were to run into considerable problems in making sure that the children stayed in the schools. This chapter discusses persistence and dropout in the community schools. 5.1 is a brief discussion of the importance of the persistence question. 5.2 then goes on to look at dropout in the community schools through a quantitative lens, first with an analysis of 'pupil flows', and then by examining stated reasons for dropout. 5.3 'gives the word' (as they say in Mali) to the villagers, examining a 'key event' in each village which parents and SMCs felt strongly about, and which they used to frame discussions of the difficulties of maintaining children in school. 5.4 attempts to integrate the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses, and to compare the village dynamic around persistence with that around enrolment.

5.1 NGO assumptions about persistence and dropout in the community schools

At the beginning of the community schools project NGO staff had two perceptions about dropout. The first was that dropout was an inevitable part of the rural schooling experience. A USAID brochure from the beginning of the 1990s indicated that only one child in four who began primary school actually reached sixth grade. Indeed, this dire backdrop was one reason that the NGO proposed instruction in local languages rather than French as was customary, since it appeared that the average child would have only a few years in school, and should start learning from day one, and not have to contend with mastering a colonial language first (Laugharn and Muskin, 1997; Save the Children/US - Mali, 1993). There was however a certain optimism that the community schools would follow a different trajectory, since many of the conditions that seemed linked with dropout in government schools ought not to obtain in the community schools. There should not be any expulsion or discouragement due to academic failure, repetition, or lack of support from a distant-seeming teacher. The school was not situated at a great distance, and did not split up children and their families.

Secondly, there was a working hypothesis that the activity of the SMCs would make an important difference in keeping children in school. Unlike government schools, community schools were to be intimately linked into the communities they served: the SMC would serve as a direct link both to traditional decision-making structures and to households. The committee, it was thought, would build up community commitment to schooling, which would serve as a sort of 'magnet' to keep children in school. The NGO hoped that the SMC would also actively 'shepherd' questions of absence and incipient dropout, managing to keep children from 'falling out' of school, and persuading their parents not to withdraw them.

And indeed, during the first year of operations of the first four community schools, these assumptions held up well: there was very little within-year dropout. So when staff asked themselves what the average annual dropout rate was likely to be over the three years of the cycle (as it was first conceived), they were fairly confident that it could be held to five percent. It should be noted that this figure was a 'guesstimate' rather than one based on study of other similar projects, but it was a figure that staff felt they could live with: a five percent annual rate would mean that of 100 children starting in year one, 90 would remain at the end of the three years of the cycle.

A 1994 document by the project (Laugharn et al, 1994) lists more than twenty 'indicators of active community participation' that an NGO staffer should be able to assess during a visit to a village, including the following on about attendance, parity, and persistence.

- The parents have determined the school calendar and hours, in collaboration with the teacher and the SMC.

- The parents have committed themselves to keeping their child in school for the entire cycle (now 6 years), and they are keeping to this commitment.

- The attendance rate of each student, according to the roll-call book, is 95%. If this is not the case, the SMC can give a reasonable explanation (sickness, etc.).

- The SMC monitors student attendance each day, and makes home visits to the parents of absent children to determine the reason and encourage attendance.

- The average parent or SMC member can explain the importance of good attendance, and the waste of resources and opportunities (individual, familial, and community) occasioned by dropping out.

- The parents and the SMC consider that maintaining parity between girls and boys is important, and can indicate the actions that they have undertaken to maintain this parity.

- The average parent or SMC member can explain the rationale for prioritizing girls' schooling.

(Laugharn et al, 1994).

It is noteworthy that there is only one mention of dropout in the list, and that the focus at the time was more on regular attendance than on simple persistence in the system (one of

the consequences of the rapid expansion of the schools was that attention to detail necessarily decreased).

The most extensive references in the literature to parents' associations and dropout concern the BRAC schools in Bangladesh (Prather, 1993; Rugh and Bossert, 1998). Dropout has been low in the BRAC schools, as it initially was in Kolondièba, since the schools have a three year cycle and strictly limit the time and financial burdens imposed on households. The decision to take the community schools in Mali to a full six-year cycle explains a good deal of this difference. Another difference between the BRAC schools and the community schools in Kolondièba which they inspired is the degree and manner of involvement of the supporting NGO. There is a BRAC staffer on the management committee of each school, while the SMCs in Kolondièba are entirely composed of villagers. The process of establishment and direction of schools is closely controlled by BRAC, and BRAC has been called 'somewhat directive' in the way it manages parent-teacher meetings. This active involvement has probably helped BRAC schools meet access targets, but it is a different style from that of Save the Children in Mali, which sought to leave more responsibility in community hands, and to try to build more on existing mechanisms for sustainability's sake.

When the decision was made in 1994 to extend the cycle to six years, the 5% figure was retained without any real discussion, despite the fact that isolated cases of serious dropout were beginning to occur, such as in Kelen.

In the event, actual dropout rates have been considerably higher than foreseen, at times approaching the rates indicated above for the Malian government schools. The following section examines the contours of community school dropout.

5.2 Patterns and rates of dropout from the community schools

5.2.1 Dropout rates

Of the 2,393 ever-enrolled pupils listed in the rosters of the 28 community schools in the Observatory, 441, or about 18%, have dropped out. One fifth of girls and one sixth of boys have dropped out.

Dropout from the community schools was very severe from the first two cohorts of pupils, enrolled in 1992 and 1993, averaging about 15% per year. Subsequent cohorts had lower rates of dropout, between 5% and 10% per year.

If the community schools were a mature schooling system, an eighteen per cent dropout rate over six grades, or about 3-4% per year, would be a relatively favourable one, comparing well with the original expectations of the NGO. However, at the time of this research, the community school system was still expanding rapidly, meaning that the majority of pupils were in the lower grades. But as will be seen in the following pages, dropout tended to be low in the initial grades of school, and to accelerate in the higher grades. If incoming recruitments should continue to have the same rates of dropout as the initial recruitments, this would imply dropout rates that are fairly high by international standards.

It is likely that the difference between the two early recruitments and the subsequent ones lies in the extension of the cycle, and for two reasons. First, parents made an initial commitment of only three years, and some may have opted out of committing to the extension (or their children may have). Secondly, since SMCs were enrolling children for only three years to start with, and with the explicit idea of having a class recruited from children aged nine to twelve, it is likely that the enrolled children were simply too old to stay in school for a six year cycle.

The scale of dropout was fairly similar for boys and girls in all cohorts. Neither the rates nor the curves are markedly different for boys and girls, with the single exception of 1992-93, where boys dropped out faster in the beginning and girls toward the end of the cycle. But even here, the ending percentages were almost identical.

By contrast, children's age at enrolment led to significant differences in persistence. Children aged nine or older at recruitment were more prone to dropout than younger children. Though the extension of the cycle in 1994 and the simultaneous focus on recruiting only 6 to 8 year olds has significantly reduced the proportion of pupils recruited at age nine or older, it has by no means eliminated the phenomenon. Fully a third of those enrolled in 1997-98 were over the age of eight, indicating that the question of age-related dropout may continue well into the next few years.

5.2.2 Stated causes of dropout

The above section gives us an idea of which types of pupils left the system, and which stayed, but there is little indication of why. We can start to explore this question in this section, on stated causes of dropout, before delving into the accounts gathered in the case villages.

In the rosters there were 441 dropouts, of whom 246 (56%) were girls. This does not include 7 pupils for whom the reason given for not continuing was death, and fifty who transferred out of a community school to another school (government or community).

Table 17 summarises the causes of dropout identified in the rosters:

Table 17: Stated reasons for dropout by sex, community schools

Stated reason	Girls		Boys		ALL		% in this category who are girls
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Marriage/engagement/ pregnancy	95	39%	0	0%	95	22%	100%
Exode	18	7%	68	35%	86	20%	21%
House and fieldwork	30	12%	26	13%	56	13%	54%
Learning difficulties/ lack of progress	8	3%	10	5%	18	4%	44%
Non-payment of pupil fees	6	2%	4	2%	10	2%	60%
Lack of interest on the part of student	1	0%	6	3%	7	2%	14%
Sickness	5	2%	1	1%	6	1%	83%
Conflict between family and school	1	0%	1	1%	2	0%	50%
Other reasons	34	14%	33	17%	67	15%	51%
No stated reason	48	20%	46	24%	94	21%	51%
ALL	246	100%	195	100%	441	100%	56%

Three of the stated reasons stand out as the most important: marriage, engagement, and pregnancy (22%), going to the *exode* (20%), and house and fieldwork (13%). Together these three reasons were given in 55% of cases. It should be noted that none of them is directly related to conditions within the school, but rather to the social and economic context of the pupil. A second grouping is that which remains a mystery of 'other reasons' and 'no stated reason.' Together these account for a little over a third of responses.

There are a number of what might be called 'minor reasons,' accounting for 9% of cases. These are indeed mostly 'in-school' reasons—namely, learning difficulties or lack of progress, non-payment of pupil fees, conflict with the school, and lack of interest on the part of the pupil. Sickness was also mentioned for a number of cases.

While rates of dropout were similar for boys and girls, the principal reasons given for leaving school were quite different between the sexes. For girls, the primary reason for dropout was the fact of or the preparation for marriage. For boys, the major reason was leaving their village to seek work and experience, the *exode*. Girls and boys were also both withdrawn from school to meet changing household labour requirements. While marriage and the *exode* were causes of dropout that tended to occur near the end of the cycle, pupils could be withdrawn at any point for labour. In 55% of cases, the stated reason for dropout was an out of school factor, and in 8% it was an in-school factor; for 36% of cases, the reasons are unknown.

5.2.2.1 Analysis of stated reasons by age at enrolment

In the light of the analysis of pupil flows, it should not be surprising that older pupils are at greater risk of dropout than younger ones.

Table 18: Stated reasons for dropout, by age at recruitment, community schools

Stated reason	Younger		Older		ALL		% in this category who are older
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Marriage/engagement/ pregnancy	11	6%	84	32%	95	22%	88%
Exode	22	12%	64	25%	86	20%	74%
House and fieldwork	23	13%	33	13%	56	13%	59%
"In-school causes"	21	12%	16	6%	37	8%	43%
Sickness	3	2%	3	1%	6	1%	50%
Other reasons	40	22%	27	10%	67	15%	40%
No stated reason	61	34%	33	13%	94	21%	35%
ALL	181	100%	260	100%	441	100%	59%

First, it is clear that dropout is a greater risk for children who are enrolled at nine or older. These older children make up 60% of the dropouts, even though they account for only about 40% of the total pupils enrolled.

For most of the reasons stated, the majority of dropouts are older children, although the percentage varies. Among the three major reasons:

- three quarters of pupils leaving school for the *exode* were among the older group;

- almost ninety percent of girls leaving school for marriage-related reasons were enrolled at nine or older;

- three fifths of children leaving school for house and field work were enrolled over-age. But the fact that 40% of these children were enrolled at a younger age shows that eliminating over-age enrolment is not a panacea: there will still be withdrawals of children for labour reasons (this is perhaps why a dropout rate persists even after the stabilisation of enrolment ages).

For the 'minor reasons,' all of the 'conflict between family and school' and 'lack of interest on the part of the pupil' are accounted for by older children, probably a reflection of adolescence and role transition. Sickness is evenly distributed among the two age groups. Two causes are markedly more common among the young group than the old one: learning difficulties (perhaps because the children were enrolled before they were ready for the experience) and non-payment of the teacher.

Interestingly, only about a third of the 'no stated reason'/'other reason' cases are in the older group. It seems that reasons are clear and standard for older children, and more varied and/or vague for younger children. This may mean that the explicit statement of reasons for dropout for older children is more acceptable (and in any case usually known by all, as in the case of *exode* or marriage) than for younger ones.

Table 18 above indicates that for boys it seems that *exode* replaces house and fieldwork as a factor in dropout around the age of 11 or 12. It also seems that *exode* may be taking

place at ages earlier than the 17 years at which parents said they were comfortable with their sons' leaving to find their way in the world. From the girls' chart, marriage definitively supersedes house and field work at about the same age. There seems to be mounting evidence that bringing down the enrolment age will greatly ease dropout, but not necessarily eliminate it.

5.2.2.2 Analysis of stated reasons by grade level at which dropout occurs

Since it has been shown that these patterns are gendered, it is useful to look at the figures for girls and boys separately.

Table 19: Stated reasons for girls' dropout, by grade in which it occurs

	1st-2nd		2nd-3rd		3rd-4th		4th-5th		5th-6th		ALL	
Stated reason	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Exode	5	11%	6	9%	3	4%	4	7%	0	0%	18	7%
House/fieldwk	9	19%	10	16%	4	5%	7	13%	0	0%	30	12%
Marriage, etc	11	23%	18	28%	25	34%	35	65%	6	67%	95	38%
"In-school"	0	0%	4	7%	7	9%	5	9%	0	0%	16	5%
Sickness	1	2%	2	3%	1	1%	1	2%	0	0%	5	2%
No stated reason	7	15%	17	27%	19	26%	2	4%	3	33%	48	19%
Other reasons	14	30%	7	11%	14	19%	0	0%	0	0%	35	14%
	47	100%	64	100%	73	100%	54	100%	9	100%	247	100%

From fourth grade onwards, marriage is virtually the exclusive reason for girls to leave school. Dropout for girls' *exode*, which is usually a prelude to marriage (see section 5.3.2) and most typically involves going to a town or city where wages (however modest) are available. Girls' *exode* happens throughout the cycle, at each transition except 5th-6th grade. More than three fifths of girls' dropout for house and field work happens before a girl reaches third grade. In this sample, no dropout occurs for this reason beyond fifth grade. Barring unforeseen changes in household labour needs, this cause of dropout is likely to happen in the first half of the cycle; that is, if parents manage to do without the labour of their daughter for three years, they can usually manage for six. Regarding the 'minor reasons', sickness is mentioned throughout, and the school-related causes (learning difficulties, salaries unpaid, conflict, lack of interest) tend to happen in the middle years, affecting the transitions to third, fourth, and fifth grades. The vague and other reasons play a large role until fourth grade, at which point reasons become clear and explicit. Reasons for young girls' leaving school may be varied, but this variety gradually cedes ground to marriage as a reason for dropout as girls' age.

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Table 20: Stated reasons for boys' dropout, by grade in which it occurs

Stated reason	1st-2nd		2nd-3rd		3rd-4th		4th-5th		5th-6th		ALL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Exode	17	32%	17	50%	19	30%	11	34%	4	36%	68	35%
House/ fieldwk	10	19%	4	12%	7	11%	4	13%	1	9%	26	13%
"In-school"	1	2%	2	6%	10	16%	6	19%	1	9%	20	11%
Sickness	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
No stated reason	7	13%	11	32%	17	27%	9	28%	2	18%	46	24%
Other reasons	17	32%	0	0%	10	16%	2	6%	3	27%	32	17%
	53	100%	34	100%	63	100%	32	100%	11	100%	193	100%

For boys, both *exode* and fieldwork taper off over the cycle. In both cases, about 80% of dropouts for these reasons happen before entry into fourth grade. This seems to indicate that parents (and/or the boys themselves) make a judgment over time about the value of continuing in school. Those who find other opportunities more interesting (or other work more pressing) leave within the first three years. Those who stay are likely to be left in school, with parents starting to feel that schooling might be the best use of their time.

This finding is somewhat paradoxical in that the 'normal', or at least 'non-alarming' age for the *exode* mentioned by parents was around seventeen, so we should expect to see departure for the *exode* happening more in higher grades. It is likely that a good deal of the earlier-grade *exode* dropouts are from the single village of Kelen and its ill-starred over-age enrolment.

A separate analysis of dropouts going into the *exode* by age group shows that four out of five of them are indeed pupils who were enrolled at age nine or above.

Table 21: Boys leaving school for the <u>exode</u>, by age at enrolment

Age at enrolment	1st-2nd		2nd-3rd		3rd-4th		4th-5th		5th-6th		ALL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Older	13	76%	14	82%	15	79%	9	82%	4	100%	55	81%
Younger	4	24%	3	18%	4	21%	2	18%	0	0%	13	19%

As was the case with girls, for boys, dropout associated with 'minor reasons' tends to occur in the middle of the cycle.

Vague and varied reasons play an ongoing role in boys' dropout, not tapering off as they do for girls. This has implications for future efforts to seek to reduce dropout: while it may be difficult to address the social and structural factors behind girls' dropout, at least it is clear where the phenomenon comes from.

5.3 Heated discussions in the village – case studies of three villages

The second analysis in this chapter, that of stated reasons for dropout, fleshed out a bit more completely how dropout is differentiated by sex, age, and locus (household-centred or school-centred). But although the data seem quite consistent and the inferences drawn

from them plausible, the process still has the feel of numbers-based speculation. Although the 'what' of dropout has become clear in the analysis of pupil flows and the 'why' is emerging, what is lacking is an articulated viewpoint on the part of those making the dropout decisions (parents and children) and those seeking to influence them (the SMCs). Moreover, the question 'how might the situation be improved?' cannot be answered without a much clearer idea of the dynamics of dropout.

The next three sections of this chapter attempt to give voice to the various actors in dropout. The 'story line' in each section arose naturally, around a school-related issue that was raising emotions in each village. In Fila, the central issue was a conflict between the SMC and several parents about sons having been withdrawn from school to work on the cotton harvest; this case illustrates nicely some of the issues involved in the 'house and field work' category. In Saba, there was real anguish around the growing practice of young girls leaving the village to look for work as maids in order to build up their bridewealth; this case shows how the preparation for marriage not only takes girls out of school, but also sends them away from village and family at an age that troubled many parents. Kelen, for its part, had the most spectacular crisis of boys' dropout for the *exode* seen in the whole district of Kolondièba, as well as a particularly difficult micropolitical situation that had severe effects on the functioning of the community school.

For reasons of space, the detail on these cases is not presented in this paper. The basic lines of the cases are explained, and the conclusions drawn are reported.

5.3.1 The case of Fila: conflict between labour and school

The 'hot issue' in the village of Fila concerned the SMC's efforts to enforce regular attendance. These efforts came into conflict with the labour needs of three households when the fathers of three adolescent boys took them out of a fifth grade class to work in the families' fields at a critical moment of cotton harvest. The Fila SMC thereupon decided to exclude the youths in question from school, causing protest and resistance from the boys' fathers. When the fathers refused to return the boys to school, the SMC decided further measures were necessary, and also excluded the younger brothers and sisters of the youths from second grade as well, to exclude the families from their membership in the Village Association (the organ with which the Cotton Authority does business), and to impose a 500 franc (US$1) per day fine on the parents until they returned their boys to school. Ultimately the fifth grade boys (but not their younger siblings) were kept out of school for almost a year as the conflict continued. There was much debate in the village as to whether the SMC reaction was useful or not.

The Fila case underlines the fact that even though the community schools were designed with the intention of avoiding conflict with children's labour as organised by parents, there can still be considerable challenges in accommodation. One clear recommendation arising from the previous section is that enrolment should be done younger: if the three boys had been younger, they might have been spared the withdrawal for the harvest.

Another possibility is to make alternative arrangements for labour, and to be explicit about this from the moment that children are first enrolled in school. In fact, most of the parents

interviewed said that enrolled children should not labour, or that their work should be at times of day, the week, or the year that do not conflict with school.

Ironically, one of the greatest blockages to schooling for all is that, in order to guarantee schooling for some children, a household will often designate other children for labour. Marcoux (1994) pointed out a similar phenomenon in urban Bamako, noting that one of the principal factors promoting a given girl's schooling is that she had an older sister who took care of tasks around the house, and should this sister marry, it often has negative effects on her younger sister's schooling career. Such changes in household labour needs are likely to be a major challenge for SMCs in the future.

Other factors may intervene as well. Parents may move to another village, where it is not at all guaranteed that there will be a school. A parents' divorce can also land the child in a village without a school or a home without commitment to schooling. A relative with a lower commitment to schooling than a child's birth parents may ask for a child to be fostered in to his or her household, often for reasons having to do with labour. All of these are situations that SMCs regularly experience, and they often happen at the expense of continued schooling.

The findings from the Fila case are well-supported by the literature on enrolment and attendance. Many studies have documented the competition between school and work, particularly cash producing work as was the cotton harvest in Fila. Household composition is important in determining labour needs, and as house and field tasks are gendered, so will the absence and dropout occasioned by them be gendered, in Fila, this was to the disadvantage of boys. The Fila case showed that the labour available to a household is influenced not only by quantifiable characteristics like the number of persons of a certain age, but also by intangibles such as the degree to which a household head and his siblings get along. Household labour availability is also subject to all sorts of changes, for example the death, sickness, emigration, marriage, or divorce of a labouring member of the same sex, and it is extremely difficult to devise a set of variables to track this complexity over time.

The household heads in conflict with the Fila SMC spoke of seeking labour elsewhere, both within and outside the household, before asking schooled children to take on large tasks. The presence of older same-sex labourers within the household or compound would facilitate this and would seem to protect the child's schooling chances. Marcoux (1994) speaks of the importance of an unmarried 15-to-29 year old woman in a household for the schooling chances of the family's girls; in Kolondièba, this 'sibling's sacrifice' applies to males as well as females. It is worth noting that the Fila SMC disparaged the three households' inability to find labourers to help them with their harvest as a sign of their social isolation; this would seem to imply that socially marginalised households may have a harder time finding substitute labour in order to keep their children in school.

It was clear from the quantitative data that, unlike marriage and the exode, house and field work constituted an obstacle for younger as well as older children's schooling. Thus while the marriage and exode obstacles to enrolment can be expected to be somewhat alleviated by lowering the average age at enrolment, house and field work will probably remain important to about the same degree as presently. SMCs should seek to forestall labour-related absences and dropouts by keeping a close eye on evolving household labour needs, and arranging for temporary support as needed to households with schooled children.

The Fila case also shows the potential utility of the SMC as a regulator of pupil attendance, an issue in rural schools the world over. The case raises the question of the length of permissible absences. On this issue the three SMCs were unanimous: only a short time is allowable, two or three days unless the child is sick. All of the SMCs saw absence as a prelude to dropout due to work. But while Fila adopted a combative attitude towards absence and Kelen a generally passive one, the SMC in Saba monitored absence closely. One of its members would visit the classroom daily, count heads, and note who was absent. In the case of absent boys he would often try to discuss the question with them outside the boys' home, so as not to incite conflict between the boy and the father, or the father and the SMC. By all accounts attendance in the Saba school has been less of a volatile issue, although there are certainly others, as will be seen in the next section.

The community schools project was designed to minimise conflicts between the agricultural calendar and the academic one, but as the case of Fila illustrates, such conflicts are not entirely avoidable. The reliance of schooling on continued routine presence, and the likelihood that some households will develop temporary but critical labour needs, means that absence, sometimes of a prolonged nature, is very likely to arise. In a sense, the real problem in Fila was not the absence of the three youths, but the way in which the SMC decided to punish that absence. Usually the education literature speaks of "parents not understanding the value of schooling" (e.g. Brimer and Pauli, 1971: 92), but it could equally be said, whether of the Fila SMC or of many studies on the promotion of schooling, that the school does not understand the labour needs of households. This misunderstanding becomes all the more difficult when efforts to improve academic quality through increased time on task begin to eat away at the *modus vivendi* worked out between the schools and the households. This was the case in Kolondièba in 1999, as pressure from the Ministry of Education was leading to discussion of the lengthening of the school year and day.

5.3.2 The case of Saba: girls' preparation for marriage

The issue in Saba involved girls rather than boys leaving school, in order to become domestic workers in cities so that they could save up to buy a 'trousseau' of cooking utensils to take into their marriage households 'with dignity.' In the Saba case, there was discord and considerable finger-pointing between fathers and mothers. Fathers claimed that mothers connived with girls to find the jobs in the city. Mothers accused fathers of marrying their daughters off too early and for petty financial advantage, in effect putting an end to their schooling opportunities. Both fathers and mothers were very concerned that the girls might become pregnant before marriage, which would carry with it a great degree of shame. The SMC was bravely trying to get parents to talk to one another and in public fora about the issue, in order to find a resolution, but as of the end of the study, no workable solution had yet been found. The Saba case illustrates the difficulty the SMC had in steering a situation in which parents were not in harmony with schooling, nor with one another.

The idea of parents withdrawing their daughter from school because of the perceived risk of pregnancy is fairly common in the literature about girls' schooling. For example, in her research in Niger, Shona Wynd (1995) found the same fear of shame as a factor motivating

parents to withdraw their daughters from school. Nearly all reviews of constraints to girls' schooling mention concern over pregnancy, sexual harassment, and so on. The parents interviewed, however, differed from the research literature in that they also indicated the concluding of their daughters' marriages was often in the latters' own best interest, either because their marriage household could offer them more security than a diploma could, or because the pregnancy of a daughter who was not engaged could significantly constrain her marriage chances. While there was heated debate about what age was too young for such engagements, most parents would probably have agreed that arranging a mature daughter's marriage was a more responsible parental act than continuing her schooling. In this the parents of Kolondièba resemble those of the Maasai girls described in Bonini's work: they willingly send about a third of their daughters (and a third of their sons) to primary school, but they resolutely draw the line thereafter and send almost no daughters to junior secondary school, because of the advent of marriageable age (Bonini, 1995a, 1998).

Regarding the question of actual rather than potential pregnancy, the literature on girls' schooling tends to focus on the logistical complications that pregnancy and motherhood impose, and the school system's often hostile reaction to pupils who are mothers (see, for example, Görgen et al., 1993, on schoolgirl pregnancy in Burkina Faso). In fact, when SMCs and parents spoke of problems for enrolled mothers, they referred instead to the likelihood that a girl would feel out of place, embarrassed to be in school, and resentful of not enjoying her transition to 'small mother' status in the village. This is in fact another example of how school can be perceived to be enforcing 'puerility' on pupils (Serpell, 1993), while school's proponents believe that it is providing liberating opportunities.

The problems of communication between fathers and mothers reveal how complex the decision-making process can become, or rather how situations can evolve chaotically in the absence of concerted decision-making. Herz et al's (1992) model of the 'parental balancing test' (see chapter two) making choices about enrolment seems rather inadequate here, it does not allow for conflicts of interest between members of the household (not even specifying the sex of 'the parent'), and it imagines a decision which is less complex than those in Saba, tackled by a parent who is held to have much more information than the parents of Saba seemed to have. Given the importance of parental decision-making for both enrolment and persistence, it is somewhat surprising that the literature on schooling has not explored household decision making in any depth. Some insights can be found in parallel literature about family planning, where household decision-making and husband-wife communication are similarly important. For example, an article by Lloyd and Blanc (1996) in Population and Development Review examines the roles of 'mothers, fathers, and others' in children's schooling, though the quantitative methods used give little sense of actual dynamics and motivation.

Finally, another aspect of girls' dropout in Kolondièba which is *terra incognita* both for the SMCs and for the education literature is the challenge posed by the inter-community, exogamous nature of marriage in Kolondièba. Though the literature often makes the point that a girl marries out of her birth household and is thus a less interesting candidate for schooling and investment than her brother, but reference is seldom made to where her marriage household is found. In Kolondièba, most girls marry into other villages, seriously limiting the SMC's ability to help her continue her schooling in the face of a recalcitrant husband, or in a marriage village where there is no school. The community schools project has been built on the solid foundation of the village, and yet the successful promotion of

girls' schooling may require concertation at a level above the village, such that families educating their daughters could expect suitors' families to value that investment, and could also expect that other villages would likewise invest so that their sons would be able to find schooled daughters.

5.3.3 The case of Kelen: boys' 'exode'

In Kelen, teenage boys were going off to Côte d'Ivoire to find their fortune (usually refered to as going on *'exode'*). The *exode* was now coming into competition with the school, especially because of the overage enrolment in Kelen.

While the exode has been part of the fabric of life in Kolondièba for decades, not much has been written about it as a social phenomenon. It is essentially a rite of passage for the young man, accompanied by a desire to acquire his first material goods. Young men's exode was not preoccupying the parents of Kelen the way that girls' flight was in Saba, nor setting parents against one another as was happening in Fila. It is seen by most, parents as well as youth, as inevitable, but many parents would like to see it happen in less disruptive ways. Those young men in Kelen who had done the exode tended to look on those who had not as inferior, either lazy or good-for-nothing or unworldly and immature, this is another example of a sentiment that appears counter-intuitive in EFA terms, and indicates again that different hierarchies of values are in operation between community and school. There was considerable peer pressure to go en exode; certainly it seems that this pressure had a greater effect on young men than did their parents' stated wish that they finish school. Clearly the best way to avoid conflict between primary schooling and the young men's desire to seek their fortune is to enroll boys at an early age, preferably age eight at the latest.

5.4 Discussion: A general model of dropout from the community schools

Five main points emerge clearly from the above qualitative and quantitative data. First, the word 'dropout' is a misnomer; what is going on in Kolondièba should rather in most cases be described as 'withdrawal', and in some cases as 'flight.' Secondly, the causes of dropout from the community schools have their roots primarily in factors outside the school, and thus eventual solutions are likely to be more social than academic. Thirdly, age emerges clearly as a very important factor in dropout: the most common situation leading to dropout is one in which staying in school seems, as Serpell puts it, a 'puerile' occupation, less attractive to a pupil or less approved of by the people around him or her. A fourth point is related to the third: many of those interviewed feel that there is a 'hierarchy of commitments', and that schooling is not the most important commitment for all parents or young adults. Finally, the decision to leave school is a complex one, involving a multiplicity of actors (including the pupil him or herself), and it is much more difficult for the SMC to manage this decision than it was to organise initial enrolments. Each of these points is discussed in turn below.

5.4.1 'Withdrawal and flight'

The term 'dropout' carries with it a connotation of passivity and carelessness. It implies that either the schooling system or the pupil him or herself did not take necessary precautions, and 'dropped' from school. Other terms used in the literature are likewise not apt, including, including Dei's 'fade-out' describing the situation of felt powerlessness among Afro-Canadian teenagers (Dei 1997), and the phrase 'pushout,' usually used to describe pupils 'shown the classroom door' by overly rigourous selection systems or teachers. Furthermore, while the phrase 'wastage' certainly describes the large-scale dropout from the first classes of the community schools from a planner's point of view, it carries a negative judgment of school leaving that is generally not borne out by the interviews. As we have seen, pupils' leaving community schools tends to be a willed event, in most cases brought about by parents, and as such the term 'withdrawal' is an accurate one, describing both school leaving that is arranged by parents, and pupil-arranged school leaving that is sanctioned by parents. For school leaving that is done without parental approval or awareness, Bambara speakers generally speak picturesquely of 'flight' (*ka boli ka taa*).

5.4.2 Major and minor causes of leaving the community schools

It is clear from the discussion in this chapter that the primary causes of leaving school are marriage, the *exode,* and house and field work, accounting together for the majority of cases. Interestingly enough, the *rates* of dropout are nearly identical for boys and girls; the reasons given for leaving school, however, are strikingly gendered, according to both the quantitative and the qualitative data. Issues around marriage are a cause exclusively for girls, and *exode* is primarily but not exclusively a boys' concern; work for the birth household is a cause of dropout for both girls and boys, but the tasks that children leave for are distinctly gendered. Marriage and *exode* are reasons closely related to the transition to adult life, while house and field work is a cause of dropout more closely related to temporary and changing labour needs within the household. Accordingly the former and the latter need to be addressed with in different ways by the SMCs.

The analysis of the quantitative data identified several in-school issues (learning difficulties, lack of interest, conflict between household and school) as 'minor' causes of dropout, and the interviews did not reveal much SMC or household concentration on questions of school quality. It should be expected that in-school reasons for school leaving will become more important as the focus of the community schools shifts from establishment to consolidation, and as more and more pupils enter the sixth grade where they are eligible to sit for the *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires*. It is unlikely, though, that school quality concerns will overtake social concerns in the near future.

5.4.3 Puerility, adulthood, and leaving school: the importance of age

The question of age is central to dropout in Kolondièba. While it may seem obvious from the data that children who were too old to complete the cycle were being enrolled, age was not considered a major issue in the beginning of the project. Some project staff, for example, did not know that older girls were being enrolled; others did not reflect on the implications of this. The project design did not acknowledge just how narrow the window of opportunity is for a girl between the onset of *hakili* and her entry into her marriage home. And even this brief duration is not entirely available to permit a girl to study, as we

learned; unmarried but engaged girls may well have a 'quest' to go on before they marry, either through a periodic 'commute' to their in-laws' household, or a riskier sojourn in a large city as a maid to acquire the marriage *trousseau*. The statistics in the *Demographic and Health Survey,* that the average Malian young woman is married at age sixteen and has her first child at nineteen (Coulibaly et al., 1996), do not leave as much time for school beforehand as the NGO had thought.

For boys, the window of opportunity is several years longer. But due to the initial, and to some extent ongoing, over-age recruitment, older boys found themselves still in the classroom when they felt that they should be going out into the world to prove themselves. The presence of school in the village introduces a new "rite of passage" to compete with the *exode* in Côte d'Ivoire, but there is so far a sizable number of youth for whom the school is decidedly less glamourous than the *exode* (also referred to in the village as *l'aventure*). Multi-age recruitment in the village schools has a role in this, for although these recruitments are important in enabling smaller communities to establish their own schools, they also brought together children of quite different age groups, and this presents challenges both to the oldest of the pupils, who feel out of place, and the youngest ones, who can have difficulty keeping up.

5.4.4 The hierarchy of commitments

What is most important in securing well-being in one's future life? One of the central tenets of the Jomtien movement is that education is central to one's future life prospects, and that as such it should be accorded priority over other activities before the onset of adulthood. This point of view has a certain degree of resonance for the people of Kolondièba; for example, not a single parent in Saba expressed opinions against schooling, and most were strongly in favour of their children's enrolment. And yet all acknowledged that preparation for girls' smooth integration into her marriage household is often the primary concern of her parents (and indeed of the girl herself), outweighing other preoccupations, including schooling. Saba SMC member Daouda K., for example, affirmed that parents had given their commitment that their children would attend school for the original three years, and then gave it again for the extension of the cycle to six years. But he added, even if the commitment has been given, 'when the girls are grown they just take off.'

Most schooling systems in the world are fairly complacent in the view that schooling is the most interesting programme on offer for the primary-school age group. The community schools face a number of special challenges. First, as has been made clear already, this 'primary school age group' is significantly older than is the case in most school populations, but the age of transition to adulthood in rural Mali is lower than it is elsewhere, especially for girls. This means that there is little room for manoeuvre, little time to spare. Secondly, and largely due to the age question, in Kolondièba, preparation for adulthood is a credible alternative to primary schooling. The choice between learning the alphabet and starting a family is not one most of the Western world is familiar with, though if the analogy were extended to higher levels of the schooling system, many young people in developing countries may have to choose between junior secondary school and adult life, and many in industrialised countries face this challenge during their secondary years. The fact that young people are called to choose between schooling and moving into

adulthood means that the School Management Committee will constantly be called into mediating problems outside the school, whether they concern work or marriage or other aspects of entry into adult life.

An indication of the relative place accorded by Kolondièba parents to schooling is given in their degree of agreement with a series of 'EFA-supportive' statements about dropout and persistence, posed to them at the same time as the survey questions on gender preference and schooling choice described in Chapter Four:

Table 22: Fathers' and Mothers' Views on Dropout (% agreement with statement)

	Statement	Fathers (n=652)	Mothers (n=1236)
S1	If the SMC asks a parent not to take his child out of school, the parent should keep the child in school.	98%	93%
S2	If a parent wants to withdraw his daughter from school for marriage, he should wait until she finishes sixth grade	83%	73%
S3	A child's dropout is a lost investment for the family	68%	56%
S4	A boy who hasn't finished 6th grade won't become a "complete adult" (*mògò*)	60%	41%
S5	It is not acceptable for a parent to withdraw a child from school on the basis of the child's not making progress	53%	44%
S6	A young man of 15 would do better to stay in school until the end of the 6th grade than to leave the village looking for work	49%	36%
S7	It is possible for a mature girl (*literally, "a girl with breasts"*) to stay in school	37%	25%
S8	It is shameful for a family if one of its children leaves school	32%	27%
S9	A girl who hasn't finished 6th grade will not become a "complete adult" (*mògò*)	5%	4%

Almost all parents recognise the SMC's mandate to seek to keep pupils in school, and that parents have a responsibility to heed the SMC (Statement S1 in Table 21 above). A substantial majority of parents of both sexes also feel that a girls' withdrawal from school for marriage should not happen before the end of sixth grade (Statement S2), though, as we have seen, this in fact happens with some frequency. Two thirds of fathers consider dropout a lost investment for the pupil's family, but a third of them do not (S3). While a 60% majority of fathers feel that schooling is necessary for the full development of their son's personality and character (*mògòya*), only one parent in *twenty* feels that schooling is necessary in the same way for girls (S4). About half of parents find that the *exode* is a better choice than primary school for a fifteen year old male (S6), and fully two-thirds of parents find that a girl who has gone through puberty can not and should not stay in school (S9). A similar two thirds of parents say that it is not shameful for a family if a child drops out of school (S8).

Dropout, where is thy sting? The above responses show that it is a relatively painless decision for many parents to take their children out of school, since they may feel little sense of loss, guilt, or shame over it, especially in comparison to the very real fear of shame that mothers expressed about the possibility of their daughters becoming pregnant before they were engaged.   It is not that these parents are against schooling: after all, they willingly enrolled their children in the community schools, daughters as well as sons. But they may well value other outcomes more than schooling, or fear other outcomes more than the end of schooling.

5.4.5 A complex, multi-actor decision

Compared to the almost non-issue of enrolment discussed in Chapter Four, leaving school tends to be a deliberate, thought-through decision. While the enrolment process was often concluded simply between the SMC and the household head, the school leaving decision involves more people, usually including the pupil him or herself, the mother (explicitly or implicitly), and perhaps the future fiancé or in-laws of a girl pupil. The decision to leave school turns less on simple determinants than on issues of motivation, opportunity, parental communication, and SMC dynamism. It is seen as a higher stakes decision than that of enrolment in the sense that getting it wrong may prove costly to a child's future life chances. Intra-household discord around the school leaving decision is more likely than around the enrolment decision, whether it be occasioned by a conflict between fathers' and mothers' interests, or the sense of paternal frustration that often accompanies a young person's 'flight' from school.

The SMCs had difficulty in limiting dropout. The social solidarity that is normally a great problem-solving resource in Malian villages was seriously fractured in the case of dropout, as husbands' interests conflicted with those of their wives, and adolescent boys' with those of their parents. Withdrawals of pupils might happen unannounced, and pupil-initiated dropout ('flight') always did, so the SMC had difficulty in working 'preventively.' The NGO had expected that the SMC could build up a consensus in the community that dropout was a lost investment to the child, the household, and the community, but in reality it was not perceived as the pivotal issue. As Michael Bopp wrote, 'Actually, schooling is a second-order problem. The primary problem is life itself, and the way life is being led' (Bopp, 1986, cited in Gilmore and Smith, 1988).

The complexity and anxiety surrounding dropout issues make them much more difficult for the SMCs to stay on top of than was the enrolment process. SMCs need to keep tabs on a wider group of people, some of whom, like the in-laws, may be well beyond their authority. While for enrolment they were primarily seeking to coordinate willing compliance with an offered benefit, on dropout they were trying to get parents and others to value schooling over what many saw as their greater self-interest. Counter to the expectations of the project designers, trying to limit dropout turned out to be a major challenge for the SMCs.

The situation discussed in this Chapter was improving at the time of the study. The high levels of over-age recruitment that characterised the first years of the project, and which are the focus of the interviews, were greatly reduced by the end of the 1990s. In addition, the SMCs are gaining insight and experience over time, and ought to be more capable over time in confronting this difficult issue.

6. Implications for the SMCs and the NGO

This section reflects on the practical lessons arising from the study for the SMCs and the NGO. Section Seven will explore the relevance of the study to global discussions of Education for All.

6.1 Reordering the hierarchy of commitments

One of the most important tasks of the SMCs is to renegotiate the boundaries between the school and the community. Physically, this was done early on in the project: there is no wall separating the school from the community, the school is made of the same materials as the dwellings in the community. In the months before the school building is finished, the pupils study under a temporary thatch roof, and community members are encouraged to roll out their mats next to the school and watch what goes on inside.

But other, vaguer social boundaries persist much longer, and they have been pointed out a number of times in this text. As we saw in Chapter Two, there is an unstable 'cohabitation' of labour and schooling as children's occupations, which is managed with various degrees of deliberateness by different households. There is a hierarchy of commitments that undeniably values schooling, but assigns it a lower priority than that of marriage for adolescent girls, and of *exode* for older boys. There is nominally a stark monopoly on decision-making within the hands of the household head, but in practice a more fluid set of actors and actions, especially around the decision to leave school. Thus a major responsibility of both the NGO and the SMC is to imagine how these relationships could be reordered in favour of access to schooling.

In Kolondièba, it is the force of stronger commitments that pulls pupils out of community schools, not a force from within the schooling system that is pushing them out. This is a very difficult issue for the SMCs to deal with, for the parents and the pupils see adolescence and early youth as a 'make or break' time for an individual's life chances, but they are not yet convinced of the relative importance of what the school has to offer at this age. SMCs, to start with, need to have quite a strong belief in the importance of schooling to be willing to take on this challenge—this may pose a problem in SMCs where for one reason or another there are important individuals on board who do not have this belief (as was the case for several years in Kelen). Further, the SMC needs to be able to imagine a situation that they have never themselves experienced, in which schooling becomes a normal, expected, even required rite of passage for children in the eyes of their parents.

While SMCs have the option of trying to decry and 'demote' other commitments, in most cases it has seemed more pragmatic to try to 'promote' schooling, usually in two ways. First, they can seek to lessen conflict between school and its alternatives (the SMC as 'school manager'). Secondly, they can try to modify the alternatives so that they permit greater access to schooling (SMC and others as social negotiators).

In this way an SMC can seek to engineer a 'win-win' situation in which the values and aspirations of parents are largely affirmed, and the school also has a better chance at thriving.

6.2 Keeping the school out of conflict with other commitments

One of the most surprising lessons learned in Chapter Four was that the basic slogan of 'education for all' had not penetrated to the village level, even though it was the ethical and political basis for the community schools project. While the project designers saw universal enrolment as their ultimate goal, community members were still learning to live with the novelty of the enrolment of a minority of their children, and manifested much less impatience to see that proportion grow. For the future development of the community schools, it is important the NGO, the SMCs, and community members discuss the idea of Education for All more explicitly, and that they understand one another's motivations and hesitations more profoundly. In particular, the NGO and the SMCs need to comprehend more clearly how much of parental scepticism about enrolling all children is related to actual labour needs, to concern over child socialisation, and to pure habit and convenience. This understanding is important in order to gauge how high enrolment rates can currently be pushed before they start to provoke a backlash from parents, some evidence was given in Chapter Four that parents are already sending children to school with less alacrity in the second enrolments of the community schools.

Regarding dropout, it would seem that the main conflict to avoid is that with children's successful transition to young adulthood, which can currently be expected around the time of puberty for girls, and between fifteen and seventeen for boys. The clearest way to avoid this conflict is to enroll children young, preferably at around the age of six, so that they will have finished the sixth grade by age twelve, and all of the villages seem to be moving in this direction, with average ages at enrolment declining from around ten at the beginning of the project to around eight in later years. But this suggestion is not without its challenges. First is the fact that triennial recruitment is one of the bases of the community schools model, and in fact makes it possible and affordable to establish a school in every community. If one were to recruit only six year olds in the average village, one would have to recruit annually (thus tripling the number of teachers and the salary outlay), and one would have a class of about twenty children. The current six-to-eight year old recruitment is more financially feasible, but it does mean that the older recruited girls will be fourteen in sixth grade, and thus under substantial pressure to leave school. One could consider staggering recruitments by sex, such that girls would be recruited at six or seven and boys at seven or eight, which would fill out the classes and still give each sex something of a window of opportunity, but it might also put girls at a developmental and learning disadvantage within the classroom. Secondly, there needs to be a reliable means of identifying the children who have the age to be recruited, most likely through more systematic requesting of birth certificates and keeping of birth records by the village health committee.

Another way to 'manage the entrance' more tightly is to build in public expressions of intent to keep children in school at the moment of recruitment, and perhaps arranging for these to be reiterated at strategic points throughout the cycle. While it has been shown that these commitments are not necessarily strong enough either to keep parents from withdrawing children, or to keep pupils from 'fleeing', a commitment publicly uttered in Bambara culture is an engagement taken fairly seriously. It may be that such public pronouncements cannot prevent *all* withdrawals, but they may well be the factor that keeps *some* parents from taking their children out of school.

The second important conflict to avoid in order to promote persistence is the competition between schooling and work. Here again the SMC can ask parents to explicitly state that they will consider all available alternatives before seeking to have their enrolled children miss school to do work. As has been seen, this will be considerably more feasible if in the household there are one or more young adults of the same sex as the enrolled children. An SMC that observes that this is not the case would do well to discuss with the household head how he intends to meet the household's labour needs, and to see if there are special arrangements (for example, a collective work day in that household's fields during planting or harvest) that can be worked out. The SMC should keep an eye on changes in households such as adults' sickness or out-migration for marriage or *exode*, that can put pressure on pupils to leave school. Conversely, it is possible, though less likely, that in-migration of new household or community members can make it possible for children previously 'unavailable' to be enrolled in school (for example, a brother returning from *exode* or a new co-wife of the household head), and the SMC should be alert to these possibilities. The SMC should also remind parents to factor the possibility of schooling into their decisions about which children to foster in or out, and when, a number of parents had spoken of daughters who never got enrolled in school because they were temporarily fostered out at the moment of recruitment, which only happens every three years.

6.2.1 The SMC (and others) as social 'problem-solver'

The second task, directly seeking to reorder the hierarchy of commitments around questions of marriage and *exode*, is a more daunting task, but it is very important. A group such as the SMC offers a real possibility of directly working on the culturally-based objections to schooling, and this is something of a breakthrough, when one considers how consistently these objections figure in studies about girls' schooling, and how seldom convincing recommended actions to address them appear. While the challenges encountered by the SMCs in the area of persistence are great, they are also to some extent 'teething problems' that need to be worked through for more effective strategies to be developed. Social solidarity channelled through an organisation like the SMC is a vastly underused resource in rural Africa.

The SMCs (and through them the NGO) have the advantage of being able to dialogue with parents about cultural practice, rather than conducting an occasional survey or quantitative analysis. Thus, they can establish which practices are considered 'adverse' within the community itself, which 'acceptable,' and which 'honourable,' and why. They can also explore how these points of view converge and diverge among elders, fathers, mothers, and youth, or among ethnic groups. The NGO can, in a non-leading manner, share with the SMCs the points of view expressed by the literature on the promotion of girls' schooling, so that those points of view can also be reacted to in village discussions. The SMC can explore an issue like young women's engagement, seeking to ascertain to what extent parents feel that they are acting in the interest of the daughter, and to what extent in their own interest. What sorts of decisions are frankly in no one's interest and ought to be abandoned? How can tensions be resolved so that girls' social interests are safeguarded, and their ability to pursue schooling is preserved? Similarly, at what point do community members judge that parents are putting their own anxieties (perhaps unfounded?) about pregnancy before the interests of their daughter? What, for the village, is an acceptable age at marriage, and why? How aware are villagers about possible adverse effects? What sorts of agreements should be made between their own village and those into which their

daughters typically marry, regarding the demands a suitor can make about his fiancée's schooling? The NGO would continue to have the unique opportunity to watch this discussion unfold within the villages, and to draw conclusions on the basis of the observation of a wide variety of situations. This then would serve as a more informed and convincing basis for proposals regarding the sorts of policy initiatives called for by Colclough et al (1998).

The SMC also has a clear interest in better husband and wife communication than that which was going on in Saba. The typical SMC has a male majority and power structure, and tends to have better links into the male networks in the village than into those of the women. NGO efforts to redress this balance seem mostly to have resulted in token appointments of women to the SMC rather than real equity within it. So in seeking to promote better SMC links to women, the NGO can either opt to try to get better-faith efforts at equity in the SMCs or seek to build links between the SMC and women's *tòns*. In either case, an SMC in a village like Saba should probably seek to work with the others to restore some order to parenting, and three useful places to start would be:

- Asking fathers to consider raising the typical age at marriage;

- Asking mothers to reconsider what is materially necessary for a daughter to possess as she enters into her marriage home (and perhaps to put a greater emphasis on daughters' intellectual and moral preparation than on their material equipment; here the school can actually help);

- Asking parents to devise a way to discuss these issues openly without fear or over-sensitivity.

Likewise, in Kelen's problem over the *exode*, some basic improvement of communications might help, but this time between the generations. Since most boys intend to come back to the village, it can be pointed out that *how* they leave matters. It can be made clear that it is fine to go to the *exode*, but only when this follows completion of the cycle.

6.3 How civil is this society? when the SMC itself has problems

The three case villages formed a sort of continuum with regard to the way they approached their work. The Saba SMC tended to be the midpoint, enthusiastic but even-tempered, while Fila had a tendency toward overzealousness and Kelen toward passivity. The experiences of the Fila and Kelen SMCs merit some discussion, as they indicate some potential weaknesses in community-based school management that need to be taken into account by those interested in the potential of this option.

6.3.1 Fila

The question of sanctions and zeal raised strikingly by the Fila SMC. Usually the challenge faced by a community association striving to bring about social change is what Woolcock (1998) calls 'enforceable trust', how to get peers to honour their own commitments to a certain type of behaviour, for example keeping their children in school. One of the elders on the SMC said that *tòns* always have a directive character:

> Even eating around a bowl, that's being in a *tòn*. You correct a child who eats sloppily….We have *tòns* everywhere. *Tòns* have chiefs, we can't leave people to their own choices, there needs to be guidance. The three fathers put their own interest before that of the village; if they're not happy, it's because of their own interest.

Arguably the problem for the Fila SMC is instead one of 'trustworthy enforcement', that it pursued its norm-changing mission too strenuously, to the point that parents refused to cooperate, and the SMC ended up blocking access to schooling rather than promoting it.

The Fila SMC seemed less well-versed than most Malian groups in the art of palaver and 'social negotiation.' Because temporary withdrawal of pupils for labour needs is arguably a rational and tactically sound response, and is in any case inevitable, an SMC needs to play a role other than mere truant policeman. And beyond the question of the conflict created within the village, the SMC was remarkably short-sighted about how the children expelled could recover their places: when asked, the SMC indicated that they could repeat the year, which is manifestly not possible in a system with triennial recruitment. The SMC's role of managers of the children's learning process had given way in this example to a simple policing function.

There is a related question of an SMC's closeness to power. Arguably, the SMC had too-easy access to authority (whether it be that of the chief or of the NGO, or both), and was not held sufficiently accountable for its actions. It is also likely, judging from the tenor of responses given by the SMC, that part of the treatment accorded to these children stems partly from the fact that their parents were somewhat socially isolated and not well-liked in the village. As the SMC said of the fathers:

> If you are sincere, you will have friends, you won't stay alone. Everyone in the village is related. To say that you only have your wife to help you during the harvest, that's the same as saying that you don't have any friends in the village.

Fila is a good example of an instance in which the Western label 'association' does not fit the *tòn* well, in the sense that the SMC was not voluntarily adhered to, and it certainly acted as though it had the right to enforce its decisions bindingly on non-members. In reality, there were no 'non-member' adults in the village, though there were clearly those who were closer to power than others.

The NGO, and others promoting similar efforts, should remind SMCs that a coerced attainment of increased enrolment is unlikely to be a stable one, and may well end up creating more problems for the school.

6.3.2 Lack of leadership: the example of Kelen

Many of the problems of the school in Kelen can be traced to a lack of will, even of belief in the community school project in general. Through long experience, the adults of Kelen, be they parents or SMC members, are skeptical of their abilities to work together to achieve common goals. Factionalism is apparent in many aspects of village life, and it has had an impact on the community school in several ways, ranging from pupils temporarily withdrawn from the school because of a dispute among adults, to hardship in collecting even modest fees, through the inability to establish a second classroom on schedule. The absence of credible leadership has also played an important role here. At the time of the

research there was a weak chief who was not respected by the community, and a vacillating SMC. The academic results of the school have been fairly poor in spite of the talent of the teacher, in part because of all the micro-politics and *mankan-ba* ('great noise', in Bambara) around the school. Leadership from the SMC is all the more crucial since in these very small schools there is no headteacher, and the SMC is usually a more important link between school and community than is the teacher.

How well can a community school fare when the community is not faring well? This is a crucial question in assessing the potential contribution of community schools to education for all in Africa. Solidarity may be a relatively abundant resource throughout rural Africa, but it is also under serious strain, given poverty, structural adjustment, HIV/AIDS, and other dislocations. What should those who would promote community involvement (for example, a Ministry of Education or an NGO) do when a community torn by factionalism is clearly having trouble with playing the role of mobiliser of commitment? If one is serious that 'education for all' does not just mean 'education for all who are lucky enough to be born in harmonious communities,' then one has to be prepared for the eventuality of communities that cannot meet this challenge.

It is likely that an NGO who knows the communities of an area well can identify with some accuracy those villages whose solidarity is weak or less than universal, and target them for special efforts in methodical sensibilisation and consensus-building, public statements of commitment, and periodic reiterations of support for schooling. It was clear parents in Kelen generally felt as strongly as those in Saba and Fila about the importance of schooling, but the SMC did not structure and reinforce this positive sentiment; thus it may help if the NGO continually brings the discussion back to the desires of parents and the interests of their children, encouraging the village authorities to guide or restructure an SMC for the sake of the children.

Finally, the case of Kelen shows that, as in the case of Peulh identity, there are instances where government schools may be an option that serve the interests of some children better. Government schools are supported by a hierarchy and an ideology oriented to the outside world. Usually these are among the characteristics that have made coexistence difficult with the village, but in cases like Kelen's, this externally oriented identity may rise above factionalism. But this will only become a real alternative when government schools exist in much greater supply, at the time of this research, the nearest one to Kelen was ten kilometers away.

6.4 ethinking the assumptions of the NGO

Much has been made in Chapters One and Four about the assumptions of the NGO in getting the community schools project started. While the NGO's commitment and willingness to develop working hypotheses and 'programmatic wagers' was important, a number of these assumptions were flawed, and need to be commented on here.

First, there was a tacit assumption in the NGO's thinking that the communities of Kolondièba subscribed wholeheartedly to the idea of education for all, but that they were prevented by obstacles from reaching it. It followed that if a community-friendly school were brought into the village, universal enrolment would naturally ensue. This might be

termed the 'if you build it, they will come' assumption. The rapid growth of enrolment rates over the first seven years of the project showed that there was a great deal of truth to this assumption, but it was clearly overambitious to expect the mere removal of obstacles to result in opportunity for all children. Systems evolve over long periods of time, and seldom in a linear fashion; some of the best learning comes about from unexpected reverses.

Secondly, much in the design of the community schools project, particularly regarding enrolment, is based on the 'typical' village, but there is no typical village. The blueprint of 'two classrooms, two teachers, thirty girls, thirty boys' was probably transmitted too rigidly both within the NGO hierarchy and to SMCs. Thus, large villages that should have been thinking of opening three or four classrooms were simply encouraged to follow the typical model. In one village, enrolments of boys were limited to twenty simply because only twenty girls had been volunteered and the SMC knew it was supposed to maintain parity! It would have been useful for the NGO to make its model more explicitly flexible, and to work out the specific guidance that different SMCs might need depending on the particular situation in their village. This became increasingly difficult as the scope of the project became larger, and logistics management overtook innovation as the project's primary *modus operandi*.

Thirdly, the NGO, which was primarily a community development organisation rather than a pedagogical one, had come into the classroom 'through the back door' and was not entirely confident in its approach to teaching and curriculum design. And yet it set itself a very large task in working with the National Pedagogical Institute to develop an alternative Bambara-language curriculum. The detailed discussion or assessment of this curriculum is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it was quite positively evaluated several years into the project (Muskin, 1999; Muskin et al., 1997). The curriculum development work, and much of the related thinking on educational relevance, however, was often working at cross-purposes with a desire on the part of the NGO for the community schools to be fully recognised by the Ministry of Education. Such recognition would be important for the ability of pupils to continue after the sixth grade in the government system, and was of course also important for the sustainability of the community schools, but much could be lost as well. The rationale for lengthening the cycle from three to six years was largely to fit within the government system, but this lengthening was taxing in all sorts of ways on both the communities and the NGO, for example, the lengthening of time commitments, conflicts with transitions to adult life for older pupils, the difficulty of finding villagers who could teach in French, or outsiders whom the community could afford to pay, and the need for pupils to be examined in a foreign language. It is useful for the NGO to reflect on the rationale for this lengthening, and for much of the project's ongoing assimilation into the official schooling system.

The NGO made a rather facile assumption that enrolments would respect age guidelines. As has been shown, over-age recruitment is instead a fundamental aspect of the two schooling systems in Kolondièba. UN statistics showing widely divergent national gross and net enrolments indicate that over-age enrolment is prevalent across Mali (UNICEF, 1999). This turned out to be a major factor promoting dropout, as was seen in Chapter Five. Once they themselves had identified the phenomenon and its consequences, it was the SMCs that sought to eliminate or at least greatly reduce it.

Further, while the NGO sought to design a school that did not compete with parents' labour needs, this needed to be done more broadly. The sorts of tasks that parents want their children to be engaged in have important implications for the community school. When the system was being designed, the 'labour obstacle' it was seeking to remove had to do mostly with the harvest and with heavier household chores. Thus attention was paid to reducing the length of the school year so that it started after the harvest and ended with the rains, and shortening the school day so that children would still have time for tasks their parents deemed important. What was probably overlooked is that certain tasks are not so easily compartmentalised, either because they are by their nature full-time, like herding, or because the require being constantly 'on-call', such as sendability. Moreover, parents may value the socialisation provided by these tasks as much as the help provided by the task itself. These are aspects that should be discussed again with communities and with SMCs, in an effort to adjust the model for a better 'cohabitation' between schooling and children's tasks.

Finally, the NGO, and in particular this researcher, has assumed that a 40% gross enrolment rate is something of a disappointment, and this view should be revised. The community school villages have gone from a near 0% enrolment rate to two in five children being enrolled in the space of seven years, which is a remarkable achievement. The rates of gender parity in the community schools are markedly better than those of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, let alone for Mali. And while the mechanisms for maintaining this parity are so far somewhat directive on the part of the SMCs, rather than based on well-rooted norms, they are still likely to have an impact on the skills, self-image and life chances of thousands of young girls.

Negotiation has gone on at two levels in this project. At the first level, the SMCs and the households have interacted over which particular children should attend school. While the SMCs could occasionally be either overbearing or overly lax, in general their efforts were well-received by the parents. At another level, there has been tacit negotiation between the SMCs and the NGO. For the NGO was trying, in the words of Rugh and Bossert (1998), to 'sell' Education for *All*, but the SMCs and the households were, for the most part only 'buying' Education for *Many*.

7. From Kolondièba to Dakar and Beyond

The community schools project was a product of the Jomtien spirit, and this research has shown that the experience in Kolondièba has important contributions to make to the education for all debate. The project is a well-documented example of the strengths and weaknesses of community-based school support associations in promoting access to schooling. It also shows that mobilisation involves more than simply trying to 'sell' an idea; in low-engagement areas, mobilisation is likely to involve considerable negotiation, and to call on the school to change its ways as much as on the parents to change theirs. Civil society has been called "the space between the state and the family" (Seligman, 1993); the community schools project has focused primarily on the partnerships not at the state-civil society frontier, but rather where civil society and families come together. It is hoped that this research, and more generally all of the experience of the community schools project, will help widen the discussion of expanding educational opportunity.

That international education policy discussion is, however, still quite focused on the state, and affords little attention to the family; this orientation emerges quite clearly from the policy documents adopted at the April 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal which brought the 'Jomtien decade' to a close. The Dakar Forum reaffirmed the lofty but unmet goals of Jomtien, pledging to ensure that:

> by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

It is going to take longer than fifteen years for Kolondièba to reach this goal. Mali made more progress toward universal primary enrolment than most nations in the 1990s, thanks to a fortuitous combination of opening political space, resources made available by parents, government, and international donors, and carefully crafted approaches. Access and equity rates in Kolondièba have made real and rapid strides, but persistence is still a vexing problem, communities are by necessity financing much of the schooling, and the question of quality is a matter of ongoing debate. It will take hard and long work, not political pronouncements, to attain this goal.

In large part the Dakar Forum was more about ritual affirmation of political goals than about reflection on the experience of the previous decade. There was much insistence, for example, on the right of every girl to be in school, but little curiosity manifested about how parents might in fact decide against this. There are unacknowledged tensions within the Dakar Framework document, which says both that all forms of gender discrimination should be eliminated and that actions should 'respect and be based on local culture and respond to local needs.' The best work of NGOs is carried out in the context of listening, reflection, and sensitive co-construction, but these were not the order of the day.

Debate was also focused very much on the states as the suppliers of schooling, with little attention paid to the family. Indeed this is particularly true of the NGO Declaration, which mentions 'governments' 21 times in a two-page document, but makes only passing mention of families as one of a number of civil society stakeholders. In the Dakar Framework document, there is more frequent mention of "transparent" (as a modifier of 'civil society') than of 'parent.'

The EFA community stands much to gain by focusing its attention more explicitly on the importance of the family to issues of access and persistence. The family, and the grassroots organisations with which it is in daily contact, make the ultimate decision about whether children will go to school or not. Rather than yet again proposing policy-level guidelines for household-level actions, the EFA community should study more closely grassroots-level interaction over schooling, attempt to describe and understand it more profoundly, and seek to support community-level associations which can make an important difference in the rural African child's chances of going to school.

7.1 Update: 2007

> The target date for achieving the EFA goals and the Millennium Development Goals is 2015. If all children are to complete a good-quality primary educatin by then, those of the appropriate age must be enrolled in grade 1 by 2009. Govts must acquire a better understanding of why certain children never enrol in school, or drop out early—so as to design programmes that effectively tackle these barriers.
>
> (Global Monitoring Report on Education for All, 2007).

There has been much real progress in the seven years since the Dakar conference that ended the Jomtien decade. Commitment from the international community is stronger and more explicit than previously, for example, enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals and the Fast Track Initiative. Donor coordination is more serious goal, as evidenced by sector-wide approaches (SWAps) and the recent Paris Declaration on the harmonisation of aid. Progress has been made on specific issues like the abolition of school fees in countries where this was problematic. There has been much civil society activity in favour of education for all.

At the level of Mali itself, there has also been real progress. According to the 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR), Mali's gross intake rate, the measure of initial enrolment, has gone up from 51% in 1999 to 64% in 2004, and has become more gender equitable. The national gross enrolment rate has increased from 51% to 64%, and the net enrolment rate from 40% to 46%. The average Malian pupil could expect to complete 5.4 years of schooling in 2004, as opposed to only 4.0 in 1999. The primary cohort completion rate was 57% in 2003. And all of these measures were more gender equitable in 2004 than in 1999, although they all still favoured boys.

The issue is that these are indicators of relative progress, but they are far short of the ideal of education for all. Along with four other francophone African countries, Mali shares the lowest 'Education Development Index' ratings worldwide. The EDI is a composite score based on gross enrolment, gender equity, primary completion, and adult literacy rates, and these five countries all had scores of below 0.60. The differences between net and gross enrolments above indicate that overage enrolment is a continuing phenomenon, with all the likelihood of dropout that this entails, as noted in the study. And finally, Mali still counts over 1.1 million children out of school, meaning that the issue that the NGO and the villages in Kolondièba set out in 1992 to address is still an extremely pressing one.

The Global Monitoring Report's analysis of the causes and solutions of non-enrolment and dropout is familiar. For non-enrolment, the typical correlates are cited: gender, rural

residence, household poverty, and parental educational history. It would be useful to bring into the EFA debate the experience of Kolondièba and similar rural initiatives, in which these correlates are largely leveled and low enrolment rates are no longer an inevitability (or, as the French put it, a *fatalité*).

The formulas that the GMR invokes for ending non-enrolment, 'exclusion' is the term used, do not include better convincing hesitant parents and communities that schooling is the best choice for their children. Instead the report talks of 'abolishing school fees, providing income support to poor and rural households to reduce reliance on child labour, teaching in children's mother tongue, offering education opportunities for disabled children and those affected by HIV/Aids, and ensuring that youth and adults get a second chance on education.'

The GMR claims that the same factors that influence being out of school also influence dropout. This is true in a general sense, but the present study shows that the obstacles grow much stronger as the child ages and enters adolescence. This indeed is one of the advantages of the CREATE model: its identification of separate Zones of Exclusion and the possibility that some of the factors influencing access are different from those that influence persistence and drop-out.

The EFA community should show more awareness, in particular, of the narrowness of the window of opportunity for girls to get a primary education. For all the emphasis placed by the international community on girls' schooling, it is striking that this community is not more aware of the odds against rural girls' staying in school for the entire primary cycle. These odds in turn make it necessary to work energetically and creatively to allow as many girls as possible to achieve this.

The GMR is silent on the role of community-based organisations as actors in getting children into school and helping them stay there, and this is a major gap. Community solidarity is an abudant resource in Africa, and it can be mobilised in favour of educational opportunity.

In a larger sense, the question of family strategies and engagement are still not on the agenda as exemplified by the Global Monitoring Report. This is perhaps understandable, since Education for All has been defined as a discourse between states and institutional donors, and thus agency and accountability are both situated at the donor and governmental levels. Even the civil society campaigning organisations, so effective at holding donors accountable for their responsibilities, give little attention to the agency and engagement of families in making progress to education for all.

In the end, families are central in the decision to enroll children, and in the ongoing, multiparty commitment necessary to keep them in school, especially if there are competing opportunities or responsibilities. The EFA movement should give devote more effort to understanding the decision-making role and responsibilities of families and communities in giving children the opportunity to learn. As Kolondièba indicates, many children stand to benefit if this is done.

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Report summary:
This paper examines the experience of the Community Schools Project of Save the Children/US in Mali. This project was aimed at increasing access to schooling, especially for girls, through community-based efforts. The paper looks at the reasons for 'enrolment for many' rather than for 'all', and why many children enrolled were leaving school before the end of the sixth grade

Author notes:
Dr Peter Laugharn is Director of Programme Development at the Bernard van Leer Foundation in the Netherlands. Previous to this he worked for Save the Children USA, including five years in Mali, the West Africa Area Director and Education Adviser for Africa. For CREATE Peter is writing a monograph in the Pathways to Access Series on access to education in community schools in Mali. This work is based on his PhD thesis carried out at the Institute of Education, University of London.