FORMAL AND NONFORMAL EDUCATION: EXPLOITING THE SYNERGY BETWEEN THEM FOR THE BENEFIT OF BOTH

WORLD EDUCATION’S INTEGRATED EDUCATION STRENGTHENING AND ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM IN MALI

A CASE STUDY
The Support for the Quality and Equity of Education program—formerly called the Improved Quality of Education Activity (IQEA)—ran from 2003-2008. This project supported the Ministry of Education’s ten-year plan for development within the education sector (called PRODEC). As the prime contractor, World Education reached 105 communes—including 800 schools—in the regions of Kidal, Gao, Tomboucotu, Sikasso, Koulikoro, Ségou, and the district of Bamako. With this project, World Education improved teacher performance by creating communities of learning; curriculum development and testing for grades 3 - 6; and improved quality and equity in education through increased community participation. Important issues such as gender equity and HIV and AIDS awareness in education were addressed throughout each of the three project components.

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Financial support for this publication was provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of UNESCO.

This report was produced by World Education, Inc.
Formal and Nonformal Education: Exploiting the Synergy Between them for the Benefit of Both

World Education’s Integrated Education Strengthening and Adult Literacy Program in Mali

A CASE STUDY

by
Souleymane Kante

February 2005
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**Glossary of Terms, Abbreviations, and Acronyms**

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<td>Association d’Auto-developpement Communitaire</td>
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<td>AMPJ</td>
<td>Association Malienne pour la Promotion des Jeunes</td>
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<td>APE</td>
<td>Association des Parents d’Elèves (Parents of Students Association)</td>
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<td>DNAFLA</td>
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<td>Fondation pour le Developpement au Sahel</td>
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<td>OMAES</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
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I. Introduction

Parent associations are a key element in the revitalization of the formal education sector in Mali, and have been since the early 1990s. Parent associations are somewhat of a misnomer, since they consist of community members, who are not necessarily parents. World Education has been a leader in the Malian parent association movement since 1993, assisting communities—over time—to establish and strengthen schools that have served more than 150,000 children.  

The literacy component of World Education’s Support for the Quality and Equity of Education program is a nonformal education effort that provides literacy classes for parent association members. It is an integral aspect of World Education’s work with parent associations. The literacy program strengthens the ability of parent associations to function as sustainable community organizations and to have an impact upon educational access, quality, and equity in their communities. The individual literacy program participants gain not only literacy and math skills, but also vital content relative to daily life, educational quality and equity, and the management of parent associations; they also experience schooling, which sensitizes them to their children’s experiences and needs as students.

The goal of World Education’s literacy program was to strengthen the ability of community parent associations to function as sustainable community organizations and have an impact upon educational access, quality, and equity in their communities. These goals were reached in anticipated and unanticipated ways. In addition to smoother technical functioning on the part of parent associations, and more active participation on the part of women board members, the literacy component has strengthened the community’s understanding of its role in ensuring the availability of quality education and in supporting children in pursuing an education.

World Education’s adult literacy program began in response to a request made by the communities with which World Education works.

This request led to the establishment of a nonformal adult basic education program that has as its explicit goal the strengthening of the formal education system. Seven years later, the synergy between the nonformal and formal systems has spread from communities to the national level, and shows no sign of stopping.

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1 Source: rapport de la session d’orientation du personnel de WED Mali, du 01 au 05 février 2001.
2 Since 2004, this program has also worked with school management committees, but for the sake of this paper, which focuses on the long-term development and evolution of the program, the focus will be on Parent associations.
II. History and Development of the Program

In the late 1990s, World Education became interested in integrating literacy education with its parent association work. Parent associations and the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work directly with them argued that lack of literacy was impeding the Associations’ abilities to achieve their goals. According to UNESCO, the adult literacy rate in Mali is 19 percent (male literacy, 26.7 percent; female literacy rate 11.9 percent.) The youth (ages 15-24) literacy rate is 24.2 percent, with 32.3 percent of young males and 16.9 percent of young females literate. Of the approximately 13 board members in each parent association, often up to nine are not literate. Of the parent members, often up to 80 percent are not literate.

In addition to the general need for literacy among all parent association members, participation of women in parent associations lagged. Along with myriad cultural reasons, some women blamed their illiteracy as a barrier to becoming active in parent associations. The hypothesis behind creating the literacy program was that increased literacy on the part of parent association board and general assembly members of both genders would lead to improved functioning and transparency of parent associations; an increased pool of future leaders for parent associations and for other community institutions; an increased ability to act as role models regarding education for children; an increased ability to follow children’s progress in school; and an increased interest in the education of girls.

The hypothesis behind providing literacy classes to women in particular was that an increase in the number of literate women in a community would lead to an increased pool of women interested in serving on the parent association boards and an increased ability of women to play an active role in community associations. Furthermore, providing another venue in which the goals and role of the parent association would be shared and discussed could only serve to strengthen the program and thus strengthen the formal education sector. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which was funding the parent association work, deserves credit for sharing this vision and supporting the development of the literacy program as a synergistic component to the overall education strengthening work.

World Education had considerable literacy expertise and programming in Nepal and the United States, but World Education’s Africa offices had little. The Mali office staff invited a US-based staff person with expertise in basic literacy and in basic education program design in developing countries to analyze the potential of integrating literacy with its education strengthening program.

At the time, the Division National d’Alphabétisation Fonctionnel et Linguistiques Appliqués—National Division for Functional Literacy and Applied Linguistics (DNAFLA) was the Malian

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5 As a subset, originally, of World Education’s USAID-funded Development of Community Institutions program, and now as a subset of World Education’s USAID-funded Support for the Quality and Equity of Education program.
governmental organization responsible for adult education.⁶ Many local nongovernmental organizations used the literacy materials and classic methodology made available by DNAFLA; nevertheless, the quality of the materials and methods was generally recognized by literacy practitioners in Mali as limited, and there was little training of high quality available for teachers. A few international NGOs had made efforts to develop their own approaches to teaching literacy in Mali, most notably Plan International and World Vision. Save the Children was experimenting with ActionAid’s Reflect methodology, which uses a community development approach. There was certainly room for new techniques and materials, particularly those that were designed to be synergistic with World Education’s efforts in the formal education sector, rather than as literacy programs independent of other development work.

The first step was to build the capacity of World Education’s Malian staff to develop and facilitate a program that featured best practices in nonformal literacy education, adapted to the Malian community context. World Education hired a former DNAFLA linguist with experience in language education and a willingness to learn new techniques as literacy coordinator. The US-based staff person who conducted the initial situational analysis took on the role of technical consultant, training the literacy coordinator in World Education’s approach to literacy while overseeing the development of the program in Mali.

The next step was field research. The literacy coordinator assessed the literacy level of residents in 12 rural villages in the region of Mali in which World Education was working to ascertain that they were truly illiterate. He also interviewed these villagers to determine what the pressing issues were in their communities, and why they wanted to become literate. The themes that emerged from this research became the core content of the basic literacy lessons.

As lessons were being written, the literacy coordinator tested them with a class convened for just this purpose. Not only did this allow for the first round of refining the initial lesson designs, but it gave the coordinator firsthand knowledge of the methodology and understanding of the challenges faced by the classroom teacher. An NGO staff person teamed with the coordinator to develop, test, and revise lessons, and a local artist worked with them to create the visual materials.

Identifying Partners
Once the full course was developed, World Education chose as formal partners five NGOs that were working with parent associations, interested in literacy, and capable of absorbing additional work. They included:

- Association d’Auto-developpement Communaute (AADEC),
- Association Subaahi-Gumo (ASG),
- Association Malienne pour la Promotion des Jeunes (AMPJ),
- Fondation pour le Developpement au Sahel (FDS),

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⁶ DNAFLA was incorporated in 2002 into the Non Formal Education Division (DNEB) of the Ministry of Education under the title of Centre National des Ressources d’Education non Formelle – National Resource Center for Non Formal Education (CNRENF).
World Education familiarized the NGO field workers with the new methodologies and materials, as well as with the management of the program. As a team, the NGO field workers and World Education staff designed the framework for the social negotiation necessary to identify the communities appropriate for the first field test, and the first teacher training. During social negotiations, the NGO field worker introduces the leadership in a community—usually village elders and the parent association board—to the idea of running a literacy program. Roles and responsibilities are delineated; for example, the NGO provides the materials, training, and on-going support, and the community designates two teachers, a classroom, and takes responsibility for managing the program on a day-to-day basis. The outcome of social negotiations is mutual agreement between the NGO and the community around whether or not the community will take on the program. In the beginning of the program, each of the five NGOs worked with five communities (for a total of 25 communities) to establish and run the literacy course.

World Education considered the first three years as developmental and a time for all involved to learn the nuances of designing and running a literacy program for adults. The NGO field staff and teachers used a common protocol to evaluate the materials and both the teaching and the training methodologies. The team made numerous changes to the curriculum, the training designs, and the learner evaluation tools and processes. They also revised the illustrations, which appear in the books and as posters, and are used to prompt the discussion that forms the initial activity of each class. Collaboration among World Education’s literacy coordinator, a staff member from World Education’s office in Guinea, the Boston technical consultant, and a specialist in math education resulted in new basic and post-literacy math books. This cross-border fertilization strengthened the work in Mali and in Guinea.

Some of the post-literacy materials were developed by the World Education team, the NGO field workers, and the literacy teachers during a five-day in-service workshop. The materials focus on the issues involved in managing a parent association. The topics were drawn directly from the experiences of the teachers, almost all of whom are parent association board members. A similar process was used to develop lessons on HIV and AIDS and its impact on education. In response to requests from the teachers, World Education developed a grammar book to supplement the post-literacy course and added additional lessons and writing exercises to the basic literacy course.

During this developmental period, World Education put little effort toward creating synergy between the formal and nonformal systems at the national level. The focus was building local capacity—the capacity of World Education, its NGO partners, and its community partners—to manage an innovative literacy program that would create a synergy at the village level between the nonformal literacy...
education component and the formal education sector. The synergy that was quickly revealed was that which occurred among the literacy program, the parent association, and the formal school, in the form of greater understanding of the role of education and the needs of children as students.

In June, 2003, the formal component of this program ended. NGO field staff worked with communities to plan for the future. In September, 2003, World Education received funding from USAID to continue work in strengthening education at the local and regional levels via community participation in education, and to include a literacy component as a support to this work.

In this iteration of the literacy program, World Education commenced a formal partnership with the Malian Ministry of Education. The department that works jointly with World Education to link nonformal efforts with formal in the form of community participation supported by literacy is Direction Nationale de l'Education à la Base - National Office of Basic Education (DNEB). The goal of this aspect of the partnership was to assure lasting support for the literacy programming, to impart new techniques to the Ministry responsible for nonformal education, and to reduce duplication of efforts.

World Education convened representatives from regional education offices from all across the country for a five-day workshop in December, 2003, to introduce World Education's Sanmogoya methodology of adult literacy. During the workshop these representatives also reviewed and strengthened the existing literacy materials, updating them with additional lessons. Many of these lessons ensure broader circulation of information about the changes in the formal education sector, such as the introduction of a new curriculum and methods such as "Pedagogie Convergente," and are thus perfect examples of the synergy possible between the formal and nonformal sectors. As of February 2005, all 405 communities working in partnership with World Education and the Malian Ministry of Education have school improvement plans and 100 of those communities have opened nonformal adult literacy programs as part of their school improvement projects.

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7 Source: Quarterly Reports of the Program “Support for the Quality and Equity of Education” by World Education/Mali to USAID, October 31, 2004, and January 31, 2005. The communities have school management committees and Parent associations; some have mothers’ associations. All groups contribute to the school improvement plans.
III. Main Features of the Program

Main Objectives
World Education’s literacy program strengthens the ability of parent associations to function as sustainable community organizations and to have an impact upon educational access, quality, and equity in their communities. The individual literacy program participants gain not only literacy and math skills but also vital content relative to daily life, to educational quality and equity, and to the management of parent associations; they also experience schooling, which sensitizes them to their children’s experiences and needs as students.

The methodology used by the program is called Sanmogoya, taken from a Bambara term that means a person has given a good deal to his or her community. In 2003, 130 villages in three Bambara-speaking regions in Mali ran the program. The parent association in each community manages it with training and support from local NGOs. Working with World Education, the NGOs have participated in curriculum development and testing and revision of materials, and have provided in-service training and on-going support for teachers. They have also evaluated learners’ literacy gains and explored learners’ perceptions of the program.

World Education’s approach to integrated adult literacy is to put into practice theories of adult education and balanced reading and writing instruction while introducing content of importance to the learners in a way that enables them to solve problems related to their lives and the life of their community. The overarching principles upon which the methodology and the program are built are:

- The literacy approach must be based on sound theories of reading and writing,
- The teacher training and literacy methodology must put into practice theories of adult education,
- The literacy and mathematics must support another sectoral objective, in this case, the improvement of educational quality and equity in Mali’s education sector,
- The sectoral content must be introduced in a way that enables learners to come up with strategies to solve problems related to that sector: A synergy is created between the nonformal literacy education and the formal sector,
- The program must be managed and sustained at the community level,
- The program design must suit the environment: the capacity of the teachers, the physical restrictions of the setting, the competing demands of everyday life, the draining impact of poverty, and

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8 Bamako, Koulikoro, Ségou. As of 2005, the program is in Koulikoro, Segou, Sikasso, Tomboctou, Kidal, and Gao.

9 Association d’aide au développement Communitaire (AADEC), Association Subaahi-Gumo (ASG), Association Malienne pour la Promotion des Jeunes (AMPJ), Fondation pour le Développement au Sahel (FDS), Œuvre Malienne d’aide à l’enfance au Sahel (OMAES), were involved in the development of the program from the beginning; in 2003, two additional NGOs were added: Cabinet de Recherche Actions pour le développement endogène (CRADE), and Association Malienne pour la promotion du Sahel (AMAPROS).
• The program must be able to expand exponentially to reach more communities and more learners.

The course is divided into two phases—basic literacy and post-literacy—and is taught by volunteer teachers drawn from the community and supervised by the parent association. Those prioritized for participation in the literacy program are illiterate parent association board members and illiterate mothers, although in every community general community members—future participants in and leaders of the parent association—are included in the literacy courses as well.

Basic literacy, the first phase, is a 250-hour course. Class size usually ranges from about 25 to 30 men and women. Communities are free to set their own schedules, but World Education recommends that they hold classes of about two hours, at least four times a week. Classes are usually held between January and June.

In the basic phase, each lesson starts with analysis by class members working in small groups, of an illustration of a social problem such as lack of water, failure to follow through on a course of vaccinations, and child labor. Learners draw upon their own knowledge and experience to resolve the issue illustrated in the picture. A term salient to this discussion is set in the curriculum and is used as the transition to the literacy activities of the lesson. The course provides learners with plenty of time to practice emergent literacy and mathematics skills by using a combination of individual, small groups, and large group activities. Comprehension is stressed alongside decoding; foundational grammar points are taught explicitly.

Learners particularly enjoy the ongoing story of a Malian village family, Sira, Sada, and their children, which runs throughout most of the basic book. This story begins in chapter eight, when learners have learned enough letters to be able to read sentences. Very slowly, the story unfolds in single-sentence installments. This text is not only the basis for the development of comprehension skills, but it also adds an element of fun: Learners want to read more about these characters.

During the seasons that fall between basic and post-literacy classes, each participating village receives copies of a book entitled “Apedugu Filaniw” (“The Twins”), which chronicles the lives of twins—separated at birth—who must deal with issues of the day such as AIDS and female genital excision. Teachers encourage learners to read and discuss the book together. By providing learners with the chance to read a simple novel, the program exposes participants to another use of literacy: entertainment. This phase enhances learners’ motivation to continue to study while keeping their skills active.
Post-Literacy
The 100-hour post-literacy phase introduces sector-specific content: the roles and responsibilities of the parent association. The goal of this phase is to ensure that literacy and mathematics skills become fluent, and that learners’ have the knowledge and capacity to participate actively in parent associations.

The materials include text and stories that lead learners to grapple with management issues and concepts related to educational quality. They also become acquainted with parent association documents and accounting practices as they learn multiplication and division. The same teachers who teach the basic phase teach the post-literacy phase, and they negotiate the schedule for the classes with the learners. Anyone who has completed the basic course in good standing has the literacy and math skills needed to transition into the post-literacy course. In general, about two-thirds of the students continue into this phase, a few repeat the basic level, and a few discontinue participation. A small number of parent association board members who have basic literacy skills from previous schooling join the literacy program at the post-literacy level.

Evaluating the Training
At the beginning and end of each course, World Education gathers basic demographic data on learners and scores on pre- and post-tests. The evaluation tools for the basic level test literacy knowledge of letter and word recognition, sentence comprehension, letter and word formation, ability to write a simple sentences, number recognition, addition with and without carrying and subtraction with and without carrying. Content knowledge is not tested in the basic level. The post-literacy course evaluation tests reading comprehension and writing, and the four mathematical operations. Group discussions after each phase provide an indication of the impact of the information provided during the course. World Education uses all this data to strengthen the curriculum and training of teachers, as well as to provide learners with positive feedback.

Materials
World Education created the following materials for the learners to use in the integrated literacy program:

- Basic literacy book: Kalanden ka kalankqgafe
- Basic math book: jate san filan
- Enrichment reading: apedugu filaninw (The Twins)
- Post-literacy book: An k’an janto kalanko la
- Post-literacy math book: jate san filanan

The program also created five teachers guides:

- Teachers’ guide to the basic literacy book
- Teachers’ guide to the basic math book
- Teachers’ guide to the post-literacy book
- Teachers’ guide to the post-literacy math book
- Teachers’ grammar book (includes activities for learners)

Teachers are supplied with laminated letter flash cards, a flip chart of problem-posing illustrations, and two oil lamps. The responsibility for providing the oil for the lamps rests with the communities.
Infrastructure

World Education trains the NGO field workers during a two week\(^{10}\) in-residence training. The NGO field workers train teachers during a two-week training. World Education provides a five-day in-service training after the end of each course for NGO field workers and their corresponding village teachers. NGO field workers provide in-service coaching and general support to teachers during visits at least once a month.

The implementation cycle for the literacy program mirrors that of the implementation process in the parent association Training and Strengthening Cycle. NGO field workers select a number of villages that have expressed interest in adding the literacy component to the work of their parent association. Criteria for selection include need on the part of parent association members, and on the part of the wider community. The NGOs also consider the capacity of the parent associations to take on and succeed at an additional task.

The NGO field workers present the parent associations that meet the criteria with an overview of the program, including the idea that the parent association will be the manager of the program (in contrast to some literacy efforts that have sent in external teachers and been managed from afar). Working together, the NGO field worker and the parent association board clarify the roles and responsibilities of the two organizations in the management of the program. Once the community and the NGO agree, the NGO field worker shows the parent association board members how to manage the literacy program. Topics include criteria for selecting teachers, negotiating enrollment issues, and location needs.

Each community identifies two volunteer teachers to ensure that, should one be unable to teach, the other can step in. Beyond that, communities develop their own policies: When and where classes are held, who attends (in all cases, parent association members are given preference), what happens when participants are absent, etc. At the same time, World Education recommends certain practices that have been shown to be beneficial to learning, for example, that classes be held at least four days a week, and for at least two hours a day. Given the weather and agricultural cycle, communities tend to hold classes between January and June, and take two years to complete the basic literacy, enrichment reading, and post-literacy cycle.

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\(^{10}\) The time allotted to the training has varied between 8 and 12 days.

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My name is Yaye Coulibaly. I am 22-years-old. I am married and the mother of two children. In 2000, I completed Sanmogoya, World Education’s basic literacy course. In 2001, I benefited from the post-literacy course. This year, I am a learner to further strengthen my competency. Frankly, I have learned a lot not only about daily life in my village, but also about the management activities of the APE and information on HIV & AIDS. I do not know how to thank the people who enabled me to acquire this information. I write and I read very well. Thanks to the training, I am the one designated on the APE board to monitor attendance at school. My enrollment entries are made without mistakes and the attendance book is very well maintained.

I received 40 days of training in income-generating activities by a rice cooperative. One of the criteria for being selected is “to be literate.” I was trained to make starch.

I can say my life has changed thanks to literacy. I take care of my small family conscientiously. Everyone is in good health, and everything is clean inside and outside the house. My children do not yet go to school, however, and I assist the children of my co-wife.

Now I am learning French. From time-to-time, I take the school book from our child who is in the 5th grade to try to understand what they are doing in the school.

If another literacy activity comes to my village, I would be available.

World Education Case Study: Formal and Nonformal Education: Exploiting the Synergy Between them for the Benefit of Both
Communities have been, as can be expected, creative in their management of the program. For example, one community decided that the young and dynamic would have priority in the first round of classes, so they could teach others in the future, with the goal of everyone in a four village cluster becoming literate over time.

Once teachers are selected—ideally a man and a woman—the NGO field workers, working with the World Education literacy coordinator, train them in the activity-based teaching methodology. As the teachers initiate their classes, the NGO field worker or the World Education literacy coordinator tests each student to determine his or her literacy ability at the beginning of the course. During the running of the course, the NGO field worker visits monthly to support the teachers and help with any issues that may arise. The NGO field worker administers the same test to each student at the end of the course and conducts an informal evaluation to find out what information the learners have learned and how they are using it. The NGO field worker also asks about the overall impact of the program on the community. Additional training, designed jointly by World Education and its NGO partners, is offered to teachers each year. Topics and focus depend upon what the needs of the teachers are at the time. Since many of the teachers have continued with the program over the course of four years, more experienced teachers join the NGO field workers in training newer teachers.

The parent association manages the program, so the parent association evaluates the management of the program during its bi-annual self-evaluation process. World Education and NGO partners use this information to design additional training for parent associations and literacy program teachers. Special literacy classes for the treasurers and secretaries of the parent associations have been held as a result of these evaluations. These special classes focus on use of the calculator and accounting for the treasurers, and note-taking for the secretaries.
Resources
The resources needed for the program can be divided into three types: development-related, training-related and operational costs. Development-related costs are those incurred in creating the materials and methods. World Education brought as many stakeholders as possible into the development cycle, which drove up costs but assured more lasting interest and ownership of the program. Training costs involve preparing the NGO partners to work with the communities, the parent associations to manage the program, and the teachers to teach the program. Operational costs include supporting the NGOs to provide ongoing support for the program, and the cost of materials. By creating class sets of books, materials costs are somewhat controlled. The communities work together to provide some compensation for the teachers, but, despite the nonformal nature of this program, the costs—in particular for training and for putting a book in each learner’s hands—are not insubstantial.
This program is innovative along a number of dimensions. The teaching methodology, which couples problem solving with literacy learning, was new to the regions of Mali where it was introduced. The idea that the parent association could manage the program as it acted to strengthen the parent association was a new concept. Creating a literacy program model that has the potential to be self sustaining was innovative. Many literacy programs pay teachers, which means that the program ends when the funding ends. This program depends upon the contributions of the community and the management of the community. While some communities can not sustain the program, others can and do.

The design of the program was synergistic: Rather than being a stand-alone literacy program, the program grew out of the desires of the parent association, to meet the needs of the parent association as it was meeting literacy needs of individual participants. In that sense it is a prime example of synergy between the nonformal and formal education programs. As time passed, the program made linkages with other programs in the region: HIV & AIDS and health, in particular. New materials were added to introduce key HIV & AIDS-related health messages.

From the very first cycle of classes, participants indicated satisfaction with the activity-based nature of the program, the relevancy of the content, and the large and bold-faced type used in the books—all innovations in Mali. The decision to use large, bold-faced type and generous white space was not made lightly. Paper is expensive in West Africa, as is printing. In acknowledging the poverty of the environment—dark classrooms and learners with undiagnosed vision problems—and addressing it in the design of the literacy and math texts, World Education chose to invest in materials that would ensure that learners could truly develop their literacy skills.

Learning to read is hard work, even if the materials and methods are dynamic. Sitting on hard benches in hot, dark rooms, peering at letters and numbers, taxes the motivation of even the most dedicated learner. The inclusion of a “story line” throughout the books that appears in chapter form enables learners to move from reading words chosen to reflect the complexity of their lives to reading sentences, paragraphs, and stories written to engage and challenge them. Learners responded, indicating that they were motivated to come to class because they wanted to know more about what was happening with the family in the story.

**Results**

Attendance in these programs has remained high. Whether this is a feature of the ownership of the program by the community, the nature of the methods and materials, solely the determination of the participants to learn to read and write, or, most likely, some combination of all these factors is unknown. A small number of participants leave, not because of lack of interest, but because of economic need. In response to the agricultural cycle, the course is held between January and June (June is the end of the dry season). A family’s food can literally run out, and men particularly—but often women as well—must often engage in some form of economic activity to earn cash for purchasing...
food. Given that some males must leave class because of economic necessity, the drop-out rate has been low.

**Greater Understanding of the Role and Importance of the Parent Association**
Specific comments, taken from lengthy interviews held with 12 learners in 2002, and group interviews held with learners in four communities in 2003, as well as reports from the NGO field workers, provide evidence of the impact of the classes. Many literacy class participants report that since participating in class, they better understand the role—and importance—of the parent association in their community. The learners’ understanding comes from two sources. The first is the basic literacy curriculum itself: in addition to a lesson on the role of the parent association, it includes many lessons on educational issues. Parent association board members are the second source of information. Some parent association board members are literacy class participants, and the parent association secretary is often one of the teachers of the class. The board members involved in the class, whether as teacher or as student, explain the role of the parent association to their peers. Board members also report using new skills to take notes and to read minutes, to record and to read about who is responsible for what (“We used to forget,” admitted one board member), to record finances, to track inventory, and to monitor attendance at school.

**Stronger belief in the value of education**
Many literacy class participants explained that belief in the value of education for children was initiated or deepened after discussions held in literacy classes: another example of the synergy between non- and formal education. Many parents now help their children with homework or plan to send all of their children, especially girls, to school in the future. “Rather than send my boy out to watch the sheep,” explained one man, “I now send him to school.” In one instance, a young man provided literacy instruction to his younger siblings, who had not attended school but were too young to participate in the program.

**Integrated Learning: Increased knowledge about and action for improving health**
At the same time, the program has also had a broader impact, which can only serve communities well. Health issues are addressed as a result of the literacy program. Participants pay greater attention to the level of cleanliness of their homes, as well as to their own and their children’s personal hygiene. Mothers often attribute ensuring that their children complete a full course of vaccinations to what they learned in literacy class: they also now safely guard their children’s vaccination cards.

The literacy class has an impact on knowledge about HIV and AIDS as well. Although learners had learned about AIDS through health education efforts, including films and information sessions, “When we read for ourselves in our own books it made more of an impression,” one learner stated.

One woman noted that she pays closer attention to her children’s health and will not hesitate to bring them to a clinic as a result of learning about health issues in literacy classes. She also started using contraceptives after learning about the importance of birth spacing in class. One young man reported wanting to become a health care worker after learning about the importance of immunizations, birth spacing, and HIV prevention in class.
**Sense of community among learners**
Many literacy class participants noted a renewed sense of community. The sheer event of coming together in the class has prompted them to take civic action. Planting of communal fields is an example of an action taken by members of one class.

**Increased financial skills**
Literacy acquisition has enabled learners to participate more fully in the financial life of their families, helping to maintain records of income and expenses. One woman reported that, as a result of becoming literate, she was able to enroll in an income-generation workshop that required literacy, and now has her own business. In several instances, participants who had their own businesses are now able to maintain their own financial records and avoid losing money, such as when giving change.

**Increased confidence and mobility**
The program has also had a strong impact on individuals. For many, becoming literate increased their confidence in daily life and in situations such as traveling. Several learners noted that they were less likely to get lost in other towns now that they were literate. One woman noted that she is now able to label her belongings when traveling, resulting in less loss.

Several participants had had previous experience with literacy programs. They indicated a preference for the Sanmogoya method, in particular the use of illustrations to facilitate discussion to understand concepts.

**How many learners completed the program?**
5,239 learners completed the basic course between 1999-2005, of whom 43% were women and 17% were members of parent association boards. 18% of learners completed the post-literacy course, of whom 40% were women and 20% were members of parent association boards. The number of communities offering the basic literacy course jumped from 25 in 2002 to 105 in 2003, which accounts for the much higher number of basic course completers than post-literacy completers. In January, 2005, 100 new communities started the program.
V. Lessons Learned

**Literacy takes a long time**

Two kinds of time are needed for a successful literacy program. The first is the time needed to develop materials and methods, especially if the program is to be owned jointly by those who are going to use it. Adhering to World Education’s philosophy that community ownership leads to sustainable development, World Education not only invested time in evaluating and revising the program but in engaging as many people as possible in its development. However, this investment of time and resources was made with the long view in mind: these materials and methods can now be used with literally thousands of villages.

The second necessary investment of time is the time needed to achieve learning gains that will be maintained after the course is over. A non-literate person seems to need to attend and participate in class regularly for at least 200 hours of instruction to be able to retain newly acquired literacy skills, and then an additional 100 hours to ensure real fluency. World Education’s materials are paced slow enough to encourage literacy mastery and retention, yet fast enough to enable learners to access interesting reading material before they grow bored.

World Education chose to divide these hours into two distinct courses, to accommodate the agricultural cycle and to refrain from over-taxing teachers’ willingness to volunteer their time. But once teachers are trained, a community and willing teachers could decide to run both the basic and post-literacy class the same year. If enough new communities are interested in doing that, and funding was available, World Education could adjust the training schedule with NGO partners to accommodate communities’ schedules.

The time invested in a literacy course also seems to have effects with more literate, informed community members. The role in development of community members coming together, day-after-day for a number of months for literacy classes, should not be ignored, nor should the small group-based methodology. Literacy class participants have time to mull over important issues, returning to them over time. Behavior changes have resulted in ways that short-term interventions failed to achieve. Literacy class participants have developed communal projects beneficial to their communities, citing their group learning as the catalyst for their actions. So, while literacy does take time, that time yields a variety of positive outcomes.

**Participants are more readily available in the evenings, and classrooms are very hot during the day. Thus holding classes at night makes sense. But there is no light.**

When asked what challenges impede the successful implementation of the program, communities and NGO field workers immediately bring up the issue of lighting. Some communities have worked around this issue by holding classes during the day. “Literacy is really important,” explained one parent association president, who is also the village chief. “People can give up their time for the few months of class and come during the day. No one could see at night and men didn’t want their wives to go to class at night.”
Other communities have augmented the oil lamps provided by the program with additional lamps and flashlights. World Education has been working with Design that Matters, an innovative NGO affiliated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), to develop a low-cost projector that can run on rechargeable batteries. This technology holds some promise and a partnership between World Education and Design that Matters received funding from USAID to pilot the technology in Mali, beginning in January 2005. The literacy books, re-designed for this purpose, will be projected onto the walls in dark classrooms. So, for example, the teacher can project the illustration on the wall, everyone can see it, and the learners can group themselves around the oil lamps for small group discussions. Then the teacher can project the first word in the lesson, and the small groups can use the light from the oil lamps to provide enough illumination for their literacy practice. By 2006, this partnership will have determined whether this technology will hold up under the severe conditions found in Mali and similar countries.

**Usually more men than women participate in the course**

A few communities have prioritized the participation of women. In some, women are all but banned from the classes due to cultural constraints.

NGO partners and World Education are working on how to show more conservative communities the benefits of educating women. This includes a more thorough exploration of the positive impact of including women in classes during social negotiations with communities. Another strategy has been to test—with private funding—the use of female teachers to teach women-only classes. This has proven to be very successful and should be replicated.

**Few women become literacy teachers, and those who do often drop out**

The project has had very few success stories in the realm of women teachers. A number of women were trained and even began teaching, but quit because of their husbands’ displeasure. Our pilot “women-teaching-women” model showed us that women teachers are less likely to quit their posts if they are being trained by women in women-only groups, and teaching women rather than teaching mixed-gender classes. Compensation for time spent teaching, organized by the participants, also helps retain women teachers.

**Teachers get tired of volunteering**

Some teachers resign after one cycle because the opportunity costs of volunteering—such as time not spent on economic activities—are too steep. Others pass the job on when other potential teachers are identified, but surprisingly few have resigned since the beginning of the program. Being identified as literate, going outside the community for training, and being included in a field worker’s visit seems to raise the stature of the teacher within the community. The added status seems to be a draw, as do the actual content of the training, and the impact of the role: The teachers’ own literacy and math skills increase. Some communities raise funds for the teachers by charging literacy class participants a fee,
others charge fines for unannounced absences as a way to raise some money for the teacher. Pitching in to help teachers with their farm work is another strategy used to provide some economic reward to the teachers.

Nevertheless, many teachers fail to teach additional cycles after the NGO support is withdrawn. Sustaining momentum in a project such as this is a common issue in grassroots development. It can, and should be addressed, in at least two ways. The first is via leadership development. One or two key community members who are committed to the ongoing success of the program must be identified and nurtured. They will be champions for the program, who will ensure that it lives on after external support, even if only in the form of motivating visits and training, has ended. Greater synergy between the nonformal and formal sectors is another way to ensure that the program continues. Institutionalizing the program via recognition from the Ministry of Education can help sustain it.

Some lessons include more than one letter at a time. Retaining two new letters can be difficult for learners
Mali's national basic literacy program teaches only one letter at a time, and does not introduce the reading of text until the whole alphabet is learned. World Education was questioned about our approach. However, World Education's experience in Nepal indicated that, for adults, the more quickly substantive content and actual words and sentences were introduced into a literacy course, the more motivated to continue—and to use new skills—learners would be. Five years of experience has demonstrated this to be true in Mali as well. Given enough practice built into lessons, learners can learn and use more than one new letter at a time. Nevertheless, in the latest iteration of the materials, almost all lessons introduce only one new letter.

Synergy created between formal and nonformal education at the community level expands to the regional and national levels
World Education spent five years building its internal capacity and experience in adult literacy. Recognition of the positive role that a nonformal adult literacy program can play in support of development goals was achieved when USAID included adult literacy as a requested support service in its 2003 requests for proposals in education and in health.

World Education is now partnering with the Malian Ministry of Education to assure that techniques are shared with Ministry of Education literacy specialists, that the goals and practices of the Ministry are not circumvented, and that other points of synergy are promoted.
VI. Conclusion

The Process
Over the past six years, World Education has learned many lessons about what it takes to develop and implement its literacy program and the Sanmogoya methodology. World Education defines an effective integrated literacy program as one that:

- enables participants to learn to read, write, and do math;
- enables participants to learn content information and problem solving skills; and
- can be run and sustained by a community with little outside intervention.

World Education’s literacy program in Mali is such a program. It did not arise over night, however. Relevant, interesting materials and methods took time to design. Including partners as co-developers at every stage of the development process ensured ongoing commitment and ownership of the program. The development phase and related investment made by World Education/Mali and its partners was substantial, and crucial, to the program’s success. This investment could not have been made without the financial support of USAID.

Building on lessons learned via the development of the program, World Education worked with seven NGOs and Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education specialists to develop a second basic literacy course, integrating health information with literacy and math instruction. Two of the NGOs that participated in this effort now use these materials exclusively for their youth literacy program. The development process was quicker than that of the original program, but included the same key elements:

- wide participation of relevant partners in all phases of development, and
- extensive testing and revision of the methods, materials, and training.

The methods and materials incorporate lessons learned as well:

- vital, relevant content;
- a pace that allows for the retention of material;
- an activity-based methodology;
- inclusion of comprehension activities as early as possible;
- the use of a consistent set of activities that allow teachers and students to focus on the material rather than the methods; and
- training and support for teachers.

The Role of Literacy as a Support to Other Development Effort
More important than the lessons learned about developing an effective literacy program, that integrates content with literacy instruction, are the lessons learned about the role of literacy as a synergistic support to other development efforts.
World Education’s literacy program began in response to a request made by the communities with which World Education and its partner NGOs work. “We can do a better job at working to educate our children,” they said, “if we could read and write ourselves.” In other words, it’s not enough to create a viable community institution which needs literate members to function, if the literacy—the power—rests in the hands of just a few community members. More community members must be literate. Only then does it become a community institution, rather than one controlled by the literate few and the NGO partners that work with them.

The same can be said for other development efforts: as long as community members are dependent upon a few literate neighbors and outsiders to provide access to information, to communicate within the legal framework of a country, development can only go so far. Integrating literacy with the content of a sector—in this case, education—assures the transparency and participation we look for in democratic institutions. This is a synergy worth supporting.

To truly create a viable community institution, more people must be literate.