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**Working Paper**

## Education for all and for life? An introduction into primary school education in Senegal

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**Zentrum für internationale Entwicklungs- und Umweltforschung der  
Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen**

**Education for All and for Life?  
An Introduction into Primary School Education in Senegal**

by

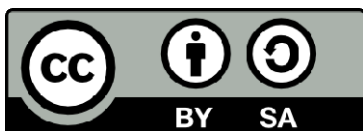
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No. 55

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## Abstract

This paper is part of a larger research project on educational decisions in developing countries, especially in West Africa. It describes the current state of primary school education in Senegal and points out respective concerns of parents, teachers and school principals. Generally spoken, figures about quantity of school enrollment point to a massive improvement during the last years. Many parents and teachers, however, are concerned about quality problems. During a field trip schools have been visited in an urban and a rural area in Senegal, where conversations with parents and different members of the educational sector have taken place and have provided some important insights. Low quality of education, high drop out rates and parents' lacking appreciation for formal schooling have been identified as main drawbacks of the schooling situation in the regions visited. Further research on this topic involves a household survey based on a questionnaire that incorporates the results presented here.

*Keywords: primary school education, school enrollment, Senegal, West Africa, field trip, schooling system*

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# 1 Introduction

In the course of the *Education for All* movement (launched in 1990) the educational system in Senegal has shown some substantial improvements. For instance, the adult literacy rate (15+) increased from not even 27 percent in 1988 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2010a) to about 43 percent in 2008 (UNICEF, 2009). The gross enrollment rate (GER)<sup>1</sup> rose from 65 percent in 1999 to 84 percent in 2008 at the primary level and even doubled from 15 percent to 30 percent at the secondary level in the same period (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2010a). However, a closer look at the current state of the education system in Senegal reveals the necessity for further efforts.

In 2008, Senegal's total population of about 12.2 million comprised roughly 1.4 million (11.6 percent) children of the official primary school age, i.e. six to twelve years old (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2010a). However, Senegal's total primary school age population exceeded 1.9 million pupils in 2008 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2010a) indicating a high extent of over-aged students in primary school. This leads to a net enrollment rate (NER)<sup>2</sup> of 73 percent compared to the GER of 84 percent at the primary school level. This, in turn, means that more than a quarter of children at the official primary school age were not enrolled in 2008. Although Senegal's NER increased sharply from 55 percent in 1999 to 73 percent in 2008 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2010a) it is still among the lowest compared to other sub-Saharan African countries (see e.g. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) (2010b) and UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2007)). Besides the low enrollment rates, a high number of drop outs is a matter of concern, since only 58 percent of children complete primary school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2010a). Accordingly, the NER was only 21 percent at the secondary school level in 2006 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2010a). While there is no significant gender gap at the primary level, with drop out rates being higher for girls than for boys the gender inequality is more distinct at the secondary level. Another major problem is the low rate of literacy. Despite some improvements made in the last decade, with an adult literacy rate of 43 percent and a youth literacy rate of 51 percent in 2006, Senegal lies beneath the sub-Saharan African average (about 62 percent and 71 percent, respectively). Additionally, literacy rates show a substantial gender gap although these disparities tend to decline in these years (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2010a).

This paper describes and analyzes the Senegalese schooling system and its implementation in an urban and a rural area. It is part of a larger project which focuses on educational decisions in developing countries, especially in West Africa. The emphasis of this study, as well as of the research project, is on primary schooling.

Besides using official sources, it builds on insights and information gained during a field trip to different Senegalese regions in October 2010. During this period, several schools have been visited in an urban and a rural area. Conversations were held with a wide range of participants and members of the educational sector, both to obtain detailed information and to gain an impression of their attitude towards different aspects of education. The research project will be continued with a quantitative study that focuses on educational decisions and the roles that family context and household composition play. Therefore, a household survey will be conducted in the region of Saint-Louis.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The following section introduces our research methodology and the study area. Section 3 describes the Senegalese schooling system,

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<sup>1</sup>The gross enrollment rate (GER) is defined as total enrollment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, divided by the population of the age which officially corresponds to the specific level of education.

<sup>2</sup>The net enrollment rate (NER) is defined as the number of children of the official school age who are enrolled in a given level of education divided by the population of the age which officially corresponds to the specific level of education.

while Section 4 analyzes the realities we have seen and were told during the field trip. Section 5 emphasizes perception of education by families, including the special situation of girls. Section 6 focuses on (economic) incentives of school enrollment and rivals of formal schooling. Section 7 concludes.

## 2 Methodology and Research Area

### 2.1 Methodology

The information presented in this study was collected during a qualitative fieldwork carried out in October 2010. Two different regions were visited during the field trip: the urban Kaolack region with the city of Kaolack and its surroundings and the rural Podor district in the Saint Louis region. The majority of interviews took place in schools so that the main respondents for this study were teachers, school principals and parents of pupils. Besides a secondary school in Podor district several public primary schools in Kaolack (city and surroundings) and in Podor district (Guédiu Chantiers community) were visited.

The interviews were conducted partly in groups and partly with single persons based on a semi-structured interview technique. Hence, additional questions amended a previously prepared questionnaire whenever necessary to gain additional information on important topics. In this way, we allowed the interviewees to express their opinions and concerns on whatever they considered important. The information obtained was supplemented during conversations with a social worker in Kaolack who is involved in several projects for disadvantaged children including a program that aims at reintegrating children that have left their families and live on the streets. Teacher trainers in the two regions, who are responsible for the formation of teachers, gave their impressions on teaching quality, school coverage and changes in both dimensions. Therefore, the field study provides some important insights into the current state of primary education from a teacher-principal perspective as well as from a parents-pupils perspective.

### 2.2 Research Area

The Republic of Senegal is the westernmost African country with its capital Dakar being located directly on the Atlantic coast. After the region had been a French colony as a part of French West Africa for more than a century, it gained independency in 1960 (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2010). Senegal's population is made up of several ethnic groups including the Wolof, Pulaar, Toucouleur, Serer and Diola. While French is the official language, many African languages are widely spoken (e.g. Wolof, Pulaar and Serer). Senegal is one of the eight members of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA<sup>3</sup>) which was founded in 1994 in the course of a drastic depreciation of the common currency Franc CFA.<sup>4</sup> The union aims to increase the economic competitiveness and financial stability of its member states by means of economic and financial integration. Besides the establishment of common and open markets, the union members share a common currency, the Franc CFA, under a common monetary authority (Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA), 2007).

In the Human Development Report 2010, Senegal ranks 144th with an HDI value of 0.411, which makes it one of the 49 Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The GNI per capita 2010 is 1,816 PPP 2008 \$ and the average life expectancy at birth is 56.2 years. Table 1 presents further summary statistics for Senegal and the other members of the UEMOA.

<sup>3</sup>Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine.

<sup>4</sup>The Franc CFA (Franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine) was introduced by the French during colonial times.



Table 1: UEMOA Members - Descriptive Statistics

	Benin	Burkina Faso	Côte d' Ivoire	Guinea-Bissau	Mali	Niger	Senegal	Togo
HDI value	0.435	0.305	0.397	0.289	0.309	0.261	0.411	0.428
HDI rank	134	161	149	164	160	167	144	139
population (millions)	9.2	16.3	21.6	1.6	13.3	15.9	12.9	6.8
life expectancy (in years)	62.3	53.7	58.4	48.6	49.2	52.5	56.2	63.3
GNI per capita (PPP 2008 \$)	1499	1215	1625	538	1171	675	1816	844
Adult literacy Rate (15 +) (in %)	40.8	28.7	54.6	51	26.2	28.7	41.9	64.9
2005-08 Prim. School Net Enrollment Ratio	92.8	63.3	56	52.1	71.5	54	72.9	83.5
2001-09 Pupil-Teacher Ratio	44.6	48.9	41.9	88.1	51.4	40.7	36.4	37.6

Source: UNDP (2010). Unless otherwise stated, the data are from 2010.

Currently, Senegal is subdivided into 14 regions, each of which is named after its regional capital. During the field trip, the regions of Dakar, Kaolack and Saint-Louis have been visited, but school visits concentrated on the latter two regions.

Kaolack region is located in the center of Senegal and borders on Gambia. The geographic and climatic conditions of the southern Sahelian zone in the north and the northern Sudanian zone in the southern part of the region are reflected in the vegetation which is characterized by shrubland in the north and by tree-covered savanna in the southern parts. About 95 percent of the population are Muslims and there are Christian and animistic minorities. Regarding the ethnic groups, the Wolof are the biggest group (over 60 percent) as in the whole country. Other important ethnic groups in Kaolack include the Pulaar (about 20 percent) and the Serer (about 10 percent) (Service Régional de la Statistique et de la Démographie de Kaolack, 2009). Countrywide the Wolof make up about 43 percent, the Pulaar about 24 percent and the Serer about about 15 percent (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2011). Agriculture is the most important sector and occupies three quarters of the workforce, mainly focussing on the cultivation of groundnuts, watermelons, legumes, sorghum, millet, sesame, maize, rice, fonio and vegetables. Extensive husbandry also plays an important role for the region's economy. Regarding industries, Kaolack's portfolio is limited, but there are, for example, soap and textile production plants. Trade is very important, partly due to its position on the trading routes from Kayes (Mali) and Tambacounda to Dakar. The city of Kaolack is located 190 kilometers south-east of Dakar and is one of the five biggest cities in the country. It is especially known for the high importance of trade, as can be seen from the big markets.

The city of Saint-Louis has about the same number of inhabitants. Figure 1 shows its location 265 kilometers north of Dakar near the Mauritanian border and at the mouth of the river Senegal. Founded by the French in 1638 and once the capital of French West Africa, the importance of the

Figure 1: Map of Senegal



Source: UN Cartographic Section (2004)

city has declined since then. Nevertheless, it is still the economic and cultural center of north-western Senegal. From the city of Saint-Louis, the region stretches towards the east next to the Mauritanian border and along the Senegal river valley. The existence of Senegal river largely explains the once important role of the fortress towns of, for example, Podor and Dagana and the current economic activity. Despite its location in the low-precipitation Sahelian zone, it facilitates alluvial irrigation agriculture. As a result, rice, sugar and tomatoes are important produces in Saint-Louis region. More distant from Senegal river and its feeding rivers, agriculture concentrates on the cultivation of groundnuts, legumes, millet and sorghum. Especially in areas that are too dry or infertile for agriculture, extensive husbandry is widespread. Another major source of income is food processing, especially the north-west of the region is well-known for its sugar and canned tomato plants (Service Régional de la Statistique et de la Démographie de Saint-Louis, 2009). The area where the fieldwork was done, however, is agrarian-oriented. Small-scale self-employment, trade and – to a limited extent – public sector jobs complete the range of jobs accessible.

## 3 The Educational Sector in Senegal

### 3.1 School System

The structure of the education system in Senegal is closely related to the French schooling system with its three general stages primary, secondary and higher (tertiary) education. In 2004, earlier laws were modified and compulsory education was extended so that it covers all children from age six to 16 (République du Sénégal, Secretariat du gouvernement, 2005). Before, in 1991 a law had been passed that formulated the right for education of all citizens and that the state was responsible for the set-up of an educational system, without specifying compulsory schooling (République du Sénégal, 1991). With the ten-year program on education and training related to *Education For All*, six years of compulsory schooling were introduced (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2003). Younger children can start with non-compulsory preschool at the age of three. Under the old legal arrangements, an advantage of attending preschool for three years was that these children had the option to start primary education at the age of six, while all others officially were to start at age seven.

Figure 2 illustrates the major elements of the Senegalese schooling system: Starting at age six or seven, children attend primary school for six years. At the end of the last grade of primary school, there is an official nationwide examination that includes several written and oral exams. When registering for this examination, students can specify whether they take the exam in order to obtain the certificate of completed primary school education (CFEE)<sup>5</sup>, to enter secondary school, or both.<sup>6</sup> The CFEE can be issued by public and private schools. Even adults who have been working for several years, but never obtained the CFEE, can register for the examinations to get the first diploma of the Senegalese education system.

Secondary education in Senegal is divided into two cycles with mandatory exams at the end of each cycle. Lower secondary school lasts for four years and concludes with exams for the diploma for completed lower secondary education (BFEM)<sup>7</sup> at the usual age of sixteen. Students who pass the BFEM are promoted to upper secondary school which has to be attended for one to three years depending on the specific type of qualification aspired. A three years lasting general and technical upper secondary education leads to the Baccalauréat (BAC) which is equivalent to the high school diploma. The Brevet de Technicien (BT) can be obtained after three years of professional education. Alternatively, there is a two year lasting short professional education leading to the Brevet d'Études Professionnelles (BEP).

### 3.2 Curriculum of Primary Schools

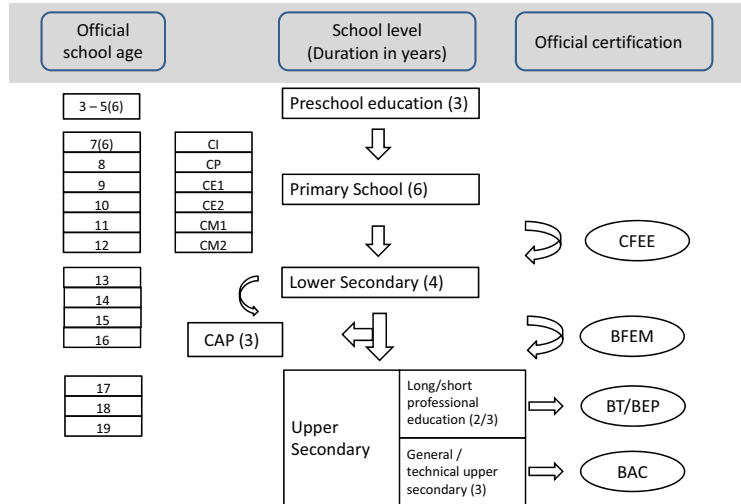
Since 2008, a new pedagogical concept, the so-called curriculum-centered approach developed by the ministry of education has been used. This curriculum is described in a pedagogical guidebook for teachers. It states what has to be taught at which level and to which extent. Besides core subjects such as French, mathematics and sciences it also includes units on health care, hygiene, protection of the environment etc. In contrast to former curricula which had been developed for Europe and transferred to Senegal and other African countries without any adjustments to the realities in the countries, this curriculum was especially designed for Senegal. Teachers confirmed that it was well adapted to the realities in the country. However, they complained about the lack of necessary materials to put the curriculum into action. At most schools, teachers also stated that the curriculum was good but that it was hardly possible to complete all the proposed lessons. Instead, they tried to teach everything in the core subjects and were not able to do all the other

<sup>5</sup>Certificat de Fin d'Études Élémentaires.

<sup>6</sup>The written exams determine the entry to class six, while written and oral exams both count for the CFEE.

<sup>7</sup>Brevet de Fin d'Études Moyennes.

Figure 2: School System in Senegal



Note: CFEE=Certificat de Fin d’Etudes Elémentaires, BFEM=Brevet de Fin d’Etudes Moyennes, CAP=Certificat d’Aptitudes Professionnelle, BT=Brevet de Technicien, BEP=Brevet d’Etudes Professionnelles

Source: Authors’ illustration based on UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2007).

subjects. Since children typically only speak their maternal tongues when they enter school, the first year at school is used to teach them French and basic calculus. Throughout primary schooling, the tuition language is French for all subjects. Those schools that have an Arab teacher, teach the students Arabic for about two hours weekly.

## 4 Reality in Public Primary Schools

The interviews revealed some important issues regarding the current situation of public primary schools. Teachers primarily complained about the bad condition of school buildings and deficient equipment of teaching materials. While schools’ inscription fees appear to be manageable at the primary level, the total costs of schooling per child can rise considerably if children have to stay at a host family. Financial burdens, however, increase sharply at the secondary level and at private primary schools. Further concerns regard too big class sizes, multigrade teaching, late enrollment and shortening of the tuition time.

### 4.1 Availability and Condition of Primary School Facilities

While this does not hold for secondary and high schools, primary schools are within reach for most children. In the areas visited, several schools are located within walking distance in the urban areas and in the rural areas, schools are in the bigger villages. Most children lived close enough

to walk to school and back home every day, usually within two kilometers. Those living further away, stayed with relatives or a host family during the school year. Talking to parents about the choice of a specific school, we gained the impression that in most cases the nearest school was chosen. Only if there were several schools close by, the previous results of the national grade six exam played a role. If the closest school was a private school and too expensive for a family, they chose a public school not too far away.

Most teachers asked during the field trip complained about very old (often 50 years) and poorly maintained buildings, some also about lacking pedagogical materials and too big class sizes. The new curriculum-based approach required teaching of units on environmental and social education where some schools had no pedagogical materials for. Blackboards were often hardly usable anymore. After the rainy season (heavy rain this year) schoolyards were still flooded and school started several days or weeks later than scheduled. Teachers and school administration complained about the lack of public support to repair the damages.

## 4.2 Costs

Officially, public primary schools are free of charge in Senegal, but each school's parents' association and the principal fix an inscription fee that has to be paid in the beginning of each school year. Thereby, the need for maintenance and reparation of the buildings are taken into consideration as well as the financial strength of the population. As a result, the fees are typically higher in urban than in rural areas. In the primary schools visited during the field trip the fees ranged from 500 to 2,000 Francs CFA<sup>8</sup>. The president of the parents' association and the school administration are free to concede delayed payment to parents not being able to pay before the beginning of the school year or to waive fees for parents especially in need. Some schools try to find additional means that reduce the costs of schooling for the pupils' families. During the last decade most of the schools visited had started collecting a stock of school books that were lent to the pupils during the school year. Before lending them to the next generation of students, faculty repaired the books if necessary. However, many pupils do not take care of the books and families hardly ever pay for lost or destroyed books. Most of the visited schools did not have enough books for all children, so that either two or three children had to share a book or some classes did not get any books at all. Lending school materials to pupils is a way to reduce costs that the children's families face. Some schools even received further materials from the state (exercise books, pencils, ball pens and erasers) that could be distributed to the students for free.

Financial burdens increase sharply when children attend secondary schools or private primary schools. Public secondary schools charge an annual inscription fee established by the parents' association which accounted for 5,000 Francs CFA (about 16.20 PPP US \$<sup>9</sup>) in the secondary school visited in a rural area. It was reported at 3,000 to 10,000 Francs CFA in Kaolack, which corresponds to the amounts prescribed by the authorities. The exact amount is fixed annually at each school according to the needs. Some municipalities support the best students so that they can continue secondary schooling even if their families do not have the financial means, but this is very limited. School fees of private primary schools are very heterogeneous, most of them charge monthly fees and some an additional annual inscription fee. In Kaolack monthly fees often amounted from 3,000 to 8,000 Francs CFA and inscription fees up to 20,000 Francs CFA. But the range is very wide. Some private schools offer their students a transport service which has to be paid separately.

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<sup>8</sup>The Franc CFA is guaranteed by the French treasury and is pegged with the EURO. 1 EURO = 656.17 Francs CFA.

<sup>9</sup>The 2008 PPP conversion factor for private consumption provided by the World Bank has been used (The World Bank, 2011).

School uniforms are becoming increasingly popular especially in the cities. Nevertheless, none of the schools visited had school uniforms. While uniforms are able to conceal social and economic differences between children to some extent, in the first place they imply an additional financial burden on the families. To limit this burden, media reported that the ministry of education (Ministère de l'Éducation) wanted to cap the annual contribution of parents at 10,000 Francs CFA and the uniform should be included in this amount (Kane, 2010).

The problem of high costs of schooling is aggravated if no school is within reach of daily travel. Families then have to face costs for schooling materials and meals that children have to take at a host family. According to parents' estimations the total costs of schooling per child and year then amount to between 25,000 and 30,000 Francs CFA.

### 4.3 Class Size, Shifts and Multigrade Teaching

Some schools lacked classrooms, so that some classes were taught in the afternoon, others in the morning (two shifts). Diagne et al. (2006) state two studies that estimate that almost thirty percent of all primary schools practice double shifts. Most of the visited schools had a very large number of pupils per class, at some schools the average class size reached 63 pupils. In this regard, the schools visited seem to be representative for most schools in Senegal. As stated in Boubacar and François (2007), more than a quarter of all public primary schools have more than 50 pupils per class.

Smaller (rural) schools that do not have enough pupils to build usual classes combine several levels in multigrade classes. For example, the first and second class are taught simultaneously by the same teacher (and the third and fourth with one teacher and the fifth and sixth with another teacher). In the classrooms, the students of one level are seated on one side, those of the other level on the other side. In the schools visited, class sizes ranged from 25 to 31 students for the combined double classes. Teachers complained about difficulties with multigrade teaching as net tuition time for each grade is reduced and pupils are distracted.

### 4.4 Grade Progression and Late Enrollment

Officially, compulsory schooling starts at the age of six and lasts for ten years, but only few children complete ten years of schooling. This is mainly due to the nationwide examination that students have to take after grade six and which leads to the CFEE. Thus, children might not enter secondary school if they have not passed the exam. Preschool education is, in general, not very common for Senegalese children because preschools are rare outside of big cities. At the schools visited hardly any children had attended preschool. One reason for the late enrollment issue is that parents might not send their children to school until they are seven because they still believe the school entrance age is seven. Teachers reported that some children started school several years behind because parents were not aware of the legal enrollment age. Some children start school at the age of eight or nine, rarely afterwards. Other reasons for delayed enrollment are that families do not want their children to walk too far or to live with other families when they are very young. Other students only attend Quranic schools when they should officially start primary school and after some years they start formal schooling.

During the six years of primary schooling, students are evaluated regularly (e.g. every three months) and teachers' decisions about the students' progression to the next grade are based on the results of these tests. At some schools, teachers stated that the repetition rate was officially fixed at ten percent, other schools reported the rate was not fixed and varied according to the students' performance. At the end of grade six, a standardized exam decides upon who can proceed to secondary school. Children who start school at the age of six are twelve years old when they take the exam if they have not repeated any grades. At some schools, teachers reported that the state

had fixed an age range at which students could take the exam (from age 10 or 11 to age 14), which prevented them from repeating the exam several times if they were too old. A teacher trainer informed us that such a rule did not exist and people could take the CFEE at any age. However, according to him, the exam that qualified for secondary school entry could only be taken at age 14 or younger. Most schools organized a preparatory exam before this standardized exam. The examination fee for the standardized exam was reported at 250 Francs CFA per student. Many schools offer –upon payment or for free – additional reinforcement courses before the exams during afternoons or weekends.

## 4.5 Tuition Time

Summer holidays extent from the end of June to mid-October (with exams taking place in July). In 2010, the centrally fixed starting date of the school year was set at 4 October for teachers and 7 October for students. Teachers start earlier in order to do some administrative work or to register the students. Typically, students or their parents come to school some days before school restarts to pay the fee and thereby enroll for the upcoming school year.

The already relatively short school year is further shortened by delayed restart due to adverse weather conditions, rain-damaged facilities or administrative work. In all schools visited classes started at least one week later and the delay extended to three or four weeks for schools that experienced more severe damages. When teaching is finally resumed, it still takes several days or even weeks, until all students return to school, teachers receive teaching materials and children get used to speaking French and being in a classroom once again. As a consequence, the average annual teaching time amounted to 690 hours in the first years of the new millennium. Although the government has announced to raise it to 900 hours which corresponds to international standards, it is not clear how this should be achieved (Boubacar and François, 2007). The amount of hours taught varies considerably between schools, so many children receive a lot less.

Usual teaching time at primary schools is from eight in the morning to one in the afternoon with one break. Schools that have two shifts use the afternoon (and sometimes Saturday mornings) for the second shift. Those schools that have two shifts but do not have different teachers for the different shifts, often drastically reduce teaching time for the individual shifts. At the school visits, we gained the impression that teaching hours were handled in a somewhat flexible way and that some of the time is used for administrative purposes. Apart from the distribution of school materials, teachers had to interrupt the lessons if new students arrived, parents dropped in to talk to the teachers, teachers' children dropped in, teachers had to talk to the school principal on administrative issues etc. These interruptions, however, might decrease in the course of the school year.

Most of the bigger schools (many of the visited schools had 700-900 students) have two supplementary teachers, that do not have their own class, but can replace other teachers that are missing e.g. because of illness. In schools that do not have supplementary teachers, the principal sometimes replaces absent teachers. Otherwise classes have to be suspended. In this case, some principals stated, the suspension of classes was tried to be avoided for the older students (especially for the 6th grade), because they had to pass the standardized exam at the end of the school year. Similarly for small multigrade schools, the smaller children are sent home when a teacher is missing so that the pupils closer to the official exams can be taught.

After the extensive summer holidays, it can take very long until the teacher can turn to teaching the topics of the grade. First, as already mentioned above, it can take already some days until the classroom can be used, enough tables are available and it has become clear which pupils should be in which class. Second, especially in the lower grades and in areas where most children do not attend preschool, it takes very long until pupils get used to being in a classroom with many other children again and until they remember what they have learned during the previous school year.

In the areas visited, children typically only speak their maternal languages (Wolof, Pulaar, Serer, Soninke and others) before they enter school. Very few families speak French at home and young pupils find it hard to remember even basic structures of French after the holidays. In a second grade class we have seen a teacher explaining her pupils how to say good morning, how to ask if they could go to the toilet etc.

## 5 Children's Education and its Importance to Families

### 5.1 Appreciation of Education

All schools visited have a parents' association with an elected president. This association is charged with the maintenance of the school facilities which is mainly financed by the annual inscription fee. Thus, the parents play an active role both in fixing the amount of the fee and in carrying out the maintenance and reconstruction work. In the beginning of the school year (and sometimes also during the year) schools invite all parents to a meeting where they present new teachers, give information on the number of students, funding of the school etc. In areas where one local language (e.g. Wolof or Pulaar) is predominant, this language is used for the collaboration between school and parents.

On the one hand, many parents have several children in the same school and are very active in this collaboration for a long period. On the other hand, many other parents never participate in any of these events and do not seem to understand (or even ask) what their children are doing at school. Especially the more educated parents reported talking to their children after school about what the children had learned at school as well as practicing calculations and reading. The principal of a school at the outskirts of a city estimated that about 15 percent of parents were really interested in what their children learned at school. Apparently, not the knowledge of a specific subject is decisive in this regard, but rather the attitude parents had towards schooling of their children. Some teachers reported that some parents did not even have a concrete idea of the concept of schooling, i.e. they had no imagination of how their children spend the days at school. For example, some of the parents did not know the name of the school or the grade their children attend. As one of the visible consequences, many students do not take any bag to school in which they could carry their pencils and exercise books, so that these things are soon in a bad condition. Of course, not every family can afford fashionable school bags, but some families prepare used rice bags as school bags and some children use simple plastic bags which already protect their school materials.

Regarding school quality, especially parents who had attended school themselves complained both about the level and about the recent developments. According to them, quality of primary and secondary schools has decreased since independence and especially during the last years when policy focused on quantity. Criticism included less qualified teachers after the shortened formation and too big class sizes. Also, the progression to the next grade and to secondary school was considered too pervious, which continuously lowered the quality.

Although many of the parents who send their children to school are very conscious about the meaning of education and make sacrifices for that they can stay at school, some teachers mentioned that absenteeism was a problem. At some schools, student absenteeism was particularly frequent during seeding and harvest season, at other schools, students were mainly absent for religious ceremonies. In addition to these reasons and illness, many teachers said that students often missed the first days (or even weeks) of a school year.



## 5.2 Gender Issues

With 74 percent the primary school enrollment rates for girls are slightly higher than for boys (72 percent) on the national level in 2008 (?). The higher the educational level, however, the lower becomes the share of females. This fact was confirmed by the field trip. As long as primary schools are available and accessible without making extensive sacrifices, parents tend to send girls and boys to school. However, parents are more concerned with girls if the school is farther away so that they would have to walk long distances or stay with a host family. Some parents stated that it was hard to find a host family for a girl that is strict enough, but that it was relatively easy to find a family a boy could stay with. In villages or smaller towns without secondary school this is a common reason for the dropout of girls. Furthermore, many parents do not attach a high value to a girl's formal education and especially in rural areas girls still marry at a very young age and often do not continue their education once they have moved to their husbands' families.

The economic activity of a community seemed to have a high influence on the gender parity at school. In agricultural communities and urban areas, girls made up about half of all students. To the contrary, in pastoralist communities girls outnumber boys by far. In one small rural primary school less than one quarter of all students were boys and in some classes there was even only one single boy. Teachers stated that many parents in pastoralist communities prefer to send their sons to Quranic schools or to make them tend the stock (in the north predominantly cows) together with their male relatives. In these communities girls are apparently often rather sent to school for that they are occupied than for that they learn a lot. "If the parents were conscious of what education means for girls", a school principal argued, "they would also be conscious of the importance of education for boys and send their sons to school, too." According to this principal, hardly any of his former (female) students had completed the entire schooling system (i.e. the BAC), but more than half of them had completed primary school. Consequently, knowing how to read is considered useful by teachers for the later life of girls, but they do not benefit from the rest of what they have learned at school.

## 6 Incentives, Disincentives and Rivals to Formal Primary Education

### 6.1 Perspectives After Primary School

Tuition fees at secondary schools are usually higher than at primary schools and since there are less secondary schools, distance plays a bigger role. The most important barrier, however, is the national grade six exam<sup>10</sup> which is a prerequisite for being accepted at a public secondary school. One of the school principals at Kaolack stated that the success rate at his school was 98 percent in summer 2010. At some other schools this success rate was lower than 50 percent. Lately, access to secondary schools has been eased and exceptions are made, so that for example the best students of a class can attend secondary school even if they do not pass the national exam. On the one hand, primary school teachers are proud if a high proportion of their students is accepted at secondary school, but on the other hand, they also mention quality problems of secondary schools. According to teachers and school principals, those students who pass the grade six exam proceed with secondary school in spite of the costs. Most parents of successful children are usually willing to make sacrifices so that their children can attend school, although sometimes children

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<sup>10</sup>In the Senegalese school system, the first class of secondary school is referred to as *Sixième* which means sixth grade, because there are six more grades until the final grade, the *Terminale*. Section 3.1 of this paper has described that the exam that marks primary school completion (CFEE) is connected to the exam that qualifies for secondary school entry (i.e. entry to *Sixième*).

have to convince their parents. The situation is a bit more difficult in rural areas when the nearest secondary school can be dozens of kilometers away. In this case, very few children commute to school daily, it is more common that children leave their families during the school year. These children often attend secondary schools wherever they have relatives or family friends they can stay with. This seems to be a bigger problem for girls, because parents find it more difficult to find a trustworthy family their daughter can live with. Making children live with other families increases the costs of schooling substantially. Distance – partly connected to costs – represents a major obstacle for continuing education after primary school.

Children who are not accepted at public secondary schools basically have two options: They can attend a private secondary school (if they can afford it) or drop out of school. Some girls already marry after (or even during) primary school and move to their husbands' families. Children – especially boys – who leave school without the BFEM, work in agriculture or seek an informal apprenticeship.

## 6.2 Returns to Education

While attending school makes children proud and raises their self-esteem, it seems to increase labor market perspectives only after completing ten years of schooling (BFEM). Children who drop out before, teachers reported, might know how to read and write which is useful for their personal development, but primary education or incomplete secondary school do not pay off in economic terms. According to some parents things had been different for their generation when already a primary school degree had significantly improved job opportunities.

For the teachers it is important to educate their students not only for the labor market, but also for an active life in the society. They mentioned civil and moral education (also education to active citizens) as important aspects. Hygienic and health units are also part of the curriculum and represent benefits of school attendance even if school is left without a degree.

## 6.3 Rivals to Formal Schooling

Formal schooling includes both public and private schools that are officially recognized and that offer their students participation in the official exams and the possibility to receive official degrees. Although most primary school students are enrolled in public schools, eleven percent attend private schools (Boubacar and François, 2007), including Christian, Arab and Laicist private schools. Tuition fees are typically higher than at public schools, but even many of the private ones have large classes, often about 50 pupils per class.

However, many parents do not want to send their children to a formal school for different reasons. For instance, in a rural community, teachers estimated that about one third of all children did not attend a formal school. Some of these children attend Quranic schools (daaras), partly because parents consider the religious education more important for their children. Studying the Quran at daaras has a long tradition in Senegal and has its roots in the formation of Muslim brotherhoods centuries ago. Traditionally, parents have sent their children, known as talibés, to daaras where they reside with their religious teachers, the marabouts, until completion of their Quranic studies.

Since most Quranic schools do not teach any other subjects, their graduates are not qualified for the secular labor market and often do not even speak French. Nevertheless, people who have studied the Quran can theoretically open up their own Quranic school. But many parents are willing to accept lower secular skills of their children in return for an ample knowledge of the Quran. Some parents try to make their children attend both formal and Quranic school, but this often does not work without problems. For example, a second grade student who had attended a Quranic school during the long summer holidays came back to his public primary school and did

not remember how to write the numbers from one to ten correctly. Instead, he wrote them from right to left and all numbers were mirror-inverted. Other parents reported that their children attended Quranic school not only during the holidays but also on weekends when formal schools are closed. As a result, children either do not have holidays and days off at all or do not attend formal school all five weekdays but only three or four days. Another variant mentioned was to start with full time Quranic education at a very young age. After one or two years these children start formal schooling and from then on they attend Quranic schools only during holidays and/or on weekends. In most cases, children sooner or later abandon either formal or Quranic school.

Attending both schools in whatever arrangement, however, is only possible if both are available close to where the child lives and if the Quranic school is organized in a way that allows the students to attend formal school. Currently, there are four different types of daaras in Senegal: Village daaras, urban daaras, “modern” daaras and seasonal daaras. Village daaras are present in many Senegalese villages so that most children live at home with their families. These children often attend formal schools in the morning and the daara in the afternoon. In many urban daaras it is not unusual that talibés from rural areas reside at the daara and assist the marabouts with different tasks. Traditionally, these residential daaras were located in rural areas and the marabout and his students made their living from tilling a plot but at some point yields had decreased too much and many marabouts moved to the towns and cities. The principal gainful activity then became begging for money and food. Begging children with rotten clothing today is an ordinary appearance of the streets in all bigger towns and cities. Of course, there are big differences in the way the marabouts treat their students, but some talibés may also be subjected to exploitation and abuse. Modern daaras are government regulated Quranic schools that have introduced other subjects of formal schools in addition to memorizing the Quran and learning Arabic. In seasonal daaras marabouts and talibés live in the cities during the dry season and return to the village during the rainy season. But this type of daaras barely exists anymore (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

In (rural) areas not sufficiently covered by formal schools, basic community schools<sup>11</sup> try to fill the gap. These schools are often organized by NGOs or by communal organizations supported by international organizations and try to teach the very basics, sometimes in local languages.

Recently, Franco-Arabic schools have opened their doors and offer a combined curriculum of traditional islamic and secular education. Most often these schools are private schools and charge relatively high tuition fees.

Some children have to work or help their families and can therefore not go to school. As already mentioned this depends a lot on the occupation of parents. For example, if parents live relatively close to a school and are involved in small scale trading or farming, they can introduce their children to their activities and make them help in the afternoons. Thus, at least out of periods of extensive work, children can go to school regularly. This is not possible for children of pastoralist families, where family members leave their homes for several days to find good pasture lands. Similarly, if no school is available where the family lives and children have to stay at another family’s place during the school year, they will not be able to help their family and cause higher costs (including direct costs for paying the host family). The principal of a rural school estimated that about five percent of the pupils were staying with relatives or another host family because their families lived too far away.

Other parents argue that they were too poor to send their children to school. Teachers sometimes claim that (at least for the primary school level) it was rather the low commitment of parents than the economic situation that restrained the children from school attendance.

Most students who miss school for longer periods do not return. A school principal reported a dropout rate of about two percent during a school year.

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<sup>11</sup>Ecoles communautaires de base, ECB.

## 7 Conclusion

Generally, school participation in Senegal has achieved a lot of progress in recent years. However, several problems remain to be tackled for further improvement. Still, too many children never attend a school. An even more severe problem is the high rate of drop outs, especially when it comes to the transition from primary to secondary school. Here, the national grade six exam, higher costs of schooling and still limited availability of secondary schools are the main barriers. As a result, only a fraction of children completes the ten years of compulsory schooling which is considered necessary to have superior job perspectives. Another issue regarding absenteeism or incomplete formal schooling is the popularity of Quranic education in Senegal. Many parents prioritize religious (esp. Quranic) studies and do not want their children to attend a formal school. In many cases, those who try to combine formal and religious schooling sooner or later have to decide on whether to drop one or the other. Despite the existence of differences between rural and urban milieus no substantial gender disparity can be observed at the primary school level. At the secondary school level, however, girls' education perspectives worsen so that completion of ten years of schooling is even less likely for girls than for boys.

While the quantity of enrolled children has undoubtedly risen during the past years, the development of school quality is more ambiguous. Many school buildings are in a bad condition and pedagogical material is often lacking or hardly usable. After the summer holidays many school facilities face damages due to heavy rainfalls which lead to delayed starts and many schools cannot afford the maintenance costs. The quality of classes itself suffers from too big class sizes, multigrade classes and irregular attendance of pupils.

In summary it can be stated that primary school education in Senegal has achieved some noticeable improvements. However, high drop out rates and rivalry with Quranic schooling lead to a low percentage of students with completed secondary education or higher. Since it is expected that formal schooling only pays off in economic terms after at least ten years of education, the achievement of a higher share of students with completed secondary school should be a reasonable task.

The purpose of further study will thus be to shed more light on some of the reasons preventing school enrollment and completion. One task will consist in identifying the reasons why many children are never enrolled in school. The research project will proceed with a household survey in the region of Saint-Louis. This region nearly reflects average educational figures of the whole country and is very diverse regarding geographical conditions, population density and economic activity of the population. Data from this survey will allow to disentangle the role of supply and demand sides. According to our expectations and impressions gained from the qualitative field work, even in areas where public schools are available and accessible, not all children are enrolled in school. For this group, parents might not see the benefit of attending formal school or might favor rival activities such as work or attendance of a religious school. A related question is whether school enrollment then depends primarily on household characteristics. Families of a certain educational level and of specific professions could be more prone to sending their children to school. On the other hand, there seems to be heterogeneity within households. We will have to study why some children attend school while their siblings do not. Reasons for the higher drop out rates of girls will also be subject to further study.

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