MEMORY AID

Using data to improve the quality of education in Niger

by setting up local school achievement monitoring days (JCSAS)

The context

An analysis of education quality management practices carried out by players at all levels of the education system in Niger has revealed that a great deal of quantitative data (assessment results, school statistics) and qualitative data (reports on the start of the school year, inspection reports, quarterly reports) are circulated with the sole aim of showing that the planned activities have been carried out. In other words, all this quantitative and qualitative data is not used to produce useful information for decision-making and, above all, for organising relevant and appropriate remedial activities capable of improving pupil learning.

This observation was made at a time when DECOS wanted to set up the Communal Days for Monitoring Learning Achievement (JCSAS) with the aim of having each commune analyse its national evaluation results and improve the interventions of inspectors and teachers. In line with the education quality management support programme implemented by IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, a strategic review was carried out to extend DECOS's vision to other existing data in the system.

The vision behind JCSAS

The main aim of a community day is to bring together the players who play an important role in education within the community to discuss the problems associated with the schooling and educational success of their children. It is expected that these discussions will lead to the identification of concrete actions that are relevant to the community and can be implemented within a short timeframe (3 months). At the end of this time, another community day will be organised to assess the effectiveness of these actions, discuss new challenges and propose new actions to be implemented (follow-up and adjustment of interventions).

Practical organisation of a JCSAS

Following several working sessions with DECOS, and taking into account the realities experienced by local authorities and their education inspectorates, it was agreed that to be effective, the organisation of a JCSAS should follow three phases: the preparation of the JCSAS, the running of the JCSAS and the monitoring of the implementation of the actions adopted by the JCSAS.

i. **Preparing for the JCSAS**: During this phase, the available quantitative and qualitative data is collected, analysed and cross-referenced in order to highlight the priority education issues for the local authority. Interviews are also carried out with key players in the local authority to highlight real problems experienced by the players, but which are not necessarily visible in the

data. All this work is used to draw up a list of themes (problems, issues) to be discussed during the day. It also enables a list to be drawn up of the players involved in these issues so that they can be invited to the day (participation, inclusion).

ii. **How a JCSAS works**: the players meet in a room to discover the priority issues for education in the community, discuss them to understand all their facets, and collectively look for solutions to overcome them. These solutions are then worked on and set out in an action plan that indicates **who does what, when, with what resources and to what end?**

iii. **The 3ème follow-up stage** is where each player identified in the action plan plays its role and implements the activities for which it is responsible. The Ministry's senior management remains available to support each player and help them overcome any obstacles they may encounter.

Pilot testing of a JCSAS and lessons learned

In order to compare this vision/organisation of a JCSAS with the reality on the ground, to study the factors that could make it a success and to identify the points of attention (conditions) that the Ministry will have to anticipate when the JCSAS are rolled out across the board, it was decided to experiment with a pilot approach to implementing a JCSAS. The communes of Hamdallaye and Ndounga organised the first JCSAS in December 2022. The experience identified a number of areas where the management of the education system needs to be improved. Here are just a few of them.

- The data on termly compositions, which are the most relevant for preparing a JCSAS, are not in a usable state: most of them have not been entered and no actor has the situation of each of the schools under his responsibility.

- The various reports that circulate (back-to-school reports, inspection reports, etc.) are not written in a structure that allows them to be used.

- The community day involves players with very different profiles: agents from the decentralised level of the Ministry of National Education (MEN), town hall officials, local associations, the village chief, etc. Translation becomes necessary because debates cannot be conducted solely in French. Translation becomes necessary because the debates cannot be conducted solely in French. What's more, moderating such a diverse group requires specific skills that need to be anticipated to ensure that the debates lead to a usable outcome.

- The players recognise that the data transmitted is generally distorted, which is a first step towards considering solutions to stop this phenomenon.

- The players find it difficult to identify concrete actions on their own: they often think of raising awareness without being able to say more. Support is needed to help them turn their ideas into concrete, relevant actions that can be carried out in the short term.

- Local players appear to be unable to identify sources of funding for the actions they would like to carry out. Often, they simply say: *the government will finance it*, or *we'll see if a TFP can finance it*. If the MEN wants local players to take charge of policy implementation, they need to know how to seek funding for their actions.

Next steps

At the end of these first days, which were very much appreciated by all the participants, an action plan based on three themes was adopted with the aim of setting out the prerequisites for the smooth running of future JCSAS (see box below). At the time of writing, this action plan is being implemented.

Inset: action plan resulting from the first JCSAS - Validated in January 2023

Theme 1: Identify schools in the municipality that are failing at school
- Priority 1: Draw up a template for the transmission of data on quarterly compositions.
- Area 2: Define a procedure for circulating these templates to avoid any loss of information.
- Priority 3: Provide the Hamdallaye and Ndounga inspectorates with a computer so that they can input the data contained in these schedules.
- Axis 4: Putting it into practice - collecting, entering and analysing composition data for the second term of the 2022-2023 school year (i.e. March/April 2023).

Theme 2: Increase the use of back-to-school and inspection reports
- Axis 1: Document the functions of re-entry reports and inspection reports.
- Axis 2: Define an outline for the inspection report.
- 3: Putting it into practice - using the framework adopted for the conduct of educational supervision in the two communes and drawing lessons from it.

Theme 3: Improving the reliability of education data
- ⇨ The activities carried out on themes 1 and 2 are expected to be a first step towards improving data reliability (at least calculation errors will be avoided). The other steps will be taken as the JCSAS is carried out.

A monitoring committee made up of a wide range of stakeholders has been set up. The main responsibility of this committee is to monitor the JCSAS experimentation process in order to capitalise on its achievements for the benefit of the education system. It will monitor and reflect on the experimentation process in order to identify and analyse the extent to which promising solutions emerging from this experimentation can be adopted more widely in the education system.