

## **Memorandum on the Progress Achieved by Mauritania in Girls' Education**

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### **1. Context**

Mauritania is a vast country of 1,030,700 km<sup>2</sup>. The Sahara desert covers three quarters of the country. The last quarter is the Sahelian region. The principal national resources come from commerce, the mining sector, and fishing. Mauritania has considerable potential in livestock and, to a lesser extent, in agriculture. However, with a GDP of US\$380 per capita and 46.3% of the population living on less than a dollar a day, Mauritania belongs to the group of least developed nations.

The **demographic and societal situation** in the country is characterized by high demographic growth, an even higher mortality rate, increased population settlement and urbanization, and the limited participation of women in the development process.

In the area of demographic growth, the population has almost doubled in the 23 years between 1977 and 2000. It rose from 1,338,830 inhabitants (first general census in 1977) to reach 1,864,236 (1988 census) and 2,508,159 (2000 census). The average annual growth rate between the last two censuses was 2.4% (1988 and 2000), while it was 2.9% between the censuses of 1977 and 1988. Present projections indicate the same growth trends, and the total population was estimated at around 2,700,000 inhabitants in 2005. This rapid growth means an increase in the young population (40% of the population are less than 15 years old.), putting considerable pressure on existing basic infrastructure (education, health, employment, etc.); about 6% are over 60 years of age. This population structure is the result of a high fertility rate and a lower mortality rate. In fact, the simulated index of fertility, despite a decreasing trend, remains high: it was 6.3 in 1988 and is estimated to be 4.7 in 2000 and 4.6 in 2003. This level is slightly lower than the average for sub-Saharan Africa (5.4). According to the Demographic and Health Survey (2001-01), the average age at first marriage is 17 years for women, and the prevalence of the use of modern contraception among married women is 5%.

In addition, the structure of the population and its geographic distribution over the entire territory affects access to basic social services. Within this framework, the socio-demographic changes that the country has experienced in the last thirty years have restricted advancement in this area. In fact, the population has almost doubled between the two censuses of 1977 (1,338,380) and 2000 (2,508,159), and the settlement process has rapidly accelerated in an environment that can be characterized as anarchy. These transformations have put considerable pressure on basic social services (health, education, employment, etc.), while the provision of services did not and could not anticipate this change.

In fact, close to 44% of the population are below 15 years of age, and the anarchistic settlement process has given rise to a high demand for education, which the

government has endeavored to satisfy. However, the absence, over the last few years, of proper town and country planning has led to the development of small towns only a few kilometers away from one another and has lessened the impact of the government's response, as is evidenced by the increased number of unfinished schools.

In the **macro-economic context**, Mauritania has for two decades implemented a program of macro-economic and structural reforms aimed at re-establishing macro-economic balance and promoting growth. The results achieved have stimulated sustained economic growth, stabilized public finances, and reduced the role of the state in the economy. This has led to a reduction in poverty and improved the social indicators. The report on the first phase of the CSLP shows an average increase of 4.6%, which is considerably higher than the average rate of 1.2% growth recorded during the 1990-1998 period. During the period 2006-2010, the governments is aiming to implement a stable macro-economic framework, promote a favorable and equitable legal and regulatory system, outward-looking trade policies and the development of basic infrastructure to increase competitiveness and the transportation of resources. Economic growth in real terms is projected at 19.4% in 2006 and at 9.9% in 2010 based on starting oil production in 2006.

### **Institutional Framework of the Educational Sector**

The Mauritanian educational system has seen many reforms since the country's independence in 1960, which have all been aimed at ensuring a better adaptability of the system to its socio-cultural environment. The penultimate reform was that of 1979, which introduced teaching in local languages and divided the system into two linguistic sections: the Arab section and the bilingual section (Arab and French). In 1999, Mauritania adopted a new reform which, among others things, brought significant changes to the organization of the system. The progressive implementation of this reform at the various education levels has put the system into a transitional phase, in which the 1979 system is coexisting with the newly reformed system over a variable time period depending on the cycle.

It is worth noting that education is free in Mauritania and that, in 2000, the government promulgated a law making primary education compulsory, thereby guaranteeing all Mauritanian children, whatever their situation and social status (orphans, poor) a normal education.

Education is at the center of all development problems due to its numerous beneficial effects such as the increase in productivity, the strengthening of national capacities to design and execute policies, innovation, whether economic, financial or technological, and the reduction of poverty and infant mortality, etc.

However, in the Mauritanian context, improvements in the performance of the education system require significant mobilization of financial resources and are largely dependent on the budgetary constraints.

It is for this reason that the implementation of structural adjustment programs in the 1980s helped the liberalization of the economy, which encouraged the participation of the private sector, helped raise growth performance, and refocused the missions of the state towards tackling the social sectors.

However, the cost of restructuring and the increasing debt service costs have reduced the resources which could be allocated to education. Debt reduction, which began at the start of the decade, has made significant additional resources available, which have been allocated to quantitative and qualitative development of the educational system, within a context marked by a particularly financially ambitious reform.

## II. Development of the Education Sector

The last two decades have seen a general increase in the **coverage of the education system**. The overall coverage indicator (average duration of schooling) rose from 5.8 years in 2000 to 6.5 years in 2004, which is higher than the average in developing countries in Africa (an average of 5 years in 2000). This performance is particularly due to the net improvement in access at the primary and secondary levels.

At the **primary level**, enrolment rose from 360,677 in 2000/2001 to 443,615 in 2004/5 (8% in private schools), corresponding to a growth of about 22% over the period. In terms of access indicators and coverage, the Gross Literacy Rate (GLR) rose from 97% to 115.9% in 2005 and the Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) went from 87% to 95% during this period.

As far as **secondary education** is concerned, student enrolment rose from 74,742 students in 2000/01 to 89,291 students in 2004/5 (out of which 10.3% were from private schools), which is an increase of 16.5% over this period. A study of the principal indicators shows a positive development in the number of new students and the rate of students' transition into the 1AS.

Available data show that, on the whole, the development of **higher education** in Mauritania over the last few years has been relatively limited. The numbers rose from 11,112 students in 2001 to 11,885 in 2004, with only 7% enrolled in the science options. The students on scholarship abroad represent about 18% of the students in higher education in 2004-05.

In **technical and vocational training**, training is offered nationally covering about thirty specialties, and its annual output is about 1200 graduates. A survey carried out in 2004 on the placement of these graduates in 2002 with some public organization has shown the following main characteristics: the rate of placement is 41%, graduates pursuing further studies constitute 10%, and the rest are awaiting employment opportunities.

With regards to **literacy**, the illiteracy rate went from 61.1% in 1988 to 47% in 2000 and to 42.5% in 2004. This development shows that the major efforts that have been invested in the Mauritanian education system over the last few years have not been in vain. The results obtained vary according to gender and social background. In the

urban areas, the literacy rate is 72.3% as against 46.2% in the rural areas, while for men it is 66.5% as against 49.5% for women. In fact, people who live in the poorest households are twice as likely to be illiterate than those who belong to richer households (38.7% against 73.6%). The fight against illiteracy cannot be looked at separately from the development of the education sector because maintaining literacy at an adult age is linked to the number of years spent in school during youth. The data from the 2004 EPCU show that the probability of becoming illiterate is high (one out of two persons) if one has spent less than four years in basic education. This probability depends on gender and living environment. In Mauritania, the probability of becoming illiterate is more influenced by gender than by the living environment.

**Education Financing:** the analysis of spending on education and its structure according to the level of education and the type of spending over the last decade shows the following.

The nominal education budget increased positively (more than quadrupled) between 1990 and 2004. The details of the spending on operations and investment are very different. Whereas total spending has increased, the rate of this increase is clearly higher for spending on investments, which has been multiplied by 16 (sixteen), while spending on operations has only tripled. These increases correspond to an annual average growth rate of 8.9% and 21.9% respectively for operations and investment expenses.

An analysis of the total resources for this sector shows that about 80% of public spending on education is supported by the state, which contributed 21% of the total 2004 budget for education.

The intra-sector allocation shows the priority accorded to basic education by the state. In fact, close to 45.3% of the national education budget is taken up by this level of education. The average value of this proportion in the countries of the sub-region is 50%. The secondary level takes up 31.2% of the education budget as against 1.6% for technical education and 12.3% for higher education.

### **III. Progress Achieved during the Past Decade from 1994 to 2005 in Girls' Education**

The increase in the Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) over the last ten years shows that there has been regular and substantial progress during this period. In fact, the GER at the basic level has risen from 65.1% for girls in 1993-1994 to 98% in 2004-2005.

The enrollment of girls in basic education went from 70,666 in 1990/1991 to 193,655 in 2002/2003 and to 221,777 in 2004-2005, which in 14 years is an absolute increase of more than 300%. Within the same period, the enrollment of boys rose by 129%. The gross and net rates of girls' enrollment have overtaken the rates for boys since the 2001/2002 school year. The GER for girls is 98% against 92.3% for boys and the Net Enrollment Rate (NER) is 75.7% compared to that for boys, which is only 71.6%.

**Table 1: GER / NER:**

	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
<b>Boys</b>	84	85.8	86.8	87.4	88.4	90.7	94.1	92.3
<b>Girls</b>	<b>81.2</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>86.1</b>	<b>85.5</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>92.6</b>	<b>97.1</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Boys</b>	66.8	64.4	65.3	63.1	65.3	69.6	74.1	71.6
<b>Girls</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>61.2</b>	<b>62.2</b>	<b>62.6</b>	<b>66.1</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>77.5</b>	<b>75.7</b>

DRP/MEN

We can therefore note that at the basic education level, the GER for girls has for four consecutive years surpassed that of boys, with an increase in the gap of 3.9 in 2003-2004 in favor of girls. In fact, the ratio of the GER between the two groups (GER girls / GER boys) went from 0.98 in 2000-01 to 1.04 in 2003-04. In total, it is fair to say that the total growth of schooling at the basic level during the past four years has essentially benefited girls and that a level of parity has been achieved for this cycle of education.

In terms of geographical equity, all regions of the country have succeeded in eliminating gender disparities.

Many countries have made progress in terms of access and equity during the 1990s. In spite of this progress, a considerable number of children are not in school, and the number of those who drop out is increasing at an extraordinary rate. This is the case of Mauritania

Access to the **first cycle of secondary education and** education at that level have seen a rapid net increase, with a growth rate of more than 78% over a period of 10 years (1990 to 2000). The enrolment of girls in the cycle generally rose from 13,837 in 1996/1997 to 38,880 in 2004/2005, corresponding to a growth rate of 65% over a period of 9 years.

The rate of participation of girls increased positively but only slightly during the decade, rising from 43% in 1996/1997 to 44.9% in 2002/2003. It reached 45.4% in 2004-2005.

However, the growth of the GER for the first and second cycles of secondary education was relatively low between 2001 and 2005. This growth conceals significant gender disparities. At the basic level, the GER for girls rose by 3.2 points between 2001 and 2004 while that of boys went down by 0.6 points during the same period. In fact, the relationship between the GER for girls and the GER for boys at this level went from 0.81 in 1001 to 0.88 in 2004. Likewise, for the second cycle of secondary education, we note positive growth in the GER for girls, which went from 14% in 2001 to 17% in 2004, against a stagnation of the GER for boys, which allowed for a reduction in the gap between the two levels (from 6.8 points in 2001 to 3 points in 2004) and an increase in their ratio (0.67 in 2001 against 0.85 in 2004). These data

show a change towards parity between the two sexes at the secondary level although there remains a considerable effort to be made to improve education at this level for both genders.

Overall, it can be said that, gender-wise, the Mauritanian system is becoming more and more equitable. Available data indicate a near parity at the basic level where the GER for girls is higher than that for boys, and a reduction of the gap for the first and second levels of the secondary cycle. These gaps respectively went from 5.2 points and 6.9 points in 2000-2001 to 3.3 points and 3 points in 2003-2004. However, disparities persist in terms of success on national examinations, particularly at the secondary level. In fact, the admission of girls to the BEPC in 2004 was only 34% as against 37% for boys, and the gap is even more significant at the level of the results for the Baccalauréat, which are 7% for girls and 17% for boys.

The gap between girls and boys is more visible at the higher education level, where young girls/women represent only 31% of the student population.

These exceptional results for the sub-region in terms of girl education are the result of a certain number of strategies adopted during the last two decades and a sustained political will during the period.

#### **IV. Experiences with Development Strategies for Girls' Education**

Mauritania has developed strategies which, although they have their limitations, have produced remarkable results in terms of access. These results have been made possible due to a sustained political will for the development of the education sector.

This political will is indispensable for any large-scale social change and is expressed through various development programs in the education sector which take into account the education of girls.

The political will was manifested by the volume of resources allocated to the sector during the last two decades. In GNP terms, the public expenditures on education climbed to about 5% of the GNP in 2004 and it is undeniable that public effort for education in Mauritania is satisfactory in comparative terms. Compared to the average for developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Mauritania largely surpasses this group of countries in the percentage of national wealth allocated to national education. The analysis of total resources for this sector shows that about 80% of public spending on education is supported by the state.

The main programs that have been developed are:

- Various education projects that make up the important area of “support for the construction and rehabilitation of classrooms”.
- The ongoing reform of the education system initiated in 1999, whose strategies are taken into account in the PNDSE (National Development Plan). This reform, specifically focused on quality and retention, has placed the strengthening of girls’

education at the highest level of the government policy. This program contains all the strategies that will allow Mauritania to achieve the objectives of the EFA.

- The creation in 1992 of the State Secretariat for Women, whose objectives are the promotion of women and girls' education.

All these government programs and reforms that have been undertaken, some of which are described further on, have in general had a remarkable impact on girls' access to schooling. We will only cite the aspects which have had a positive impact on girls' education.

➤ The "Arabization" of the school system

Concerned with increasing the possibilities of access to basic education, especially in rural areas, and in view of adapting education programs to the economic and cultural environment of the country, the Mauritanian government has gradually introduced Arabic as the language of instruction. Thus, the 1966 reform provided that Arabic be taught as a discipline. The 1973 reform instituted religious teaching in addition to Arabic, and introduced a first basic year (1AF) where teaching was entirely in Arabic. Finally, the 1979 reform brought in the two tracks system (one Arabic and the other bilingual). In the opinion of numerous observers, the "Arabization" of the system has undeniably contributed to the increase in schooling that certain parts of the country have experienced in the last two decades.

In fact, the Arabization of schooling reform and to a certain extent the introduction of national languages (1979-1999) have contributed to inspiring greater confidence from the conservatives who feared the alienation of their girls through schooling. This very conservative sector of society has been the most positively affected by this measure.

### Settlement

The generally nomadic population found it difficult to leave their children in school during the migration periods and took them with them. The great drought experienced in the country in the early 1970s forced people to flee the countryside and remain in the towns, in search of subsistence. This settlement allowed their children to remain in school and attend regularly. Thus, settlement has had a very positive impact on schooling in general and on girls in particular.

- The proximity of basic schools to communities (massive construction of classrooms)

From the viewpoint of various observers, this strategy has, by far, been the one that has greatly contributed to the progress recorded in schooling.

Within the framework of the various education projects implemented since the beginning of the 1980s, the government has undertaken a massive construction of classrooms and schools, favoring maximum social benefits as compared to economic benefits. This policy was chosen in response to the need to bring schools closer to the

communities. In fact, the level of schooling in Mauritania, as we have already indicated above, was low compared to those of neighboring countries or countries in North Africa.

Since the 1990s, at least 7000 classrooms have been built in all the regions of the country and especially in the rural areas.

- The creation of nearby colleges in each region in order to give girls access to the first cycle of secondary education.

During the last five years, the Mauritanian authorities, with the aim of bringing access to education close to the communities, have opened about forty rural colleges in almost all the regions of the country. The opening of these colleges is, in the view of those in charge of education, a determining factor in the increase in enrolment of girls in the first cycle of secondary education.

- The opening of school cafeterias in schools in underprivileged areas.

The World Food Program (WFP) is participating in Education For All (EFA) through substantial support of food rations for school cafeterias. Its current project, the first phase of which began in 1992, contributed to the increase in enrollment of new pupils into the first year of basic school, notably in the underprivileged areas. The number of students increased from 15,000 at the start of the program to 54,360 in 1998 and 98,000 in 2004 – 2005.

- Community awareness through Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) programs

The IEC programs were aimed at the inhabitants in all regions and at the local level, in the rural as well as urban areas. The awareness program sought to inform families of the importance of school and the need for education of children in general, and girls in particular. This program has had a positive impact on certain populations.

- Involvement of religious leaders in the promotion of girls' education in certain very conservative sectors of society

Religious leaders and local authorities were involved in the awareness campaigns in the communities concerning the need to educate girls. These awareness campaigns have undoubtedly benefited girls' education in certain very conservative areas of society.

- Scholarships and prizes given to especially deserving girls

A strategy of giving prizes to girls was put in place and proved not only to be motivating but also conclusive to the extent that, in June 2002, the pupils in the first positions in each category of the award in the first year of basic level were girls.



However, it is dangerous to identify just one or many among these strategies which have been favorable to the effective education of girls in Mauritania, or, indeed, anywhere else. One of the strategies described above, taken on its own, could not have contributed to the achievement of this objective. In fact, only an appropriate combination of strategies has resulted in sustained progress (access and retention) in girls' education in Mauritania. However, it is necessary to emphasize that while these strategies have had an impact on the improvement of education, improvement is also due to the special status of women in Mauritanian society. In fact, women benefit from a privileged position in the society, characterized by their role. Key factors are:

- The protection of women by tradition, notably in terms of maintenance (the men in a family are under obligation to financially take care of women).
- The absence of social taboos associated with divorce (divorce is not considered a constraint, and a divorced woman has the same chance to marry again as a woman who has never been married).
- The positive perception of the woman's role in the development of society and the family (women almost totally control the informal sector of commerce. Also, in certain societal settings, they are exempt from difficult tasks such as agriculture, cattle raising, carrying water, etc.).

These different aspects ensure that there is certainly less societal reticence towards girls' education.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to emphasize that these improvements recorded by Mauritania in the domain of education are at risk due to the constraints which the education system is currently facing. The main constraints, stated below, will undeniably cause more harm to girls than to boys, in that the former are more fragile.

## **V. Constraints and Problems in the Education Sector**

Educational policies implemented since the 1980s have favored the improvement of access over the improvement of quality.

The national program for development of the education sector adopted in 2001 had as its objectives to improve education opportunities, strengthen the quality of education, reduce regional disparities, strengthen girls' education, increase the role of the private sector in education, consolidate the management of the system, and improve the management of human resources. The national strategy for the promotion of women (SNPF) was to contribute to the improvement of demand among girls through a certain number of motivating measures at the community level.

Regarding the **basic level of education**, the strategy adopted aimed to favor implementation of the 1999 reform, promotion of completion rates for the basic cycle, and improvements in quality.

The 1999 reform has many dimensions, but its main characteristic concerns the language of instruction. Recent analyses have shown that the reform was formally put in place without the system having the necessary personnel, due to difficulties in transforming a significant percentage of existing teachers into bilingual teachers and producing new teachers with the necessary bilingual skills.

The second important objective was the improvement of the completion rate for the first basic cycle in order to make progress towards the objective of universal completion in 2015. To ensure universal completion, two conditions are necessary: the first is that of universal access to the first year of schooling; the second is that of retention in school up to the end of the cycle for those who have had access to schooling. In 1999, it was estimated that the completion rate at the basic level was about 47%. In 2005, it was only 45%. The latter figure is not only lower than the target of the decennial program, it is also lower than the rate noted in 1999. At this level, the failure of the program in relation to this aspect is not in doubt.

The third and last important objective was the improvement of the level of learning of the pupils. The measures taken have shown that this objective was not met to the extent that the evaluations performed between 2000 and 2004 show a reduction in the average ability of the pupils. Moreover, the PASEC survey of 2004 permitted the ranking of the average performance of Mauritanian pupils as compared to that of pupils of ten other French-speaking countries in the region. It is of great concern that the comparison shows that Mauritania had the worst performance of all the countries studied, which evidently presents a serious problem for the future.

In all, one can conclude that the level of learning of Mauritanian students is too low, and that this is a structural problem in the system; this poor structural performance has certainly been worsened by the inappropriate implementation of the reform.

As concerns the **secondary level**, a low **retention** rate has also been observed, especially among girls, due to numerous dropouts. This retention rate slightly improves during the last three years of schooling but remains at an unacceptable level, since only two out of three entrants in the first year of secondary school reach the third year. Moreover, internal efficiency and the quality of teaching remain limited. This results in a significant repetition rate and dropping out. With regards to the learning level of pupils, it is low: only 40% of knowledge in science and mathematics is acquired at the secondary level.

Although equity improved during the last years, status disparities still exist, depending on the living environment and the *wilaya*. On the one hand, the rates of access and retention are clearly higher in the urban environment than in the rural area; on the other hand, the *wilayas* of Gorgol, of Guidigaha, of Brakna, and of Hodh El Charghi, in spite of favorable developments in the past years, continue to record schooling rates and rates of retention that are lower than the national average.

The **external effectiveness** of the Mauritanian educational system continues to be weak and this is due to the wide gap between the training of school dropouts and the needs of the business sector. This gap is reflected in the growth of employment in

certain sectors that are little covered by the present training opportunities (hotel management, tourism, electronics, telecommunications, etc.), and by the preponderance of subjects such as law, economics, literature, and social science at the higher level.

**Higher education** in Mauritania is faced with a certain number of difficulties, which, if they persist, could compromise its development. In fact, the different analyses of the higher education situation have identified the following problems: (i) qualitative and quantitative inadequacy of the products of higher education in relation to the qualifications required in the various sectors of the economy; (ii) the weakness of the quality of education and research, particularly applied research; (iii) lack of performance resulting in the continual lowering of the internal and external efficiency of the system and the modest amount of research activity and scientific publication; (iv) difficulties in financing the system due to the inefficiency of public spending granted to higher education and the narrowness of the resource base; and (v) the limited use of new information and communication technology.

With regards to **technical and vocational training**, the inadequacy of current methods of training in the face of the labor market needs is aggravated by the following major constraints: (i) the dispersed nature of the system between many operators; (ii) the lack of information concerning the employment needs in the absence of a monitoring system for studying the labor market; (iii) the inadequacy of management capabilities; (iv) the limited involvement of employers in the management of training; (v) the non-existence of a framework to enable private training; (vi) the weakness of the national certification system; and (vii) the old buildings in the educational establishments, the deficiencies of their equipment, the unsuitability of their method of management and organization, the inadequacy of their capabilities in on-going training, the absence of training programs that comply with quality standards, the lack of motivation of the trainers, their lack of capabilities, and the non-existence of an orientation system for candidates.

The **management and guidance** of the educational system constitute the principal restrictions stifling development of the educational sector. In fact, the different programs that have been put in place have not resolved the management problems which the system has faced. Two types of failure are perhaps entrenched in the educational system.

The first weakness concerns the structure of accountability and supervision at the level of overall educational policy, which is characterized by overlapping authority and especially by inadequate articulation between institutional responsibilities and the challenges of the decennial program. The second weakness concerns the process of the implementation program and the functioning of educational services at the decentralized level, up to the school level where learning is carried out and where the programs planned at the central level are properly or improperly carried out.

On the informational level, one should note, in the first place, an almost anarchic allocation of resources (and of teachers in particular) to schools, and secondly, almost no relation between the resources made available to schools and their performance

level. These two observations underscore, on the one hand, very poor and inequitable management of resources (and notably the personnel) by the ministry and, on the other hand, the non-existence of achievement-based management.

Moreover, an analysis of the salary situation by educational level shows a rise in average annual salary, increasing towards the higher level. In spite of the increase in current monetary terms of the average salary of teaching personnel at the different levels of education, its actual value has been considerably reduced during the last 20 years. Between 1985 and 2004, the salary of a teacher at the basic level lost 50% of its real value, of which 14% was lost between 1998 and 2004.

The results of the EPCV survey 2004 show the relative weakness of a teacher's salary at the basic and secondary levels as compared to the equivalent salary in other employment sectors. The average salary in the private sector, the paragonovernmental sector, and the informal, non-agricultural sector, corresponding to the profile of a teacher (average age and number of years of study) is more than the salary presently offered by the public service sector for the same background, which creates an increasingly demotivating factor for the teaching personnel.

But the point that is the most worrisome in the management of the Mauritanian education system concerns is the aspect of the management of academics. In fact, the analysis unambiguously shows that it is not the level of spending per student which determined the capacity of a school to retain students during the cycle, nor its capacity to prepare them effectively for examinations at the end of the cycle. At the secondary level, the situation is similar to that at the basic level. There are institutions which have a relatively modest level of per-student resources, but which have good examinations results. There also non-performing institutions that have rather generous resources available but yet are characterized by disappointing examination results.

With regards to **financing of the sector**, it was planned that the implementation of the decennial program would be facilitated, on the one hand, by an intense mobilization of national public resources, and, on the other hand, by an increase in resources from international aid. The international aid (from the World Bank, the African Development Bank, France and the Islamic Development Bank) did indeed grow significantly, but this was not sufficiently the case for the national public resources. Thus, while it was anticipated that the current operating expenses for education financed by the state, in proportion to the GDP, increased by 0.8 points between 1999 and 2004 (due to the debt-reduction initiative and the increased priority given to the sector), it seems that this proportion is rather stagnant.

*In conclusion, one should note that while the country has made progress in terms of quantitative coverage and equity, it is probable that it has not been sufficiently attentive to either the qualitative dimension of education or the management structure of the system in order to make it compatible with its own growth. On these two points, which are in fact quite closely related, improvement appears to be necessary. Concerning the inflow of students into the system, the relatively high dropout and repetition rates at the different educational levels can be noted.*

*To sustain the significant progress that has been made in terms of coverage and access over the past decade, Mauritania, with the aid of its partners, must face the new challenges caused essentially by the dysfunction which characterizes the management of the education sector. Substantial improvement must be brought in with effective implementation of strategies, and this must be done at the school level, which must be used as the unit of analysis, and thus be the focal point of the strategies put in place.*

*Considering the extent of the efforts which remain to be made, it is to be noted that the government's effort to achieve the objectives of Education For All in 2015 requires sustained, unflinching support on the part of the international community for the mobilization of additional financing, in particular for the 2006-2015 period. However, the donors must equally ensure that their involvement responds to an actual and real need. A definition of the essential package or of a basic quality school could serve as a guiding plan for the coordination of all efforts.*